USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

RFS and webRFS Q&A's

A. General Questions

1. What Agencies are impacted by the RFS provisions?

Answer: The RFS provisions apply to FSA, NRCS, and RD. The Agencies, along with the applicable USDA Departmental level offices, collaborated to jointly implement RFS after the 2008 Farm Bill. For the implementation of the 2014 Farm Bill provisions, the Agencies collaborated to establish a two-phased approach. During Phase I, an RFS will be provided to current or prospective agricultural producers or landowners who request a benefit or service while vising a Service Center office, or by mailing, e-mailing, or faxing a request to a Service Center office.

The RFS shall be provided through a combination of:

- webRFS, and/or
- providing the customer with a copy of a completed form documenting the action taken in response to their request.

During Phase II, the Agencies will evaluate the effectiveness of webRFS and issues/concerns raised by USDA stakeholders and employees to determine any additional action required.

2. Can I still use AD-2088, Receipt of Request for Benefit of Service Offered by USDA, after December 1, 2014?

Answer: No, AD-2088 will be removed from all Agency websites on December 1, 2014, and all FSA, NCRS, and RD employees must immediately begin using webRFS to provide an RFS.

3. How do I issue an RFS if webRFS is unavailable due to network or connectivity issues?

Answer: Each FSA, NRCS, and RD Service Center location must maintain copies of the paper version of their input screen for manual completion of an RFS if webRFS is unavailable. Whenever a manual RFS is completed, the original copy will be provided to the customer and a copy must be maintained by the Agency and entered in webRFS once the system becomes available. An entry must be made in the "Action Taken Addition Description" field indicating the receipt was provided manually. A copy of the receipt from webRFS does not have to be provided to the customer; however, the appropriate box should be selected to accurately reflect how the manual RFS was provided to the customer.

4. Am I required to maintain hard copies of receipts issued using webRFS?

Answer: No, all data entered on the input screens is captured by webRFS. The webRFS search capabilities can be used to find and print a receipt should it be needed in the future.

5. Service Centers were required to maintain copies of receipts issued using formAD-2088. What should be done with those copies once webRFS is available?

Answer: FSA, NRCS, and RD offices should continue to maintain copies of receipts issued using AD-2088 according to the guidance provided by their Agency when RFS was initially implemented after the 2008 Farm Bill.

6. Should I continue using the RFS posters dated March 2012 after December 1, 2014?

Answer: No, the March 2012 version of the poster includes a copy of a portion of AD-2088. In addition, the poster indicates a receipt is available "upon request." Guidance regarding the issuance and posting of a revised poster is forthcoming

7. Will Departmental Regulation (DR) 4370-002, Providing a Receipt for Service or Denial of Service by the Farm Service Agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Rural Business Service, the Rural Housing Service, and the Rural Utilities Service, be revised to require the use of webRFS?

Answer: Yes, DR 4370-002 will be revised; however, revision may be deferred until an assessment of Phase I can be completed.

8. Do I have to provide a receipt to every customer?

Answer: 7 U.S.C. 2779-1, as amended by the 2014 Farm Bill, requires FSA, NRCS, and RD to provide an RFS to a current or prospective "agricultural producer or landowner" who requests any benefit or service offered by USDA. Beginning December 1, 2014, FSA, NRCS, and RD Service Center employees must provide an RFS to customers who either:

- are a current or prospective agricultural producer or landowner, who during an office visit; or in writing by e-mail, FAX, or U.S. mail, requests a benefit or service listed:
    - in Section C 2 of the webRFS User's Guide, or

    - as an option in the radio buttons under "Service Requested" on the webRFS input screen; or

- requests a receipt, regardless of whether or not it is listed in either of the above.

An RFS is not required for other Federal agencies, guaranteed lenders, and individuals/groups that have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Agreement (contribution, direct, or reimbursable) as these parties are not considered an "agricultural producer or landowner." Examples include: RD will not issue a receipt to FSA. FSA will not issue a receipt to guaranteed lenders submitting guaranteed requests. NRCS will not issue receipts to organizations they have entered into a MOU with.

Note: Use of RFS may be expanded in the future.

