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Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

# NEWSLETTER

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- [Neil Combee to Serve as State Executive Director for USDA's Farm Service Agency in Florida and the US Virgin Islands](#)
- [Recourse Seed Cotton Loans](#)
- [The Census of Agriculture is a Producer's Voice, Future, and Opportunity.](#)
- [USDA to Measure Final 2017 Row Crop Production and Grain Stocks with Two End-of-Year Surveys](#)
- [Emergency Conservation Program Assistance Available in 54 Florida Counties](#)
- [Environmental Review Required Before Project Implementation](#)
- [FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans](#)
- [Maintaining Good Credit History](#)
- [USDA Seeks Applications for Grants to Help Agricultural Producers and Small Rural Businesses Develop New Products](#)
- [Dates to Remember](#)

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## Florida FSA Newsletter

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### Florida Farm Service Agency

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#### State Committee:

Martin Griswold  
Donell Gwinn  
Gayle King  
James Peeples

#### State Executive Director:

Neil Combee

#### Division Chiefs:

#### Administrative Officer

Mark Cotrell

### Neil Combee to Serve as State Executive Director for USDA's Farm Service Agency in Florida and the US Virgin Islands

The Trump Administration recently appointed Neil Combee as the new State Executive Director (SED) for the USDA Florida/US Virgin Islands Farm Service Agency (FSA). Combee joined the Florida/US Virgin Islands FSA team on Monday, Nov. 27.

Combee most recently served in the Florida House of Representatives where he served as chair of the Oversight, Transparency and Administration subcommittee. He has previously served as a board member for the Southwest Florida Water Management District and on the Polk County Board of Commissioners. Additionally, Combee raises beef cattle, watermelon, sod, seed and hay in Polk County.

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### Recourse Seed Cotton Loans

Cotton producers can request a recourse seed cotton loan at their

**Farm Program**

Tom Hockert

local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office. Due to this year's large cotton crop and delayed ginning, these seed cotton loans can provide interim financing to producers until their cotton is ginned.

**Farm Loans**

Justin Teuton

Recourse seed cotton loans are available from the beginning of harvest through March 31, 2018. Seed cotton loans must be repaid by May 31, 2018.

Please contact your local FSA Office for questions specific to your operation or county.

After the cotton has been ginned, the seed cotton loan is repaid with proceeds from the ginned cotton.

County Offices will provide written or e-mail notification to every Cooperative Marketing Association (CMA) or Loan Servicing Agent (LSA) used by the producer to ensure that the proceeds from a ginned cotton loan are used to repay a seed cotton loan obligation. Any proceeds obtained from LSA or CMA, whether from a loan or Loan Deficiency Payment (LDP), will be jointly payable to the producer and to the Commodity Credit Corporation if these proceeds are from a loan for the same cotton that is collateral for the seed cotton loan.

Contact your local FSA office to learn about eligible requirements or to request a seed cotton loan.

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## The Census of Agriculture is a Producer's Voice, Future, and Opportunity.

In December farmers and ranchers across the nation will receive the 2017 Census of Agriculture. Producers can mail in their completed census form, or respond online via the improved web questionnaire. The online questionnaire has been revised extensively to make it more convenient for producers.

Conducted once every five years, the census of agriculture is a complete count of all U.S. farms, ranches, and those who operate them; it is the only source of uniform, comprehensive, and impartial agriculture data for every state and county in the nation.

Farmers and ranchers, trade associations, government, extension educators, researchers, and many others rely on census of agriculture data when making decisions that shape American agriculture – from creating and funding farm programs to boosting services for communities and the industry. The census of agriculture is a producer's voice, future, and opportunity.

For more information about the 2017 Census of Agriculture, visit [www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov) or call (800) 727-9540.

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## USDA to Measure Final 2017 Row Crop Production and Grain Stocks with Two End-of-Year Surveys

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is encouraging producers to respond to two upcoming surveys – the December Agricultural Survey and the County Agricultural Production Survey – that are critical to row crop producers around the country. The results of the surveys help determine the structure of the 2017 farm payment and risk management programs administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency and Risk Management Agency.

The County Agricultural Production Survey was sent to 170,000 row crop producers beginning Nov. 3. Responses are due by Jan. 15, 2018, and NASS will publish county-level results for corn, soybeans, sunflowers, and sorghum on Feb. 22, 2018, in the Quick Stats database. These county-

level data are critical for USDA farm payment determinations.

