

In This Issue:

- [Message from Dean Schamore, State Executive Director for FSA in Kentucky](#)
- [USDA Now Accepting Applications for Available Funds to Help Cover Organic Certification Costs](#)
- [Soybean Request for Referendum - 2024](#)
- [Happy World Bee Day!](#)
- [Environmental Review Required Before Project Implementation](#)
- [USDA Reminds Producers of Climate-Smart Opportunities Using Farm Loan Programs](#)
- [USDA Announces Availability of Low-Interest Physical Loss Loans for Kentucky Producers in 7 Counties Affected by Tornadoes and High Winds that Occurred in March and April 2024](#)
- [Farm Service Agency Call Center](#)
- [Current Farm Loans and Farm Programs Interest Rates](#)

Message from Dean Schamore, State Executive Director for FSA in Kentucky



May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Many farming operations require long hours of manual labor, and when met with volatile markets and unpredictable weather events, the farming business can become very stressful. According to Mental Health America, 1 in 5 adults in the U.S. experience mental illness each year. And according to data compiled by researchers at the University of Kentucky, U.S. farmers are more than twice as likely to die by suicide than the general population. Sadly, from 2004-17, we lost 109 Kentucky farmers from suicide.

The primary goal of Mental Health Awareness Month is to raise awareness about mental health conditions, combat the stigma often associated with mental health challenges, and underscore the critical importance of mental well-being. Mental Health Awareness Month encourages open conversations, promotes understanding, and highlights

the urgent need for accessible mental health resources. Please keep in mind that there are resources available to help with emotional support.

The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to anyone experiencing emotional distress, or for anyone who is worried about a loved one who may need crisis support. The service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and can be reached by calling or texting **988** or chatting at <https://988lifeline.org/chat/>.

Another great source of emotional support is [Raising Hope](#), which is a local outreach campaign to support healthy lives on Kentucky farms and to help farmers and their families across Kentucky during disaster events. *Always know that you are not alone — stress is a part of life and it's okay to talk about it and seek help. Just as it's important to take care of crops or animals, it's important to take care of yourself.*

On behalf of all of us at the Farm Service Agency in Kentucky, we thank our farmers and producers for caring for the land and helping ensure the delivery of safe and affordable food and fiber for us all.

FSA Offices will be closed Monday, May 27th in observance of Memorial Day. Offices will reopen Tuesday, May 28th. Memorial Day commemorates all the women and men who have died while in military service. On this special day, let's remember all the men and women who sacrificed for us. I wish you a blessed Memorial Day.

Sincerely,

Dean Schamore
State Executive Director for FSA
Kentucky State Office

USDA Now Accepting Applications for Available Funds to Help Cover Organic Certification Costs

Through the [Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#) (OCCSP), USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will cover up to 75% of organic certification costs at a maximum of \$750 per certification category. FSA is now accepting applications, and organic producers and handlers should apply for OCCSP by the Oct. 31, 2024, deadline for eligible expenses incurred from Oct. 1, 2023, to Sept. 30, 2024. FSA will issue payments as applications are received and approved.

“Costs associated with obtaining organic certification can be a barrier for Kentucky producers wanting to get certified,” said Dean Schamore, FSA State Executive Director in Kentucky. “Through OCCSP assistance, FSA helps Kentucky organic producers obtain certification and leverage related benefits like premium prices for commodities and access to broader markets and additional technical assistance.”

OCCSP was part of a [broader organic announcement](#) made by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack on May 15, 2024, which also included the Organic Market Development Grant program and Organic Transition Initiative.

Eligible Applicants, Expenses and Categories

OCCSP provides cost-share assistance to producers and handlers of organic agricultural commodities for expenses incurred obtaining or maintaining organic certification under USDA's [National Organic Program](#). Eligible OCCSP applicants include any certified organic producers or handlers who have paid organic certification fees to a USDA-accredited certifying agent.

Cost share assistance covers expenses including application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement and arrangement requirements, inspector travel expenses, user fees, sales assessments and postage. OCCSP pays a maximum of \$750 per certification category for crops, wild crops, livestock, processing/handling, and state organic program fees (California only).

How to Apply

To apply, producers and handlers should contact FSA at their local [USDA Service Center](#) and be prepared to provide documentation of organic certification and eligible expenses. OCCSP applications can also be submitted through participating state departments of agriculture. For more information, visit the [OCCSP](#) webpage.

