

# USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Veterans Webinar Series



**May 14, 2025, 2:00 – 4:30pm Eastern**

**May 15, 2025, 2:00 – 4:00pm Eastern**

# What is a Veteran Farmer or Rancher (VFR)

USDA also has dedicated programs for Veteran Farmers and Ranchers (VFRs).  
The definition of a VFR also varies depending on the agency.

## Veteran Farmer or Rancher (VFR)

### FSA and NRCS Criteria

Individual who has served in the armed forces, including a reserve component; was released from service under conditions other than dishonorable; and:

**qualifies as a BFR (see differences); or first obtained veteran status during the last 10 years.**

- A legal entity or legal operation can be considered VFR if at least 50 percent ownership in the business is held by VFR individuals.
- For FSA Farm Loan Programs, a majority of the entity must be owned by VFR individuals, unless they are married, in which case just one of the spouses must be VFR.

### RMA Criteria

**Individual who has served in the armed forces, including a reserve component; was released from service under conditions other than dishonorable; and:**

**first obtained veteran status during the last 5 years.**



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# NEW FARMERS

Preparing to  
Participate:  
Your Key to Success





# Michael Sherman Outreach Specialist



## **Pennsylvania Farm Service Agency**

- 23 years with USDA (FSA and AMS)
- Beginning Farmer & Veteran State Coordinator

# IDENTIFICATION OF YOUR FARMING OPERATION

- What type of agricultural operation are you striving to establish?
- What experience or education do you possess that can contribute to your success?
- What resources do you currently have?
- What resources will you need?
- Where do you see your operation in the next 5 years and how will you get there?

# DEVELOPING A PLAN

- Your plan is a road map to success
- A concise plan decreases instances of confusion, unpredictability and failure
- Set realistic goals and expectations for the operation
- Remember that farms are businesses and businesses have managers

# CREATE YOUR FARMING RESUME

- Many beginning farmers discredit or undervalue their agricultural experiences and education in conversations with staff
- Prior experience is an important component to the eligibility determinations that are required when obtaining loans
- Be able to discuss your farming portfolio comfortably to county office staff

## **INITIAL CONTACT: COORDINATORS WILL ASSIST**

- Each state has a Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coordinator
- Coordinators can help you identify resources
- Connect you with your local Service Center
- Provide referrals to local assistance programs specific to your region
- <https://www.farmers.gov/your-business/beginning-farmers/coordinators>



# LOCATING YOUR USDA SERVICE CENTER

- Connect with your local USDA representatives at a single location
- Appointments are encouraged for efficient time management for you and staff
- Contact information for your local Service Centers can be found by visiting <https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/USDA-service-centers>

# **MY APPOINTMENT IS SCHEDULED: WHAT DO I NEED TO BRING?**

- Official Tax ID (such as SSN or EIN)
- Legal Entity Paperwork
- Property Deeds or Lease Agreements
- Proof of Signature Authority (if required)

# WHAT WILL FSA DO ON THIS VISIT

- Search established farm records to see if a Farm Serial Number (FSN) and Tract exists for your land
- Delineate your farm boundaries to develop acreages on map used for various types of program participation
- If boundaries exist but are incorrect, FSA will reconstitute farm

# OBTAINING A FARM SERIAL NUMBER

- A farm serial number (FSN) is required to participate in most USDA programs
- There is no cost to obtain an FSN
- Provide proof of ownership or lease agreement
- Used to establish and maintain a farm history for the land
- Farm serial numbers remain with the land and do not follow the operator

# **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR PARTICIPATION: YOUR INPUT IS KEY!**

- Have a basic understanding of programs that are available for your specific need
- Discuss goals and objectives for operation
- Explore current programs available for your production model
- If expansion is desired, be sure to ask about loan programs that provide financing
- Identify priorities for future participation



# INTERNAL USDA RESOURCES

- Be sure to inquire about conservation programs available through the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)
- If further processing ag commodities or energy efficiency is a priority, ask to speak with a representative from USDA Rural Development (RD)
- Crop insurance is an important tool in risk management, be sure to get contact information from the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA)

# EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- State Departments of Agriculture
- Veterans Organizations
- Veteran Business Outreach Centers
- County Conservation Districts
- Local Farm Bureau Chapters
- Extension Programs
- Commodity Organizations
- Colleges/Universities
- Small Business Development Centers

# GovDelivery

- Be sure to signup for GovDelivery updates from your state and local Service Center
- Provides timely notification of current programs and current interest rates offered through FSA
- Allows for opportunity to receive texts pertaining to important signup deadlines

# RECEIPT FOR SERVICE

- Provided by local county office staff when you apply for a program or request assistance
- Some receipts are automatically generated when benefits are requested from certain programs
- Receipts serve as a record for your interaction with office

# AFTER YOUR VISIT

- Annually file your acreage report according to established deadlines
- Maintain contact with your local office
- Explore self-service options if you are unable to make subsequent visits to office
- Share your experience with the USDA with friends, neighbors or relatives who may be interested in learning more about USDA services





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Questions?





**Amanda Robertson**  
National Outreach Specialist  
BFR Regional Coordinator



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Creditworthiness:  
How to prepare for  
financing





## Items to be discussed:

- Creditworthiness
- Tips to consider when applying for a loan
- FSA Loan Programs
- Loan eligibility
- How to apply for a loan



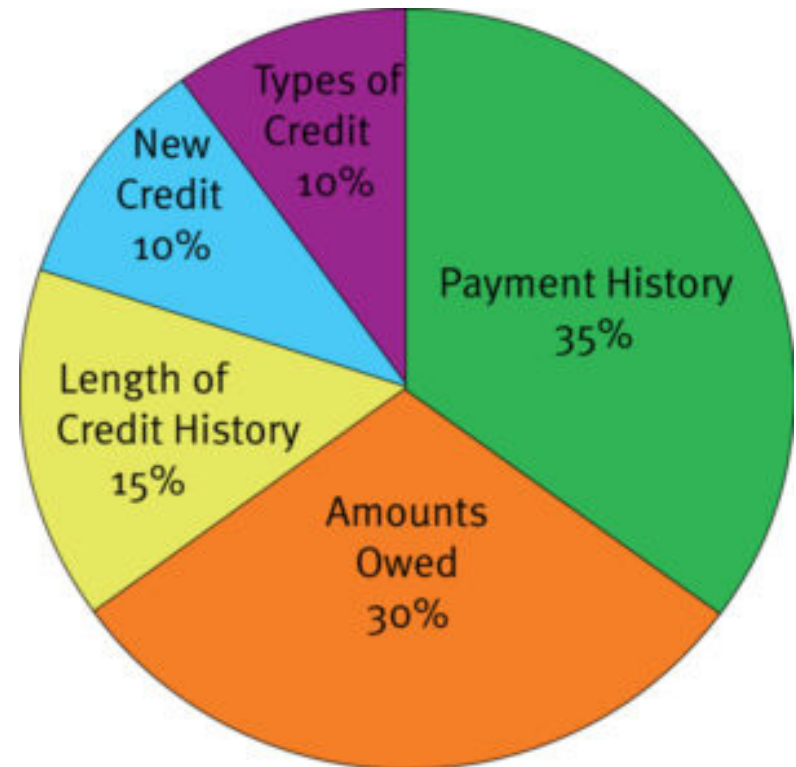
# What is Creditworthiness?

- A measure of how likely you are to pay on your debt obligations.
  - Repayment history
- How worthy you are to receive new credit.
- What lenders consider before they approve any new credit.



