

Minority Farmers Advisory Committee
Questions from MFAC for FSA
September 22, 2015

FSA Outreach

How is FSA tracking Receipt for Service? How are we ensuring or monitoring the effectiveness?

- All service center agencies, (FSA, NRCS and RD) track the issuance of receipts weekly. NRCS maintains the current webRFS database for all three agencies and provides each agency HQ lead with a state weekly report, and a detailed report by county each quarter.
- Half of the numbers of FSA issued receipts reflect producers who declined receiving the actual receipt. Receipts are recorded in the system regardless and issued a unique identifying number.
- Employee Q&A calls have been conducted and agency directives were issued to all three agencies. All service center employees of all three agencies were required to complete training before implementing and will have webRFS requirements in their FY 2016 performance plans beginning October 1.
- The intent of webRFS is to provide a customer with a receipt of the service they requested and service that was provided or not provided and why. Receipts are not to provide status of program decisions, as applicants receive program decisions by mail along with applicable appeal rights.
- FSA is utilizing webRFS as a tool for enhanced customer service to provide producers and/or potential producers with a summary of service. FSA plans to expand customer service summary with their Bridges program.
- Customers who have not received documentation/or receipts from their visit to a service center are to contact USDA's Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO). To date, FSA has only received one inquiry from OAO regarding a webRFS inquiry and it was a case where a producer contacted a State Office, not service center by telephone. webRFS is only required for requests made in person or in writing. Telephone calls are not applicable. However producers who call a service center always have the right to specifically request a receipt, but telephone calls are not a requirement for offices to provide.

What are the defined requirements for RFS?

- The Secretary agreed that FSA, NRCS, and RD should implement Receipt for Service via a phased approach. Section 12204 of the 2014 Farm Bill requires FSA, NRCS, and RD to issue a receipt containing certain information to current or prospective producers or landowners when they request, in person or in writing, any benefit or service offered by the agencies. Under the 2008 Farm Bill, a receipt was required to be issued only when requested by the customer.
- Implementing a phased approach allowed for agencies to build on and upgrade initial Receipt for Service implementation to enhance and improve the receipt transaction services for customers and staff based on staff, stakeholder, and customer feedback.

- Implementing Receipt for Service in a non-phased, one-time manner would have caused significant delays in implementation. There was also a greater likelihood of error or poor investment with a one-time approach, rather than an iterative, phased approach.
- Phase 1 is a first step toward full implementation of this provision, not an end point. Because the Farm Bill requirement was effective immediately upon enactment, the agencies moved to implement Phase immediately.
- The following contacts/interactions trigger a receipt for service: customer office visit, customer email, customer fax, and customer letter (U.S. mail).
- In Phase I “office” was identified as USDA service centers that service the public, as state and national offices provide service and oversight to the service centers.
- Interactions with customers in the office trigger a receipt for service unless there is an existing relationship (e.g., a regular visit with customer for the past 10 years, status inquiry on pending application, etc.) or a formal agreement (Memorandum of Understanding, or Partnership). These parameters balance the need to moderate intake as the agencies adapt to new business processes and new technology with the need to provide greater customer service via receipts for interactions. The statute is explicit about “in person or in writing.”
- This recommendation was guided by the desire to ensure that all visitors asking relevant questions (not about the location of the John Deere dealership) walk out of the office with some kind of document in hand, be it an acreage report, program contract, or a receipt.
- The agencies sought input from stakeholders and staff in this area to inform of the agencies’ efforts to develop a Phase 2 or long-term implementation solution.
- The Secretary approved that FSA, NRCS, and RD would include the following programs/areas in Receipt for Service implementation
 - FSA: Farm Loan Program Direct Applications Requested and Received; Farm Storage Facility Loan Applications Requested and Received; Farm Program Benefit Requested (but not Received because the form or contract received in that case will be considered a receipt); County Committee Elections; General Program Information; Notice of Loss – Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance.
 - NRCS: All programs are encompassed under the following headings – Soil Surveys; Technical Assistance; Program Information; Program Application; Wetland/HEL; LRA.
 - RD: Rural Energy for America Program; Farmworker Housing; Value-Added Producer Grants; and Small Socially Disadvantaged Producer Grants.
- The list of programs/areas above focuses on both those that are used the most and those that interface with producers, landowners, and potential landowners as required by statute.
- The agencies anticipated that stakeholders would like to see a broader list of programs included. This interest is something that the agencies expect they would accommodate in Phase 2 of Receipt for Service implementation.
- During the stakeholder listening session in June, no comments were made to the agencies. Less than 20 called in to participate and 0 stakeholders appeared in person. However OAO advised they received a few emails after the stakeholder session.
- The Interagency team determined the desire to expand the listing but a decision regarding the technology for all agencies has not yet been finalized.

