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Alabama FSA Newsletter

Alabama Farm Service Agency

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Please contact your local FSA Office for questions specific to your operation or county.

USDA Begins 49th Enrollment Period for the Conservation Reserve Program

December 2015 Marks 30th Anniversary for the Nation's Most Successful Voluntary Conservation Program

Farmers and ranchers are reminded that the next general enrollment period for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) **began Dec. 1, 2015, and ends on Feb. 26, 2016**. December 2015 also marks the 30th anniversary of CRP, a federally funded program that assists agricultural producers with the cost of restoring, enhancing and protecting certain grasses, shrubs and trees to improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and reduce loss of wildlife habitat.

As of September 2015, 24.2 million acres were enrolled in CRP. CRP also is protecting more than 170,000 stream miles with riparian forest and grass buffers, enough to go around the world 7 times. For an interactive tour of CRP success stories from across the U.S., visit www.fsa.usda.gov/CRPis30, or follow on Twitter at #CRPis30.

Participants in CRP establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat on marginally productive agricultural lands. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. At times when commodity prices are low, enrolling sensitive lands in CRP can be especially attractive to farmers and ranchers, as it softens the economic hardship for landowners at the same time that it provides ecological benefits. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years. The long-term goal of the program is to re-establish native plant species on marginal agricultural lands for the primary purpose of preventing soil erosion and improving water quality and related benefits of reducing loss of wildlife habitat.

Contracts on 1.64 million acres of CRP are set to expire on Sept. 30, 2016. Producers with expiring contracts or producers with environmentally sensitive land are encouraged to evaluate their options under CRP.

Since it was established on Dec. 23, 1985, CRP has:

- Prevented more than 9 billion tons of soil from eroding, enough soil to fill 600 million dump trucks;
- Reduced nitrogen and phosphorous runoff relative to annually tilled cropland by 95 and 85 percent respectively;
- Sequestered an annual average of 49 million tons of greenhouse gases, equal to taking 9 million cars off the road.

Since 1996, CRP has created nearly 2.7 million acres of restored wetlands.

To submit CRP offers, producers must visit their local FSA office. To find a local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>. For more information FSA conservation programs, visit a local FSA office or www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

USDA Issues Safety-Net Payments to Alabama Farmers Facing Market Downturn

The USDA Farm Service Agency has begun issuing financial assistance for the 2014 crop year to those agricultural producers who are participating in the new safety-net programs established by the 2014 Farm Bill. The new programs, known as Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC), are designed to protect against unexpected drops in crop prices or revenues due to market downturns.

Unlike the old direct payments program, which provided funds in good years and bad years, these new programs only provide financial assistance when prices or revenues drop below normal. For example, nationwide, farms participating in ARC-County that are receiving payments experienced a \$20 billion drop in revenues relative to the historical benchmark. Similarly, lower prices in commodities such as peanuts and corn have triggered PLC assistance.

Also, please note that funds provided by the ARC-County program can vary from county to county. The 2014 Farm Bill requires ARC-County payments to be calculated using the national average market year price (which does not vary by county), and the average county yield (which varies by county). This creates county-by-county differences in payment rates. The yield data comes from surveys conducted by the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the national standard that uses the highest-precision statistical procedures available. Where that data does not exist, the next strongest data is used: county-level crop insurance data from the Risk Management Agency. If that data does not exist, the next strongest data is used: NASS district data. Where NASS district data doesn't exist, the FSA State Committees provide data.

Because the new programs are designed as financial assistance for prices and revenues lower than normal, not all producers will receive a payment, (as occurred with the old direct payments program). ARC/PLC payments are designed to help with unexpected changes in the marketplace, and to supplement other assistance programs, such as crop insurance. To learn more about the data used in calculating payments, how payments are calculated, crop-specific and state-specific information, please visit our website at www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc.

USDA Improves Access to Capital for Tribal Farmlands with Multiple Owners

New Program Allows More Farm Loans for “Highly Fractionated” Tribal Land

USDA is expanding the availability of farm loans for Indian tribes and members to purchase tribal farmland that has multiple owners. The improved lending opportunities are possible due to new authority granted by the 2014 Farm Bill, which allows USDA to provide revolving loan funds to qualified intermediary lenders that can relend the funds to qualified tribes and individuals. The program became available on Dec.1, 2015.

