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## From the Alaska FSA State Executive Director

I spent the past week in our nation's capital attending a gathering of FSA State Executive Directors and Rural Development State Directors from across the country. Amongst various trainings, leadership discussions and presentations, we also had multiple interactions with Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. He was announcing the historic Inflation Reduction Act debt relief offered to distressed borrowers. This is a historic, once-in-a-generation investment and opportunity for this country and for the rural and agricultural communities that USDA serves, including here in Alaska. The Inflation Reduction Act will help producers stay on the farm, prevent producers from becoming ineligible for future assistance, and promote climate-smart agriculture by increasing access to conservation assistance.

Another reminder that the Alaska Farm Bureau meeting is quickly approaching. The agenda is packed with technical presentations, research opportunities and lots of fun. You can register, purchase concert tickets and see the full agenda on the Farm Bureau's website at [www.alaskaafb.org](http://www.alaskaafb.org) What am I most looking forward to? The Alaska premier of the award-winning feature documentary "The Long Rider" film. The star of the film, Filipe Masetti Leite, rode



horseback from Alaska to the tip of Argentina and created this movie along they way. I was lucky enough to meet, interview and play tour guide to Filipe while he was in Palmer, and I can't wait to watch the film Thursday night. Filipe will join us for a post-film Q&A and will also be speaking at the convention.

The Governor's Food Security Task Force has released a draft report on the Alaska food system. They are seeking public comment through 10/31/22. You can read the full report and provide feedback at <https://alaska-food-systems-soa-dnr.hub.arcgis.com/>

The Alaska Division of Agriculture is conducting a statewide survey to gather input on the hay and grain situation in Alaska. If you produce, sell, or purchase hay, grain, or other types of feed your input is critical. The Division has identified incentives to provide assistance and to address statewide food security. Please take a few minutes to answer some short survey questions at the following link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AlaskaHayandGrainSurvey> This survey is separated into three different components: producer, retailer, and consumer, and will direct you to the appropriate survey based on that answer. Please complete the survey by **November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022** if Alaska's hay and grain situation directly impacts you. Your feedback is very important to us.

Finally – the National Drought Mitigation Center in cooperation with the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the Northwest Climate Hub will be hosting two drought workshops in early November. There is an in-person opportunity in Delta Junction on November 14<sup>th</sup> and an in-person or hybrid opportunity in Palmer on November 16<sup>th</sup>.

<HTTPS://GO.UNL.EDU/AKDROUGHT>

Reminders:

- Applications for OTECP and OCCSP are both due October 31, 2022.
- USDA Reminds Farmers and Ranchers of Nov. 4 Deadline to Submit Your RTCP Receipts.
- The deadline to apply for the Northern County FSA Program Technician Vacancy is November 8, 2022.
- Veterans Day, State and County FSA Offices closed, November 11, 2022.
- Thanksgiving Day, State and County FSA Offices closed, November 24, 2022.
- The deadline to return the County Committee Election ballots to local FSA offices, or to be postmarked, is Dec. 5, 2022.
- Acreage Reporting date for 2023 Crop year for Fall-Seeded Small Grains is December 15, 2022.
- Christmas Day, State and County FSA Offices closed, December 26, 2022.
- New Years Day, State and County FSA Offices closed, January 2, 2023.
- The FSCSC application period for 2022 ends on January 31, 2023.

Amy Pettit  
State Executive Director  
Alaska Farm Service Agency

## USDA Reminds Farmers and Ranchers of Nov. 4 Deadline to Submit Your RTCP Receipts

The [Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment Program \(RTCP\)](#) signup ended on September 2, 2022. This program covered transportation expenses incurred from October 1, 2021 through September 30, 2022. If you applied for the RTCP program and have not turned all your receipts into the FSA office, now is the time to do so. Applicants will have until COB on Nov. 4, 2022, to provide supporting documentation. If you have any questions, contact your local FSA office.

For more information on RTCP, farmers and ranchers in the eligible areas can visit their FSA county office or the FSA website at [fsa.usda.gov/pricesupport](https://fsa.usda.gov/pricesupport). To locate your local FSA office visit [farmers.gov/service-center-locator](https://farmers.gov/service-center-locator).

## Northern County FSA Office in Delta Junction, Alaska Is Hiring

The Northern County Farm Service Agency (FSA) office in Delta Junction, Alaska is hiring a full time Program Technician (PT). The deadline to apply is **November 8, 2022**.

Duties include general office activities supporting FSA programs administered at the field level. Successful applicants must be reliable, have a professional attitude and enjoy working with the public.

