



Montana Agriculture Student Loan Assistance Program

Program Guidance

March 2020

Applications will be accepted from 4/1/2020 until 6/1/2020.

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
Tina.bateman@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 1, 2020
Application Deadline	June 1, 2020
Top applicants present to Agriculture Development Council in Helena, MT	<i>Tent.</i> July 21, 2020
Award Announcements made	August, 2020

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
2. Top applicants will be asked to present their application to the Agriculture Development Council at the July 21 council meeting in Helena, MT.

If technical difficulties make submitting via the fundingmt.org website impossible, applicant must contact the MT Department of Agriculture GTA Program Specialist prior to the application due date at tina.bateman@mt.gov or 406-444-0134.

Eligibility

An applicant must:

- be a Montana resident;
- have obtained an associate or baccalaureate degree from an approved Montana college or university;
- 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 made under an eligible federal education loan program.

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 <p>If you are not the primary owner, also include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Succession statement signed by primary owner. <i>Available here.</i>
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 <p>And</p> <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 student loans are those made pursuant to a federal loan program, except for a federal parent loan for undergraduate students (PLUS) loan, as provided in 20 U.S.C. 1078-2.

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	Great Falls College MSU
Missoula College UM	Dawson Community College
Bitterroot College	Flathead Valley Community College
Montana Tech	Miles Community College
Highlands College of MT Tech	Aaniih Nakoda College <i>(formerly Fort Belknap College)</i>
University of Montana Western	Blackfeet Community College
Helena College UM	Chief Dull Knife College
Montana State University – Bozeman	Fort Peck Community College
Gallatin College MSU	Little Big Horn College
Montana State University – Billings	Salish Kootenai College
City College at MSU Billings	Stone Child College
Montana State University Northern	

If your college or university is not on this list please contact Montana Department of Agriculture GTA Program Specialist, Tina Bateman to determine eligibility at tina.bateman@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 award amount under this program is \$5,000 dispersed over a five-year period. The maximum lifetime award under this program is \$25,000, or the applicant's actual eligible student loan indebtedness at the time eligibility is established, whichever is less.

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 servicer or provided to the recipient on a reimbursement basis provided verified loan statements indicating full and timely payments are made available to the department. If payments are provided directly to the recipient proof of payment must be provided on a monthly basis.

Available Funding: No more than \$100,000 of the funds will be available for 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.

If departure from the farm/ranch is the result of uncontrollable circumstances appeal may be made to the Council to wave the requirement to repay assistance paid.

Monitoring and Reporting

The Montana department of Agriculture will conduct 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 presented to the council, rank the projects and make funding determinations.

Funding Priorities: In ranking applications, 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.

Council Presentations

After initial review, top applicants will be asked to make a short presentation to the Agriculture Development Council at the July 21 meeting in Helena. Final funding decisions will be announced within three months of the application deadline.