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Alaska State FSA Newsletter

Alaska State Farm Service Agency

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Alaska FSA State Director News - Farm Service Agency Extends Voting Deadline for County Committee Elections

Producers Now Have Until Dec. 13 to Submit Ballots

The deadline to submit ballots for the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) 2016 County Committee Elections has been extended to ensure farmers and ranchers have sufficient time to vote. Eligible voters now have until Dec. 13, 2016 to return ballots to their local FSA offices. Producers in local administrative areas listed below who have not received their ballot should pick one up at the Northern and Southern County FSA offices.

FSA has modified the ballot, making it easily identifiable and less likely to be overlooked. Ballots returned by mail must be postmarked no later than Dec. 13, 2016. Newly elected committee members will take office Jan. 1, 2017.

The following are this year's candidates who have been nominated in their LAA's to serve as a committee member. All candidates have agreed to serve if elected.

Southern County Office
800 W Evergreen, Ste 216
Palmer, AK 99645

County Executive Director
Erin Sturdivant
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Hours Monday-Friday
8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Committee Meetings:
Northern Co Dec 19, 8:30 a.m.
Southern Co Dec 16, 4:00 p.m.

Please contact your local FSA
Office for questions specific to
your operation or county.

Northern County LAA-1 Includes the area that encompasses the following areas: North Slope, Northwest Arctic, Yukon-Koyukuk and Nome Census areas, as well as the Denali and Fairbanks North Star Borough.

Michaela Rice Anderson resides east of Fairbanks, and has raised Pigs and Cattle for many years. Michaela has been actively involved as a member of the Alaska Farm Bureau, and 4-H club. She is actively promoting Alaska Agriculture by getting involved with informing public, and legislatures of issues that face the Alaska Agriculture industry.

McLaren “Mac” Carter resides in Central, AK, a diversified farmers market vegetable producer who raises a large variety of crops from tomatoes to potatoes and has lived and farmed in the Central, Alaska community for 16 years. The Carter’s are very involved with the community and each year celebrate an annual bringing in of the crops through a community festival for the whole area.

Rebecca “Becky” Hammond resides on an 80 acre farm east of Fairbanks, AK. In the past has raised animals and produced brome hay on their farm to feed their animals. Currently raises angora goats, merino sheep, and angora rabbits for fiber and meat. She also raises poultry for show, eggs, and meat. Becky stays very busy processing fibers by hand spinning, hand dying, and creating different wares from the fiber.

Election Ballots will be Counted in Public at the Northern County FSA Office at 8:30 a.m. on December 19, 2016.

Southern County LAA-2 Includes the municipality of Anchorage, Valdez/Cordova Census area south of Chugach Mtns. Kenai Peninsula Borough north of Kasilof River.

Abby Ala, a 2nd generation farmer in Soldotna on land that has been in her family for over 69 years. Abby operates a greenhouse, produces vegetables as well as hay, and boards horses.

Amy Daugherty has been a resident of Southeast Alaska for over 40 years. She and her husband owned and operated Merryweather Farm in remote Gustavus, near Glacier Bay National Park for seven years. Their farm sells to inns, restaurants and to local food enthusiasts at farmer’s market – type venues.

William L. Hightower grew up on his grandmother's farm in Iowa and attended Iowa State University studying forestry. Since moving to Sterling, Alaska in 1975 he has been involved in mini farming, raising produce and livestock.

Election Ballots will be Counted in Public at the Southern County FSA Office at 4:00 p.m. on December 16, 2016.

Nearly 7,700 FSA County Committee members serve FSA offices nationwide. Each committee has three to 11 elected members who serve three-year terms of office. One-third of County Committee seats are up for election each year. County Committee members apply their knowledge and judgment to help FSA make important decisions on its commodity support, conservation, indemnity, disaster and emergency programs.

Producers must participate or cooperate in an FSA program to be eligible to vote in the County Committee election. Approximately 1.5 million producers are currently eligible to vote. Farmers and ranchers who supervise and conduct the farming operations of an entire farm, but are not of legal voting age, also may be eligible to vote.

For more information, visit the FSA website at www.fsa.usda.gov/elections or contact Lloyd Wilhelm, Northern CED, at (907) 895-4242, Erin Sturdivant, Southern CED, at (907) 761-7754.

USDA Announces Enrollment Period for Safety Net Coverage in 2017

Producers on farms with base acres under the safety net programs established by the 2014 Farm Bill, known as the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) or Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs, can begin visiting FSA county offices starting Nov. 1, 2016, to sign contracts and enroll for the 2017 crop year. The enrollment period will continue until Aug. 1, 2017.

Since shares and ownership of a farm can change year-to-year, producers on the farm must enroll by signing a contract each program year.

If a farm is not enrolled during the 2017 enrollment period, the producers on that farm will not be eligible for financial assistance from the ARC or PLC programs for the 2017 crop should crop prices or farm revenues fall below the historical price or revenue benchmarks established by the program. Producers who made their elections in 2015 must still enroll during the 2017 enrollment period.

