

NEWS

FSA Celebrates Children

According to Chase's Calendar of Events, December is Children's Month because of the seasonal concentration of gift giving. *FSA NEWS* is taking a look at some of our many employees through-

out the country who give their time and expertise to helping children learn and grow.

We all know how much American agriculture needs its young people to carry on the vital and sacred tradition of

farming. Through the caring and creativity of many of our own employees, we're helping to reinforce the importance of agriculture and keeping the road open for careers in farming – the greatest occupation of all!

Louisiana Active in FFA

Louisiana FSA employees are looking forward to another year of involvement with FFA. For the past 3 years, FSAers statewide have prided themselves on their strong bond with local FFA chapters. Employees' involvement has expanded tremendously, especially with the FFA Stars Recognition Program.

The nationwide Stars program identifies outstanding FFA members in each of its 7,251 local chapters. Recipients are recognized each summer at the FFA's annual convention. This year, 19 FSA staff members throughout Louisiana helped select state awardees in numerous agricultural categories. FSA staff not only acted as judges, they also recruited help from RD, NRCS, state organizations, businesses, and farmers. The judging process is quite involved and takes a lot of personal time, but Louisiana FSA employees are committed to helping FFA members achieve their goals.

Louisiana SED Willie Cooper says, "Helping with this contest gives us the opportunity to recognize young adults' achievements and help prepare them for careers in agriculture. We are



photos by Willie Cooper
Stars program judges Price Gay, Louisiana State Committee; Ralph Marks, Louisiana State FSA Office; and Brian Vanderlick, Rapides Parish FSA Committee.

FFA not only acknowledges exceptional FFA members through its Star program. The organization also recognizes stars outside FFA who have made outstanding contributions. Our own Administrator Kelly was recognized in October with an Honorary American FFA Degree, the highest honorary degree bestowed by FFA to government leaders, agribusiness representatives, and agricultural teachers.

The award acknowledges Mr. Kelly's longstanding steadfast support of FFA, including volunteering as a Star program judge and connecting local FFA chapters to FSA state and county offices. Congratulations Mr. Kelly!

ADMINISTRATOR'S COLUMN

Season's Greetings!

With the holiday season upon us and the new year just ahead, I'd like to take this opportunity to extend my warmest wishes to you and your family.

In the coming weeks, we will be caught up in the joy and reflection of holiday festivities. Many of us will celebrate longstanding traditions, delight in the smiles illuminating the faces of children, and welcome in the new year.

It is a busy time for everyone as we follow the traditions of giving. But for all of you in FSA, giving is a year-round tradition—and this year was no exception. As the first year of the new millennium comes to a close, I pause to consider your remarkable contributions to FSA.

This year you continued to maintain a record of outstanding commitment to improving and sustaining American

agriculture. Your high-quality professional assistance to America's agricultural producers and your fellow employees is unsurpassed. You offer your vision, insights, and passion for our Agency and its work.

Your achievements and sacrifices do not go unnoticed by myself, my staff, or the American agricultural community. I am impressed daily with your work and profoundly grateful and indebted to you for everything you do. I offer my sincere thanks and appreciation for all of the work—both on and off the clock—that you do to bring safety and hope to so many people. It is a privilege to work with you.

In the coming year, our Agency will continue its tradition of service despite the challenges that face us. As you celebrate this holiday season, may each of you find joy and satisfaction in the knowledge that because of *you*, our Agency remains a beacon of hope to farmers and ranchers throughout this great country.

My family and I wish you a safe and peaceful holiday season and many joyous new beginnings in 2001. Enjoy the holidays!



HAPPY NEW YEAR!

The celebration of the new year is the oldest of our holidays. It was first observed about 4,000 years ago in ancient Babylon. The Babylonian new year, however, began on what is now March 23 – a logical date, since it is the beginning of spring and the time for planting seeds. The new year continued to begin in the spring through Roman times, until Julius Caesar established the 365-day Julian Calendar around 46 B.C. He did this in an attempt to synchronize the year with the sun because it takes roughly that many days for the Earth to orbit around the sun. The current Gregorian Calendar keeps January 1 as the start of the new year.

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The Aftermath of Hurricane Floyd

by Warren Hepler, Outreach Coordinator; and Cynthia Valles, Regional Public Affairs Specialist

Just over a year ago, Hurricane Floyd devastated eastern North Carolina, and agricultural losses crippled crop and livestock farms throughout the region. Fallen trees and debris covered farms and filled drainage ditches and canals. Dead poultry and livestock floated into flooded homes and streets, and thousands of people were left homeless in the aftermath of what many have called the storm of a lifetime.