The December Agricultural Survey will go to 84,000 producers beginning Nov. 29. Responses are due by Dec. 21, 2017, and NASS publishes results in the Crop Production 2017 Summary report on Jan. 12, 2018. Information collected in this survey also feeds into the county estimates for row crops. The survey also asks about grain stocks stored on-farm.

When producers receive the surveys, they have the option to respond using the secure online questionnaire or return it by mail. NASS safeguards the privacy of all respondents and publishes only aggregate data, ensuring that no individual operation or producer can be identified.

These and all NASS data are available online at [www.nass.usda.gov/Publications](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications) and the searchable [Quick Stats database](#). Watch a video on how NASS data are used at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBW-g1FgLN8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBW-g1FgLN8).

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## Emergency Conservation Program Assistance Available in 54 Florida Counties

The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) provides emergency funding and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters and to implement emergency water conservation measures in periods of severe drought.

The following counties are eligible for ECP assistance: **Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Brevard, Broward, Charlotte, Citrus, Clay, Collier, Columbia, Dade, Desoto, Dixie, Duval, Flagler, Gilchrist, Glades, Hamilton, Hardee, Hendry, Hernando, Highlands, Hillsborough, Indian River, Jefferson, Lafayette, Lake, Lee, Leon, Levy, Madison, Manatee, Marion, Martin, Monroe, Nassau, Okeechobee, Orange, Osceola, Palm Beach, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Putnam, St. Johns, St. Lucie, Sarasota, Seminole, Sumter, Suwannee, Taylor, Union, Volusia, Wakulla**

For land to be eligible, the natural disaster must create new conservation problems that, if untreated, would:

- be so costly to rehabilitate that Federal assistance is or will be needed to return the land to productive agricultural use
- is unusual and is not the type that would recur frequently in the same area
- affect the productive capacity of the farmland
- impair or endanger the land

A producer qualifying for ECP assistance may receive cost-share levels not to exceed 75 percent of the eligible cost of restoration measures. No producer is eligible for more than \$200,000 cost sharing per natural disaster occurrence. The following types of measures may be eligible:

- removing debris from farmland
- grading, shaping, or releveling severely damaged farmland
- restoring permanent fences
- restoring conservation structures and other similar installations

Producers who suffered a loss from a natural disaster should contact their local FSA Office for ECP deadlines.

To be eligible for assistance, practices must not be started until all of the following are met:

- an application for cost-share assistance has been filed
- the local FSA County Committee (COC) or its representative has conducted an onsite inspection of the damaged area
- the Agency responsible for technical assistance, such as the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), has made a needs determination, which may include cubic yards of earthmoving, etc., required for rehabilitation

For more information about ECP, please visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).

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## 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.

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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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## Maintaining Good Credit History

Farm Service Agency (FSA) Farm Loan programs require that applicants have a satisfactory credit history. A credit report is requested for all FSA direct farm loan applicants. These reports are reviewed to verify outstanding debts, if bills are paid timely and to determine the impact on cash

flow.

Information found on a customer's credit report is strictly confidential and is used only as an aid in conducting FSA business.

Our farm loan staff will discuss options with you if you have an unfavorable credit report and will provide a copy of your report. If you dispute the accuracy of the information on the credit report, it is up to you to contact the issuing credit report company to resolve any errors or inaccuracies.

There are multiple ways to remedy an unfavorable credit score.

- Make sure to pay bills on time. Setting up automatic payments or automated reminders can be an effective way to remember payment due dates.
- Pay down existing debt.
- Keep your credit card balances low.
- Avoid suddenly opening or closing existing credit accounts. FSA's farm loan staff will guide you through the process, which may require you to reapply for a loan after improving or correcting your credit report. For more information on FSA farm loan programs, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).

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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](http://USDA.RuralDevelopment). For assistance in Florida, call 352-338-3444.

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## Dates to Remember

Dec 25 - Federal Holiday Observed. Offices Closed.

Jan 1 - Federal Holiday Observed. Offices Closed.

Jan 6 - ECP Sign-up Deadline

Jan 15 - Federal Holiday Observed. Offices Closed.

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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).