

January 2018



Farm Service Agency **Electronic News Service**

NEWSLETTER

GovDelivery

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Rhode Island FSA Newsletter

Rhode Island Farm Service Agency

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Acting State Executive Director: Alison Rose

State Committee: Doreen Pezza, Judith Carvalho, Chris Jaswell, Ellen Puccetti

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

In December farmers and ranchers across the nation received 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

*State Committee Meetings
second Tuesday of every
month subject to change.*

Rhode Island County Office:
401-828-3120 Option 2

County Executive Director:
Sheryl Michener

County Committee: Vincent
Confreda, Kim Coulter, Victor
Hoogendoorn, Joseph Silveria

*County Committee Meetings,
first Wednesday of every
month subject to change.*

Farm Loan Office: 401-828-
3120 Option 3.

Farm Loan Manager:
Roxanne S. Boisse

Dates to Remember:

January 15th, Holiday Offices
are Closed.

March 6th, RI Women in Ag
Conference will be held at the
Crowne Plaza Hotel Warwick,
RI.

March 15th, Deadline to
Insure Annual Crops under
the Non-Insured Crop
Disaster Assistance Program
(NAP). Contact the RI FSA
County Office at 401-828-
3120 Option 2.

April 20th, Applications due
for EQIP and RCPP. For more
information contact Natural
Resource Conservation
Services (NRCS) at 401-828-
1300.

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 or call (800) 727-9540.

New Actively Engaged Provisions for Non-Family Joint Operations or Entities

Many Farm Service Agency programs require all program participants, either individuals or legal entities, to be "actively engaged in farming". This means participants provide a significant contribution to the farming operation, whether it is capital, land, equipment, active personal labor and/or management. For entities, each partner, stockholder or member with an ownership interest, must contribute active personal labor and/or management to the operation on a regular basis.

The 2014 Farm Bill established additional payment eligibility provisions relating to the farm management component of meeting "actively engaged in farming". These new provisions apply to joint operations comprised of non-family members or partners, stockholders or persons with an ownership in the farming operation. Effective for 2016 and subsequent crop years, non-family joint operations are afforded to one member that may use a significant contribution of active personal management exclusively to meet the requirements to be determined "actively engaged in farming". The person or member will be defined as the Farm Manager for the purposes of administering these new management provisions.

In some instances, additional persons or members of a non-family member joint operation who meet the definition of Farm Manager may also be allowed to use such a contribution of active personal management to meet the eligibility requirements. However, under no circumstances may the number of Farm Managers in a non-family joint operation exceed a total of three in any given crop and program year.

USDA Processing Pending Conservation Reserve Program Continuous Enrollment Offers

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will process many pending eligible offers for land enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and will temporarily suspend accepting most new offers until later in the 2018 fiscal year.

All current, eligible CRP continuous enrollment offers made through Sept. 30, 2017, except for those made under the Pollinator Habitat Initiative (CP42), will be approved. Additionally, FSA is temporarily suspending acceptance of most offers going forward to provide time to review CRP allocation levels, and to avoid exceeding the statutory cap of 24 million acres.

The CRP acreage cap is a provision of the 2014 Farm Bill. Current enrollment is about 23.5 million acres nationwide. USDA is accepting all pending continuous enrollment offers that were made beginning on May 4, 2017, and extending through Sept. 30, 2017, except Pollinator Habitat Initiative offers. Pollinator acreage offers are being declined because the program has met its acreage enrollment goal. Effective immediately, USDA is suspending acceptance of all new CRP continuous offers received or submitted after Sept. 30, 2017. The suspension will continue until later in the 2018 fiscal year.

However, FSA will continue to accept eligible offers for state-specific Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and CRP Grasslands enrollment. Offers received on or after Oct. 1, 2017, are subject to fiscal year 2018 rental rates which have been adjusted to reflect current market conditions and were established after careful review of the latest USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) cash rent data.

In return for enrolling in CRP, USDA, through FSA, provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Landowners enter into contracts that last between 10 and 15 years. CRP pays farmers and ranchers who remove sensitive lands from production and plant certain grasses, shrubs and trees that improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and increase wildlife habitat. Payment totals for 2017 were announced earlier this week totaling over \$1.6 billion.

For more information about CRP, contact your local FSA office or visit www.fsa.usda.gov/crp. To locate your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

USDA Financial Assistance Available to Help Organic Farmers Create Conservation Buffers

USDA is assisting organic farmers with the cost of establishing up to 20,000 acres of new conservation buffers and other practices on and near farms that produce organic crops.

The financial assistance is available from the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a federally funded voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive land is not farmed or ranched, but instead used for conservation benefits. CRP participants 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. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

For conservation buffers, funds are available for establishing shrubs and trees, or supporting pollinating species, and can be planted in blocks or strips. Interested organic producers can offer eligible land for enrollment in this initiative at any time.

Other USDA FSA programs that assist organic farmers include:

- The Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program that provides financial assistance for 55 to 100 percent of the average market price for organic crop losses between 50 to 65 percent of expected production due to a natural disaster.
- Marketing assistance loans that provide interim financing to help producers meet cash flow needs without having to sell crops during harvest when market prices are low, and deficiency payments to producers who forgo the loan in return for a payment on the eligible commodity.
- A variety of loans for operating expenses, ownership or guarantees with outside lenders, including streamlined microloans that have a lower amount of paperwork.
- Farm Storage Facility Loans for that provide low-interest financing to build or upgrade storage facilities for organic commodities, including cold storage, grain bins, bulk tanks and drying and handling equipment.
- Services such as mapping farm and field boundaries and reporting organic acreage that can be provided to a farm's organic certifier or crop insurance agent.

Visit www.fsa.usda.gov/organic to learn more about how FSA can help organic farmers. For an interactive tour of CRP success stories, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/CRPis30 or follow #CRPis30 on Twitter. To learn more about FSA programs visit a local FSA office or www.fsa.usda.gov. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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 purposes and/or to purchase or improve farms or ranches. While all qualified producers are eligible to apply for these loan programs, the FSA has provided priority funding for underserved applicants. An 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, underserved groups are women, African Americans, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders. If producers or their spouses believe they would qualify as underserved, they should

contact their local FSA office for details. FSA loans are only available to applicants who meet all eligibility requirements and are unable to obtain the needed credit elsewhere.

Farm Loan Graduation Reminder

FSA Direct Loans are considered a temporary source of credit that is available to producers who do not meet normal underwriting criteria for commercial banks.

FSA periodically conducts Direct Loan graduation reviews to determine a borrower's ability to graduate to commercial credit. If the borrower's financial condition has improved to a point where they can refinance their debt with commercial credit, they will be asked to obtain other financing and partially or fully pay off their FSA debt.

By the end of a producer's operating cycle, the Agency will send a letter requesting a current balance sheet, actual financial performance and a projected farm budget. The borrower has 30 days to return the required financial documents. This information will be used to evaluate the borrower's potential for refinancing to commercial credit.

If a borrower meets local underwriting criteria, FSA will send the borrower's name, loan type, balance sheet and projected cash flow to commercial lenders. The borrower will be notified when loan information is sent to local lenders.

If any lenders are interested in refinancing the borrower's loan, FSA will send the borrower a letter with a list of lenders that are interested in refinancing the loan. The borrower must contact the lenders and complete an application for commercial credit within 30 calendar days.

If a commercial lender rejects the borrower, the borrower must obtain written evidence that specifies the reasons for rejection and submit to their local FSA farm loan office.

If a borrower fails to provide the requested financial information or to graduate, FSA will notify the borrower of noncompliance, FSA's intent to accelerate the loan, and appeal rights.

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).

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