

## **ACMF Farm Service Agency Recommendations:**

1. The ACMF recommends that FSA firmly limit terms for all elected county committee members to serve no longer than a maximum of 9 years. Concerted efforts should be made to strongly encourage broader participation from among those communities who have been excluded by custom or practice or discouraged because “it’s always been that way”.

*FSA established a new COC Web software that will track individual members' terms and service eligibility of current COCs members. This ensures the three-year consecutive term limit is not exceeded. This software is readily available to states. (POC: Field Operations)*

2. The ACMF recommends that FSA take on an exerted effort to “get the word out” via county committee offices as USDA outreach partners. For example, the members recently discovered the recently updated 7 C.F.R. 7 suggests mere ‘cooperation’ by sharing one’s farm information with the county offices vests individuals voting eligibility.

*FSA’s Outreach Office (OO) will work with FSA’ Deputy Administrator for Field Operations (DAFO) Office to enhance efforts and identify opportunities to expand reach. Currently, there is a website <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-room/county-committee-elections/index> that contains public facing information regarding elections. OO and DAFO are planning an internal webinar soon to train staff regarding COC activities. Once the internal webinar is complete, the OO will offer an external webinar to engage external stakeholder share the information. Current efforts include the recent call for nominations issued June 17th in English and Spanish. The COC website now includes a link to the Local Administrative Area (LAA) GIS locator which allows producers to identify the LAA their farming interests are located in and determine if nominations will be accepted in s LAA for the next election cycle. The site also includes previous years’ nationwide election results reports. Other enhanced efforts include posting the call for COC nominations onto the main FSA page [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov) as well as the links on the COC Elections page and farmers.gov. Recently the agency extended their outreach strategy to include targeted social media campaigns on Facebook which have been successful in other program announcements. (POC: Outreach Office)*

3. The ACMF recommends that the USDA reinforce activities that all county committees are currently bound to do, including but not limited to: (1) conducting greater outreach to all producers, (2) produce actual minutes (in addition to summaries) of committee meetings, (3) post notices for meetings beyond the office boards (e.g., digital and print media perhaps offering a virtual option for public attendance, whenever possible), and other more targeted communication blitzes regarding FSA program offerings or changes.

*As indicated in response #2, additional efforts to conduct greater outreach are listed above. To reinforce those efforts, FSA issued guidance in May to county office and county committees to develop election outreach plans which include actions to issue public notices of the election and election website; post maps of the local administrative area (LAA) boundaries in public places and in the local service centers; report customer declared race, ethnicity and gender information into the system to help strengthen data to identify election participation; actively contact representatives from targeted underserved groups to solicit nominations; publicize processes, dates through various media-based platforms; host meetings,*

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*teleconferences and webinars related to the COC election; locally reproduce the outreach materials on the COC Election website and post in public locations within the COC jurisdictions; ensure informational meetings are publicized through all available means. State outreach coordinators were required to ensure COC nomination and election processes are shared through targeted media sources in addition to the state's internet site; monitor each county office's planned outreach activities and provide a report to the State Executive Director to review and ensure targeted outreach activities are planned to obtain nominees from underrepresented groups. The National Office reviews to ensure compliance. (POC: Outreach Office)*

4. The ACMF recommends displaying new posters in every county committee office describing what customers, stakeholders, clients, constituents, or the like should expect during their time in any FSA office. These posters should be placed in a highly visible location where visitors may review standard expected procedures during and after their visit. These next steps should also be added or incorporated on the back side of the Receipt for Service document, along with legible and complete instructions about their right to contact the National Appeals Division for free services.

*The Outreach Office (OO) will work with FPAC's External affairs Division and DAFO to develop posters in FY 2024 for the county offices. OO has developed posters for FSA State Outreach Coordinators (SOC) to use and will use this template to target suggested information for use in county offices. (POC: Outreach Office)*

5. The ACMF recommends that the USDA increase direct technical or other assistance via its partners, who are embedded in the communities they serve. These partners would provide hands-on assistance for individuals in their minority farming communities to accurately complete applications. They might also provide guidance on access (e.g., legal guidance or other barriers), or assist with other technical business requirements. This would require larger grants with longer time commitments to be effective. Navigating issues with heirs' property and legal technicalities, for instance, are areas where USDA partners could be helpful.

*FSA has made great strides in partnerships through grants and cooperative agreements. Many offer technical assistance and focus on areas such as: taxpayer assistance, Increasing Land Access, and Heirs' Property. Further, FSA has increased the number of 3–5-year term grants to help build capacity over a longer term resulting in effective outreach, education, and technical assistance. Funding opportunities and amounts have expanded during this administration to almost \$500 million annually with support from the Inflation Reduction Act. In previous years, FSA's cooperative agreement budget was limited to \$5 million annually. (POC: Outreach Office)*

6. Finally, the ACMF recommends that the Secretary utilize his authority to appoint members to the county committees to ensure more equitable representation reflecting the community whenever there is an opportunity to do so. These discretionary appointments should be deployed liberally to diversify local committees and should be for a full term of 3 years (versus 1-year).

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*To ensure equity of SDA-appointed members, the Secretary has authorized a policy change (September 2023) that extends the term lengths for appointed SDA members to a 3-year term. SDA members appointed in 2023 and future years will now serve a 3-year term like members elected through the traditional election process. (POC: Field Operations)*