



USDA Announces Assistance for On-Farm Food Safety Expenses for Specialty Crop Growers

Toolkit for Stakeholders

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is providing up to \$200 million in assistance for specialty crop producers who incurred eligible on-farm food safety program expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification in calendar years 2022 and 2023.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will accept applications for 2022 from June 27, 2022, through January 31, 2023. The application period for 2023 will be announced at a later date.

We need your help. We want to ensure specialty crop producers are aware of this program and the available resources to apply, including how to contact the FSA office at their local USDA Service Center and FSA's call center. This toolkit is meant for partners and stakeholder groups to share information on FSCSC in their networks. It includes:

- Key messages
- Newsletter article
- Social media posts with graphic

Answers to frequently asked questions can be found at farmers.gov/food-safety/faq.

Please contact us at fpac.bc.press@usda.gov with any additional questions.



Key Messages

- USDA's Farm Service Agency is establishing FSCSC to assist specialty crop operations that incur eligible on-farm food safety program expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification in calendar years 2022 and 2023.
- For each year, FSCSC covers a percentage of the specialty crop operation's cost of obtaining or renewing their certification, as well as a portion of their related expenses.
- To be eligible for FSCSC, the applicant must be a specialty crop operation; a small business or very small business; and have obtained or renewed a:
 - 2022 food safety certification that was issued between June 21, 2022, and December 31, 2022; or
 - 2023 food safety certification issued during the 2023 calendar year; and
 - Have paid eligible expenses
- FSCSC is open to specialty crop operations located in the United States and territories.
- FSCSC provides assistance for eligible expenses paid by the applicant related to the food safety certification for 2022 and 2023 calendar years.
- Expenses that have been incurred by the applicant but have not been paid are not eligible for assistance through FSCSC.
- Specialty crop operations that obtain food safety certification through a group model under a food safety management system are eligible to apply for assistance for their share of eligible expenses paid by the group, in addition to any eligible expenses they incur individually.
- Specialty crop operations may receive assistance for the following costs:
 - **Developing a food safety plan for first-time food safety certification**
 - A food safety plan is a requirement for any specialty crop operation or group undergoing formal food safety certification, and the majority of costs associated with food safety plan development occur the first year an operation undergoes food safety certification.
 - FSCSC will cover a percentage of the costs of specialty crop operations developing their own plan or hiring a consultant.
 - For specialty crop operations that develop their own plans, FSCSC will cover a percentage of the costs of seminars and tools used to create a food safety plan.
 - For those that hire a consultant, FSCSC will cover a percentage of the consulting fees and other associated expenses.
 - **Maintaining or updating an existing food plan**
 - Certification programs typically require an annual review of the food safety plan to ensure it is current and addresses any new audit or regulatory requirements, as well as incorporates any new hazards.
 - FSCSC will cover a percentage of the costs of maintaining and updating existing food safety plans.
 - **Food Safety Certification**



- FSCSC will cover a percentage of the cost of obtaining food safety certification issued by a certifier, including application fees, inspection costs, inspection fees (including travel costs and per diem for certifiers), user fees or certifier sales assessments, and postage.
 - **Certification Upload Fees**
 - FSCSC will cover a percentage of the cost to upload audit reports and certification documentation into commercial audit databases, which may be required by buyers of specialty crops.
 - **Microbiological Testing**
 - FSCSC will cover a percentage of the microbiological testing for products, soil amendments, and water as specified by a food safety plan or food safety management system.
 - The FSMA Produce Safety Rule requires covered farms to test their agricultural water, and commercial food safety standards may require additional testing to determine if water meets the microbial requirements of the Environmental Protection Agency's drinking water standard.
 - Retail, food service, and institutional buyers are also increasingly requiring microbiological testing of finished product.
 - Testing of soil amendments, particularly amendments of animal origin (composting) is also required by many food safety audit programs.
 - **Training**
 - FSCSC will cover the cost of food safety training for the specialty crop operation.
 - The FSMA requires all covered operations to take a training course. Additionally, most certification programs require training as well.
- Ineligible expenses include infrastructure improvements, equipment, supplies, salaries and benefits and fees or penalties for late payment.
- The application period for 2022 will be June 27, 2022, through January 31, 2023, and the application period for 2023 will be announced at a later date.
- Interested specialty crop producers can apply by completing the FSA-888, Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops Program (FSCSC) application, along with other required documents and submit to their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) in their USDA Service Center.
 - Applications will be accepted in person, by mail, email, fax, or electronic means.
- Applicants may be required to provide additional documentation to FSA if necessary, to verify eligibility or issue payment.
- Specialty crop operations certified as part of a group under a food safety management system must provide documentation of the applicant's portion of the group's expenses from the entity responsible for maintaining the group's certification if requested by FSA.
- FSCSC payments are calculated separately for each category of eligible costs based on the percentages and maximum payment amounts:



