

The Canadian Agricultural Skills Service (CASS) Questions and Answers

1. **What is CASS?** The Canadian Agricultural Skills Service or CASS (a component of the Agricultural Policy Framework Renewal Chapter) is a joint initiative of Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. CASS has been implemented to assist farmers, beginning farmers and their spouses to undertake skills development and training.
2. **What is the objective of CASS?** The objective of CASS is to help farmers and their spouses to increase their family income through:
 - training in on-farm skill areas;
 - training for alternative, off-farm employment; or
 - training for alternative business opportunities.
3. **Who is eligible for CASS?** Eligibility for participation in CASS is determined on the basis of two types of criteria - primary (basic) and secondary (additional) criteria.
 - Primary Criteria
 - CASS applicants must be actively engaged in commercial agricultural production as:
 - an individual, or, a spouse of an individual so engaged; or
 - a member or a spouse of a member of a corporation, partnership, cooperative, or other association of persons with at least a 20% share and actively engaged in the farming operations.

or, the applicant must be

- a beginning farmer/spouse who intends to establish a farm business; or
- an individual/spouse who has owned and operated a farm business for less than 6 years, and,

in either case, can demonstrate that the farm business will have, or has, annual gross farm sales of at least \$10,000.

- Secondary Criteria

Applicants must also meet these criteria for CASS participation:

- annual net income for the individual (or net family income, where applicable) for the immediately preceding three years averages no more than \$45,000, or in the case of beginning farmers, annual net individual or net family income (as

applicable) for the immediately preceding one year only is no more than \$45,000;

- willing to participate in an individualized assessment process to develop a learning plan with a qualified Service Provider;
- willing to permit sharing of essential information regarding assessment, ILP, and progress with appropriate parties (AAFC and other authorized, responsible parties) within the provisions of applicable privacy legislation;
- not in receipt of Employment Insurance benefits for training (a declaration stating the same will be required); and
- out of school (high school or equivalent) for two years preceding application to CASS.

4. What benefits are available under CASS? CASS provides funding for training assistance based on net family income levels.

All CASS participants will take part in a Skills Assessment and development of an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) upon approval of their application. The Regional Colleges will perform this function in Sask. A maximum of \$2,000 is available for this activity. The amount required is determined between the Participant and the Career Counsellor based on the individual needs and goals of the Participant.

The maximum additional financial support available to any particular Participant will depend on the Participant category they fit into and their income level in the preceding one or three years.

The level of additional benefits available by category and income level are as follows:

- Producers/spouses whose net family income is less than \$35,000 (3 year average) are eligible for reimbursement of approved costs up to a maximum of \$16,000 per Participant.
- Producers/spouses whose net family income is more than \$35,000 but not above \$40,000 (3 year average) are eligible for reimbursement of approved costs up to a maximum of \$12,000 per Participant.
- Producers/spouses whose net family income is above \$40,000 but not more than \$45,000 (3 year average) are eligible for reimbursement of approved costs up to a maximum of \$8,000 per Participant.
- Beginning farmers/spouses are assessed for eligibility up to the \$16,000, \$12,000 or \$8,000 level on the basis of their net family income for the preceding year only.
- Individuals who are members of a corporation, partnership, cooperative, or other association of persons, and who are actively engaged in farm operations, and who hold at least a 20% share in the corporation will also be eligible to participate. Their eligibility and

benefit level will be determined on the same basis as an individual farmer or spouse.

While beginning farmers/spouses whose net family income is greater than \$45,000 are not eligible for financial assistance, they are eligible for the Assessment and ILP development component of CASS.

CASS benefits are summarized in the following table:

Participant Type	Net Family Income Level	Maximum Benefit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producers/Spouses • Beginning Farmers/Spouses 	Less than \$35,000	up to \$16,000 each + <i>Assessment and ILP development (\$2,000 maximum)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producers/Spouses • Beginning Farmers/Spouses 	\$35,001 to \$40,000	up to \$12,000 each + <i>Assessment and ILP development (\$2,000 maximum)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Producers/Spouses • Beginning Farmers/Spouses 	\$40,001 to \$45,000	up to \$ 8,000 each + <i>Assessment and ILP development (\$2,000 maximum)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning Farmers/Spouses 	More than \$45,000	<i>Assessment and ILP development assistance only (\$2,000 maximum)</i>