If you are interested or know of someone who might be interested, please share this information with them. Here is the direct link to the position with information on how to apply: <https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/683636800>

**Applications must be completed through USAJOBS by November 8, 2022.**

Contact Donna Kramer at 907-761-7753 if you have specific questions regarding the position.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

## USDA Accepting Applications to Help Cover Costs of Organic, Transitioning Producers

*Applications for the Organic and Transitional Education Certification Program (OTECP) and Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) due October 31, 2022.*

Agricultural producers and handlers who are certified organic, along with producers and handlers who are transitioning to organic production, can now apply for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [Organic and Transitional Education Certification Program](#) (OTECP) and [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP), which help

producers and handlers cover the cost of organic certification, along with other related expenses. Applications for OTECP and OCCSP are both due October 31, 2022.

OTECP covers:

- Certification costs for organic producers and handlers (25% up to \$250 per category).
- Eligible expenses for transitional producers, including fees for pre-certification inspections and development of an organic system plan (75% up to \$750).
- Registration fees for educational events (75% up to \$200).
- Soil testing (75% up to \$100).

Meanwhile, OCCSP covers 50% or up to \$500 per category of certification costs in 2022.

This cost share for certification is available for each of these categories: crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling and State organic program fees.

Producers can receive cost share through both OTECP and OCCSP. Both OTECP and OCCSP cover costs incurred from October 1, 2021, to September 30, 2022. Producers have until October 31, 2022 to file applications, and FSA will make payments as applications are received.

To apply, producers and handlers should contact the Farm Service Agency (FSA) at their local USDA Service Center. As part of completing the OCCSP applications, producers and handlers will need to provide documentation of their organic certification and eligible expenses. Organic producers and handlers may also apply for OCCSP through participating State agencies.

Additional details can be found on the [OTECP](#) and [OCCSP](#) webpages.

## **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](https://farmers.gov/food-safety).

### **Applying for Assistance**

The FSCSC application period for 2022 ends on 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. 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](https://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](https://farmers.gov/food-safety) for additional program details, eligibility information and forms needed to apply.

## **Maintaining Good Credit History**

Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans require applicants to have a satisfactory credit history. A credit report is requested for all FSA direct farm loan applicants. These reports are reviewed to verify outstanding debts, see if bills are paid timely and to determine the impact on cash flow.

Information on your credit report is strictly confidential and is used only as an aid in conducting FSA business.

Our farm loan staff will discuss options with you if you have an unfavorable credit report and will provide a copy of your report. If you dispute the accuracy of the information on the credit report, it is up to you to contact the issuing credit report company to resolve any errors or inaccuracies.

There are multiple ways to remedy an unfavorable credit score:

- Make sure to pay bills on time
  - Setting up automatic payments or automated reminders can be an effective way to remember payment due dates.
- Pay down existing debt
- Keep your credit card balances low
- Avoid suddenly opening or closing existing credit accounts

FSA's farm loan staff will guide you through the process, which may require you to reapply for a loan after improving or correcting your credit report.

For more information about farm loans, please contact the Northern County FSA office at 907-895-4242 ext 150 and the Southern County FSA Office at 907-761-7773.

## **Progression Lending from FSA**

Farm Service Agency (FSA) farm loans are considered progression lending. Unlike loans from a commercial lender, FSA loans are intended to be temporary in nature. Our goal is to help you graduate to commercial credit, and our farm loan staff is available to help borrowers through training and credit counseling.

The FSA team will help borrowers identify their goals to ensure financial success. FSA staff will advise borrowers on developing strategies and a plan to meet your goals and graduate to commercial credit. FSA borrowers are responsible for the success of their farming operation, but FSA staff will help in an advisory role, providing the tools necessary to help you achieve your operational goals and manage your finances.

For more information about farm loans, please contact the Northern County FSA office at 907-895-4242 ext 150 and the Southern County FSA Office at 907-761-7773 or visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

If you would need to request an accommodation to attend or participate in these meetings and/or events, please contact the Northern County FSA Service Center, at (907) 895-4242, ext. 150 or the Southern County FSA Service Center, at (907) 761-7773 to request accommodations (e.g., an interpreter, translator, seating arrangements, etc.) or materials in an alternative format (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape – captioning, etc.). Dial 7-1-1 to access telecommunication relay services.

## Alaska State Farm Service Agency

800 E Palmer-Wasilla Hwy., Suite 216  
Palmer, AK 99645  
Phone: 907-761-7738  
Fax: 907-761-7789

### Northern County FSA Service Center

PO Box 585

Delta Junction, AK 99737

Phone: 907-895-4242 ext. 150

Fax: 855-711-9095

Hours:

Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

[www.fsa.usda.gov/ak](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/ak)

### Southern County FSA Service Center

800 E Palmer-Wasilla Hwy. Ste 216

Palmer, AK 99645

Phone: 907-761-7773

Fax: 907-761-7789

### County Committee Meetings

Northern Co November 8, 10:00 a.m.

Southern Co November 8, 7:30 a.m.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866)

632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).



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