Category of Eligible Expenses	Payment Amount of Eligible Costs	
	Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers	All other applicants
Development of a food safety plan for first-time certification	75 percent (no maximum)	50 percent (no maximum)
Maintaining or updating a food safety plan	75 percent, up to a maximum of \$375	50 percent, up to a maximum of \$250
Food safety certification	75 percent, up to a maximum of \$2,000	50 percent, up to a maximum of \$2,000
Certification upload fees	75 percent, up to a maximum of \$375	50 percent, up to a maximum of \$250
Microbiological testing – products	75 percent, up to 5 tests	50 percent, up to 5 tests
Microbiological testing – soil amendments	75 percent, up to 5 tests	50 percent, up to 5 tests
Microbiological testing – water	75 percent, up to 5 tests	50 percent, up to 5 tests
Training	100 percent, up to a maximum of \$300	100 percent, up to a maximum of \$200

- Payments will be equal to the applicant’s eligible expenses multiplied by the percentage for the applicable category in the table above, not to exceed the maximum payment amount for the category, if applicable.
- An applicant must report any previous cost share assistance received for the expenses included on their application.
- The amount of the applicant’s FSCSC payment plus the reported additional cost share assistance cannot exceed the total amount of eligible expenses for each category.
- FSA will issue payments for 2022 nightly after application approval. For 2023, payments will be issued after the end of the application period. If calculated payments exceed the amount of available funding, payments will be prorated for 2023.



Newsletter Article

USDA Announces Assistance for On-Farm Food Safety Expenses for Specialty Crop Growers

New Program Part of Broader Effort to Transform Food System, Create Jobs

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) plans to provide up to \$200 million in assistance for specialty crop producers who incur eligible on-farm food safety program expenses to obtain or renew a food safety certification in calendar years 2022 or 2023. USDA's new [Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops](#) (FSCSC) program will help to offset costs for specialty crop producers to comply with regulatory requirements and market-driven food safety certification requirements, which is part of USDA's broader effort to transform the food system to create a more level playing field for small and medium producers and a more balanced, equitable economy for everyone working in food and agriculture.

Specialty crop operations can apply for assistance for eligible expenses related to a 2022 food safety certificate issued on or after June 21, 2022, beginning June 27, 2022. USDA is delivering FSCSC to provide critical assistance for specialty crop operations, with an emphasis on equity in program delivery while building on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and supply chain disruptions. Vilsack made the announcement from Hollis, N.H., where he toured a local, family-owned farm and highlighted USDA's efforts to help reduce costs for farmers and support local economies by providing significant funding to cut regulatory costs and increase market opportunities for farmers in New Hampshire and across the nation.

Program Details

FSCSC will assist specialty crop operations that incurred eligible on-farm food safety certification and related expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification in calendar years 2022 and 2023. For each year, FSCSC covers a percentage of the specialty crop operation's cost of obtaining or renewing their certification, as well as a portion of their 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 2022 (issued on or after June 21, 2022) or 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.
- Training.

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.

Applying for Assistance

The FSCSC application period for 2022 is June 27, 2022, through January 31, 2023, and the application period for 2023 will be announced at a later date. FSA will issue payments at the time of application approval for 2022 and after the application period ends for 2023. 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. Producers can visit farmers.gov/service-locator to find their local FSA office. Specialty crop producers can also call 877-508-8364 to speak directly with a USDA employee ready to assist.

Producers can visit farmers.gov/food-safety for additional program details, eligibility information and forms needed to apply.



Sample Posts for Facebook and Twitter

Below are social media posts for use on Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms. Be sure to tag us on Twitter: @FarmersGov and @usdaFSA.

- @USDA is providing up to \$200 million in assistance for specialty crop producers with eligible on-farm food safety expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification in calendar years 2022 and 2023. [Farmers.gov/food-safety](https://farmers.gov/food-safety)
- Eligible specialty crop producers can apply for assistance for on-farm food safety expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification in calendar year 2022 starting June 27. [Farmers.gov/food-safety](https://farmers.gov/food-safety)



The graphic features a dark green background on the left with the USDA logo and text. On the right is a photograph of a field with large green leafy plants. A white rounded rectangle at the bottom contains the Farmers.gov logo and application details.

USDA
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

**Food Safety
Certification for
Specialty Crops**

 **Accepting Calendar Year
2022 Applications**
June 27, 2022 to January 31, 2023
www.farmers.gov/food-safety