

For: State and County Offices

2012 COC Nominations and Election

Approved by: Deputy Administrator, Field Operations



1 Overview

A Background

COC elections provide farmers and ranchers the opportunity to represent producers in their community by serving on their local FSA COC. All farmers and ranchers are encouraged to consider running for these seats.

Significant emphasis continues to be placed on improving diversity on COC's. FSA is working diligently to increase the number of SDA farmers and ranchers nominated for COC using FSA-669A. States and counties have actively and successfully been able to place many more SDA candidates' names on ballots. These efforts must be continued and expanded to ensure that SDA farmers and ranchers have every opportunity for election to FSA COC's.

FSA must also continue working on encouraging voters to look to beginning farmers and ranchers as a source for nominees of COC elections. COC's and County Office employees must reach out to beginning farmers and ranchers with information and encouragement to run for a seat on COC. Beginning farmer contacts should include, but not be limited to, County Extension educators and high school and college instructors.

Publicity and outreach efforts must be directed to all producers, with special emphasis on SDA and beginning farmers and ranchers. Every means must be used to contact organizations whose members consist of SDA farmers and ranchers, as these organizations have the opportunity to nominate farmers and ranchers for candidacy to COC's.

Not only must COC's and County Office employees encourage producers to submit FSA-669A's, they must strongly encourage all voters to return ballots after having selected the candidate of their choice. Historically, about 13 percent of the ballots mailed were voted and returned. On average, 2 million ballots are mailed annually, so there is great opportunity for a candidate to be elected if only a small percentage increase in voted and returned ballots is realized.

Disposal Date	Distribution
April 1, 2013	State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices

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1 Overview (Continued)

B Purpose

This notice instructs STC's, COC's, County Offices, Outreach Coordinators, and State Office staff responsible for COC elections to:

- **ensure that the correct LAA's are identified for the election**

Note: Every year special elections are necessary because of elections held in wrong LAA's, and other avoidable mistakes. See 15-AO, subparagraph 79 A for guidance.

- ensure that County Offices begin accepting FSA-669A's for COC elections

Note: FSA-669A's may be accepted any time before the opening of the nomination period.

- be informed of the 2012 COC election schedule (Exhibit 2).

Note: Reminder postcards will no longer be sent to producers by the contractor or County Offices.

C SDA Farmer or Rancher Representation on COC's

An SDA farmer, rancher, or agricultural producer is a member of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of his or her identity as a member of the group without regard to his or her individual qualities. SDA groups include women, African Americans, American Indians, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders.

To increase representation of SDA farmers and ranchers on COC's, FSA **requires** County Offices and COC's to do the following:

- actively solicit and accept FSA-669A's from producers and groups representing SDA producers in the COC jurisdiction before close of the nomination period
- provide organizations representing SDA groups with detailed information during the nomination period about the process and opportunity to nominate candidates using FSA-669A during the nomination period

Notes: Record, in COC minutes **and** Outreach Tracking and Information System (OTIS), the names of SDA groups contacted and information that was provided to them.

Organizations representing SDA farmers and ranchers may file FSA-669A's.

- place informational posters and fact sheets in public buildings, churches, and businesses serving SDA producers.

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1 Overview (Continued)

D Beginning Farmer or Rancher Representation on COC's

To encourage representation of beginning farmers and ranchers on COC's, FSA **requires** County Offices and COC's to:

- actively solicit completed FSA-669A's from producers considered as beginning farmers or ranchers
- provide organizations whose membership is made up of or includes beginning farmers and ranchers with detailed information about the COC election process
- provide high schools and colleges with informational posters and fact sheets.

E Publicizing Elections

FSA National, State, and County Offices shall:

- provide COC fact sheets and posters to producer organizations, community-based organizations, tribal governments, local NIFA offices, organizations representing SDA groups, young farmer and rancher organizations, and land grant institutions
- ensure that all producers are adequately and timely informed about COC nomination and election procedures including all nomination and election deadlines and dates

Note: County Offices and COC's shall begin extensive COC election outreach activities immediately.

- place special emphasis on providing COC nomination and election information to SDA groups representing minority and female farmers and ranchers and organizations that have beginning farmers as members
- post maps that clearly identify LAA boundaries and LAA's conducting elections in the Service Center and in public locations

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1 Overview (Continued)

E Publicizing Elections (Continued)

- ensure FSA-669A's are:
 - available on the counter at each FSA County Office
 - provided to **all** eligible voters, in the LAA holding an election, by 1 of the following methods:
 - included in a newsletter or special mailing that is sent by regular mail, e-mail, or GovDelivery
 - personally handed to producers while they are in the office

Note: A record must be kept of producers who receive FSA-669A's while in the office.

