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**Farmers Can Now Enroll for the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs the 2024 Crop Year**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced that agricultural producers can now enroll in the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Agriculture Risk Coverage \(ARC\) and Price Loss Coverage \(PLC\)](#) programs for the 2024 crop year. Producers can enroll and make election changes for the 2024 crop year starting Dec. 18, 2023. The deadline to complete enrollment and any election change is March 15, 2024.

On Nov. 16, 2023, President Biden signed into law H.R. 6363, the *Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024* (Pub. L. 118-22), which extended the *Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018* (Pub. L. 115-334), more commonly known as the 2018 Farm Bill, through September 30, 2024. This extension allows authorized programs, including ARC and PLC, to continue operating.

**2024 Elections and Enrollment**

Producers can elect coverage and enroll in ARC-County (ARC-CO) or PLC, which provide crop-by-crop protection, or ARC-Individual (ARC-IC), which protects the entire farm. Although election changes for 2024 are optional, producers must enroll through a signed contract each year. Also, if a producer has a multi-year contract on the farm it will continue for 2024 unless an election change is made.

If producers do not submit their election revision by the March 15, 2024, deadline, their election remains the same as their 2023 election for commodities on the farm. Farm owners cannot enroll in either program unless they have a share interest in the cropland.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice, safflower seed, seed cotton, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat.

**2022 Crop Year Payments**

This fall, FSA issued payments totaling more than \$267 million to agricultural producers who enrolled in the 2022 ARC-CO option and the ARC-IC option for covered commodities that triggered a payment. Payments through the PLC option did not trigger for the 2022 crop year.

ARC and PLC payments for a given crop year are paid out the following fall to allow actual county yields and the Market Year Average prices to be finalized. These payments help mitigate fluctuations in either revenue or prices for certain crops. Payments for crops that may trigger for the 2023 crop year will be issued in the fall of 2024.

### **Crop Insurance Considerations**

ARC and PLC are part of a broader USDA safety net that also includes crop insurance and marketing assistance loans.

Producers are reminded that ARC and PLC elections and enrollments can impact eligibility for some crop insurance products.

Producers on farms with a PLC election can purchase Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) through their Approved Insurance Provider; however, producers on farms where ARC is the election are ineligible for SCO on their planted acres for that crop on that farm.

Unlike SCO, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) is unaffected by an ARC election. Producers may add ECO regardless of the farm program election.

Upland cotton farmers who choose to enroll seed cotton base acres in ARC or PLC are ineligible for the stacked income protection plan (STAX) on their planted cotton acres for that farm.

### **Web-Based Decision Tools**

Many universities offer web-based decision tools to help producers make informed, educated decisions using crop data specific to their respective farming operations. Producers are encouraged to use the tool of their choice to support their ARC and PLC elections.

### **More Information**

For more information on ARC and PLC, producers can visit the [ARC and PLC webpage](#) or contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also make elections and complete enrollment [online with level 2 eAuth](#).

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### **USDA Appoints New Members to the Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announces the appointment of 15 new members to the Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers (ACMF). The newly appointed members serve terms of up to two years.

“Minority farmers face unique challenges in accessing the land, credit, and training they need to succeed,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “This committee is part of USDA’s commitment to ensure that all farmers have equal access to USDA programs and services, especially minority farmers and producers in underserved communities.”

Newly appointed members are:

Sarah E. Bell, Alabama	Anita Lee, New York
Amalia Zimmerman-Lommel, California	Julian R. Mangano, New York
Jacqueline Bido, Florida	Arnetta Cotton, Oklahoma
Sedrick K. Rowe, Jr., Georgia	Elsa Sanchez, Pennsylvania

Jeremy L. Hendrix, Louisiana	Willette M. Crawford, South Carolina
Carolyn G. Jones, Mississippi	Kimberly M. Ratcliff, Texas
Delmar Stamps, Mississippi	Christina Chanes, U.S. Virgin Islands/U.S. Territories

Mercy Kariuki-McGee, Washington Committee members represent socially disadvantaged farmers, nonprofit organizations, civil rights organizations or professions, and institutions of higher education.

The Advisory Committee for Minority Farmers was established by Congress in the Food Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 to ensure that underserved farmers have equal access to USDA programs. Committee members advise the Secretary of Agriculture on the administration of the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Competitive Grant Program. They also make recommendations to the Secretary on how to increase minority participation in USDA programs.

