
FSA Direct Loan Targeting: Successful and Financially Necessary?

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and Eddie C. Chavez*

Abstract

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) direct farm loan program provides credit to family-sized farms, including those operated by beginning farmers and socially disadvantaged applicants. Approximately 37% of all U.S. farms are estimated to be eligible for FSA direct loans when farm size, credit needs, farming experience, and occupation are taken into account. However, market penetration rates for various borrower cohorts range from 0.8% to 4.6% for FY 2000–2003. In general, beginning farmers have weaker financial characteristics than non-beginning farmers. Yet, the same result is not found when comparing socially disadvantaged farmers with non-socially disadvantaged farmers, such that there are few significant differences or the differences in financial characteristics are mixed. Overall, results indicate FSA direct farm loan borrowers have weaker financial characteristics than eligible, non-FSA direct farm loan borrowers, implying FSA is serving farmers likely to be denied credit by commercial lenders.

Key words: beginning farmer, Farm Service Agency, federal direct loan, socially disadvantaged

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Farm Service Agency (FSA) farm loan programs are designed to provide credit to family-sized farms unable to obtain credit from conventional sources at reasonable rates and terms despite having sufficient cash flow to repay and an ability to fully secure the loan. FSA loans are divided into loans made directly to farmers (direct) and loans made to farmers by other lenders with an FSA guarantee (guaranteed). This study focuses on direct loans.

FSA's direct farm loan program provides short- to intermediate-term farm operating loans (OL) and long-term farm ownership (FO) loans as well as emergency (EM) loans to family-sized farms. Federal legislation mandates that portions of FO and OL loan funds be targeted to family-sized farm subgroups of socially disadvantaged (SDA) and beginning farmer (BF) applicants.

FSA recognizes an SDA farmer or rancher as "one of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of his or her identity as a member of the group without regard to his or her individual qualities. SDA groups are women, African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders" (USDA/FSA, 2006). For OL purposes, a BF is a farmer who meets the general OL eligibility criteria and has 10 or less years of farming experience. For FO purposes, a BF is a farmer who meets the general FO criteria, has 3–10 years of farming experience, and owns acreage which does not exceed 30% of the county average farm size.¹

¹ Prior to 2004, the acreage limit was 25% of the county average farm size (U.S. 7 CFR 1543.4).

Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork

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Table of Contents Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork

1. Understanding the eBook Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
 - Personalized Recommendations
 - Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork User Reviews and Ratings
 - Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork and Bestseller Lists

5. Accessing Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork Free and Paid eBooks
 - Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork Public Domain eBooks
 - Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork eBook Subscription Services
 - Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork Budget-Friendly Options
6. Navigating Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork Compatibility with Devices
 - Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork Enhanced eBook Features
7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
 - Interactive Elements Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
8. Staying Engaged with Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
 - Setting Reading Goals Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
 - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Fsa Direct Loan Necessary Paperwork
 - Distinguishing Credible Sources
13. Promoting Lifelong Learning

- Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
- Exploring Educational eBooks

14. Embracing eBook Trends

- Integration of Multimedia Elements
- Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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