"The scope of damage was absolutely unbelievable," says Phillip Farland, North Carolina SED. "The journey back from this major natural disaster has been a long one for producers and for FSA."

Soon after Hurricane Floyd hit, Farland met with Vice President Gore, Governor Hunt, Secretary Glickman, and USDA officials to seek financial assistance for farmers to use toward the cost of repairing damaged structures and other losses caused by the floods. President Clinton declared 67 North Carolina counties disaster areas, making them immediately eligible for Federal aid.

Local FSA offices responded to Floyd quickly, though flooded roads and bridges made it difficult for employees to get to their offices. Floods caused some offices to remain closed even after the waters receded. USDA service center staff provided advice and guidance at local Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Recovery Centers. Employees who suffered personal losses still reported to work to salvage equipment and producer records.

"We were only able to save the main computer and about five drawers of files and some of the larger maps," said FSA Edgecombe CED Kenny Johnson, whose office was flooded by over four feet of water.



photos by
Cynthia Valles

North Carolina SED Phillip Farland (second from left) meets with local FSA staff and farmers in Edgecombe County to assess the damage caused by Hurricane Floyd.

FSA paid out over \$289 million to North Carolina agricultural producers in 1999 and expects to far exceed that amount in 2000. "This is the first year in the last five that weather has not had a significant negative impact on crop production," says Farland. "Farmers are a tough bunch. But, many have told our county office staff that if it were not for the financial assistance provided by FSA over the last year, they would have been out of business."

"I've been in 50 states, and no other state has done what you people have," said FEMA Director James Lee Witt during a visit to Duplin County this month. Duplin County's FSA office alone issued over \$14 million in payments to farmers affected by the disaster.

The North Carolina General Assembly also provided \$860 million in disaster relief assistance funds to assist with housing, agricultural, and infrastructure repair for the entire eastern portion of the state affected by the hurricane. Governor Hunt, who once worked for the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service as a summer employee measuring tobacco, spearheaded the effort to develop a financial package to assist rural communities.

While low commodity prices and everyday hazards are challenging, farmers in North Carolina have survived the worst possible situation over the last few years with the dramatic tobacco quota cuts and the severe natural disasters they have faced.

"Crop prices are still low, but preliminary reports indicate producers will have a bumper crop of tobacco, corn, and soybeans," said Farland. "Their spirit is strong and with the help of the state of North Carolina and FSA, we hope farmers will prosper in the years to come."



A tractor sits in a flooded field in Pitt County. Flood damage to farmland equipment cost millions, and thousands of acres of farmland were destroyed by Hurricane Floyd.

FSA CELEBRATES

continued from first page

reaching out to possible beginning farmers.” FFA is so pleased with Louisiana FSA’s growing participation that last summer the organization presented the state with its “Blue & Gold Award” for distinguished service.

“Our involvement with FFA is a ‘coming together’ of diverse people for the benefit of the youth,” says Cooper. “These FFA youths are truly dedicated to their schools, their FFA chapters, and their projects. We will be proud to continue our relationship with FFA this coming year and far into the future.”



Stars program judges Randy Fontenot, Rapides Parish FSA Office; Wendell Bertrand, Jeff Davis Parish FSA Office; and June Davis, Jeff Davis Parish FSA Office.

Kansas FSA Activity Book

by Trish (Smith) Halstead, Outreach Coordinator, Kansas State Office

In the Kansas State Office, we have developed a fun tool to help our state’s kids learn about farming, Kansas agriculture, and FSA. It is a 24-page activity book packed with agricultural-related trivia, games, and puzzles.

The idea for the book came about at a state EEO/Civil Rights Advisory Council meeting. I mentioned my concern for the lack of FSA outreach materials for children in our state. Our council decided to create the Kansas FSA Activity Book.

We gathered the information for the book from several sources, with advisory council members creating and laying out the pages. The two farm safety pages were taken from an old Farmers Home Administration activity book. We even got a youngster involved; a daughter of one of our advisory council members created one of the word scrambles!

We have distributed copies of the book to every Kansas FSA office. County offices can print them on regular paper

in either color or black & white. The book is not bound on the edge, so offices don’t have to use outside printers. Just a regular printer and a stapler is all that is needed.

