

A GUIDE TO USDA GRANTS & LOANS

For Private Businesses

December, 2022



While USDA offers many opportunities for funding and support, we recognize that it can be difficult to navigate grant and loan programs, and even more challenging to understand what you are eligible for and how to apply. We hope this guide helps. It breaks down available grants and loans for **private businesses with brief descriptions and hyperlinks to program websites where you can learn more.**

Good Luck!



Preface

A few cautions. Not everything available to private businesses is found in this guide. We focus on programs typically offered year after year. Sometimes USDA announces one-time funding opportunities that may be of interest to you but are not on our list. For example, in August 2022, the Inflation Reduction Act included approximately \$40 billion for USDA climate-smart agriculture programs, biofuel development, forest restoration work, renewable energy tax credits, conservation technical assistance and rural electric cooperative carbon capture and storage and resilience projects. This [article](#) provides a high-level summary of the law. Over time we will learn more about how these dollars will be dispersed and what might be available to the private sector.

You also will not find information about programs designed for individual farmers (e.g., farm operating and ownership loans, on-farm infrastructure grants), conservation (e.g., EQIP, CRP), housing, and small business set-aside programs. If you don't see something in this guide that fits your needs, you can undertake a more exhaustive search on the [USDA Grants and Loans](#) website.

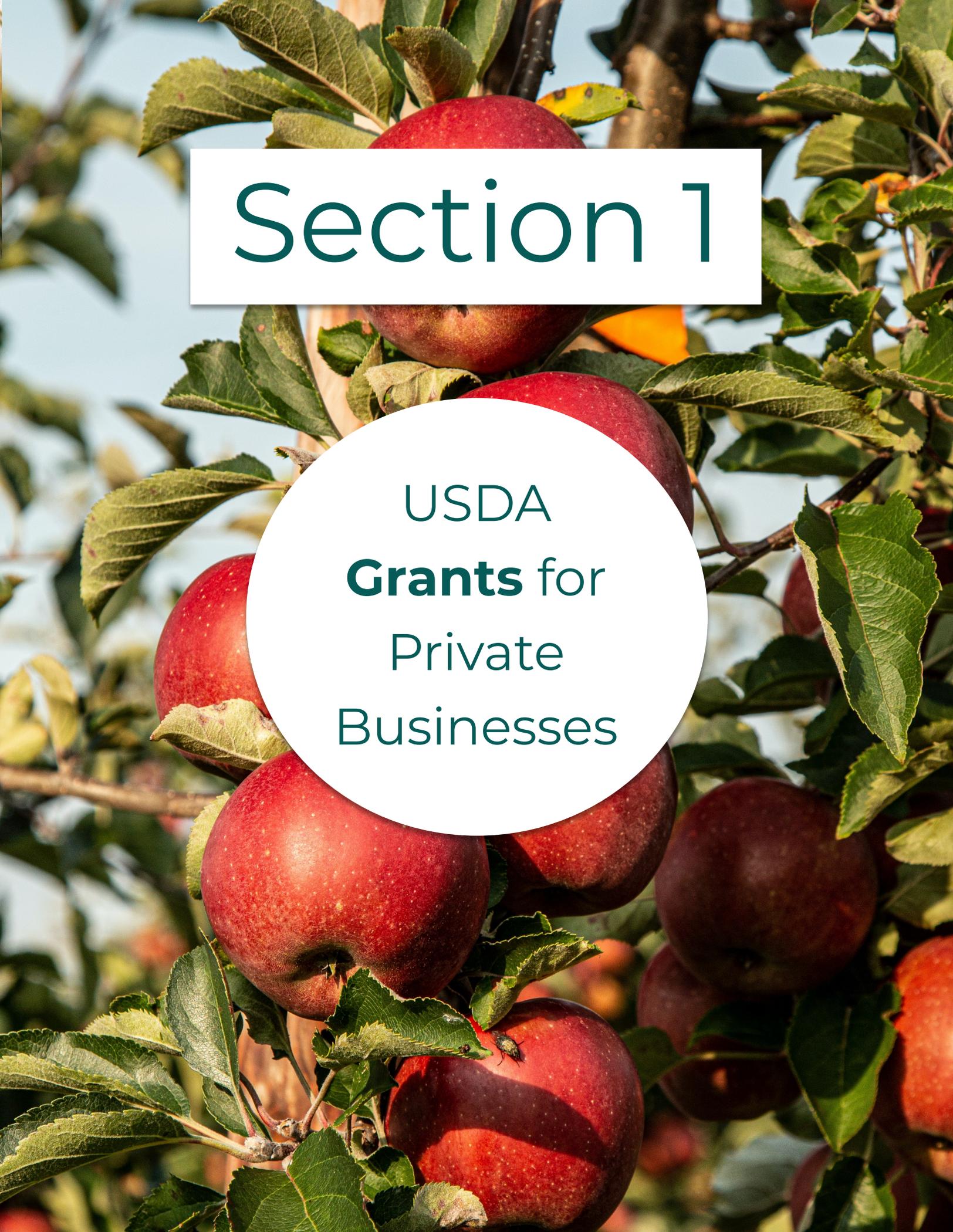
Finally, one more caveat. Every five years or so, Congress writes a new farm bill that can alter or eliminate existing programs and/or add new ones. It certainly doesn't happen instantaneously upon passage of the law, with program changes often taking years to implement.