Opportunity for State Departments of Agriculture

FSA is also accepting applications from state departments of agriculture to administer OCCSP. FSA posted a [funding opportunity summary on grants.gov](#) and will electronically mail the Notice of Funding Opportunity to all eligible state departments of agriculture. Applications are due July 12, 2024.

If a state department of agriculture chooses to participate in OCCSP, both the state department of agriculture and FSA county offices in that state will accept OCCSP applications and make payments to eligible certified operations. Producers or handlers can receive OCCSP assistance from either FSA or the participating state department of agriculture but not both.

More Information

USDA offers other assistance for organic producers, including the [Organic Transition Initiative \(OTI\)](#), which includes direct farmer assistance for organic production and processing and conservation. For more information on organic agriculture, visit [farmers.gov/organic](#).

Soybean Request for Referendum - 2024

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will conduct the Soybean Request for Referendum May 6 through May 31, 2024, in county Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices.

The Soybean Promotion, Research and Consumer Information Act requires USDA to conduct a Request for Referendum every five years to determine if producers want to vote on continuation of the Soybean Checkoff Program. The last Request for Referendum was conducted in 2019.

Individual producers and other producer entities may request a referendum at the county FSA office where their administrative farm records are maintained. Producers who do not

participate in FSA programs may request a referendum through the county FSA office where they own or rent land.

To be eligible to participate, producers must certify and provide documentation that they produced soybeans and paid an assessment(s) on their soybeans during the period of January 1, 2022, through December 31, 2023. Producers may obtain Form LP-51-1, Soybean Promotion and Research Order Request for Referendum, by postal mail, fax or in person from their FSA county office. The form will be available on the [United Soybean Board](#) page of the AMS website, from May 6, 2024, to May 31, 2024.

Completed forms and supporting documentation must be returned to the appropriate county FSA office by fax or in person no later than close of business May 31, 2024. Mailed forms must be postmarked by midnight May 31, 2024, and received in the county FSA office by close of business, June 7, 2024.

USDA will conduct a referendum if a least 10 percent of the nation's 413,358 soybean producers support a referendum. Not more than one-fifth of the producers who support having a referendum can be from any one state.

[Notice of the opportunity](#) to request a referendum was published in the Federal Register Feb. 2, 2024.

The soybean checkoff program is administered by a 77-member producer board and is designed to expand uses of soybeans and soybean products in domestic and foreign markets. The national program is financed by a mandatory assessment of one-half of 1 percent of the net market price of soybeans.

More information about the board is available on the [United Soybean Board](#) page and on the board's website, unitedsoybean.org. You may also contact Agricultural Marketing Specialist Jason Julian at (202) 731-2149 or Jason.Julian@usda.gov; or Jeana Harbison at (202) 527-3398 or Jeana.M.Harbison@usda.gov.

Happy World Bee Day!



Assistance for Bee and Honey Producers – From Plant to Product

World Bee Day is celebrated each year on May 20th. Bees help feed and fuel communities by pollinating crops. In fact, some scientists estimate that one out of every three bites of food we eat exists because of animal pollinators like bees. From plants to final product, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has programs to help bee and honey producers every step of the way. Our programs can help protect and conserve habitat, protect your investments and recover from disasters impacting your operation.

[Learn More](#)

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.

USDA Reminds Producers of Climate-Smart Opportunities Using Farm Loan Programs



The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds agricultural producers that Farm Loan Programs can be used to support a variety of climate-smart agriculture practices, which build on many practices that farmers and ranchers already use, like cover cropping, nutrient management and conservation tillage.

Climate-smart agricultural practices generate significant environmental benefits by capturing and sequestering carbon, improving water management, restoring soil health and more. Farm loan funding complements other tools to help producers adopt climate-smart practices, such as FSA's [Conservation Reserve Program](#), [crop insurance options](#) that support conservation, and conservation programs offered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

FSA offers [multiple types of loans](#) to help farmers and ranchers start, expand or maintain a family agricultural operation. These loans can provide the capital needed to invest in climate-smart practices and equipment including the establishment of rotational grazing systems, precision agriculture equipment or machinery for conversion to no-till residue management. Additionally, for programs like Conservation Reserve Program and NRCS conservation programs where USDA and the producer share the implementation cost, a farm loan could be used for the producer's share, if consistent with the authorized loan purpose.

Some additional ways farm loans can be leveraged to invest in climate-smart agriculture practices or equipment include:

- **Precision Agriculture Equipment** - Eligible producers could use a Term Operating Loan to purchase equipment like GPS globes, monitors, or strip till fertilizer equipment.
- **Cover Crops** - Eligible producers could use an Annual Operating Loan for seed costs.

