



United States Department of Agriculture



Alabama USDA June Newsletter

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Alabama USDA Newsletter - June 2024

Farm Service Agency | Natural Resources Conservation Service | Risk Management Agency

In This Issue:

- [USDA Expands Funding Opportunities for Specialty Crop Growers to Help Offset On-Farm Food Safety Expenses for 2024 and 2025](#)
- [Urban Producers, Public Invited to Attend July Meeting of Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](#)
- [USDA Reminds Alabama Producers to File Crop Acreage Reports](#)
- [Farm Service Agency Seeking Nominations for Farmers and Ranchers to Serve on Local County Committees](#)
- [USDA Opens Application Period for Composting and Food Waste Reduction Cooperative Agreements](#)

USDA Expands Funding Opportunities for Specialty Crop Growers to Help Offset On-Farm Food Safety Expenses for 2024 and 2025



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

FOOD SAFETY CERTIFICATION FOR SPECIALTY CROPS

Accepting Applications: 2024 → July 1, 2024 to Jan. 31, 2025
for Calendar Years: 2025 → Jan. 1, 2025 to Jan. 31, 2026

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is expanding the [Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops \(FSCSC\) program](#) to now include medium-sized businesses in addition to small businesses. Eligible specialty crop growers can apply for assistance for expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety certification. The program has also been expanded to include assistance for 2024 and 2025 expenses. Producers can apply for assistance on their calendar year 2024 expenses beginning July 1, 2024, through Jan. 31, 2025. For program year 2025, the application period will be Jan. 1, 2025, through Jan. 31, 2026.

Program Details

FSCSC assists specialty crop operations that incurred eligible on-farm food safety certification and expenses related to obtaining or renewing a food safety. 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.

Eligible FSCSC applicants must be a specialty crop operation; meet the definition of a small or medium-size business and have paid eligible expenses related to certification.

- A small business has an average annual monetary value of specialty crops sold by the applicant during the three-year period preceding the program year of no more than \$500,000.
- A medium size business has an average annual monetary value of specialty crops the applicant sold during the three-year period preceding the program year of at least \$500,001 but no more than \$1,000,000.

Specialty crop operations can receive the following cost assistance:

- 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 eligible cost category. Details about payment rates and limitations are available at farmers.gov/food-safety.

Applying for Assistance

Interested applicants have until Jan. 31, 2025, to apply for assistance for 2024 eligible expenses. FSA will issue payments as applications are processed and approved. For program year 2025, the application period will be January 1, 2025, through January 31, 2026. FSA will issue 50% of the calculated payment for program year 2025 following application approval, with the remaining amount to be paid after the application deadline. If calculated payments exceed the amount of available funding, payments will be prorated.

Specialty crop producers can apply by completing the [FSA-888-1](#), *Food Safety Certification for Specialty Crops Program (FSCSC) for Program Years 2024 and 2025* application. The application, along with the [AD-2047](#), *Customer Data Worksheet* and [SF-3881](#), *ACH Vendor/Miscellaneous Payment Enrollment Form*, if not already on file with FSA, can be submitted to the FSA office at any USDA Service Center nationwide by mail, fax, hand delivery or via electronic means. Alternatively, producers with an eAuthentication account can apply for FSCSC [online](#). Producers interested in creating an eAuthentication account should visit farmers.gov/sign-in.

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

More Information

To learn more about FSA programs, producers can contact their local [USDA Service Center](#). Producers can also prepare maps for acreage reporting as well as manage farm loans and view other farm records data and customer information by [logging into their farmers.gov account](#). Producers without an account can [sign up today](#).

Urban Producers, Public Invited to Attend July Meeting of Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production

We're inviting urban producers, innovative producers, and other stakeholders to virtually attend a public meeting of the Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production on July 11 from 12-5 p.m. Eastern.

Meeting details can be viewed in the [Federal Register Notice](#). Written comments can be submitted via UrbanAgricultureFederalAdvisoryCommittee@usda.gov by July 25 at 11:59

p.m. The Committee will deliberate and vote on proposed recommendations and address public comments during the meeting. USDA will share the agenda between 24 to 48 hours prior to the meeting on the [Committee's webpage](#).



