



MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF **AGRICULTURE**

Montana Agriculture Student Loan Assistance Program

Program Guidance

April 2024

Applications will be accepted from 4/18/2024 until 6/3/2024.

Applications must be complete and submitted with all required documents to be considered.

Refer Any Questions to:

Student Loan Assistance Program
Montana Department of Agriculture
PO Box 200201
Helena, MT 59620-0201
406-444-0134
Bailey.kaskie@mt.gov

Legal Authority:

MCA Sections 90-9-203, 90-9-501 (Montana Code Annotated)
ARM 4.16.104 and 4.16.503 (Administrative Rules of Montana)

Montana Agriculture Student Loan Assistance Program

This program was developed to encourage Montana's college-educated youth to pursue a primary career in farming or ranching; reduce financial stress on Montana's farm and ranch operators; and promote succession planning to preserve interest in Montana's agricultural future. Successful applicants may receive loan assistance for up to five years for qualified education loans.

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Important Dates

Application Window Open	April 18, 2024
Technical Assistance Call	May 14, 2024
Application Deadline	June 3, 2024
Qualifying applications will be presented to Agriculture Development Council	<i>Tent.</i> June 20, 2024
Award Announcements made	June, 2024

How to Apply:

1. Review program guidance and confirm eligibility.
2. Create an account at funding.mt.gov
3. Follow online instructions to apply for Montana Agriculture Student Loan Assistance Program
4. Upload all required documentation
5. Qualifying applicants will be presented to the Agriculture Development Council at the June council meeting in Helena, MT.

If technical difficulties make submitting via the funding.mt.gov website impossible, applicant must contact the MT Department of Agriculture GTA Program Manager prior to the application due date at bailey.kaskie@mt.gov or 406-444-0134.

Eligibility

An applicant must:

- be a Montana resident;
- have obtained an associate or baccalaureate degree from a Montana based Postsecondary Institution;
 - Postsecondary institution" means:
 - a unit of the Montana university system, as defined in MCA **20-25-201**;
 - a Montana community college, defined and organized as provided in MCA **20-15-101**; or
 - an accredited tribal college located in the state of Montana.
- have an outstanding balance on an eligible student loan from obtaining such degree;
- be the primary owner, heir, successor or assignee of a farm or ranch in Montana;
- participate in the day-to-day operations of the farm or ranch;
- agree to operate a farm or ranch in Montana for at least five years; and
- be in a non-default status on a student loan.

Required Documentation

Completed applications must include documentation to support each of the eligibility requirements listed below. Documentation not listed in the examples will be considered on a case by case basis.

Eligibility Requirement	Example Documentation <i>Submit one from each category unless otherwise stated.</i>
Proof of Residency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Montana Driver's License• State I.D.• Tribal I.D.
Completion of associate or baccalaureate degree from a postsecondary institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transcript• Diploma
Primary ownership, including an heir, successor, or assignee of an agricultural operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current business license• Articles of Incorporation• Bylaws• Operating Agreement• Succession plan If you are not the primary owner, also include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Succession statement signed by primary owner.
Participate in the day-to-day operations of farm/ranch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most recent tax return, including schedule F if applicable
Educational loan information, including: outstanding loan amount, loan servicer, payment schedule, history, interest rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loan agreement And <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most recent account statement

Eligible Student Loans

A successful applicant must have an outstanding balance on eligible student loan debt used to fund an undergraduate degree from an approved Montana college or university.

Eligible Colleges and Universities

Successful applicants will have completed an associate or baccalaureate degree from an approved Montana postsecondary institution that is: a unit of the Montana university system; a Montana community college; or an accredited tribal college located in the state of Montana.

Eligible Colleges and Universities

University of Montana – Missoula

Missoula College UM

Bitterroot College

Montana Tech

Highlands College of MT Tech

University of Montana Western

Helena College UM

Montana State University – Bozeman

Gallatin College MSU

Montana State University – Billings

City College at MSU Billings

Montana State University Northern

Great Falls College MSU

Dawson Community College

Flathead Valley Community College

Miles Community College

Aaniiih Nakoda College (*formerly Fort Belknap College*)

Blackfeet Community College

Chief Dull Knife College

Fort Peck Community College

Little Big Horn College

Salish Kootenai College

Stone Child College

If your college or university is not on this list please contact Montana Department of Agriculture GTA Program Manager, Bailey Kaskie to determine eligibility at bailey.kaskie@mt.gov.

Award Amount

A qualified farmer or rancher is eligible for student loan assistance for up to a maximum of five years.

The total amount of loan repayment assistance may not exceed 50% of the total amount of educational loans outstanding. The minimum outstanding loan amount is \$10,000.

Successful applicants may choose whether the council makes one annual payment or 12 monthly payments for each year of a qualified farmer or rancher's eligibility.

Disbursements may be made by the department directly to the educational loan.

Available Funding: No more than \$100,000 of the funds expended by the Agriculture Development Council in the biennium beginning July 1, 2021 may be expended for the purpose of the Montana Agriculture Student Loan Assistance Program.

Service Commitment

Successful applicants must commit to operate a farm or ranch on a full-time basis for at least five years following application.

Funding recipients who cease to operate the farm or ranch before the end of the five-year commitment period must repay the total amount of assistance received to date.

Monitoring and Reporting

The Montana department of Agriculture will conduct annual monitoring activities for ongoing eligibility verification and program compliance.

Funding recipients who fail to complete required monitoring reports or abide by written agreement must repay the total amount of assistance received since the date of the last verified report or date of breach.

Montana Agriculture Development Council

The Montana Agriculture and Development Council (council) will review all complete applications and the required materials, determine whether each proposed project meets the requirements, consider information provided by the applicant to the council at a meeting designated for such purpose, rank the projects according to the information reviewed and make all funding determinations based on eligibility, funds availability, and project rankings.

Funding Priorities: In developing a prioritization method, the council shall consider giving priority to applicants:

- with the greatest financial need;
- who are most likely to successfully continue operating a farm based on factors including an applicant's interest in farming, training, experience, business plan, and relationship with a mentor;
- who operate farms that employ sustainable best practices for farming that are identified in the list of approved conservation enhancements and practices under the conservation stewardship program of the U.S. department of agriculture; and
- are members of groups that are underrepresented in farming in Montana.