- all eligible producers in the LAA holding an election, who have not received FSA-669A by July 1, 2012, **must** be mailed FSA-669A or sent a postcard
- the postcard **must** include the following options for obtaining FSA-669A:
 - web site where FSA-669A's may be printed or downloaded
 - going to an FSA County Office
 - calling an FSA office and requesting FSA-669A by mail

Note: Exhibit 1 provides example wording that may be used on a postcard. Instructions for printing mailing labels by LAA are available at the DAFO SharePoint web site under the Documents section.

- publicize:
 - the <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections> web site and inform the public that for:
 - FSA-669A, scroll down to the links under "Election Materials" and CLICK "**2012 Nomination Form**"
 - fact sheets, scroll down to the links under "Fact Sheets"

Note: FSA-669A in English and Spanish is also available at <http://intranet.fsa.usda.gov/FSA> for employee access.

- COC nomination and election information in newsletters, public service announcements, broadcast and print media, inserts in office mailings, or any other means of communication.

2 Action

A SED, STC, and State Outreach Coordinator Action

SED's and STC's shall ensure that all State- and local-level organizations whose members include SDA farmers and ranchers are contacted and informed of the upcoming COC nominations and elections. NIFA offices and local groups, and organizations that serve beginning farmers and ranchers, shall be provided COC nomination and election information.

SED's, in consultation with State outreach coordinators or designees, shall require each COC to develop and submit to SED through planned outreach activities entered in OTIS, **by June 15, 2012**. The Strategic Outreach Plan in OTIS and the supporting listing of outreach activities serve as each office's plan to ensure that all producers are adequately informed of the COC nomination and election processes. The planned outreach activities, including a list of all partner organizations involved, shall be entered into OTIS at the County Office level. Activity types to be used for COC outreach may include, but are **not** limited to, the following:

- broadcast and print media
- conferences
- meetings
- newsletters, etc.

Planned COC election outreach activities must specifically promote COC elections outside of the Service Center, and identify in OTIS how elections will be promoted. After activities are entered, the COC Election Outreach Plan is populated with the activities and is available from the "Generate a Report" section of OTIS. County Offices are instructed to print and review the COC Election Outreach Report to ensure that the planned activities provide a complete and accurate COC elections outreach effort for the year for each County Office.

Note: Each County Office plan **must** include methods for targeting SDA farmers and ranchers.

Each office's overall COC Election Outreach Plan includes the following items from OTIS:

- State Strategic Outreach Plan
- planned activities listed in the COC Election Outreach Plan
- list of partner organizations as of the date of printing.

These reports shall be printed and retained together in each office as the official COC Election Outreach Plan for 2012.

State outreach coordinators shall:

- take an active role in contacting representatives of SDA groups to provide COC nomination and election information

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2 Action (Continued)

A SED, STC, and State Outreach Coordinator Action (Continued)

- ensure that representatives of SDA groups fully understand the responsibilities of COC's and COC nomination and election processes
- cooperate with and provide outreach assistance to County Offices and COC's
- ensure that County Offices enter all meetings and conferences for COC election outreach in OTIS
- ensure that each County Office has entered all partner organizations contacted in OTIS no later than **August 1, 2012**

Note: Each Partner Organization only needs to be listed once, even if contacted by multiple counties.

- provide the Partner Organizations and Contacts Report and COC Outreach Report from OTIS to SED.

B COC Action

COC's, with the assistance of CED's and County Office staff, shall **immediately** develop an election outreach plan to inform all producers of the upcoming COC nomination and election processes and dates. Planned activities **must** specifically promote COC elections outside of the Service Center, and identify in OTIS how elections will be promoted. After activities are entered, the COC Election Outreach Plan is populated with the activities and is available from the Generate a Report section of OTIS. County Offices shall print and review their report to ensure that the planned activities provide a complete and accurate COC Elections Outreach Plan.

Note: Each County Office plan **must** include methods for targeting SDA farmers and ranchers.

