

December 2017



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

# NEWSLETTER

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## Louisiana FSA Newsletter

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### Louisiana Farm Service Agency

3737 Government Street  
Alexandria, LA 71302

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

**State Executive Director:**  
Craig A. McCain

**Next State Committee Meeting:**  
To be determined

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

To find contact information for your local office go to

### Message from Craig A. McCain, FSA State Executive Director

Happy Holidays! It has been written, “You shall know them by their fruits.” Most of the communication issued from this Agency is, as it should be; focused on loans, program benefits and assisting agricultural producers across the State. However, in this Season, it seems appropriate to speak about the people involved in this great industry. Ag producers are known generally to be an optimistic, hard-working, committed lot. A lifetime spent in agricultural work has proven this to be a very accurate description. However, farmers and ranchers are also a warm, kind and generous group! These characteristics are demonstrated each time we face the most challenging of times, whether it be in the form of drought, fire, flood or hurricane! Neighbors helping neighbors or people assisting perfect strangers! We have experienced these events here in our State several times in recent memory and our neighbors in Texas and Florida lived through this just a few months ago. Whatever the case, the character and goodwill born in the hearts of our farming communities has been demonstrated time and time again! As I said previously, much of our daily work and efforts are spent

planning for and producing the fruits of our hands; however, in this season, the Farm Service Agency would like to recognize and thank you for the fruit of your hearts! If a person can be known by their fruits, "You" are well known! Thank you for the fruit of your hands and the fruit of your hearts! The Louisiana Farm Service Agency is proud to be a part of this great industry and we are very happy to serve you. We wish you a Blessed Holiday Season and a Happy New Year!

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## Upcoming Important Dates

- **Nov. 1 - Aug. 1, 2018** - Enrollment period for 2018 ARC/PLC
- **Dec. 25** - USDA Service Centers will be closed in observance of Christmas Day
- **Jan. 1** - USDA Service Centers will be closed in observance of New Year's Day
- **Jan. 2** - Final acreage reporting date for honey

**LA Women in Ag Conference, Feb. 22 & 23, 2018 in Alexandria; to pre-register visit <http://louisianawomeninag.com/>**

Louisiana FSA now offers SMS texting; receive text message alerts on your cell phone regarding important deadlines, reporting requirements and updates.

Whether you are in the field, on a tractor or even on horseback, this service enables FSA customers and stakeholders to receive notifications while on the go.

Contact your local FSA Office for more information.

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## Farm Service Agency – A Vital Source of Assistance to America’s Farmers and Ranchers

Through the work of dedicated staff in over 2,100 county and state offices, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides vital farm safety-net assistance to agricultural producers across America.

The 'safety net' provided in the 2014 Farm Bill has helped producers withstand economic losses as well as losses resulting from natural disasters. Loans for operating expenses, farm purchases and other purposes help current producers stay in business and allow a new generation of farmers and ranchers get their start.

Agriculture demands working capital. FSA provided credit, either directly or guaranteed through commercial lenders, to 120,000 family farmers across the country.

In fiscal year 2017, USDA [Farm Loan Programs](#) pumped \$6 billion in support to a diverse group of producers across America. That was the second highest total in FSA history. Over \$2.5 billion of that total was direct and guaranteed [operating loans](#), and another \$3.5 billion was allocated for direct and guaranteed [farm ownership loans](#). This additional financing enabled farmers and ranchers across the country to access capital to start their operations, or to expand their existing operations. The new lending continued the recent growth in FSA's farm loan portfolio.

FSA highlights from the year include:

**Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage (ARC/PLC) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**

- USDA is issuing approximately \$8 billion in payments under the ARC and PLC programs to agricultural producers who suffered market downturns in 2016.
- In 2017, FSA distributed \$1.6 billion in CRP payments to over 375,000 Americans for doing their part in improving water quality, reducing soil erosion and increasing wildlife habitat.

## **Disaster Assistance**

In response to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, USDA announced special procedures to assist producers in states and territories who lost crops or livestock or had other damage to their farms or ranches. Also, because of the severe and widespread damage caused by the hurricanes, USDA provided flexibility to assist farm loan borrowers. FSA dispatched additional staff to the affected areas and, in response to a request for assistance, rolled out a special program providing vouchers to dairy herd owners in Puerto Rico who used the assistance to purchase feed.

