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Alabama FSA Newsletter

Alabama Farm Service Agency

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Farm Foundations for Veterans

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) in partnership with the National Center of Appropriate Technology (NCAT) will host four, 2.5-day seminars titled, "Farm Foundations for Veterans" in Alabama. The seminars are free and open to active duty military members, veterans and spouses with less than 10 years of experience in agriculture. The program will consist of 1.5 days of in-class information on how to get started in farming, how to qualify for government programs that reward land stewardship and conservation efforts, how to pursue profitable niche markets, business plan development and organic certification. It will also include pest management, livestock production, risk management and estate planning. USDA agencies including FSA, Rural Development (RD) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will present program information the first day of the course. A full day will be devoted to farm visits for hands-on experience at production farms, including a livestock operation (goats and/or cattle) and a fruit/vegetable farm.

The location and date of these seminars are as follows:
Tuscaloosa, Alabama: July 26 - 28, 2016

Active duty military members, veterans and their spouses who are interested in registering for a seminar or who need additional information can contact Cassandra Searight, Public Affairs Specialist at cassandra.searight@al.usda.gov or by telephone at 334-279-3502.

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in these events should contact Cassandra Searight at 334-279-3502 or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.

Enrollment Period for 2016 USDA Safety Net Coverage Ends Aug. 1

Producers who chose coverage from the safety net programs established by the 2014 Farm Bill, known as the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs, can visit FSA county offices through Aug. 1, 2016, to sign contracts to enroll in coverage for 2016.

Although the choice between ARC and PLC is completed and remains in effect through 2018, producers must still enroll their farm by signing a contract each year to receive coverage.

Producers are encouraged to contact their local FSA office to schedule an appointment to enroll. If a farm is not enrolled during the 2016 enrollment period, producers on that farm will not be eligible for financial assistance from the ARC or PLC programs should crop prices or farm revenues fall below the historical price or revenue benchmarks established by the program.

The two programs were authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill and offer a safety net to agricultural producers when there is a substantial drop in prices or revenues for covered commodities. Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice (which includes short grain and sweet rice), safflower seed, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat. Upland cotton is no longer a covered commodity. For more details regarding these programs, go to www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc.

For more information, producers are encouraged to visit their local FSA office. To find a local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

USDA Provides Targeted Assistance to Cotton Producers to Share in the Cost of Ginning

One-time Payments to Begin in July to Assist with 2016 Ginning Season

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) will provide an estimated \$300 million in cost-share assistance payments to cotton producers through the new Cotton Ginning Cost-Share program, in order to expand and maintain the domestic marketing of cotton.

The Cotton Ginning Cost Share program will offer meaningful, timely and targeted assistance to cotton growers to help with their anticipated ginning costs and to facilitate marketing. The program will provide, on average, approximately 60 percent more assistance per farm and per producer than the 2014 program that provided cotton transition assistance.

Through the Cotton Ginning Cost-Share program, eligible producers can receive a one-time cost share payment, which is based on a producer's 2015 cotton acres reported to FSA, multiplied by 40 percent of the average ginning cost for each production region. With the pressing need to provide assistance ahead of the 2016 ginning season this fall, USDA will ensure the application process is straight-forward and efficient. The program estimates the costs based on planting of cotton in 2015, and therefore the local FSA offices already have this information for the vast majority of eligible producers and the applications will be pre-populated with existing data. Sign-up for the program will **begin June 20 and run through Aug. 5, 2016** at the producer's local FSA office. Payments will be processed as applications are received, and are expected to begin in July.

Since 2011, cotton fiber markets have experienced dramatic changes. As a result of low cotton prices and global oversupply, cotton producers are facing economic uncertainty that has led to many producers having lost equity and having been forced to liquidate equipment and land to satisfy loans. The ginning of cotton is necessary prior to marketing the lint for fiber, or the seed for oil or feed. While the Cotton Ginning Cost-Share program makes payments to cotton producers for cotton ginning costs, the benefits of the program will be felt by the broader marketing chain associated with cotton and cottonseed, including cotton gins, cooperatives, marketers and cottonseed crushers and the rural communities that depend on them.

