

For: FSA Employees

Sharing Success Stories

Approved by: Deputy Administrator, Field Operations



1 Overview

A Background

Success stories help to tell the FSA story to the public. These stories show how FSA programs and loans are helping farmers and ranchers provide food, fuel, and fiber to millions of Americans and billions of people worldwide.

Stories and ideas come from Field Office employees who work directly with producers whose stories exemplify how FSA has helped. A story idea differs from an actual story. A story idea is a concept written as a brief paragraph explaining an interesting fact, accomplishment, or success that would raise interest among the public. A story idea is then developed into a story. A story is a narration of an incident or event.

Typically, Field Office employees receive requests for success stories from National Office program divisions. This notice establishes procedures for FSA employees to submit success story ideas or success stories.

B Purpose

This notice:

- provides guidance on submitting outreach story ideas or stories
- gives an outline for each State to submit 1 story idea or story each quarter
- illustrates how to determine a story from a nonstory
- provides guidance on how to write a story for those who desire to actually write a complete story

Disposal Date

January 1, 2016

Distribution

All FSA employees; State Offices relay to County Offices

1 Overview (Continued)

B Purpose (Continued)

- offers direction for taking photos
- creates a central library of FSA farm program and farm loan outreach successes.

C Contact

If there are questions about this notice, State Offices shall contact either of the following:

- Tanya Brown, DAFO, Outreach Marketing Editor, by either of the following:
 - e-mail to **tanya.brown@wdc.usda.gov**
 - telephone at 202-690-1098
- Brenda Carlson, OEA, Lead Regional Public Affairs Specialist, by either of the following:
 - e-mail to **brenda.carlson@tx.usda.gov**
 - telephone at 979-680-5213.

2 Submitting Success Story Ideas

A How to Submit a Success Story Idea

Each State is required to submit story ideas that show how FSA is helping and supporting the farming and ranching communities across the United States. A story idea is a concept written as a brief paragraph explaining an interesting fact, accomplishment, or success that would raise interest among the public and make a great story.

All story ideas should be e-mailed to **sharingoursuccesses@wdc.usda.gov** and include the following:

- the name or names of the producers
- telephone and e-mail contact information of the producers
- name and contact information of FLO, CED, SED, PT, State Office program specialist, or FSA employee who assisted the producers
- brief paragraph explaining the success and how FSA helped
- photos of the producers (subparagraph D)
- FSA-463 (Exhibit 1).

2 Submitting Success Story Ideas (Continued)

B State Submissions

A minimum of 4 story ideas annually are required from each State. At least 2 to 3 story ideas should focus or highlight underserved customers. The following schedule provides a variety of story ideas. This is not a set schedule. If a State has a story idea that does not follow this schedule, feel free to submit it. DAFO and OEA will work together to construct the ideas into a story that will be used for the USDA Blog, Fencepost, and/or Outreach Sharing Our Successes (SOS) webpage. All completed and published stories will be filed in the SOS library on the DAFO Outreach SharePoint web site. If a State or county wants to submit a completed story, they are encouraged to do so by following the guidelines in subparagraph C.

The following story idea schedule is broken down by region:

First Quarter (January - March)

Northwest - Any Type of Disaster Assistance (Emergency Disaster (ED), EFRP, ELAP, LFP, LIP, NAP, TAP)

Midwest - Underserved Producers (Beginning, Veterans, Women, Tribal, Ethnic)

Southwest - COC's, Recruitment, FSFL's, Margin Protection Program for Dairy Producers (MPP)

Northeast - Microloans, Youth Loans, Conservation

Southeast - StrikeForce and Know Your Farmer (Local, Regional, and Organic Producers)

Second Quarter (April - June)

Northwest - StrikeForce and Know Your Farmer (Local, Regional, and Organic Producers)

Midwest - Any Type of Disaster Assistance (ED, EFRP, ELAP, LFP, LIP, NAP, TAP)

Southwest - Underserved Producers (Beginning, Veterans, Women, Tribal, Ethnic)

Northeast - COC's, Recruitment, FSFL's, MPP

Southeast - Microloans, Youth Loans, Conservation

Third Quarter (July - September)

Northwest - Microloans, Youth Loans, Conservation

Midwest - StrikeForce and Know Your Farmer (Local, Regional, and Organic Producers)

Southwest - Any Type of Disaster Assistance (ED, EFRP, ELAP, LFP, LIP, NAP, TAP)

Northeast - Underserved Producers (Beginning, Veterans, Women, Tribal, Ethnic)

Southeast - COC's, Recruitment, FSFL's, MPP

Fourth Quarter (October - December)

Northwest - COC's, Recruitment, FSFL's, MPP

Midwest - Microloans, Youth Loans, Conservation

Southwest - StrikeForce and Know Your Farmer (Local, Regional, and Organic Producers)

Northeast - Any Type of Disaster Assistance (ED, EFRP, ELAP, LFP, LIP, NAP, TAP)

Southeast - Underserved Producers (Beginning, Veterans, Women, Tribal, Ethnic)

2 Submitting Success Story Ideas (Continued)

B State Submissions (Continued)

Regions

Northwest - AK, ID, MT, ND, NE, OR, SD, WA, WY

Midwest - IA, IL, IN, MI, MN, MO, OH, WI

Southwest - AZ, CA, CO, HI, KS, NM, NV, OK, TX, UT

Northeast - CT, DE, MA, MD, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, WV

Southeast - AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, PR, SC, TN, VA, VI

C Guidelines on How to Write a Story

Often FSA employees have a desire to write an actual story instead of submitting a story idea. For those who would like to write a story, the following are guidelines. Once completed, all stories along with photos, FSA-463, and producer contact information should be e-mailed to sharingoursuccesses@wdc.usda.gov.