As a direct result of more than a dozen tribal meetings across the country, USDA is able to implement a solution to a longstanding barrier to financing, which will increase the availability of farm loans to Native Americans who want to start or expand a farming or ranching operation on Indian lands.

Under the [1887 Dawes Act](#), Indian reservation land was divided and allotted to individual tribal members such that with the passing of each generation, title ownership was divided and parceled among heirs, while the land was not. As a result, land once owned by a single person could today be owned by hundreds or thousands of individuals, resulting in what is known as “highly fractionated Indian land.” In many instances, landowners are unknown or cannot be located, which complicates the coordination of ownership or prevents the use of the property altogether. There are more than 245,000 owners of three million fractionated land interests, spanning approximately 150 Indian reservations.

Under the rules published today, USDA will now allow tribes and tribal members to submit a farm loan application to an intermediary lender. To participate, intermediary lenders first must be approved by USDA. The lenders may be private and tribal nonprofit corporations, public agencies, Indian tribes, or lenders subject to federal or state regulation (such as a credit union or other financial institution). FSA will lend to the intermediary, which will relend to the applicant. The intermediary lender also will administer the loan for the applicant.

Additional information on guidelines and criteria for intermediate lenders and how to file a loan application under Highly Fractionated Indian Land loan program will be shared Dec. 7, 2015 at the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) meeting and Tribal consultation in Las Vegas, Nev. For more information, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/farmloans or contact the local FSA county office. To find the local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

USDA also has opened a 90-day period for the public to submit comments on this program. Written comments must be submitted by Feb. 29, 2016, at www.regulations.gov, using Regulation Identifier Number 0560-AI32.

FSA County Committee Elections Close Dec. 7

Farmers and Ranchers Have a Voice in Local Farm Program Decisions

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds producers that 2015 FSA County Committee election ballots must be returned to local FSA offices by Dec. 7, 2015.

Nearly 7,700 FSA County Committee members serve FSA offices nationwide. Each committee has three to 11 elected members who serve three-year terms of office. One-third of county committee seats are up for election each year. County committee members apply their knowledge and judgment to help FSA make important decisions on its commodity support programs; conservation programs; indemnity and disaster programs; emergency programs and eligibility.

Producers must participate or cooperate in an FSA program to be eligible to vote in the county committee election. Approximately 1.9 million producers are currently eligible to vote. Farmers and ranchers who supervise and conduct the farming operations of an entire farm, but are not of legal voting age, also may be eligible to vote.

Farmers and ranchers will begin receiving their ballots the week of Nov. 9. Ballots include the names of candidates running for the local committee election. FSA has modified the ballot, making it more easily identifiable and less likely to be overlooked. Voters who do not receive ballots in the coming week can pick one up at their local FSA office. Ballots returned by mail must be postmarked no later than Dec. 7, 2015. Newly elected committee members and their alternates will take office Jan. 1, 2016.

For more information, visit the FSA website at www.fsa.usda.gov/elections. You may also contact your local USDA Service Center or FSA office. Visit <http://offices.usda.gov> to find an FSA office near you.

Alabama Producers Urged to Consider Risk Protection Coverage before Crop Sales Deadlines

The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds producers to review available USDA crop risk protection options, including federal crop insurance and Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage, before the crop deadline.

Federal crop insurance covers crop losses from natural adversities such as drought, hail and excessive moisture. NAP covers losses from natural disasters on crops for which no permanent federal crop insurance program is available, including perennial grass forage and grazing crops, fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass, ginseng, honey, syrup, bioenergy, and industrial crops.

The following crops in Alabama have a NAP application deadline of December 31, 2015:

- **2016-crop potatoes (Irish, red, russet, and white)**

USDA has partnered with Michigan State University and the University of Illinois to create an online tool at www.fsa.usda.gov/nap that allows producers to determine whether their crops are eligible for federal crop insurance or NAP and to explore the best level of protection for their operation. NAP basic coverage is available at 55 percent of the average market price for crop losses that exceed 50 percent of expected production, with higher levels of coverage, up to 65 percent of their expected production at 100 percent of the average market price available, including coverage for organics and crops marketed directly to consumers. Crops intended for grazing are not eligible for additional NAP coverage.