There is a federal government-wide search tool, [Grants.gov](#), that centralizes information on more than 1,000 different grant programs across federal grantmaking agencies that together award more than \$500 billion annually. The search engine allows you to search by eligibility, agency, and funding instrument (e.g., cooperative agreement, grant, procurement contract). There is information on this site to help you understand the process of applying for federal dollars. For example, before applying for a funding opportunity, you need to register an account with Grants.gov. The federal government requires all applicants for Federal grants and cooperative agreements (with the exception of individuals other than sole proprietors) to have a [UEI number \(Unique Entity Identifier\)](#). It is generated in [SAM.gov](#). All applicants also need to have an [EIN number](#) (Employer Identification Number), otherwise known as a Federal Tax ID issued by the IRS.



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Section 1

USDA
Grants for
Private
Businesses

Agriculture Innovation Center Program

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Local Governments, State Governments, Federally-recognized Indian Tribes, Institutions of higher education, Nonprofit organizations, and Commercial organizations.

Description: The Agriculture Innovation Center Program makes grants to agriculture innovation centers to provide technical assistance. The assistance is provided to agricultural producers to help them develop and market value-added agricultural products.

Funding Ceiling: \$1,000,000

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: National and State CIG – all non-Federal entities and individuals are eligible to apply. All CIG projects must involve EQIP-eligible producers.

Description: CIG is a competitive program that supports the development of new tools, approaches, practices, and technologies to further natural resource conservation on private lands. Through creative problem solving and innovation, CIG partners work to address our nation's water quality, air quality, soil health and wildlife habitat challenges, all while improving agricultural operations.

Funding Ceiling: \$4,000,000

Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Agricultural businesses and cooperatives, CSA networks and associations, Food Councils, Economic development corporations, Local governments, Nonprofit and public benefit corporations, Producer networks or associations, Regional farmers' market authorities, and Tribal governments.

Description: FFMP funds projects that develop & expand direct producer-to-consumer markets to increase access to and availability of locally/regionally produced agricultural products.

Funding Ceiling: \$750,000

Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP)

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Agricultural businesses & cooperatives, CSA networks & associations, Food councils, Economic development corporations, Local governments, Nonprofit & public benefit corporations, Producer networks or associations, Regional farmers' market authorities, and Tribal governments.

Description: LFPP funds projects that develop, coordinate and expand local and regional food business enterprises that engage as intermediaries in indirect producer to consumer marketing to help increase access to and availability of locally and regionally produced agricultural products.

Funding Ceiling: \$750,000

Market Access Program (MAP)

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: A nonprofit U.S. agricultural trade organization, a nonprofit State regional trade group, a U.S. agricultural cooperative, or a State agency.

Description: Through the Market Access Program (MAP), FAS partners with U.S. agricultural trade associations, cooperatives, state regional trade groups and small businesses to share the costs of overseas marketing and promotional activities that help build commercial export markets for U.S. agricultural products and commodities.

Funding Ceiling: \$20,000,000

Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Sole proprietor businesses or other entities that engage – or want to engage – in meat and poultry processing.