In Phase I, agencies identified programs where existing documentation provided to the customer would serve as the receipt. For FSA receipts are required for the following:

- County Committee Elections
- Farm Loan Programs Direct Loan Application Received
- Farm Loan Programs Direct Loan Application Requested
- Farm Loan Programs Disaster Set-Aside Application Received
- Farm Loan Programs Disaster Set-Aside Application Requested
- Farm Loan Programs Partial Release, Subordination, or Consent Application Received
- Farm Loan Programs Partial Release, Subordination, or Consent Application Requested
- Farm Loan Programs Primary Loan Servicing Application Received
- Farm Loan Programs Primary Loan Servicing Application Requested
- Farm Programs Benefit Requested
- Farm Storage Facility Loan Application Received
- Farm Storage Facility Loan Application Requested
- General Program Information
- Local Registration Authority Request (for eAuthentication access)
- Other (Describe Below)
- Report Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program Loss

In Phase II FSA plans to issue receipts for every program and request. (Phase II is slated for October)

How can the public provide feedback to FSA?

- FSA provides 24hr response through their online knowledge base called: AskFSA.
- The public is able to submit questions, review answers in the library through this public service. Subject matter experts provide the answers directly to the inquirer and commonly asked questions are posted in the library for future reference.
<https://askfsa.custhelp.com>
- In our Bridges pilot, we utilized surveys regarding the service experience in Bridges counties. We are working to expand that nationally in Phase III of Bridges.
- Producers are always welcome to submit written feedback and/or ask to speak to the County Executive Director who manages the office or the District Director that manages FSA offices in various state districts.

Details on the 5 New Farmer positions that were created: Job announcements, expected fill dates, States they will focus on, position descriptions.

- Last month 5 FSA advertised 5 Program Management positions August 14 – August 27.
- These positions were available to the general public (no prior federal experience was required).
- An overwhelming number of applications were received and are being reviewed by HRD for the issuance of a certificate of eligible applicants.

- Fill dates are unknown at this time, as they are contingent on completion of the application review and certificates being issued.
- The state offices where these positions will be headquartered include:
 1. VA or NC
 2. GA
 3. NV/AZ/NM or TX
 4. SD
 5. KY/TN

The major duties include:

- Represents USDA by working with new and beginning farmers, and military veterans to identify barriers to access and to coordinate efforts enabling them to participate in supportive programs;
- Researches and analyzes the history of new and beginning farmers and ranchers, and military veterans in a region. Conducts analyses to determine any obstacles that may prevent these groups from participating in USDA programs;
- Advises and coordinates with other public and private organizations to ensure that USDA programs are available to new and beginning farmers and ranchers, and military veterans, as well as to identify needs, resources, and obstacles;
- Develops and implements an active new and beginning farmer and rancher, and military veteran connection program for their region;
- Plans and provides training opportunities for local, state, and regional USDA employees, stakeholders, and new farmers and ranchers on USDA resource availability;
- Develops and provides training and educational tools to local cross-agency USDA staff on new and beginning farmer and rancher needs, outreach tactics, and opportunities.
- The positions will serve as regional USDA specialists to support all new/beginning farmers.
- The Specialists will work closely with the states' Food and Ag Councils (SFAC) to bridge collaboration, cooperation and training between USDA agencies as well as organizations and associations that serve beginning farmers.
- Specialists will be the “boots on the ground” to help complement NRCS, FSA and RD efforts to reach new farmers.
- Once the certificates have been issued, interviews will be conducted by State Executive Directors and a panel in those states. The program management specialists will be supervised by FSA State Executive Directors (SEDs).

FSA Programs

What is the amount that is capped for waived fees, for beginning farmers and ranchers for Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)?

For all coverage levels, the NAP service fee is the lesser of \$250 per crop or \$750 per producer per administrative county, not to exceed a total of \$1,875 for a producer with farming interests in multiple counties. Producers who elect additional coverage must also pay a premium equal to:

- The producer's share of the crop; times
- The number of eligible acres devoted to the crop; times
- The approved yield per acre; times
- The coverage level; times
- The average market price; times
- A 5.25 percent premium fee.

For value loss crops, premiums will be calculated using the maximum dollar value selected by the producer on form CCC-471, "Application for Coverage." The maximum premium for a producer is \$6,562.50 (the maximum payment limitation times a 5.25 percent premium fee).