FSA makes the book available to anyone wanting to use it. The book has

been used for Earth Day presentations, local county fairs, the State Fair, farm shows, the Mid-America Farm Expo, elementary school presentations, 4-H club presentations, etc. We have received great feedback from recipients

continues

Fun Farm Word Search

H F C A T S N C
 P O U G C H E L
 W B S N E E K A
 F A R M D E C F
 Y S C O T P I C
 B H E S R O H A
 U E P H O N C L
 L D N O E W M F
 L P I G O D P Z

	<u>Words</u>		
Fun	Farm	Cow	Dog
Chicken	Shed	Sow	Sheep
Pig	Calf	Bull	Horse

Grains Word Scramble

Different grains are used as ingredients for some of our favorite foods. If we had no grains we would not have any rice, bread, oatmeal, or flour for baking cookies!

Un-scramble the words below to discover some common grains.

taos: _ _ at _

htewa: _ _ h _ at

yralb: b _ _ le _

gmuohrs: _ o _ h _ m

eirc: _ _ _ e _

nero: _ _ o _ n

ybseoans: s _ _ b _ _ n _

Pages from the Kansas FSA Activity Book.

continued

and get requests from schoolteachers for extra copies.

We also hand out the activity books to

children who visit local FSA offices with their parents. While the parents are busy with us, the children stay out of mischief by occupying themselves

with activities in the book. The book will never become obsolete, and we often make additional copies for special activities/events.

Iowa Coloring Contest Promotes Farm Safety

by Bruce Cordes, Public Affairs Specialist, Iowa State Office

The Iowa State FSA Office is gearing up for its second annual coloring contest for kids to be held early next year. Iowa FSA Offices sponsored the first contest last January for kids 7 to 10 years of age. With farm safety as the theme, the contest drew a large response from kids throughout the state as over 4,850 entries were submitted.

The Iowa FSA Strategic-Plan Wellness Team developed the contest to help promote farm safety issues and a healthy work environment for FSA customers and their families. Wellness team members Vicky Hinsenbrock from Winneshiek County and Rose Woerner from Wapello County worked out the details, set up the guidelines, and developed posters and information for schools. Iowa FSA coordinated this contest with the Farm Safety 4 Just Kids (FS4JK) organization, which provided the coloring sheets and helped with prizes.

County offices publicized the contest through news releases and sent out coloring sheets to area schools and youth organizations. Judging panels, that included FSA county staff, selected county-wide winners who received prize packages of stickers, magnets, etc. Winners advanced to the district level, and eight of these district winners advanced to the state level. A state office panel of judges selected Spencer Baak, a fourth-grader from Buena Vista County as the state winner. The judges said that Spencer's entry showed imaginative coloring with



Marilyn Adams, FS4JK President; Spencer Baak; and Rex Wittrock, CED, Buena Vista County.

an eye for detail. Spencer received a \$100 savings bond and other prizes.

FSA employees thoroughly enjoyed this event as a departure from everyday duties, while helping children throughout the state become more aware of the importance of farm safety. Several county offices presented certificates to all the participants, some gave out ribbons, and the schools and media really got involved. Newspapers throughout Iowa covered the contest and ran articles on local winners.

Marilyn Adams, FS4JK President, is thrilled with events like this because they keep farm safety on the minds of children year around. This is a fun way for kids to learn about farm safety, and the theme went over so well that the 2001 contest theme will remain farm safety. We are looking to expand the



State coloring contest winner Spencer Baak with his winning entry. The sheet shows farm animals with the phrase, "Be careful around the bigger animals. Stay on your side of the fence."

contest by possibly including a poster contest for older children. Several schools have asked us to return to their classrooms to talk with the students about USDA/FSA activities and programs.

Unselfish with Shellfish

by Deborah Lebrun, Program Assistant, Rhode Island State Office

On September 17, Rhode Island SED Paul Brule donated his time and culinary skills to put on a good old-fashioned New England clambake to benefit his local parish. The clambake included a variety of foods, but the main attractions were the delicious steamed clams cooked on heated rocks and seaweed. Approxi-

mately 125 people attended the Warren, R.I. event, including several FSAers. We all enjoyed ourselves and raised about \$2,000 for a great cause!



photo by Deborah Lebrun

Rhode Island SED Paul Brule skillfully bakes clams for charity.

In Touch with Missouri

by Christine Zeigler, Communications Coordinator, Missouri State Office; and Virginia Vernon, District Director, District I, Missouri

This fall, two top FSAers made inroads with Missouri FSA staff and members of the state's agricultural population.

In September, Administrator Kelly toured upland and Missouri River bottomland farming operations. He also met with FSA employees in four state service centers. Kelly listened intently as the employees expressed concerns about administering FSA programs to a diverse group of customers in such a diverse area.

