

For: State and County Offices

2011 COC Nomination and Election

Approved by: Deputy Administrator, Field Operations



1 Overview

A Background

COC elections provide farmers and ranchers the opportunity to represent producers in their community by running for a seat on FSA COC. All farmers and ranchers are encouraged to consider running for these seats.

Significant emphasis continues to be placed on improving diversity on COC's. FSA is working diligently to increase the number of SDA farmers and ranchers nominated for COC. States and counties have actively and successfully been able to place many more SDA candidates' names on ballots. These efforts must be continued and expanded to ensure that SDA farmers and ranchers have every opportunity for election to FSA COC's.

FSA must also work to encourage voters to look toward beginning farmers and ranchers as a source for nominees for COC elections. 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. Beginning farmer contacts should include, but not be limited to, County Extension educators and high school and college instructors.

Publicity and outreach efforts must be directed toward SDA and beginning, as well as, all farmers and ranchers. Every means must be used to contact organizations whose members consist of SDA farmers and ranchers, as these organizations have the opportunity to nominate farmers and ranchers for candidacy to COC's.

Not only must COC's and County Office employees encourage producers to submit nominations, they must also strongly encourage all voters to return ballots after having selected the candidate of their choice. Last year, only 13 percent of the ballots mailed were 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, 2012	State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices

Notice AO-1503

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:
 - **ensure that the correct LAA's are identified for the election**
Note: Every year special elections are necessary because of elections held in wrong LAA's, and other avoidable mistakes.
 - ensure that County Offices begin accepting FSA-669A's for COC elections
Note: FSA-669A's may be accepted any time before the opening of the nomination period.
 - be informed of:
 - changes in FSA-669A (Exhibit 1)
 - the 2011 COC election schedule (Exhibit 2)
- obsoletes Notice AO-1501 to provide the correct version of FSA-669A in Exhibit 1.

C SDA Farmer or Rancher Representation on COC's

SDA farmer, rancher, or agricultural producer is 1 of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of his or her identity as a member of the group without regard to his or her individual qualities. SDA groups are women, African Americans, American Indians, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders.

To increase representation of SDA 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 SDA producers in the COC jurisdiction before close of the nomination period
- provide organizations representing SDA groups with detailed information during the nomination period about the process and opportunity to nominate candidates during the nomination period

Notes: Record, in COC minutes **and** Outreach Tracking and Information System (OTIS), the names of SDA groups contacted and information that was provided to them.

Organizations representing SDA farmers and ranchers may file FSA-669A's.

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1 Overview (Continued)

C SDA Farmer or Rancher Representation on COC's (Continued)

- place informational posters and fact sheets in public buildings, churches, and businesses serving SDA producers.

D 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-669A'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.

E Publicizing Elections

FSA National, State, and County Offices shall:

- provide COC fact sheets and posters to producer organizations, community-based organizations, tribal governments, local National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) offices, organizations representing SDA groups, young farmer and rancher 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.

- place special emphasis on providing COC nomination and election information to SDA groups representing minority and female farmers and ranchers and organizations that have beginning farmers as members
- post maps that clearly identify LAA boundaries and LAA's conducting an election in the Service Center and in public locations

Note: Producers shall be informed of all election information, including LAA's holding an election and where to obtain FSA-669A's.

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1 Overview (Continued)

E Publicizing Elections (Continued)

- publicize:
 - the Internet web site and inform the public that FSA-669A's and fact sheets are available at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections>
- Note:** FSA-669A's are also available:
- at <http://intranet.fsa.usda.gov/FSA> (for employee access)
 - in Spanish.
- COC nomination and election information in newsletters, public service announcements, broadcast and print media, insertions with office mailings, or any other means of communication.

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 SDA farmers and ranchers are contacted and made aware of the upcoming COC nominations and elections. NIFA 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, 2011**, a plan to ensure that all producers are adequately informed of the COC nomination and election processes. These planned activities, including any Partner Organizations involved, shall be entered into OTIS at the county level. Activity types to be used for COC outreach may include, but are not limited to, the following:

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

Planned activities must specifically promote COC elections outside of the Service Center, and identify how elections will be promoted.