Q1. What Is a Success Story?

- A1. A success story shows how FSA serves farmers and ranchers. These stories should show how FSA is making a positive impact in people's lives.

Q2. How Should Success Stories Be Written?

- A2. Success stories should be written in journalistic format that outlines the basic Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How. Most success stories are feature stories. Feature stories by definition are special human interest stories that are closely tied to a news event; in FSA's case, it is tied to a current farm program or farm loan program. The stories focus on particular people, places, and events, and provide details on concepts and ideas.

Q3. How Do I Gather Information for a Feature Story?

- A3. Writers use 3 tools to gather information for stories: **observation**, **interviews**, and **background research**. Through the use of these tools, the writer brings the story to life through colorful description, narration, and **significant quotes**.

- When interviewing subjects, the writer not only wants to listen to what the subject is saying, but take notes on what is happening around them, such as smells, noises, colors, and emotions.
- The writer must remain objective and keep his or her opinion out of the story.

Note: The idea of a feature story or success story is not to praise the State or County Office staff and employees. That diminishes the credibility of the story. The purpose of the story is to show the public how FSA employees and programs can help them. Although the work of the employee can be mentioned, the focus is not on the employee, but the farmer or rancher.

2 Submitting Success Story Ideas (Continued)

C Guidelines on How to Write a Story (Continued)

Example: When a farmer or rancher is quoted as saying, “My farm was saved thanks to FSA”, that holds more weight with other farmers (and the public) than an FSA employee writing, “The hard work of FSA and the County Office saved Mr. Smith’s farm”.

Q4. How Should the Story Be Formatted?

A4. All feature stories should have a headline, opening paragraph or introduction, main body, and conclusion.

Headline: Although the headline is on the top of the article, it is usually one of the hardest things to write. Headlines are the first thing people will read. If it is not interesting, then the writer just wasted their time writing the article, because the reader will not read past the headline. Headlines should be:

- catchy

Note: It should catch the reader’s attention and make them want to read the story.

- highlight or tell what the story is about
- include a verb or action word.

Note: Headlines are **not** statements.

Opening Paragraph or Introduction: This is often referred to as the lede (lead) of the story. It should grab the reader and make the reader want to continue reading the story. It may have a hook or be mysterious, funny, entertaining, or sad. It should draw the reader to want to read more.

Example: For 20 years, John Hancock woke up at 4 a.m., milked the cows, fed the chickens, and tended to 20 acres of crops. On December 14, all of that stopped.

Note: This opening paragraph has provided the reader with the main character of the story and has told the reader that he is a farmer or performs some sort of agricultural work, and that he has been doing it for 20 years. It also tells the reader that after 20 years of a routine life, something has happened.

2 Submitting Success Story Ideas (Continued)

C Guidelines on How to Write a Story (Continued)

Second Paragraph: “When I woke up, I could not believe what I saw. It was like a nightmare. I thought I was dreaming,” said Hancock.

Note: At this point, the writer can insert a quote that introduces the main character’s voice. This is not a hard and fast rule. A quote does not have to be in the second paragraph, but it works here.

Third Paragraph: What he saw was eight feet of snow that had wiped out his entire herd, killed off his chickens, and destroyed \$1.2 million in barns and farm equipment.

Note: This is where the writer wants to start telling the story and explaining to the reader what it is they walked into when they started reading this story.

Main Body: This is where the writer starts to tell the story. This is where the interviews, history, facts and statistics, and quotes play their role.

Example: Hancock is 1 of 500 farmers in Anytown, Texas, who suffered losses because of an unprecedented snow storm that struck the city last month, leaving thousands of people homeless, and farmers, like Hancock, wondering how they will pay their bills and recover from the destruction.

“It is the absolute worst storm I have ever seen in my life,” said Texas Farm Loan Officer Jim Stone. “Surprisingly, Mr. Hancock was still in good spirits, but I could tell he was stressed and wanted to know if there was any way he could get back to farming.”

Note: This also is where the writer starts to tell how FSA helped the farmer and explain the program. There is no need to reiterate an entire press release when explaining the program. Sum it up in 1 short paragraph (2 to 3 sentences).

Conclusion: This is where the writer ends the story. There is no need to summarize the entire story or say “In summary”. Also, do not summarize by giving an opinion. Do not write “With this program, Hancock will have a successful operation” or “With this program, we think Hancock will have a successful operation”. At no point should the writer’s voice or opinion be included in the story. Many conclusions end with a quote or paraphrase from the producer indicating success or what he or she thinks will be the final outcome.