The Administrator thanked the employees for the jobs they continue to do, recognizing that, "FSA has done a tremendous amount of work with fewer employees." Workers expressed their appreciation for Kelly's visit and his genuine concern for field employees who work with customers day-to-day, face-to-face.



photo by Virginia Vernon
Buchanan County, Mo. FSA program technicians listen to Administrator Kelly (not shown).

And in October, Missouri SED Brad Epperson spoke with the 2001 Coro Fellows during their "Agriculture Focus Week." Coro is a nonprofit organization that strengthens citizen participation and leadership in the community. Graduates are placed in the areas of government, politics, business, nonprofit organizations, media, and labor—just to name a few! In addition to meeting Epperson, the students visited several farms and met with various government and private sector agricultural leaders.

Epperson comments, "These bright and self-motivated students were

full of questions about FSA programs and showed a lot of interest in agriculture. It was obvious that the Coro graduates will lead the new millennium in whatever careers they choose."



photo by Mary Stubbs
Coro students meet with Missouri SED Brad Epperson.



photo by Virginia Vernon
Administrator Kelly speaks to the staff.

Mediation Program Continues!

by Chester Bailey, USDA Agricultural Mediation Program Specialist

USDA's popular Agricultural Mediation Program, administered by FSA, was recently reauthorized through fiscal year 2005. Each year, Congress provides funding for the program, appropriating \$3 million for this fiscal year.

First authorized in 1987, the mediation program helps agricultural producers and their creditors resolve disputes confidentially in a nonadversarial setting, thus avoiding the traditional process of litigation, appeals, bankruptcy, and foreclosure. This is crucial as America's family farmers continue to deal with a fluctuating economy, low commodity prices, and a seemingly endless rash of natural disasters.

Mediation helps resolve many areas of disputes, including farm loans, price support payments, wetland determinations, conservation compliance, and Conservation Reserve Program payment eligibility/limitation. The most difficult disputes to resolve involve farm loan programs (60%), Conservation Reserve Program (20%), and Production Flexibility Contracts (20%).

In addition to formal mediation services, most of the certified states provide mediation training and consulting services to producers, lenders, and USDA agencies.

The successful program is continually growing for a good reason—it works. The number of mediation clients increased from 4,140 in FY 1999 to over 4,673 in FY 2000. And the number of agreements or resolutions increased from 2,898 in FY 1999 to over 3,411 in FY 2000. Not to mention, dollars were saved: Mediation, at \$400 to \$750 per case, offers significant savings over national level administrative hearings, which cost around \$3,500 per case.

A couple of examples can illustrate just how effective the program is:

The Arizona Mediation Program has been building new bridges to meet the needs of mediation in the Southwest. A farmer was denied a lower interest rate and not allowed to restructure his loan after a decade of delinquency with an FSA program. He had contacted a lawyer who litigated similar issues. It became clear that the main problem was lack of communication between FSA and the farmer. He also did not understand some of the financial issues including redoing of the terms and conditions of the loan. The mediator was able to settle this case within 27 hours to the satisfaction of both parties. FSA did not have to go to court, nor did this require any substantial write-off for FSA.

In Arizona, a case involved a borrower who had no way to communicate outside of her native Navajo language. The mediators conducted the entire session in Navajo, which was a first for the state. Again, the principle problem was lack of communication, and the case was resolved within two weeks with less than 15 hours in time spent.

And, in Michigan, a young farming family filed for Chapter 12 reorganization bankruptcy after losing a soybean crop due to a storm, and their farm was sold at auction. Several attempts to resolve the issue had been unsuccessful,

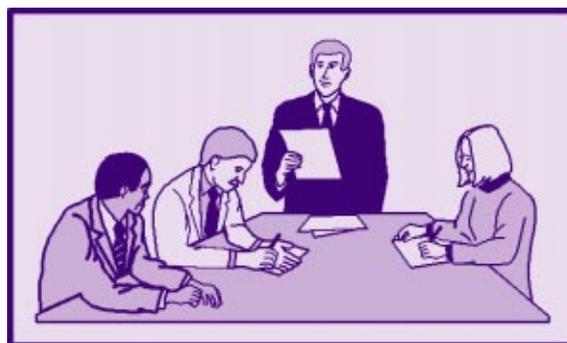
prompting the wife to write to a senator, who referred her to the State Mediation Program. The Michigan mediators contacted the bankruptcy court and the attorneys involved for permission to mediate. The case was resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

Federal legislation encourages state involvement by providing matching grant funds to participating states. Currently, 25 states participate: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. FSA expects to certify one or two new states this fiscal year.

