UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Farm Service Agency
Washington, DC 20250

For: FSA Employees

Outreach Tracking and Information System (OTIS)

Approved by: Deputy Administrator, Field Operations

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1 Overview

A Background

OTIS 3.0 serves as FSA's primary means for measuring outreach performance based on data reported.

FSA is required to conduct outreach, see subparagraph E for definition, activities to farm and ranch advocacy groups, with special emphasis on organizations that support SDA agriculture producers. Based on legislative and OIG mandates, outreach was elevated as a **priority** for all FSA offices.

B Purpose

This notice provides:

- guidance to assist State and County Offices with planning, recording, funding, executing, and reporting SDA (targeted) and general outreach activities in FY 2012 when using **OTIS 3.0**

- guidance for using targeted and general outreach allotments

- an explanation of the policy and procedures for managing annual State allotments for targeted and general outreach

- guidance for developing plans and processing payment for outreach events and activities planned that will conform to FSA's national outreach goals, priorities, and outcomes.

Disposal Date	Distribution
August 1, 2012	All FSA employees; State Offices relay to County Offices

1   Overview (Continued)

C   Outreach Means Test

To determine whether an activity being considered is outreach oriented, the following conditions must apply:

- activity must take place outside the FSA office and reach more than 1 person, unless the 1 person is representing a large body or group, such as community based organization's staff or leadership

- activity will reach SDA or agriculture groups that may have **limited or no past exposure to FSA programs**.

D   Using OTIS

OTIS is an Intranet software application that is used for managing, tracking, and reporting outreach activity information at national, State, and county levels. OTIS users include State Outreach Coordinators (SOC's), County Office Outreach Coordinators (COOC's), National Office users, and report users, as follows:

- COOC's can:

  - enter into OTIS, County Office-level outreach activities scheduled within their County Offices

  - add activity results into OTIS after the activity has concluded

  - modify, delete, or add clarification comments about County Office-level activities

  - manage relationship with partner organizations

  - review and become familiar with State Strategic Outreach Plan (SOP) goals and objectives

  - generate reports

  - conduct outreach activities that fit the means test according to subparagraph C

- SOC's can:

  - manage the Statewide achievement of State goals and objectives

  - add County Office-level and State-level activity plans for outreach activities that take place in multiple counties or multiple County Office areas

  - add activity results after the activity has concluded

1   Overview (Continued)

D   Using OTIS (Continued)

- develop and certify SOP's

- manage relationships with partner organizations

- review State outreach

- generate reports

- National Office users can:

  - add outreach activity plans for national or regional activities

  - add activity results for national activities

  - assist State Offices in the development of, and approve SOP's

  - manage overall allotments issued to States through BU notices

  - monitor/oversee outreach activity plans to ensure accuracy

  - provide technical assistance to State and County Offices in developing activity plans that are correct and complete

  - view activity details for all State and County Offices

  - oversee the achievement of national goals and review State goals

  - manage relationships with regional and national partner organizations

  - generate reports in response to Departmental, Congressional, and Executive agency requests

- report users can generate reports.

1   Overview (Continued)

E   OTIS Screen Examples

The following are examples of OTIS screens that can be viewed by FSA offices with State-level or National-level OTIS access.

F   Outreach Definitions

The following are definitions used when discussing outreach:

- <u>audiences</u> mean FSA customers or potential customers and interested parties that are attending or being affected by an outreach activity

- <u>bona fide need</u> means a reason defined, in writing, by a partner organization that states why funds from one FY are needed to pay for outreach costs incurred for activities that take place/occur in the next FY

- <u>broadcast media</u> means a resource to deliver a message or information using radio, television, or Internet

1   Overview (Continued)

    F   Outreach Definitions (Continued)

- conferences mean organized or planned functions with defined topics or themes lasting for 1 or more days in duration

- cost items mean itemized costs for an outreach event broken down by item, such as rental of rooms, chairs, tables, audiovisual services, printing of meeting or conference materials, use of a FAX machine and transmittal, booth space rental, registration fees, and workshop registration, etc.

- community based organization (CBO) means a nonprofit group that operates within a single region of a State or within a local community

  Note: May operate independently or as a subset of larger nonprofits and be funded through Federal, State, and foundation sources and internal program income. Some operate on a voluntary basis while others retain large staff and multiple offices. Some are formally incorporated, guided by a written strategic plan developed by a representative board of directors, who are functionally supported by a manager or executive director and paid staff. CBO's may include community-service and action, health, educational, advocacy, personal growth and improvement, social welfare, and self-help for the disadvantaged.

