

For: State and County Offices

2004 County Committee (COC) Nomination and Election

Approved by: Deputy Administrator, Field Operations



1 Overview

A Background

The Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 requires the Secretary to solicit and accept nominations for FSA COC member positions from organizations representing the interests of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers (SDA's).

It has been concluded that under-representation of minorities and females on COC's may prevent socially disadvantaged producers from receiving information about election, program, and other available services.

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 requires the Secretary to prepare a report and make available to the public the participation rate of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers according to race, ethnicity, and gender.

B Purpose

This notice instructs STC's, COC's, State Office personnel responsible for COC elections, and Outreach Coordinators to:

- begin accepting nominations for the 2004 COC election
- actively seek members of SDA groups as nominees for the COC elections
- make COC nomination and election information available to local producers using all means possible to include, but not limited to, FSA county or area newsletters, local and minority-oriented newspapers, radio, and television stations
- publicize the Internet site and inform the public that nomination forms and fact sheets are available at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/publications/elections/>

Disposal Date May 1, 2005	Distribution State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices
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1 Overview (Continued)

B Purpose (Continued)

- conduct informational meetings to promote and explain the COC nomination and election process
- be informed of changes in the 2004 COC election calendar according to Exhibit 1
- be informed about COC election processes.

C Definition of Socially Disadvantaged Group and Member

Socially disadvantaged group means a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities.

Socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher is a farmer or rancher who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group.

D Socially Disadvantaged Group Representation on COC's

To ensure representation of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers on COC's, FSA requires County Offices and COC's to do the following:

- actively solicit and accept nominations from producers and groups representing socially disadvantaged producers in the county or area before the close of the nomination period
- provide SDA organizations with specific information about the process and opportunity to nominate during the nomination period

Note: Record in COC minutes the names of organizations and what information was provided.

- place informational posters and fact sheets in public facilities and churches or businesses serving SDA members.

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1 Overview (Continued)

E Publicizing Elections

FSA National, State, and County Offices shall publicize COC nomination and election procedures and:

- provide COC fact sheets and posters to producer organizations, community-based organizations, tribal governments, local CSREES offices, SDA organizations, and land grant institutions
- ensure that all producers are adequately and timely informed about COC nomination and election procedures

Note: County Offices and COC's shall begin COC election outreach activities immediately.

- place special emphasis on providing COC nomination and election information to socially disadvantaged groups representing minority and female farmers and ranchers.

2 Action

A SED, STC, and Outreach Coordinator Action

SED's and STC's shall ensure that all State and local level organizations whose members include SDA individuals are contacted and made aware of the upcoming COC nominations and elections.

The SED, in consultation with the State Office Outreach Coordinator or designee, shall require each COC to develop and submit to SED **by July 30, 2004**, a plan to ensure that all producers are adequately informed of COC nomination and election processes.

Note: Each county plan shall include methods for targeting SDA's.

State Outreach Coordinators shall:

- take an active role in contacting SDA leaders and providing them COC nomination and election information
- ensure that SDA representatives fully understand the responsibilities of COC's and the COC nomination and election process
- cooperate with and provide outreach assistance to County Offices and COC's
- compile a list of organizations contacted and provide the list to DAFO before the end of the nomination period.

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2 Action (Continued)

B COC Action

COC's, with the assistance of CED's and County Office staff, shall immediately develop a plan to inform all producers, with special emphasis on SDA's, of:

- COC nomination and election processes
- specific actions that the County Office will take to ensure that:
 - each minority, female, and other under-represented group in the county is contacted and informed of the COC nomination and election process
 - COC nomination forms and assistance are available for all producers
 - all eligible voters are recorded correctly in the automated system.

It is critical to FSA's current and future well-being that COC's and employees ensure that all producers have an equal opportunity to be a candidate for COC. COC's shall inform employees to:

- listen to producers' concerns and suggestions
- explain FSA programs and missions
- develop good working relationships with all producers
- place emphasis on obtaining SDA nominees.

The nomination of eligible producers is the primary method used to obtain candidates for COC elections. COC's are responsible for ensuring that all producers are knowledgeable about the nomination process for COC positions.

COC's shall begin immediately to solicit candidates for COC. COC's should actively solicit nominees before the close of the nomination period on September 3, 2004. Names will not be added to ballots after the close of the nomination period. It is the COC and County Office's responsibility to make every effort possible to obtain nominees **before** the close of the nomination period to help ensure that alternates will be available for COC.

