



County Committee FACT SHEET

National Association of FSA County Office Employees

NASCOE

Overview:

The County Committee (COC) system was formed with the passage of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 and the creation of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration or AAA. Local committees were formed to oversee the Federal farm programs implemented by the Roosevelt “New Deal”.

COC members are elected each year by other farmers and landowners. Each COC consists of a chairperson, vice chairperson, and 1-9 regular members. Effective March 1, 2013, Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack was given the authority to appoint a Socially Disadvantaged (SDA) voting member to the COC based on demographics of a county to ensure fair representation. Counties not meeting the thresholds established for appointed SDA members have non-voting SDA advisors recommended by the local county committee in consultation with local community groups and local Tribal organizations representing SDA farmers and ranchers. COC’s make decisions as a committee rather than individuals and must have a quorum present to conduct official business. The addition of voting and non-voting SDA members provides an additional layer of oversight to ensure fair representation for all FSA program participants.

Responsibilities:

County Committees provide local input on the administration of FSA farm programs, including commodity price support loans and payments, conservation programs, disaster payments, and emergency programs. Committee members are a critical component of the day-to-day operations of FSA, upholding integrity, and accountability to FSA Farm Programs.

The duties of county committees currently include:

- Overseeing the administration of Farm and Conservation programs at the local level;
- Informing farmers of the purpose and provisions of FSA programs;
- Hiring and supervising a County Executive Director to monitor day to day operations in the county office;
- Keeping the State FSA Committee informed of local administrative area (LAA) conditions;
- Monitoring changes in farm programs;
- Participating in monthly county meetings;
- Directing outreach activities;
- Making recommendations to the State Committee on

existing programs;

- Conducting hearings and reviews as requested by the State Committee; and
- Ensuring SDA farmers and ranchers are fairly represented.

County Committees do not oversee the administration of FSA direct or guaranteed farm operating loans or ownership loans. Direct and Guaranteed Loans are administered by FSA federal Farm Loan employees. However, handbook 16-AO policy states that the COC is an important resource within the FSA county office. FSA employees with FLP loan making responsibilities, may consult with COC regularly to stay informed of any conditions in the area that may affect demand for FSA loans, shall work closely with COC and CED in conducting outreach activities, and may consult with COC for information about local agricultural practices and production conditions.

The COC does have responsibility for determining Farm Storage Facility Loan needs and making loan approvals dependent upon credit feasibility recommendations completed by an individual with farm loan approval authority. COC’s shall not view financial information, such as balance sheets and cash flow statements provided by the applicants. Additionally, the County Committee has approval authority for the Marketing Assistance Loan program.

It should be noted, the previous Farmers Home Administration (FmHA), prior to being merged with the Farm Service Agency in 1994, did have county committees that acted on farm operating and ownership loan applications. These committees were not farmer-elected, but rather were appointed members.

Conclusion:

County Committees continue to play a vital role in the administration and integrity of Farm Programs at the grass -roots level. Their personal knowledge of the local farming practices and conditions provide the county office great insight and bridges the gaps between federal farm policy and program implementation. Undoubtedly, the county committee is the most unique form of accountability and integrity in all Federal Government.

Local farmers and ranchers that are nominated and elected by their peers deliver an exceptional form of accountability and trust that doesn’t exist elsewhere within the Federal Government.