



[www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov)

**Mecosta County  
USDA Service  
Center**  
18260 Northland Dr  
Big Rapids, MI. 49307-9272  
Telephone 231-796-2659 Ext. 2

**County Committee**

Mike Hopkins – Chairperson  
John Orr – Vice Chairperson  
Gerald Mondrella – Member  
Beth Storey – Advisor

**County Office Staff**

Sherry Adams, Program Technician  
Towna Aris, Program Technician  
Shelley Lobert, Program Technician  
Heather Sellers, Program Technician (Intermittent)  
Larry Sheridan, Farm Loan Officer

**Farm Loan Manager**

Rick Dean

**County Executive Director**

Travis Murray

**Office Hours:** 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Monday – Friday  
Closed All Federal Holidays

***February 2009***

**Field Reporter**

Don Foos

**County Committee Election Results**

Congratulations to John Orr! John was re-elected to represent producers from Hinton, Martiny, Millbrook, Sheridan, and Wheatland Townships on the Mecosta County Committee. He was re-elected to his 3rd term. The election results for Local Administrative Area #3 were:

John Orr— Elected to the County Committee (COC)                      Brian Taylor — 1st alternate to COC

Other person receiving votes: Daniel Hein. Thank you to all who voted and received votes.

**DCP Signup Underway**

The 2009 Direct and Counter-Cyclical Payment (DCP) Program sign up for farms with base acres has begun. You can signup at your local USDA service center or online at [www.fsa.usda.gov/dcp](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dcp). To access this on-line service, you must have an active USDA eAuthentication Level 2 account, which requires filling out an online registration form at <http://www.eauth.egov.usda.gov>. Then visit the local USDA Service Center for identity verification. Signup continues through June 1, 2009. The June 1, 2009 deadline is mandatory for all participants. **FSA will not accept any late-filed applications after June 1, 2009.** This is a major change!

For 2009, you may request advance direct payments based on 22 percent of the direct payment for each commodity associated with the farm. Counter-cyclical payment rates vary depending on market prices and are issued only when the effective price for a commodity is statutorily set below its target price.

Producers who are eligible for the DCP Program will also be eligible to enroll in the Average Crop Revenue Election (ACRE) Program if they choose to. **However, procedure on the ACRE program is not yet available. You can not sign up for ACRE at this time.** You may first enroll in the DCP Program, receive advance direct payments, and then later modify your enrollment to include the ACRE program. We will send out a newsletter once ACRE is available. Once ACRE is elected for the farm, it will remain enrolled in ACRE for the duration of the 2008 Farm Bill, regardless of owner/operator changes.

**New Rules for Changes in Operator**

If you are going to rent or work a new piece of ground that is not owned by you, please let us know as soon as possible. Our staff must hear from the owner whether in writing, with the owner’s signature, or a verbal statement from the owner, clarifying who is going to work the ground. We have to have this information from the owner of the ground **before** we can do any record changes. This is a major change!

## Payment Limits & Direct Attribution

For commodity, price support, and disaster programs eligibility under the new farm bill, the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limitation is now a three-year average of **non-farm AGI of \$500,000**. If the **non-farm AGI** exceeds \$500,000, **that person or entity is ineligible** for commodity, price support, and disaster programs. Also, if the three-year average **farm AGI** exceeds \$750,000, **that person or entity is ineligible** for direct payments issued under the Direct and Counter-Cyclical Program.

For conservation programs, if the three-year average **non-farm AGI exceeds \$1 million**, **that person or entity is ineligible**, unless 66.66 percent or more of the average AGI was derived from activities related to farming, ranching and forestry operations. In addition, the AGI limitation for conservation programs may be waived on a case-by-case basis if it is determined that environmentally sensitive land of special significance would be protected.

**The new AGI form requires the producer to provide evidence such as tax records, business documents (for review only, not for retention), or a signed third party verification deemed acceptable by CCC to verify the average adjusted gross income, average adjusted gross farm income, and average adjusted gross nonfarm income at least once every 3 years beginning no later than the 2011 program year or the year the producer or legal entity ceases operation, if that occurs first.**

Program payments are limited by direct attribution to individuals or entities. A legal entity is defined as an entity created under Federal or State law that owns land or an agricultural commodity, product, or livestock. Through direct attribution, payment limitation is based on the total payments received by the individual, both directly and indirectly. Qualifying spouses are eligible to be considered separate persons for payment limitation purposes, rather than being automatically combined under one limitation.

Individuals and entities must be "actively engaged in farming" with respect to a farming operation in order to be eligible for specified payments and benefits. To be "actively engaged in farming," the individual or entity must make significant contributions to the farming operation of: (1) capital, equipment, land, or a combination thereof; and (2) personal labor or active personal management, or a combination thereof.

## National Lamb Referendum

Lamb producers, feeders, and first handlers have the opportunity to vote in a nationwide referendum on whether to continue or terminate the Lamb Promotion, Research, and Information Order. The referendum will be held February 2-27, 2009. The referendum will be conducted at USDA's FSA offices. To be eligible to vote, persons **must certify and provide documentation, such as a sales receipt or remittance form which shows they have been engaged in the production, feeding, or slaughtering of lambs during the period of January 1, 2008 through December 31, 2008**. Persons eligible to vote should obtain form LS-86 from a FSA office either in person, by fax, by mail, or via the internet at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/lsmarketingprograms>. The producer must vote in the county FSA office where their administrative farm records are maintained. If a person is not participating in FSA programs, the opportunity to vote will be provided at the county FSA office where the person owns or rents land. The Form LS-86 and supporting documentation must be returned in person, by mail, or by fax to the appropriate county office prior to the close of business on February 27, 2009.