9. Do I have to provide a receipt for every service or benefit provided?

Answer: During Phase I, effective December 1, 2014, FSA, NRCS, and RD Service Center employees are required to provide an RFS for any benefit or service listed in Section C 2 of the webRFS User's Guide, as an option in the radio buttons under "Service Requested" on the webRFS input screen, or any time a customer requests a receipt.

10. What action should I take if a customer requests a receipt for a benefit or service not included in Phase I?

Answer: A receipt must be provided to any customer requesting an RFS, using webRFS, regardless of whether or not the benefit or service is included in Phase I. The radio button "Other:" should be selected as the "Service Requested" and an entry in the "Service Requested Additional Description" field will be required to document the request.

11. Am I required to enter an action in webRFS if the customer advises they do not want a receipt?

Answer: Yes, if the customer requested a benefit or service covered by Phase I listed in Section C 2 of the webRFS User's Guide, or as an option in the radio buttons on the input screen. Select the radio button "Customer Declined" in the "Receipt" field on the input screen. The customer will not receive an RFS; however, the data will be stored in webRFS and may be searched and retrieved at a later date, if necessary.

12. **Am I required to provide an RFS if a current or prospective agricultural producer or landowner requests a benefit or service by telephone?**

    Answer: No, during Phase I, FSA, NRCS, and RD are not required to issue an RFS when the request for benefit or service is made by telephone, unless the customer specifically requests a receipt.
    Exception: RFS will be provided for NAP losses reported by telephone.

13. **Am I required to issue the RFS at the time the benefit or service was provided?**

    Answer: 7 U.S.C. 2779-1 requires the RFS be issued "on the date of the request." In situations where the request is received late in the day, or after the office has closed, the RFS must be issued on the next business day.

14. **Where can I find a list defining the acronyms used on the RFS input screens?**

    Answer: All acronyms used on the FSA, NRCS, and RD input screens in webRFS are defined in Section B 1 of the webRFS User's Guide.

15. **Will customers be familiar with the acronyms used in webRFS?**

    Answer: Acronyms are only used on the input screens used by FSA and NRCS employees for data entry. All terms will be spelled out on the actual RFS provided to the customer.

16. **Does the RFS have reporting capabilities that will allow agencies to track the number of receipts provided?**

    Answer: During Phase I, reporting capabilities will only be available in the National Office. Reporting capabilities for State Offices and Service Centers will be provided in the future.

17. **Does webRFS validate USPS mailing addresses?**

    Answer: No. Address data entered into webRFS is not validated against USPS data.

18. **Can I complete a receipt on behalf of another employee who provided the service?**

    Answer: No. Employees must enter their own transactions with a customer in webRFS as the receipt includes the name of the employee whose eAuth account was used to enter the data in the webRFS.

19. Can I issue receipts on behalf of another Agency?

Answer: Yes. The webRFS input screen will default based on the Agency code associated with the employee's eAuth account. However, if an employee is providing office coverage for another Agency, they may select the radio button for that Agency to access the appropriate input screen. As a courtesy, employees providing office coverage for another Agency should provide that Agency with a printed copy of any receipt issued in webRFS.

Note: Employees should only issue receipts on behalf of another Agency when providing office coverage for that Agency. If a customer inquiry results in a referral to another webRFS Agency, the employee should issue a receipt using their Agency input screen and select the option "Referral Made" in the "Action Taken" field.

20. Can I reprint a receipt at a later date?

Answer: Yes, all data enter in webRFS is maintained and can be searched to allow receipts to be reprinted, if needed. Employees may complete searches using any of the following fields:

- First Name
- Last name
- Mailing Address
- City
- State
- ZIP Code
- Customer Email.

21. Am I required to complete the "Additional Description" fields associated with either "Service Requested" or "Action Taken"?

Answer: Use of the "Additional Description" field is required only when "Other" is selected in the "Contact Method" or "Action Taken" fields. Employees may opt to use the "Additional Description" fields whenever necessary to further document the benefit or service requested, or the action taken.

22. Who should I issue the RFS to if the request is made on behalf of an entity?

Answer: The RFS should be issued to the individual representing the entity, and the name of the entity should be entered in the optional "Business Entity" field.