Beginning, limited resource, and traditionally underserved farmers are eligible for a waiver of the service fee and a 50 percent premium reduction when they file form CCC-860.

Exact determinations/methodology for Disaster program

Attached is a Fact Sheet on Emergency Disaster Designation and Declaration Process

FSA Loans

What was the targeted allocated funds for SDA groups in all loans?

- In Fiscal Year 2014, 23.9 percent of customers receiving loan assistance were targeted underserved (socially disadvantaged), exceeding the established performance goal of 18.4 percent. Total loans made to targeted underserved farmers topped \$759 million, the highest amount ever.

Is the cap on Microloans (\$50,000) set by regulation or statute?

- Set by Statute

Farm Service Agency Representation at MFAC Meeting:

Cynthia Cuellar, FSA, Outreach Specialist

Kimberly Graham, FSA, Farm Programs

John Tamashiro, FSA, Farm Loans

Brian Garner, FSA, Civil Rights



Emergency Disaster Designation and Declaration Process

OVERVIEW

Agriculture-related disasters and disaster designations are quite common. Many counties in the United States have been designated as disaster areas in the past several years, even in years of record crop production.

The Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to designate counties as disaster areas to make emergency loans (EM) available to producers suffering losses in those counties and in counties that are contiguous to a designated county. In addition to EM eligibility, other emergency assistance programs, such as FSA disaster assistance programs, have historically used disaster designations as an eligibility trigger.

TYPES OF DISASTER DESIGNATIONS

FSA administers four types of disaster designations:

- USDA Secretarial disaster designation;
- Presidential major disaster and Presidential emergency declarations;
- FSA Administrator's Physical Loss Notification; and
- Quarantine designation by the Secretary under the Plant Protection Act or animal quarantine laws.

USDA Secretarial disaster designations must be requested of the Secretary of Agriculture by a governor or the governor's authorized representative, by an Indian Tribal Council leader, or by an FSA State Executive Director (SED). The Secretarial disaster designation is the most widely used and its process is the most complicated of the four. An expedited process for drought was introduced in 2012. The general process and the expedited process are described in further detail under "**Secretarial Disaster Designation Process.**"

Presidential major disaster declarations, which must be requested of the President by a governor, are administered through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). A Presidential major disaster declaration can be made within days or hours of the initial request. FEMA immediately notifies FSA of the primary counties named in a Presidential declaration.

An FSA Administrator's Physical Loss Notification (APLN) is for physical losses only, such as a building destroyed by a tornado. Livestock-related losses are considered physical losses. An APLN is requested of FSA's Administrator by an FSA SED.

A quarantine designation is requested of the Secretary of Agriculture by an FSA SED. A quarantine designation authorizes EM loans for production and physical losses resulting from quarantine.

WHAT DOES A DISASTER DESIGNATION SPECIFY?

A disaster designation specifies:

- The disaster that resulted in the designation;
- The incident period (dates) of that disaster;
- The specific counties included in the designation.

THE SECRETARIAL DISASTER DESIGNATION PROCESS

In 2012, USDA streamlined the Secretarial disaster declaration process to reduce paperwork and documentation requirements at the local FSA level, making the process more efficient and timely for agricultural producers. The program improvements included Fast Track Secretarial disaster designations for severe drought, which provide for a nearly automatic designation when, during the growing season, any portion of a county meets the D2 (Severe Drought) drought intensity value for eight consecutive weeks or a higher

drought intensity value for any length of time as reported in the U.S. Drought Monitor (<https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>).

For all other natural disaster occurrences, including drought conditions that do not trigger a Fast Track designation, the county must have a 30 percent production loss of at least one crop or a determination must be made by surveying producers that other lending institutions will not be able to provide emergency financing. The process for those Secretarial disaster designations is described below.

PROCESS

STEP 1

The governor, Indian Tribal Council leader, or FSA SED makes a request in writing to the Secretary of Agriculture within three months of the ending date of the disaster

STEP 2

FSA county offices assemble required agricultural loss information for the Loss Assessment Report (LAR).

STEP 3

The County Emergency Board (CEB) reviews the LAR and makes a recommendation to approve, defer, or reject the request.

STEP 4

The State Emergency Board (SEB) reviews the request and the CEB's recommendation. The SEB's recommendation is submitted to FSA's National Headquarters (NHQ).

STEP 5

FSA NHQ reviews the loss information on the LAR, determines eligibility, and prepares a package, including the letter of approval or disapproval, to be signed by the Secretary.