The Committee is managed by the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production and was established through the 2018 Farm Bill and is part of a broad USDA investment in urban agriculture.

[Learn more and register.](#)

USDA Reminds Alabama Producers to File Crop Acreage Reports



Agricultural producers in Alabama should make an appointment with their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office to complete [crop acreage reports](#) before the applicable deadline after planting is complete.

An acreage report documents a crop grown on a farm or ranch, its intended use and location. Filing an accurate and timely acreage report for all crops and land uses, including failed acreage and prevented planted acreage, can prevent the loss of benefits.

How to File a Report

The following acreage reporting dates are applicable in State:

November 15	Apiculture, Onions
January 15	Blueberries, Canola, Rapeseed, Fall Oats, Peaches, Fall Wheat
March 15	Pecans, Potatoes (Planted 1/1-3/1)
May 15	Sweet Corn, Potatoes (Planted 3/2-4/15), Tobacco, Tomatoes
July 15	All Other Crops, Perennial Forage, CRP
July 31	Hemp
September 30*	Value-loss and controlled environment crops (except nursery)

*Note The established ARD for value loss and controlled environment crops is September 30 for the ensuing crop year.

Acreage reporting dates vary by crop and by county. Contact your local FSA office for a list of acreage reporting deadlines by crop.

To file a crop acreage report, producers need to provide:

- Crop and crop type or variety

- Intended crop use
- Number of crop acres
- Map with approximate crop boundaries
- Planting date(s)
- Planting pattern, when applicable
- Producer shares
- Irrigation practice(s)
- Acreage prevented from planting, when applicable
- Other required information

Acreage Reporting Details

The following exceptions apply to acreage reporting dates:

- If the crop has not been planted by the acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.
- If a producer acquires additional acreage after the acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendar days after purchase or acquiring the lease. Appropriate documentation must be provided to the county office.

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP-covered crops is the earlier of the dates listed above or 15 calendar days before grazing or crop harvesting begins.

Prevented Planted Acreage

Producers should also report crop acreage they intended to plant but were unable to because of a natural disaster, including drought. Prevented planted acreage must be reported on form CCC-576, *Notice of Loss*, no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA).

FSA recently updated policy that applies to prevented planted acreage due to drought. To certify prevented planted acreage due to drought, all of the following must apply:

- The area that is prevented from being planted has insufficient soil moisture for seed germination on the final planting date for non-irrigated acreage.
- Prolonged precipitation deficiencies that meet the D3 or D4 drought intensity level as determined by the U.S. Drought Monitor.
- Verifiable information must be collected from sources whose business or purpose is recording weather conditions as determined by FSA.

Continuous Certification Option for Perennial Forage

Agricultural producers with perennial forage crops have the option to report their acreage once, without having to report that acreage in subsequent years, as long as there are no applicable changes on the farm. Interested producers can select the continuous certification option after FSA certifies their acreage report. Examples of perennial forage

include mixed forage, birdsfoot trefoil, chicory/radicchio, kochia (prostrata), lespedeza, perennial peanuts and perennial grass varieties.

Once the continuous certification option is selected, the certified acreage will roll forward annually with no additional action required by the producer in subsequent years unless the acreage report changes.

Farmers.gov Portal

Producers can access their FSA farm records, maps, and common land units through the farmers.gov customer portal. The portal allows producers to export field boundaries as shapefiles and import and view other shapefiles, such as precision agriculture boundaries within farm records mapping. Producers can view, print and label their maps for acreage reporting purposes. Level 2 eAuthentication or login.gov access that is linked to a USDA Business Partner customer record is required to use the portal.

Producers can visit farmers.gov/account to learn more about creating an account. Producers who have authority to act on behalf of another customer as a grantee via an FSA-211 *Power of Attorney* form, Business Partner Signature Authority or as a member of a business can now access information for the business in the farmers.gov portal.

More Information

For questions, producers should call their FSA county office. To find their FSA county office, visit farmers.gov/service-center-locator.