USDA also provided extensive assistance for a variety of other disasters throughout the country, including drought in the northern high plains, wildfires in the west and central plains, floods, tornados, freezes and other storms. For example, in July, USDA authorized the use of additional CRP lands for emergency grazing and haying in and around portions of Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota affected by severe drought. USDA also added the ability for farmers and ranchers in those areas to hay and graze CRP wetland and buffer practices. This followed a previous action in April and June to assist the area and provided livestock producers with an additional feed source. In October, FSA teamed with other USDA agencies to provide assistance to wildfire-damaged areas of northern California, including loans and other disaster assistance programs.

## **New Farmers**

In August, Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue signed a Memorandum of Understanding with officials from SCORE, the nation's largest volunteer network of expert business mentors, to support new and beginning farmers. The agreement provides new help and resources for beginning ranchers, veterans, women, socially disadvantaged Americans and others, providing new tools to help them both grow and thrive in agri-business.

Johansson said these accomplishments are in line with Secretary Perdue's goals of maximizing the ability of the men and women of America's agriculture and agribusiness sector to create jobs, prioritizing customer service every day for American taxpayers and consumers and ensuring the food we produce meets the strict safety standards we've established while always remembering that America's agricultural bounty comes directly from the land.

For more information about FSA program, please visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov) or contact your local FSA office. To find an FSA location near you, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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## **The Census of Agriculture is a Producer's Voice, Future, and Opportunity**

In December farmers and ranchers across the nation will receive the 2017 Census of Agriculture. Producers can mail in their completed census form, or respond online via the improved web questionnaire. The online questionnaire has been revised extensively to make it more convenient for producers.

Conducted once every five years, the census of agriculture is a complete count of all U.S. farms, ranches, and those who operate them; it is the only source of uniform, comprehensive, and impartial agriculture data for every state and county in the nation.

Farmers and ranchers, trade associations, government, extension educators, researchers, and many others rely on census of agriculture data when making decisions that shape American agriculture – from creating and funding farm programs to boosting services for communities and the

industry. The census of agriculture is a producer's voice, future, and opportunity.

For more information about the 2017 Census of Agriculture, visit [www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov) or call (800) 727-9540.

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## USDA Announces Enrollment Period for Safety Net Coverage in 2018

FSA announced that farmers and ranchers with base acres in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) safety net program may enroll for the 2018 crop year. The enrollment period will end on **Aug. 1, 2018**.

**Since shares and ownership of a farm can change year-to-year, producers must enroll by signing a contract each program year.**

The producers on a farm that are not enrolled for the 2018 enrollment period will not be eligible for financial assistance from the ARC or PLC programs for the 2018 crop should crop prices or farm revenues fall below the historical price or revenue benchmarks established by the program. Producers who made their elections in previous years must still enroll during the 2018 enrollment period.

The ARC and PLC 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](http://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>.

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## Recourse Seed Cotton Loans

Cotton producers can request a recourse seed cotton loan at their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office. Due to this year's large cotton crop and delayed ginning, these seed cotton loans can provide interim financing to producers until their cotton is ginned.

Recourse seed cotton loans are available from the beginning of harvest through March 31, 2018. Seed cotton loans must be repaid by May 31, 2018.

After the cotton has been ginned, the seed cotton loan is repaid with proceeds from the ginned cotton.

County Offices will provide written or e-mail notification to every Cooperative Marketing Association (CMA) or Loan Servicing Agent (LSA) used by the producer to ensure that the proceeds from a ginned cotton loan are used to repay a seed cotton loan obligation. Any proceeds obtained from LSA or CMA, whether from a loan or Loan Deficiency Payment (LDP), will be jointly payable to the producer and to the Commodity Credit Corporation if these proceeds are from a loan for the same cotton that is collateral for the seed cotton loan.

Contact your local FSA office to learn about eligible requirements or to request a seed cotton loan.

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## Payments to Deceased Producers

In order to claim a Farm Service Agency (FSA) payment on behalf of a deceased producer, all program conditions for the payment must have been met before the applicable producer's date of death.

If a producer earned a FSA payment prior to becoming deceased, the following is the order of precedence of the representatives of the producer:

- administrator or executor of the estate
- the surviving spouse
- surviving sons and daughters, including adopted children
- surviving father and mother
- surviving brothers and sisters
- heirs of the deceased person who would be entitled to payment according to the State law

In order for FSA to release the payment, the legal representative of the deceased producer must file a Form FSA-325, to claim the payment for themselves or an estate. The county office will verify and determine that the application, contract, loan agreement, or other similar form requesting payment issuance, was signed by the applicable deadline for such form, by the deceased or a person legally authorized to act on their behalf at that time of application.

