

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Farm Service Agency
Washington, DC 20250

Notice AO-1819**For:** State and County Offices**Establishing New Urban County Committees (UCOC), Staffing Urban Service Centers,
Training Opportunities, and Conducting Outreach to Urban Producers****Approved by:** Administrator**1 Overview****A Background**

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill) authorized the Secretary to establish no less than 10 new UCOC's as part of a 5-year or longer UCOC pilot project. Organized in collaboration with the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP) within NRCS, FSA has established 17 FSA UCOC's devoted exclusively to urban agriculture.

In FY 2022, USDA announced 6 additional locations for COC's focused exclusively on urban agriculture, including new UCOC locations in metropolitan Detroit and metropolitan Grand Rapids. Organized in collaboration with OUAIP within NRCS, other new committees in Chicago, Brooklyn, Oakland, and Los Angeles join 11 previously announced UCOC's. The 6 new locations were selected based on a consideration of data that included opportunity for economic growth, diversity, proximity to tribal nations, as well as the number of farm-to-table projects, urban farms, community and residential gardens, and green infrastructure projects within metropolitan and suburban areas.

FY 2020 UCOC Pilot Locations	FY 2021 UCOC Pilot Locations	FY 2022 New UCOC Locations
Albuquerque, NM	Atlanta, GA	Detroit, MI
Cleveland, OH	Dallas, TX	Grand Rapids, MI
Philadelphia, PA	Minneapolis, MN	Chicago, IL
Portland, OR	New Orleans, LA	Brooklyn, NY
Richmond, VA	Phoenix, AZ	Oakland, CA
	St. Louis, MO	Los Angeles, CA

Disposal Date

January 1, 2023

8-11-22

Distribution

State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices

Page 1

1 Overview (Continued)

A Background (Continued)

In FY 2022, FSA will be providing additional support to pilot locations by:

- allocating resources to hire staff at the local level
- awarding cooperative agreements to community-based organizations and other entities
- assisting in the stand-up of urban Service Centers in the selected pilot locations.

FSA will continue to collaborate with NRCS and OUAIP to increase our service and outreach in urban communities and connect them to our available programs and resources. All State and County Offices are expected to continue to engage with urban producers, regardless of whether or not the State is currently involved in the UCOC pilot program.

B Purpose

This notice:

- identifies resources for outreach, education, engagement, and technical assistance for urban producers
- contains guidance and information about the following:
 - establishing a new UCOC pilot location
 - outreach methods and suggested best practices for engaging with urban producers
 - upcoming training, engagement opportunities, and resources.

C Contacts

If there are questions about this notice:

- State Offices will contact Jenna Segal, FSA's Acting Urban Agriculture Lead, at jenna.segal@usda.gov
- County Offices will contact the State Office Outreach Coordinator.

For general questions about the 2022 UCOC election, contact Cherie Moore, DAFO, at cherie.moore@usda.gov.

For assistance with outreach to beginning farmers and ranchers (BFR), contact the Regional BFR Coordinator.

For additional information about OUAIP, visit <https://www.farmers.gov/your-business/urban-growers>.

2 Establishing New UCOC Pilot Locations

A Establishing UCOC and LAA Boundaries in UCOC Pilot States

Selected State and County Office locations in the UCOC pilot are expected to conduct outreach to local stakeholders and urban producers to:

- identify urban nominees and eligible voters
- establish new LAA boundaries for UCOC's.

Each UCOC pilot location will be required to establish boundaries according to 15-AO, Part 3, Section 3. In addition, State and County Offices may use the known concentration of urban participation to assist in the initial determination of urban LAA boundaries. Outreach will continue throughout the year to build out eligible voter lists in preparation for the election. The initial election will be a transitional election to determine which LAA will serve a 1-, 2-, or 3-year term. Terms following the initial year will be 3 years.

State Offices must assist County Offices with updating the County Election Control Table in the COC software to create the new UCOC's and LAA's.

Traditional COC's will be identified using "COC 1" in the COC software. UCOC's will be identified using "COC 3" in the COC software.

