

June 2015



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Alaska FSA Newsletter

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Alaska FSA Seeks Nominees for County Committee 2015 Elections

The election of agricultural producers to Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committees is important to farmers and ranchers. It is crucial that every eligible producer participate in these elections because FSA county committees are a link between the agricultural community and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

County committee members are a critical component of the operations of FSA. They help deliver FSA farm programs at the local level. Farmers and ranchers who serve on county committees help with the decisions necessary to administer the programs in their counties. They work to ensure FSA agricultural programs serve the needs of local producers.

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Hours Monday-Friday
8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Committee Meetings:
Northern Co June TBA
Southern Co June TBA

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

FSA encourages all interested agricultural producers, including women and minority growers, to seek nomination. Eligible candidates must participate or cooperate in any Farm Service Agency program and be of legal voting age.

For election purposes, counties are divided into local administrative areas, or LAAs. Each LAA contributes one producer to serve a three-year term on the Farm Service Agency county committee. Nominated by local farmers and ranchers, candidates must live in the county's local administrative area they will represent and must be eligible to vote in the county election. Members serve on staggered three-year terms so that one-third of the seats are up for re-election each year.

The Alaska 2015 election is being held in the following LAAs:

Southern County LAA -1 which Includes all of the following boroughs and census areas: Wade Hampton, Bethel, Dillingham, Bristol Bay, Lake & Peninsula, Aleutians East and West, Kodiak Island and the Kenai Peninsula Borough south of the Kasilof river (includes Homer and surrounding area).

Northern County LAA-3 which includes the area beginning at the SE corner of the Matsu Borough proceeding north to NW corner of SE Fairbanks Census area, east to line following Clearwater road intersecting AK Hwy, proceeding SE to AKGREAA line, south then SE following line to Canadian border, south following Canadian border to Chugach Mtn. Range, turning west following Chugach Mtn. west to SW corner of Matsu Borough. (Includes Delta Junction, Glennallen, and Kenny Lake.)

All FSA offices will accept nominations through August 3, 2015. If you would like to nominate a candidate, or yourself, the nomination form is available at USDA Service Centers and online at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections>. For more information contact your local FSA office.

USDA Announces Restart of Biomass Crop Assistance Program for Renewable Energy

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced that incentives will resume this summer for farmers, ranchers and forest landowners interested in growing and harvesting biomass for renewable energy. The support comes through the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP), which was reauthorized by the 2014 Farm Bill. BCAP provides financial assistance to establish and maintain new crops of energy biomass, or who harvest and deliver forest or agricultural residues to a qualifying energy facility.

Financial assistance is available through BCAP for costs associated with harvesting and transporting agriculture or forest residues to facilities that convert biomass crops into energy. Eligible crops may include corn residue, diseased or insect infested wood materials, or orchard waste. The energy facility must first be approved by USDA to accept the biomass crop. Facilities can apply for, or renew, their BCAP qualification status beginning today. \$11.5 million of federal funds will be allocated to support the delivery of biomass materials through December 2015. Last year, more than 200,000 tons of dead or diseased trees from National Forests and Bureau of Land Management lands were removed and used to produce renewable energy, while reducing the risk of forest fire. Nineteen energy facilities in 10 states participated in the program.

Farmers, ranchers and forest landowners can also receive financial assistance to grow biomass crops that will be converted into energy in selected BCAP project areas. New BCAP project area proposals will be solicited beginning this summer and accepted through fall 2015, with new project area announcements and enrollments taking place in early spring 2016. The extended proposal submission period allows project sponsors time to complete any needed environmental assessments and allows producers enough lead time to make informed decisions on whether or not to pursue the BCAP project area enrollment opportunity. This fiscal year USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will allocate up to \$8 million for producer enrollment to expand and enhance existing BCAP project areas. Additionally, in accordance with the 2014 Farm Bill, underserved farmers are eligible for a higher establishment cost share. BCAP projects have supported over 50,000 acres across 74 counties in 11 different project areas.

For more information, visit www.usda.gov.

Secretary Vilsack Announces Additional 800,000 Acres Dedicated to Conservation Reserve Program for Wildlife Habitat and Wetlands

Secretary Hails Program's 30th Anniversary, Announces General Signup Period

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today that an additional 800,000 acres of highly environmentally sensitive land may be enrolled in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) under certain wetland and wildlife initiatives that provide multiple benefits on the same land.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will accept new offers to participate in CRP under a general signup to be held Dec. 1, 2015, through Feb. 26, 2016. Eligible existing program participants with contracts expiring Sept. 30, 2015, will be granted an option for one-year extensions. Farmers and ranchers interested in removing sensitive land from agricultural production and planting grasses or trees to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality and restore wildlife habitat are encouraged to enroll.