## Emergency Loans Available

Mecosta County and other surrounding county farmers who suffered significant damage due to drought or severe frost/freezing in 2008 may be eligible for low-interest emergency loans from the Farm Service Agency if they are unable to get financing from any other source. These loans carry an interest rate of 3.75 percent. For production losses, eligible farmers can also use emergency loan funds to recover a portion of losses on growing crops that were destroyed. Loan applications will be accepted at our office through August 19, 2009 for losses caused by drought and August 31, 2009 for losses caused by severe frost/ freezing. Please contact Rick Dean, FSA Farm Loan Manager, at (231) 796-2659 ext. 2.

## Looking For a Farm Loan?

FSA provides financial assistance and business planning. Farmers that intend to apply to the Farm Service Agency for loan assistance for the upcoming crop year are encouraged to file their applications as early as possible. Filing early will help ensure that your loan is processed and approved as early as possible so that planting decisions can be made. Failure to apply early can result in a delay in processing loans due to the volume of applications that must be processed in date order.

**Loans to Beginning Farmers and Ranchers:** FSA provides direct and guaranteed loans to beginning farmers and ranchers who don't meet the qualifications to obtain financing from a traditional lender. Each Fiscal Year, the Agency targets a portion of its direct and guaranteed farm ownership (FO) and operating loan (OL) funds to beginning farmers and ranchers. A beginning farmer or rancher is an individual or entity (1) has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years; (2) meets the loan eligibility criteria requirements of the program to which he/she is applying; (3) substantially participates in the operation; and, (4) for FO purposes, does not own a farm greater than 30 percent of the median size farm in the county. All applicants for direct FO loans must have operated a farm for at least 3 years.

**Rural Youth Loan:** The FSA provides financial and business planning assistance that can help rural youth get a start on their futures. Operating loans are available to individual rural youths age 10 through 20 to establish and operate income producing projects. The Youth Loan Program is designed to provide start-up funds to establish and operate income producing projects of modest size in connection with participation in 4-H clubs, FFA and similar agriculturally-focused organizations.

Each project is designed to be part of an organized and supervised program of work. The project is to be planned and operated with the help of an adult or project advisor. It should provide the youth with practical business and educational experience, and produce sufficient income to repay the loan.

### **Achieving Your Conservation Goals**

One of the first steps in obtaining conservation assistance from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is arranging for an on-farm visit to assess your operation's conservation concerns. Sharing as much information as possible with the conservationist will save time and frustration later and help you make better decisions. If you have a partner in your operation, it would be beneficial if they are present for the site visit. If you rent or lease land, it is also important to know if you have the authority to enter into a long-term contract for implementing conservation practices on that land.

The producer should be open and honest with the conservationist and share information about any difficulties being experienced such as handling animal waste or erosion problems. During the visit, point out areas of concern such as areas of excessive erosion or even a wildlife pattern that you wish to influence.

The most important preparation for conservation planning is examining your short and long-term goals. Do you plan to make a change in your farming operation or are you looking to improve the habitat on your land? How much can you afford to invest in conservation measures on an annual basis? How readily can you obtain funds to finance conservation improvements? Knowing the answers to these questions can help you and the conservationist prioritize and plan accordingly. NRCS may be able to provide financial assistance to help you meet these goals.

If NRCS conservation programs fit your needs, there are basic eligibility requirements to receive financial assistance. These include meeting the highly erodible land and wetland conversion regulations. Producers cannot receive financial assistance if they have a gross annual income exceeding \$1 million, unless two-thirds of that income is from farming or forestry. Each conservation program has additional eligibility rules. The mission of NRCS and your conservation district is to conserve our natural resources. By working closely with your conservationist, your objectives can be achieved while addressing the agencies mission. Improved conservation will benefit present and future generations who depend on productive land, clean water, and air.

In Mecosta County, contact Jennifer Taylor in Big Rapids at (231) 796-2659. In Osceola or Lake Counties, contact Greg White in Reed City at (231) 832-5341.

Mecosta County FSA Office  
18260 Northland Drive  
Big Rapids, MI 49307

PRSRT.STD  
U.S. Postage and Paid  
Lansing, MI  
Permit NO. 19



## **FINAL DEADLINES and DATES to REMEMBER**

- \*Ongoing Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) Program Sign up
- \*February 10, 2009 Mecosta County Committee meeting at 9 a.m. at Mecosta Co. USDA Service Center\*\*\*
- \*February 16, 2009 Office Closed – Presidents Day
- \*February 27, 2009 Crop Disaster Program (2005-2007) signup ends.
- \*March 16, 2009 Last day to buy Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) for most 2009 spring planted crops.
- \*June 1, 2009 Last day to sign up for Direct and Countercyclical Program (DCP) **NO EXCEPTIONS!**

\*\*\* Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in meeting/event/function should contact Travis Murray at (231) 796-2659 extension 2, email: [travis.murray@mi.usda.gov](mailto:travis.murray@mi.usda.gov), or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.

### **Crop Disaster Program Signup Deadline**

The Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Crop Disaster Program (CDP) signup period for years 2005-2007 will end February 27, 2009. The ending date applies to the receipt of a signed and completed FSA-840 application along with all supporting documentation and required forms at the applicable county FSA office. Sign-up information and required forms are available at each county FSA office. Late filed applications will not be approved after the Feb. 27 deadline.

### **Changing MILC Start Date**

If a producer wants to change his milk production start month for the Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) Program, the producer can, if they meet the following deadlines.

Changes to the start month must be made on or before the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month before:

- 1) The start month that was originally selected by the producer for that fiscal year (fiscal year begins October 1).
- 2) The newly selected MILC production start month.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its program 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 programs. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information ( Braille, large print, audiotope, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.