The program has the same eligibility requirements as were used for the 2014 Cotton Transition Assistance Program, including a \$40,000 per producer payment limit, requirement to be actively engaged in farming, meet conservation compliance and a \$900,000 adjusted gross income limit.

To learn more about the Cotton Ginning Cost-Share program, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/cgcs or contact a local FSA county office. To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Dairy Producers Can Enroll to Protect Milk Production Margins

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Alabama announced that dairy producers can enroll for 2017 coverage in the Margin Protection Program for Dairy (MPP-Dairy) starting July 1. The voluntary program, established by the 2014 Farm Bill, provides financial assistance to participating dairy producers when the margin – the difference between the price of milk and feed costs – falls below the coverage level selected by the producer.

The Margin Protection Program gives participating dairy producers the flexibility to select coverage levels best suited for their operation. Enrollment began July 1 and ends on Sept. 30, 2016, for coverage in calendar year 2017. Participating farmers will remain in the program through 2018 and pay a minimum \$100 administrative fee each year. Producers have the option of selecting a different coverage level during open enrollment each year.

USDA has a web tool to help producers determine the level of coverage under the Margin Protection Program that will provide them with the strongest safety net under a variety of conditions. The online resource, available at www.fsa.usda.gov/mpptool, allows dairy farmers to quickly and easily combine unique operation data and other key variables to calculate their coverage needs based on price projections. Producers can also review historical data or estimate future coverage needs, based on data projections. The secure site can be accessed via computer, Smartphone or tablet 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

To complete enrollment, producers must make coverage elections during the enrollment period and pay the annual \$100 administrative fee that provides basic catastrophic protection that covers 90 percent of milk production at a \$4 margin coverage level. For additional premiums, operations can protect 25 to 90 percent of production history with margin coverage levels from \$4.50 to \$8, in 50 cent increments. Once enrolled, dairy operations are required to participate through 2018 by making coverage elections each year. Producers can mail the appropriate form to the producer's administrative county FSA office, along with applicable fees without necessitating a trip to the local FSA office. If electing higher coverage for 2017, dairy producers can either pay the premium in full at the time of enrollment or pay 100 percent of the premium by Sept. 1, 2017. Premium fees may be

paid directly to FSA or producers can work with their milk handlers to remit premiums on their behalf.

Also beginning July 1, 2016, FSA will begin accepting applications for intergenerational transfers, allowing program participants who added an adult child, grandchild or spouse to the operation during calendar year 2014 or 2015, or between Jan. 1 and June 30, 2016, to increase production history by the new cows bought into the operation by the new family members. For intergenerational transfers occurring on or after July 1, 2016, notification to FSA must be made within 60 days of purchasing the additional cows.

Dairy operations enrolling in the new program must meet conservation compliance provisions and cannot participate in the Livestock Gross Margin Dairy Insurance Program.

For more information, visit FSA online at www.fsa.usda.gov/dairy or stop by a local FSA office to learn more about the Margin Protection Program. To find a local FSA office in your area, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

2016 Acreage Reporting Dates

In order to comply with FSA program eligibility requirements, all producers are encouraged to visit the local County FSA office to file an accurate crop certification report by the applicable deadline.

The following acreage reporting dates are applicable for Alabama:

November 15, 2015	Apiculture, PRF/Perennial Forage, Onions
January 2, 2016	Honey (If colonies are acquired after January 2, 2015, the crop must be reported within 30 calendar days of the date colonies of bees are acquired, brought into, or removed from the county.)
January 15, 2016	Blueberries, Canola, Rapeseed, Fall Oats, Peaches, Fall Wheat
March 15, 2016	Pecans, Potatoes (planted Jan. 1- Mar. 1)
May 15, 2016	Sweet Corn, Potatoes (planted Mar. 2-Apr. 15), Tobacco, Tomatoes
May 31, 2016	Nursery Crops
July 15, 2016	All Other Crops
September 30, 2016	Aquaculture and Value Loss Crops

The following exceptions apply to the above acreage reporting dates:

- If the crop has not been planted by the above acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.
- If a producer acquires additional acreage after the above acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendar days after purchase or acquiring the lease. Appropriate documentation must be provided to the county office.
- If a perennial forage crop is reported with the intended use of "cover only," "green manure,"

“left standing,” or “seed,” then the acreage must be reported by July 15th.