If the application, contract or loan agreement form was signed by someone other than the participant who is deceased, FSA will determine whether the person submitting the form has the legal authority to submit the form to compel FSA to pay the deceased participant.

Payments will be issued to the respective representative's name using the deceased program participant's tax identification number. Payments made to representatives are subject to offset regulations for debts owed by the deceased.

FSA is not responsible for advising persons in obtaining legal advice on how to obtain program benefits that may be due to a participant who has died, disappeared or who has been declared incompetent.

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## USDA Encourages Producers to Consider Risk Protection Coverage before Crop Sales Deadlines

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

Producers are reminded that crops not covered by insurance may be eligible for NAP. The 2014 Farm Bill expanded NAP to include higher levels of protection. Beginning, underserved and limited resource farmers are now eligible for free catastrophic level coverage, as well as discounted premiums for additional levels of protection."

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.

Producers can determine if crops are eligible for federal crop insurance or NAP by visiting

<https://webapp.rma.usda.gov/apps/actuarialinformationbrowser2017/CropCriteria.aspx>.

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, including coverage for organics and crops marketed directly to consumers.

Deadlines for coverage vary by state and crop. To learn more about NAP visit [www.fsa.usda.gov/nap](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/nap) or contact your local USDA Service Center. To find your local USDA Service Centers go to <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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.

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## Financial Hardship and Loan Servicing

Many farm loan borrowers' payments are due on Jan. 1. FSA expects and encourages prompt payment. However, for borrowers who cannot make their payments due to adversity such as a natural disaster or production difficulties beyond their control, FSA is committed to providing our farm loan borrowers with the tools necessary to be successful. A part of ensuring this success is providing guidance and counsel from loan or loan servicing application, through the term of your loan, and after. In order for FSA to help, you must alert your local FSA office to any of the following:

- Any proposed or significant changes in the farming operation
- Any significant changes to family income or expenses
- The development of problem situations
- Any losses or proposed significant changes in security

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

If past due on payments, FSA will notify you of your options with a Notice of Availability of Loan Servicing. Please pay special attention to this notice as it provides you with your options for FSA servicing programs and outlines specific deadlines that you must meet. Failure to meet these statutory deadlines may significantly limit your options and FSA's ability to help address your farm's financial difficulties.

For more information on FSA farm loan programs, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov). Please contact your local FSA Service Center if you have any questions or would like to schedule an appointment to meet with the loan staff to discuss your options.

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## FSA Offers Joint Financing Option on Direct Farm Ownership Loans

The USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) [Direct Farm Ownership loans](#) are a resource to help farmers and ranchers become owner-operators of family farms, improve and expand current operations, increase agricultural productivity, and assist with land tenure to save farmland for future generations.

Depending on the applicant's needs, there are three types of Direct Farm Ownership Loans: regular, down payment and joint financing. FSA also offers a [Direct Farm Ownership Microloan](#)

option for smaller financial needs up to \$50,000.

Joint financing allows FSA to provide more farmers and ranchers with access to capital. FSA lends up to 50 percent of the total amount financed. A commercial lender, a State program or the seller of the property being purchased, provides the balance of loan funds, with or without an FSA guarantee. The maximum loan amount for a Joint Financing loan is \$300,000 and the repayment period for the loan is up to 40 years.

To be eligible, the operation must be an eligible farm enterprise. Farm Ownership loan funds cannot be used to finance nonfarm enterprises and all applicants must be able to meet general eligibility requirements. Loan applicants are also required to have participated in the business operations of a farm or ranch for at least three years out of the 10 years prior to the date the application is submitted. The applicant must show documentation that their participation in the business operation of the farm or ranch was not solely as a laborer.

For more information about FSA Loan programs, contact your local FSA office or visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov). To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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## Farmers to Receive Documentation of USDA Services

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

The 2014 Farm Bill requires a customer receipt to be issued for any agricultural program assistance requested from FSA, the Natural 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.

A service is any information, program or loan assistance provided whether through a visit, by email, fax or letter.

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## Selected Interest Rates for December 2017

- Farm Operating Loans — Direct 2.875%
- Farm Ownership Loans — Direct 3.750%
- Farm Ownership Loans — Direct Down Payment, Beginning Farmer or Rancher — 1.50%
- Emergency Loans — 3.750%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (3 years) — 1.750%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (5 years) — 2.000%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (7 years) — 2.250%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (10 years) — 2.375%
- Farm Storage Facility Loans (12 years) — 2.375%
- Sugar Storage Facility Loans (15 year term) — 2.500%
- Commodity Loans — 2.500%

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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).