5. **What is net family income?** Net Family Income is defined as the total of the applicant's and spouse's net income, as per line 236 on the Notice of Assessment from the Canada Revenue Agency.
6. **What if my spouse wants to apply but I don't?** It is not necessary for the farmer or beginning farmer to participate in order for the spouse to qualify for CASS funding. The spouse must apply on his/her own.
7. **If I apply now and qualify, but don't undertake training until next year, will I have to re-apply then?** No. Once you have been qualified, you remain so until the program ends on March 31, 2008.
8. **What costs do the benefits cover?** CASS provides both direct training and participation benefits.

Direct training benefits include:

- Tuition and other instructional costs
 - Non-degree programs and up to 24 months of a community college program
 - General educational development and academic upgrading
 - Lab fees; student card
 - Fees for correspondence courses
 - Workshop/Field Day fees
 - Tutoring
 - Internet or Cable TV connection
- Material and supplies
 - Shipping and postage costs
 - Clothing and footwear, protective eyewear
 - Texts and software
- Other
 - Short term rental costs for equipment
 - Some conference costs
 - Any other reasonable costs deemed eligible

Beyond course fees and supplies, there are costs participants may incur in attending learning opportunities. Participant benefits may include:

- dependent care (incremental, demonstrated costs incurred for the care of a child or other person wholly or partially dependant upon the Participant for the times when the Participant is not able to fulfill the normal care and support commitments due to training or other learning activity);
- disability costs not covered through alternative sources of funding (incremental cost for special devices or assistance required by the Participant to enable participation in training);
- travel/commuting/accommodation/meals away from home; and
- replacement labour for work performed by the Participant and only for periods when the Participant is actively engaged in approved learning activity.

9. What documents are needed to verify three year average income (or one year for beginning farmers)? The CRA T451E or "Notice of Assessment" from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) for each of the last three years or one year in the case of a beginning farmer.

10. How is spouse defined for CASS? For CASS purposes, and as defined in accordance with the Modernization of Benefits and Obligations Act, "spouse" refers to someone married to a farmer or beginning farmer, or someone living in a conjugal relationship with a farmer or beginning farmer for a continuous period of at least one year.

11. Is there an age limit for CASS? No, as long as you have been out of high school (or equivalent) for two years, you are eligible for CASS.

12. What are Gross Farm Sales? Gross farm sales are the summation of lines 9370 to 9520 inclusive on Income Tax Form T2042 "Statement of Farming Income". This includes sales of all agricultural commodities and excludes program payments, rebates, custom work and machine rentals, insurance proceeds, patronage dividends and other income.

13. How do I qualify as a beginning farmer? For beginning farmers, *intent* must be demonstrated by providing the following two proofs at the time of application:

- proof that the applicant owns or controls (owns/rents/leases) productive agricultural assets to generate farming income; **and**
- proof of recent or future farm sales:
 - financial statement for the previous year, if available;
 - income tax return (T1) for the previous year showing farm income;
 - documentation pertaining to farm loans (e.g., from a financial institution, Farm Credit Corporation, etc.);
 - documentation pertaining to other AAFC financial programs (e.g., Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization Program (CAISP), Farm Improvement and Marketing Cooperatives Loans Act (FIMCLA), Advance Payment Program (APP), Spring Credit Advance Program (SCAP), Production Insurance (PI), etc.);

or,

- a budgetary forecast (e.g. business plan indicating future annual gross farm sales of at least \$10,000).

Applicants requiring help in business planning are advised to call the Canadian Farm Business Advisory Service at 1-866-452-5558

14. How do I qualify as a member of a corporation, partnership, cooperative or other association? Applicants in these categories must provide evidence of:

- at least a 20% share of the business; and
- active engagement in the farming operation.

Additional conditions for these applicants:

- The individual member's and/or spouse's benefits will still be determined on the basis of CRA's Notice of Assessment in response to their individual income tax return, wherever possible.
- Applicants from corporate farm entities will have to show retained earnings as part of their income.

Applicants in these categories should discuss their application with a Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Renewal Specialist.

15. Are members of First Nations eligible for CASS? Yes. They should discuss the program and their application with a Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Renewal Specialist.