- **No/Reduced Till** - Eligible producers could use a Term Operating Loan to purchase equipment.
- **Livestock Facility Air Scrubber or Waste Treatment** - Eligible producers could use a Farm Ownership Loan for capital improvements to livestock facilities.
- **Cross Fencing** - Eligible producers could use an Annual or Term Operating Loan to purchase fencing and installation equipment.

Visit the [Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry webpage on farmers.gov](#) to learn more and see detailed examples of how an FSA farm loan can support climate-smart agriculture practices.

USDA Announces Availability of Low-Interest Physical Loss Loans for Kentucky Producers in 7 Counties Affected by Tornados and High Winds that Occurred in March and April 2024

Physical loss loans through the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) can help producers repair or replace damaged or destroyed physical property essential to the success of the agricultural operation, including livestock losses. Examples of property commonly affected include essential farm buildings, fixtures to real estate, equipment, livestock, perennial crops, fruit and nut bearing trees, and harvested or stored crops and hay.

Impacted Area: Kentucky

Triggering Disaster: Tornado that occurred on March 14, 2024.

Application Deadline: January 7, 2025.

Primary Counties Eligible: Carroll, Trimble.

Contiguous Counties Also Eligible:

Kentucky: Gallatin, Henry, Oldham, Owen.

Indiana: Clark, Jefferson, Switzerland.

Triggering Disaster 2: Tornado and High Winds that occurred on April 2, 2024.

Application Deadline: January 7, 2025.

Primary Counties Eligible: Vanderburgh, Indiana.

Contiguous Counties Also Eligible:

Kentucky: Henderson.

Indiana: Gibson, Posey, Warrick.

More Resources

On farmers.gov, the [Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool](#), [Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance fact sheet](#), and [Loan Assistance Tool](#) can help you determine program or loan options. To file a Notice of Loss or to ask questions about available programs, contact your local [USDA Service Center](#).

Farm Service Agency Call Center

Farmers and ranchers can contact a call center to receive one-on-one assistance from USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) employees ready to help. By calling 877-508-8364, customers can ask questions about FSA programs.

The call center was created as a way to better serve customers, especially those who have not worked with FSA previously.

Customers who contact the call center can expect to receive the same great service they would receive as if they were in their FSA county office.

FSA Call Center staff can also provide service to non-English speaking customers. Customers using the call center will still call 877-508-8364 and select 1 for English and 2 to speak with a Spanish-speaking employee. For other languages, customers select 1 and indicate their language to the call center staff.

The call center is just one of many ways USDA has adjusted and added flexibilities to meet the needs of our customers. One thing remains the same, USDA stands committed to offering exceptional customer service to our nation's farmers and ranchers.

Current Farm Loans and Farm Programs Interest Rates

Selected Interest Rates for May 2024

 Farm Loan Programs		 Farm Programs		
90-Day Treasury Bill	5.500%	Farm Storage Facility Loans	3 Year	4.625%
Farm Operating Loans - Direct	5.250%		5 Year	4.375%
Farm Ownership Loans - Direct	5.500%		7 Year	4.375%
Limited Resource Loans	5.000%		10 Year	4.375%
Farm Ownership Loans - Direct FO Down Payment	1.500%		12 Year	4.500%
Emergency Loans	3.750%		Commodity Loans	
		CCC Borrowing Rate		5.125%

Farm Loans and Farm Programs Interest Rates

- See our [2024 Kentucky Guaranteed Lender Newsletter](#)
- See our [2024 USDA Farm Service Agency Annual Program and Policy Reminders](#).

Kentucky FSA State Office

771 Corporate Dr., Ste 205
 Lexington, KY 40503
 Phone: 859-224-7601
[Visit State Webpage](#)

State Committee

John McCauley
 (Committee Chair) Lexington

Carrie Divine Morganfield
 Pat Henderson Irvington

James Kay, Sr.
Roger Thomas

Versailles
Smiths Grove

State Executive Director

Dean Schamore
859-224-7601

Dean.Schamore@usda.gov

Administrative Officer

Clark Sturgeon

859-224-7622

clark.sturgeon@usda.gov

Farm Program Chief

Jennifer Farmer

859-224-7614

jennifer.farmer@usda.gov

Farm Loan Chief

Warren Whitaker

859-224-7443

warren.whitaker@usda.gov

Contact [your local USDA Service Center](#).

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).