

November 2017



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

NEWSLETTER

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Arkansas FSA Newsletter

Arkansas Farm Service Agency

700 West Capitol, Room 3416
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201
Phone: 501-301-3000
www.fsa.usda.gov/ar

State Committee: Chairman
Theodore Eldrige, Sr.

Members Eric Anderson,
Mike Freeze, Johnny Loftin,
and Richard Simmons

State Committee Meeting:
2nd Wednesday and
Thursday of each Quarter

State Executive Director:
David Curtis

Administrative Officer:
Sharon Baker

Message from the SED

On October 29, 2017, I was appointed State Executive Director for Arkansas. My career with USDA began in 1983 as a temporary field man for Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service (ASCS) in Boone County. In 1985, I was accepted into the ASCS County Operations Trainee (COT) program, training in Jackson and Baxter Counties. In 1986, I became the County Executive Director in Fulton County and remained there until the office was closed in 2012. From 2012 until my appointment, I was County Executive Director for Stone/Izard/Cleburne Counties.

I would like to thank Clayton Parr for his dedication and service the past 10 ½ months while serving as Acting State Executive Director.

I look forward to working with the farmers and ranchers of Arkansas in my new expanded role. There are many challenges in the Agriculture Community today but together we will make a difference.

David Curtis
State Executive Director

Farm Programs:
Anita Wilson

Farm Loans:
James Culpepper

Please contact your local FSA Office for questions specific to your operation or county. To find contact information for your local office go to www.fsa.usda.gov/ar.

FSA Encourages Farmers and Ranchers to Vote in County Committee Elections

The 2017 Farm Service Agency County Committee Elections began on Nov. 6, when ballots were mailed to eligible voters. The deadline to return the ballots to local FSA offices is Dec. 4, 2017.

County committee members are an important component of the operations of FSA and provide a link between the agricultural community and USDA. Farmers and ranchers elected to county committees help deliver FSA programs at the local level, applying their knowledge and judgment to make decisions on commodity price support programs; conservation programs; incentive indemnity and disaster programs for some commodities; emergency programs and eligibility. FSA committees operate within official regulations designed to carry out federal laws.

To be an eligible voter, farmers and ranchers must participate or cooperate in an FSA program. A person who is not of legal voting age, but supervises and conducts the farming operations of an entire farm may also be eligible to vote.

Eligible voters who do not receive a ballot can obtain one from their local USDA Service Center. Dec. 4, 2017, is the last day for voters to submit ballots in person to local USDA Service Centers. Ballots returned by mail must also be postmarked no later than Dec. 4. Newly elected committee members will take office Jan. 1, 2018.

Firearms and Dangerous Weapons Forbidden In Federal Facilities

USDA Service Centers and Farm Service Agency Offices are Off Limits for Firearms

This is an important reminder to all customers and patrons of USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices and USDA Service Centers statewide that **firearms are forbidden (even with a permit/license) in Federal Buildings**. A Federal Building by definition is any building owned, leased or rented by the Federal Government, where Federal employees are regularly present for the purpose of performing their official duties.

The items that are prohibited in Federal facilities include any item prohibited by any applicable Federal, State, local, and tribal law and/or ordinance, as well as firearms, dangerous weapons, explosives, or other destructive devices (including their individual parts or components) designed, redesigned, used, intended for use, or readily converted to cause injury, death, or property damage. Possession of firearms and dangerous weapons in Federal facilities as outlined above is a crime punishable by fines and imprisonment.

For a complete list of items prohibited in Federal facilities, please view and/or download the document titled, **Items Prohibited from Federal Facilities: An Interagency Security Committee Standard**: <http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/isc-items-prohibited-federal-facilities-feb-2013-508.pdf>. **The lists of prohibited items outlined in this document apply to all facility occupants, contractors, and the visiting public.**

If you have questions or concerns regarding this notification, please contact your local Farm Service Agency office—<http://offices.usda.gov>.

USDA Processing Pending Conservation Reserve Program Continuous Enrollment Offers

Acceptance of Most 2018 Offers Temporarily Suspended

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will process many pending eligible offers for land enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and will temporarily suspend accepting most new offers until later in the 2018 fiscal year.