State and County Offices will complete the following steps to create UCOC's and LAA's:

- navigate to the COC election website at <https://intranet-apps.fsa.usda.gov/COC/Reporting/index.jsp> and select "County Election Control Table"
- in the "Add an Entry to the Control Table" section, ENTER "3" in the "COC" field, enter the applicable LAA number in the "LAA" field, and CLICK "Add Entry"
- employees will only be able to add one LAA at a time, so continue with the previous step until all urban LAA's have been successfully added.

Once UCOC is created, producers will need to update their producer election file and eligible voter lists. Producers currently participating or cooperating in farm programs that are affected by an LAA change must be sent notification of the change. Upon request, they may make a 1-time election to remain in the LAA currently handling their operation.

For questions about LAA boundaries, contact Cherie Moore at cherie.moore@usda.gov.

B Electing and Nominating UCOC Members

All UCOC locations are expected to work with DAFO to determine the correct election cycle (traditional, makeup, or special elections) for the 2023 calendar year.

2 Establishing New UCOC Pilot Locations (Continued)

C Urban Service Centers (Staffing and Establishment)

FSA and NRCS, in coordination with OUAIP and MSD, Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Business Center, will be establishing locations, including short- or long-term leasing options for urban Service Centers in each UCOC pilot location. FSA and NRCS are establishing USDA urban Service Centers where producers can meet with FSA and NRCS staff to:

- obtain a farm number
- register to vote and participate in UCOC elections
- access relevant USDA programs and services.

SED's should be engaging with local leadership, mayors' offices, and congressional representatives to engage them in the process of finalizing long-term urban Service Center locations.

FSA urban Service Centers will be staffed with two CO employees. State Offices may use shared management operations and existing CO position descriptions, including CED's and PT's (including a lead PT), according to 27-PM.

Note: STC's may waive the requirement for CED's in Training to apply for urban CED positions.

State Offices will submit any new hire urban CO positions into the Hiring Tracker following the normal hiring process. If UCOC has been established, UCOC will be the selecting official for these two CO positions. If UCOC has not yet been established, STC will be the selecting official for the positions.

State Offices involved in the UCOC pilot can move forward with the hiring process as soon as State-level MOU's are signed between NRCS and FSA that identify the short-term location of the new urban Service Center. When determining short-term locations, consideration should be given to:

- proximity to the urban area, ensuring that it is within 50 miles
- locality pay of the area to ensure that it is covered under the same locality pay as the urban area.

Hiring Tracker requests should identify the UCOC pilot city as the new hire's duty location. Hiring managers must make clear to applicants during the interview and hiring process that:

- FSA is working on final leases in the UCOC location
- they are aware of the agreed upon short-term office location according to the MOU.

2 Establishing New UCOC Pilot Locations (Continued)

D Communications

When urban Service Centers are established, USDA will make a department-level announcement in the form of a press release and toolkit with customizable local announcement materials. State-level leadership and staff should wait to communicate about urban Service Centers with media or members of the public until the national announcement has been made. Media inquiries about urban Service Centers can be directed to fpac.bc.press@usda.gov.

3 Required Outreach Activities

A Conducting Outreach to Urban Producers

State and County Offices will collaborate with stakeholder organizations to conduct outreach to urban producers and gather feedback about training or interest in participating in FSA's programs in urban areas. It is expected that FSA employees consistently use the best practices included in this notice as appropriate and ensure that outreach coordinators and State and County Urban Agriculture points of contact are aware of this guidance when conducting outreach activities. Urban producers often use diverse production methods, have limited knowledge of existing USDA programs, produce nontraditional crops, and grow crops in unconventional locations, such as on a roof top, on small tracts of land, or in indoor hydroponic farms. The following are the recommended best practices:

- any State participating in the UCOC pilot program will host an Urban Agriculture Outreach, Education, and Engagement Event to conduct outreach to urban producers, assist urban producers with applying to FSA programs, and educate urban producers about the UCOC pilot program
- share UCOC flyers with farmers, community gardeners, food policy councils, nonprofits, State Departments of Agriculture contacts, and extension agents who can assist with outreach efforts
- identify urban farmers or nonprofits who participate in USDA programs (such as, SNAP, Farmers Market, USDA/AMS Grant Recipients) and share outreach materials with them
- contact local churches, campuses, local city officials for urban agriculture initiatives in the city, known organizations or contacts with rooftop farms, apiaries, or community garden plots to identify potential nominees and eligible voters
- collaborate with community-based organizations and cooperative agreement recipients to conduct outreach to urban producers
- collaborate with the State Outreach Coordinator (SOC), BFR Coordinator, or NRCS Urban Conservationist for support.