COC's shall take specific actions to ensure that:

- **correct LAA's are holding elections**
- minority and female organizations in the COC jurisdiction are contacted and informed of the COC nomination and election processes
- organizations whose membership include beginning farmers and ranchers are provided nomination and election information
- FSA-669A's are available at the counter for producers requesting FSA-669A's

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2 Action (Continued)

B COC Action (Continued)

- all eligible voters are recorded correctly in SCIMS and the producer election data file
- all eligible voters listed in LAA's conducting elections are notified of nomination and election dates and procedure
- deceased producers are marked **not** eligible to vote in the Producer Election data file on the COC Election web site.

COC's and/or employees shall:

- explain the duties and eligibility requirements of being a COC member to producers
- place emphasis on obtaining SDA and beginning farmer or rancher nominees
- enter meetings and conferences for COC election outreach in OTIS
- enter all partner organizations contacted in OTIS, if not already entered
- make every effort to obtain nominees **before** the close of the nomination period, **August 1, 2012**, to help ensure that alternates will be available for COC's.

Note: Every COC election must have at least 1 nominee. County Offices will continue to conduct outreach for additional nominees until the end of the nomination period.

The nomination of eligible producers by voters or community-based organizations is the **only** method used to obtain candidates for COC elections. COC's are responsible for ensuring that all producers are knowledgeable about the nomination process for COC positions.

Candidate **names will not be added by COC's to FSA-669A's** after the end of the nomination period.

C CED Action

CED's shall:

- **review the current COC Member Information Report with COC's to ensure that the correct LAA is identified for holding an election in 2012**
- take an active role in contacting representatives of SDA groups to solicit nominations on FSA-669A's and ensure that these groups fully understand COC's role
- be available to meet with SDA farmer and rancher groups and groups whose membership include beginning farmers, to fully explain COC nomination and election procedures

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2 Action (Continued)

C CED Action (Continued)

- locally reproduce FSA-669A's, fact sheets, and posters from FSA's Internet at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections> and post them in public locations in COC jurisdictions
- ensure that all producers are informed of all election information, including LAA's holding an election, and where to obtain FSA-669A's
- conduct informational meetings to explain the COC nomination and election processes to the public
- work with COC's to ensure that information and meetings are thoroughly publicized through all available means
- ensure that deceased producers' names are **removed** from the eligible to vote list
- **ensure that all nominees listed on FSA-593 are recorded in SCIMS as individuals, flagged eligible to vote, and are entered in the correct COC/LAA in the Producer Election data file according to 15-AO, subparagraph 109 C**

Note: Particular attention **must** be given to nominees who are members of entities such as trusts, estates, corporations, limited partnerships, and limited liability corporations. **Only** the eligible voting member may be a candidate. This individual **must** have an Individual Profile Record established in SCIMS according to 15-AO, subparagraph 77 D. Nominees must be on the ballot using their name **only** with no other business or entity identifier.

Example: John Smith, Jr. or Sue L. Smith shall **not** be entered as John Smith, Jr./DBA Smith Farms, or Sue L. Smith Farms.

- send completed FSA-593 to the State Office no later than September 7 each year.

D FSA-669A's and COC Slate

Individuals who want to file FSA-669A's may nominate themselves or other eligible candidates. Eligible candidates may be nominated by organizations representing SDA farmers and ranchers, or by any eligible producer whose records are administered in the same COC jurisdiction.

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2 Action (Continued)

D FSA-669A's and COC Slate (Continued)

FSA-669A:

- provides a signature block for individuals or organizations that are using FSA-669A to nominate an eligible candidate other than themselves

Note: It is the nominator's responsibility to obtain the nominee's certification and signature **before** returning FSA-669A to the County Office.

- includes a checkbox in the Nominee's Certification block to identify write-in candidates after election results are known.

There is **no** required minimum number of eligible nominees for a COC's slate, unless there are **no** FSA-669A's filed for an LAA election. If no FSA-669A's are received, see 15-AO, paragraph 108. A separate FSA-669A **must** be used for each individual nomination. Names shall **not** be added to COC slates after the nomination period closes, if at least 1 candidate files FSA-669A.

There must be at least 1 candidate in each LAA holding an election. However, it is vital to **actively solicit more than 1 nominee** so that an alternate is available.

E Mailing FSA-669's

Name and address records of eligible voters in SCIMS and the COC Election web site are provided to the printing company by Kansas City. This database is used by the printer to mail FSA-669's to eligible voters. COC's and County Offices are responsible for ensuring that the information provided is correct. Changes made in FSA records after the data has been provided to the printing company will **not** be reflected in the name and address database used by the printer for both FSA-669's. The deadline for changes to be included in the data sent to the printing company is **September 28, 2012**.

FSA-669's will be mailed to eligible voters **no later than November 5, 2012**, by the printing company.

