

**For:** FSA Employees

**2005 FSA Administrator’s Awards for Service to Agriculture (AASA)**

**Approved by:** Deputy Administrator, Management



**1 Overview**

**A Background**

AASA is the highest recognition that FSA can bestow upon its employees. The USDA Secretary’s Honor Awards are currently undergoing a revision, but FSA is proceeding with AASA’s because recognition has always been vitally important in FSA and the Agency has always tried to give employees every opportunity to submit nominations for deserving individuals and groups.

Nominations:

- shall be submitted **by April 29, 2005**
- will be reviewed by FSA
- will be presented in June 2005.

AASA nominations will automatically be considered for nomination for USDA Secretary’s Honor Awards when that program is restarted.

**B Purpose**

This notice:

- announces 2005 AASA Program
- details the procedures for submitting nominations for AASA.

**C Labor-Management Obligations**

Where exclusive representation exists, this notice does not apply until bargaining takes place. Where contract language addresses these policies and procedures for bargaining unit employees, contract language prevails.

<b>Disposal Date</b>	<b>Distribution</b>
October 1, 2005	All FSA Employees; State Offices relay to County Offices

## 2 AASA Program Provisions

### A Eligibility

All FSA employees are eligible for AASA, including STC and COC members.

### B AASA Categories

AASA categories have been revised and are as follows:

- supporting productive farms and ranches
- supporting secure and affordable food and fiber
- conserving natural resources and enhancing the environment
- enhancing outreach and partnerships
- ensuring civil rights
- strategically managing human capital
- improving strategic accountability
- improving business process effectiveness
- improving stakeholder satisfaction
- encouraging the use of eGov by our customers.

See Exhibit 1 for descriptions of categories.

### C Nominations

Although supervisors normally initiate nominations, **any** employee may submit a nomination; however, nominations should be routed through the supervisor of the recommended employee.

Submit nominations either electronically or in hard copy and include the following information:

- AASA category for which the individual/group is being nominated
- name of nominee (or group name, if a group nomination)

**Note:** The employee's/group's name will be printed on the certificate as it is shown on the nomination.

- position title, official duty station, and telephone number of nominee (list information for all group members, if group nomination)
- group leader (if group nomination)
- citation to be shown on the certificate

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### 2 AASA Program Provisions (Continued)

#### C Nominations (Continued)

- write-up with detailed basis for recognition, **not** to exceed 2 pages.

**Notes:** Accomplishments may go back up to 1 year. See Exhibit 2 for help with the write-up.

Nominations **must** be received by HRD, Performance Management Benefits and Awards Branch (PMBAB) by **COB April 29, 2005**.

### 3 Submitting Nominations for GS and CO Employees in County Offices

#### A Supervisor's Responsibilities

Supervisors shall:

- periodically discuss potential nominees with DD
- review and critically evaluate both GS and CO employees to ensure that all deserving employees receive consideration for being nominated
- submit nominations only for clearly outstanding achievements (see Exhibit 2 for documentation guidelines)
- submit nominations to their DD.

#### B DD Responsibilities

DD's shall:

- periodically discuss potential nominees with supervisors
- forward all nominations to State Office for consideration.

#### C SED Responsibilities

SED:

- shall review all nominations to select individuals, teams, and groups for State awards for service to Agriculture
- may nominate individuals and groups for AASA
- shall sign as recommending official for nominations being submitted for AASA
- shall forward AASA nominations to Sederis Fields, DAFO, by **April 26, 2005**.

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### 3 Submitting Nominations for GS and CO Employees in County Offices (Continued)

#### D DAFO Responsibilities

DAFO shall:

- review nominations
- submit nominations for DAFO staff
- initial field nominations and sign nominations as recommending individual for DAFO staff
- **by April 29**, forward nominations to HRD, PMBAB.

### 4 Submitting Nominations for Employees in National Office, Kansas City, St. Louis, Salt Lake City, and State and District Offices

#### A Supervisor's Responsibilities

Supervisors shall:

- review and critically evaluate all employees to ensure that all deserving employees are considered for nomination
- submit nominations only for clearly outstanding achievements (see Exhibit 2 for documentation guidelines)
- submit nominations to the Division/Staff Directors.

