



National Association of Farmer Elected Committees

January 31, 2023

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

I'm writing on behalf of the National Association of Farm Elected Committees (NAFEC), which represent over 9,000 County FSA Committee members and advisors from all across the United States. These committee members also serve on commodity organizations, farm groups, producers associations, farm and ranch cooperatives, livestock associations, civic clubs, bank boards, church boards, school boards, conservation districts, and practically every other farm and ranch type organization in America. These committee members come from diverse backgrounds, different races, and are both men and women who fully support the application of fairness, equity and integrity among every FSA County Committee across this great country. These committees have been an integral part of a government system that has delivered farm programs with speed and efficiency second to none ever since the great depression. As the sole representative for these committees, NAFEC continues to support our mission statement which is-and will always be- to promote and improve the farmer elected committee system for the local administration of farm programs.

The current USDA Equity Commission's oral and written testimony, as presented in the Equity Commission minutes regarding the Elected County FSA Committees, has been especially concerning to NAFEC and many other agriculture organizations across the country. While we certainly agree that discrimination and inequity have no place in our offices or among our committees, we also believe that in a country founded upon democracy, the elected committee system is a perfect example of Abraham Lincoln's vision for the "People's Department" ¹, one that provides an innovative form of grass roots government. As Secretary Henry Wallace envisioned in 1934, the committees have been democratic both in form and spirit and an effective instrument in economic self-government. ²

As the only association representing FSA Farmer Elected Committees, we are concerned that NAFEC has never been asked by the newly formed Equity Commission to provide oral testimony at the commission hearings. In listening to the oral testimony and written minutes of the commission, it is also quite apparent that there is misunderstanding, even among commission members regarding the role of FSA committees in loan making. I want to be very clear in stating FSA elected committees have absolutely no involvement in the farm operating (including micro loans) and farm ownership loans that are made by the General Service (GS) employees of the Farm Service Agency. These employees answer and report directly to the GS District Director, who in turn answers and reports to the politically appointed State FSA Director.

¹ USDA website- Secretary Column, February 21, 2017

² 1934 Yearbook of Agriculture

If you choose to look back at former committees, we would also clarify that the former Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) committees that had some involvement in loan activities were not democratically elected committees like the old ASCS or current FSA committees. In fact, in previous USDA reports, the overwhelming majority of the discrimination complaints brought forth under the previous lawsuits (Pigford, Pigford II, Hispanic & Womens, and Keepseagle) involved the former FmHA committees and their involvement in loan making or loan denials. To blame wide discrimination on the current elected FSA committee system is not a fair representation of the facts.

To be completely fair, we agree that inequity and, in some cases, blatant discrimination has occurred even among FSA elected Committee's acting on program matters. NAFEC does not condone this activity and believes it should never be tolerated. Over the years NAFEC has worked hard to root out issues of inequity and assist state FSA offices and even the FSA Washington DC office on rectifying such issues. However, the answer to resolving many of these issues isn't in eliminating a very effective system of government that has been in place for almost 90 years, but rather can be found in increased face to face training of committee members. We have repeatedly requested FSA provide annual face to face county committee training for all committee members. However, over the past fifteen years training has continued to decline, rather than increase. If USDA and FSA are serious about inequity, the continual training of FSA committee members must be elevated and funded. In addition, we have supported the Secretary of Agriculture's ability to appoint voting SDA producers to local committees in cases where representation is needed. However, the number of minority appointments has decreased over the past few years rather than increased.

In closing I would like to commend the commission for doing everything they can to make recommendations to ensure equity and justice for all is provided to every customer working with the USDA/FSA. We stand ready to assist you in this endeavor while supporting and affirming democratically elected committees with local input and control which provides the best opportunity to have effective government at the local level.

Sincerely,



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