Updates to Acreage Reporting and Prevented Planted Acres

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) made several policy updates to acreage reporting and prevented planted acres.

Prevented Planted Acres

In order to certify prevented planted acreage due to drought, all of the following must apply:

- The area that is prevented from being planted has insufficient soil moisture for germination of seed on the final planting date for non-irrigated acreage
- Prolonged precipitation deficiencies that meet the D3 or D4 level as determined by the U.S. Drought Monitor
- Verifiable information must be collected from sources whose business or purpose is recording weather conditions as determined by FSA and the sources include, but are not limited to:
 - U.S. National Weather Service
 - Bureau of Reclamation
 - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 - National Institute of Food and Agriculture
 - Natural Resources Conservation Service
 - Local irrigation authorities responsible for water allocations
 - State Department of Water Resources
 - National Institute of Food and Agriculture

- Other sources responsible for the collection of water data or regulation of water resources (water allocations).

FSA reminds producers to report prevented planted and failed acres in order to establish or retain FSA program eligibility for some programs. You should report crop acreage you intended to plant, but due to natural disaster, were prevented from planting. Prevented planting acreage must be reported on form CCC-576, *Notice of Loss*, no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and the Risk Management Agency (RMA).

Late-Filed Acreage Reports

FSA can now accept late-filed acreage reports without a field visit if the producer can provide proof of existence and disposition. Producers are required to pay the late filed fee.

Proof of existence of the crop includes, but is not limited to:

- seed receipts showing the amount, variety, and date purchased;
- receipts for cleaning, treating, etc., for seed planted on the farm;
- a written contract or documentation of an oral contract to produce a specific crop;
- evidence that was accepted and approved by the RMA or another USDA agency;
- precision planting, spraying, or harvesting geospatial data or maps;
- drone photos with location and notable physical boundaries;
- other aerial or ground imagery with the ability to determine date, acres, and crop.

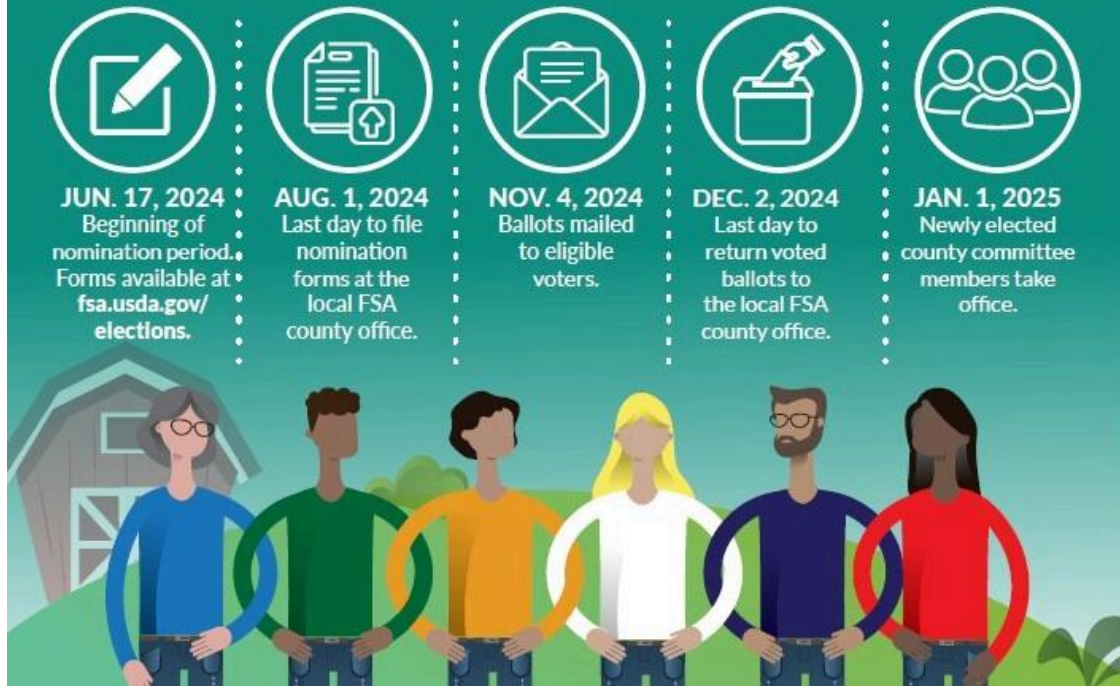
Proof of disposition of the crop includes, but is not limited to:

