



National Association of Farmer Elected Committees (NAFEC)

County Committee Informational Fact Sheet

History:

The Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) was passed in 1935 and this created the forerunner of our county committee system. The County Control Associations were formed and these local committees were set to oversee the Federal Farm programs implemented by the Roosevelt "New Deal" legislation. Then, in the 1938 Farm Bill the elected county committees became part of the permanent law we have operated under for over 80 years.

Congress reorganized the Department of Agriculture in 1994 with HR 3171, Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act. This established what we call today Farm Service Agency (FSA). The 2002 Farm Bill included provisions increasing transparency and accountability of county committee elections and requiring participation from socially disadvantaged (SDA) farmers in county committees and USDA programs. Effective March 1, 2013, Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, was given the authority to appoint a Socially Disadvantaged (SDA) member to a committee if it is warranted based on the area demographics to ensure fair representation. Counties not meeting the thresholds established for appointed voting SDA members have non-voting SDA advisors as recommend by the locally elected committee in consultation with local community groups and local Tribal organizations representing SDA members. The 2018 Farm Bill established a pilot program to operate county committees in urban and suburban areas. County Committees must ensure that county office operations remain farmer- focused while providing quality customer service that is fair and equitable to all farmers and ranchers.

County Committee Responsibilities:

Local County Committees make decisions as a committee rather than as individuals and must have a quorum present when conducting official business. Additionally, a voting and non-voting SDA member provides an additional layer of oversight to ensure fair representation for all participants. COC's provide local input on the administration of FSA farm programs. Committee members are a critical component of the day-to-day operation of FSA, upholding the original mission of county committees in the 1933 AAA act by providing integrity and accountability to FSA farm programs. County Committees are held accountable to the Secretary of Agriculture.

The duties of the county committee currently include:

- Overseeing the administration of Farm and Conservation programs at the local level
- Informing and educating farmers or the purpose and provisions of FSA Programs

- Hiring and supervising a County Executive Director to monitor the day to day activities in the local office.
- Keeping the State FSA Committee (STC) aware of local administration area (LAA) conditions
- Monitoring changes in farm programs
- Participation in county committee meetings
- Directing outreach activities to reach all stakeholders in local area
- Make recommendations to STC on existing programs
- Conduct hearings and reviews as requested by STC
- Ensuring SDA farmers and ranchers are fairly represented
- Participate and follow rules on ethics and security

The COC's oversee the Federal Farm programs at the local level, they do not oversee the FSA direct or guaranteed farm operating or ownership loans administered locally. Farm loan programs are administered by federal employees and the COC have no authorization of supervision of federal employees. However, handbook 16-AO policy states that the COC is an important resource within the FSA county office and the local community. FSA employees with FLP loan making authority may consult with the COC on a regular basis to stay informed of any conditions that may affect demand for FSA loans, shall work closely with the COC and CED while conducting outreach activities, and may consult with the COC for information about local agricultural practices and productions conditions.

Although the Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service (ASCS) and Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) merged in 1994 to form the Farm Service Agency (FSA), it should be noted, the previous FmHA, prior to the merge, did have local committees that acted on farm operating and ownership loan applications. These committees were appointed and not farmer elected like the committees of ASCS and now the FSA.

Conclusion:

County Committees continue to play a vital role in the administration and integrity of the FSA programs at the grass-roots level. Their personal knowledge of local farming practices and conditions provide the county office a better perspective and insight into the local needs of farmers and ranchers as well as bridge the gaps between federal farm policy and program implementation. It has been noted through the years that undoubtedly, the county committee system is the most unique for of accountability and integrity in all of Federal Government. The COC system of election by peers should be held in high regard and used as an example of a true grass-roots form of government administration and oversight of federal programs.