

U.S. public loan and loan guarantee programs for alternative protein commercialization

GFI tracks U.S. public investment opportunities for alternative protein commercialization and scale-up. Federal loan and loan guarantee programs GFI is aware of are listed below. To share information about public investment or learn more about GFI's [Public Investment and Industry Initiative](#), please contact senior policy specialist, public investment and industry, Maille O'Donnell, at mailleo@gfi.org.

Loan programs for alternative protein producers

USDA Business and Industry Loan Guarantee Program

The Business and Industry Loan Guarantee Program (B&I) is designed to support rural businesses by improving access to debt from lenders such as commercial banks, credit unions, and local community development organizations. Lenders may apply for guarantees of up to 80 percent and up to **\$15 million** on loans for projects in rural areas.

Eligibility

- Projects must be located in rural areas, defined as areas with the nearest town population of less than 50,000 residents.
- Funds may be used for business conversion, enlargement, repair, modernization, or development; purchase and development of land, buildings, or other infrastructure; purchase and installation of machinery and equipment, supplies, or inventory; debt refinancing when such refinancing improves cash flow and creates jobs; business and industrial acquisitions when the loan will maintain business operations and create or save jobs.

[Learn more](#)

USDA Biorefinery, Renewable Chemical, and Biobased Manufacturing Assistance (9003) Program

This program provides loan guarantees of up to **\$250 million** to support developing, constructing, and retrofitting new and emerging technologies to produce advanced biofuels, renewable chemicals, and biobased products.

Eligibility

- **Current federal regulations** governing this program exclude food and feed products from the definition of “biobased products.” However, **intermediate ingredients or feedstocks used for food products** may be eligible. Thus, alternative protein end-product manufacturing projects do not qualify, but projects focused on producing intermediate ingredients or feedstocks for alternative protein manufacturing may qualify. **Companies are encouraged to contact USDA Rural Development program staff** with questions about their eligibility.

- Funds may be used for the development, construction, and retrofitting of biobased product manufacturing facilities. Refinancing may be eligible in certain circumstances.

[Learn more](#)

USDA Rural Energy for America Program

This program, also administered by USDA's Office of Rural Development, provides guaranteed loan financing and grant funding to rural small businesses or agricultural producers for renewable energy systems or to make energy efficiency improvements.

Loan guarantees may be up to **75 percent of total eligible project costs**. Grants may not exceed 50 percent of total eligible project costs. Renewable Energy Systems Grants may be between **\$2,500 to \$1 million** and Energy Efficiency Grants may be between **\$1,500 and \$500,000**.

Eligibility

- For the purposes of the program, “**agricultural producers**” **must be** “directly engaged in the production of agricultural products through labor management and operations, including the cultivating, growing, and harvesting of plants and crops (including farming); breeding, raising, feeding, or housing of livestock (including ranching); forestry products; hydroponics; nursery stock; or aquaculture, whereby 50 percent or greater of their gross income is derived from the operations.”
 - Therefore, companies who are turning agricultural products into alternative protein end-products likely do not qualify, but companies who produce agricultural inputs for alternative protein products, pursuant to the definition above, may qualify.

- Companies are encouraged to **contact** USDA Rural Development to confirm their eligibility. Agricultural producers do not need to be located in rural areas to qualify for the program.

- The program is also open to **rural small businesses**. Small businesses must be located in a rural area (population < 50,000) and meet Small Business Administration **size standards**. Business headquarters may be located in a non-rural area as long as the project site is located in an eligible rural area.
- Other requirements include:
 - Technical merit and utilization of commercially available technology
 - An energy audit or assessment for all energy efficiency projects
 - An environmental review before award or construction
- Funds may be used for the purchase and installation of renewable energy systems or for the purchase, installation, and construction of energy efficiency improvements. A full list of eligible uses can be found on the **[program website](#)**.

[Learn more](#)

DoD Office of Strategic Capital Credit Program

The Department of Defense's Office of Strategic Capital (OSC) is currently developing new loan and loan guarantee programs to “attract and scale private capital to technologies critical to the national and economic security of the United States.” OSC is **authorized by Congress** to:

- “develop, integrate, and implement **capital investment strategies proven in the commercial sector to shape and scale investment** in critical technologies and assets,

- identify and prioritize promising critical technologies and assets that **require capital assistance** and **have the potential to benefit the DoD**, and
- **make eligible investments** in such technologies and assets, such as supply chain technologies not always supported through direct investment.”

OSC’s pilot loan program, open from January to February 2025, provided direct loans of **\$10 million** to **\$150 million** for capital investment and equipment financing in existing manufacturing facilities.