- receipts showing number and units sold if the sale can be positively identified as sale of the crop for the farm for the year represented;
- a written contract or documentation of an oral contract to produce a specific crop;
- records showing the crop was fed to livestock;
- documentation of payment for custom harvesting indicating acreage, location, and crop year;
- evidence that was accepted and approved by another USDA agency.

Farm Service Agency Seeking Nominations for Farmers and Ranchers to Serve on Local County Committees

Nominations are now being accepted for farmers and ranchers to serve on local U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committees. These committees make important decisions about how federal farm programs are administered locally. All nomination forms for the 2024 election must be postmarked or received in the local FSA office by Aug. 1, 2024.

2024 COUNTY COMMITTEE ELECTIONS



Elections for committee members will occur in certain Local Administrative Areas (LAA). LAAs are elective areas for FSA committees in a single county or multi-county jurisdiction and may include LAAs that are focused on an urban or suburban area.

Customers can locate their LAA through a geographic information system locator tool available at fsa.usda.gov/elections and determine if their LAA is up for election by contacting their local FSA office.

Agricultural producers may be nominated for candidacy for the county committee if they:

- Participate or cooperate in a USDA program.
- Reside in the LAA that is up for election this year.

A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information about their farming or ranching operation to FSA, even if they have not applied or received program benefits.

Individuals may nominate themselves or others and qualifying organizations may also nominate candidates. USDA encourages minority, women, urban and beginning farmers or ranchers to nominate, vote and hold office.

Nationwide, more than 7,700 dedicated members of the agricultural community serve on FSA county committees. The committees are made up of three to 11 members who serve three-year terms. Committee members are vital to how FSA carries out disaster recovery, conservation, commodity and price support programs, as well as making decisions on county office employment and other agricultural issues.

Urban and Suburban County Committees

The 2018 Farm Bill directed USDA to form urban county committees and make other advancements related to urban agriculture, including the establishment of the Office of

Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production. FSA established county committees specifically focused on urban agriculture that work to encourage and promote urban, indoor and other emerging agricultural production practices. Additionally, the county committees may address food access, community engagement, support of local activities to promote and encourage community compost and food waste reduction.

Urban committee members are nominated and elected to serve by local urban producers in the same jurisdiction. Urban county committee members provide outreach to ensure urban producers understand USDA programs, serve as the voice of other urban producers and assist in program implementation that support the needs of the growing urban community.

The 27 cities with urban county committees are listed at fsa.usda.gov/elections and farmers.gov/urban. Of these, ten urban county committees will hold an inaugural election this cycle.

More Information

Producers should contact their local FSA office today to register and find out how to get involved in their county's election, including if their LAA is up for election this year. To be considered, a producer must be registered and sign an [FSA-669A](#) nomination form. This form and other information about FSA county committee elections are available at fsa.usda.gov/elections.

All nomination forms for the 2024 election must be postmarked or received in the local USDA Service Center by the Aug. 1, 2024, deadline. Election ballots will be mailed to eligible voters in November 2024.

USDA Opens Application Period for Composting and Food Waste Reduction Cooperative Agreements

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is accepting applications for Composting and Food Waste Reduction (CFWR) pilot projects for fiscal year 2024. The cooperative agreements, using remaining funds from the American Rescue Plan Act, are jointly administered by USDA's Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Selected projects will develop and test strategies for planning and implementing municipal compost plans and food waste reduction plans and are part of USDA's broader efforts to support urban agriculture.

USDA's Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP) – led by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) – will accept applications on Grants.gov until 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on Sept. 4, 2024. Projects must be two years in duration with an estimated start date of June 1, 2025.

