July 2016

Georgia State FSA Newsletter

Georgia State Farm Service Agency
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FSA County Committee Nomination Period in Counties Now Open

The nomination period for the FSA county committee began on June 15, 2016. Nomination forms must be postmarked or received in the County FSA Offices by close of business on August 1, 2016.

County Committees are unique to FSA and allow producers to have a voice on federal farm program implementation at the local level.

To be eligible to serve on the FSA county committee, a person must participate or cooperate in an agency

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To find contact information for your local office go to www.fsa.usda.gov/ga

administered program, be eligible to vote in a county committee election and reside in the Local Administrative Area (LAA) where they are nominated. All producers, including women, minority and beginning farmers and ranchers are encouraged to participate in the nomination and election process.

Producers may nominate themselves or others as candidates. Organizations representing minority and women farmers and ranchers may also nominate candidates. To become a nominee, eligible individuals must sign form FSA-669A. The form and more information about county committee elections is available online at: www.fsa.usda.gov/elections.

Elected county committee members serve a three-year term and are responsible for making decisions on FSA disaster, conservation, commodity and price support programs, as well as other important federal farm program issues. County committees consist of three to 11 members.

FSA will mail election ballots to eligible voters beginning November 7. Ballots are due back in the County Offices by mail or in person no later than December 5, 2016. All newly elected county committee members and alternates will take office January 1, 2017.

For more information about county committees, please contact the County FSA office at 706-546-2266 or visit www.fsa.usda.gov/elections.

Dairy Producers Can Enroll to Protect Milk Production Margins

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Georgia announced that dairy producers can enroll for 2017 coverage in the Margin Protection Program for Dairy (MPP-Dairy) starting July 1. The voluntary program, established by the 2014 Farm Bill, provides financial assistance to participating dairy producers when the margin – the difference between the price of milk and feed costs – falls below the coverage level selected by the producer.

The Margin Protection Program gives participating dairy producers the flexibility to select coverage levels best suited for their operation. Enrollment began July 1 and ends on September 30, 2016, for coverage in calendar year 2017. Participating farmers will remain in the program through 2018 and pay a minimum $100 administrative fee each year. Producers have the option of selecting a different coverage level during open enrollment each year.

USDA has a web tool to help producers determine the level of coverage under the Margin Protection Program that will provide them with the strongest safety net under a variety of conditions. The online resource, available at www.fsa.usda.gov/mpptool, allows dairy farmers to quickly and easily combine unique operation data and other key variables to calculate their coverage needs based on price projections. Producers can also review historical data or estimate future coverage needs, based on data projections. The secure site can be accessed via computer, Smartphone or tablet 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

To complete enrollment, producers must make coverage elections during the enrollment period and pay the annual $100 administrative fee that provides basic catastrophic protection that covers 90 percent of milk production at a $4 margin coverage level. For additional premiums, operations can protect 25 to 90 percent of production history with margin coverage levels from $4.50 to $8, in 50 cent increments. Once enrolled, dairy operations are required to participate through 2018 by making coverage elections each year. Producers can mail the appropriate form to the producer's administrative county FSA office, along with applicable fees without necessitating a trip to the local FSA office. If electing higher coverage for 2017, dairy producers can either pay the premium in full at the time of enrollment or pay 100 percent of the premium by September 1, 2017. Premium fees may be paid directly to FSA or producers can work with their milk handlers to remit premiums on their behalf.

Also beginning July 1, 2016, FSA will begin accepting applications for intergenerational transfers, allowing program participants who added an adult child, grandchild or spouse to the operation during calendar year 2014 or 2015, or between January 1 and June 30, 2016, to increase production history by the new cows bought into the operation by the new family members. For intergenerational transfers occurring on or after July 1, 2016, notification to FSA must be made within 60 days of purchasing the additional cows.

Dairy operations enrolling in the new program must meet conservation compliance provisions and cannot participate in the Livestock Gross Margin Dairy Insurance Program.

For more information, visit FSA online at www.fsa.usda.gov/dairy or stop by a local FSA office to learn more about the Margin Protection Program. To find a local FSA office in your area, visit http://offices.usda.gov.

USDA Provides Targeted Assistance to Cotton Producers to Share in the Cost of Ginning

One-time Payments to Begin in July to Assist with 2016 Ginning Season

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) will provide an estimated $300 million in cost-share assistance payments to cotton producers through the new Cotton Ginning Cost-Share program, in order to expand and maintain the domestic marketing of cotton.