23. **How should RFS be handled if multiple entity members were present at the time the benefit or service was requested?**

    Answer: Select one member whose first and last name will be entered on the input screen. It may be the name of the entity member that typically represents the entity, or the member selected by the entity. The name of the entity must be entered in the optional "Business Entity" field, and the names of the additional entity members present at the time the benefit or service was requested should be documented in the "Service Request Additional Description" field.

24. **Should I issue an RFS if a Civil Rights complaint is received?**

    Answer: Yes, employees should follow their Agency guidance regarding the procedure for forwarding the complaint to the Civil Rights staff and should issue an RFS using webRFS "Other" buttons, and "Additional Description" fields to document the service requested and action taken.

B. FSA Specific Questions

1. **Why is it necessary to track both applications requested and applications received for FLP, but only applications requested for FP?**

    Answer: Many of the class action lawsuits have been linked primarily to the loan application process. Therefore, Phase I provides for more detailed tracking of programs subject to Equal Credit Opportunity Act (ECOA), such as when either FLP or FSFL applications are requested or received. This policy will be further evaluated in the future.

2. **Am I required to provide an RFS if a benefit or service is requested at an outreach event, such as a booth at the County Fair?**

    Answer: No. During Phase I, an RFS is only required when the benefit is requested, in person, at the Service Center, or by mailing, e-mailing, or faxing a request to the Service Center.

3. **Will I still be required to provide FSA-2303 when an incomplete FLP direct loan application is received as required by 3-FLP, subparagraph 45 B, if I have provided an RFS?**

    Answer: The Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs is currently evaluating options to consolidate existing notification requirements to minimize the impact of webRFS implementation.

4. **Does the RFS eliminate the need to send incomplete and complete application, or eligibility letters to FLP direct loan applicants?**

   Answer: No, RFS does not replace any official form or correspondence currently required in FLP directives.

5. **If I receive a written request for an FLP direct loan application, can I include the RFS in the mailing with 3-FLP, Exhibit 5, and the application package?**

   Answer: Yes, both RFS and Exhibit 5, along with the application package, can be provided at the same time, either in person, or by mail.

6. **If a producer requests a change to their address, are both RFS and AD-2047 required?**

   Answer: No. A copy of AD-2047 should be provided to the customer in lieu of RFS.

7. **When will 1-CM be revised to remove the reference to AD-2088?**

   Answer: An amendment to 1-CM, addressing the use of webRFS, will be issued by the end of the calendar year.

8. **Where do I find the paper version of the webRFS input screen that is to be used when weRFS is unavailable due to connectivity issues?**

   Answer: As directed in General Question #3, each FSA, NRCS, and RD Service Center location must maintain copies of the paper version of their input screen for manual completion of an RFS if webRFS is unavailable. Paper versions of FSA's input screen are available for printing on the DAFO Training Website at **http://intranet.fsa.usda.gov/fsatraining**. Whenever a manual RFS is completed, the original copy will be provided to the customer and a copy must be maintained by the Agency and entered in webRFS once the system becomes available. An entry must be made in the "Action Taken Addition Description" field indicating the receipt was provided manually. A copy of the receipt from webRFS does not have to be provided to the customer; however, the appropriate box should be selected to accurately reflect how the manual RFS was provided to the customer.

C. NRCS Specific Questions

1. **If tool is housed in USDA Connect, it may be difficult to find it quickly, especially for people who don't use Connect on a regular basis. Is there some way to add it to the header bar (maybe next to My OCIO)?**

   Answer: The webRFS tool on USDA Connect can be saved as a favorite in your web browser, or as an additional homepage to make it easier to locate the tool.

2. **If you run a search by State and do not add in service center, will it pull up results from all States?**

   Answer: Yes, to run the "Search" function, the user should enter at least one of the search criteria to narrow the search. The more data you enter the narrower the search and the more limited information you will get as a result of the search.

3. **Will the web based tool be much like Protracts in that all is well on the east coast for accessing the tool during the morning hours, but in the afternoon access will be sporadic when the west coast users are online?**

   Answer: The webRFS tool will be a national and multi-agency tool, so there will be many users accessing the tool at any time. The difference from ProTracts is that the webRFS tool is a database that only captures and stores data. WebRFS does not connect to other NRCS or USDA business tools so the tool should not be impacted by the volume of users. Any issues identified in access or speed will be addressed in a future phase.