The ARC and PLC programs were authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill and offer a safety net to agricultural producers when there is a substantial drop in prices or revenues for covered commodities. Covered commodities include barley, canola, large and small chickpeas, corn, crambe, flaxseed, grain sorghum, lentils, mustard seed, oats, peanuts, dry peas, rapeseed, long grain rice, medium grain rice (which includes short grain and sweet rice), safflower seed, sesame, soybeans, sunflower seed and wheat. Upland cotton is no longer a covered commodity. For more details regarding these programs, go to www.fsa.usda.gov/arc-plc.

For more information, producers are encouraged to visit their local FSA office. To find a local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>.

USDA Expands Working-Lands Conservation Opportunities through CRP

USDA will offer a new Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Grasslands practice specifically tailored for small-scale livestock grazing operations. Small livestock operations with 100 or fewer head of grazing dairy cows (or the equivalent) can submit applications to enroll up to 200 acres of grasslands per farm. USDA's goal is to enroll up to 200,000 acres.

The current CRP Grassland ranking period ended on Nov. 10, 2016. To date, the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) has received nearly 5,000 offers covering over 1 million acres for this CRP working-lands conservation program. These offers are predominantly larger acreage rangeland in Western states.

The new practice for small-scale livestock grazers aims, in part, to encourage greater diversity geographically and in types of livestock operation. This opportunity will close on Dec. 16, 2016. Offers selected this fiscal year will be enrolled into CRP Grasslands beginning Oct. 1, 2017.

Participants in CRP Grasslands establish or maintain long-term, resource-conserving grasses and other plant species to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat on marginally productive agricultural lands. CRP Grasslands participants can use the land for livestock production (e.g. grazing or producing hay), while following their conservation and grazing plans in order to maintain the cover. A goal of CRP Grasslands is to minimize conversion of grasslands either to row crops or to non-agricultural uses. Participants can receive annual payments of up to 75 percent of the grazing value of the land and up to 50 percent to fund cover or practices like cross-fencing to support rotational grazing or improving pasture cover to benefit pollinators or other wildlife.

USDA will select offers for enrollment based on six ranking factors: (1) current and future use, (2) new farmer/rancher or underserved producer involvement, (3) maximum grassland preservation, (4) vegetative cover, (5) environmental factors and (6) pollinator habitat. Offers for the second ranking period also will be considered from producers who submitted offers for the first ranking period but were not accepted, as well as from new offers submitted through Dec. 16.

Small livestock operations or other farming and ranching operations interested in participating in CRP Grasslands should contact their local FSA office. To find your local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>. To learn more about FSA's conservation programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation.

Preauthorized Debit Available for Farm Loan Borrowers

USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) has implemented pre-authorized debit (PAD) for Farm Loan Program (FLP) borrowers. PAD is a voluntary and alternative method for making weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly, semi-annual or annual payments on loans.

PAD payments are pre authorized transactions that allow the National Financial and Accounting Operations Center (NFAOC) to electronically collect loan payments from a customer's account at a financial institution.

PAD may be useful for borrowers who use nonfarm income from regular wages or salary to make payments on loans or adjustment offers or for payments from seasonal produce stands. PAD can only be established for future payments.

To request PAD, customers, along with their financial institution, must fill out form RD 3550-28. This form has no expiration date, but a separate form RD 3550-28 must be completed for each loan to which payments are to be applied. A fillable form can be accessed on the USDA Rural Development (RD) website at <http://www.rd.usda.gov/publications/regulations-guidelines>. Click forms and search for "Form 3550-28."

If you have a "filter" on the account at your financial institution, you will need to provide the financial institution with the following information: Origination ID: 1220040804, Agency Name: USDA RD DCFO.

PAD is offered by FSA at no cost. Check with your financial institution to discuss any potential cost. Preauthorized debit has no expiration date, but you can cancel at any time by submitting a written request to your local FSA office. If a preauthorized debit agreement receives three payment rejections within a three month period, the preauthorized debt agreement will be cancelled by FSA. The payment amount and due date of your loan is not affected by a cancellation of preauthorized debit. You are responsible to ensure your full payment is made by the due date.

For more information about PAD, contact your local FSA office. To find a local FSA office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>

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.

Upcoming Acreage Reporting Dates

In order to comply with FSA program eligibility requirements, all producers are encouraged to visit the local County FSA office to file an accurate crop certification report by the applicable deadline.

The following acreage reporting dates are applicable for Alaska:

December 15, 2016 - Perennial Forage and Fall-Seeded Small Grains

The following exceptions apply to the above acreage reporting dates:

- If the crop has not been planted by the above acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed.
- If a producer acquires additional acreage after the above acreage reporting date, then the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendar days after purchase or acquiring the lease. Appropriate documentation must be provided to the county office.
- If a perennial forage crop is reported with the intended use of "cover only," "green manure," "left standing," or "seed," then the acreage must be reported by July 15th.

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP covered crops is the earlier of the dates listed above or 15 calendar days before grazing or harvesting of the crop begins.

For questions regarding crop certification and crop loss reports, please contact your local County FSA office.

Persons with disabilities who require accommodations to attend or participate in these meetings and/or events should contact Lloyd Wilhelm, Northern CED, at (907) 895-4242, Erin Sturdivant, Southern CED, at (907) 761-7754 or Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.

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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