16. I've recently quit farming. Am I still eligible for CASS?

Applicants/spouses who have ceased farming operations within 12 months of their application are eligible.

17. What Participant costs are not covered by CASS? There are costs related to CASS participation that the program will not cover. Some examples of costs which are the sole responsibility of the Participant include:

- personal costs incurred during the initial assessment and ILP development phase of their participation in CASS. This might include things like child care and travel costs incurred while the ILP is being developed, but before it is approved. (Once the Participant is engaged in an approved ILP, the costs anticipated for re-assessments or ILP amendments may be considered to be part of ILP implementation costs);
- purchase of capital assets (e.g., computers, fax machines, tools and equipment);
- any vehicle-related costs over and above any eligible mileage allowances (e.g., insurance; damage);
- medical, dental and pharmaceutical costs except for related insurance premium costs when included as a component of community college tuition costs;
- vision-related costs which are not incrementally necessary to the ILP (safety glasses for example may be eligible as materials and supplies);
- relocation costs;
- start-up capital for alternative business development;
- debt servicing costs;
- any penalties or fines regardless of when or how incurred; or
- family or spousal support payments

18. What courses/training activities are covered by CASS? Generally, courses or learning activities offered by a public or private training institution, agency or a qualified individual will be eligible under CASS. Courses will be considered as eligible if they are offered by licensed and regulated learning institutions in the Province of Saskatchewan (i.e. University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina, Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), Regional Colleges, and Private Vocational Schools licensed by Saskatchewan Learning), or Private Educational Institutions certified by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC).

If a Participant requests financial support for a learning activity that is not included in the previous description, CASS management will investigate to determine if the activity is appropriate for CASS support.

19. Are degree courses eligible for CASS funding? Only college level certificate or diploma programs are eligible. Some degree courses that support the overall goal of the Participant's ILP but not the attainment of an actual degree, may be approved. Applicants should contact the CASS Case Manager to discuss their particular situation.

20. Do conference and meeting activities qualify for CASS benefits? CASS supports participation in activities which are designed to provide demonstrable learning outcomes. Therefore, it is not appropriate to provide financial assistance for an activity where benefits are not sufficiently tangible.

Conferences are normally intended as a forum for discussion, networking, and information exchange. As such, they generally do not constitute training or learning activities leading to demonstrable learning. However, it is the *content and outcome* of the learning activity which is most important, not the name given to the venue or event in which it occurs.

Participants must discuss this issue with a Renewal Specialist before considering adding any such activity to their ILP.

21. How do I determine what courses are available and eligible for CASS benefits? The Career Counsellor at the Regional College will help you determine which courses are suitable to include in your ILP. Your Renewal Specialist or the CASS Case Manager can act as an additional resource for courses that qualify for CASS benefits.

22. Will I have to travel to a major centre to take the training? Not necessarily. It depends on what your interests and learning goals are. In some cases, you will find that the training is available at your local Regional College. The Regional Colleges broker courses from the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) and other training institutions. In addition, some training is delivered by distance including home study, video- or internet-based training, etc. If travel is necessary to attend a course, travel and accommodation costs are considered eligible expenses.

23. I want to get off-farm employment or start a business. Would training assistance be available to help me improve my skills? Yes.

24. Are training and learning activities outside Canada eligible for assistance under CASS? No.

25. Are training and learning activities outside Saskatchewan eligible for CASS benefits? Yes provided that a similar activity in the province is not closer to the Participant.

26. Do I have to be a Saskatchewan resident to apply for CASS in Saskatchewan? Yes.

27. Do I have to exit farming to receive training assistance under CASS?

No, CASS is designed to help farmers and their spouses increase their income. There is no requirement to exit farming. Alternatively, if you are planning to exit farming you may still be eligible for training assistance under CASS. However, you must be a farmer/spouse or beginning farmer/spouse at the time of application in order to qualify.

28. Will my CASS benefits be taxable? Yes, the program will issue AGR-1 and T4-E tax claim forms.

29. How do I apply for CASS funding? Complete an “Application for Funding” form. These forms can be obtained:

- on the internet at www.agr.gov.sk.ca/docs/about_us/apf/renewal.asp;
- by contacting the CASS toll free number @ 1-888-887-7977;
- by contacting your regional SAF Renewal Specialist; or
- by contacting an ACS Credit Advisor close to you.