Note: Each county plan must include methods for targeting SDA farmers and ranchers.

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2 Action (Continued)

A SED, STC, and State Outreach Coordinator Action (Continued)

State Outreach Coordinators shall:

- take an active role in contacting representatives of SDA groups to provide COC nomination and election information
- ensure that representatives of SDA 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 that County Offices enter all meetings and conferences for COC election outreach in OTIS
- ensure that each county has entered all Partner Organizations contacted in OTIS no later than **August 1, 2011**

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.

B COC Action

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

COC's shall take specific actions to ensure that:

- **the correct LAA or LAA's is/are holding an election(s)**
- 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

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2 Action (Continued)

B COC Action (Continued)

- FSA-669A's are available for producers requesting a ballot in COC jurisdictions
- all eligible voters are recorded correctly in SCIMS and the producer election data file
- all eligible voters listed in LAA's conducting elections are notified of nomination and election dates and procedure
- deceased producers are marked not eligible to vote in the Producer Election data file on the COC Election web site.

COC's and/or employees shall:

- explain the duties and eligibility requirements of being a COC member to producers
- place emphasis on obtaining SDA and beginning farmer or rancher nominees
- enter meetings and conferences for COC election 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 1, 2011**, to help ensure that alternates will be available for COC's.

Note: Every COC election must have at least 1 nominee.

The nomination of eligible producers by voters or community based organizations is the only 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-669A's** after the end of the nomination period.

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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 2011**
- take an active role in contacting representatives of SDA groups to solicit nominations and ensure that these groups fully understand COC's role
- be available to meet with SDA 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/elections>** and post them in public locations in COC jurisdictions
- ensure that all producers are informed of all election information, including LAA's holding an election, and where to obtain FSA-669A's
- 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 deceased producers' names are removed from the eligible to vote list
- **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 given 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. Nominees must be on the ballot using their name only with no other business or entity identifier.

Example: John Smith, Jr. or Sue L. Smith are not to be entered as John Smith, Jr./DBA Smith Farms, or Sue L. Smith Farms.

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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 SDA farmers and ranchers, or by any eligible producer whose records are administered in the same COC jurisdiction.

FSA-669A:

- provides a signature block for individuals or organizations that are using the form to nominate an eligible candidate other than themselves

Note: It is the nominator's responsibility to obtain the nominee's certification and signature before returning FSA-669A to the County Office.

- includes a checkbox in the Nominee's Certification block to identify write-in candidates after election results are known.

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. If no FSA-669A's are received, see 15-AO, paragraph 108. 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 FSA-669A.

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

E Mailing FSA-669's

Name and address records of eligible voters in SCIMS and the COC Election web site are provided to the printing company by Kansas City. This database is used by the printer to mail FSA-669's and post cards to eligible voters. COC's and County Offices are responsible for ensuring that the information provided is correct. Changes made in FSA records after the data has been provided to the printing company will not be reflected in the name and address database used by the printer for both FSA-669's and post cards. The deadline for changes to be included in the data sent to the printing company is **September 28, 2011**.

FSA-669's will be mailed to eligible voters **no later than November 4, 2011**, by the printing company.

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2 Action (Continued)

F Contacts

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

- Barbara Boyd by:
 - e-mail to **barbara.boyd@wdc.usda.gov**
 - telephone at 202-720-7890

- Deborah Johnson by:
 - e-mail to **deborah.johnson@wdc.usda.gov**
 - telephone at 202-720-0067.

Example of FSA-669A

The following is an example of FSA-669A.