- direct or e-mail means traditional postal or electronic mailing of information, brochures, posters, fact sheets, etc., made to a specific set of producers, such as the producers in a particular LAA, or to partner organizations, farm-related businesses, or other interested parties

  Note: This differs from a newsletter that is sent to **all** producers, who are coded to receive mail, listed in SCIMS as the customers of a County Office.

- exhibit means a display or exposition that showcases FSA programs and services available for potential and existing customers

- fairs mean public promotional events, such as State and county fairs/agriculture shows, where agriculture-oriented activities are scheduled

- farm shows means public promotional events generally sponsored by the agribusiness community or commercial entity

- field days mean demonstrations or farm/agribusiness tours where new, innovative, or quality agriculture practices that can be supported by FSA programs are presented

1   Overview (Continued)

F   Outreach Definitions (Continued)

- general outreach efforts mean public events and activities that serve the public at large, **without** emphasis or focus on a special population or group

    Notes: A **broad mix** of race, ethnicity, and gender shall be present for the activity to fit the general definition.

    General outreach partners or sponsors include participating organizations that may be local civic, advocacy, or community-based organizations with a mission that includes the advancement of agriculture by expanding access to FSA programs.

- meeting means a gathering that has a defined objective exclusively designed and presented to reach an identified audience

- newsletters mean a method used by State and County Offices to provide timely FSA program information such as signup, elections, etc.

    Note: Newsletters are sent to all producers and other interested parties listed in the SCIMS database for a particular County Office, and provide information on multiple FSA programs in each issue.

- observe means FSA staff attending an event or activity as an official of FSA, but not as a presenter

- outreach means activities planned for the purpose of raising awareness of FSA programs initiated at the national, State, or county level **conducted beyond the normal course of business** outside of initiating FSA office

- partner means a local, State, or national organization that provides training, education, outreach, or agriculture advocacy to all or a segment of the agriculture community

- plan means developing the concept and benefits of an FSA outreach activity and the details of FSA participation

- present means deliver a prepared talk or speech about FSA programs and opportunities to an audience

- print media means delivering messages or information using newspapers, brochures, press releases, fact sheets, etc.

- recruit means the process of identifying and interacting with qualified individuals at career fairs, collegiate interviews, etc. for the purpose of possible employment with FSA

1   Overview (Continued)

   F   Outreach Definitions (Continued)

- <u>role</u> means the work or functions performed by the FSA office staff when developing outreach activities

- <u>sponsor</u> means FSA and/or other Federal Agencies and non-Federal organizations that contribute resources to assist in establishing or delivering an education or outreach activity

- <u>State Office outreach activities</u> mean outreach activities directed to a Statewide audience organized and supported by an FSA State Office

- <u>targeted outreach efforts</u> mean, at minimum, <u>significant majority</u> means over **60 percent** of the audience participating in the outreach activity reflects a demographic makeup that is minority, women, or disabled, as defined in the Federal Civil Rights or Americans with Disabilities (ADA) legislation

   Note: This should **not** be the **only** criteria used to determine whether an event is targeted. The content of the programs **must** be designed to reach the intended audience. Target group partners or sponsors include organizations with a primary mission dedicated to increasing participation by SDA minorities, women, or disabled people in agriculture by expanding access to FSA programs.

- <u>technical assistance</u> means a service that provides customers with custom learning experiences and individualized assistance

- <u>workshops</u> mean education and training provided to USDA customers (or potential customers) that enables them to participate in programs or receive services, realize benefits from FSA programs, and promote an understanding of the USDA mission, goals, and objectives.

2   Planning, Recording, and Funding Outreach Activities

A   Outreach Event Planning: General and Targeted Outreach Activities at the State and County Levels

According to subparagraph 1 C, State and County Offices will plan outreach activities annually. SDA groups are addressed through targeted outreach activities. Agriculture advocacy- or community-based organizations that serve a broader population will be addressed through general outreach activities and funding.

For FY 2012, planned general and targeted outreach events and activities, according to paragraph 4, shall be reviewed individually and certified by SOC's, on behalf of SED.