All current, eligible CRP continuous enrollment offers made through Sept. 30, 2017, except for those made under the Pollinator Habitat Initiative (CP42), will be approved. Additionally, FSA is temporarily suspending acceptance of most offers going forward to provide time to review CRP allocation levels, and to avoid exceeding the statutory cap of 24 million acres.

The CRP acreage cap is a provision of the 2014 Farm Bill. Current enrollment is about 23.5 million acres nationwide. USDA is accepting all pending continuous enrollment offers that were made beginning on May 4, 2017, and extending through Sept. 30, 2017, except Pollinator Habitat Initiative offers. Pollinator acreage offers are being declined because the program has met its acreage enrollment goal. Effective immediately, USDA is suspending acceptance of all new CRP continuous offers received or submitted after Sept. 30, 2017. The suspension will continue until later in the 2018 fiscal year.

However, FSA will continue to accept eligible offers for state-specific Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and CRP Grasslands enrollment. Offers received on or after Oct. 1, 2017, are subject to fiscal year 2018 rental rates which have been adjusted to reflect current market conditions and were established after careful review of the latest USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) cash rent data.

In return for enrolling in CRP, USDA, through FSA, provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Landowners enter into contracts that last between 10 and 15 years. CRP pays farmers and ranchers who remove sensitive lands from production and plant certain grasses, shrubs and trees that improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and increase wildlife habitat. Payment totals for 2017 were announced earlier this week totaling over \$1.6 billion.

For more information about CRP, contact your local FSA office or visit www.fsa.usda.gov/crp. To locate your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Transitioning Expiring CRP Land to Beginning, Veteran or Underserved Farmers and Ranchers

Retired or retiring landowners or operators are encouraged to transition their Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres to beginning, veteran or underserved farmers or ranchers through the Transition Incentives Program (TIP). TIP provides annual rental payments to the retiring farmer for up to two additional years after the CRP contract expires, provided the transition is not to a family member.

Enrollment in TIP is on a continuous basis. Beginning, veteran or underserved farmers and ranchers and retiring CRP participants may enroll in TIP beginning one year before the expiration date of the CRP contract or Aug. 15. For example, if a CRP contract is scheduled to expire on Sept. 30, 2018, the land may be offered for enrollment in TIP beginning Oct. 1, 2017, through Aug. 15, 2018. The Aug. 15 deadline allows the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) time to complete the TIP sustainable grazing or crop production conservation plans. The TIP application must be submitted prior to completing the lease or sale of the affected lands.

New landowners or renters must return the land to production using sustainable grazing or farming methods.

For more information on TIP, visit <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation>.

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 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.

Payments to Deceased Producers

In order to claim a Farm Service Agency (FSA) payment on behalf of a deceased producer, all program conditions for the payment must have been met before the applicable producer's date of death.

If a producer earned a FSA payment prior to becoming deceased, the following is the order of precedence of the representatives of the producer:

- administrator or executor of the estate
- the surviving spouse
- surviving sons and daughters, including adopted children
- surviving father and mother
- surviving brothers and sisters
- heirs of the deceased person who would be entitled to payment according to the State law

In order for FSA to release the payment, the legal representative of the deceased producer must file a form FSA-325, to claim the payment for themselves or an estate. The county office will verify and determine that the application, contract, loan agreement, or other similar form requesting payment issuance, was signed by the applicable deadline for such form, by the deceased or a person legally authorized to act on their behalf at that time of application.

If the application, contract or loan agreement form was signed by someone other than the participant who is deceased, FSA will determine whether the person submitting the form has the legal authority to submit the form to compel FSA to pay the deceased participant.

Payments will be issued to the respective representative's name using the deceased program participant's tax identification number. Payments made to representatives are subject to offset regulations for debts owed by the deceased.

FSA is not responsible for advising persons in obtaining legal advice on how to obtain program benefits that may be due to a participant who has died, disappeared or who has been declared incompetent.