#### B Office Director's Responsibilities

Office directors shall:

- review nominations
- submit nominations
- sign nominations as recommending individuals
- forward nominations to appropriate Deputy Administrator for review.

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### 5 Processing Nominations Received From Recommending Individuals

#### A Deputy Administrator's/Staff Director's Responsibilities

Deputy Administrators/Staff Directors shall:

- review nominations submitted from all offices
- **by April 29**, recommend and submit nominations to HRD, PMBAB.

#### B HRD, PMBAB Responsibilities

HRD, PMBAB shall:

- collect all nominations submitted
- route names of employees to the Employee and Labor Relations Branch and the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) to ensure that nominees have no pending administrative actions
- prepare and distribute nominations to the selection committee members
- attend the selection committee meeting to provide technical advice and document selection process
- prepare certificates/plaques for recipients.

#### C Administrator's Selection Committee Responsibilities

The Administrator shall appoint the selection committee to:

- review AASA nominations
- make final recommendations.

The selection committee shall include one member from each of the following:

- Administrator's staff or office
- DAFP
- DAFLP
- DAFO
- DACO
- DAM
- OCR
- labor organizations
- HRD, PMBAB.

**5 Processing Nominations Received From Recommending Individuals (Continued)**

**D Selection Committee's Responsibilities**

The selection committee shall:

- review and rate nominations
- ensure that a diversified group of nominees is recommended
- submit recommendations to the Administrator for AASA's and for The Secretary's Honor Awards Program, when it restarts.

**E Administrator's Responsibilities**

The Administrator shall determine the number of:

- recipients for AASA's
- nominations to be forwarded to the Department for the Secretary's Honor Award Program, when it restarts.

**F Administrator's Awards Recognition**

Recipients (individuals and group leaders) shall be recognized at a ceremony in June 2005 in Washington, DC. The Administrator shall present the awards. Group members will be recognized at local ceremonies.

Pictures shall be taken during the ceremony to be included in the Agency's newsletter or other appropriate forum.

## AASA Categories

AASA may be given for outstanding performance in any of the following categories. These categories are drawn from the Agency's strategic plan and reflect what FSA is all about. Review the categories carefully and select the 1 that best fits the contribution.

### 1. Supporting Productive Farms and Ranches

To provide income stability, FSA makes direct payments to farmers, ranchers, and eligible landowners. The Agency works diligently to provide assistance and marketing loans promptly, efficiently, and equitably. When natural disasters strike, FSA reacts quickly to help affected producers recover from their losses and restore their lands to pre-disaster productivity levels. Additionally, FSA partners with commercial lenders to guarantee ownership and operating loans and makes direct loans to producers to finance operating expenses and farm ownership loans or to provide needed capital in times of emergency. FSA also partners with RMA to inform producers about the benefits of insuring their crops against disaster or market-related income losses. Commodity, disaster, loan, and insurance programs help ensure that America continues to have a productive agricultural sector.

Similar to the loan programs, FSA commodity operation programs help create additional market opportunities for farmers and ranchers. Commodity operations serve to enhance a thriving agricultural community and to promote a more market-based agricultural sector. Specifically, warehouse receipts, authorized under the United States Warehouse Act, create enforceable title documents between warehouse operators and farmers with terms and conditions meeting the requirements of lending institutions. Recently, to create a vital efficiency, FSA moved warehouse receipts from a paper to electronic format. Electronic warehouse receipts (EWR's), when combined with other electronic documents, greatly reduce the time involved in marketing commodities and reduce associated business costs throughout the marketing chain.