ELIGIBLE NATURAL DISASTERS

Eligible natural disasters are disasters in which damaging weather conditions or other adverse natural occurrence phenomena have substantially affected farmers causing severe production losses. Eligible natural disaster conditions include drought, flooding, excessive rain and humidity, severe storms, lightning, hail, mudslides and landslides, snow, ice, blizzards, frost, freeze, below-normal temperatures, wind, tornadoes, hurricanes, typhoons, tropical storms, fire, excessive heat, volcanoes, pests and disease.

FSA PROGRAMS INITIATED BY DESIGNATIONS AND/OR DECLARATIONS

All four types of designation, (Secretarial disaster designations, Presidential disaster declarations, APLNs, and quarantine designations) immediately trigger the availability of low-interest FSA EM loans to eligible producers in all primary and contiguous counties. More information about EM loans is available at <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/farm-loan-programs/emergency-farm-loans/index>.

FSA borrowers located in designated disaster areas or contiguous counties, who are unable to make their scheduled payments on any debt, may be authorized to have certain set asides. Under Section 331A of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act, FSA is authorized to consider setting aside certain payments owed by FSA borrowers to allow the operation to continue.

Additional disaster assistance requiring a designation may also be provided by new programs in the future.

REGULATION GOVERNING DISASTER DESIGNATION PROCESS

The regulation governing disaster designations is at 7 CFR Part 759. The rule was published in the Federal Register on July 13, 2012, at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-07-13/html/2012-17137.htm>.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on FSA disaster programs, visit <https://disaster.fsa.usda.gov> or visit your local FSA county office. To find your local FSA county office, visit <https://offices.usda.gov>.

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CUSTOMER SUMMARY

OS-1509-16444

Cuellar Cynthia

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Washington, DC 20250 USA

9/23/2015

Notes : No Additional Notes added.

List of Resources:

Account Name: USDA Farm Service Agency

<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/>

Contact: Veronica Huron

State Outreach Coordinator

2405 Texas Avenue, South

College Station Texas 77840 USA

(979) 680-5156

veronica.huron@tx.usda.gov

Account Name: USDA Farm Service Agency

<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/>

Contact: Vickie Lane

State Outreach Coordinator

4121 Carmichael Road

Montgomery Alabama 36106 USA

(334) 279-3508

vickie.lane@al.usda.gov

Account Name: USDA Farm Service Agency
<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/>

Contact: FSA State Office
State Outreach Coordinator
3001 Coolidge Road, Suite 350
East Lansing Michigan 48414 USA
(517) 324-5110

Account Name: USDA Farm Service Agency
<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/>

Contact: Veronica Tribbet
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Account Name: USDA Farm Service Agency
<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/>

Contact: Shelly Bilderback
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(405) 742-1041
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Account Name: USDA Farm Service Agency
<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/>

Contact: Aaron Robinson
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Jackson Mississippi 39211 USA
(601) 965-4300 , 108
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Summary of Services: On 09/23/2015 you inquired about **quickHit** + and you received:

- 7 Resource[s]
- 7 Contact[s]: Veronica Huron, Vickie Lane, FSA State State Office, Veronica Tribbet, Christina Reed, Shelly Bilderback, Aaron Robinson
- Invitation[s] to

Additional Notes:

This list of resources is for informational purposes only; it is not intended to be all-inclusive or promote any specific organization, individual or resource. We hope this list provides you with useful information based on your search results. The goal of the FSA *Bridges to Opportunity* pilot program is to increase customer access to resources benefiting agriculture and rural communities.

This document serves as your official USDA Receipt for Service as mandated by Section 12204 of the Agricultural Act of 2014.

Privacy Act Statement - Bridges to Opportunity Program

The following statement is made in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 USC 552a - as amended). The authority for requesting the information identified on this website is 7 CFR Part 2 and the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (Pub. L. 101-624). The information will be used in the Bridges to Opportunity Program to help current or prospective customers access a broader array of resources in their local area, assist in determining the resource and service needs of current or prospective customers, execute current or prospective customer referrals to partners, and to actively contribute to the delivery of partner resources. The information collected on this website may be disclosed to other Federal, State, Local government agencies, Tribal agencies, and nongovernmental entities that have been authorized access to the information by statute or regulation and/or as described in applicable Routine Uses identified in the System of Records Notice for USDA/FSA-2, Farm Records File (Automated) and USDA/FSA-14, Applicant/Borrower. Providing the requested information is voluntary. However, failure to furnish the requested information may result in an inability on the part of FSA to provide current or prospective customers accurate/timely benefits and services under the Bridges to Opportunity Program.