

November 2014



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## Pennsylvania FSA Updates

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### Pennsylvania Farm Service Agency

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Harrisburg, PA 17110

**Phone:** 717-237-2117

**Fax:** 855-778-8909

[www.fsa.usda.gov/pa](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pa)

#### State Executive Director:

Bill L. Wehry

#### State Committee Members:

Sheryl Vanco, Janet Lewis, Greg Hostetter, Robert Mikesell, Larry Kehl

For local FSA service center contact information, please visit:

<http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>

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

#### Dates to Remember

**November 11:** Veteran's Day – Offices

### USDA Farm Service Agency County Committee Elections to Begin Monday, Nov. 3

USDA encourages farmers and ranchers to make their voices heard by voting in the upcoming Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Committee elections. Beginning Monday, Nov. 3, 2014, USDA will mail ballots for the 2014 elections to eligible producers across the country. Producers must return ballots to their local FSA offices by the Dec. 1, 2014, deadline to ensure that their vote is counted.

FSA County Committee members provide an important link between the local 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 support programs; conservation programs; indemnity and disaster programs; emergency programs and eligibility. County 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

Closed

also be eligible to vote.

**November 17:** Final Reporting Date for Apiculture, Fall Forage Seeding, PRF/Perennial Forage, Fall-Seeded Small Grains

**November 20:** NAP Application Closing Date for Apples, Apricots, Cherries, Chestnuts, Grapes, Kiwifruit, Nectarines, Peaches, Pears, Berries, and Walnuts

**November 27:** Thanksgiving Day – Offices Closed

**December 1:** Nap Application closing Date for Honey

**December 5:** MPP Registration Deadline

**December 15:** Deadline for MPP Final Rule Comments

**January 2:** Final Reporting Date for Honeybees

**January 15:** Final Reporting Date for Maple Sap

**Continues:** Continuous Conservation Reserve Program Signup

Eligible voters who do not receive ballots in the coming week may pick one up at their local USDA Service Center or FSA office. The deadline to submit ballots is Dec. 1, 2014. Ballots returned by mail must be postmarked no later than Dec. 1, 2014. Newly elected committee members and their alternates will take office Jan. 1, 2015.

More information on county committees, such as the new 2014 fact sheet and brochures, can be found on the FSA website at [www.fsa.usda.gov/elections](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections). You may also contact your local USDA Service Center or FSA office. Visit <http://go.usa.gov/pYV3> to find an FSA office near you.

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## USDA Extends Dairy Margin Protection Program Deadlines

Enrollment Continues Through Dec. 5; Comments Accepted Until Dec. 15.

USDA is extending the deadlines for the dairy Margin Protection Program. Farmers now have until Dec. 5, 2014, to enroll in the voluntary program, established by the 2014 Farm Bill. The program provides financial assistance to participating farmers when the margin – the difference between the price of milk and feed costs – falls below the coverage level selected by the farmer.

Producers are encouraged to use the online Web resource at [www.fsa.usda.gov/mpptool](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mpptool) to calculate the best levels of coverage for their dairy operation. The secure website can be accessed via computer, smartphone or tablet.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) also extended the opportunity for public comments on both the Margin Protection Program and the Dairy Product Donation Program until Dec. 15, 2014.

Comments can be submitted to USDA via the regulations.gov website at <http://go.usa.gov/GJSA>.

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## USDA Enhances Farm Storage Facility Loan Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced the expansion of the Farm Storage and Facility Loan program, which provides low-interest financing to producers. The enhanced program includes 22 new categories of eligible equipment for fruit and vegetable producers.

Producers with small and mid-sized operations, and specialty crop fruit and vegetable growers, now have access to needed capital for a variety of supplies including sorting bins, wash stations and other food safety-related equipment. A new more flexible alternative is also provided for determining storage needs for fruit and vegetable producers, and waivers are available on a case-by-case basis for disaster assistance or insurance coverage if available products are not relevant or feasible for a particular

producer.

