

Certifying Financial Literacy for USDA/FSA Borrowers

Author: Patrick Hatting | Farm Business Management Specialist | Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
1625 Adventureland Dr, Suite A | Altoona, IA 50009

NAVIGATING DEBT IN CHALLENGING TIMES

Farmers and ranchers often face irregular income, making timely financing critical to their success. Nationally, farm real estate debt is expected to reach **\$374.2 billion**, and farm non-real estate debt is forecast at **\$187.6 billion** in 2025 (USDA ERS, 2025). As the **debt-to-asset ratio increases** and **working capital declines**, financial literacy becomes more essential than ever.

THE ROLE OF EXTENSION IN FINANCIAL LITERACY

Extension plays a vital role in supporting smaller and newer farmers and ranchers as they navigate financial challenges. Partnering with the **USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)**, the **Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Financial Decision Making Course** enhances financial knowledge among farm and ranch borrowers.

ABOUT THE COURSE

- **Designed to increase financial literacy** and build equity in farm operations.
- **Fulfills FSA mandatory borrower education requirements** with certification provided directly to FSA loan officers.
- **Flexible learning options:** Online (10-12 hours) or correspondence-based.
- **Over 300 active students**, with **111 graduates** in the past three years.

REVENUE GENERATOR

- One of the lead revenue generators for the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach retail store
- Finances the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Financial Associates who provide complementary FINPACK analysis to farmers and ranchers

IOWA STATE
UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach



Financial Decision Making

REAL WORLD IMPACT

Graduates develop detailed cash flow budgets tailored to their own operations, which can be easily updated annually. With personalized instructor support, students gain the skills necessary to make informed financial decisions, strengthening their businesses and the rural economy.

"Thanks for getting back to me. I appreciate all that this course covers. I've done financial statements in the past but didn't use them the best to budget. This course has definitely helped the way I will be operating from now on."

– Davis County Farmer, March 2025



EMPOWERING FARMERS FOR A PROSPEROUS FUTURE

By investing in financial education, we equip farmers and ranchers with the tools they need to achieve long-term success and contribute to a thriving agricultural community.

RESOURCES



Ag Decision Maker
<https://go.iastate.edu/YCZPEC>



Financial Decision Making Course
<https://go.iastate.edu/3CHZDH>