Eligibility

OSC’s programs are developed for 31 Covered Technology Categories (CTCs) given by Congress. OSC has stated that they define the technology categories broadly (and intentionally have not codified definitions for CTCs beyond the category names written in statute) and encourage companies who may meet more than one CTC to note so in their application. Alternative proteins may be eligible under the *advanced manufacturing, biomass, synthetic biology, and space-enabled services and equipment* CTCs.

[Learn more](#)

EXIM Bank loan programs

EXIM Bank is the official export credit agency of the United States. It is an independent government agency and its mission is to “support American job creation, prosperity, and security through exporting.”

EXIM Bank provides a variety of financial products across industries, including export credit insurance, working capital loan guarantees, direct loans, project and structured finance programs, and loans/loan guarantees for domestic manufacturing projects.

EXIM Bank has \$16 billion in statutory authority. It has no minimum or maximum transaction amount and has provided loans/loan guarantees ranging from **\$10,000** to **\$5 billion**.

Eligibility

To qualify for EXIM Bank’s programs, **at least 25 percent of revenues** for the related project **must come from exports**. For small businesses (defined per **SBA size standards**), women- or minority-owned businesses, or businesses in critical technology sectors (alternative protein companies may qualify under “biotechnology”) the export requirement is **15 percent**.

- EXIM Bank evaluates the export nexus over the life cycle of the loan rather than annually, so projects may qualify even if the export nexus is not immediately reached. If it is not reached over the life cycle of the project, additional fees may apply.

[Learn more](#)

Small Business Administration 7(a) loan program

The **Small Business Administration 7(a) loan program** provides loan guarantees of up to **\$5 million**. Loans can be used for:

- Acquiring, refinancing, or improving real estate and buildings
- Short- and long-term working capital
- Refinancing current business debt
- Purchasing and installation of machinery and equipment, including AI-related expenses
- Purchasing furniture, fixtures, and supplies
- Changes of ownership (complete or partial)
- Multiple-purpose loans, including any of the above

Companies who meet the eligibility criteria may find eligible lenders using the SBA [**lender matching tool**](#).

Eligibility

- Businesses must be located in the U.S. and meet [**SBA size requirements**](#).
- Businesses must be “unable to obtain the desired credit on reasonable terms from non-Federal, non-State, and non-local government sources.”

[**Learn more**](#)

Small Business Administration 504 loan program

The [**Small Business Administration 504 loan program**](#) offers long-term, fixed-rate financing of up to \$5.5 million for major fixed assets. 504 loans can be used for the improvement or modernization of existing facilities or the purchase or construction of:

- Existing buildings or land
- New facilities
- Long-term machinery and equipment with a useful remaining life of a minimum of 10 years, including project-related AI-supported equipment or machinery for manufacturing products

504 loans are given by Certified Development Companies (CDCs) who are certified and regulated by SBA. Companies can find CDCs [**here**](#).

Eligibility

In addition to meeting small business [**size requirements**](#), companies must have a **tangible net worth of less than \$15 million** and an **average net income of less than \$5 million** after federal income taxes for two years preceding their application.

[**Learn more**](#)

Small Business Administration Microloan program

The Small Business Administration (SBA) Microloan program gives small businesses access to loans of **up to \$50,000**. SBA provides funds to designated [**intermediary lenders**](#) who loan to small businesses. Loans may be used for a variety of purposes to help small businesses expand. Examples include:

- Working capital
- Inventory
- Supplies
- Furniture
- Fixtures
- Machinery
- Equipment

Eligibility

- Each intermediary lender has its own lending and credit requirements.
- Businesses must meet SBA [**size requirements**](#).

[**Learn more**](#)

Economic Development Administration Revolving Loan Fund Program

This program makes grants to establish Revolving Loan Funds (RLFs) that make loans to businesses who cannot otherwise obtain traditional bank financing matched with local funds. Award amounts vary from **\$500,000** to **\$2 million**. There are currently over 400 EDA-funded RLFs across all 50 states. Businesses interested in accessing loans from RLFs should contact RLFs directly rather than the Economic Development Administration. A list can be found on [**this webpage**](#).

Eligibility

- Each Revolving Loan Fund must develop and maintain an RLF plan that demonstrates how the fund will fulfill economic development goals throughout its lifecycle.
- Investment priorities vary across RLFs. Most make general business loans aimed to create and retain jobs while some focus on certain sectors and industries.
- A list of EDA-funded RLF recipients is available [here](#). The list is composed mostly of counties, states, cities, and towns.

[Learn more](#)

U.S. Department of the Treasury State Small Business Credit Initiative

The State Small Business Credit Initiative provides funds to states to implement programs to increase capital access for small businesses. States can provide cash collateral to make it easier for small businesses to secure loans, direct loans, loan guarantees, and equity investments. SSBCI also provides funding for technical assistance (legal, accounting, financial advisory) to make it easier for small businesses to obtain capital. Specific programs vary by state, and a full list can be found [here](#).

