

July 2017



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

# NEWSLETTER

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## Hawaii & Pacific Basin State FSA Newsletter

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Steve Peterson

#### USDA Announces Signup for the 2017 Reimbursement Transportation Program

*Program Helps Offset Cost for Farmers and Ranchers Outside the Contiguous U.S.*

The Reimbursement Transportation Cost Payment Program (RTCP) for fiscal year 2017 will begin on July 17, 2017, and end on Sept. 8, 2017.

The 2014 Farm Bill reauthorized RTCP, which offsets a portion of the costs of transporting agricultural products over long distances. The program allows farmers and ranchers in Alaska, Hawaii and insular areas including the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Virgin Islands of the United States, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Republic of Palau, to recover any transportation costs.

This program helps U.S. farmers and ranchers outside the 48 contiguous states who are at a competitive disadvantage when transporting agriculture products to market.

**Chief, Farm Loan Program:**  
Steve Bazzell

RTCP payments are calculated based on the costs incurred for transportation of the agricultural commodity or inputs during a fiscal year, subject to an \$8,000 per producer cap per fiscal year. In the event that claims for payments exceed the funds available from the program for a fiscal year, payments will be reduced on a pro-rata basis.

### **Upcoming County Meetings:**

Hawaii County Committee  
October 13, 2017 at 8:30 am

For more information on RTCP, farmers and ranchers in the eligible areas can visit their administrative FSA county office or the FSA website at [www.fsa.usda.gov/pricesupport](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pricesupport). To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Honolulu County Committee  
July 21, 2017 at 3:00 pm

Maui County Committee  
July 20, 2017 at 8:30 am

Kauai County Committee  
July 19, 2017 at 9:00 am

Guam County Committee  
October 4, 2017 at 10:00 am

CNMI County Committee  
October 11, 2017 at 10:00 am

To find contact information for your local office [click here](#).

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## **Update Your Records**

FSA is cleaning up our producer record database. If you have any unreported changes of address or zip code or an incorrect name or business name on file they need to be reported to our office. Changes in your farm operation, like the addition of a farm by lease or purchase, need to be reported to our office as well. Producers participating in FSA and NRCS programs are required to timely report changes in their farming operation to the County Committee in writing and update their CCC-902 Farm Operating Plan.

If you have any updates or corrections, please call your [local FSA office](#) to update your records.

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## **Eligibility for Nominations for the 2017 County Committee Elections**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committees are a critical component of the day-to-day operations of FSA and allow grassroots input and local administration of federal farm programs.

Committees are comprised of locally elected agricultural producers responsible for the fair and equitable administration of FSA farm programs in their counties. Committee members are accountable to the Secretary of Agriculture. If elected, members become part of a local decision making and farm program delivery process.

A county committee is composed of three to 11 elected members from local administrative areas (LAA). Each member serves a three-year term. To be eligible for nomination and hold office as a committee member or alternate, a person must fulfill each of the following requirements: (1) be a producer with an interest in farming or ranching operations, (2) participate or cooperate in any FSA program provided for by law, (3) be a U.S. citizen, (4) be of legal voting age, (5) meet the basic eligibility requirements, and (6) reside in the county or multi-county jurisdiction in which they will be serving.

All nomination forms for the 2017 election must be postmarked or received in the local USDA service center by Aug. 1, 2017. For more information on FSA county committee elections and appointments, refer to the FSA fact sheet: Eligibility to Vote and Hold Office as a COC Member available online at: [www.fsa.usda.gov/elections](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections).

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## **NRCS Announces Farm Bill Program Application Deadlines in Pacific Islands Area**

Pacific Islands agricultural producers and forestry managers who want to address natural resources and increase environmental benefits are encouraged to sign up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or the Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA) through the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Travis Thomason, PIA NRCS Director, announced that **October 20, 2017** will be the application deadline in PIA. "Producers can sign up for Farm Bill Programs at any time throughout the year, but to compete for the upcoming funding period, I encourage producers with resource concerns to submit an application by the application deadline," Thomason explains.

Many applicants have shown interest in funding to address soil erosion and water quality issues on cropland. However, there are also funding for addressing issues on grazing land operations, confined livestock operations, organic producers, and wildlife habitat improvements, just to name a few.

Producers interested in EQIP or AMA should submit a signed application to the local NRCS field office or submit it electronically through the Conservation Client Gateway ([www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/cgate/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/cgate/)). Applications submitted by October 20, 2017 will be evaluated by NRCS staff for funding.

Applicants must meet eligibility requirements in order to participate in EQIP or AMA. NRCS field office staff will work with applicants to determine eligibility and answer ranking questions. If an application is ranked high enough to be selected for funding, the applicant will work with the local NRCS field office staff to develop a contract.

EQIP and AMA are voluntary conservation program available for agricultural producers and forestry managers. Through these programs, NRCS will provide financial and technical assistance to install conservation practices that reduce soil erosion and sedimentation, improve grazing lands, improve water and air quality, create wildlife habitat, improve forest health and more. For more information on EQIP or AMA, contact the local NRCS field office or visit [www.PIA.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.PIA.nrcs.usda.gov).

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## Organic Certification Cost Share Program

The Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) provides cost share assistance to producers and handlers of agricultural products who are obtaining or renewing their certification under the National Organic Program (NOP). Certified operations may receive up to 75 percent of their certification costs paid from Oct. 1, 2016, through Sept. 30, 2017, not to exceed \$750 per certification scope.

Eligible costs include application fees, inspection costs, fees related to equivalency agreement/arrangement requirements, travel/per diem for inspectors, user fees, sales assessments and postage.

Ineligible costs include equipment, materials, supplies, transitional certification fees, late fees and inspections necessary to address National Organic Program regulatory violations.

Producers and handlers may submit OCCSP applications to FSA county offices or they may apply through participating State Agencies, which will be listed at <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/occsp/index> as their agreements to administer the program are finalized.

The FSA OCCSP application form is available at [USDA's eForms site](#), by selecting "Browse forms" and entering "OCCSP" in the "title or keywords" field on the search page.

To learn more about organic certification cost share, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/organic](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/organic) or contact a local FSA office by visiting <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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## USDA Microloans Help Farmers Purchase Farmland and Improve Property

*Producers, Including Beginning and Underserved Farmers, Have a New Option to Gain Access to Land*

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is offering farm ownership microloans, creating a new financing avenue for farmers to buy and improve property. These microloans are especially helpful to beginning or

underserved farmers, U.S. veterans looking for a career in farming, and those who have small and mid-sized farming operations.

The microloan program has been hugely successful, providing more than 16,800 low-interest loans, totaling over \$373 million to producers across the country. Microloans have helped farmers and ranchers with operating costs, such as feed, fertilizer, tools, fencing, equipment, and living expenses since 2013. Seventy percent of loans have gone to new farmers.

Now, microloans will be available to also help with farm land and building purchases, and soil and water conservation improvements. FSA designed the expanded program to simplify the application process, expand eligibility requirements and expedite smaller real estate loans to help farmers strengthen their operations. Microloans provide up to \$50,000 to qualified producers, and can be issued to the applicant directly from the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA).

To learn more about the FSA microloan program visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/microloans](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/microloans), or contact your local FSA office.

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## 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.

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## July 2017 Interest Rates

Farm Operating Loans 2.875%

Farm Operating Microloans 2.875%

Farm Ownership Loans 3.875%

Farm Ownership Microloans 2.875%

Farm Ownership Loans Direct Down Payment for Beginning Farmer or Rancher 1.50%

Emergency Loans 5.75%

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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).

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