The Cotton Ginning Cost Share program will offer meaningful, timely and targeted assistance to cotton growers to help with their anticipated ginning costs and to facilitate marketing. The program will provide, on average, approximately 60 percent more assistance per farm and per producer than the 2014 program that provided cotton transition assistance.

Through the Cotton Ginning Cost-Share program, eligible producers can receive a one-time cost share payment, which is based on a producer's 2015 cotton acres reported to FSA, multiplied by 40 percent of the average ginning cost for each production region. With the pressing need to provide assistance ahead of the 2016 ginning season this fall, USDA will ensure the application process is straight-forward and efficient. The program estimates the costs based on planting of cotton in 2015, and therefore the local FSA offices already have this information for the vast majority of eligible producers and the applications will be pre-populated with existing data. Sign-up for the program began June 20 and runs through August 5, 2016 at the producer's local FSA office. Payments will be processed as applications are received, and are expected to begin in July.

Since 2011, cotton fiber markets have experienced dramatic changes. As a result of low cotton prices and global oversupply, cotton producers are facing economic uncertainty that has led to many producers having lost equity and having been forced to liquidate equipment and land to satisfy loans. The ginning of cotton is necessary prior to marketing the lint for fiber, or the seed for oil or feed. While the Cotton Ginning Cost-Share program makes payments to cotton producers for cotton ginning costs, the benefits of the program will be felt by the broader marketing chain associated with cotton and cottonseed, including cotton gins, cooperatives, marketers and cottonseed crushers and the rural communities that depend on them.

The program has the same eligibility requirements as were used for the 2014 Cotton Transition Assistance Program, including a $40,000 per producer payment limit, requirement to be actively engaged in farming, meet conservation compliance and a $900,000 adjusted gross income limit.

To learn more about the Cotton Ginning Cost-Share program, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/cgcs or contact a local FSA county office. To find your local FSA county office, visit http://offices.usda.gov.

Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP)

The Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) provides emergency assistance to eligible livestock, honeybees, and farm-raised fish producers who have losses due to adverse weather events or other conditions not covered by other agricultural disaster assistance programs.

Eligible livestock losses include grazing losses not covered under the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP), loss of purchased feed and/or mechanically harvested feed due to an eligible adverse weather event, and additional cost of transporting water (not the water itself) because of an eligible drought.

Eligible honeybee losses include colony losses in excess of normal mortality due to an eligible weather event or loss condition, including CCD, and hive losses due to eligible adverse weather.

Eligible farm-raised fish losses include death losses in excess of normal mortality and/or loss of purchased feed due to an eligible adverse weather event.

Producers who suffer eligible livestock, honeybee, or farm-raised fish losses from October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016 must file:

- A **notice of loss within 30 calendar days of when the loss occurs**
- An **application for payment by November 1, 2016**

The Farm Bill caps ELAP disaster funding at $20 million per federal fiscal year – payments most likely will be factored.

The following ELAP Fact Sheets (by topic) are available online:

- ELAP for Farm-Raised Fish Fact Sheet
- ELAP for Livestock Fact Sheet
- ELAP for Honeybees Fact Sheet

To view these and other FSA program fact sheets, visit the FSA fact sheet web page at www.fsa.usda.gov/factsheets.

Report Livestock Losses

The Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) provides assistance to eligible producers for livestock death losses in excess of normal mortality due to adverse weather events such as tornados floods, lightning, wildfires, extreme heat or extreme cold (ONLY if certain and specific criteria are met) as well as attacks by animals reintroduced into the wild by the federal government or protected by federal law. **NOTE:** Coyotes are NOT federally protected and losses caused by coyotes are NOT eligible for LIP.

For 2016, eligible losses must occur on or after January 1, 2016, and before December 31, 2016. A notice of loss must be filed with FSA within 30 days of when the loss occurs. Participants must provide supporting documentation to their local FSA office verifying the loss no later than 30 calendar days after the end of the calendar year for which benefits are requested.

IMPORTANT – **Documentation provided by the producer must be verifiable and the types of documentation that meet the "verifiable requirements" are not usually available to livestock producers in Georgia**. It is strongly suggested that producers incurring livestock losses **contact their local FSA office immediately upon discovering livestock losses** and arrange for the County Office to make a farm visit to verify the number of livestock lost and the cause of death. **Otherwise the producer may not be able to provide the verifiable documentation required for LIP eligibility**.

