

Farmers Helping Farmers

Franklin County

FSA committee shares information with local growers

Terri Hayles' family farm had never participated in Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs. The lower Franklin County operation grows everything from alfalfa to asparagus to seed corn, but the family didn't think about how they might benefit from FSA.

Hayles heard about the start of a revenue assistance program and that finally drew her into the Pasco FSA office to see how it might affect her operation. After several visits, the topic of county committees came up and the need for female participation.

"I took them up on their offer to be an advisor, and ran when a committee opening came up," said Hayles, who is now the Vice-Chair of the committee. "I enjoy being on the committee, and I've learned a heckuva lot."



Franklin County Committee Member Terri Hayles (right) with FSA State Executive Director Judy Olson (left) and Under Secretary Michael Scuse.

The FSA county committee system provides a unique federal government experience: farmers and ranchers are elected by their peers to help FSA administer farm programs and provide an important source of information.

Serving as an advisor was a good way for Hayles to interact with the committee and educate herself about the programs. Even though advisors aren't voting members, Hayles said that the committee always asked for, and considered, her opinions on decisions.

The FSA has a two-pronged mission: on one side it oversees a portfolio of programs dealing with disaster assistance, conservation practices, revenue assistance and some crop insurance. The agency also makes loans to farmers and ranchers for annual operating expenses, purchasing or expanding agricultural operations and emergency loans to repair natural disaster damage.

The three-to-five person committees are the place that producers can appeal most agency decisions. Committees also make decisions which help to determine program payments.

The committees meet approximately once a month. Voting in the election helps guarantee the committee truly represents the agricultural producers in each county, and is a knowledgeable group of producers.

Helping out new growers has been a high-point for the committee. Hayles pointed to a situation where a new grower bought land and didn't know about FSA or its portfolio of programs. The committee worked to educate this grower about FSA. Working to get information to farmers and get them to start working with their local FSA office has been a positive experience for the committee.

Each county committee draws its members from local administrative areas. Counties are broken up into administrative areas for the purposes of voting. Local administrative areas encompass similar agriculture or geographic areas. Nominated by local farmers and ranchers, candidates must live in the county or local administrative area they will represent and must be eligible to vote in the county election. Members serve on staggered three year terms so that one-third of the seats are up for re-

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election each year, and producers can serve for nine years.

After more than 70 years, the county committee structure remains a cornerstone of FSA's efforts to preserve and promote American agriculture, said Bruce Clatterbuck, Franklin County FSA Executive Director.

"We're here to help the farmers, providing them with a level playing field," Hayles said.

**For more
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