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Greeting From Our Executive Director

It's hard to believe that I have served as Mississippi's Farm Service Agency State Executive Director for one year: I'm forever grateful, and I do not take my position frivolously.

Many of you who have had the opportunity meeting me know that I share the mission of the Agency, which includes ensuring that FSA is equitably serving all farmers, ranchers, and agricultural partners through the delivery of effective, efficient agricultural for all Mississippians. Serving in this capacity has afforded me some memorable experiences with USDA staff and producers across the great State of Mississippi.

As the Christmas Season approaches, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mississippi Farm Service Agency employees, to our agricultural partners, and to the farmers and ranchers who depends on our services, as we are just as much dependent on the goods and services they provide.

This Christmas, please take time to reflect on the past and while looking forward to the days ahead with your family and friends!



New Guide Available for Underserved Farmers, Ranchers

A new multi-agency guide for USDA assistance for underserved farmers and ranchers is now available. If you are a farmer or rancher and are a minority, woman, veteran, beginning, or limited resource producer, you can use this booklet to learn about assistance and targeted opportunities available to you. This includes programs offered through the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Risk Management Agency. The guide is also available in Spanish, Hmong, Korean, Vietnamese, Thai and Chinese on farmers.gov/translations.

USDA Opens People's Garden Initiative to Gardens Nationwide



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is expanding its People's Garden Initiative to include eligible gardens nationwide. School gardens, community gardens, urban farms, and small-scale agriculture projects in rural, suburban and urban areas can be recognized as a "People's Garden" if they register on the USDA website and meet criteria including benefitting the community, working collaboratively, incorporating conservation practices and educating the public. Affiliate People's Garden locations will be indicated on a map on the USDA website, featured in USDA communications, and provided with a People's Garden sign.

About the Gardens

USDA originally launched the People's Garden Initiative in 2009. It's named for the "People's Department," former President Abraham Lincoln's nickname for USDA, which was established during his presidency in 1862.

People's Gardens grow fresh, healthy food and support resilient, local food systems; teach people how to garden using conservation practices; nurture habitat for pollinators and wildlife and create greenspace for neighbors.

How to Register

To learn more about People's Garden or to register one, visit the People's Garden webpage at usda.gov/Peoples-Garden. The location and information on each garden will be displayed on a map. USDA will send a "People's Garden" sign to each garden and invite continued engagement through photos and information sharing. Gardens on federal property, such as USDA offices, are required to donate produce. We invite these gardens to report how much is being donated.

To be eligible, gardens:

Benefit the community by providing food, green space, wildlife habitat, education space.

- **Are a collaborative effort.** This can include groups working together with USDA agencies, food banks, after school programs, Girl Scouts, Master Gardeners, conservation districts, etc.
- **Incorporate conservation management practices,** such as using native plant species, rain barrels, integrated pest management, xeriscaping.
- **Educate the public** about sustainable gardening practices and the importance of local, diverse, and resilient food systems providing healthy food for the community.

New gardens will join the People's Garden at USDA headquarters in Washington, D.C. and 17 other flagship gardens established earlier this year.

More Information

The People's Garden Initiative is part of USDA's broader efforts to advance equity, support local and regional food systems and access to food, and encourage use of conservation and climate-smart practices.

USDA Offers Farmers.gov Features to Help Farmers Hire Workers

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced new features on the farmers.gov website designed to help facilitate the employment of H-2A workers.

USDA's goal is to help farmers navigate the complex H-2A program that is administered by Department of Labor, Department of Homeland Security, and the State Department so hiring a farm worker is an easier process.

The primary new H-2A features on Farmers.gov include:

- A real-time dashboard that enables farmers to track the status of their eligible employer application and visa applications for temporary nonimmigrant workers;
- Streamlining the login information so if a farmer has an existing login.gov account they can save multiple applications tracking numbers for quick look-up at any time;
- Enables easy access to the Department of Labor's (DOL) Foreign Labor Application Gateway (FLAG);
- Allows farmers to track time-sensitive actions taken in the course of Office of Foreign Labor Certification's (OFLC) adjudication of temporary labor certification applications;
- Allowing for farmers to access all application forms on-line.

All information can be found at www.farmers.gov/manage/h2a.

In 2018, USDA unveiled farmers.gov, a dynamic, mobile-friendly public website combined with an authenticated portal where customers can apply for programs, process transactions and manage accounts. With feedback from customers and field employees who serve those customers, farmers.gov delivers farmer-focused features through an agile, iterative process to deliver the greatest immediate value to America's agricultural producers – helping farmers and ranchers do right, and feed everyone.

USDA Announces First Three Lenders for Heirs' Property Relending Program



USDA is announcing that Shared Capital Cooperative, Akiptan, Inc. and the Cherokee Nation Economic Development Trust Authority (CNEDTA), have been approved or conditionally approved as intermediary lenders through the Heirs' Property Relending Program (HPRP). Once HPRP loans with these lenders close, these lenders will help agricultural producers and landowners resolve heirs' land ownership and succession issues. Additionally, USDA encourages more intermediary lenders, including cooperatives, credit unions

and nonprofit organizations to apply. More information is at farmers.gov/heirs/relending.

Heirs may apply directly to the intermediary lenders for loans to resolve land ownership and succession issues.

Environmental Review Required Before Project Implementation

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to consider all potential environmental impacts for federally funded projects before the project is approved.

For all Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs, an environmental review must be completed before actions are approved, such as site preparation or ground disturbance. These programs include, **but are not limited to**, the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), Farm Storage Facility Loan (FSFL) program and farm loans. If project implementation begins before FSA has completed an environmental review, the request will be denied. Although there are exceptions regarding the Stafford Act and emergencies,

it's important to wait until you receive written approval of your project proposal before starting any actions.

Applications cannot be approved until FSA has copies of all permits and plans. Contact your local FSA office early in your planning process to determine what level of environmental review is required for your program application so that it can be completed timely.

Update Your Records



FSA is cleaning up our producer record database and needs your help. Please report any changes of address, zip code, phone number, email address or an incorrect name or business name on file to our office. You should also report changes in your farm operation, like the addition of a farm by lease or purchase. You should also report any changes to your operation in which you reorganize to form a Trust, LLC or other legal entity.

FSA and NRCS program participants are required to promptly report changes in their farming operation to the County Committee in writing and to update their *Farm Operating Plan* on form CCC-902.

To update your records, contact your local County USDA Service Center.

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State Executive Director
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