Additionally, Farm Storage Facility Loan security requirements have been eased for loans up to \$100,000. Previously, all loans in excess of \$50,000 and any loan with little resale value required a promissory note/security agreement and additional security, such as a lien on real estate. Now loans up to \$50,000 can be secured by only a promissory note/security agreement and some loans between \$50,000 and \$100,000 will no longer require additional security.

The low-interest funds can be used to build or upgrade permanent facilities to store commodities. Eligible commodities include grains, oilseeds, peanuts, pulse crops, hay, honey, renewable biomass commodities, fruits and vegetables. Qualified facilities include grain bins, hay barns and cold storage facilities for fruits and vegetables.

Contact your local FSA office or visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov) for more about FSA programs and loans, including the Farm Storage Facility Loan Program.

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## **USDA Farm Service Agency Announces Key Dates for New 2014 Farm Bill Safety Net Programs**

USDA announced key dates for farm owners and producers to keep in mind regarding the new 2014 Farm Bill established programs, Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC). The new programs, designed to help producers better manage risk, usher in one of the most significant reforms to U.S. farm programs in decades.

Dates associated with ARC and PLC that farm owners and producers need to know:

- Sept. 29, 2014 to Feb. 27, 2015: Land owners may visit their local Farm Service Agency office to update yield history and/or reallocate base acres.
- Nov. 17, 2014 to March 31, 2015: Producers make a one-time election of either ARC or PLC for the 2014 through 2018 crop years.
- Mid-April 2015 through summer 2015: Producers sign contracts for 2014 and 2015 crop years.
- October 2015: Payments for 2014 crop year, if needed.

USDA leaders will visit with producers across the country to share information and answer questions on the ARC and PLC programs.

USDA helped create online tools to assist in the decision process, allowing farm owners and producers to enter information about their operation and see projections that show what ARC and/or PLC will mean for them under possible future scenarios. The new tools are now available at [www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc). Farm owners and producers can access the online resources from the convenience of their home computer or mobile device at any time.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice (which includes short grain rice), safflower seed, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat. Upland cotton is no longer a covered commodity.

Producers can contact their local FSA office for more information or to schedule an appointment.

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## **USDA Reminds Farmers of 2014 Farm Bill Conservation Compliance Changes**

The 2014 Farm Bill implements a change that requires farmers to have a Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification (AD-1026) on file.

For farmers to be eligible for premium support on their federal crop insurance, a completed and signed AD-1026 certification form must be on file with the FSA. The Risk Management Agency (RMA), through the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC), manages the federal crop insurance program that provides the modern farm safety net for American farmers and ranchers.

Since enactment of the 1985 Farm Bill, eligibility for most commodity, disaster, and conservation

programs has been linked to compliance with the highly erodible land conservation and wetland conservation provisions. The 2014 Farm Bill continues the requirement that producers adhere to conservation compliance guidelines to be eligible for most programs administered by FSA and NRCS. This includes most financial assistance such as the new price and revenue protection programs, the Conservation Reserve Program, the Livestock Disaster Assistance programs and Marketing Assistance Loans and most programs implemented by FSA. It also includes the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, and other conservation programs implemented by NRCS.

Many FSA and Natural Resource Conservation (NRCS) programs already have implemented this requirement and therefore most producers should already have an AD-1026 form on file for their associated lands. If however an AD-1026 form has not been filed or is incomplete then farmers are reminded of the deadline of June 1, 2015.

When a farmer completes and submits the AD-1026 certification form, FSA and NRCS staff will review the associated farm records and outline any additional actions that may be required to meet the required compliance with the conservation compliance provisions.

FSA recently released a revised form AD-1026, which is available at USDA Service Centers and online at: [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov). USDA will publish a rule later this year that will provide details outlining the connection of conservation compliance with crop insurance premium support. Producers can also contact their local USDA Service Center for information. A listing of service center locations is available at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/contact/local/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/contact/local/).