Description: The Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program (MPPEP) provides grants to help eligible processors expand their capacity. USDA Rural Development designed the MPPEP to encourage competition and sustainable growth in the U.S. meat processing sector, and to help improve supply chain resiliency.

Funding Ceiling: \$25,000,000

Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer Programs

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: For-profit small businesses and small proprietorships.

Description: The SBIR/STTR programs focus on transforming scientific discovery into products and services with commercial potential and/or societal benefit. Unlike fundamental research, these programs support small businesses in the creation of innovative, disruptive technologies & enable the application of research advancements from conception into the market.

Funding Ceiling: \$181,500

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: The agency, commission, or department responsible for agriculture within any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands is eligible to apply directly to the USDA for grant funds. Organizations or individuals interested in the SCBGP should contact their state department of agriculture for more information.

Description: The purpose of the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) is to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Specialty crops are defined as “fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture).”

Urban Agriculture and Innovation Production Grants

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Nonprofits having a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS (other than institutions of higher education), Native American tribal organizations, Native American tribal governments (Federally recognized), and Independent school districts

Description: Urban Agriculture and Innovation Production (UAIP) competitive grants initiate or expand efforts of farmers, gardeners, citizens, government officials, schools, and other stakeholders in urban areas and suburbs.

Funding Ceiling: \$300,000

Value-Added Producer Grants

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Independent producers, agricultural producer groups, farmer- or rancher-cooperatives, and majority-controlled producer-based business ventures, as defined in the program regulation.

Description: The Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program helps agricultural producers enter value-added activities to generate new products, create and expand marketing opportunities, and increase producer income.

Funding Ceiling: Planning Grants: \$75,000, Working Capital Grants: \$250,000

Grants to Support Rural Communities

Community Connect Grants

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Incorporated organizations, Federally-recognized Tribes, State and local units of government, and any other legal entity, including cooperatives, private corporations, or limited liability companies organized on a for-profit or not-for-profit basis

Description: This program provides financial assistance to eligible applicants that will provide broadband service in rural, economically-challenged communities where service does not exist.

Funding Ceiling: \$3,000,000

Rural Business Investment Program

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: For-profit entities or a subsidiary of an entity. All applicants must have relevant experience in venture capital or community development financing, must raise a minimum of \$10 million in private equity capital, and may be structured as limited partnerships, limited liability companies or corporations

Description: This program provides a Rural Business Investment Company (RBIC) license to newly formed developmental capital organizations to help meet the equity capital investment needs in rural communities.

Rural Community Development Initiative Grants (RCDI)

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Public bodies, Non-profit organizations, and Qualified Private (for-profit) Organizations.

Description: RCDI grants are awarded to help non-profit housing and community development organizations, low-income rural communities and federally recognized tribes support housing, community facilities and community and economic development projects in rural areas.

Funding Ceiling: \$25,000

Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) - Renewable Energy Systems & Energy Efficiency Improvement Guaranteed Loans & Grants

[Link](#)