Producers who suffer livestock losses in 2016 must file both of the following:

- A notice of loss the earlier of 30 calendar days of when the loss occurred
- An application for payment by January 30, 2017.

Additional Information about LIP is available at your local FSA office or online at: www.fsa.usda.gov.

Livestock Forage Losses

LFP provides compensation to eligible livestock producers who suffer grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned or cash leased land.

ONLY Producers in the following 36 counties are eligible to apply for 2016 Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) benefits on native pasture, improved pasture, and forage sorghum **AT THIS TIME**:

Banks Bartow Butts Carroll Catoosa Chattooga Clayton Cobb Coweta Dade DeKalb Douglas Elbert Fayette Floyd Franklin Fulton Gordon Habersham Hall Hart Heard Henry Jackson Lamar Madison Meriwether Newton Paulding Pike Rabun Rockdale Spalding Stephens Walker Whitfield

NOTE: Eligibility is updated every Thursday and additional counties may become eligible in future weeks; please check with your local FSA county office to see if your county is eligible.

County Offices can only accept LFP applications after notification is received by the National Office if that they are in a county with a qualifying drought rating. **IMPORTANT - County eligibility is based solely on the U.S. Drought Monitor Rating** for Georgia and neither the FSA State Office nor County Offices have any input into the determination of LFP eligibility for a county.

Eligible livestock producers must complete a CCC-853 and the required supporting documentation no later than January 30, 2017 for 2016 losses. Producers with cash-leased land are required to provide written lease agreements from the land owner containing specific information on the rented land. In addition, grazing land for which benefits are requested under LFP are required to have been reported to the FSA office; if the land has not already been reported, a late-filed acreage report can be accepted but a "late-filing" fee will be assessed.

Additional Information about LFP, including eligible livestock is available at your local FSA office or online at: www.fsa.usda.gov.

Banks, Catoosa, Dade, Elbert, Franklin, Hart, Jackson, Madison and Walker Counties Eligible for Emergency Loans Following Secretarial Disaster Declaration

Effective July 9, 2016, Banks, Catoosa, Dade, Elbert, Franklin, Hart, Jackson, Madison and Walker Counties were declared as primary disaster counties due to recent drought. 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.

Dade, Walker and Chattooga Counties Eligible for Emergency Loans Following Secretarial Disaster Declaration

Effective July 6, 2016, Dade, Walker and Chattooga Counties were declared as contiguous disaster counties due to drought occurring in Alabama. 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.

Dade, Walker, Catoosa and Whitfield Counties Eligible for Emergency Loans Following Secretarial Disaster Declaration

Effective July 6, 2016, Dade, Walker, Catoosa and Whitfield Counties were declared as contiguous disaster counties due to drought occurring in Tennessee. 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.

Farm Loan Graduation Reminder

FSA Direct Loans are considered a temporary source of credit that is available to producers who do not meet normal underwriting criteria for commercial banks.

FSA periodically conducts Direct Loan graduation reviews to determine a borrower’s ability to graduate to commercial credit. If the borrower’s financial condition has improved to a point where they can refinance their debt with commercial credit, they will be asked to obtain other financing and partially or fully pay off their FSA debt.

By the end of a producer’s operating cycle, the Agency will send a letter requesting a current balance sheet, actual financial performance and a projected farm budget. The borrower has 30 days to return the required financial documents. This information will be used to evaluate the borrower’s potential for refinancing to commercial credit.

If a borrower meets local underwriting criteria, FSA will send the borrower’s name, loan type, balance sheet and projected cash flow to commercial lenders. The borrower will be notified when loan information is sent to local lenders.

If any lenders are interested in refinancing the borrower’s loan, FSA will send the borrower a letter with a list of lenders that are interested in refinancing the loan. The borrower must contact the lenders and complete an application for commercial credit within 30 calendar days.

If a commercial lender rejects the borrower, the borrower must obtain written evidence that specifies the reasons for rejection and submit to their local FSA farm loan office.

If a borrower fails to provide the requested financial information or to graduate, FSA will notify the borrower of noncompliance, FSA's intent to accelerate the loan, and appeal rights.

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).