For 30 years, the Conservation Reserve Program has helped farmers and ranchers prevent more than 8 billion tons of soil from eroding, reduce nitrogen and phosphorous runoff relative to cropland by 95 and 85 percent respectively, and even sequester 43 million tons of greenhouse gases annually, equal to taking 8 million cars off the road.

The voluntary Conservation Reserve Program allows USDA to contract with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive land is conserved. Participants establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. In return, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

CRP protects water quality and restores significant habitat for ducks, pheasants, turkey, quail, deer and other important wildlife which spurs economic development like hunting and fishing, outdoor recreation and tourism across rural America. Today's announcement allows an additional 800,000 acres for duck nesting habitat and other wetland and wildlife habitat initiatives to be enrolled in the program.

Farmers and ranchers should consider the various CRP continuous sign-up initiatives that may help target specific resource concerns. Financial assistance is offered for many practices including conservation buffers and pollinator habitat plantings, and initiatives such as the highly erodible lands, bottomland hardwood tree and longleaf pine.

Farmers and ranchers may visit their FSA county office for additional information. The 2014 Farm Bill authorized the enrollment of grasslands in CRP and information on grasslands enrollment will be available after the regulation is published later this summer.

For more information on CRP and other FSA programs, please visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

USDA Packages Disaster Protection with Loans to Benefit Specialty Crop and Diversified

Free basic coverage and discounted premiums available for new and underserved loan applicants

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) today announced that producers who apply for FSA farm loans also will be offered the opportunity to enroll in new disaster loss protections created by the 2014 Farm Bill. The new coverage, available from the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), is available to FSA loan applicants who grow non-insurable crops, so this is especially important to fruit and vegetable producers and other specialty crop growers.

New, underserved and limited income specialty growers who apply for farm loans could qualify for basic loss coverage at no cost, or higher coverage for a discounted premium.

The basic disaster coverage protects at 55 percent of the market price for crop losses that exceed 50 percent of production. Covered crops include "specialty" crops, for instance, vegetables, fruits, mushrooms, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass, ginseng, honey, syrup, hay, forage, grazing and energy crops. FSA allows beginning, underserved or limited income producers to obtain NAP coverage up to 90 days after the normal application closing date when they also apply for FSA credit.

In addition to free basic coverage, beginning, underserved or limited income producers are eligible for a 50 percent discount on premiums for the higher levels of coverage that protect up to 65 percent of expected production at 100 percent of the average market price. Producers also may work with FSA to protect value-added production, such as organic or direct market crops, at their fair market value in those markets. Targeted underserved groups eligible for free or discounted coverage are American Indians or Alaskan Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and women.

FSA offers a variety of loan products, including farm ownership loans, operating loans and microloans that have a streamlined application process.

Growers need not apply for an FSA loan, nor be a beginning, limited resource, or underserved farmer, to be eligible for Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program assistance. To learn more, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/nap or www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans, or contact your local FSA office at <https://offices.usda.gov>.

ARC, PLC and CTAP Acreage Maintenance

Producers enrolled in Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC), Price Loss Coverage (PLC) or the Cotton Transition Assistance Program (CTAP) must protect all cropland and noncropland acres on the farm from wind and water erosion and noxious weeds. Producers who sign ARC county or individual contracts and PLC contracts agree to effectively control noxious weeds on the farm according to sound agricultural practices. If a producer fails to take necessary actions to correct a maintenance problem on a farm that is enrolled in ARC, PLC or CTAP, the County Committee may elect to terminate the contract for the program year.

A list of noxious weeds can be found on the following website:
<http://plants.usda.gov/java/noxiousDriver>.

Beginning Farmer Loans

FSA assists beginning farmers to finance agricultural enterprises. Under these designated farm loan programs, FSA can provide financing to eligible applicants through either direct or guaranteed loans. FSA defines a beginning farmer as a person who:

- Has operated a farm for not more than 10 years
- Will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm
- Agrees to participate in a loan assessment, borrower training and financial management program sponsored by FSA
- Does not own a farm in excess of 30 percent of the county's average size farm. Additional program information, loan applications, and other materials are available at your local USDA Service Center. You may also visit www.fsa.usda.gov.

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Save Time - Make an Appointment with FSA

To insure maximum use of your time and to insure that you are afforded our full attention to your important business needs, please call our office ahead of your visit to set an appointment and to discuss any records or documentation that you may need to have with you when you arrive for your appointment. For local FSA Service Center contact information, please visit:

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

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).