Agricultural producers face severe economic losses caused by natural phenomena such as drought, excessive moisture, hail, wind, hurricane, tornado, lightning, insects or other animal pests, reduced prices, reduced yields, or any combination of these. Agricultural production is characterized by relatively small profit margins and cycles of goods and bad production years. FSA works in partnership with RMA to provide and support cost-effective means of managing risk for agricultural producers. This assistance is part of the economic safety net and improves the economic stability of agriculture through powerful risk management tools designed to help farmers and ranchers protect their livelihoods in times of disasters and other uncontrollable conditions.

**AASA Categories (Continued)****2. Supporting Secure and Affordable Food and Fiber**

The result of FSA's financial safety net is year-round availability of a variety of low-cost, secure, and nutritious foods for all Americans and for food aid recipients worldwide. FSA purchases and delivers food aid to recipients in needy countries who benefit from U.S. humanitarian food aid through the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) programs. FSA also purchases and delivers food aid to recipients of U.S. food distribution programs including:

- National School Lunch Program
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program
- Emergency Food Assistance Program
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.

In addition, FSA supports a secure supply of food and fiber through the Administration of U. S. Warehouse Act (USWA) and enforces licensing requirements for commodity storage facilities. FSA reduces contamination from improper storage practices and provides adequate and secure storage capacity for the Nation's commodities. Reducing, controlling, or eliminating agricultural pest and disease outbreaks requires partnerships and a steady stream of new technologies and processes to detect, analyze, and verify the emergence of pests and disease before they become economic or public health threat.

**3. Conserving Natural Resources and Enhancing the Environment**

Agriculture affects natural resources and the environment. FSA administers conservation programs with producers and other partners, particularly NRCS. The Agency's goal is to protect natural resources and environmental interests while supporting the Nation's farmers and ranchers in retaining soil productivity, improving water and air quality, and enhancing wildlife habitat.

FSA programs also support compliance with provisions for highly-erodible lands and wetlands by improving conservation practices and increasing the number of acres with conservation cover. FSA provides incentives to target conservation benefits through the following programs:

- ECP
- Debt for Nature Program
- CRP
- GRP.

The Agency is also partners with State and local governments to target specific problems environmental areas through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). FSA works to limit the negative effects of agricultural production by supporting the restoration of wetlands and helping farmers and ranchers install riparian and grassland buffers. Through ECP, FSA will continue to help farmers restore lands damaged by natural disasters and install wells in times of prolonged droughts.

## AASA Categories (Continued)

**3. Conserving Natural Resources and Enhancing the Environment (Continued)**

Farmers and ranchers have done a great deal to improve the environment in the past 20 years. Soil erosion decreased by more than 1 billion tons per year, and for the first time in the Nation's history, net acres of wetlands increased. Many sportsman groups have seen huge increases in pheasant and duck numbers in the past 20 years. These significant improvements in environmental quality result partly from programs implemented by FSA.

**4. Enhancing Outreach and Partnerships**

FSA began developing partnerships soon after it was created. Over the years, the Agency has strengthened strategic partnerships by reaching out to other Federal and State agencies, local organizations, non-profit associations, and private organizations to leverage valuable resources and fulfill its mission. For example, FSA relies on NRCS to provide technical expertise to conservation program participants. NRCS employees make recommendations for conservation practices and ensure program compliance while FSA administers the financial aspects of these Congressionally-mandated programs. This partnership substantially improves the environment which benefits program participants and society at large.

To help producers improve their marketing and financial management skills, FSA partners with CSREES to hold classed and informational meetings on these subjects. FSA and CSREES also work together to host seminars, co-sponsor agricultural expos, and hold information meetings to help producers understand the benefits and requirements of new FSA programs. When the 2002 Farm Bill legislation was passed, FSA partnered with CSREES, NRCS, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, and many agricultural commodity organizations to hold informational "town hall" meetings to outline the provisions of the legislation and explain programs to producers and other interested stakeholders. Without these partnerships, FSA could not have reached as many producers and program enrollment would have likely been lower.

