

For: State and County Offices

2009 COC Nomination and Election

Approved by: Acting Deputy Administrator, Field Operations



1 Overview

A Background

Significant emphasis has been placed upon improving diversity on COC's as stressed in current and past Farm Bills. FSA is working diligently to increase the number of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers nominated for COC seats. States and counties have actively and successfully been able to place many more socially disadvantaged candidates' names on ballots. These efforts must be continued and expanded to ensure that socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers have every opportunity to be elected to FSA COC's.

As FSA strives for increased diversity on COC's, FSA must also conduct efforts to encourage voters to look toward beginning farmers and ranchers as a resource for nominees for COC elections. This year and in all subsequent years, COC's and County Office employees must reach out to beginning farmers and ranchers with information and encouragement to run for a seat on COC.

Publicity and outreach efforts must be directed toward socially disadvantaged and beginning, as well as, traditional farmers and ranchers. Every means must be exercised to contact community based organizations whose members consist of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, as these organizations have the opportunity to nominate farmers and ranchers for candidacy to COC's. Beginning farmer contacts should include, but not be limited to, County Extension educators and high school and college instructors.

Not only must COC's and County Office employees encourage nominations, but must also strongly encourage all voters to return their ballots after having selected the candidate of their choice. For many years, approximately only 17 percent of all ballots mailed have been voted and returned. On average, 2 million ballots are mailed annually, so there is great opportunity for a candidate to be elected if only a small percentage increase in voted and returned ballots is realized.

Disposal Date	Distribution
April 1, 2010	State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices

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1 Overview (Continued)

B Purpose

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

- continue to use procedure issued in the "Uniform Guidelines for Conducting Farm Service Agency County Committee Elections" found on the FSA Internet at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA> under the "News & Events" tab, and in 15-AO, Exhibit 4
- **ensure that the correct local administrative area (LAA's) are identified for the 2009 election**

Note: Every year makeup or special elections are necessary because of elections held in wrong LAA's.

- ensure that County Offices begin anytime accepting FSA-669A's for 2009 COC elections

Note: FSA-669's may be accepted any time before the opening of the nomination period.

- actively seek producers who are members of socially disadvantaged groups as nominees for COC elections
- make COC nomination and election information available to organizations representing socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and all local producers using all means possible including, but not limited to, FSA county or area newsletters, local and minority-oriented newspapers, and radio and television stations
- actively seek beginning farmer and rancher nominees
- publicize the Internet site and inform the public that FSA-669A's and fact sheets are found at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA> under the "News & Events" tab

Notes: FSA-669A's are:

- also available at <http://intranet.fsa.usda.gov/FSA>
- available in Spanish.
- conduct informational meetings with socially disadvantaged groups, beginning farmer or rancher groups, and all producers to promote and explain the COC nomination and election processes

Note: Informational meetings should be conducted year round, with emphasis on nominations shortly before and during the nomination period.

- document all COC outreach activities in the Outreach Tracking Information System (OTIS)

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1 Overview (Continued)

B Purpose (Continued)

- notify DAFO contacts if no nominations are received by any County Office
- be knowledgeable about COC election process
- be informed of changes in the 2009 COC election calendar (see Exhibit 1).

C Definitions

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.

Beginning farmer or rancher is an individual who:

- has **not** operated a farm for more than 10 years
- will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm.

D Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher Representation on COC's

To increase 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 FSA-669A's from producers and groups representing socially disadvantaged producers in the county or COC jurisdiction before the close of the nomination period
- provide organizations representing socially disadvantaged groups with detailed information about the process and opportunity to nominate candidates during the nomination period

Notes: Record, in COC minutes and OTIS, the names of socially disadvantaged groups contacted and information that was provided to socially disadvantaged groups.

Socially disadvantaged groups may file FSA-669A's.

- place informational posters and fact sheets in public facilities, churches, and businesses serving socially disadvantaged producers.

