



EXTENSION

AGEC-280

Getting started with USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)

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The United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (USDA FSA) manages a wide variety of programs under the authorization of federal legislation. FSA aims to support farmers and ranchers through various loans, disaster, conservation and revenue protection programs, along with other ad hoc programs. For example, in 2024, just under 5 million acres were enrolled in the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) program and 2.6 million acres were enrolled in the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) program (www.farmers.gov). Many producers across Oklahoma have worked with the FSA for years and will already have production history and farm records in place, making program applications easy.

However, for new producers a bit more work is needed to get set up in the FSA system. Becoming familiar with the FSA and the resources the agency provides can help producers manage production risks and take advantage of farm programs authorized by the federal government. Farm numbers are required for applying for FSA loans, annual programs like ARC and PLC, non-insured crop disaster assistance (NAP), and disaster assistance for crop and livestock producers like the Livestock Forage Program (LFP) and Emergency Relief Program (ERP). Also, a farm number obtained from FSA is required as a gateway to many other USDA programs. For example, crop insurance requires a farm number and that annual crop reports be submitted to FSA. Conservation programs through the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) also require a farm number for applications.

Getting started with the FSA

Starting with the FSA typically begins with a face-to-face meeting at your local USDA Service Center. Use this link to find the closest service center to your operation: <https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator>. It is advised to make an appointment ahead of time as common enrollment periods can keep the center busy throughout the work week. Before meeting with an FSA representative, make sure to ask the office what types of documentation you may need to enroll in various programs. These can include but are not limited to:

- Proof of identity such as a driver's license, passport, or social security card
- Copy of your farm's property title and rental or lease agreements associated with the land
- Production records or herd inventory
- Official tax identification and business documents

During a visit

While meeting with an FSA representative, you may be able to register for a farm number. That farm number will then be used on other federal programs and loan applications. It is possible that purchased properties will already have an FSA farm number that can be transferred with ownership. Check with your local FSA office to see if that is the case. If a farm is incorporated or considered a separate legal entity, proof of signature authority may be needed before any contracts are signed with the USDA.

Various forms will need to be completed to confirm eligibility for FSA programs. A full description of the purpose of each form can be found through the USDA eForms Database (<https://forms.sc.egov.usda.gov/eForms>). The forms listed below will be filled out on that first visit, which is also a good time to ask questions about eligibility and programs. This list of forms must be completed before participation in any USDA program. These are used to ensure that a producer is not farming wetland areas or highly erodible lands (HELs) and do not exceed \$900,000 of average gross income throughout a three-year period.

Forms that will be needed in the first year include:

- Form AD-2047 Customer Data Worksheet
- Form CCC-901 Member Information for Legal Entities (if the farm is incorporated or considered a separate legal entity)
- Form CCC-902 Farm Operating Plan for both individuals and legal entities
- Form CCC-943 Average Gross Income from Farming, Ranching or Forestry Certification
- AD-1026 Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Certification
- SF-3881 Direct Deposit

After a visit

Concluding a visit to your local service center, submit your acreage reports annually to maintain eligibility for USDA programs. A key annual activity necessary for maintaining your FSA account is submitting an annual acreage report. The Report of Acreage form (FSA-578) is submitted through the FSA office, although you may also fill it out by working with your local crop insurance agent. To submit a crop acreage report, you will need: crop type or variety, intended crop use, number of acres, planting dates, etc. A crop acreage report is used for field crops, forage crops and specialty crops. For more extensive information regarding crop acreage reports, visit <https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/crop-acreage-reports#how-to> or your local FSA office. Also, it is a good idea to sign up for text alerts from your county FSA office. The texts are not frequent but will keep you up to date on upcoming deadlines and new programs that are available.

Conclusion

There are several good reasons to get your farm number and submit annual crop acreage reports. Establishing a base set of farm records will make it easier to apply for programs as they open. This is especially true when a disaster occurs. With a farm number and up-to-date annual reporting, a disaster program make take only one or two forms plus documentation of the disaster. This reduces the burden during the stressful days and weeks after a disaster occurs. Also, during busy enrollment seasons for the office, you can focus on questions associated with programs rather than trying to get back records updated, again saving time and effort. Each program has a unique set of forms and records required. For more details on record keeping for USDA programs, see OSU Extension Fact Sheet AGE-1070. Taking proactive steps to establish your farm with FSA today can save time down the road.

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