USDA's Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement (OPPE) provides administrative staff support for the work initiated by the committee. OPPE develops and maintains partnerships focused on solutions to challenges facing rural and underserved communities and connects those communities to the education, tools, and resources available to them through USDA programs and initiatives.

For more information, visit the [Advisory Committee on Minority Farmers website](#).

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

### **USDA Approves Emergency Conservation Assistance for Drought**

ECP provides emergency funding to eligible livestock producers experiencing severe drought situations where water available for livestock has been reduced below normal levels to the extent, that without access to additional water sources, livestock survival is threatened.

Approved practices may include installing pipelines or other facilities for livestock water, constructing and deepening wells for livestock water, installing portable electric pumps and developing springs or seeps for livestock water.

### **USDA Supports Urban and Innovative Producers**



Are you gardening or farming in an urban environment or involved in controlled environment agriculture, rooftop farms, hydroponic, aeroponic, aquaponic facilities or other types of innovative production? Agencies across USDA including the [Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production \(OUAIP\)](#) have programs and resources available for you, and many are listed in this [Urban Agriculture Programs at a Glance](#) brochure.

USDA offers resources to help you:

- **Starting, Financing, and Protecting Your Farm or Garden:** Our resources can help you [access land and capital](#) for equipment and operating costs and start [a business plan](#). USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) offers a variety of [funding opportunities](#) and Rural Development (RD) can help urban and innovative producers locate guaranteed financing through the [Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program](#). Our [Risk Management Agency \(RMA\)](#) can help you insure your crops against losses, including the micro farm policy. Learn more about [USDA programs that support risk management](#).
- **On-Farm Guidance and Innovation:** [Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#) offers technical and financial assistance with [conservation planning](#) based on your goals, including high tunnels, soil health management systems, composting facilities and irrigation. Local organizations like [Cooperative Extension](#) also offer free training and expertise. [OUAIP](#) offers [competitive grants](#) for NRCS [Conservation Innovation Grants](#) fund innovative on-farm projects, some of which are targeted towards urban and innovative producers.
- **Marketing and Selling:** FSA, [Agricultural Marketing Service \(AMS\)](#), and [Food and Nutrition Service \(FNS\)](#) can help you reach customers in new ways and open additional revenue streams when selling products. The [Women, Infants, Children \(WIC\) Farmers' Market Nutrition Program](#) and [Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program](#) issues coupons for eligible foods from state-approved farmers, farmers' markets, or roadside stands. [Farm Storage Facility Loans \(FSA\)](#) provide low-interest loans to build, upgrade, or purchase permanent or portable facilities to store commodities, including fruit and vegetable cold storage, washing, packing, and handling buildings and equipment.

[Farmers Market Promotion Program \(FMPP\)](#) funds projects that develop, coordinate and expand direct producer-to-consumer markets like farmers markets. Agricultural businesses and cooperative are among the eligible entities.

A first step is to contact your local [USDA Service Center](#), including our new [Urban Service Centers](#), to meet face to face with our staff from FSA and NRCS. If you're a new farmer, you can also reach out to your state [Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coordinator](#).

We also invite you to get involved with your [FSA Urban County Committee](#), which provides local input on USDA urban agriculture policy, and the [Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](#), which advises the Secretary of Agriculture and holds public meetings.

[Sign up for e-mail updates on Urban Agriculture](#) and learn more at [farmers.gov/urban](#) or [usda.gov/urban](#).

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## **USDA Reminds Specialty Crop Growers of Deadline to Apply for Assistance for 2023 On-Farm Food Safety Expenses**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reminds specialty crop growers that assistance is available for producers who incur eligible on-farm food safety program expenses to obtain or renew a food safety certification through the Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops (FSCSC) program. Producers can apply for assistance on their calendar year 2023 expenses through Jan. 31, 2024.

### **Program Details**

FSCSC assists specialty crop operations that incurred eligible on-farm food safety certification and related expenses pertaining to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification in calendar year 2023. FSCSC covers a percentage of the specialty crop operation's cost of obtaining or renewing its certification, as well as a portion of related expenses.

To be eligible for FSCSC, the applicant must be a specialty crop operation; meet the definition of a small business or very small business; and have paid eligible expenses related to the 2023 certification.