Federal crop insurance coverage is sold and delivered solely through private insurance agents. Agent lists are available at all USDA Service Centers or at USDA's online Agent Locator: <http://prodwebnlb.rma.usda.gov/apps/AgentLocator/#>. Producers can use the USDA Cost Estimator, <https://ewebapp.rma.usda.gov/apps/costestimator/Default.aspx>, to predict insurance premium costs.

For more information on NAP, service fees, premiums and sales deadlines, contact your local County FSA office or visit the web at www.fsa.usda.gov/nap.

2016 Acreage Reporting Dates

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

The following upcoming acreage reporting dates are applicable for Alabama:

Date	Crops
January 15, 2016	Blueberries, Canola, Rapeseed, Fall Oats, Peaches, Fall Wheat
March 15, 2016	Pecans, Potatoes (planted Jan. 1 – Mar. 1)

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.

Farmers to Receive Documentation of USDA Services

Local Offices Issue Receipts for Services Provided

Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds agricultural producers that FSA provides a receipt to customers who request or receive assistance or information on FSA programs.

As part of FSA’s mission to provide enhanced customer service, producers who visit FSA will receive documentation of services requested and provided. From December through June, FSA issued more than 327,000 electronic receipts.

The 2014 Farm Bill requires a receipt to be issued for any agricultural program assistance requested from FSA, the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Rural Development (RD). Receipts include the date, summary of the visit and any agricultural information, program and/or loan assistance provided to an individual or entity.

In some cases, a form or document – such as a completed and signed program enrollment form – serve as the customer receipt instead of a printed or electronic receipt. A service is any information, program or loan assistance provided whether through a visit, email, fax or letter.

To learn more about FSA, visit www.fsa.usda.gov or to find your local USDA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

Microloans

Farm Service Agency (FSA) reminds farmers and ranchers that the FSA Microloan that offers borrowers simplified lending with less paperwork is available. The microloan allows eligible beginning, small and mid-sized farmers to access up to \$50,000 in loans using a simplified application process with up to seven years to repay.

Farm Service Agency (FSA) developed the Microloan program to better serve the unique financial operating needs of beginning, niche and the smallest of family farm operations by modifying its operating Loan application, eligibility and security requirements. The program offers more flexible access to credit and serves as an attractive loan alternative for smaller farming operations like specialty crop producers and operators of community supported agriculture (CSA). These smaller farms, including non-traditional farm operations, often face limited financing.

Microloans can be used for all approved operating expenses as authorized by the FSA Operating Loan Program, including but not limited to:

- Initial start-up expenses
- Annual expenses such as seed, fertilizer, utilities, land rents
- Marketing and distribution expenses
- Family living expenses
- Purchase of livestock, equipment, and other materials essential to farm operations
- Minor farm improvements such as wells and coolers
- Hoop houses to extend the growing season
- Essential tools
- Irrigation
- Delivery vehicles

The FSA Microloan application, FSA-2330, may be obtained from the local FSA office or can be downloaded and printed from the USDA website. Applicants who are having problems gathering information or completing forms should contact their local FSA office for help.

Microloans are part of USDA's continued commitment to [small and midsized farming operations](#).

Since 2010, more than 50 percent of USDA's farm loans now go to beginning farmers and FSA has increased its lending to targeted underserved producers by nearly 50 percent.

Please review the FSA [Microloan Program Fact Sheet](#) for program application, eligibility and related information.

Loans for Targeted Underserved Producers

FSA has a number of loan programs available to assist applicants to begin or continue in agriculture production. Loans are available for operating type loans and/or to purchase or improve farms or ranches.

While all qualified producers are eligible to apply for these loan programs, FSA has provided priority funding for members of targeted underserved applicants.

A targeted underserved applicant is one of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic or gender prejudice because of his or her identity as members of the group without regard to his or her individual qualities.

For purposes of this program, targeted underserved groups are women, African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

FSA loans are only available to applicants who meet all the eligibility requirements and are unable to obtain the needed credit elsewhere.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. 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).