

October 2017



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

# NEWSLETTER

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## Massachusetts FSA Newsletter

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### Massachusetts Farm Service Agency

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#### Acting State Executive Director:

Daniel Smiarowski

#### State Committee

James Larkin, Chair  
Donald Leab  
H. Michael Smolak, Jr.  
Adrienne Mollor  
Shelley Szawlowski-Smiarowski

Please contact your local FSA Office for questions specific to

### Environmental Review Required Before Project Implementation

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to consider all potential environmental impacts for federally-funded projects before the project is approved.

For all Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs, an environmental review must be completed before actions are approved, such as site preparation or ground disturbance. These programs include, **but are not limited to**, the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), Farm Storage Facility Loan (FSFL) program and farm loans. If project implementation begins before FSA has completed an environmental review, this will result in a denial of the request. There are exceptions regarding the Stafford Act and emergencies. It is important to wait until you receive written approval of your project proposal before starting any actions, including, but not limited to, vegetation clearing, site preparation or ground disturbance.

Remember to contact your local FSA office early in your planning

your operation or county at [offices.usda.gov](http://offices.usda.gov).

process to determine what level of environmental review is required for your program application so that it can be completed timely.

Applications cannot be approved contingent upon the completion of an environmental review. FSA must have copies of all permits and plans before an application can be approved.

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## **USDA Issues Farm Safety Net and Conservation Payments**

USDA Farm Service Agency announced that over \$9.6 billion in payments will be made to producers through the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC), Price Loss Coverage (PLC) and Conservation Reserve (CRP) programs. The USDA is issuing approximately \$8 billion in payments under the ARC and PLC programs for the 2016 crop year, and \$1.6 billion under CRP for 2017.

The ARC and PLC programs were authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill and offer a safety net to agricultural producers when there is a substantial drop in revenue or prices for covered commodities. Over half a million producers will receive ARC payments and over a quarter million producers will receive PLC payments for 2016 crops, starting the first week of October and continuing over the next several months.

Payments are being made to producers who enrolled base acres of barley, corn, grain sorghum, lentils, oats, peanuts, dry peas, soybeans, wheat and canola. In the upcoming months, payments will be announced after marketing year average prices are published by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service for the remaining covered commodities. Those include long and medium grain rice (except for temperate Japonica rice), which will be announced in November; remaining oilseeds and chickpeas, which will be announced in December; and temperate Japonica rice, which will be announced in early February 2018. The estimated payments are before application of sequestration and other reductions and limits, including adjusted gross income limits and payment limitations.

Also, as part of an ongoing effort to protect sensitive lands and improve water quality and wildlife habitat, USDA will begin issuing 2017 CRP payments in October to over 375,000 Americans.

Signed into law by President Reagan in 1985, CRP is one of the largest private-lands conservation program in the United States. Thanks to voluntary participation by farmers and landowners, CRP has improved water quality, reduced soil erosion and increased habitat for endangered and threatened species. In return for enrolling in CRP, USDA, through the Farm Service Agency (FSA) on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation, provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Participants enter into contracts that last between 10 and 15 years. CRP payments are made to participants who remove sensitive

lands from production and plant certain grasses, shrubs and trees that improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and increase wildlife habitat.

For more details regarding ARC and PLC programs, go to [www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc). For more information about CRP, contact your local FSA office or visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/crp](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/crp).

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## USDA Seeks Applications for Grants to Help Agricultural Producers and Small Rural Businesses Develop New Products

The USDA Rural Development (RD) is accepting applications for grants to help farmers, ranchers and producer-based businesses nationwide develop new product lines.

The funding is being provided through the Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program. VAPG grants can be used to develop new products from raw agricultural products or promote new markets for established products. Veterans, socially-disadvantaged groups, beginning farmers and ranchers, operators of small and medium-sized family farms and ranches and farmer and rancher cooperatives are given special priority.

The deadline to submit paper applications is Jan. 31, 2018. Electronic applications submitted through [grants.gov](http://grants.gov) are due Jan. 24, 2018. For more information on this grant program, visit [USDA Rural Development](#).

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## Elections for the 2018 County Committee

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Committee Elections are underway in all counties. It is important that every eligible producer participate in these elections because FSA county committees are a link between the agricultural community and the USDA.

County committee members are a critical component of FSA operations. Committees should be comprised of members who reflect the diversity of producers involved in production agriculture in their county. This means that producers representing underserved groups or communities should be on the committee to speak on behalf of their constituency.

Underserved producers are beginning, women and other minority farmers and land owners and/or operators who have limited resources. Other minority groups including Native American and Alaska Natives; persons under the poverty level, and persons that have disabilities are also considered underserved.

County committee election ballots will be mailed to eligible voters on Nov. 6, 2017. The last day to return completed ballots is Dec. 4, 2017.

For more information on eligibility to serve on FSA county committees, visit: [www.fsa.usda.gov/elections](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections).

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## Beginning Farmer Loans

FSA assists beginning farmers to finance agricultural enterprises. Under these designated farm loan programs, FSA can provide financing to eligible applicants through either direct or guaranteed loans. FSA defines a beginning farmer as a person who:

- Has operated a farm for not more than 10 years
- Will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm
- Agrees to participate in a loan assessment, borrower training and financial management program sponsored by FSA
- Does not own a farm in excess of 30 percent of the county's average size farm. Additional program information, loan applications, and other materials are available at your local USDA Service Center. You may also visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).

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## FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans

The USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Direct Farm Ownership loans](#) are a resource to help farmers and ranchers become owner-operators of family farms, improve and expand current operations, increase agricultural productivity, and assist with land tenure to save farmland for future generations.

Depending on the applicant's needs, there are three types of Direct Farm Ownership Loans: regular, down payment and joint financing. FSA also offers a [Direct Farm Ownership Microloan](#) option for smaller financial needs up to \$50,000.

Joint financing allows FSA to provide more farmers and ranchers with access to capital. FSA lends up to 50 percent of the total amount financed. A commercial lender, a State program or the seller of the property being purchased, provides the balance of loan funds, with or without an FSA guarantee. The maximum loan amount for a Joint Financing loan is \$300,000 and the repayment period for the loan is up to 40 years.

To be eligible, the operation must be an eligible farm enterprise. Farm Ownership loan funds cannot be used to finance nonfarm enterprises and all applicants must be able to meet general eligibility requirements. Loan applicants are also required to have participated in the business operations of a farm or ranch for at least three years out of the 10 years prior to the date the application is submitted. The applicant must show documentation that their participation in the business operation of the farm or ranch was not solely as a laborer.

For more information about FSA Loan programs, contact your local FSA office or visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov). To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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