Payment Limitations by Program

The 2014 Farm Bill established a maximum dollar amount for each program that can be received annually, directly or indirectly, by each person or legal entity. Payment limitations vary by program for 2014 through 2018.

Below is an overview of payment limitations by program.

Commodity and Price Support Programs

The annual limitation for the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs, Loan Deficiency Payments (LDPs) and Market Loan Gains is \$125,000 total.

Conservation Programs

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) annual rental payment and incentive payment is limited to \$50,000. CRP contracts approved before Oct. 1, 2008, may exceed the limitation, subject to payment limitation rules in effect on the date of contract approval.

The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) has an annual limit of \$200,000 per disaster event. The Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) has an annual limit of \$500,000 per disaster event.

Disaster Assistance Programs

The annual limitation of \$125,000 applies to the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP), Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) and Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP). The total payments received under ELAP, LFP and LIP may not exceed \$125,000. A separate limitation of \$125,000 applies to Tree Assistance Program (TAP) payments. There is also a separate \$125,000 payment limit for the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP).

Payment limitations also apply to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs. Contact your local NRCS office more information.

For more information on FSA payment limitations by program, visit https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/2015/payment_eligibility_payment_limitations.pdf.

Communication is Key in Lending

Farm Service Agency (FSA) is committed to providing our farm loan borrowers the tools necessary to be a success. A part of ensuring this success is providing guidance and counsel from the loan application process through the borrower's graduation to commercial lending institutions. While it is FSA's commitment to advise borrowers as they identify goals and evaluate progress, it is crucial for borrowers to communicate with their farm loan staff when changes occur. It is the borrower's responsibility to alert FSA to any of the following:

- Any proposed or significant changes in the farming operation;
- Any significant changes to family income or expenses;
- The development of problem situations;
- Any losses or proposed significant changes in security

In addition, if a farm loan borrower cannot make payments to suppliers, other creditors, or FSA on time, contact your farm loan staff immediately to discuss loan servicing options.

For more information on FSA farm loan programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

Borrower Training

Borrower training is available for all Farm Service Agency customers. This training is required for all direct loan applicants, unless the applicant has a waiver issued by the agency.

Borrower training includes instruction in production and financial management. The purpose is to help the applicant develop and improve skills that are necessary to successfully operate a farm and build equity in the operation. It aims to help the producer become financially successful. Borrower training is provided, for a fee, by agency approved vendors. Contact your local FSA Farm Loan Manager for a list of approved vendors.

Selected Interest Rates for**November 2017**

90-Day Treasury Bill	1.000
Farm Operating Loans — Direct	2.750
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct	3.625
Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher	1.500
Emergency Loans	3.750
Farm Storage Facility Loans (3 years)	1.625
Farm Storage Facility Loans (5 years)	1.875
Farm Storage Facility Loans (7 years)	2.125
Farm Storage Facility Loans (10 years)	2.375
Farm Storage Facility Loans (12 years)	2.375
Commodity Loans 1996-Present	2.375

Dates to Remember	
11/6/2017	COC Election Ballots mailed to Eligible Voters
11/15/2017	Final Date to Report Perennial Forage Acreage for 2018
11/20/2017	2018 NAP Application Closing Date for: Apples, Asparagus, Blueberries, Cranberries, Figs, Grapes, Nectarines, Peaches, Pears, Plums
11/21/2017	EAEC Annual Public Meeting—Forrest City Arkansas
12/01/2017	2018 NAP Application Closing Date for Honey
12/4/2017	Last day to return voted COC Elections Ballots to USDA Service Center
12/14/2017	ALCDC Grower's Meeting.—Fargo, Arkansas
12/15/2017	Final Date to Report Acreage for Fall-Seeded Small Grains for 2018
12/15/2017	Deadline for Enrollment in Dairy Margin Protection Program
12/16/2017	Menifee Community Economic Development Summit—Menifee, Arkansas
1/1/2017	Newly Elected COC Members take office
3/9,/2018	UAPB's Rural Life Conference—Pine Bluff

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in this meeting/function/event should contact their local County Executive Director or Sharon Baker at 501-301-3014, (TDD# or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339, and (Sharon.Baker@ar.usda.gov).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).
