



United States Department of Agriculture



## Farm Service Agency

### Office of Program Education and Stakeholder Engagement County Committee (COC) Frequently Asked Questions for Stakeholders

#### **Do FSA county committees make a difference?**

County committees impact the administration of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) within a community. They help make determinations on programs such as disaster assistance, hiring decisions, and assist with outreach. County committee members can impact producers through their decision making and help shape the culture of a local FSA office. They also ensure the fair and equitable administration of FSA farm programs in their counties and are accountable to the Secretary of Agriculture.

#### **What is an FSA county committee?**

Every FSA office in the country is required by law to have an advisory board made up of local farmers and ranchers. Members of the board (called a county committee) are elected by their peers (local farmers and landowners) in the fall of every year.

#### **What do county committees do?**

County committees make informed decisions in FSA service centers across the country. Every FSA office is required to have a county committee, and they are made up of local farmers who are elected by local farmers.

#### **What kind of voice does a member have?**

County committee decisions are made by consensus and committee members represent the priorities and voice of the diversity of producers and all production types.

#### **What issues can they speak to?**

Conduct hearings and reviews as requested by the state committee, ensure socially disadvantaged (SDA) farmers and ranchers are fairly represented, make recommendations to the state committee on existing programs, monitor changes in farm programs, and inform farmers of the purpose and provisions of FSA programs.

#### **What positions are there within a county committee?**

Committees have a chair, vice chair, voting member, minority non-voting advisor, and if applicable, an appointed voting SDA member.

#### **How do I become committee chair?**

The positions are voted on among the current COC members at the organizational meeting held each January. If you are interested in a particular role, you should communicate this during the initial January meeting after elections take place.

# Farm Service Agency County Committees



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### What's the history of county committees?

The county committees were authorized by Congress in the 1930's to allow for grassroots input and local administration of "Agricultural Adjustment Administration" programs.

### Why should we represent diversity?

To ensure fair representation of SDA farmers and ranchers and production types.

### What is the time commitment?

Meetings are held monthly and last approximately two to three hours, depending on the amount of materials that need to be reviewed. Meetings will not be held if there is not sufficient business to address on a given month. If impromptu work or pressing issues arise between meetings, a conference call can be held instead of a physical meeting.

### How long are the terms?

Three years.

### Are there term limits?

A limit of three terms for a total of nine consecutive years.

### What are the differences between elected and appointed COC members?

Both positions require a nomination form, but the elected member is voted in by the winning number of votes tallied in their county. An appointed member is selected by the Secretary of Agriculture to represent the underserved in that county. Both positions are voting members.

### What is the incentive? What kind of benefits or compensation do COC members receive?

Committee members get reimbursed for travel to and from committee meetings. Committee members also receive a stipend for their time.

### Are COC members considered federal employees?

No

### What types of rules do they have to follow?

Although COC members are not federal employees, they are still required to obey some of the same rules that apply to federal and county employees. For example, COC members complete security and ethics training. They are also subject to some of the guidelines outlined in FSA Handbook 22-PM, which can be accessed online at: [https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/22-pm.pdf](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/22-pm.pdf)

### How can stakeholders support producers who are running for office or who want to vote?

Stakeholders can help producers by sharing information online and by word of mouth at public meetings or when interacting with farmers.

### How do COC's affect decisions for Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) or Rural Development (RD)?

COCs approve cost-share rates used in conservation programs in conjunction with NRCS. COCs also approve eligibility, which may affect NRCS program payments and producer eligibility.

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### How do I find out the financial impact of COCs in my state?

You can refer to your state accomplishments fact sheet to learn more about the impact of FSA financial programs in your state. Visit [fsa.usda.gov/outreach](http://fsa.usda.gov/outreach) to find your state impact report.

### Why should organizations promote COC elections?

County committees provide local input on the administration of FSA programs, including commodity price support loans and payments, conservation programs, disaster payments and emergency programs. Farmers who serve on committees help decide administrative details of programs and provide input on how to improve program delivery. County committees play critical roles in outreach. They help shape the culture of their local offices and improve customer service. Organizations can help make sure their producers are being served by promoting representation on county committees.

### How do I know if I'm eligible to be nominated to serve on a county committee?

To hold office as a COC member or alternate, a person must fulfill each requirement: be a producer who owns or operates a farm or ranch; participate or cooperate in any FSA program provided for by law; be a U.S. Citizen; be of legal voting age; meet the basic eligibility requirements; and reside in the county or multi-county jurisdiction in which they will be serving.

### Can I nominate myself?

Yes. Individuals may nominate themselves or others as a candidate. Additionally, organizations representing underserved (minority and women) farmers or ranchers may nominate candidates. Nomination forms are filed for the county committee at the office that administers a producer's farm records. To become a nominee, eligible individuals must sign nomination form FSA-669A. The form includes a statement that the nominee agrees to serve if elected. This form is available at your FSA county office and online at [www.fsa.usda.gov/elections](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections).

### What happens when someone is nominated? Are they notified?

Nominees will be notified because the FSA-669A needs to have the nominee's signature. If the candidate is nominated by someone else or an organization, the county office will contact that person to inform them they have been nominated. If they accept the nomination, they will need to sign the nomination form.

### How do I know if I'm eligible to vote?

To be eligible to vote, producers must be currently farming in the county and participating in a USDA program or have a loan with FSA. Only certain districts of the county are up for election each year, and if you are eligible to vote, you should receive a ballot in the mail in November. If you are in the FSA system for a current Local Administrative Area (LAA) election, you will also receive a ballot.

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### What if I farm with my parents? How do I know if I will receive a ballot?

If you are in our system and actively farming, you will receive a ballot when your LAA is up for election.

### How do I find out if I'm farming in an LAA that is up for an election?

You can contact your local FSA office and ask if your LAA is up for an election. If it is not, ask when the next election will be.

### Who can I contact to make sure I get a ballot?

You can contact your local FSA office to find out if you are eligible to vote. If you're eligible to vote, but did not receive your ballot in the mail, you may pick one up at your local FSA office.

### How do I vote?

Ballots are mailed to all eligible farmers and landowners the first Monday in November. You can either mail your ballot or turn it in at your local FSA office. You will receive a receipt when you submit your ballot.

### When do I vote?

All ballots are due back the first Monday in December. Check with your local office on the exact date, as it changes year to year.

### Who counts the ballots?

The ballots are counted by current COC members, the county executive director and other office staff, if needed.

### Is the ballot counting public?

The counting of the ballots is open to the public. The date and time will be printed on the ballot you receive in the mail.

### Will my vote even matter?

Absolutely! Generally, only a fraction of eligible farmers vote in their local county committee elections. With such a low turnout, your vote matters even more. Every ballot sent in is another step closer to making sure family farmers are heard.

**[www.fsa.usda.gov/elections](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections)**

Contact your local FSA county office to learn more about County Committees.

**<https://offices.usda.gov>**

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