FACT SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARM SERVICE AGENCY

April 2013

FSA County Committee Election

Overview

The election of agricultural producers to Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committees is important to ALL farmers and ranchers, whether beginning or long-established with large or small operations. It is crucial that every eligible producer participate in these elections because FSA county committees are a link between the agricultural community and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

County committee members are a critical component of the operations of FSA. They help deliver FSA farm programs at the local level. Farmers and ranchers who serve on county committees help with the decisions necessary to administer the programs in their counties. They work to ensure FSA agricultural programs serve the needs of local producers.

County committees provide local input on:

- Commodity price support loans and payments
- Conservation programs
- Incentive, indemnity and disaster payments for some commodities
- Emergency programs
- Payment eligibility

FSA county committees operate within official regulations designed to carry out federal laws. County committee members apply their judgment and knowledge to make local decisions.

Election Period

June 17, 2013 – The nomination period begins. Request nomination forms from the local USDA Service Center or obtain online at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections.

Aug. 1, 2013 – Last day to file nomination forms at the local USDA Service Center

Nov. 4, 2013 – Ballots mailed to eligible voters

Dec. 2, 2013 – Last day to return voted ballots to the USDA Service Center

Jan. 1, 2014 – Newly elected county committee members take office.

Who Can Vote

Agricultural producers of legal voting age may be eligible to vote if they participate or cooperate in any FSA program. A person who is not of legal voting age but supervises and conducts the farming operations of an entire farm also may be eligible to vote. Members of American Indian tribes holding agricultural land are eligible to vote if voting requirements are met. More information about voting eligibility requirements can be found in the FSA fact sheet titled "FSA County Committee Election - Eligibility to Vote and Hold Office as a County Committee Member." Producers may contact their local USDA Service Center for more information.

Nominations

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 USDA Service Centers and online at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections.

Nomination forms for the 2013 election must be postmarked or received in the local USDA Service Center by close of business on Aug. 1, 2013.

Agricultural producers who participate or cooperate in an FSA program may be nominated for candidacy for the county committee. Individuals may nominate themselves or others as a candidate. Additionally, organizations representing minority and women farmers or ranchers may nominate candidates. Nomination forms are filed for the county committee of the office that administers a producer's farm records.

Don't Miss Out on Voting

Ballots will be mailed to voters by Nov. 4, 2013, and must be returned to the FSA county office or postmarked by Dec. 2, 2013. Eligible voters must contact their local FSA county office before the final date if they did not receive a ballot.

Uniform Guidelines

USDA issued uniform guidelines for county committee elections to help ensure that FSA county committees fairly represent the agricultural producers of a county or multi-county jurisdiction, especially minority and women producers. Minorities are African-Americans, American Indians or Alaska Natives, Hispanics, Asians, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders. The guidelines govern the FSA county committee election process and are designed to increase participation of minorities and women.

The following are just some of the specifics of the guidelines that are now in effect:

- If no valid nominations are filed, the Secretary of Agriculture may nominate up to two individuals to be placed on the ballot.
- County committees must annually review local administrative area boundaries to ensure the fair representation of minority and women producers in their county or multi-county jurisdictions.
- FSA county offices shall actively locate and recruit eligible candidates identified as minority and women farmers and ranchers as potential nominees for the county committee elections through outreach and publicity, including the development of partnerships with community-based organizations.

To read the guidelines in their entirety, visit the County Committee Elections page at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections.

In addition to minority and women producers, USDA strongly encourages beginning farmers to actively seek a position on a county committee.

Appointed Voting Members

Secretary Vilsack used the authority granted in the 2002 Farm Bill to appoint socially disadvantaged (SDA) committee members with voting privileges to serve on county committees in county jurisdictions that lack fair SDA representation. The Secretarial appointees do not replace elected members but join them as voting members on the committee. Individuals serving as non-voting minority advisors are encouraged to submit a nomination form. These forms are also accepted from community-based organizations representing SDA producers. SDA voting members are appointed by the Secretary from the nominations received.

Role of Advisors

In addition to elected or appointed members, FSA county committees may also include advisors. Advisors are appointed to county committees in counties or multi-county jurisdictions that have significant numbers of minority or women producers and lack such members on FSA county committees. Advisors play an important role by providing diverse viewpoints and by representing the interests of minorities and women in decisions made by county committees. FSA state committees officially appoint advisors who are recommended by county committees or community-based organizations.

For More Information

For more information about FSA county committees, visit a local FSA or USDA Service Center or the website at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections.

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