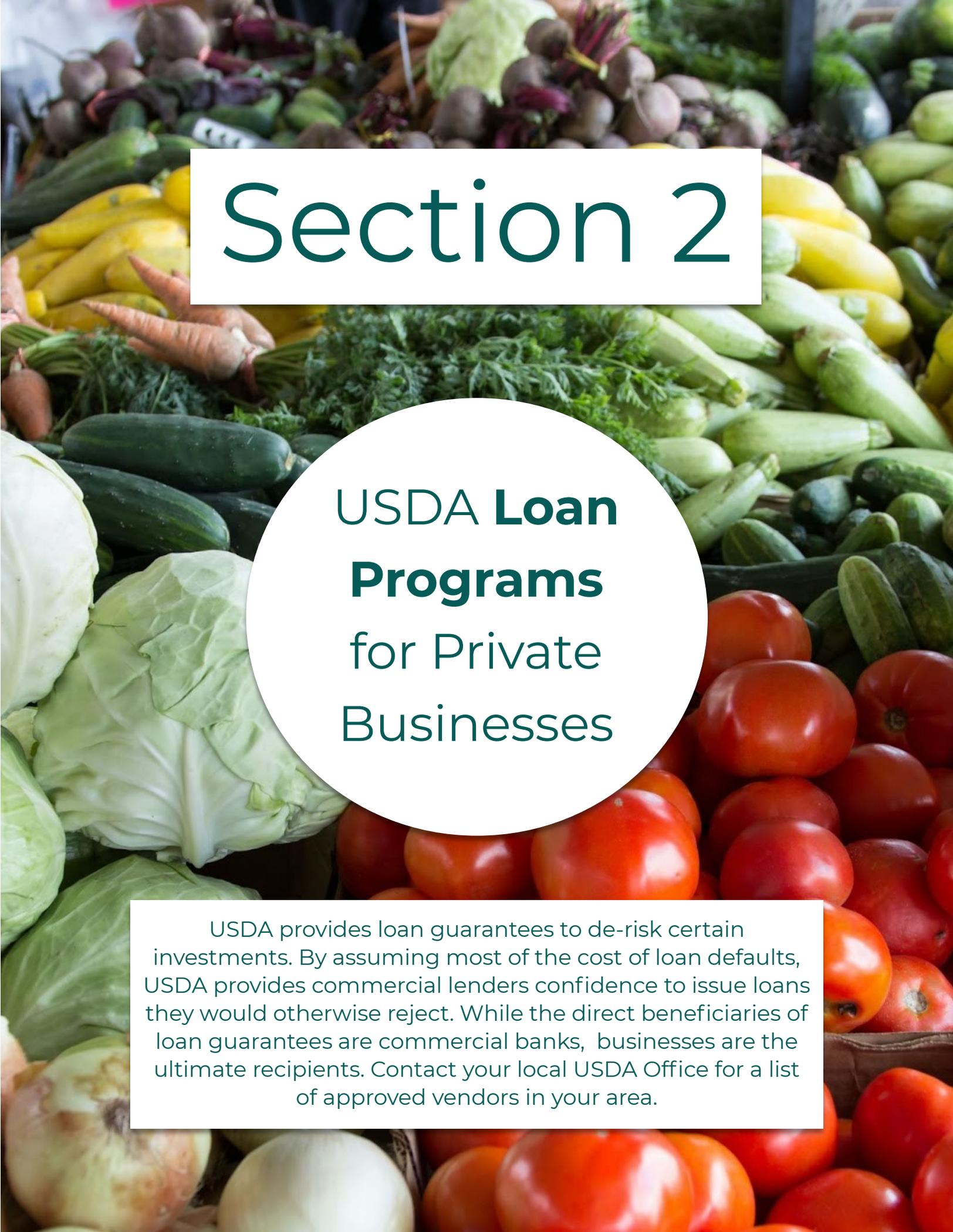
Eligible Applicants: Agricultural producers with at least 50 percent of their gross income coming from agricultural operations & Small businesses in eligible rural areas.

Description: This program provides guaranteed loan financing and grant funding to agricultural producers and rural small businesses for renewable energy systems or to make energy efficiency improvements. Agricultural producers may also apply for new energy efficient equipment and new system loans for agricultural production and processing.

Renewable Energy Funding Ceiling: \$500,000

Energy Efficiency Funding Ceiling: \$250,000

Loan Ceiling: The loan guarantee percentage is published annually in the Federal Register.



Section 2

USDA **Loan Programs** for Private Businesses

USDA provides loan guarantees to de-risk certain investments. By assuming most of the cost of loan defaults, USDA provides commercial lenders confidence to issue loans they would otherwise reject. While the direct beneficiaries of loan guarantees are commercial banks, businesses are the ultimate recipients. Contact your local USDA Office for a list of approved vendors in your area.

Business and Industry Loan Guarantees

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Examples include Federal and State-chartered banks, Savings and loans, Farm Credit Banks with direct lending authority, and Credit unions. Must be approved under the OneRD Guarantee Loan Initiative.

Eligible Borrowers: For-profit or non-profit businesses, Cooperatives, Federally-recognized Tribes, Public bodies, and Individuals engaged or proposing to engage in a business.

Description: This program offers loan guarantees to lenders for loans to rural businesses.

Loan Ceiling: N/A

Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Lenders who have the legal authority, financial strength and sufficient experience to operate a successful lending program. This includes lenders that are subject to supervision and credit examination by the applicable agency of the United States or a State.