Events and activities **must** be certified by State Offices individually in OTIS **before** obligating funds according to subparagraph 3 B. OTIS 3.0 provides a means to certify activities as a group or individually. See the OTIS 3.0 SOC Training Manual at **https://wdcprod80.sc.egov.usda.gov/OTIS/Outreach/Resources/Help/National/soc_otis_training_guide.pdf**.

B   Selecting Goals to Align With Activities in OTIS

An FSA pre-entered goal **must** be selected to align with every Outreach Activity Plan entered in OTIS. Each plan **must** have a profile of the estimated demographic breakdown of the target groups expected to be reached by the activity.

C   Entering Activity Plans in OTIS Correctly

Each activity plan **must** reflect a demographic breakdown of the gender, race, and ethnicity and disability, if applicable, of a target group. This information can be entered if provided to the State or County Office by a partner organization, or SOC's may make their own estimate in absence of reliable data. The following demographic categories are **required** to complete an outreach entry plan.

Category	Description
Gender	Male/female breakdown of target audience, as estimated, **must** equal 100 percent.
Race	Total of all race categories of targeted audience, as estimated, **must** equal 100 percent.
Ethnicity	Every entry **must** include an ethnicity entry and total ethnicity of group, as estimated, **must** equal 100 percent.
Disabled Audiences	Targeted by FSA, but the data for measuring the number of disabled farmers and ranchers nationwide, or by State, is not statistically significant, based on current sources. NASS does not specifically track such data.

2 Planning, Recording, and Funding Outreach Activities (Continued)

C Entering Activity Plans in OTIS Correctly (Continued)

The following is an example of the screen that will be displayed to enter demographic data for the outreach activity as shown in the OTIS 3.0 SOC Training Manual.

Activity plans require data and descriptive information be entered so the activity is **fully described**, the partner group is mentioned, and the type of activity matches the description. Vague descriptions will be deleted from OTIS after the year is closed out, if it is unclear who will receive the benefit of the activity planned.

The following provides examples of acceptable and unacceptable OTIS entries.

Acceptable OTIS Entry	Unacceptable OTIS Entry
Name: Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) Workshop Partner: XX State Extension Service Type: Workshop	Name: Personal visit with Mr. Smith Partner: None Type: Group Meeting
Name: Good Ag Radio Show Partner: County Extension, Farm Bureau Type: Broadcast Media	Name: Producer Funeral Partner: None Type: Meeting
Name: Direct Mail Campaign for Beginning Farmers Partner: none Type: Direct/Electronic Mail	Name: Letter Partner: None Type: Print Media
Name: COC Direct Mail Campaign to SDA Farmers Partner: The Hispanics in Farming Association Type: Direct/Electronic Mail	Name: SDA Partner: SDA Group Type: Public Relations

2   Planning, Recording, and Funding Outreach Activities (Continued)

   C   Entering Activity Plans in OTIS Correctly (Continued)

   There are fields in OTIS for entering the overall cost of an outreach activity. The line item titled, "cost item" requires entering an estimated cost of the activity, based on research conducted on the **cumulative costs reasonably expected** to be incurred by the State or County Office.

   Notes: SOC provides certification (approval) of each outreach activity entered into OTIS. The State Office obligates the funding for the activity, after approval.

   "Approval" of an outreach activity by certification in OTIS is considered as an approval by SED of each State Office.

   Regular date reminders, post cards, and informational notices sent to producers and the media are **not** considered outreach activities, but are considered as communications activities done in the normal course of business when administering an FSA program in the State or County Office.

   Approval should **not** be done automatically.

   D   Evaluating and Entering Results of the Activity in OTIS

   FSA **requires** results to be entered and certified into OTIS 3.0 for each outreach activity entered and approved into OTIS. Results showing attendance, actual demographic breakdown at the conclusion of an activity, and total cost **must** be entered. The exception will be bona fide need related activities that will remain open through the first quarter of a subsequent FY until they occur and results are entered. After the event occurs and results are entered, they will also be closed as a part of FY in which they were funded.

   E   SOC Certification in OTIS

   For FY 2012, **only** State level certification is **required** for outreach activities in OTIS. **No National Office certification of State or county events is required**. Certification by SOC is considered to be equal to an approval by SED; therefore, it is key to plan quality activities, and certify **only** what can be fully executed and reported within the applicable FY.