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2 Action (Continued)

F Contacts

If there are questions about this notice, contact either of the following:

- Barbara Boyd by:
 - e-mail to **barbara.boyd@wdc.usda.gov**
 - telephone at 202-720-7890
- Deborah Johnson by:
 - e-mail to **deborah.johnson@wdc.usda.gov**
 - telephone at 202-720-0067.

For questions about outreach activities and entering election activities in OTIS, contact Nancy Bond by either of the following:

- e-mail to **nancy.bond@wdc.usda.gov**
- telephone at 202-260-6069.

Example Postcard Wording

According to subparagraph 1 E, the following is example wording to use on a postcard.

County FSA Committee (COC) Election

June 15 through August 1, 2012, is the period for nominating farmers and ranchers as candidates for the local COC election. FSA encourages all eligible producers to nominate themselves, or another eligible producer, to run for office. Nomination forms (FSA-669-A's) are available:

- at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections>, and scroll down to the links under "Election Materials" and CLICK "**2012 Nomination Form**"
- by picking up FSA-669A at your local FSA office
- by calling your local office and requesting FSA-669A be sent to you.

2012 COC Election Schedule

The following provides the 2012 COC election schedule.

Date	Activity
April 2, 2012	<p>COC's and County Offices will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that the correct LAA's are identified for holding an election in 2012 by reviewing the current COC Member Information Report in the Reports section of the COC Election web site and FSA-668 • complete a review of LAA boundaries • send all LAA boundary determinations on FSA-582 to STC for approval. <p>Note: COC's shall document reviews and determinations of LAA's up for election and LAA boundaries in COC minutes.</p>
May 25, 2012	<p>STC's complete FSA-582 reviews, approve FSA-582's, and notify County Offices.</p> <p>Note: STC's shall document reviews and determinations about LAA boundaries in STC minutes.</p>
June 1, 2012	<p>COC's and County Offices will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review the Current COC Member Information Report to ensure accuracy of LAA's holding elections • review eligible voter lists and verify accuracy as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remove the checkmark (✓) from the eligible to vote field in the Producer Election Data File for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • producers who are deceased • voters for whom no valid address can be obtained • any entries of "Unknowns" <p>Note: The "receive mail indicator" is overridden for COC elections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • add eligible voters names by adding a checkmark (✓) to the "Eligible to Vote" field in the Producer Election data file • ensure that all eligible voters are associated with the correct COC and LAA • issue public notice of election and LAA boundaries. <p>Note: COC's and CED's shall review LAA's holding elections and eligible voter lists for accuracy and record their determinations in COC minutes.</p>

2012 COC Election Schedule (Continued)

Date	Activity
June 15, 2012	<p>COC's and County Offices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase outreach activities to acquire nominees and fully publicize the nomination and election processes • complete and print eligible voters list • make eligible voter lists available to the public.
August 1, 2012	<p>Final date for County Offices to receive FSA-669A's or for FSA-669A's to be postmarked. County Offices begin reviewing FSA-669A's.</p>
September 5, 2012	<p>COC's complete slates of nominees, if no FSA-669A's were received.</p> <p>County Offices ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each nominee is in SCIMS as an individual (first name, possibly middle initial, last name only; no entities or DBA's) • SCIMS matches the race, ethnicity, and gender information on FSA-669A • the correct determination codes for race, ethnicity, and gender have been selected for each nominee in SCIMS <p>Note: If nominee has entered the race, ethnicity, and gender on FSA-669A, the determination codes in SCIMS shall be updated accordingly and show, "Customer Declared".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • each nominee is flagged eligible to vote, and in the correct COC/LAA in the Producer Election data file. <p>Final date for County Office to mail congratulation letters to nominees.</p>
September 1, 2012, to September 24, 2012	<p>County Offices enter nominee and ballot data in COC Elections web site. State Offices shall monitor closely to ensure that all elections are entered timely.</p>
September 27, 2012	<p>Deadline for name and address changes to be included in data sent to printing company.</p>
November 5, 2012	<p>FSA-669 to be mailed by printing company to each producer on eligible voter lists for LAA's holding election.</p>
December 3, 2012	<p>Completed FSA-669A's or FSA-669B's to be returned to County Office or postmarked.</p>
December 10, 2012	<p>Final date for COC's and County Offices to count FSA-669B's.</p>
December 1, 2012, to December 31, 2012	<p>Elections web site available for County Offices to enter election results. County Offices enter election results.</p>