



Veteran Farmer Streamlined Eligibility (VFSE) Program

Background

For Fiscal Year 2017, Congress appropriated one-time monies in the amount of \$90,000, enabling *BattleGround to Breaking Ground (BGBG)* to partner with the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Services Agency (FSA), to support the training of veteran farmers by pre-qualifying veteran farmers for FSA Direct Farm Ownership loans upon completion of a certified training program. Access to capital is not limited to the availability of credit, but also to the ability of an applicant to meet the eligibility requirements in the Direct Farm Ownership loan program. Currently, regulations state that an applicant for a Direct Farm Ownership or Downpayment Loan, including a Microloan, must have participated in the business operations of a farm for at least 3 out of the 10 years prior to date the application is submitted. The 2014 Farm Bill allowed for one of these three years to be substituted with the following experience:

1. Post-secondary education that is at least 16 semester hours in agriculture business, horticulture, animal science, agronomy, or other agriculture related fields.
2. Significant business management that is at least one year of management experience in a non-agriculture-related field where the applicant's day-to-day responsibilities included direct management experience, such as personnel decisions, payroll, and inventory ordering — however, not an individual who is a manager in title only.
3. Military leadership or management that is, as a general rule, any officer E5 or above having completed an acceptable military leadership course.

Relevance

On September 15, 2017, FSA signed a Cooperative Agreement with Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service to develop a pilot project that will partner with their current Veteran program, *BGBG*, to supplement their program to include veteran farmers from all states — veterans who are beginning farmers. Several options were reviewed but given a short turn-around time and relatively limited funds. It was determined that the greatest chance of success lied with a program already successfully operating, and familiar with USDA funding such as *BGBG*, which is operating under a NIFA grant.

It is anticipated that applicants will complete the three-phase program in one-year, NTE 18 months, will obtain hands-on experience in their chosen and identified farming area of interest for one production cycle, will complete at least 16 weeks of financial literacy training, will have a completed farm business plan at the conclusion of the program, and will obtain a certificate showing completion of this program.

This certificate will be used in an FSA Service Center to represent eligibility for farm experience and management, and will be applicable for a Farm Ownership Microloan or Beginning Farmer Downpayment Loan. Farm Loan Officers will retain the responsibility to determine agency eligibility.

VFSE Objectives

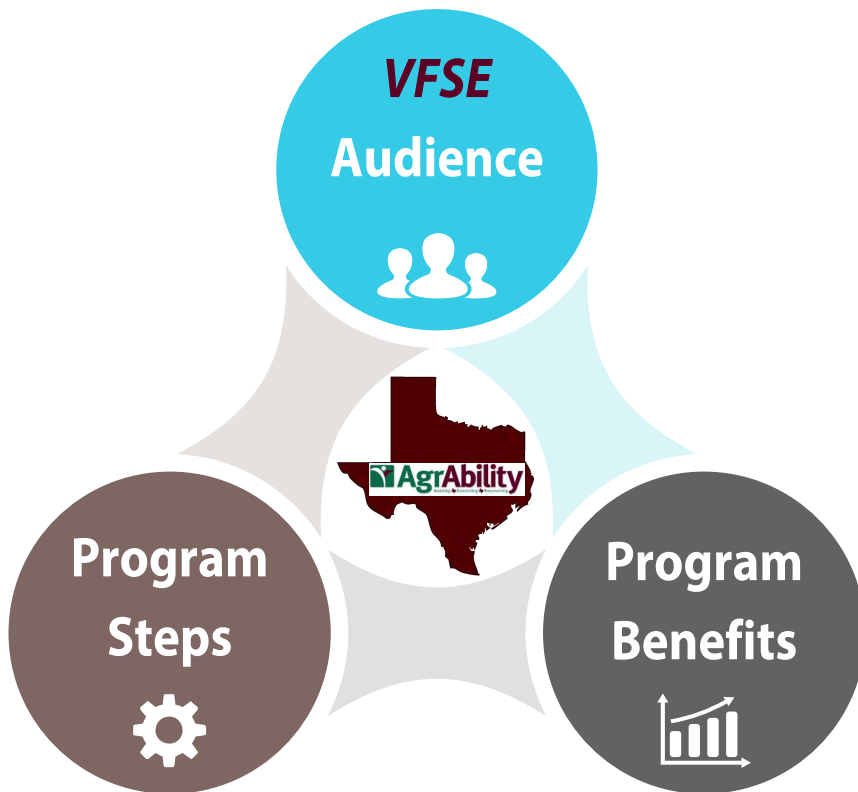
Develop a more streamlined approach for veteran farmers to qualify for farm ownership loans

Determine whether this streamline approach successfully leads to financial literacy and higher financial success

Further determine whether this streamlined approach can or should be expanded past this one pilot and to other applicants

BattleGround to Breaking Ground Entrepreneurial Training Project

<h3 style="text-align: center; text-decoration: underline;">Phase 1</h3> <p style="text-align: center;">BattleGround to Breaking Ground Ag Workshop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Business Ideas • Business Planning Basics • Resources 	<h3 style="text-align: center; text-decoration: underline;">Phase 2</h3> <p style="text-align: center;">Online Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 weeks of business planning courses • Individual Education Plan • Community of Practice • <i>Develop your business plan!</i> 	<h3 style="text-align: center; text-decoration: underline;">Phase 3</h3> <p style="text-align: center;">Production Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentorship • Hands-On Training • Production Agriculture Online Courses
<h1 style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">Apply </h1>		



VFSE Audience

- Military veterans
- Additional eligibility requirements (see available application: 6/15/2018 –7/20/2018)

Program Steps

- Step 1:** Application Period: 6/15/2018 through 7/20/2018
- Step 2:** Attend in-person basic training in College Station, Texas: August 24-26, 2018
- Step 3:** Complete 3-phase BGBG program
 - 12-18 month program
 - Online courses
 - 100 hours hands-on experience
- Step 4:** Attend in-person graduation (College Station)

Program Benefits for Graduates

- Eligible for FSA Farm Ownership Microloan
- Eligible for FSA Partnership Loan
- Eligible for access to land, equipment, and established markets