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1 Overview (Continued)

E Beginning Farmer or Rancher Representation on COC's

To encourage representation of beginning farmers and ranchers on COC's, FSA **requires** County Offices and COC's to:

- actively solicit FSA-669's from producers considered beginning farmers or ranchers
- provide organizations whose membership is made up of or includes beginning farmers and ranchers with detailed information about the COC election process
- provide high schools and colleges with informational posters and fact sheets.

F 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, organizations representing socially disadvantaged groups, young farmer organizations, and land grant institutions
- ensure that all producers are adequately and timely informed about COC nomination and election procedures including all nomination and election deadlines and dates

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

- document all activities conducted to promote and publicize COC elections in OTIS using FSA program code "COC Elections Outreach"
- place special emphasis on providing COC nomination and election information to socially disadvantaged groups representing minority and female farmers and ranchers and organizations that have beginning farmers as members
- post maps of the COC jurisdiction that clearly identify LAA boundaries and LAA's conducting an election in the Service Center and in public locations.

Note: Include LAA's, FSA-669A's, and election information in at least 1 FSA county newsletter or press release before the opening of the nomination period.

2 Action

A SED, STC, and State Outreach Coordinator Action

SED's and STC's shall ensure that all State and local level organizations whose members include socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers are contacted and made aware of the upcoming COC nominations and elections. Extension offices and local groups with beginning farmers and ranchers shall be provided COC nomination and election information.

SED's, in consultation with State Outreach Coordinators or designees, shall require each COC to develop and submit to SED through OTIS, **by June 15, 2009**, a plan to ensure that all producers are adequately informed of the COC nomination and election processes. These planned events, including any Partner Organizations involved, shall be entered into OTIS at the county level. Event types to be used for COC outreach may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- meetings
- conferences
- broadcast and print media
- newsletters, etc.

Note: Each county plan shall include methods for targeting socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

State Outreach Coordinators shall:

- take an active role in contacting representatives of socially disadvantaged groups and providing COC nomination and election information
- ensure that representatives of socially disadvantaged groups fully understand the responsibilities of COC's and COC nomination and election processes
- cooperate with and provide outreach assistance to County Offices and COC's
- ensure County Offices enter all planned and unplanned events for COC outreach in OTIS
- ensure that each county has entered all Partner Organizations contacted in OTIS no later than **August 3, 2009**

Note: Each Partner Organization only needs to be listed once, even if contacted by multiple counties.

- provide the Partner Organizations and Contacts Report and COC Outreach Report from OTIS to SED.

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2 Action (Continued)

B COC Action

Upon issuing this notice, COC's, with the assistance of CED's and County Office staff, shall immediately develop an election outreach plan and inform all producers of the upcoming COC nomination and election processes and dates.

COC's shall take specific actions to ensure that:

- minority and female organizations in the COC jurisdiction are contacted and informed of the COC nomination and election processes
- organizations whose membership include beginning farmers and ranchers are provided nomination and election information
- FSA-669A's are available for all producers in COC's jurisdiction
- all eligible voters are recorded correctly in Service Center Information Management System (SCIMS) and the producer election data file
- all eligible voters in LAA's conducting elections are notified of nomination and election dates and procedure.

COC's and/or employees shall:

- explain the duties and eligibility requirements of being a COC member to producers
- place emphasis on obtaining socially disadvantaged and beginning farmer or rancher nominees
- enter planned or unplanned events for COC outreach in OTIS
- enter all Partner Organizations contacted in OTIS, if not already entered
- make every effort to obtain nominees **before** the close of the nomination period, **August 3, 2009**, to help ensure that alternates will be available for COC's.

Note: See Part D if there are no nominees for COC.

The nomination of eligible producers is the 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.

Candidate **names will not be added by COC's to FSA-669's after August 3, 2009**, unless instructed by DAFO.

