

November 2015



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### South Carolina Farm Service Agency

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#### State Committee:

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Warren Dixon  
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Don Sharp  
Tom Trantham

#### State Executive Director:

W. Jack Nettles, Acting

#### Administrative Officer:

Toni Turner

#### Farm Programs Chief:

Amy Turner

### FSA County Committee Elections Have Begun

Farm Service Agency (FSA) today announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) began mailing ballots to eligible farmers and ranchers across the country for the 2015 FSA County Committee elections on Monday, Nov. 9, 2015. Producers must return ballots to their local FSA offices by Dec. 7, 2015, to ensure that their vote is counted.

Nearly 7,700 FSA County Committee members serve FSA offices nationwide. Each committee has three to 5 elected members who serve three-year terms of office. One-third of county committee seats are up for election each year. County committee members apply their knowledge and judgment to help FSA make important decisions on its commodity support programs; conservation programs; indemnity and disaster programs; emergency programs and eligibility.

Producers must participate or cooperate in an FSA program to be eligible to vote in the county committee election. Approximately 1.9 million producers are currently eligible to vote. Farmers and ranchers who supervise and conduct the

## **Farm Loan Programs Chief:**

Frank Sligh

Producers can contact their [local FSA Office](#) for more information or to schedule an appointment.

farming operations of an entire farm, but are not of legal voting age, also may be eligible to vote.

Farmers and ranchers will begin receiving their ballots the week of Nov. 9. Ballots include the names of candidates running for the local committee election. FSA has modified the ballot, making it more easily identifiable and less likely to be overlooked. Voters who do not receive ballots in the coming week can pick one up at their local FSA office. Ballots returned by mail must be postmarked no later than Dec. 7, 2015. Newly elected committee members and their alternates will take office Jan. 1, 2016.

For more information, visit the FSA website at [www.fsa.usda.gov/elections](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections). You may also contact your local USDA Service Center or FSA office. Visit <http://offices.usda.gov> to find an FSA office near you.

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## **USDA Issues Safety-Net Payments to SC Farmers Facing Market Downturn**

The USDA Farm Service Agency has begun issuing financial assistance for the 2014 crop year to those agricultural producers who are participating in the new safety-net programs established by the 2014 Farm Bill. The new programs, known as Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC), are designed to protect against unexpected drops in crop prices or revenues due to market downturns.

Unlike the old direct payments program, which provided funds in good years and bad years, these new programs only provide financial assistance when prices or revenues drop below normal. For example, nationwide, farms participating in ARC-County that are receiving payments experienced a \$20 billion drop in revenues relative to the historical benchmark. Similarly, lower prices in commodities such as peanuts have triggered PLC assistance.

Also, please note that funds provided by the ARC-County program can vary from county to county. The 2014 Farm Bill requires ARC-County payments to be calculated using the national average market year price (which does not vary by county), and the average county yield (which varies by county). This creates county-by-county differences in payment rates. The yield data comes from surveys conducted by the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the national standard that uses the highest-precision statistical procedures available. Where that data does not exist, the next strongest data is used: county-level crop insurance data from the Risk Management Agency. If that data does not exist, the next strongest data is used: NASS district data. Where NASS district data doesn't exist, the FSA State Committees provide data.

Because the new programs are designed as financial assistance for prices and revenues lower than normal, not all producers will receive a payment, (as occurred with the old direct payments program). ARC/PLC payments are designed to help with unexpected changes in the marketplace, and to supplement other assistance programs, such as crop insurance. To learn more about the data used in calculating payments, how payments are calculated, crop-specific and state-specific information, please visit our website at [www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc).

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## SC Producers Eligible for Emergency Loans Following Presidential Disaster Declaration

All counties in SC have received a disaster declaration due to the recent flooding and continued rains. Under this designation, producers with operations in any primary or contiguous county are eligible to apply for low interest emergency loans.

Emergency loans help producers recover from production and physical losses due to drought, flooding and other natural disasters or quarantine.

Producers have eight months from the date of the declaration to apply for emergency loan assistance. FSA will consider each loan application on its own merits, taking into account the extent of losses, security available and repayment ability. Producers can borrow up to 100 percent of actual production or physical losses, to a maximum amount of \$500,000.

For more information about emergency loans, please contact your local FSA office or visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).