FSA's Outreach Program staff identifies and works with internal and external partner organizations and customers to overcome barriers to program participation faced by underserved farmers and ranchers. The program places special emphasis on increasing the diversity of FSA's customers by reaching out to **new or beginning farmers and ranchers, members of racial and ethnic minority groups, and women**. An Outreach Coordinator is assigned to each State and Puerto Rico to assist customers in every locality. FSA will focus its initiatives to achieve the 2 related end outcomes identified as follows:

- increase percentage of program participation by members of targeted groups
- increase percentage of FSA resources and services enhanced through effective partnerships.

Outreach is the responsibility of everyone within FSA. To achieve FSA's mission, it is essential that every farmer or rancher have an equal opportunity to participate in FSA programs. FSA places special emphasis on reaching farmers and ranchers **who are members of a racial or ethnic minority group, new or beginning farmers or ranchers, or women** to bring them on par with other farmers and ranchers in terms of program participation and farm ownership.

**AASA Categories (Continued)****5. Ensuring Civil Rights**

Civil Rights is incorporated into all aspects of FSA's programs to ensure equitable delivery of programs and services and equitable treatment of FSA customers; the Nation's farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural producers. Civil rights is also incorporated into aspects of FSA employment practices to provide a workplace free of discrimination and to enhance the diversity of the workforce through affirmative steps to recruit, hire, train, and promote employees from diverse backgrounds. The 2-pronged strategy aims to ensure civil rights in both the delivery of FSA programs and the diverse make-up of employees who deliver these programs.

FSA has targeted 3 measures:

- increase the percentage of employees with measurable civil rights performance elements in their annual performance plans
- reduce percentage of program and employment civil rights complaints filed
- reduce the average processing time for civil rights program and employment complaints filed.

FSA aims to ensure that all employees' performance standards provide for civil rights accountability. A key performance objective across USDA is to hold managers, supervisors, and other employees accountable for ensuring that its customers and employees are treated in accordance with USDA's civil rights policy.

**6. Strategically Managing Human Capital**

A team of customer-driven and results-oriented professionals will drive FSA to reach its strategic goals. More than 20,000 Federal, State, and County employees provide services to farmers and ranchers across the United States, and overseas. At FSA, strategic management of human capital ensures that the Agency has the right employees with the right skills in the right place at the right time to effectively support program goals.

With a projected 40 percent retirement rate over the next 5 years, human resources faces a huge challenge in maintaining a sufficiently skilled workforce to provide effective and efficient programs and services to America's farmers and ranchers. Emphasizing effective human capital management, FSA's senior management and HRD have focused efforts on reducing competency and skills needs (or gaps) of mission-critical occupations by recruiting, developing, and retaining a high quality, diverse workforce.

**AASA Categories (Continued)****7. Improving Strategic Accountability**

FSA promotes sound financial management through leadership, policy, and oversight. In 2003, FSA again displayed its financial leadership by obtaining an unqualified (clean) audit opinion for the second consecutive year. A clean audit opinion is indicative of sound financial management policies and procedures; and assures the public that financial statement data is reliable, accurate, and complete. This allows users the financial statements to place a high degree of confidence in the information and to use the data to make informed decisions and manage resources wisely.

Key performance measures are:

- reduce average processing time to certify and disburse payments
- reduce percentage of erroneous payments
- increase percentage of program results and budget requirements that are linked to the FSA Strategic Plan and fully-costed
- increase the percentage of adverse decisions resolved internally
- increase percent of material weaknesses that are corrected on schedule.

**8. Improving Business Process Effectiveness**

Modernizing FSA's IT and commodity inventory systems will help the Agency to meet the challenges of the future and respond promptly to customer demands. Modernization will also help to minimize homeland security vulnerabilities and enable field offices to mobilize resources around program demand, regardless of their physical location. FSA is collaborating with its USDA Homeland Security Office to develop food safety and security strategies and to conduct risk assessments for commodity operations and related programs. The Agency is working with USDA to implement measures to manage and protect USDA commodities and loan collateral. FSA is also evaluating the possibility of replacing or upgrading current inventory systems to promptly provide the critical data necessary to minimize security risks. In addition to training all employees on incident management, the Agency is coordinating with the Office of Procurement and Property Management to obtain appropriate security classifications for all FSA employees and contractors involved in determining commodity suitability and safety.

