

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

DEPARTMENTAL REGULATION		NUMBER: 1043-43
SUBJECT: National Commission on Small Farms	DATE: July 9, 1997	
	OPT: Natural Resources Conservation Service	

1 PURPOSE

a This regulation establishes the National Commission on Small Farms (Commission). The purpose of the Commission is to gather and analyze information regarding small U.S. farms and ranches and recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture a national strategy to ensure their continued viability, including specific measures the public, non-profit and private sectors can take to enhance the economic livelihood of small farms.

b The Commission is in the public interest and within the duties and responsibilities of the Department of Agriculture (USDA). Establishment of the Commission also implements the recommendation of the USDA Civil Rights Action Report to develop a national policy on small farms.

2 SPECIAL INSTRUCTION

a This regulation will expire two years from the date of filing.

b Unless renewed, the Commission will terminate two years from the date of filing.

3 OFFICERS AND MEMBERSHIP

a The Commission may have as many as 30 members, one of whom will serve as chair and two who will serve as vice-chairs. Members will represent

small farms and ranches, finance, commerce,, rural communities, nonprofit organizations, academia, state and local governments, Native Americans, farmworkers, the diverse groups USDA programs serve, and other interests as the Secretary determines. USDA will follow equal opportunity practices in making appointments to the Commission. Membership shall include, to the extent practicable, individuals with demonstrated ability to represent minorities, women, and persons with disabilities.

b The Secretary of Agriculture shall make all appointments to the Commission and the members will serve at the Secretary's discretion.

c The Commission may establish subcommittees as it determines necessary subject to the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act and the approval of the Chair or the Chair's designee.

4 EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS

The Commission will gather and evaluate information, studies, and data pertinent to small farms and ranches, including limited resource farmers. This evaluation and analysis should include:

(1) USDA and other studies, information and data, such as transcripts of public hearings for the Civil Rights Action Team, the Rural Summit, the Civil Rights Action Report, and the reports of the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Working Group and the Advisory Committee on Agricultural Concentration;

(2) Current USDA programs that serve small farms and ranches and the effectiveness of those programs, including but not limited to farm loans, rural development loans and grants, research, extension, and education programs, outreach and technical assistance, natural resource conservation, private forestry, risk management, marketing, fair trade practices, trade and export promotion, farm labor, and mediation:

(3) Other Federal, state, and private sector programs and policies that serve small farms and ranches and the effectiveness of those programs;

(4) The needs of individuals and families starting and operating small farms and ranches, including but not limited to credit, agricultural production and diversification, speciality crops, private forestry, marketing, risk management, research, education, extension, mediation and alternative dispute resolution, natural resource conservation, outreach, and technical assistance;

(5) The effectiveness of different types of farm operations and production systems in ensuring the viability of small farms and ranches, including, but not limited to, sustainable agriculture, diversified and integrated operations, speciality and niche crops, direct marketing, alternative uses of agricultural products, community supported agriculture, and cooperative or coordinated production, processing, and marketing systems, including locally-owned, value-added cooperatives, as well as barriers to and ways in which to promote the adoption of the most effective and efficient operations and production practices by small farm and ranch operators;

(6) Availability and accessibility of credit and other financing options;

(7) Ways to assist beginning farmers and ranchers as well as to assist farmworkers including facilitating the transition from farmworker to farm or rancher owner or operator;

(8) Relationships among USDA programs, estate planning, and other factors influencing land ownership and the conversion of productive farm land to non-farm uses;

(9) The effects, if any, of USDA's organizational and management structure on the viability of small farms and ranches;

(10) Agricultural market, structural, and organizational trends as they relate to small farms;

(11) The role of USDA, if any, in facilitating the fair and effective operation of small farms and ranches in vertically integrated agricultural systems;

(12) The interdependence of small farms and ranches and rural economies and communities; and

(13) The social, cultural, and environmental contributions of small farms.

5 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evaluation and analysis described in Section 4 and the public hearings described in Section 8, the Commission shall make findings and shall recommend a national strategy to ensure the continued viability of small farms and ranches in U.S. agriculture. The findings and strategy shall address the issues analyzed by the Committee under Section 4, including, but not limited to:

(1) Ways to make existing USDA or other Federal, state, private or non-profit programs, policies and practices more effective at meeting the needs of and provide a stronger safety net for small farms and ranches;

(2) New USDA or other Federal, state, private, or non-profit programs, policies, and practices, that would benefit small farms and ranches and provide a stronger safety net for small farms and ranches;

(3) The types of production systems and practices noted in number (5) of Section 4 that are likely to be the most effective for small farms and ranches and ways in which to improve and facilitate the adoption by small farms and ranches of such systems and practices;

(4) Ways to assist beginning farmers, farmworkers, including addressing minorities,

women, and persons with disabilities, to become farm owners or operators; and

(5) The role of USDA in assisting small farms and ranches in vertically integrated agricultural systems, such as producer education about contract production or regulatory action to ensure fair contracts and practices, as well as any additional steps USDA should take to address issues of agricultural concentration.

6 HEARINGS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Commission will hold public forums and hearings as specified in Section 8 and may hold additional forums and hearings and solicit public comment as necessary and appropriate within budgetary constraints.

7 ESTIMATED ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS

a Commission members shall serve without pay and without reimbursement of travel or per them costs, except reimbursement of travel and per them costs shall be made to a Commission member who requests and otherwise would be unable to serve without such reimbursement.

b Annual operating costs are estimated to be \$155,000 including .33 staff year support for fiscal year 1997, and \$35,000 including .20 staff years for fiscal year 1998.

8 NUMBER AND FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

a The Commission will meet as necessary to perform its functions as determined by the chair. The Commission will hold at least three public hearings, which may be in conjunction with working sessions of the Commission.

b The designated Federal official shall be responsible for the prior approval of the agenda for all full Commission meetings and notification of Commission meetings and agendas in the Federal Register.

9 REPORTS/SUPPORT

a The Commission shall submit its findings and recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture by September 30, 1997.

b Funding and support for the Commission will be provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

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