2   Planning, Recording, and Funding Outreach Activities (Continued)

E   SOC Certification in OTIS (Continued)

The following are examples of OTIS screens.

2   Planning, Recording, and Funding Outreach Activities (Continued)

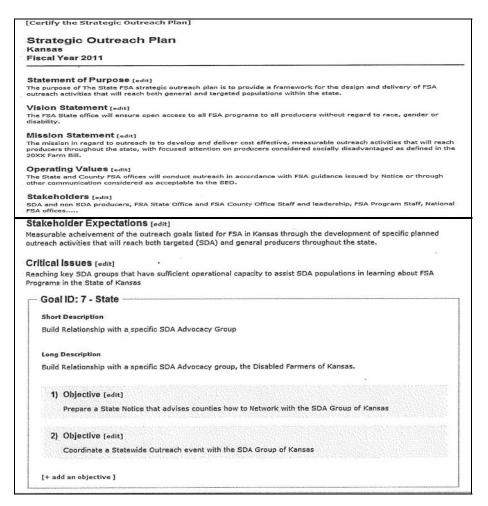**F   Summary of the Steps in Planning and Recording Outreach Activities**

At the beginning of each FY, before any activity plans can be entered into OTIS, a strategic plan **must** be:

- entered into OTIS by each State
- certified by SOC on behalf of the State Office
- approved in its final form by the National Office.

Note: For FY 2012, the National Office has prepared a uniform outreach strategic plan for all States to adopt.

Each State SOP will reflect how the national and State goals will be achieved by **all** FSA offices in each State, collectively. To enter outreach activity into OTIS, a goal **must** be selected that will be achieved by the activity being planned and entered into OTIS. No entry may be saved in OTIS without it being attached to a national or State goal.

The following is an example of SOP that will be displayed in OTIS. The OTIS 3.0 SOC Training Manual provides instructions for entering the content of a State Outreach Strategic Plan in OTIS 3.0.

[Certify the Strategic Outreach Plan]

Strategic Outreach Plan
Kansas
Fiscal Year 2011

Statement of Purpose [edit]
The purpose of The State FSA strategic outreach plan is to provide a framework for the design and delivery of FSA outreach activities that will reach both general and targeted populations within the state.

Vision Statement [edit]
The FSA State office will ensure open access to all FSA programs to all producers without regard to race, gender or disability.

Mission Statement [edit]
The mission in regard to outreach is to develop and deliver cost effective, measurable outreach activities that will reach producers throughout the state, with focused attention on producers considered socially disadvantaged as defined in the 20XX Farm Bill.

Operating Values [edit]
The State and County FSA offices will conduct outreach in accordance with FSA guidance issued by Notice or through other communication considered as acceptable to the SED.

Stakeholders [edit]
SDA and non SDA producers, FSA State Office and FSA County Office Staff and leadership, FSA Program Staff, National FSA offices.....

Stakeholder Expectations [edit]
Measurable acheivement of the outreach goals listed for FSA in Kansas through the development of specific planned outreach activities that will reach both targeted (SDA) and general producers throughout the state.

Critical Issues [edit]
Reaching key SDA groups that have sufficient operational capacity to assist SDA populations in learning about FSA Programs in the State of Kansas

Goal ID: 7 - State

Short Description
Build Relationship with a specific SDA Advocacy Group

Long Description
Build Relationship with a specific SDA Advocacy group, the Disabled Farmers of Kansas.

1) **Objective** [edit]
Prepare a State Notice that advises counties how to Network with the SDA Group of Kansas

2) **Objective** [edit]
Coordinate a Statewide Outreach event with the SDA Group of Kansas

[+ add an objective]

2   Planning, Recording, and Funding Outreach Activities (Continued)

F   Summary of the Steps in Planning and Recording Outreach Activities (Continued)

FSA goals are listed in OTIS under the strategic plan section on the main page of the application. In FY 2012, national outreach goals will be developed by the National Office, and inserted in all State SOP's. State Offices may supplement 2 additional, optional goals that are specific to their respective State. See Notice AO-1523 for FSA's national outreach goals.

3   Explanation of Outreach Formula and Use of Funds

A   Funding Formula

FSA outreach funding is subject to the current year's budget limitations. When funding is issued, it is prorated to general and targeted activities based on NASS 2007 State Agriculture Profile demographic data. The specific dataset selected for consideration is based on agriculture operators as defined by NASS.

