

# Nebraska FSA State Review Plan Proposal

## Fact Sheet

### *Addressing Challenges, Supporting Staff, Improving Efficiency & Service to Producers*

#### **What prompted this proposal?**

- Budget and Staff reductions prompted FSA Administrator, Teresa Lasseter, to request that each State conduct an independent, local-level review of the effectiveness and efficiency of FSA offices.
- The Administrator requested that each State analyze the following:
  1. Ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of program delivery.
  2. Methods to improve training.
  3. Methods to better utilize technology.
- The Administrator asked that each State Executive Director (SED) and State Committees (STCs) form a review committee to identify the following:
  1. The optimum network of FSA facilities, staffing, training and technology.
  2. All within existing budgetary and staffing allotments.

#### **Why is consolidation needed?**

#### **To Address Challenges, To Better Support our Staff, To Improve Efficiency and Service to Producers:**

- FSA is operating with limited resources. Nationally, FSA has received budgetary reductions each year and is asked to do more with less.
- Because of this the SED/STC has not been able to staff Nebraska FSA Offices to meet workload demand.
- Declining resources resulted in an 11% reduction in permanent staffing (43 employees) in the last six years; consequently, many offices do not have sufficient staff available to meet program demands.
- In summary, Nebraska's County Office (CO) staffing has been decreased by 139 employees in the past 11 years.
- Declining resources resulted in a 75% reduction in temporary staffing during the past six years.
- Reduced temporary staffing limits assistance that can be provided to FSA Offices and impacts County Committee and Field Reporter funding.

- The State Office cannot hire permanent employees above authorized staffing levels.
- Increased stress for staff in 1 and 2 person offices to manage all programs efficiently and take leave when needed.
- Limited resources have also impacted funding available for employee training, travel, rent, supplies and equipment.
- It has become difficult for shared management offices to function efficiently when they are short-staffed and their manager is required to divide time between two locations.

**What did the State Committee consider when making this decision?**

- It was determined that “doing nothing” about the situation would not support employees, would not address Nebraska FSA challenges and therefore was not a viable option.
- The State Committee and SED sought input from all 250 farmer-elected County Committee Members and all 500 FSA Employees regarding options to consider when analyzing office structure.
- The State Committee and SED visited with congressional staffs, ag and commodity group leaders, state and federal organizations to provide information and to provide them the opportunity to offer input.

The following items were provided for employees and County Committee Members to rank in terms of important considerations when reviewing FSA Office structure. (Not listed in any particular order.)

**Customer Service:**

- When possible locate office in community where producers go for other Ag services.
- Diversity of Agriculture.
- Office staff size may vary based on diversity of agriculture.
- Office staff size may vary based on number of producers or farms.
- Consider time required to travel to FSA Office.
- Consider driving distances experienced by producers for non-FSA services.

### **Employee Considerations:**

- Allows employees in small offices to take leave – improves morale.
- FSA workload conditions experienced in the office.
- Larger staff is better prepared with cross-trained program back-ups.
- Larger staff affords the opportunity to train employees.
- Allows employees to specialize in programs instead of being responsible for all programs.
- Larger staff can handle walk-in customers more easily.

### **Fiscal Responsibility:**

- Payments and benefits may be distributed to the producers faster.
- Web based administration of farm records/FSA business through one office.
- Fewer offices results in less administrative functions and more time to focus on serving producers.

### **Basis of Final Decision:**

The STC identified the following criteria to use when analyzing office operations in Nebraska:

- Workload of Administering FSA programs specifically that the complexity of FSA programs required that each location have a full-time CED and a minimum of three Program Technicians.
- When possible, FSA Offices would be located in trade areas in which the producers normally travel.
- Distance between offices would remain a factor. The STC reserved the right to maintain an FSA location when a potential consolidation would result in an extensive commute for producers and employees.
- The STC also considered current and future changes in Agriculture that have a dynamic affect on Ag in the area.

## **Benefits of Proposal:**

### ***For Producers:***

- Maintains a strong FSA presence, providing accessibility to producers and located in ag trade areas where possible.
- Gives producers from consolidated locations the choice of what contiguous county they want to conduct business in.
- Positions staff based on where producers want to conduct business.
- Focuses more staff time on serving producers by reducing time spent on administrative duties.

### ***For Employees:***

- Dedicates one manager to each FSA location.
- Reduces administrative duties allowing staff to focus more on program delivery.
- FSA will be able to devote funding toward training of employees resulting in All FSA Staff being trained and equipped to handle workload.
- Larger staffs with more time for program delivery will increase efficiency and service to the producer.
- Larger staffs will allow more schedule flexibility for employees.
- Less administrative funding required.

## **How will technology be used in the future?**

The Secretary recognizes that FSA's Information Technology infrastructure needs attention;

- Since more farmers are going to use technology in their operations to become more efficient.
- Current delays in service due to technology are not acceptable and are being addressed at the national level.
- Improving the IT infrastructure would better support FSA employees in program delivery and would provide additional flexibility and faster service to producers who choose to use available technology.

- Available resources can be directed to enhancement of web-based programs which provide FSA with an opportunity to service ALL of the producer's farms in one Service Center regardless of where located.

**What is next in this process?**

- Public meetings will be held in each affected location within 30 days of the announcement.
- Public comments will be received during this 30 day period.
- The State Committee and State Executive Director will review comments prior to submitting the final restructure proposal to USDA.
- Upon final approval from USDA, Congress is notified fulfilling a law that requires 120 day notice prior to an office consolidation or closure.
- All producers impacted by a consolidation are given the chance to select which contiguous county they choose to conduct FSA business in.
- Staff is re-positioned to handle corresponding workload.