2 Action (Continued)

C CED Action

CED's shall:

- take an active role in contacting leaders of socially disadvantaged groups to solicit nominations and ensure that these groups fully understand the role of COC's
- be available to meet with socially disadvantaged groups to fully explain the COC nomination and election procedures
- locally reproduce the nomination forms, fact sheets, and posters from the FSA internet at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/publications/elections/> and post them in public locations in the county or area
- conduct informational meetings to explain the COC nomination and election process to the public
- work with the COC to ensure that information and meetings are thoroughly publicized through all available means.

D Nominations and Slate

For COC elections, there is no required minimum number of eligible nominees for the COC slate, unless **no** FSA-669A's are received for the local administrative area(s) (LAA's) conducting an election. COC's are required to complete a slate of nominees only if no nominations are received.

If no nominations are received, COC's shall solicit and obtain nominations from **at least 3** interested and willing candidates to complete the slate. At least 1 nominee must be of a socially disadvantaged group. COC's shall solicit and include nominees who represent the interests of SDA groups. COC's must verify that each individual nominated by COC to fill a slate is willing to serve and meets all eligible requirements. Nominees must certify willingness to serve by signing FSA-669A.

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2 Action (Continued)

E Ballot Mailing

Ballots will be mailed to eligible voters **by November 8, 2004**, by a selected contractor. County Offices shall prepare a supply of manually created ballots (FSA-669B) to provide to anyone not on a mailing list or for walk-in voters. County Offices shall also prepare a supply of pre-addressed return envelopes (FSA-73 and FSA-73E) bearing the mailing address of the voting site to provide with the manually created ballots.

FSA-669B is available from the FFAS Employee Forms site accessible from <http://intranet.fsa.usda.gov>.

F Contact

If there are questions about this notice, contact 1 of the following individuals:

- Ken Nagel, 202-720-7890, Ken.Nagel@wdc.usda.gov
- Deborah Johnson, 202-720-0067, Deborah.Johnson@wdc.usda.gov
- Zina Riley, 202-720-0258, zina.riley@wdc.usda.gov

FSA County Committee Election Calendar

Date	Activity
May 1, 2004	<p>COC to complete review of LAA boundaries and send changes to STC.</p> <p>Note: COC shall document in the minutes the review and determinations concerning LAA boundaries.</p>
June 30, 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure accuracy of LAA or LAA’s holding election. • Print eligible voters list to verify accuracy. Remove deceased voters and add eligible voters to the county name and address file. Ensure all eligible voters are associated with the correct county and correct LAA. <p>Note: COC shall review eligible voters list for accuracy and record in COC minutes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COC’s and County Offices begin outreach activities to try to acquire nominees and publicize the nomination and election process. • STC to complete review of COC LAA boundary changes and approve by July 15, 2004. <p>Note: STC shall document in the minutes the review and determinations concerning LAA boundaries.</p>
June 28-July 9, 2004	<p>Correct eligible voters list in System 36.</p>
July 15, 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KC-ADC will provide County Offices with a web-based copy of their eligible voters list for cross-check of accuracy; make any changes in System 36. Web site address provided at a later date. • Issue public notice of election and LAA boundaries.
July 30, 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure nomination forms are available at the County Office. • Make eligible voters list available to the public. Provide copies to anyone requesting a list of eligible voters. • COC final date to submit plan to SED to ensure that all producers are adequately informed of COC nominations and elections.
September 3, 2004	<p>Final date to accept nomination forms or for forms to be postmarked.</p>
September 10, 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review nominations. • Complete slates of candidates. • Final date for mailing letter of congratulations to nominees.
September 17-October 1, 2004	<p>Final date for counties to enter nominee data in the COC E-Authentication application.</p>

FSA County Committee Election Calendar (Continued)

Date	Activity
October 8, 2004	Consolidated ballot data to contractor by KC-ADC.
November 8, 2004	Final date for contractor to mail ballots.
November 16, 2004	Final date for contractor to mail reminder post cards.
December 6, 2004	Final date for voters to return completed ballots or for ballots to be postmarked.
December 13, 2004	Final date for counting ballots.
December 13-20, 2004	Counties shall enter election data in COC Election Reporting E-Authentication application.
December 16, 2004	Final date for counties to enter data to COC E-Authentication application for make-up elections.
December 23, 2004	Final date for State Office to transmit data to KC-ADC (only if still on System 36)/Enter to E-Authentication application.
December 28, 2004	KC-ADC to consolidate make-up election ballot data for contractor.
January 10, 2005	KC-ADC to send initial election report to DAFO.
January 10, 2005	Final date for contractor to mail make-up election ballots.
January 31, 2005	Final date for voters to return completed make-up election ballots or ballots to be postmarked.
February 4, 2005	Final date for counting make-up election ballots.
February 10, 2005	Final date to enter make-up election data to E-Authentication application.
February 24, 2005	KC-ADC to send final report to DAFO.