“Uneaten food makes up approximately 4% of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions,” said Terry Cosby, Chief of NRCS, which houses the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production. “Turning food waste into valuable compost is an important climate solution and benefits both farmers and communities. Local strategies and tools like the cooperative agreements are important climate solutions and also contribute to food security at the community level, and we encourage communities to apply.”

Cooperative agreements support projects led by local and tribal governments, schools or other eligible entities that:

- Generate compost.
- Increase access to compost for agricultural producers.
- Reduce reliance on and limit the use of fertilizer.
- Improve soil quality.
- Encourage waste management and permaculture business development.
- Increase rainwater absorption.
- Reduce municipal food waste.
- Divert food waste from landfills.

OUAIP will prioritize projects that anticipate or demonstrate economic benefits; incorporate plans to make compost easily accessible to farmers, including community gardeners; integrate other food waste strategies, including food recovery efforts, and collaborate with multiple partners. Additional details are available in the [Grants.gov notice](#).

This is the fifth year that OUAIP has offered this funding opportunity. Examples of past investments include Geneva Compost and Food Waste Diversion, from the Town of Geneva, New York, which diverted food waste and other biodegradables from the waste stream to generate nutrient-rich compost, improving soil quality, reducing reliance on fertilizers, and engaging in food recovery efforts that take “extra” food and get it to community members in need.

Another example of a past recipient is the Composting and Food Waste Reduction Pilot Project by Tucson Unified School District in Tucson, Arizona. The project built infrastructure to provide compost to school and community gardens, improve soil quality, reduce food waste, and demonstrate the economic benefits of including food reclamation education as an integral part of a school garden and nutrition programs for students, their families and the community.

Webinar

A pre-recorded webinar will provide an overview of the cooperative agreements’ purpose, project types, eligibility and basic requirements for submitting applications. The webinar will be posted at usda.gov/urban.

More Information

Earlier today, USDA, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and the White House announced the [National Strategy for Reducing Food Loss and Waste and Recycling Organics](#) as part of President Biden’s whole-of-government approach to tackle climate change, feed people, address environmental justice, and promote a circular economy.

OUAIP was established through the 2018 Farm Bill. It is led by NRCS and works in partnership with numerous USDA agencies that support urban agriculture and innovative production. Other efforts include:

- Administering the [People's Garden Initiative](#), which celebrates collaborative gardens across the country and worldwide that benefit their communities by growing fresh, healthy food and supporting resilient, local food systems using sustainable practices and providing greenspace.
- Creating and managing a [Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](#) to advise the Secretary on the development of policies and outreach relating to urban agriculture.
- Investing \$9.1 million for [Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production](#) competitive grants in fiscal year 2023.
- Investing \$40 million, made possible by President Biden's American Rescue Plan, into partnerships with community-based organizations that will conduct outreach, education and technical assistance to support urban producers.
- Investing in [risk management education](#) to broaden the reach of crop insurance among urban producers.
- Organizing 27 FSA urban and suburban county committees to make important decisions about how FSA farm programs are administered locally. Urban farmers who participate in USDA programs in the areas selected are encouraged to participate by nominating and voting for county committee members.
- Establishing 17 new [Urban Service Centers](#) staffed by FSA and NRCS employees where urban producers can access farm loan, conservation, disaster assistance and risk management programs.
- Partnering with the [Vermont Law and Graduate School Center for Agriculture and Food Systems](#) to develop resources that help growers understand and work through local policies.

Learn more about Composting and Food Waste Cooperative Agreements at usda.gov/urban and view [a complete list of 2023 cooperative agreement recipients and project summaries](#). In 2023, USDA awarded \$11.5 million in 38 cooperative agreements. For additional resources available to producers, download the [Urban Agriculture at a Glance brochure](#) or visit farmers.gov/urban.

NIFA is building a better future by nurturing innovation in the food and agricultural sciences and cultivating equitable change in communities across the nation. Through investment in science as a solution to our greatest challenges, USDA NIFA collaborates with partners to drive research, education and Extension — improving lives, supporting livelihoods and sustaining the planet. In FY 2023, NIFA's total investment was \$2.5 billion.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under 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 throughout America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit usda.gov.

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