

Urban County Committee Elections

Eligibility to vote and hold office as a county committee member



Overview

USDA has been increasing services to producers in urban locations throughout the U.S. This includes Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Committees (COC), which are a critical component of the day-to-day operations of FSA and allow grassroots input and local administration of federal farm programs.

A list of locations with urban county committees can be found at fsa.usda.gov/elections.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) encourages all eligible producers and urban growers with farming or ranching operations to vote or hold office as county committee members, including beginning or established producers, historically underserved producers (minority and women), or large or small operations.

Urban and Suburban Farming

Urban agriculture generally refers to the cultivation, processing, and distribution of agricultural products in urban and suburban settings, including things like vertical production, warehouse farms, community gardens, rooftop farms, hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic facilities, and other innovations. Urban farmers and gardeners work among diverse populations to expand access to nutritious foods, foster community engagement, provide jobs, educate communities about farming, and expand green spaces.

How it Works

Urban and suburban producers are elected to serve by urban producers in the defined Local Administrative Area (LAA) to serve a 3-year commitment. FSA county committees will meet at least quarterly and help identify the needs of the growing urban agriculture market for both Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and FSA programs by:

- Outreach and partnership with local stakeholders.
- Identifying urban agriculture community needs to assist the USDA in determining potential (legislative, regulatory, administrative) program enhancements.
- Tailoring program recommendations for future grower opportunities.
- Understanding and promoting available USDA programs.
- Providing education on USDA programs and FSA committees to urban and suburban producers and local stakeholders.
- Reviewing producer applications and assisting with administrative and programmatic oversight.

Who is Eligible to Vote?

Contact your local FSA office to confirm your eligibility. Affirmation of eligibility to vote must be determined for a vote to count in an election. General eligibility requirements include:

1. Is of legal voting age, or if not of legal voting age, supervise and conduct the farming operation for the entire farm.
2. Is engaged in the production or sale of an agricultural commodity as either:
 - An individual who meets one or more of the following:
 - Is eligible and capable to vote in one's own right.
 - Is a partner of a general partnership.
 - Is a member of a joint venture.
 - An authorized representative of a legal entity, such as:
 - A corporation, estate, trust, limited partnership, non-profit or other business enterprise, excluding general partnerships and joint ventures.
 - A state, political subdivision of a state, or any state agency.Only the designated representative may cast a vote for the entity.
3. Participates or cooperates in any USDA program that is provided for by law.

Note: A cooperating producer is someone who has provided information about their urban operation(s) even if they have not applied or received USDA program benefits.

Contact your local FSA office to register as an urban or suburban grower, voter, or to be considered as an eligible nominee in the COC Election.



Interpretation of Voting Eligibility for Spouses in Community Property States

In community property states, the spouse of an eligible voter is also eligible to vote.

Local Administrative Areas

A county or multi-county jurisdiction served by an FSA county committee is divided into 3 to 11 local administrative areas (LAA). Each LAA is represented by one member on the FSA county committee. A person may only vote in one LAA (the LAA in which he or she participates or cooperates in FSA programs or programs administered by FSA). Urban participants must have an interest within the county or multi-county boundary.

Individuals can identify the LAA they or their farming interests are located in via a county committee election GIS locator tool on fsa.usda.gov/elections.

Multiple Farm Interests in Same County or Area

Eligible voters who participate or cooperate in USDA programs on separate farms in more than one LAA in the same county or multi-county jurisdiction may only cast one ballot and be eligible to hold office in one LAA. Voters with farming interests in more than one LAA will only be eligible to vote once and will be assigned to the LAA closest to where they reside. Urban producers residing outside the designated boundary may choose any LAA they have farming interest in upon request.

Who can Hold Office?

To hold office as an FSA county committee member, a person must meet each of the basic eligibility requirements described below:

1. Be a U.S. citizen.
2. Be an urban producer with records administered through the urban COC jurisdiction.
3. Reside or have farming interests in the LAA that is up for election.*

** In instances where a candidate has no farming interest within the LAA they reside, they may be assigned to the LAA where their farming interests are located.*

4. A person must not have been:
 - Removed or disqualified from:
 - FSA county committee membership or alternate membership, or
 - FSA employment.
 - Removed for cause from any public office or have been convicted of fraud, larceny, embezzlement or any other felony.
 - Dishonorably discharged from any branch of the armed services.

During the election period, individuals not receiving a ballot in the mail may obtain a ballot directly from their FSA county office. The ballot must be cast on or before the election deadline.

Discrimination Prohibited

USDA prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

FSA and NRCS Programs Available

FSA – Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, Organic Certification Cost Share Program, microloans and Farm Storage Facility Loans.

NRCS – Conservation financial and technical assistance, including high tunnels, soil health, and irrigation.

For more information on programs for available for urban farmers, visit farmers.gov/urban.

More Information

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only; other restrictions may apply. For program specifics or additional information about FSA county committees, visit a local USDA Service Center or the FSA county committee website at fsa.usda.gov/elections.

Anytime

Contact your local FSA office for information on how to participate.

By June

Register to be an eligible voter.

Mid-June

Beginning of nomination period.
Forms available at fsa.usda.gov/elections.

Early Aug.

Last day to file nomination forms at the local FSA county office.

Early Nov.

Ballots mailed to eligible voters.

Early Dec.

Last day to return voted ballots to the local FSA county office.

January 1

Newly elected county committee members take office.