# Credit Report

- Provides your credit score
- Detailed record of your credit history
  - Loans
  - Credit cards
  - Payment history
  - Bankruptcies
  - Medical Expenses
  - Judgements (may or may not appear)
- FSA credit report fee
  - Individual- \$16
  - Husband/Wife- \$24.50
  - Entity- \$50



**NOTE: FSA does not make a loan determination based on credit score but rather repayment history.**

# Rebounding your Credit

- Manage your finances
  - Work within your budget
- Contact collectors
  - Develop payment plan
  - Make timely payments
- Take control
  - Be aware of debts
  - Be cautious of co-signing



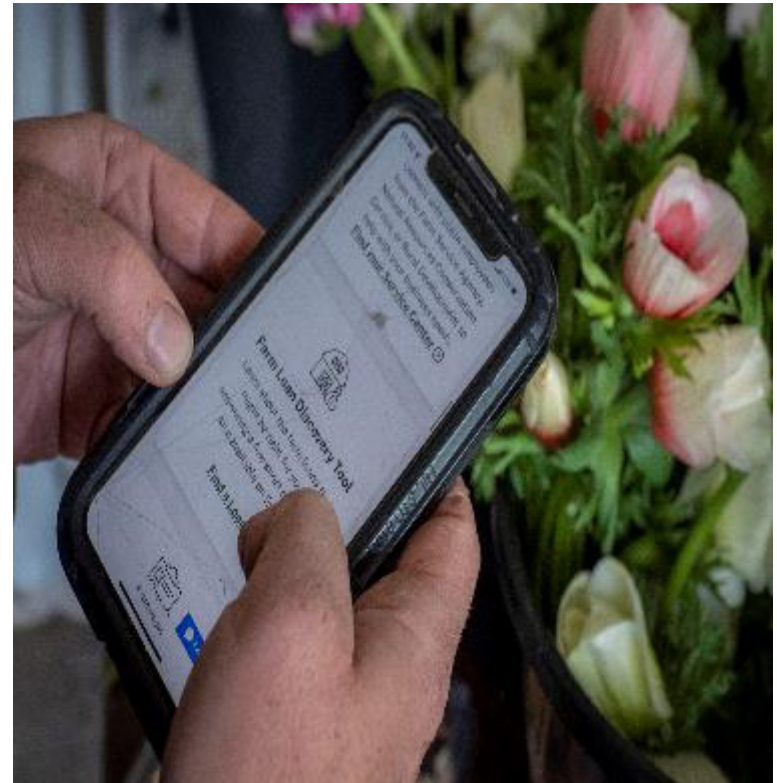
## When Applying for a Loan:

- Have a plan
  - What are you growing/raising?
- Land and capital
  - Do you have access to land and equipment?
- Do your research
  - Production and Marketing
- Provide production history or research production
  - No established history?
  - Do your homework



# When Applying for a Loan-continued

- Have a marketing plan
  - Do you need a contract?
  - Are you selling at market or direct consumer?
- Be mindful of your credit history
  - Do you have good credit?
- Communicate openly and efficiently
  - Be upfront with your loan official
  - let them know the good, bad, and ugly.
- Set goals
  - Short term and long term



# FSA Farm Loan Programs

## Farm Ownership

- Purchase real estate, capital improvements, soil and water conservation, loan closing and related expenses
- \$600,000 maximum loan amount
- Term up to 40 years

## Operating Loan

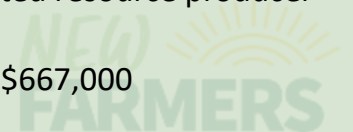
- Purchase livestock, equipment, production expenses, refinance operating expenses
- \$400,000 maximum loan amount
- Term 1-7 years

## Microloans

- For farm ownership and operating purposes
- \$50,000 loan limit for each purpose with combined loan amount not exceeding \$100,000
- Operating terms are 1-7 years
- Farm Ownership terms are up to 40 years

## Beginning Farmer Down Payment Loan

- Purchase real estate
- Must be a beginning, socially disadvantaged, veteran or limited resource producer
- Requires a 5% down payment
- FSA can loan up to 45% of the purchase price not to exceed \$667,000





## What are the Eligibility Requirements?

- Be a family farmer or rancher;
- Have a satisfactory credit history;
- Not have provided FSA with false or misleading documents or statements in the past;
- Be a citizen of the United States, a non-citizen national, or a qualified alien;



## General Eligibility Requirements – continued

- Be unable to obtain credit elsewhere at reasonable rates and terms;
- Have the legal capacity to incur obligations of the loan;
- Not have outstanding unpaid U.S. judgments;
- Not be delinquent on a federal debt;



## General Eligibility Requirements – continued

- Not have been convicted of growing, producing, harvesting, or storing a controlled substance within the last 5 crop years;
- Not have received debt forgiveness from FSA (with exceptions)
- Have the training, education, or farm experience to manage the farm or ranch.