This form is available electronically. FSA-669A (03-31-11)	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE Farm Service Agency	Form Approved - OMB No. 0560-0229
<h3>NOMINATION FORM FOR COUNTY FSA COMMITTEE ELECTION</h3>		
<p>This form allows individuals to nominate themselves or any other person as a candidate. If additional forms are needed, this one may be copied or may be obtained at the County FSA Office or obtained electronically at http://www.sc.egov.usda.gov. Each form submitted must be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Limited to one nominee. B. Signed and dated by the nominee in Item 3. Nominee must sign if willing to have his/her name placed on the ballot and agrees to serve if elected. <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Note: Name shown on ballot will appear exactly the same as in Agency records.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> C. Delivered to the County FSA Office or postmarked no later than August 1, 2011. D. Signed and dated as a write-in candidate if elected as a member and willing to serve on the COC. <p>The County FSA Committee is responsible for reviewing each form to determine the eligibility of nominees. A person who is nominated on this form and is found ineligible will be so notified and have an opportunity to file a challenge.</p> <p>Persons nominated should actively participate in the operation of a farm or ranch and be well qualified for committee work. A producer is eligible to be a County FSA committee member if the producer resides in the Local Administrative Area (LAA) in which the election is to be held and is eligible to vote.</p> <p>This is a non-salary public service position. A small stipend is provided to offset expenses.</p> <p>Federal regulations may prohibit County FSA Committee members from holding certain positions in some farm, commodity, and political organizations if such positions pose a conflict of interest with FSA duties. The positions include functional offices such as president, vice president, secretary, or treasurer; and positions on boards or executive committees. Conflict of interest restrictions also apply to employees, operators, managers, and majority owners of tobacco warehouses. Questions concerning eligibility should be directed to the County FSA Office.</p> <p>A candidate has the option to request that all voted ballots for an individual county committee election be returned to the respective State Office in lieu of being returned to the county office. This request must be in writing and submitted to the local County Executive Director prior to the announced end of the nomination period.</p> <p>The duties of County FSA Committee members include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Administering farm program activities conducted by the County FSA Office. B. Informing farmers of the purpose and provisions of the FSA programs. C. Keeping the State FSA Committee informed of LAA conditions. D. Monitoring changes in farm programs. E. Participating in county meetings as necessary. F. Performing other duties as assigned by the State FSA Committee <p><small>The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all of its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).</small></p> <p><small>To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Stop 9410, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call toll-free at (866) 632-9992 (English) or (800) 877-8339 (TDD) or (866) 377-8642 (English Federal-relay) or (800) 845-6136 (Spanish Federal-relay). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.</small></p>		

Example of FSA-669A (Continued)