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## Microloans

Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds farmers and ranchers that the FSA borrowing limit for microloans increased from \$35,000 to \$50,000, on Nov. 7, 2014. Microloans offer borrowers simplified lending with less paperwork.

The microloan change allows beginning, small and mid-sized farmers to access an additional \$15,000 in loans using a simplified application process with up to seven years to repay. Microloans are part of USDA's continued commitment to [small and midsized farming operations](#).

To complement the microloan program additional changes to FSA eligibility requirements will enhance beginning farmers and ranchers access to land, a key barrier to entry level producers. FSA policies related to farm experience have changed so that other types of skills may be considered to meet the direct farming experience required for farm ownership loan eligibility. Operation or management of non-farm businesses, leadership positions while serving in the military or advanced education in an agricultural field will now count towards the experience applicants need to show when applying for farm ownership loans. **Important Note:** Microloans cannot be used to purchase real estate.

Since 2010, more than 50 percent of USDA's farm loans now go to beginning farmers and FSA has increased its lending to targeted underserved producers by nearly 50 percent.

Please review the FSA [Microloan Program Fact Sheet](#) for program application, eligibility and related information.

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## USDA Extends Dairy Margin Protection Program Deadline to November 20, 2015

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced that the deadline to enroll for the dairy Margin Protection Program for coverage in 2016 has been extended until Nov. 20, 2015. The voluntary program, established by the 2014 Farm Bill, provides financial assistance to participating farmers when the margin – the difference between the price of milk and feed costs – falls below the coverage level selected by the farmer.

Producers are encouraged to use the online Web resource at [www.fsa.usda.gov/mpptool](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mpptool) to calculate the best levels of coverage for their dairy operation. The secure website can be accessed via computer, smartphone or tablet.

Producers who were enrolled in 2015 will need to make a coverage election for 2016 and pay the \$100 administration fee. Although any unpaid premium balances for 2015 must be paid in full by the

enrollment deadline to remain eligible for higher coverage levels in 2016, premiums for 2016 are not due until Sept. 1, 2016. Also, producers can work with milk marketing companies to remit premiums on their behalf.

To enroll in the Margin Protection Program for Dairy, contact your local FSA county office. To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Payments under the program may be reduced by a certain percentage due to a sequester order required by Congress and issued pursuant to the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985. Should a payment reduction be necessary, FSA will reduce the payment by the required amount.

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## USDA Offers Flood Impacted SC Farmers and Ranchers Immediate Disaster Assistance

Farm Service Agency Stands Ready to Assist Agricultural Producers Slammed by Recent Heavy Rains

SC Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds farmers and ranchers across the state of federal farm program benefits that may be available to help eligible producers recover from recent heavy rains and flooding.

FSA offers disaster assistance and low-interest loan programs to assist agricultural producers in their recovery efforts following floods or similar qualifying natural disasters. Available programs and loans include:

- **Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)** - provides financial assistance to producers of non-insurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory, or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters (includes native grass for grazing). Eligible producers must have purchased NAP coverage for 2015 crops.
- **Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP)** - offers payments to eligible producers for livestock death losses in excess of normal mortality due to adverse weather. Eligible losses may include those determined by FSA to have been caused by hurricanes, floods, blizzards, wildfires, tropical storms, tornados lightening, extreme heat, and extreme cold. Producers will be required to provide verifiable documentation of death losses resulting from an eligible adverse weather event and must submit a notice of loss to their local FSA office within 30 calendar days of when the loss of livestock is apparent.
- **Tree Assistance Program (TAP)** – provides assistance to eligible orchardists and nursery tree growers for qualifying tree, shrub and vine losses due to natural disaster.
- **Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP)** - provides emergency relief for losses due to feed or water shortages, disease, adverse weather, or other conditions, which are not adequately addressed by other disaster programs. ELAP covers physically damaged or destroyed livestock feed that was purchased or mechanically harvested forage or feedstuffs intended for use as feed for the **producer's** eligible livestock. In order to be considered eligible, harvested forage must be baled; forage that is only cut, raked or windrowed is not eligible. Producers must submit a notice of loss to their local FSA office within 30 calendar days of when the loss is apparent. ELAP also covers up to 150 lost grazing days in instances when a producer has been forced to remove livestock from a grazing pasture due to floodwaters. For beekeepers, ELAP covers beehive losses (the physical structure) in instances where the hive has been destroyed by a natural disaster including flooding, high winds and tornadoes.
- **Emergency Loan Program** – Available to producers with agriculture operations located in a county under a primary or contiguous **Secretarial Disaster designation**. These low interest loans help producers recover from production and physical losses due to drought, flooding.
- **Emergency Conservation Program (ECP)** - provides emergency funding for farmers and ranchers to rehabilitate land severely damaged by natural disasters; includes fence loss.