# Find the Farm Loan that is right for you with the Loan Assistance Tool!

- [Loan Assistance Tool / Portal \(usda.gov\)](https://usda.gov)
  - Check eligibility for FSA farm loans
  - Discover FSA loan products
  - Learn how to apply for a Direct Farm Loan online





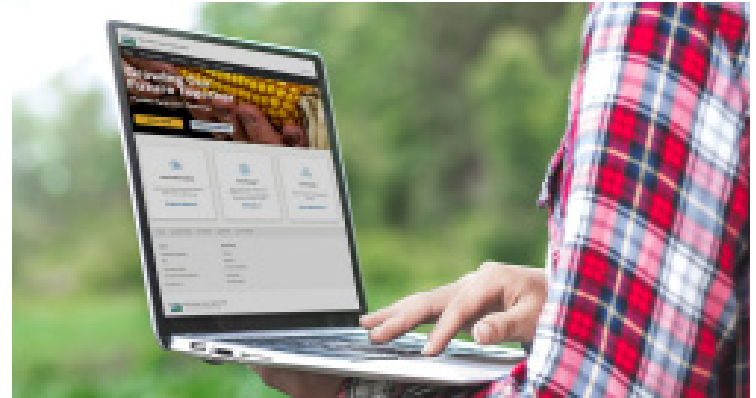
# Preparing your FSA Direct Loan Application

- All FSA direct loan applications require the same basic forms
- Loan official will advise if additional information is required
- Apply in person or on-line
- Connect with your local USDA Service Center
  - [Questions? Find Your Local Service Center | Farmers.gov](https://www.farmers.gov/questions/find-your-local-service-center)



## Apply for a Direct Loan online

- Access a secure online portal to complete loan application
- Upload supporting documents
- Pay the required credit report fee
- Submit the application for processing



Note: You will need a USDA individual customer record linked to a USDA Level 2 eAuthentication account. Visit [farmers.gov/account](https://farmers.gov/account) or contact your local USDA Service Center for assistance.

## USDA's Online Farm Loan Tools: [farmers.gov/loans](https://farmers.gov/loans)

- **Find a Farm Loan**
  - [Loan Assistance Tool / Portal \(usda.gov\)](https://usda.gov)
- **Apply for a Direct Loan**
  - [Online Loan Application Tool](https://farmers.gov)
- **Make a Direct Farm Loan Payment**
  - [Pay My Loan Self-Service Tool](https://farmers.gov)





## If you are new to farming, ranching, and USDA:

- Connect with your State BFR Coordinator
  - [Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coordinators | Farmers.gov](#)
- Check out the step-by-step guide to starting a farming or ranching operation
  - [Beginning Farmers and Ranchers | Farmers.gov](#)



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## Each day we will cover different topics, including:

### Wednesday, May 14, 2025

1. **USDA Key Personnel Introduction and Overview**
2. **Veterans and the USDA, with Michael Sherman**  
Introduction to USDA's definition of military veteran farmer and rancher and how it differs across agencies.
3. **How to Get Started, with Michael Sherman**  
Guidance on how to prepare for a successful appointment at the local Service Center.
4. **Credit Worthiness, with Amanda Robertson**  
Learn the factors FSA Loan Officers use to determine credit worthiness.

### Thursday, May 15, 2025

1. **Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG), with Carlos Contreas and DeLea Taylor**  
Overview of grant program to help with value-added production and sales.
2. **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), with Floyd Nauls**  
Learn how to integrate conservation practices into working land.