2 Action (Continued)

C CED Action

CED's shall:

- **review the current COC Member Information Report with COC's to ensure that the correct LAA is identified for holding an election in 2009**
- take an active role in contacting representatives of socially disadvantaged groups to solicit nominations and ensure that these groups fully understand COC's role
- be available to meet with socially disadvantaged farmer and rancher groups and groups whose membership include beginning farmers to fully explain COC nomination and election procedures
- locally reproduce FSA-669A's, fact sheets, and posters from FSA's Internet at **<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA>** under the "News & Events" tab and post them in public locations in COC's jurisdiction
- include FSA-669A's and describe LAA's holding elections in at least 1 newsletter that is sent to every producer in COC's jurisdiction
- conduct informational meetings to explain the COC nomination and election processes to the public
- work with COC's to ensure that information and meetings are thoroughly publicized through all available means
- **ensure that all nominees listed on FSA-593 are recorded in SCIMS as individuals, flagged eligible to vote, and placed in the correct COC/LAA in the producer election data file according to 15-AO, subparagraph 109 C.**

Note: Particular attention **must** be paid to nominees who are members of entities such as trusts, estates, corporations, limited partnerships, and limited liability corporations. Only the eligible voting member may be a candidate. This individual **must** have an individual profile record established in SCIMS according to 15-AO, subparagraph 77 D.

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2 Action (Continued)

D FSA-669A's and COC Slate

Individuals who want to file FSA-669A's may nominate themselves or other eligible candidates. Eligible candidates may be nominated by organizations representing socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, or by any eligible producer whose records are administered in the same COC jurisdiction

There is **no** required minimum number of eligible nominees for COC's slate, unless **no** FSA-669A's are filed for LAA's conducting elections. A separate FSA-669A **must** be used for each individual nomination. Names shall **not** be added to COC slates after the nomination period closes, if at least 1 candidate files an FSA-669A.

There must be at least 1 candidate in each LAA holding an election. However, it is **very important** to **obtain more than 1 nominee** so that an alternate is available.

Follow this table, if no valid FSA-669A's are filed for a particular LAA election.

IF...	THEN notify...
CED	the State Office by August 6, 2009 .
State Office	DAFO immediately, by e-mail to kenneth.nagel@wdc.usda.gov and deborah.johnson@wdc.usda.gov .
DAFO	the Secretary's Office by August 14, 2009 .

The Uniform Guidelines for COC election require the following process when **no** FSA-669A's are filed:

- the Secretary may nominate up to 2 individuals for the COC slate

Note: If the Secretary chooses not to exercise this authority, STC may nominate 2 individuals. If the Secretary only nominates 1 individual, STC may nominate up to 1 individual for the slate. If there are less than 2 nominees on the slate after the Secretary and STC determine whether to make any nominations, COC shall ensure that the slate is filled with 2 nominees. One of the 2 nominees must be a farmer or rancher from a socially disadvantaged group. COC's must verify that each individual nominated by COC to fill a slate is willing to serve and meets all eligibility requirements.

- the Secretary may nominate an eligible socially disadvantaged producer to a slate regardless of whether FSA-669A has been filed.

Notes: A nomination by the Secretary may include the current advisor for COC. **An advisor must meet eligibility requirements to serve on COC.**

STC and COC shall keep detailed minutes of nomination determinations.

Nominees, whether self-nominated or nominated by another, must attest to their willingness to serve by signing FSA-669A. COC's must ensure that the nominee is eligible to serve as an individual in LAA conducting the election.

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2 Action (Continued)

E Mailing FSA-669B's

FSA-669B's will be mailed to eligible voters **no later than November 6, 2009**, by a selected vendor. County Offices **shall** prepare a supply of:

- locally created FSA-669B's to provide to voters not on an eligible voters list or for voters requesting FSA-669B's
- pre-addressed return FSA-73's with the mailing address of the voting site to provide with the locally created FSA-669B's
- FSA-73E's to provide with the locally created FSA-669B's.