Funding is allocated among the following 4 demographic categories of operators as reported by NASS:

- general - all operators, by State

- targeted - minority operators, by State; that is, African American or Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders, or those of Hispanic ethnicity

- woman principal operators, by State

- disabled operators, by State.

NASS farm operator numbers were selected as the standard comparison because outreach activities **must** reach individual operators rather than farms. A focus on individuals enables FSA to inform the general and targeted (SDA) public through outreach efforts that bring new information to current FSA clients, or reach beyond to potential participants of FSA programs.

The NASS data contains a profile report for each State, identifying the number of operators in that State that fall in 1 of the 4 categories. Each category was assigned budget authority based on a pro rata share of FSA outreach dollars allotted nationally.

Targeted outreach budget authority to each State was determined by totaling all minority operators by State, and calculating that number as a percentage of all operators nationwide.

A designated amount of each State's allotment may be spent on targeted outreach activities. The formula also provides funding for general audiences that may be mixed in composition. This provides SED's within State Offices with more flexibility to conduct both targeted and general outreach in collaboration with County Offices.

3   Explanation of Outreach Formula and Use of Funds (Continued)

B   Administrative and Budgetary Considerations

Outreach budgets are subject to funding availability for FY2012. OTIS 3.0 will accept **only** $0 cost activities unless a budget allotment for each State has been entered into OTIS by the National Office.

There are overall administrative and budgetary considerations that need to be taken when planning outreach activities. To ensure that the greatest benefit is being gained from FSA funding committed to outreach activities, States shall seek to reduce the cost per attendee ratio (Total Dollars Requested divided by Total Attendees Projected) at every opportunity.

General outreach funding must be obligated for general activities (less than 60 percent SDA present) or may supplement targeted activities (60 percent or more present are SDA) at the State Offices discretion.

C   Recording Specific Types of Outreach Expenses

OTIS provides entry area for certain typical expenses. Outreach expenses cannot be entered unless there is a budget in place by the National Office.

- Youth events, including Future Farmers of America (FFA), Ag in the Classroom, and 4-H events and activities should be entered in OTIS as "**General Outreach**" activities in the OTIS activity entry plan.

- Fairs and local agricultural activities will be sponsored using "General Outreach" funding **only**.

- Booth or display replacement expenses will be paid using "General Outreach" funding **only**.

- Print and broadcast media, newsletters, broadcast, and other media funding requests, to the public, will be entered in OTIS, but at $0 cost, unless they are being translated into a foreign language. Translated printed documents are considered as targeted outreach activities.

  Notes: Costs for translated newsletters **only** may be submitted based on the number of copies translated.

3   Explanation of Outreach Formula and Use of Funds (Continued)

   C   Recording Specific Types of Outreach Expenses (Continued)

   States Offices may obligate formula funding for targeted and general outreach up to the amount approved in the Final Allotment when announced through a BU notice. Targeted outreach funding dedicated to minority, women, and disabled outreach activities may **not** supplement general outreach activities unless approved by the regional outreach coordinator. Funding that is **not** obligated for targeted outreach by July 31st will be reduced to the amount approved or obligated as of that date. Excess funds will then be repurposed for other activities.

   Outreach funding must be obligated and recorded as activities take place. **Results are to be entered into OTIS immediately after the conclusion of an outreach activity**.

   D   USDA Interagency Coordination Considerations

   Funding contribution amounts from other Federal partners, including other USDA agencies, **must** be coordinated to minimize any duplication of sponsorships or financial support. Activity plans in OTIS should be notated accordingly, if other USDA component agencies are partners in an outreach activity.

   E   Partner Group Coordination

   Outreach activity planning requires coordination with partner organizations to determine sponsorship costs, or research into meeting costs such as displays, handouts and the location costs if FSA is going to host the activity.

   Sponsorship contribution amounts among partner organizations should be leveraged with FSA outreach funds to the maximum benefit possible. In addition, FSA offices will seek to minimize any duplication of sponsorships or financial support. Activity plans in OTIS should be notated accordingly, if other USDA component Agencies are partners in an outreach activity. Planners should seek efficiencies when planning attendees and Agency representation when multiple USDA Agencies participate jointly in an outreach activity.