Specialty crop operations may receive assistance for the following costs:

- Developing a food safety plan for first-time food safety certification.
- Maintaining or updating an existing food safety plan.
- Food safety certification.
- Certification upload fees.
- Microbiological testing for products, soil amendments and water.

FSCSC payments are calculated separately for each category of eligible costs. A higher payment rate has been set for socially disadvantaged, limited resource, beginning and veteran farmers and ranchers. Details about the payment rates and limitations can be found at [farmers.gov/food-safety](https://farmers.gov/food-safety).

### **Applying for Assistance**

The FSCSC application period for 2023 closes Jan. 31, 2024. FSA will issue payments after the application period closes. If calculated payments exceed the amount of available funding, payments will be prorated.

Interested specialty crop producers can apply by completing the FSA-888, Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops Program (FSCSC) application. The application, along with other required documents, can be submitted to the FSA office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means.

Specialty crop producers can also call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to assist. Visit [farmers.gov/food-safety](https://farmers.gov/food-safety) for additional program details, eligibility information and forms needed to apply.

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### **USDA Now Accepting Applications for Farm Loans Online**



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has launched an [online application for Direct Loan customers](#). More than 26,000 customers who submit a Direct Loan application each year can now use an online, interactive, guided application that is paperless and provides helpful features including an electronic signature option, the ability to attach supporting documents such as tax

returns, complete a balance sheet and build a farm operating plan. This tool is part of a broader effort by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to streamline its processes, improve customers service, and expand credit access.

The online farm loan application replicates the support an applicant would receive when completing a loan application in person with an FSA Farm Loan Officer, while continuing to provide customers with one-on-one assistance as needed. This tool and other process improvements allow farmers and ranchers to submit complete loan applications and reduce the number of incomplete and withdrawn applications.

Through a personalized dashboard, borrowers can track the progress of their loan application. It can be accessed on [farmers.gov](https://farmers.gov) or by completing FSA's Loan Assistance Tool at [farmers.gov/loan-assistance-tool](https://farmers.gov/loan-assistance-tool). To use the online loan application tool, producers must establish a USDA customer account and a [USDA Level 2 eAuthentication \("eAuth"\) account or a Login.gov account](#). For the initial stage, the online application tool is only available for producers who will be, or are currently, operating their farm as an individual. FSA is expanding the tools availability to married couples applying jointly and other legal entities in 2024.

### **Farm Loan Improvement Efforts**

FSA has a significant initiative underway to streamline and automate Farm Loan Program customer-facing business processes. For the over 26,000 producers who submit a Direct Loan application to FSA annually, and its 85,000 Direct Loan borrowers, FSA has made improvements this year, including:

- A [simplified direct loan paper application](#), reduced from 29 pages to 13 pages.
- The [Loan Assistance Tool on farmers.gov](#) that provides customers with an interactive online, step-by-step guide to identifying the Direct Loan products that may be a fit for their business needs and to understanding the application process.

### More Information

FSA continues to accept and review individual requests for assistance from borrowers who took certain extraordinary measures to avoid delinquency on their direct FSA loans or those who missed a recent installment or are unable to make their next scheduled installment. All requests for assistance must be received by Dec. 31, 2023. For more information, or to submit a request for assistance, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) or visit [farmers.gov/inflation-reduction-investments/assistance](#).

The Inflation Reduction Act, a historic, once-in-a-generation investment and opportunity for agricultural communities, provided \$3.1 billion for USDA to provide relief for distressed borrowers with certain FSA direct and guaranteed loans and to expedite assistance for those whose agricultural operations are at financial risk. Since October 2022, USDA has provided approximately \$1.6 billion in immediate assistance to more than 27,000 financially distressed direct and guaranteed FSA loan borrowers.

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### Environmental Review Required Before Project Implementation



The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to consider all potential environmental impacts for federally funded projects before the project is approved.

For all Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs, an environmental review must be completed before actions are approved, such as site preparation or ground disturbance. These programs include, **but are not limited to**, the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), Farm Storage Facility Loan (FSFL) program and farm

loans. If project implementation begins before FSA has completed an environmental review, the request will be denied. Although there are exceptions regarding the Stafford Act and emergencies, it's important to wait until you receive written approval of your project proposal before starting any actions.

Applications cannot be approved until FSA has copies of all permits and plans. Contact your local FSA office early in your planning process to determine what level of environmental review is required for your program application so that it can be completed timely.

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