

March 2015



Oklahoma FSA Program Updates and Reminders

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Hours:

Monday - Friday
8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

State Committee Members:

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Steve Nunley, Marlow
Brenda Neufeld, Fairview
Steve Butler, Wagoner
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Eligibility

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Important ARC/PLC Program Deadlines Approaching - Contact County FSA Office by March 31

Deadlines under the new safety-net programs established by the 2014 Farm Bill, known as Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC), are fast approaching. **The final day to update yield history or reallocate base acres and for farm owners/producers to choose ARC or PLC coverage is March 31, 2015.**

If no changes are made to yield history or base acres by March 31, 2015, the farm's current yield and base will be used. A program choice of ARC or PLC coverage also must be made by March 31, 2015, or there will be no 2014 payments for the farm and the farm will default to PLC coverage for 2015 through the 2018 crop year.

Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice (which includes short grain rice), safflower seed, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat. Upland cotton is no longer a covered commodity.

Online tools are available at www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc, to help producers explore how ARC or PLC coverage will affect their operation under possible future scenarios.

For more information on ARC/PLC or to set up an appointment for base and yield updates or to make an election on your farms, please contact your county FSA office immediately. Please have your base and yield information available and election decisions made before your scheduled appointment date to speed up the election process.

USDA Expands StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity to Build Rural Economies

Oklahoma Joins Twenty States Receiving Targeted Assistance Addressing Rural Poverty

Recently, USDA Secretary Vilsack announced an expansion of the USDA [StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity](#) to address chronic rural poverty in 32 identified counties in Oklahoma.

In 2010, Secretary Vilsack established USDA's StrikeForce Initiative to address the specific challenges associated with rural poverty. Using data from the National Census, USDA state based leadership identified specific rural areas enduring the worst chronic poverty in need of StrikeForce attention. StrikeForce teams have facilitated collaboration with more than 500 community partners and public entities to bring targeted assistance to these areas. The results from StrikeForce efforts to date demonstrate that partnership models are the key in building rural economies by creating jobs, building homes, feeding kids, assisting farmers, and conserving natural resources.

Through StrikeForce efforts, USDA has invested over \$16.5 billion in specific efforts to stimulate chronic rural economies. These investments have helped facilitate: more than 69 million meals to low income children through the Summer Food Service Program; over 125,000 low income home owners to receive loans to repair or purchase homes; 8,000 low income farmers and ranchers access capital through low interest loans or other financial services; 11,800 contracts to conserve and manage natural resources and land conservation; and, more than 5,100 new or retained jobs through rural business development activities.

Additional information about USDA's StrikeForce Initiative for Rural Growth and Opportunity, including state maps, fact sheets and resources, is available at www.usda.gov/strikeforce.

Oklahoma Counties Eligible for Emergency Loans

Oklahoma has 54 counties that have been declared a primary/contiguous disaster due to drought and heat using the streamlined Secretarial Disaster Designation process. Under this designation, producers with operations in any primary or contiguous county are eligible to apply for low interest emergency loans.

Oklahoma counties included in the designation are: Alfalfa, Beaver, Beckham, Blaine, Bryan, Caddo, Canadian, Carter, Cimarron, Cleveland, Comanche, Cotton, Creek, Custer, Dewey, Ellis, Garfield, Garvin, Grady, Grant, Greer, Harmon, Harper, Jackson, Jefferson, Johnston, Kay, Kingfisher, Kiowa, Lincoln, Logan, Love, Major, Marshall, McClain, Murray, Noble, Okfuskee, Oklahoma, Okmulgee, Osage, Pawnee, Payne, Roger Mills, Rogers, Stephens, Texas, Tillman, Tulsa, Wagoner, Washington, Washita, Woods, and Woodward.

The streamlined disaster designation process issues a drought disaster declaration when a county has experienced a drought intensity value of at least a D2 (severe drought) level for eight consecutive weeks based on the U.S. Drought Monitor during the crop year.

Emergency loans help producers recover from production and physical losses due to drought, flooding and other natural disasters or quarantine.

Producers have eight months from the date of the declaration to apply for emergency loan assistance. FSA will consider each loan application on its own merits, taking into account the extent of losses, security available and repayment ability. Producers can borrow up to 100 percent of actual production or physical losses, to a maximum amount of \$500,000.

For more information about emergency loans, please contact your local FSA office.

USDA Finalizes Procedures for Sorghum Referendum

USDA is announcing procedures for the upcoming referendum regarding the continuation of the Sorghum Checkoff Program and is announcing the dates it will conduct the referendum.

The Sorghum Promotion, Research, and Information Order requires that a referendum be conducted no later than seven years after the start of assessments, which began on July 1, 2008. For the program to continue, a majority of those voting must favor the continuation of the order.