The mediation program is often lauded by government officials, community leaders, and newspapers throughout the country for helping producers avoid expensive litigation and bankruptcy. U.S. Congressman John Thune of South Dakota said, "Through mediation, producers and lenders can find a solution fitting to all involved."

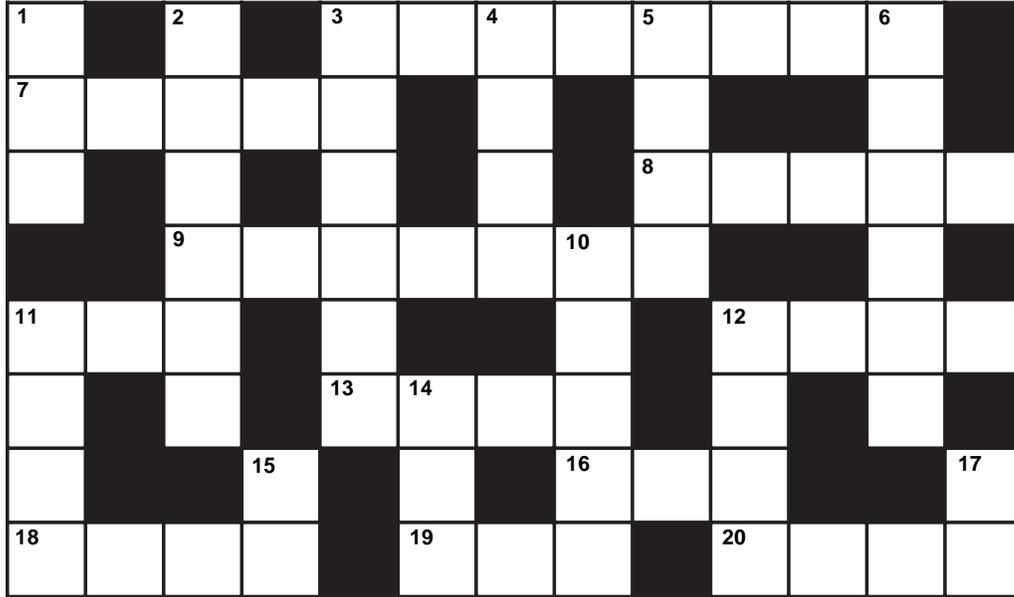
The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture stated that the program has played a significant role in resolving agricultural credit and other disputes. And Vice President Gore cited the program's effectiveness in a National Performance Review report.

Mediation helps thousands of agricultural producers resolve financial problems and stay on their farms. FSA strongly supports this ever-expanding program that efficiently and effectively resolves program disputes.



DECEMBER FSA CROSSWORD

by Denise Lickteig, Farm Loan Manager, Nemaha County Office, Neb.,
and FSA NEWS Editorial Board Member



ACROSS

- 3. A curly-edged, broad-leaved chicory used in green salads
- 7. Type of wool eligible for FSA commodity payments
- 8. Large, open area of land used for livestock grazing
- 9. It's our middle name
- 11. Drink this beverage at your favorite pub
- 12. A producer with a ____ loss may be eligible for FSA disaster assistance
- 13. Join your oxen together with this device
- 16. Fleecy queen of the barnyard

- 18. FSA commodity loan grain is subject to these periodic checks
- 19. Abbreviation for the report counties fill out following a hurricane, etc.
- 20. Forest commodity

DOWN

- 1. A shade tree of the olive family
- 2. Lanky ranch animals
- 3. Commodities like corn and soybeans can provide an environmentally-friendly source of this
- 4. Popular tea made with milk, spices, and honey
- 5. Steak cooked just slightly is this
- 6. Enjoy this festive drink at your holiday gatherings
- 10. Many FSA employees will enjoy holiday ____ this month
- 11. Former agency merged with 14 DOWN to form FSA
- 12. Cows ruminate, humans do this
- 14. FmHA is an ____ agency that merged with 11 DOWN to form FSA
- 15. FSA employees give their all ____ work
- 17. FSAer who oversees several

WORLD'S TALLEST SNOWMAN

Bethel, Maine made a name for itself when it landed in the *Guinness Book of Records* in 1999 by building the world's largest snowman. Angus, the 114-foot tall snowman, was named after Maine Governor Angus King.

-- Source: About.com



CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
December 3-9	Palau, Hawaii and Guam	Carolyn Cooksie, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs, to sign memorandum of understanding between offices
December 21	Kansas City, Mo.	Alex King, Acting Deputy Administrator for Commodity Operations, to make a site visit to FSA offices
December 25		Christmas Day
December 31		New Year's Eve
January 1		Happy New Year!

Note: The above is subject to change.