Eligible Borrowers: Public bodies, Indian tribes on Federal and State reservations, Federally recognized Tribes, and Non-profit organizations.

Description: This program provides loan guarantees to eligible lenders to develop essential community facilities in rural areas.

Loan Ceiling: \$100,000,000

Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loan Program (short-term)

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Lenders, including banks, credit unions, CDFIs, loan funds, and others. Must be approved under the OneRD Guarantee Loan Initiative.

Eligible Borrowers: Must be directly engaged in the middle of the food supply chain. Examples of the types of entities that may qualify for the program include a meat processor or a food hub.

Description: This program guarantees loans for qualified lenders to finance food systems projects, specifically for start-ups or expansions in the middle of the food supply chain.

Loan Ceiling: \$40,000,000

Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Nonprofits, Federally-recognized tribes, and Institutions of higher education.

Eligible Ultimate Recipients: Businesses located in an eligible area with 10 or fewer full-time employees.

Description: This program provides loans and grants to Microenterprise Development Organizations (MDOs) to help microenterprises startup and grow through a Rural Microloan Revolving Fund and to provide training and technical assistance to microloan borrowers and micro entrepreneurs.

Loan Ceiling: \$500,000

Grant Ceiling: \$205,000

Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant Program

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: A former Rural Utilities Service borrower who borrowed, repaid or pre-paid an insured, direct or guaranteed loan, Nonprofit utilities that are eligible to receive assistance from the Rural Development Electric or Telecommunication Programs, and Current Rural Development Electric or Telecommunication Programs borrowers.

Eligible Project Examples: Business incubators, Community development assistance to nonprofits and public bodies, Facilities and equipment to educate and train rural residents to facilitate economic development, Facilities and equipment for medical care for rural residents, Start-up venture costs, Business expansion, and Technical assistance.

Description: The Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant program provides funding for rural projects through local utility organizations.

Loan Ceiling: \$1,500,000

Grant Ceiling: \$300,000



Section 3

USDA
**Research
Grants** for
Private
Businesses

Agricultural Genome to Phenome Initiative

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Local State agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, university research foundations, other research institutions and organizations, Federal agencies, national laboratories, private organizations, foundations, or corporations, and individuals.

Description: This initiative focuses on collaborative science engagement that intends to develop a community of researchers across both crops and animals that will lay the foundation for expanding knowledge concerning genomes & phenomes of importance to the agriculture sector.

Award Ceiling: \$1,920,000

Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) - Foundational and Applied Science Program

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: State agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, university research foundations, other research institutions and organizations, federal agencies, national laboratories, private organizations or corporations, and individuals.

Description: The AFRI Foundational and Applied Science Program supports grants in six AFRI priority areas to advance knowledge in both fundamental and applied sciences important to agriculture.

Award Ceiling: \$15,000,000

AFRI - Sustainable Agricultural Systems

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: State agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, university research foundations, other research institutions and organizations, federal agencies, national laboratories, private organizations or corporations, and individuals.

Description: NIFA seeks applications that take a systems approach for projects that are expected to significantly improve the supply of affordable, safe, nutritious, and accessible agricultural products, while fostering economic development and rural prosperity in America.

Award Ceiling: \$10,000,000

Biotechnology Risk Assessment Research Grants (BRAG)

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Any United States public or private research or educational institution or organization.

Description: The purpose of the BRAG program is to support the generation of new information that will assist Federal regulatory agencies in making science-based decisions about the effects of introducing into the environment genetically engineered organisms.

Award Ceiling: \$500,000

Ecology and Evolution of Infectious Diseases (EEID)

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: State agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, university research foundations, other research institutions and organizations, federal agencies, national laboratories, private organizations or corporations, and individuals.

Description: The multi-agency EEID program supports research on the ecological, evolutionary, organismal and social drivers that influence infectious diseases and increase quantitative and/or computational understanding of pathogen transmission dynamics.

Total Funding Ceiling: \$36,500,000 (individual award ceiling N/A)

Farm Business Management and Benchmarking (FBMB)

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: State agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, university research foundations, other research institutions and organizations, federal agencies, national laboratories, private organizations or corporations, and individuals.

Description: This program provides funds for improving the farm management knowledge and skills of agricultural producers by maintaining and expanding a national, publicly available farm financial management database to support improved farm management.