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP covered crops is the earlier of the dates listed above or 15 calendar days before grazing or harvesting of the crop begins.

For questions regarding crop certification and crop loss reports, please contact your local County FSA office.

During National Pollinator Week, USDA Announced Key Measures to Improve Pollinator Health

USDA's Conservation Reserve Program Currently Provides 15 Million Acres of Healthy Forage for Pollinators, and New Partnership Will Ensure Additional High-Quality Habitat in the Future

During National Pollinator Week, USDA announced two initiatives in support of the [President's National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honeybees and Other Pollinators](#), announced just over one year ago. A review of USDA's most popular conservation program found that farmers and ranchers across the country are creating at least 15 million acres of healthy forage and habitat for pollinators, and the department has also entered into a new partnership with leading honey bee organizations that will help to ensure future conservation projects continue to provide benefits to these important species.

USDA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with two honey bee organizations, the American Honey Producers Association and the American Beekeeping Federation, to facilitate an ongoing partnership that will ensure USDA's conservation initiatives are as advantageous as possible to pollinators and that beekeepers understand how they can benefit from USDA's conservation and safety net programs.

FSA plays a critical role in the delivery of programs that provide a safety net for beekeepers who experience losses due to natural disasters, and the agency administers the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish Program, which provides assistance for the loss of honeybee colonies, in excess of normal mortality, due to Colony Collapse Disorder or other natural causes. These groups have helped to ensure that these safety net programs work well, and they have helped focus research to learn more about the impacts of USDA programs and make continuous improvements. This MOU creates a framework to ensure ongoing, meaningful information sharing to help beekeepers and honey bees into the future.

The National Strategy called for seven million acres of land to be enhanced or restored for pollinators. Since then, USDA has more than tripled the acreage enrolled in CRP's pollinator initiative, through which USDA helps to cover the cost of planting pollinator-friendly wildflowers, legumes and shrubs, and USDA has increased the limit on this initiative in response to landowner demand so that more acres can be enrolled in the future.

This [fact sheet](#) contains more information about USDA's work to keep pollinators buzzing and contributing to a diverse domestic and global food supply.

To learn more about FSA's conservation programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation or contact a local FSA county office. To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

FSAfarm+, FSA's Customer Self-Service Portal

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) has launched a new tool to provide farmers and ranchers with remote access to their personal farm information using their home computers. Farmers and ranchers can now view, print or export their personal farm data all without visiting an FSA county office.

The program, known as **FSAfarm+**, provides you with secure access to view your personal FSA data, such as base and yields, Conservation Reserve Program data, other conservation program acreage, Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation status information, field boundaries, farm imagery, name and address details, contact information and membership interest and shares in the operation. This data will be available in real time, at no cost to the producer and allow operators and owners to export and print farm records, including maps. Producers also can electronically share their data with a crop insurance agent from their own personal computer.

Farm operators and owners first will need "Level 2 eAuthentication" to access the webportal. This level of security ensures that personal information is protected for each user. Level 2 access can be obtained by going to www.eauth.usda.gov, completing the required information and then visiting your local FSA office to finalize access.

For more information on **FSAfarm+**, the customer self-service portal, contact your local FSA office. To find your local FSA county office, click <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Loan Servicing

There are options for Farm Service Agency loan customers during financial stress. If you are a borrower who is unable to make payments on a loan, contact your local FSA Farm Loan Manager to learn about the options available to you.

Youth Loans

The Farm Service Agency makes loans to youth to establish and operate agricultural income-producing projects in connection with 4-H clubs, FFA and other agricultural groups. Projects must be planned and operated with the help of the organization advisor, produce sufficient income to repay the loan and provide the youth with practical business and educational experience. The maximum loan amount is \$5000.

Youth Loan Eligibility Requirements:

- Be a citizen of the United States (which includes Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) or a legal resident alien
- Be 10 years to 20 years of age
- Comply with FSA's general eligibility requirements
- Be unable to get a loan from other sources
- Conduct a modest income-producing project in a supervised program of work as outlined above

- Demonstrate capability of planning, managing and operating the project under guidance and assistance from a project advisor. The project supervisor must recommend the youth loan applicant, along with providing adequate supervision.

Stop by the county office for help preparing and processing the application forms.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).