3 Required Outreach Activities (Continued)

B Reporting Urban Agriculture Outreach Activities

SOC's should work with State and County Office employees to record any new urban agriculture contacts into the Outreach Tracking and Information System. Additionally, any State with an existing UCOC should have completed an Urban Agriculture State Plan using the Urban Agriculture State Plan template or identified State goals and/or activities related to UCOC outreach in the FY 2022 Strategic Outreach Plan. State Offices are required to provide updates on their activities to FSAOutreach@usda.gov on a quarterly basis. Any activity related to UCOC outreach or general outreach to urban producers tagged using the urban agriculture COC tag as the designated FSA program. This information will be incorporated into FSA's annual report to Congress updating them on the status of the pilot.

4 Training Opportunities

A FSA Urban Agriculture Survey

In August 2022, FSA will be administering a 2-part employee survey to:

- determine the impact of an FSA-wide urban agriculture training
- identify additional program barriers and training needs.

The survey will be administered through Qualtrics. While this survey is optional, it is strongly encouraged that all staff participate so that leadership can determine any additional training needs and program barriers so FSA can better serve urban producers.

B Urban Agriculture Trainings

State and County Office employees should participate in FPAC's Urban Agriculture Trainings. Beginning in FY 2022, FPAC will launch an introductory training for FSA employees that contains information needed to successfully conduct outreach to urban producers. More information and registration details will be provided at a later date. The training will contain the following information:

- introduction or overview of urban agriculture and OUAIP
- descriptions of FPAC programs for urban programs and resources administered through our agencies (FSA, NRCS, and RMA)
- examples and descriptions of programs, grants, and technical assistance opportunities through USDA agencies that provide support to urban producers
- featured stories from FPAC cooperative agreement recipients, grant recipients, and program participants who advanced innovation in urban agriculture.

4 Training Opportunities (Continued)

C National Urban Agriculture Calls for UCOC Pilot Locations

Each State in the UCOC pilot must identify outreach and State leads to attend urban agriculture calls hosted by DAFO and FSA Outreach to ensure that pilot States are able to report on successes and challenges related to the implementation of the pilot. Each pilot State should designate points of contact for each UCOC pilot location. Send updated State contact information and designations to cherie.moore@usda.gov.

D FPAC-Urban and Small Acreage Working Group

State and County Office employees interested in learning more about FPAC's urban agriculture initiative are invited to join the FPAC-Urban and Small Acreage Working Group Teams page, pending supervisorial approval. The FPAC-Urban and Small Acreage Working Group Teams page:

- provides updates from FPAC agencies related to urban agriculture
- hosts monthly meetings
- highlights urban agriculture trainings relevant to FPAC employees
- identifies opportunities for collaboration
- addresses challenges in program implementation and outreach
- highlights State- and county-level successes.

To join the FPAC-Urban and Small Acreage Working Group Teams page, request to join using this [link](#).

4 Training Opportunities (Continued)

E Review Outreach Toolkit

SOC's should review FSA's outreach toolkit for employees to use when conducting outreach to urban producers. The toolkit launched in July 2022. The toolkit will be updated periodically as new resources are developed. The toolkit is available at <https://inside.fsa.usda.gov/operations/office-of-outreach/program-toolkits>. The resources will also be available in AgLearn. The kit includes the following:

- FY 2020-2021 Report to Congress (under review)
- Communications Resources and Talking Points
- Urban Agriculture State Plan Template
- FSA/NRCS Letter on Urban Agriculture
- FSA Urban Agriculture Overview PowerPoint
- FSA Urban Agriculture Fact Sheet (in development)
- FPAC Urban Ag. at a Glance Brochure
- Urban COC Q&A's (updated May 2022)
- Urban COC Outreach Flyer (updated May 2022)
- Urban COC Outreach FAQ's (updated May 2022).