

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Programs, Projects and Operations Subcommittee

SUBJECT: USDA State Review Plan Proposal

DATE: April 5, 2007

FROM: Puls, Ralph

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA), both agencies of the United States Department of Agriculture, have announced the results of their recently concluded business plan review. The FSA proposes the consolidation of 12 of the 81 offices in Nebraska. Offices in the Papio-Missouri River NRD that would be affected are the Sarpy/Douglas County office and the Dakota County office. The proposal would consolidate the Sarpy/Douglas County office with the Cass County office in Weeping Water. The Dakota County office would be consolidated with Dixon County and the combined offices would be located in the FSA office in Dakota City; the office building the P-MRNRD constructed in 2005 to house FSA, NRCS and Dakota County Rural Water.

The consolidation of the Sarpy /Douglas offices with the Cass County office would result in the closure of the Sarpy /Douglas office and their five employees would be moved to Cass County and/or Washington County. This move would have a negative impact on the landowners, operators and others in Sarpy and Douglas Counties. Cooperators routinely visit both the FSA and NRCS and in many cases the P-MRNRD offices to conduct their business.

The USDA has been promoting the efficiency of one stop service centers for many years, and the P-MRNRD has responded by providing office space to these USDA agencies in Sarpy/Douglas County, Washington County and Dakota County. In each of these locations the District has at least one P-MRNRD employee, who assists with the implementation of both USDA programs and P-MRNRD programs. In the case of the Sarpy/Douglas office here at the Natural Resources Center cooperators can and visit offices of the Department of Environmental Quality, the Corps of Engineers and the Headquarters offices of the P-MRNRD. Frequently these cooperators will learn of District programs available to them by meeting with District staff in the building.

The USDA has proposed a plan which they say will address declining budgets and staff numbers and focus more on serving producers through a more efficient network of FSA offices. The plan doesn't appear to give credit to the added efficiency and convenience to the public that is offered by providing a local, one stop service center to the cooperators in Sarpy and Douglas County.

The FSA has a 30 day comment period with a deadline of April 27, 2007 during which time it will accept comments or concerns.

**It is recommended that the subcommittee recommend to the Board of Directors that staff respond to the USDA Review Plan Proposal expressing the District's concerns about the proposed closure of the Sarpy/Douglas County FSA office.**

## **News Release**

Nebraska Farm Service Agency

[www.fsa.usda.gov/ne](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/ne)

7131 A Street  
Lincoln, Nebraska 68510

Contact: Brian Wolford  
(402) 437-5581

**\*\*Embargoed until 11:30 a.m. CDT, March 27, 2007\*\***

### **Nebraska Farm Service Agency Announces State Review Plan Proposal**

LINCOLN, NE, March 27, 2007 – The USDA Nebraska Farm Service Agency has proposed a revised office structure which will address declining budgets and staff numbers and focus more resources on serving producers. The plan proposes the consolidation of twelve Nebraska FSA Offices which will allow the Agency to more adequately staff remaining offices, thus improving efficiency and service to Nebraska producers.

“The review of operations was required by the FSA Administrator with the goal of identifying the optimum network of FSA offices, staffing, training and technology within existing budget and staffing resources,” said State Executive Director Brian Wolford. “The Nebraska State Committee met with FSA County Committee members, employee associations, and a committee of FSA employees to gather input for criteria used to analyze operations in Nebraska. The Committee’s goal has been to develop a proposal that would address agency challenges, better support our staff and improve efficiency and service to producers.”

Informational meetings were held with congressional staffs, State Senators, commodity and livestock groups along with state and federal partners during the past 12 months to communicate FSA challenges, the FSA review process and to take suggestions. “Maintaining a structure of 81 offices while staffing levels continue to decline has taken its toll on Nebraska FSA,” said Milton Rogers, State FSA Committee chairman. “We agreed with the feedback from those employees that felt something needed to be done to address our most critical staffing challenges.”

County office workload was the primary criteria used to analyze and establish operations. The proposal dedicates one County Executive Director (CED) to each resulting FSA location. It also suggests a minimum of at least four full-time employees in any office which would include one CED and three program technicians. “By striving toward a minimum sized-office of at least four people and reducing administrative duties, employees will be able to focus more time on serving producers,” said Wolford.

Nebraska FSA Offices proposed for consolidation are as follows:

- Banner County to be consolidated with Scotts Bluff County.
- Boyd County to be consolidated with Holt County.

*Continued*

Nebraska FSA Offices proposed for consolidation continued:

- Deuel County to be consolidated with Garden County.
- Dixon County to be consolidated with Dakota County.
- Dundy County to be consolidated with Chase County.
- Frontier County to be consolidated with Red Willow County.
- Garfield County to be consolidated with Valley County.
- Greeley County to be consolidated with Valley County.
- Hayes County to be consolidated with Hitchcock County.
- Sarpy County to be consolidated with Cass County.
- Sherman County to be consolidated with Buffalo County.
- Thomas County to be consolidated with Lincoln County.

*Douglas ??*

Public meetings will be held in communities where a consolidation is proposed. The meetings will include a presentation followed by an opportunity for the public to comment on the proposal. Upon completion of the 30-day comment period, the State Committee will evaluate all feedback and opinions received regarding the proposal and will submit a final recommendation to the Secretary of Agriculture for final approval.

“Once approved, impacted producers would be given the choice of which contiguous county in which to conduct their FSA business and we would position staff accordingly,” said Wolford. “We understand that some producers and employees are going to travel further to reach the FSA office; however, after months of discussions and analysis, we believe that restructuring Nebraska FSA is necessary to address our budget and staffing challenges, to provide more support for our employees and to continue to serve our customers in the most efficient manner possible.”



**Farm Service Agency**

**Nebraska FSA State Review Plan Proposal  
30-Day Comment Period**

Comments or concerns should be submitted to any one of the following three options:

USDA Nebraska Farm Service Agency  
c/o State Review Plan  
7131 A Street  
Lincoln, NE 68510

[www.fsa.usda.gov/ne](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/ne)

[FSA.Offices@ne.usda.gov](mailto:FSA.Offices@ne.usda.gov)

**Deadline to submit comments: April 27, 2007**