Eligibility

- Businesses must meet SBA [size requirements](#).
- Individual state programs may have additional eligibility requirements.

[Learn more](#)

DOE Loan Programs Office

The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Loan Programs Office (LPO) provides large-ticket [project financing](#) and loan guarantees. While LPO has no minimum or maximum transaction amount, its loans and loan guarantees are typically greater than \$100 million. This investment can be used to support the development, construction, and operation of commercial-scale facilities.

Eligibility

Alternative protein companies are eligible to apply for LPO financing and guarantees as "industrial decarbonization technologies" under the updated Title 17 Program Guidance released in May 2023.

[Learn more](#)

Loan programs for investors

Office of Strategic Capital Small Business Investment Company Critical Technology program

The SBICCT Initiative represents a partnership between the Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) Office of Strategic Capital (OSC) to grow private sector investments in technologies critical to U.S. national and economic security. The initiative provides government-backed loans of up to **\$175 million** to investment funds (including venture capital) raising capital that demonstrate intent to invest at least 60 percent of aggregate financings into **small business** portfolio companies in one or more of the outlined **Critical Technology Areas** (CTAs). The loans may enhance fund-level investment returns through the resulting fund-level leverage.

Loans can be accessed in two ways (terms may be found on the **SBIC's website**):

- The new Accrual Debenture—a loan of up to 1.25x the amount of private capital committed to the fund and that accrues interest over a 10-year term to align with the cash flows of longer duration and equity-oriented investment strategies.
- The longstanding SBA Standard Debenture—a loan of up to 2x the amount of private capital committed to the fund and that requires a semi-annual payment of interest on outstanding leverage to align to credit strategies.

DoD also provides Program Related Initiatives intended to drive value in the implementation of the Licensee's respective investment strategies, such as access to technical experts, cybersecurity support for portfolio companies, security clearance (when necessary), and Cooperative Research and Development Agreements.

Eligibility

- Funds must have experienced fund managers with a strong track record of performance and scaling relevant technologies.
- As outlined in the **Investment Policy Statement (IPS)** for the program, Critical Technology Areas (CTAs) that may be relevant for alternative proteins include biotechnology, advanced materials, and space technology.
- As noted in the **OSC Investment Strategy**, industry segments of particular interest that may be relevant for alternative proteins include advanced manufacturing, biomass, and synthetic biology.
- Particular emphasis will be placed on mandates with a focus on enabling technologies, enhancing U.S. competitiveness, and investment opportunities that require patient capital.
- Funds must invest in small businesses, as defined **here** (under heading “Regulations governing SBICs”).
- Investors/LPs, key licensee personnel, and portfolio companies cannot be from **countries of special concern**, most notably China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia.

Application deadlines are quarterly. **Learn more**

Small Business Investment Company program

The Small Business Administration (SBA) licenses and provides capital to professionally managed equity and debt investment funds through its Small Business Investment Company (SBIC) program. SBA provides government-guaranteed loans to funds to match privately raised capital. The program aims to increase access to financing for U.S. small businesses and startups and potentially improve risk-adjusted returns for private investors.

Benefits of forming an SBIC include:

- Rapid fund deployment
- Access to long-term capital
- Flexible terms and investment opportunities
- Exemption from SEC registration
- Exemption from **Volcker Rule** (which generally restricts banking entities from “engaging in proprietary trading and from owning, sponsoring, or having certain relationships with a hedge fund or private equity fund”)
- Increased financial scale
- Tax advantages for LPs

Eligibility

- SBICs must invest in U.S. small businesses, defined as having the following:
 - Tangible net worth of less than \$24 million and average net income after Federal income taxes for the preceding two completed years of less than \$8 million.
 - Or, the **industry size standard** covering the industry in which the applicant is primarily engaged.

- At least 25% of an SBIC’s financing must be in smaller enterprises, defined as having the following:
 - Net worth less than \$6 million and average net income after Federal income taxes for the preceding two years of less than \$2 million.
 - Or, the size standard for the industry in which it is primarily engaged.
- SBICs may not invest in (with certain exceptions) any of the following types of businesses:
 - Passive businesses
 - Real estate businesses
 - Project financing
 - Farm land purchases
 - Businesses contrary to public interest
 - Foreign investments
 - Associated suppliers

[Learn more](#)

If you are seeking public investment for alternative protein scale-up and commercialization, or decide to apply to any of these programs, we’d love to hear from you. Please reach out to senior policy specialist, public investment and industry, Maille O’Donnell, at mailleo@gfi.org.

About GFI

The Good Food Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit working internationally to make alternative proteins like plant-based and cultivated meat delicious, affordable, and accessible. GFI advances open-access research, mobilizes resources and talent, and empowers partners across the food system to create a sustainable, secure, and just protein supply. GFI is funded entirely by private philanthropic support.



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