**AASA Categories (Continued)****8. Improving Business Process Effectiveness (Continued)**

Key performance measures are:

- increase percentage of internal business processes that are streamlined systematically
- increase percentage of transactions completed through a Web environment
- increase percentage of total contracts that are performance based
- reduce or maintain the average processing time in announcing marketing assistance loan program rates and preparing cost benefit analyses.

**9. Improving Stakeholder Satisfaction**

The Satisfaction Index will measure Agency success in managing key relationships with 3 major stakeholder groups: employees, partners, and customers. Our objective is to examine satisfaction related to areas such as the employee engagement, quality of program output, and effectiveness of partnerships to deliver mission results. We are considering gathering performance data for the Satisfaction Index from a number of sources, including but not limited to surveys and focus groups.

To manage its business processes more effectively, FSA will track the percentage of processes streamlined, the percentage of transactions completed through the Web environment, and the percentage of performance-based contracts. To determine if FSA is performing effectively in all areas, FSA will use a Satisfaction Index to take a 360-degree look at how the Agency delivers its products and services to the public and how it interacts with internal and external customers. The Agency is exploring the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) model, a well-established approach used as a performance management tool in some public agencies. ACSI model is a set of causal equations that link customer expectations, perceived quality, and perceived value to customer satisfaction. FSA is reviewing survey research conducted within the last 5 years, such as the Customer Service Comment Card Pilot Program described below, to determine the appropriate scope and methodology for developing our Satisfaction Index.

**10. Encouraging the Use of eGov by Our Customers**

By 2006, FSA will rely on a set of core processes to conduct electronic government transactions with the public and USDA Service Centers. FSA will follow Federal and USDA-defined enterprise architecture solutions to enable its electronic government delivery channel. FSA is already implementing USDA's eAuthentication service and enterprise solutions for geospatial data. FSA has also implemented an Extensible Authorization Service (EAS) to further expand the portability of granting authorizations within FSA web-based applications. In FY 2004, FSA added 31,000 customers through the eAuth process and the web usage of its programs is climbing regularly at 1,500 to 2,000 new users per week.

**AASA Categories (Continued)****10. Encouraging the Use of eGov by Our Customers (Continued)**

However, this is a challenging transition. National Agricultural Statistics Service information indicates that few customers are prepared to conduct electronic business transactions. In many areas of the United States, high speed web access to the Internet remains an issue for FSA customers and clients. As FSA continues to deploy up-to-date Web-based delivery programs, education, and customer support to those customers ready to fully convert to electronic commerce transactions, servicing customers by traditional program delivery (that is face-to-face transactions) will continue to be an Agency requirement.

**Documenting AASA**

AASA documentation should justify reasons why an individual's or group's service to agriculture is outstanding, clearly exceeds job requirements, and deserves honorary recognition by the Administrator.

Documentation must convince various organizational screening levels and the Administrator's selection committees that the nominee has accomplished more than the job required, or that the results of those accomplishments, while within the job's responsibilities, are highly significant and clearly warrant recognition. The following questions may stimulate ideas for developing a nomination.

- What was done that deserves recognition?
  - Was it unique, a new approach, exceptionally creative?
  - If so, why?
- What was the effect of the accomplishment?
  - Was it local, regional, national, or international in scope?
  - Was it a model for others?
- Did the accomplishment result in increased program effectiveness?
  - Did it reduce costs?
  - Did it result in more effective operation or better public service?
  - Describe the results.
- What distinguished the nominee's profession or career? What special qualities or capabilities make the individual outstanding?
- What specific performance far exceeded job requirements?
  - Was the work done with less than usual supervision, help, or resources?
  - What obstacles were overcome?
  - What new techniques or procedures were developed?

The justification should avoid:

- emphasizing job responsibility rather than accomplishment
- retirement testimonials
- quoting statistics and making progress statements without comparing them to earlier periods or circumstances
- general or vague statements about what was done, without referring to how it was done or by whom.