

Farm Service Agency

Eligibility to Vote and Hold Office as a County Committee Member

FACT SHEET
April 2020

Overview

Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Committees are a critical component of the day-to-day operations of FSA and allow grassroots input and local administration of federal farm programs.

Farmers and ranchers who are elected to serve on FSA county committees apply their judgment and knowledge to help with the decisions necessary to administer FSA programs in their counties, ensuring the needs of local producers are met. FSA county committees operate within official federal regulations and provide local input on:

- Income safety-net loans and payments, including setting county average yields for commodities;
- Conservation programs;
- Incentive, indemnity, and disaster payments for some commodities;
- Emergency programs; and
- Payment eligibility.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) encourages all eligible producers with farming or ranching operations to vote or hold office as county committee members, including beginning, established, women, African-American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic, Asian American, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander producers.



How it Works

Voter Requirements

A person who meets the requirements in No. 1 or No. 2, as well as No. 3, is eligible to vote in the 2020 county committee elections:

1. Be of legal voting age and have an interest¹ in a farm or ranch as either:
 - An individual who meets one or more of the following:
 - Is eligible and capable to vote in one's own right.
 - Is a partner of a general partnership.
 - Is a member of a joint venture.
 - An authorized representative of a legal entity, such as:
 - A corporation, estate, trust, limited partnership, or other business enterprise, excluding general partnerships and joint ventures.
 - A state, political subdivision of a state, or any state agency.*Only the designated representative may cast a vote for the entity.*

OR

2. Not of legal voting age, but supervises and conducts the farming operations of an entire farm.

AND

3. Participates or cooperates in any FSA program that is provided for by law.

¹ i.e. have legal documentation of ownership or tenancy of a farm or ranch, with the farm or ranch in FSA records.



Discrimination Prohibited

USDA prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

Interpretation of Voting Eligibility for Spouses in Community Property States

In community property states, the spouse of an eligible voter is also eligible to vote.

American Indian Tribal Lands

Members of American Indian tribes holding agricultural land are eligible to vote in an FSA county committee election if the tribal member meets the voting requirements. For purposes of FSA county committee elections, every member of an American Indian tribe is considered an agricultural landowner if the land on which the tribal member's voting eligibility is based is tribally owned or held in trust by the United States for the tribe, even if the individual does not personally produce a crop on that land.

Who is Eligible to Vote?

Local Administrative Areas

A county or multi-county jurisdiction served by an FSA county committee is divided into three to 11 local administrative areas (LAA). Each LAA is represented by one member on the FSA county committee. A person may only vote in one LAA (the LAA in which he or she participates or cooperates in FSA programs or programs administered by FSA).

Multiple Farm Interests in Same County or Area

Eligible voters who participate or cooperate in FSA programs on separate farms in more than one LAA in the same county or multi-county jurisdiction may only cast one ballot. Such voters must choose only one LAA in which they wish to cast their ballots.

Multi-County Jurisdictions

Eligible voters with separate farming interests in more than one county or in more than one FSA county committee jurisdiction (which may include more than one county) are eligible to vote in each election conducted for each jurisdiction's committee. Voting is limited to one LAA in which farming interests are located per each FSA county committee jurisdiction. Only one vote may be cast in each county or multi-county jurisdiction.



Who is Eligible to Hold Office?

To hold office as an FSA county committee member, a person must meet each of the basic eligibility requirements described below:

1. Participate or cooperate in a program administered by FSA.
2. Be eligible to vote in an FSA county committee election.
3. Reside in the LAA that is up for election².
4. A person must not have been:
 - Removed or disqualified from:
 - FSA county committee membership or alternate membership, or
 - FSA employment.
 - Removed for cause from any public office or have been convicted of fraud, larceny, embezzlement or any other felony.
 - Dishonorably discharged from any branch of the armed services.

People uncertain about their eligibility to vote in the FSA county committee election should contact their local FSA office. Affirmation of eligibility to vote must be determined in order for a vote to count in an election.

During the election period, individuals not receiving a ballot in the mail may obtain a ballot directly from their FSA county office. The ballot must be cast on or before the election deadline.

² In special cases, this requirement may be waived. Check with the local FSA office.

More Information

For more information about FSA county committees, visit fsa.usda.gov/elections or visit your local USDA Service Center. To find your local FSA office, visit farmers.gov.

Find your Local USDA Service Center

Find your local USDA Service Center at offices.usda.gov.