FSA-669B's are available at <http://intranet.fsa.usda.gov>, under "Forms, Publications, and Supplies". FSA-73's and FSA-73E's may be ordered from the Kansas City Warehouse on FSA-159. **State and County Offices shall maintain a supply of FSA-73's and FSA 73E's.**

F Contacts

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

- Kenneth Nagel by either of the following:
 - e-mail at kenneth.nagel@wdc.usda.gov
 - telephone at 202-720-7890
- Deborah Johnson by either of the following:
 - e-mail to deborah.johnson@wdc.usda.gov
 - telephone at 202-720-0067.

COC Election Calendar

The following provides the 2009 COC election schedule.

2009 COC Election Schedule	
April 1, 2009	<p>COC's and County Offices will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that the correct LAA's are identified for holding an election in 2009 • complete review of LAA boundaries • send all LAA boundary determinations on FSA-582 to STC for approval. <p>Note: COC's shall document reviews and determinations of LAA boundaries in COC minutes.</p>
May 29, 2009	<p>STC's complete FSA-582 reviews, approve FSA-582's, and notify County Offices.</p> <p>Note: STC's shall document reviews and determinations about LAA boundaries in STC minutes.</p>
June 1, 2009	<p>COC's and County Offices will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review the Current COC Member Information Report to ensure accuracy of LAA's holding elections • review eligible voter lists and verify accuracy as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remove deceased voters names by changing the eligible to vote flag to "N" in the producer election data file on COC election web site • remove names of voters for whom no valid address can be obtained by changing the eligible to vote flag to "N" in the producer election data file on the COC election web site • ensure that there are no "Unknowns" on the eligible voter list by changing the eligible to vote flag to "N" • add eligible voters names by changing the eligible to vote flag to "Y" • ensure that all eligible voters are associated with the correct county and LAA <p>Note: The no mail flag is overridden for COC elections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • issue public notice of election and LAA boundaries. <p>Note: COC's and CED's review LAA's holding elections and eligible voter lists for accuracy and record their determinations in COC minutes.</p>

COC Election Calendar (Continued)

2009 COC Election Schedule	
June 15, 2009	<p>COC's and County Offices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase outreach activities to acquire nominees and fully publicize the nomination and election processes • complete and print eligible voters list • make eligible voter lists available to the public. <p>Note: County Offices shall ensure that a supply of FSA-73's and FSA-73E's is on hand.</p>
August 3, 2009	Final date for County Offices to receive FSA-669A's or for FSA-669A's to be postmarked. County Offices begin reviewing FSA-669A's.
August 7, 2009	<p>County Offices complete reviews of FSA-669A's for eligibility. Notify State Office if none received. STO shall notify DAFO no later than August 14, 2009.</p> <p>Note: If no FSA-669A's are received by COB August 3, 2009, COC's shall immediately begin the process of obtaining 2 willing nominees, 1 of whom must be an eligible SDA producer for the slate in the event the Secretary chooses not to exercise his authority to nominate.</p>
September 8, 2009	<p>COC's complete slates of nominees, if no FSA-669A's were received.</p> <p>County Offices ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each nominee is in SCIMS as an individual • SCIMS matches the race, ethnicity, and gender information on FSA-669A • the correct determination codes for race, ethnicity, and gender have been selected for each nominee in SCIMS <p>Note: If nominee has entered the race, ethnicity, and gender on FSA-669A, the determination codes in SCIMS shall show "Customer Declared".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each nominee is flagged eligible to vote, and in the correct COC/LAA in the producer election data file. <p>Final date for County Office to mail congratulation letters to nominees.</p>
September 14, 2009, to September 25, 2009	County Offices enter nominee and ballot data in COC Elections web site.
November 6, 2009	FSA-669B to be mailed by printing company to each producer on eligible voter lists for LAA's holding election.
November 20, 2009	Reminder postcards to be mailed by printing company.
December 7, 2009	Completed FSA-669B's to be returned to County Office or post-marked.
December 14, 2009	Final date for COC's and County Offices to count FSA-669B's.
December 8, 2009, to December 28, 2009	Elections web site available for County Offices to enter election results.