

January 2014



Alabama FSA State Updates

Alabama FSA State Office

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Dr. Walter Hill, Chairperson
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Danny Ellison, Member
George Hodge, Member
Fred Hughes, Member

Next State Committee Meeting: February 11-12, 2014

Topics for January

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New County Committee Election Ballots Mailed

The County Committee Election ballots that were mailed to producers on Nov. 4 were incorrectly printed with the producer's name and address on the back of the ballot. County committee elections must use a secret ballot so the misprinted ballots cannot be used. Please destroy or recycle the misprinted ballot. If you have already voted, your ballot will be destroyed unopened. **New ballots were mailed to producers on December 20, 2013.** These ballots will indicate that they are the corrected ballot in several places, including on the outside of the mailing, on the ballot and on the outside of the return envelope.

The corrected ballot must be returned to the FSA Office or postmarked by January 17, 2014. If mailed, postage is required and ballots must be signed and postmarked by midnight January 17, 2014. All newly elected county committee members will take office February 18, 2014. All county committee members whose term expired on Dec. 31, 2013, will have their term extended to January 31, 2014.

More information on county committees, such as the new fact sheet and brochures, can be found on the FSA website at www.fsa.usda.gov/elections or at a local USDA Service Center.

NAP Provisions — Are Your Crops Covered?

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) application deadline dates vary according to the crop being insured. Producers should apply for NAP coverage using form CCC-471 (Application for Coverage) prior to the application closing date for the crop being insured. Most spring-seeded crops have an application closing date of February 28. Related service fees are due when the application is filed. Contact your local FSA office for the application closing dates for your crops.

Upcoming 2014 Acreage Reporting Deadline Dates

Alabama producers now have until January 15, 2014, to report crops that have a November 15, 2013, reporting deadline without paying a late-file fee. Crops under this waiver include apiculture, PRF (pasture, rangeland, and forage) insured crops, and permanent grasses, including, but not limited to Bahia, Bermuda, Dallas, and Fescue. The Risk Management Agency (RMA) did not grant a waiver, thus producers need to consult their crop insurance agent for deadlines for insured crops.

In order to comply with FSA program eligibility requirements, all producers are encouraged to visit their local FSA county office to file an accurate crop certification report by the applicable deadline.

The following acreage reporting deadline dates are approaching for Alabama:

January 15, 2014: Blueberries, canola, rapeseed, fall oats, peaches, and fall wheat

March 15, 2014: Pecans and potatoes (planted Jan. 1- Mar. 1)

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP covered crops is the earlier of the dates listed above or 15 calendar days before grazing or harvesting of the crop begins.

Late file fees will be assessed for 2014 crops reported after January 15, 2014.

For questions regarding crop certification and crop loss reports, please contact your local FSA county office.

Farm Storage Facility Loan Program

The Farm Storage Facility Loan Program (FSFLP) allows producers of eligible commodities to obtain low-interest financing to build or upgrade farm storage and handling facilities.

The new maximum principal amount of a loan through FSFL is \$500,000. Participants are now required to provide a down payment of 15 percent, with CCC providing a loan for the remaining 85 percent of the net cost of the eligible storage facility and permanent drying and handling equipment. Additional security may be required for poured-cement open-bunker silos, renewable biomass facilities, cold storage facilities, hay barns and for all loans exceeding \$50,000. New loan terms of 7, 10 or 12 years are available depending on the amount of the loan. Interest rates for each term rate may be different and are based on the rate which CCC borrows from the Treasury Department.

Payments are available in the form of a partial disbursement, if requested, and the remaining final disbursement. The optional partial disbursement will be available after a portion of the construction has been completed. The final fund disbursement will be made when all construction is completed. The maximum amount of the partial disbursement may only be 50 percent of the projected and approved total loan amount.

The following commodities are eligible for farm storage facility loans:

- Corn, grain sorghum, rice, soybeans, oats, peanuts, wheat, barley or minor oilseeds harvested as whole grain
- Corn, grain sorghum, wheat, oats or barley harvested as other-than-whole grain
- Pulse crops - lentils, small chickpeas, dry beans and dry peas
- Hay
- Renewable biomass
- Fruits (including nuts) and vegetables - cold storage facilities
- Honey

For more information about FSFL please visit your FSA county office or www.fsa.usda.gov.

Foreign Owners Must Report Holdings

The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act (AFIDA) requires all foreign owners of U.S. agricultural land to report their holdings to the Secretary of Agriculture. The Farm Service Agency administers this program for USDA.

All individuals who are not U.S. citizens, and have purchased or sold agricultural land in the county are required to report the transaction to FSA within 90 days of the closing. Failure to submit the AFIDA form (FSA-153) could result in civil penalties of up to 25 percent of the fair market value of the property. County government offices, realtors, attorneys and others involved in real estate transactions are reminded to notify foreign investors of these reporting requirements.

FSA Annual Reminders

- *Controlled Substance* - Any person convicted under federal or state law of a controlled substance violation could be ineligible for USDA payments or benefits. Violations include planting, harvesting or growing a prohibited plant. Prohibited plants include marijuana, opium, poppies and other drug producing plants.

- *Special Accommodations* - Reasonable accommodations will be made, upon request, for individuals with disabilities, vision impairment, or hearing impairment to attend or participate in meetings or events sponsored by the Farm Service Agency. If special accommodations are required to attend or participate in our programs or activities, you should contact your local FSA office or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.

- *Power of Attorney* - For those who find it difficult to visit the county office because of work schedules, distance, health, etc..., FSA has a power of attorney form available that allows producers to designate another person to conduct business at the office. If interested, contact our office or any Farm Service Agency office for more information.

- *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.

- *Appeal Process* - After an FSA official makes a decision on a request for USDA services or application, the producer will be sent a letter informing him/her of the decision and options that can be pursued. Generally, program participants have three choices — an informal review with the original agency decision-maker, an opportunity for mediation and finally, an appeal to the next level of authority within the agency.

- *FSA Signature Policy* - Husbands and wives may sign documents on behalf of each other for FSA and Commodity Credit Corporation programs in which either has an interest. This option is automatically available unless a written request for exclusion is made to the county office staff by either spouse. There are exceptions to the rule, where spouses may not sign on behalf of each other for partnerships, joint ventures, corporations or other similar entities. Individual signatures are also required on certain Farm Loan Program and Farm Storage

Facility Loan documents. For more clarification on spousal signature authority, feel free to contact your local FSA office.

USDA Rural Development seeking applications for its Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG) Program

The deadline for applications under USDA Rural Development's VAPG program is February 24, 2014. The primary objective of the VAPG program is to help agricultural producers enter into value-added activities related to the processing and/or marketing of bio-based value-added products. Generating new products, creating and expanding marketing opportunities, and increasing producer income are the end goals of this program. You may receive priority if you are a beginning farmer or rancher, a socially-disadvantaged farmer or rancher, a small or medium-sized farm or ranch structured as a family farm, a farmer or rancher cooperative, or are proposing a mid-tier value chain, as defined in the Program Regulations. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis. The maximum grant is \$75,000 for planning grants and \$200,000 for working capital grants. Producers must match the grant funds requested with cash or eligible in-kind funds. Additional information can be found at: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_VAPG.html. Contact your servicing USDA Rural Development office for assistance.

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).