



National Association of Farmer Elected Committees

Representing Farm Service Agency County Committee Members since 1965

January 30, 2025

Dear Senate and House Agriculture Committee Members,

As the new Congress/Senate begins to consider our next Farm Bill, the National Association of Farmer Elected Committees (NAFEC), are excited to reach out to you regarding the new Farm Bill. We are excited because we represent the County FSA Committees, the only elected (by the people) local grassroots committees with oversight of the Federal government. As such, we believe this system has a great amount of potential for the future, not only within USDA and the Farm Service Agency, but also as a template for other government departments and agencies that could greatly benefit from having locally elected men and women, with some form of Federal oversight.

Since the 1930's, locally elected committees have had oversight of Federal Farm Programs. However, during the past few years there has been a steady push from within Washington DC to reduce the oversight and authority of local committees. We believe this pushes in the wrong direction. And as a group that has members from every facet of agriculture, representing every agriculture group or organization in the nation, we know that farmers and ranchers throughout the nation support this system. We also believe the taxpayers who fund farm programs are also highly favorable to a system that provides both Federal support, and local oversight of Federal dollars.

Over the past few years, the Administration of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) has bypassed the will of Congress by creating programs that allow FSA executives to review and approve applications, without County Committee oversight. As you consider the next Farm Bill, we urge you to include in Farm Bill language, provisions that require local County FSA Committees oversight responsibilities of every new and existing program of any type. We know that this will not occur without specific Farm Bill language that directs the bureaucrats within USDA to ensure these type regulations reflect the will of congress. In addition, the recent language in the previous House farm bill draft indicates a transfer of the administering agency for the Conservation Reserve program from FSA to the NRCS. This draft language if approved would amend current law Section 228 7 U.S.C.6936 section B 2 & 5 by striking subchapter B of chapter 1 of subtitle D of such title (16 U.S.C. 3831) et seq. If the NRCS is given authority to administer the CRP, funds to administer will come directly from the program funds allocated to producers. In contrast funds to administer CRP are currently an FSA budgetary line item that do not come from program funds. This would result in less program funds in the hands of CRP contract holders. As such, NAFEC believes that FSA should remain as the administrating agency for the CRP program, while NRCS continue to be the technical agency when processing CRP applications and contracts.

Secondly, County Committee members currently have supervisory oversight of local FSA County Executive Directors. However, over the past few years this authority (that is in permanent law) has been slowly eroded by the FSA authorities who are allowing District Directors to take this authority from our local elected committee members. We know that this will continue, unless specific language in the Farm Bill is developed to ensure permanent law is followed.

Finally, over the past four years the Biden Administrations Equity Commission have made many unfounded accusations against local elected committees. The commission also has used these accusations to try and eliminate elected committees, in favor of appointed committees. As we previously indicated, we believe elected committees are the best system within government.



In addition, the administration has placed a low level of priority upon training elected committee members. To ensure committees are annually trained and funds are provided so that committees have regular monthly meetings, the FSA budget should contain a line item which requires annual face to face training of all newly elected committee members and provides funding for every committee in the nation to meet on a monthly basis. This is critical especially considering criticisms of the County Committee system in recent years.

Specifically, to accomplish these objectives we propose that farm bill language include the following:

1. All programs (both new and current) administered by the Farm Service Agency will require that every application submitted by an agriculture producer be reviewed and approved or disapproved (with appeal rights) by the locally elected County/Area FSA Committee. Delegations of authority to a County Executive Director be allowed only when routine decisions are needed to ensure timely program delivery.
2. The Farm Service Agency should continue as the administrative agency of the Conservation Reserve Program.
3. County FSA Committee Committees shall remain the sole supervisors of the FSA County Executive Directors to ensure accountability to local farmers and ranchers and taxpayers. This authority cannot be delegated to District Directors or other Federal employees.
4. A Farm Bill line item be established within the FSA budget to require annual face-to-face training be provided to all newly elected County Committee members. Furthermore, every committee in the nation shall be funded for up to one meeting per month, to ensure program integrity and oversight by local committees.

NAFEC appreciates the efforts you and your staff are putting forth to ensure we have a new Farm Bill. We stand ready and willing to assist or answer any questions you may.

Sincerely,

The Executive Committee of the
National Association of Farmer Elected Committees

Jim Zumbrink, President, Ohio
Craig Turner, Executive Vice President, Texas
Jim Densberger, Vice President, Nebraska
Bob Braden, Secretary/Treasurer, Iowa
Cole Sims, At Large Area Director, Louisiana
Coy Poitier, Southwest Area Director, Texas
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Dan Pillsbury, Northeast Area Director, Vermont
Dennis Kuhlengel, Midwest Area Director, Illinois
Dan Noteboom, Northwest Area Director, Washington

The County Committee System of FSA:
True Democracy at the grassroots level in the People's Department