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## **USDA Farm Service Agency Reminds Producers: Farm Bill Allows Early Termination for Certain CRP Contracts**

The Farm Service Agency reminds producers with acres under contract through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) that they can apply for early contract termination, as required by the 2014 Farm Bill. The deadline to request early CRP contract termination is Jan. 30, 2015.

This is a unique opportunity to request early termination afforded by the 2014 Farm Bill. The earliest effective date for this early termination is October 1, 2014. The requesting CRP contract must have been in effect for at least five years and additional eligibility conditions must be met to qualify. The 2014 Farm Bill identifies a list of 10 exceptions whereby land will not be eligible for the early termination provisions. For a complete list of these exceptions, please view the program fact sheet online at [http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/crp\\_opt\\_out\\_fact\\_sht.pdf](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/crp_opt_out_fact_sht.pdf)

Once a CRP contract termination request is approved by the FSA County Committee, the decision may not be reversed and the terminated contract will not be reinstated. Once the land is no longer considered under the CRP contract all participants must meet HEL/WC and other conservation compliance provisions for all associated lands.

For more information or to verify eligibility for early termination (opt-out) for existing CRP contracts, please contact your local FSA office. For local FSA Service Center contact information, please visit: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

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## **USDA Expands Access to Credit to Help More Beginning and Family Farmers**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced improvements to farm loan programs by expanding eligibility and increasing lending limits to help more beginning and family farmers. As part of this effort, USDA is raising the borrowing limit for the microloan program from \$35,000 to \$50,000; simplify the lending processes; updating required "farming experience" to include other valuable experiences; and expanding eligible business entities to reflect changes in the way family farms are owned and operated. The changes become effective Nov. 7.

The microloan changes will allow beginning, small and mid-sized farmers to access an additional \$15,000 in loans using a simplified application process with up to seven years to repay. Microloans are part of USDA's continued commitment to [small and midsized farming operations](#).

In addition to farm related experience, other types of skills may be considered to meet the direct

farming experience required for farm loan eligibility such as operation or management of a non-farm business, leadership positions while serving in the military, or advanced education in an agricultural field. Also, individuals who own farmland under a different legal entity operating the farm now may be eligible for loans administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA). Producers will have an opportunity to share suggestions on the microloan process, and the definitions of farming experience and business structures through Dec. 8, 2014, the public open comment period.

FSA is also publishing a Federal Register notice to solicit ideas from the public for pilot projects to help increase the efficiency and effectiveness of farm loan programs. Comments and ideas regarding potential pilot projects will be accepted through Nov. 7, 2014.

For more information on farm loans, please visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov) or contact your local Farm Service Agency office.

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## Loans for the Socially Disadvantaged

FSA has a number of loan programs available to assist applicants to begin or continue in agriculture production. Loans are available for operating type loans and/or purchase or improve farms or ranches.

While all qualified producers are eligible to apply for these loan programs, the FSA has provided priority funding for members of socially disadvantaged applicants.

A socially disadvantaged applicant is one of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic or gender prejudice because of his or her identity as members of the group without regard to his or her individual qualities.

For purposes of this program, socially disadvantaged groups are women, African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

FSA loans are only available to applicants who meet all the eligibility requirements and are unable to obtain the needed credit elsewhere.

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## FSA SIGNATURE POLICY

Using the correct signature when doing business with FSA can save time and prevent a delay in program benefits. The following are FSA signature guidelines:

- Spouses may sign documents on behalf of each other for FSA and CCC programs in which either has an interest, unless written notification denying a spouse this authority has been provided to the county office
- Spouses shall not sign on behalf of each other as an authorized signatory for partnerships, joint ventures, corporations, or other similar entities

For additional clarification on proper signatures contact your local FSA office.

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## BANK ACCOUNT CHANGES

Current policy mandates that FSA payments be electronically transferred into a bank account. In order for timely payments to be made, producers need to notify the FSA county office when an account has been changed or if another financial institution purchases the bank where payments are sent. Payments can be delayed if the FSA office is not aware of updates to bank accounts and routing numbers.

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USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. 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).