- **HayNet** - is an Internet-based Hay and Grazing Net Ad Service allowing farmers and ranchers to share 'Need Hay' ads and 'Have Hay' ads online. Farmers also can use another feature to post advertisements for grazing land, specifically ads announcing the availability of grazing land or ads requesting a need for land to graze. [www.fsa.usda.gov/haynet](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/haynet).

To establish or retain FSA program eligibility, farmers and ranchers must report prevented planting and failed acres (crops and grasses). Prevented planting acreage must be reported on form FSA-576, Notice of Loss, no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and Risk Management Agency (RMA).

For more information on disaster assistance programs and loans visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/) or contact your local FSA Office. To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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## Farmers to Receive Documentation of USDA Services

Local Offices Issue Receipts for Services Provided

Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds agricultural producers that FSA provides a receipt to customers who request or receive assistance or information on FSA programs.

As part of FSA's mission to provide enhanced customer service, producers who visit FSA will receive documentation of services requested and provided. From December through June, FSA issued more than 327,000 electronic receipts.

The 2014 Farm Bill requires a receipt to be issued for any agricultural program assistance requested from FSA, the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Rural Development (RD). Receipts include the date, summary of the visit and any agricultural information, program and/or loan assistance provided to an individual or entity.

In some cases, a form or document – such as a completed and signed program enrollment form – serve as the customer receipt instead of a printed or electronic receipt. A service is any information, program or loan assistance provided whether through a visit, email, fax or letter.

To learn more about FSA, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov) or to find your local USDA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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## SC AgriBiz & Farm Expo Invites You to an Outstanding Educational Experience

These are tough economic times for South Carolina producers and ranchers and the 2016 SC AgriBiz and Farm Expo has an agenda designed to help with outstanding educational programming, according to Jody Martin, the show's executive director.

"We have educational sessions that will help farmers improve their efficiency during these difficult times," Martin said.

The expo is set for Jan. 13-14, 2016 at the Florence Civic Center in Florence, S.C. Educational sessions are planned for both days of the show and will cover topics ranging from precision agriculture to managing price and production risk, a small farmer symposium, a cattle clinic and a CAMM conference. Besides offering educational opportunities, the Expo also offers the opportunity to connect with others and experience new and innovative cutting edge technology in agriculture.

At 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 13, Nathan Smith, Extension economist with the University of Georgia, will speak on "Managing Price and Production Risks in Tough Times." Martin called this a "must attend" seminar for commercial ag farmers as they make plans for the new crop year.

Martin said small and beginning farmers are an important part of the expo and the Small Farmer Symposium set from 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 13 will include an informative and



entertaining session by Van McCall, of AgSouth Farm Credit. Mr. McCall will speak on “Considerations for Beginning Farming Operations” and “Business Management Cornerstone: the Balance Sheet.”

“Van is a cross of a businessman and Jeff Foxworthy. He will help inexperienced farmers with the business side of running a small farm and make it fun,” Martin said.

Also on Wednesday, January 13th, a cattle clinic is set to include a session at 10:30 a.m. on “Heifer Development & Selection” presented by Brian Bolt, Manager of Business Development with AgriClear, Inc. Early afternoon, there will be two “Optimization Clinics for Hay Equipment”. Then at 3:30 p.m., Bolt will speak on cattle marketing and the market outlook.

On Thursday, Jan. 14, educational sessions for commercial farmers will focus on precision agriculture. At the 10:30 a.m. session, Steve Valencsin, founder and CEO of GROWERS, a precision farm management business based in Raleigh, N.C. will share details on how farmers can use data-driven farming to reduce costs and increase yields. Valencsin will speak on “Data Driven Farming – Making Your Farm Data Work for You.”

The Small Farmer Symposium continues on Thursday, Jan. 14 from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and will include a presentation on growing your business through social media. In addition, Jim Matson with Matson Consulting will speak on “What Food Buyers are Looking For.”