   F   Using NASS Data to Identify County Office Demographics

   NASS maintains agriculture census summaries that highlight key topics and demographic trends from the 2007 Census of Agriculture. Through the NASS web site at **www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/Fact_Sheets/index.asp**, fact sheets include narrative and data combined to illustrate current trends among U.S. farmers and agricultural operations.

4   Managing Outreach Activities in OTIS

A   OTIS Screen Examples

The following are examples of OTIS screens.

Note: Activities may be certified individually or as a group.

4   Managing Outreach Activities in OTIS (Continued)

B   Bona Fide Needs Requests

Bona fide needs requests will be subject to funding availability for outreach events taking place in the first quarter of FY 2013. To participate and certify a bona fide need activity, the State Office must submit a written request from the partnering organization hosting the activity under consideration. The request must specifically provide reasonable cause as to why outreach funds must be paid to the partner group in advance for an activity taking place in FY 2013. Bona fide need requests shall be obligated and completed **before** September 30, 2012. If obligation/payment has **not** occurred by September 30, 2012, funding approved under the Bona Fide Needs Rule will be rescinded.

Note: Funds **must** be obligated and recorded to the correct outreach spending account within 30 calendar days of the date the activity is recorded to occur in OTIS 3.0. Results and actual expenditures **must** also be entered **after** an outreach activity takes place.

When entering bona fide need activities in OTIS 3.0, OTIS will record and track bona fide need requests within the year that funding was obligated to the activity being scheduled. The activity will record in OTIS using the Activity Plan Entry Screen. A "Bona Fide Need?" radio button will be displayed, as follows, to mark the activity on the Activity Plan Entry Screen. At the conclusion of FY 2012, the costs associated with that activity will be paid, but OTIS will holdout the activity from closeout processes until the activity occurs and results are entered. After all bona fide need activities are completed based on results entered, the FY 2012 funding year will closeout as final.

5   COC Representation and Yearend Closeout

A   COC in OTIS

SOP's provide the framework for all outreach activities in a State, of which outreach for COC is a part. When a State SOP is printed from OTIS, it reflects COC goals and the State's intentions for reaching new COC participants. The Outreach Strategic Plan is supplemented by COC activities that are collected and reported along with SOP to USDA and on for Congressional review. See 15-AO for specific guidance.

B   Yearend Closing of Outreach Spending and OTIS

In July each year, the National Office will conclude all outreach plans as of July 31. Until then, the State Offices budget and outreach officials receiving allotments and allocations shall do the following:

- keep amounts authorized for obligations within specified limitations under targeted and general outreach allotments

- manage targeted and general outreach funds within amounts allotted

- forward obligation invoices or documents to the appropriate budget office for processing

- review reports on unliquidated obligations to determine validity of obligations, and advise National Office of remaining unobligated balances by July 31

- expedite clearance of invoices, bills, vouchers, etc., to ensure that accurate project and budget coding is in place for yearend closeout **before** September 15, annually.

C   OTIS Closeout

SOC's will complete the following closeout:

- cancel or delete all OTIS entries representing events or activities that were canceled or entered in error

- enter results, including actual costs, for all outreach activities that did take place

- complete and submit all bona fide need requests before July 31, and preserve documents of the need in the outreach files, as required by 25-AS, Exhibit 51.6

- certify results.

6   Additional Information

A   Reports

OTIS 3.0 will provide reports using the "Generate a Report" Section on the left side the OTIS 3.0 Home Page. Reports on activities and expenditures may be customized using the Ad Hoc Menu, or the list of specialized reports listed. COC reports will reflect aggregate data by State and nationally.

B   National Office Role

For FY 2012, the National Office will continue to provide States with technical assistance in planning and developing their outreach activities and budget, including the following:

- design methods for improving outreach delivery nationwide

- collect data and information for FSA, USDA, and Executive level reports

- develop allotments and coordinate BU notices with OBF

- work with States to coordinate events

- work with community-based organizations to coordinate funding for national outreach events and activities

- conduct spending reviews to ensure that the guidelines of this notice, as well as general FSA guidance, are followed as outreach efforts are conducted throughout the country

- the primary central contact for FSA about outreach activities at the national, State, and local levels

- serve as lead representative office to SDA minority, women, and gender advocacy groups on behalf of FSA.