Award Ceiling: \$500,000

Food and Agriculture Service Learning Program

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: State agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, university research foundations, other research institutions and organizations, federal agencies, national laboratories, private organizations or corporations, and individuals.

Description: The program's goal is to increase the capacity for food, garden, and nutrition education within host organizations or entities, such as school cafeterias and classrooms, while fostering higher levels of community engagement between farms and school systems.

Award Ceiling: \$225,000

Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: State agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, university research foundations, other research institutions and organizations, federal agencies, national laboratories, private organizations or corporations, and individuals.

Description: The purpose of this program is to fund projects that will enhance the ability of producers and processors who have already adopted organic standards to grow and market high quality organic agricultural products.

Award Ceiling: \$3,000,000

Special Research Grants Program Aquaculture Research

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: State agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, university research foundations, other research institutions and organizations, federal agencies, national laboratories, private organizations or corporations, and individuals.

Description: The purpose of the Aquaculture Research program is to support the development of an environmentally and economically sustainable aquaculture industry in the U.S. and generate new science-based information and innovation to address industry constraints.

Award Ceiling: \$300,000

Specialty Crops Research Initiative (SCRI)

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: State agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, university research foundations, other research institutions and organizations, federal agencies, national laboratories, private organizations or corporations, and individuals.

Description: The purpose of the SCRI program is to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry by awarding grants to support research and extension that address key challenges of national, regional, and multi-state importance in sustaining all components of food and agriculture, including conventional and organic food production systems.

Award Ceiling: \$10,000,000

Urban, Indoor, and Emerging Agriculture

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: State agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, university research foundations, other research institutions and organizations, federal agencies, national laboratories, private organizations or corporations, and individuals.

Description: The Urban, Indoor, and Emerging Agriculture (UIE) program supports research, education, and extension work by awarding grants to solve key problems of local, regional, and national importance that facilitate development of urban, indoor, & emerging agricultural systems.

Award Ceiling: \$1,000,000

Women and Minorities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Fields Program (WAMS)

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: State agricultural experiment stations, colleges and universities, university research foundations, other research institutions and organizations, federal agencies, national laboratories, private organizations or corporations, and individuals.

Description: The purpose of this program is to support research, education/teaching, and extension projects that increase participation by women and underrepresented minorities from rural areas in STEM.

Award Ceiling: \$100,000

An Additional Funding Resource Outside of USDA:

Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research (FFAR)

[Link](#)

Eligible Applicants: Each funding announcement includes information about eligibility. In general, FFAR welcomes applications from all US institutions of higher education, nonprofit and for-profit organizations, government-affiliated researcher and domestic and international organizations. Any individual(s) with the skills, knowledge and resources necessary to carry out the proposed research as Program Director(s)/Principal Investigator(s) is invited to work with his/her organization to develop an application for support.

Description: FFAR builds public-private partnerships to support bold science. Their research, co-created with the agriculture community, fills critical research gaps. They also invest in the future scientific workforce. FFAR funds pioneering research in 6 key challenge areas: soil health, sustainable water management, next generation crops, advanced animal systems, urban food systems, and the health-agriculture nexus. They have awarded over 350 grants across the world that tackle big food and agriculture challenges.

How to Apply: You must apply to an open funding opportunity through their online [Grants Management System](#). Only applications submitted through this portal will be evaluated.

About the Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems

Our Vision

A world where all communities enjoy nutritious food produced from thriving, equitable, & environmentally sustainable food systems.

Our Mission

Together we drive social progress, economic productivity, and ecosystem resilience through food systems transformation.

The Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems at Arizona State University develops innovative ideas and solutions to the many challenges of current food systems. Taking a holistic and transdisciplinary approach, the Center's work encompasses water and energy use, carbon footprint and nutrition, innovations in agtech, and the well-being and livelihood of farmers and others working in food systems.

The Swette Center has six focus areas that drives its work: engage the private sector in food system reform, educate the next generation of leaders, harness the power of deliciousness, support indigenous foodways, advance organic research and policy, and enable true cost accounting. To learn more about the Center, you can visit their website and social media by [clicking here](#) or scanning the QR code.



Join us to create the future of food.

Together, we drive social progress, economic productivity and ecosystem resilience through food systems transformation