A key part of the expo is the CAMM Conference, set from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 14. Speakers from Clemson’s Confined Animal Manure Manager (CAMM) program will present on the benefits of using animal manure to grow crops for on-farm bio diesel and how to make biodiesel from crops grown with manure. The day will close with a session on air pollutants associated with swine farms and their impacts and mitigation. Individuals seeking CAMM recertification can receive 5 hours for attending the conference. The cost of this certification, including admission and lunch vouchers is \$100.00.

“The expo will have educational sessions that will help every farmer in South Carolina and we look forward to a big crowd,” Martin said.

For more details, log on to the expo website at [www.SCAgriBixExpo.com](http://www.SCAgriBixExpo.com).

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## Apply Now with NRCS for Environmental Quality Incentives Program’s Fiscal Year 2016 Funding.

South Carolina’s farmers and forest landowners still have time to apply for financial and technical assistance to protect the health and productivity of their private agricultural and forestland through USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service’ (NRCS) popular [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP).

NRCS accepts EQIP applications year round, but makes funding selections at specific times during the fiscal year. **The application cutoff date for fiscal year 2016 regular EQIP is Nov. 20.** NRCS is encouraging farmers and forest landowners to submit their applications as soon as possible because funding is limited. NRCS provided \$13.1 million in EQIP funding to eligible South Carolina farmers and forest landowners in fiscal year 2015.

“NRCS works hard to help eligible farmers and private forest landowners plan and carry out conservation practices that can benefit all South Carolina’s citizens such as clean air and water, healthy and productive forests, and healthy soils,” said Ann English, State Conservationist for NRCS in South Carolina. “EQIP provides crucial funding to help producers carry out these practices on their agricultural land.”

EQIP, a voluntary conservation program, promotes agricultural production and environmental quality. This program is available to eligible farmers and landowners and offers financial and technical assistance to install or implement structural and management practices on private agricultural land and forest land that deliver environmental benefits, such as improved water quality

and reduced soil erosion. Eligible land includes cropland, pastureland and non-industrial private forestland.

In South Carolina, EQIP will pay 75 percent of the costs to implement eligible conservation practices for producers. In addition, the 2014 Farm Bill strengthened benefits for historically underserved farmers, beginning and limited resource farmers, American Indian tribes and veterans by doing the following:

- increased payment rates up to 90 percent for financial assistance through EQIP;
- and provided advance payment of up to 50 percent to purchase materials and services needed to implement conservation practices included in their EQIP contract. Examples of conservation practices include nutrient management, manure management facilities, cover crops, heavy use areas, and wildlife habitat management.

In addition, NRCS in South Carolina can use EQIP to help producers carry out specific types of agricultural activities statewide or in specific geographic areas through the following special agency initiatives:

- **On-Farm Energy Initiative**—Helps farmers and landowners become more energy efficient and energy independent.
- **Organic Initiative**—Helps organic and transitioning to organic farmers address resource concerns such as soil erosion.
- **National Water Quality Initiative**—Helps farmers and landowners improve water quality and aquatic habitats in priority watersheds with impaired streams.
- **Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative**—Helps farmers and landowners implement high tunnels that extend growing seasons in an environmentally safe manner.
- **Longleaf Pine Initiative**—Helps farmers and landowners improve the sustainability and profitability of longleaf pine forest through the implementation of forest management practices.
- **Working Lands for Wildlife—Gopher Tortoise Initiative**—Helps farmers and landowners voluntarily create, restore or enhance gopher tortoise habitat to support recovery of the species.
- **StrikeForce Initiative**—Provides targeted outreach to farmers and landowners in rural, persistent poverty communities to promote USDA programs and services.

NRCS evaluates each application, with higher priorities given to applications that use cost-effective conservation practices, address local priorities and provide the most environmental benefit. The major natural resource priorities in South Carolina are reduction of non-point source pollutants, reduction in soil erosion through plant management, and wildlife management to protect at-risk species.

For more information about EQIP, visit your local NRCS office. USDA service center locations are listed at <http://offices.usda.gov>. To learn about financial and technical assistance available to help South Carolina farmers and other landowners improve and protect their land, visit NRCS in South Carolina's website at [www.sc.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.sc.nrcs.usda.gov).

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