FSA-669A (03-31-11) Page 2		Form Approved - OMB No. 0560-0229	
FSA-669A (03-31-11)		U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE Farm Service Agency	
NOMINATION FORM FOR COUNTY FSA COMMITTEE ELECTION			
1. NAME OF NOMINEE (Type or Print Nominee's Full Name)		TO BE COMPLETED BY COUNTY FSA OFFICE	
2. ADDRESS OF NOMINEE		4. INITIALS OF EMPLOYEE RECEIVING FORM AND DATE RECEIVED	
		5. COUNTY	
3. NOMINEE'S CERTIFICATION: <i>I hereby agree to have my name placed on the ballot, that I will serve if elected, and if there is a conflict of interest, I will resign such position.</i> <input type="checkbox"/> I DO want to witness the settling of tied votes with another nominee. <input type="checkbox"/> I DO NOT want to witness the settling of tied votes with another nominee.		6. LAA	
		7. STATE	
3A. SIGNATURE OF NOMINEE		8. NOMINATOR'S CERTIFICATION: <i>If this nomination is by other than self, the following eligible voter or representative of a community based organization hereby nominates the afore-named person to be a candidate in the next County FSA Committee election for the county.</i>	
3B. DATE		8A. SIGNATURE OF NOMINATOR	
<input type="checkbox"/> Check here if nominee is a write-in candidate.		8B. DATE	
		(If the individual is self nominating, no signature is required).	
9. TO BE COMPLETED BY NOMINEE			
VOLUNTARY INFORMATION FOR MONITORING PURPOSES: The following information is requested by the Federal Government in order to monitor FSA's compliance with federal laws prohibiting discrimination against program participants on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, marital status, handicapped condition, or age. You are not required to furnish this information, but are encouraged to do so. This information will not be used in evaluating your nomination or to discriminate against you in any way.			
ETHNICITY		RACE (Choose as many boxes as applicable)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino		<input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaska Native	
<input type="checkbox"/> Not Hispanic or Latino		<input type="checkbox"/> Black or African-American	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Asian	
		<input type="checkbox"/> White	
		GENDER	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Male	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Female	
INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THIS FORM			
Complete the form as follows:			
ITEM 1 Type or Print the nominee's full name. The nominee must be:			
A. Eligible to vote in the designated County FSA Committee election.			
B. Eligible to hold the office of County FSA Committee member.			
C. Willing to serve if elected.			
ITEM 2 Enter the nominee's current address.			
ITEM 3 The nominee must check one of the boxes to indicate a preference regarding the settling of tied votes.			
ITEMS 3A & 3B The nominee must sign and date.			
ITEMS 8A & 8B The nominator must sign and date. (If the individual is self nominating, no signature is required.)			
ITEM 9 Completing this item is voluntary.			
ALL FORMS MUST BE RECEIVED IN THE COUNTY OFFICE OR POSTMARKED BY AUGUST 1, 2011.			
NOTE: The following statement is made in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 USC 552a - as amended): The authority for requesting the information identified on this form is the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Pub. L. 110-246). The information will be used to obtain nominees for election to the County FSA Committee. The information collected on this form may be disclosed to other Federal, State, Local government agencies, Tribal agencies, and nongovernmental entities that have been authorized access to the information by statute or regulation and/or as described in applicable Routine Uses identified in the System of Records Notice for County Personnel Records, USDA/FSA-6. Providing the requested information is voluntary. However, failure to furnish the requested information will result in a determination of ineligibility for nomination for election to the County FSA Committee.			
According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0560-0229. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 10 minutes per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. The provisions of appropriate criminal and civil fraud, privacy, and other statutes may be applicable to the information provided. RETURN THIS COMPLETED FORM TO YOUR COUNTY FSA OFFICE.			

2011 COC Election Schedule

The following provides the 2011 COC election schedule.

Date	Activity
April 1, 2011	<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 2011 by reviewing the current COC Member Information Report in the reports section of the COC Election web site and the FSA-668, Length of Service for Committee Members and Eligibility for COC to Hold Office • 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's up for election and LAA boundaries in COC minutes.</p>
May 27, 2011	<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, 2011	<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 the checkmark from the eligible to vote field in the Producer Election Data File for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • producers who are deceased • voters for whom no valid address can be obtained • any entries of "Unknowns" <p>Note: The "receive mail indicator" is overridden for COC elections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • add eligible voters names by adding a checkmark to the eligible to vote field in the Producer Election Data File • ensure that all eligible voters are associated with the correct COC and LAA • issue public notice of election and LAA boundaries. <p>Note: COC's and CED's shall review LAA's holding elections and eligible voter lists for accuracy and record their determinations in COC minutes.</p>

2011 COC Election Schedule (Continued)

Date	Activity
June 15, 2011	<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.
August 1, 2011	<p>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.</p>
September 7, 2011	<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 (first name, possibly middle initial, last name only, no entities or DBA's) • 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 be updated accordingly and 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 1, 2011, to September 23, 2011	<p>County Offices enter nominee and ballot data in COC Elections web site. State Offices shall monitor closely to ensure that all elections are entered timely.</p>
September 28, 2011	<p>Deadline for name and address changes to be included in data sent to printing company.</p>
November 4, 2011	<p>FSA-669 to be mailed by printing company to each producer on eligible voter lists for LAA's holding election.</p>
November 18, 2011	<p>Reminder postcards to be mailed by printing company.</p>
December 5, 2011	<p>Completed FSA-669A's or FSA-669B's to be returned to County Office or post-marked.</p>
December 12, 2011	<p>Final date for COC's and County Offices to count FSA-669B's.</p>
December 1, 2011, to December 30, 2011	<p>Elections web site available for County Offices to enter election results. County Offices enter election results.</p>