4. **If you make a mistake and have already submitted the receipt, can you edit the saved receipt or just have to create a new one?**

   Answer: You would need to create a new receipt.

5. **Can you perform the search using wild cards?**

   Answer: No, the search function does not allow the use of wild cards.

6. **Will the HTML attachment be blocked by some user's e-mail firewalls or antivirus?**

   Answer: The e-mail attachment was tested on various public/private e-mail services and there were no errors. **If** errors are identified they will be addressed to ensure that customers are able to receive the attachment by e-mail.

7. **As we use the receipt and as more programs become available through the Farm Bill will additional options be added?**

   Answer: Yes, the options for programs and services offered in webRFS will grow and change as necessary to fit our business and the customers' needs.

8. **In the County Office we may not always be able to load the receipt while the producer is here; do we have the option to load it after the producer leaves?**

   Answer: Yes, although the ideal answer is to provide the receipt at the time of service, the option is available for a receipt to be generated after the service is provided.

9. **Do text messages count as telephone calls or as e-mails?**

   Answer: For Phase One of Receipt for Service, text messages are counted as telephone calls and thus do not require a receipt. Once the level of service involves e-mails then receipts should be issued.

10. **A lot of times a telephone request will lead to an e-mail contact. For example, a person may call with a soils question; we may then e-mail them a soils report, and then answer follow up questions. When in the process do we need to provide a receipt?**

    Answer: When the service or communication moves to e-mails that is the time to begin providing a receipt.

D. RD Specific Questions

1. **What RD programs are included in the webRFS?**

   Answer: The following programs are included in webRFS:

   - Farm Labor Housing Loan and Grant Program
   - Rural Energy for America Program
   - Small, Socially Disadvantaged Producer Grant Program
   - Value Added Producer Grant Program.

2. **Can we use webRFS to provide an RFS for RD programs other than the Farm Labor Housing Loan and Grant Program, Rural Energy for America Program Small, Socially Disadvantaged Producer Grant Program, and Value Added Producer Grant Program?**

   Answer: Yes. While the 2014 Farm Bill only requires RD to provide an RFS to current or prospective agricultural producers and landowners that fall under these four (4) RD programs; any customer who wants a receipt should receive one. There is an option in webRFS that allows you to capture other programs if a customer explicitly asks for a receipt – select 'other' and write out details that accurately describe the interaction with the customer.

3. **In general, when should we provide an RFS?**

   Answer: If you are meeting with an individual agricultural producer or producer entity or landowner at your office or at another location, you should provide an RFS that includes the date of the meeting, the subject of the meeting, any action taken and recommendations to the customer(s).

4. **Under what circumstances would we not provide an RFS to a customer**?

   Answer: You would not provide a receipt to a customer that you merely direct to another USDA Agency co-located in your office or who attends an outreach event where RD is giving a presentation to a group of people. In addition, a receipt is not required at every step in the loan or grant assistance process. RD has standard operating procedures for each program documenting actions taken through the processing and servicing of loan and grant applications and issuing a receipt for every step would be duplicative.

5. **Do we need to provide an RFS to a customer who submits an application for assistance?**

   Answer: Yes. Paper applications submitted in person, via fax, or via e-mail should be logged in via webRFS and the customer should receive a receipt. Confirmation of applications received electronically through e-mail can be sent via e-mail and customers submitting an application via a web-based portal such as grants.gov will automatically receive a receipt so a webRFS receipt is not needed

6. **Do all RD employees have to use webRFS?**

   Answer: All RD employees are required to take the training and issue an RFS if a customer seeks information about the Farm Labor Housing Loan and Grant Program, the Rural Energy for America Program, the Small, Socially Disadvantaged Producer Grant Program, or the Value Added Producer Grant Program.

7. **Do we still utilize the RD Contacts database for tracking our outreach meetings and events**?

   Answer: Yes, webRFS does not replace the RD Contacts database and employees must utilize the database to capture meetings and events to document their outreach metrics for program performance.