A Renewal Specialist or ACS Credit Advisor will arrange a meeting with you to determine your eligibility and refer you to the appropriate Regional College for a Skills Assessment and development of your Individual Learning Plan.

30. Why do I need a Skills Assessment and Individual Learning Plan (ILP)?

A Skills Assessment and ILP are CASS program requirements because they help participants determine the best plan for training to meet their goals. The ILP describes the learning goals, lists the learning activities required to achieve the goals, provides timelines and estimates the costs associated with the learning activities. The ILP is the basis of the contract between CASS and the Participant and indicates the funding approved for each activity and includes a payment schedule for benefits.

Participants set the direction, goals and content of the ILP. CASS simply provides the assistance.

31. Who performs the Skills Assessment and develops the Individual Learning Plan (ILP)? SAF has contracted with Regional Colleges in Saskatchewan to perform this function. Career Counsellors employed by the Colleges are professionals with skills in assessment and knowledge of educational and employment opportunities.

There are 7 Regional Colleges in Saskatchewan. Each has satellite campuses.

- North West Regional College: 306-937-5100
 - Campuses: North Battleford, Meadow Lake
 - Regional Service Centres: Spiritwood, St. Walburg, Unity
 - TEL Centres: Big River, Unity
 - Basic Education Centres: Big River, Duck Lake, Leask

- Cumberland Regional College: (306) 862-9833
 - Campuses: Melfort, Nipawin, Tisdale, Hudson Bay
- Prairie West Regional College: (306) 242-5377
 - Campuses: Biggar, Kindersley, Rosetown, Outlook, Warman
- Carlton Trail Regional College: (800) 667-2623
 - Campuses: Humboldt, Davidson, Southey, Watrous, Wynyard
- Parkland Regional College: (306) 786-2762
 - Campuses: Canora, Esterhazy, Fort Qu'Appelle, Melville, Yorkton
- Cypress Hills Regional College: (306) 778-5471
 - Campuses: Swift Current, Gravelbourg, Maple Creek, Shaunavon
- South East Regional College: (306) 848-2503
 - Campuses: Assiniboia, Estevan, Whitewood, Weyburn
 - Basic Education Centres: Indian Head, Moosomin

32. How much detail is required in my ILP? Participants approved for CASS funding have a maximum of \$2,000 available for Skills Assessment and development of an ILP. The training/learning goals of the Participant determine how detailed the ILP needs to be.

For example, an ILP for obtaining a 1A drivers licence may be much less detailed than for training to become a homecare worker. It's up to the Participant to determine the ILP with the Career Counsellor at the Regional College.

33. How long will the assessment process take? It depends on your individual needs. The Career Counsellor will schedule an initial interview where you will determine the type of skills assessments best suited to your needs. The Career Counsellor will be well equipped to help you identify those skills where improvement is desired.

Since each participant will choose a different combination of assessment processes and tools, it is difficult to determine the time required. The estimated time for the various assessment tools runs from 2 hours to 12 hours. We hope to move participants as quickly as possible through the assessment process, development of the ILP and the approval process so that they can proceed with training in a timely manner. However, there may be times when demand for services is high and the process slows down so it is best to start the application process well in advance of the start date of any training you may be interested in.

34. I've just completed my Skills Assessment and had my ILP developed at the Regional College. Can I begin training immediately? No, your ILP must be approved by the CASS Case Manager. Following approval by the Case Manager you must sign a Participant Agreement that outlines the CASS benefits approved, a training timeline and a payment schedule.

35. I've just completed a training course. Can I apply to have my tuition covered under CASS? No. CASS only provides benefits for those learning activities listed on a Participant's approved ILP.

36. If I qualify for CASS benefits, when does my training have to be complete? CASS, under the Agriculture Policy Framework expires Mar. 31, 2008. All training must be complete before then. The timing of Participant training is determined in the development of the ILP.

37. I'm not sure what training I want. Can I update my ILP later? Yes, provided you do not exceed the \$2,000 benefit. You may want to add more training, change the time of a course or drop something. Your ILP can only be updated with approval from the CASS Case Manager.