Example: “I was not sure how I was going to make it or how I was going to recover, but this program is a welcomed start,” said Hancock.

2 Submitting Success Story Ideas (Continued)

C Guidelines on How to Write a Story (Continued)

Q5. What to Avoid Doing?

A5. The writer should avoid the following.

- The writer should never quote himself or herself in the article.
- The writer's voice should never be in the story. Avoid giving an opinion.
- The words "hard work and dedication" should be avoided. They are overused in so many success stories.
- Never start an opening paragraph or introduction with a question. It shows no creativity and a lack of thought. Any story can start with a question, which is why it is considered unacceptable. Only in rare instances should an opening paragraph or introduction start with a question.
- Do not use the article as an opportunity to praise employees or the State or County Office. This is an outreach tool that allows other farmers or ranchers to see that FSA provides a great service. But it takes other farmers and ranchers to tell that story to other farmers and ranchers. Employees and State and County Offices should be praised in the FSA Empowerment newsletter and at internal award ceremonies.
- Do not tell the reader what people think and feel. Use quotes to convey this. It is not credible to write, "Everyone had a wonderful time and learned a lot." That tells the reader nothing. Use a quote from an attendee, "I had a wonderful time and I learned about the youth loan. I will have my son at the County Office next week to apply."

Q6. What Should I Always Do?

A6. Always do the following:

- take photos

Note: Avoid posed shots and use more candid shots of a person working in his or her environment. See subparagraph D.

- complete FSA-463 (Exhibit 1).

2 Submitting Success Story Ideas (Continued)

D Photos

Photos should accompany all submitted stories and story ideas. All photos should be in digital format with a minimum resolution of 300dpi. Photos should be of the person (farmer, rancher, or youth) working in his or her environment. Candid shots of the person working are ideal, although it is alright to get a “grip-n-grin” shot if a candid shot is not available. Also, include a caption with the photo that includes the name of the people in the photo and what is happening.

E FSA-463

FSA-463 (Exhibit 1) must accompany all stories. FSA-463 gives FSA permission to use photos, interviews, videos, and testimonies from producers and others.

F Approval

All stories must be approved by OEA before posting for viewing by the general public.

FSA-463, Photograph and Testimonial Consent/Release Form

This form is available electronically. FSA-463 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (08-08-13) Farm Service Agency <div style="text-align: center;">PHOTOGRAPH AND TESTIMONIAL CONSENT/RELEASE FORM</div>		1A. Originating Name and Address <i>(Include Zip Code)</i> 1B. Originating Telephone No. <i>(Include Area Code)</i> 1C. Originating Office Fax No. <i>(Include Area Code)</i>
<i>A release is not required for photographs or testimony of public officials including FSA employees in the conduct of their official duties.</i>		
2(a) _____, hereby consent to the royalty-free <div style="text-align: center;"><small><i>(Print name of person this Consent/Release form applies to)</i></small> </div> use by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) of photograph(s) taken of me by employees/ representatives of USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), and of any reproduction of the photograph(s) in any form, with editing for clarity full or in part, in any media, for any purpose in connection with USDA, world-wide, free and clear of any claim whatsoever on my part. I also consent to the use of my name with the photograph(s) and any testimonial(s) and comment(s) I may have made at the time of the photograph(s), including the editing thereof. Furthermore, I understand that the photograph(s), testimonial(s) and comment(s) will not be sold by FSA and may be used alone or in conjunction with other types of printed material, including use on FSA's Internet and Intranet, and in all other means of public display. I hereby release the United States, its officers, and employees from liability for any violation of any right I may have in connection with the foregoing use. I hereby waive any right of inspection or approval of the photograph(s) or of the use that may be made of the photograph(s), my name, and my comment(s). (b) <input type="checkbox"/> I am of legal age. (c) <input type="checkbox"/> I am NOT of legal age <i>(Must have parent/legal guardian consent. See Note below).</i> (d) Type of consent (Check all that apply): <input type="checkbox"/> Photograph Consent <input type="checkbox"/> Testimonial Consent		
<i>NOTE: I am a/the parent/legal guardian of the minor who executed the foregoing Consent/Release. Acting both for myself individually and on behalf of said minor, I hereby consent to the execution of the foregoing Consent/Release by said minor and agree to the provisions thereof.</i>		
(e) If signing for minor, relationship to minor: _____		
(f) Name of Person giving consent <i>(please print)</i> : _____		
(g) Mailing Address: _____		
(h) Telephone No. <i>(Include Area Code)</i>	(i) Fax No. <i>(Include Area Code)</i>	(j) Email Address
(k) Signature <i>(Person giving consent)</i>		(l) Date Signed
3A. FSA Official Signature	3B. FSA Official Title	3C. Date Signed
Maintain a copy of this form in the originating office and forward one copy to: USDA-FSA Public Affairs Branch, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, STOP Code 0506, Room 3624, Washington, D.C. 20250-0506 Fax: 202-720-2979		
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