



Farmers Helping Farmers

Kittitas County

FSA committee crucial to disaster recovery for farmland

“My main philosophy has been to get the word out about what FSA has to offer.”- Kittitas County Committee Chair Rick Haberman.

Flooding is a constant danger for Washington’s agricultural producers, whether on the rainy western half of the state, or along rivers and tributaries on the east side. During floods, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committee is responsible for approving some FSA flood response measures and helping inform local producers of the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP).

In 2009, Kittitas County experienced flooding and producers needed help removing debris and reshaping the land for agricultural use. ECP can provide financial assistance. The county committee worked quickly to approve the program and start the rebuilding process for producers.

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 one way for producers to obtain information.

“It’s great to be a voice for FSA,

my producer neighbors and people in the county, it’s a fun experience,” Kittitas County FSA Committee Chair Rick Haberman said.

Haberman was asked to run for the committee by a retiring member, and the committee chairman thought that he could serve as a good spokesperson for the agency.

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 annual committee election

helps guarantee the committee truly represents the agricultural producers in each county and is a knowledgeable group of producers.

“I’ve never had to go out and solicit farmers to serve. There’s always people wanting to be a part of it,” Brent Reitmeier, Kittitas County FSA Executive Director said. “FSA is the only organization that I know of that encompasses the federal government and local representatives this way, and it’s great.”

Drought response has been another major accomplishment for the committee. Several years ago, Kittitas County experienced drought conditions and the committee worked extensively to network with affected producers and educate them about the extent of assistance farmers and ranchers could receive. This community involvement helped producers find that with FSA assistance, they could recoup losses in less than half the time it would take through non-governmental aid.

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The Kittitas County Committee has four members; three elected representatives and an advisor representing female producer interests. The members grow seed and grain crops, including grasses, oats and alfalfa.

Each county committee draws its members from local administrative areas. Counties are broken up into administrative areas for the purposes of voting. 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 reelection 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, Reitmeier said.

"My main philosophy has been to get the word out about what FSA has to offer, and anytime I can help a young farmer get into it or help explain a program to someone in my LAA is a great experience," Haberman said.

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