USDA will conduct the referendum beginning on March 23, 2015, through April 21, 2015, at county FSA offices for producers and the Agricultural Marketing Service office for importers. Ballots may be obtained in person, by mail or facsimile at county FSA offices, or via the Internet.

Any eligible person engaged in the production or importation of sorghum from January 1, 2011, to December 31, 2014, is eligible to participate. Individuals are required to provide documentation such as a sales receipt or remittance form that shows they engaged in the production or importation of sorghum.

The Sorghum Checkoff Program, and its 13-member board, is authorized by the Commodity Promotion, Research, and Information Act of 1996. The Sorghum Checkoff is intended to be a national, coordinated, self-help marketing program designed to strengthen the position of sorghum in the marketplace, maintain and expand existing domestic and foreign markets and uses for sorghum, and develop new markets and uses for sorghum.

The final procedures were published in the Nov. 18, 2010, Federal Register. The notice announcing the dates of the referendum was published in the Feb. 19, 2015, Federal Register.

For more information, contact Craig Shackelford, Marketing Specialist, Research and Promotion Division, Livestock, Poultry, and Seed Program, AMS, USDA, 22 Jamesport Lane, White, GA 30184; Telephone: (470) 315-4246; craig.shackelford@ams.usda.gov. Procedures and additional information about the referendum can be found at: www.ams.usda.gov/SorghumReferendum.

USDA Enhances Farm Storage Facility Loan Program

USDA has expanded the Farm Storage and Facility Loan program, which provides low-interest financing to producers. The enhanced program includes 22 new categories of eligible equipment for fruit and vegetable producers.

Producers with small and mid-sized operations, and specialty crop fruit and vegetable growers, now have access to needed capital for a variety of supplies including sorting bins, wash stations and other food safety-related equipment. A new more flexible alternative is also provided for determining storage needs for fruit and vegetable producers, and waivers are available on a case-by-case basis for disaster assistance or insurance coverage if available products are not relevant or feasible for a particular producer.

To be eligible for the loan you must be a producer of the commodity to be stored. Loan terms range from 7, 10, or 12 years depending on loan amounts. Maximum loan amount is \$500,000 per loan. Loan applications must be approved before construction begins. Interest rates depend on the loan term. Current interest rate for a 7 year loan is 1.750%.

The low-interest funds can be used to build or upgrade permanent facilities to store commodities. Eligible commodities include grains, oilseeds, peanuts, pulse crops, hay, honey, renewable biomass commodities, fruits and vegetables. Qualified facilities include grain bins, hay barns and cold storage facilities for fruits and vegetables.

Breaking New Ground?

Agricultural producers are reminded to consult with FSA and NRCS before breaking out new ground for production as doing so without prior authorization may put a producer's federal farm program benefits in jeopardy. This is especially true for land that must meet Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions.

Producers with HEL determined soils must apply tillage, crop residue and rotation requirements as specified in their conservation plan.

Producers should notify FSA prior to conducting land clearing or drainage projects to ensure compliance. If you intend to clear any trees to create new cropland, these areas will need to be reviewed to ensure any work will not risk your eligibility for benefits.

Landowners and operators can complete form AD-1026 Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification to determine whether a referral to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is necessary.

Need Trees?

The Oklahoma Forestry Services (OFS) is conducting their annual conservation seedling sales now through mid to late April. The seedlings are grown at the OFS State Nursery, located south of Norman, from local seed sources that are selected specifically because they perform well in Oklahoma's diverse environment. Seedlings are bare-root, one or two years old, 10 to 30 inches in height and are sold in bundles of 50.

Species that will be available, while supplies last, include: Oriental Arborvitae, Arizona Cypress, baldcypress, roughleaf dogwood, eastern redbud, lacebark elm, Rocky Mountain juniper, common lilac, Shumard Oak, northern red oak, white oak, native pecan, ponderosa pine, scotch pine, Virginia pine, American plum, fragrant sumac, sycamore and black walnut.

Orders may be placed by: mailing an order form obtained at your local USDA service center or OSU Extension office; ordering online at www.forestry.ok.gov; or, by calling the Forest Regeneration Center at 1-800-517-3673.

Oklahoma Forestry Services, a division of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, is committed to conserving, enhancing and protecting the forest resources of Oklahoma for current and future generations. For more information, visit www.forestry.ok.gov or call 405-288-6326.

Farm Loan Interest Rates:

- Farm Operating Loans = 2.375%
- Farm Ownership Loans = 3.375%
- Farm Ownership Down Payment Loans = 1.5%
- Micro Loans = 2.375%
- Youth Loans = 2.375%
- Emergency Loans = 3.375%

*Rates effective April 1, 2015

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).