38. How do I participate in CASS? There are 8 steps in the CASS process:

- I. Complete a CASS Application for Funding Form.
- II. Send your signed application to the CASS office listed on the bottom of the form or take it to your regional SAF Renewal Specialist or ACS Credit Advisor.
- III. The Renewal Specialist or Credit Advisor will verify your eligibility and determine the level of financial benefit based on your family net income and your farming status. You will need to provide the CRA T451E or "Notice of Assessment" from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) for each of the last three years (one year in the case of a beginning farmer).

If you are a beginning farmer/spouse or member/spouse of a corporate farm, you will need to additional documentation to determine your eligibility. Those requirements are found earlier in this document.

You will be required to sign a declaration stating that you are not receiving Employment Insurance benefits at present.
- IV. The Renewal Specialist or Credit Advisor will complete an "Applicant Referral Form" that indicates you are eligible for a Skills Assessment and Individual Learning Plan development.
- V. Contact the Career Counsellor at the Regional College nearest you and make arrangements to complete the Skills Assessment and develop an ILP. You will need to provide the Applicant Referral Form.
- VI. Submit the completed ILP to the CASS Case Manager for approval.
- VII. CASS will notify you when your ILP and training benefits have been approved. You will be required to sign a Participant Agreement at that time.
- VIII. When your training is complete, submit your claim for reimbursement attaching receipts and/or proof of payment. Your claim will be reviewed and a cheque issued.

- 39. I don't currently have funds available to cover some of the costs in my approved ILP. Can I receive an advance payment?** Yes. This is a negotiated process between the Participant and the CASS Case Manager.
- 40. Can CASS pay my tuition costs directly to the training provider?** Yes. This must be approved by the CASS Case Manager.
- 41. Do I have to repay any of the training benefits?** No, as long as the amount paid does not exceed the actual cost of training (as supported by paid receipts or invoices) and the training was approved in your ILP. In the event of an overpayment, the Participant is required to repay the excess to CASS.
- 42. What follow up does CASS provide?** The CASS Case Manager will work closely with you to monitor your progress in meeting the targets of your ILP. Should you experience difficulty in meeting the goals of your ILP, the Case Manger will provide assistance to move the plan forward in the desired direction.
- 43. If I am approved as a CASS Participant, what are my responsibilities?** Once you have been approved for participation and benefits, your responsibilities will be to:
- sign a Participant Agreement with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food that stipulates the CASS benefits approved, a training timeline and a payment schedule;
 - take part in your skills and needs assessment and develop your Individual Learning Plan;
 - invest the time to complete your plan by following through on the approved learning activities in your Individual Learning Plan;
 - make sure that you keep the CASS Case Manager informed of any changes needed in your Individual Learning Plan and contract, as well as any changes in your personal circumstances which may affect your participation in CASS;
 - document your costs and submit timely claims as required, and
 - help us evaluate the CASS program by completing surveys about your satisfaction with program delivery services and your Individual Learning Plan ILP outcome(s).
- 44. If I participate in CASS will I be allowed to participate in other Renewal programs?** Yes, all participants are strongly encouraged to take advantage of any or all of the Renewal programs that they feel would benefit them.
- 45. How do I contact a Renewal Specialist or an ACS Credit Advisor?** SAF Renewal Specialists are located regionally throughout the province:
- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| North Battleford | (306) 446-7479 |
| Prince Albert | (306) 953-2774 |
| Yorkton | (306) 786-1507 |
| Saskatoon | (306) 933-6150 |
| Regina | (306) 787-4051 |
| Weyburn | (306) 848-2393 |

ACS Credit Advisors can be contacted at the following locations:

Assiniboia	(306) 642-7232
Kindersley	(306) 463-5498
Saskatoon	(306) 933-6143
Moose Jaw	(306) 694-3618
Prince Albert	(306) 953-2778
Tisdale	(306) 878-8840
Weyburn	(306) 848-2534 or (306) 848-2849
Yorkton	(306) 786-1530
Swift Current	(306) 778-8492

For more information on the Canadian Agricultural Skills Service:

Toll free: 1-888-887-7977

Website: www.agr.gov.sk.ca/docs/about_us/apf/renewal.asp

Email: cass@agr.gov.sk.ca

Other Renewal programs 1-866-452-5558 or www.agr.gc.ca/renewal