

USDA-FSA

Seed Cotton Base Acre Allocation,

Yield Update,

Election and Enrollment

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Executive Summary

The United States Department of Agriculture - Farm Service Agency (USDA-FSA) has various programs that strive to help farmers, ranchers, and agricultural partners sustain their agricultural production and businesses. The USDA-FSA provides America's farmers and ranchers with financial assistance while also helping protect natural resources and enhancing food security. The Imperial County is a rural community that strongly hosts farming and production of agriculture. This rural community may be a poverty-stricken community, but it is also a gateway towards agriculture and has helped assist in feeding people all around the world. Agriculture accounts for a substantial amount of economic revenue and income for many families in the community, as most businesses that are locally owned within the community are involved in agricultural services that deal with the transportation of produce, regulation of producers, and field labor services.

I've had the opportunity to serve as a student intern at the Imperial County USDA-FSA where I learned about various agricultural policies, legislation, and programs that are implemented by the USDA-FSA throughout the Imperial County. Throughout my internship I was able to help assist with the implementation of agricultural policies and covered commodity risk and loss programs. Specifically, I assisted with implementing the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 (BBA) which authorized seed cotton as a covered commodity under the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs effective for the 2018 crop year. I also have been able to contribute and first-hand see the service that the Imperial County USDA-FSA provides to residents throughout the Imperial County in exploring opportunities in agriculture.

Project Objectives

In April before the beginning of my internship, I was able to attend the 2018 California State University's Water Resources and Policy Initiatives Conference held Palm Desert, CA. This conference was a California-wide higher education discussion that pushed students, faculty and staff, and various administrators to explore and discuss water-related education, research, issues, and other policy initiatives dealing with sustainability and water resources management. I found this experience cultivating to my participation as a student intern supported by the Water Resources and Policy Initiatives (WRPI), as I recognized complex issues about water sustainability and management that California faces today and how we can further implement resolutions and policies that will help solve these current and long-term issues related to water.

The goal of this project was to become familiarized with current legislation and programs that are being implemented by USDA-FSA, which lead to my interest in assisting with the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs effective for the 2018 crop year. Specifically, the Bipartisan Act of 2018 (BBA) authorized seed cotton as covered commodity under the ARC and PLC programs. Owners of a farm with generic base acres as of September 30, 2013, and recent planting history of covered commodities, had a one-time opportunity to allocate generic base acres. Farmers and ranchers throughout the Imperial County would need to allocate generic base acres according to their production of crops considered covered commodities, which now included seed cotton as a covered commodity. These programs assist in anticipating market volatility and weather uncertainty as these forces may often result in low farm revenue. The USDA-FSA states, "The Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs assist farmers of 21 key crops in managing this

risk...As a result, payments for the 2015 crop losses - largely corn, soybean, and wheat - started in October 2016 and are estimated to be about 50 percent greater than the \$5.2 billion paid for 2014 crop losses. Now in its third year, approximately 1.7 million farms enrolled for 2016 crop ARC/PLC coverage,” (Farm Service Agency Impacts, Selected Accomplishments, 2016) when discussing results of ARC and PLC programs throughout the United States.

As I learned more about these programs I began to analyze and learn about the procedures involved in the implementation of the seed cotton base acre allocation, yield update, election, and enrollment under the ARC and PLC programs. This would involve seed cotton provisions similar to those for crops initially included in 2015 in the ARC/PLC programs resulting from the 2014 Farm Bill and include a multi-step process in allocating generic base acres to seed cotton base acres. An important factor in providing eligibility for the allocation of generic base acres to seed cotton base acres or other covered commodity base acres is the farm demonstrates a recent history of planting covered commodities, requiring that this included upland cotton. The farm also must have been planted or approved prevented planted to a covered commodity, including upland cotton, at any time during 2009 through 2016 crop years. According to the USDA-FSA, producers would need to review the 2009 through 2012 planting history on farms that are determined eligible with generic base acres to ensure the planting history is complete.

Project Approach

As I took on this project, I assisted my supervisor and program technicians in various steps for implementing the allocation of seed cotton under the ARC and PLC programs. The USDA-FSA provides that steps for implementing the allocation of seed cotton are:

1. Determine if a covered commodity was planted on the farm during the 2009 through 2016 crop years.
2. Identify planted and considered planted history of covered commodities, including upland cotton, on the farm with generic base acres.
3. Current owner(s) of the farm allocate generic base acres to seed cotton or allocate generic base to seed cotton and other planted covered commodities as applicable.
4. Current owner(s) of the farm updates the seed cotton yield.
5. Current producer(s) on the farm elect the applicable program for seed cotton, unless the the ARC-Individual Coverage (ARC-IC) was previously elected on the farm.
6. The producer(s) on the farm enroll the farm.

I assisted with the reallocation of seed cotton base by providing yield update calculations using the information and data provided by owners and producers of farms participating in the allocation of seed cotton under the ARC and PLC programs. I was assigned to assist in calculating seed cotton base and helping determine the amount of seed cotton base through generic base acre allocation options including:

- Option 1: Allocate generic base acres on a farm to seed cotton base acres to the higher of the following: 80 percent of the generic base acres on the farm - the remaining 20 percent goes to unassigned base acres for which there will be no payments and the average of planted and

considered planted upland cotton acres on the farm in crop years 2009-2012, not to exceed the total generic base acres on the farm.

- Option 2: Allocate generic base acres in proportion to the 4-year average planted and considered planted of covered commodities, including upland cotton, in crop years 2009-2012, to the total planted and considered planted acres of all covered commodities planted on the farm.

Additional tasks performed:

- On a daily basis, I updated notices and amendments according to USDA-FSA policies.
- Assisted in carrying out office activities and functions pertaining to the program areas administered in the Imperial County, including the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees and Farm-Raised Fish (ELAP).
- Updated farm program and procedural documents within folders and binders throughout the office in order to adhere to changes made to farm programs administered by USDA-FSA.
- Established new excel sheets in order to maintain producer data.
- Assisted in calculating overall totals.
- Maintained and updated files information, along with database management for keeping record of information.

Project Outcomes

The Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs serve to provide a financial safety net for farmers and ranchers in the occurrence of circumstances that include adverse weather and/or volatile market forces that would result in low farm revenue. This is a critical component in the risk that is associated with farming and producing agriculture, which provides significant assistance to those that choose to become involved and explore opportunities in agriculture. Agricultural risk and price losses in crops serve as factors that can impact a farm's revenue, which may lead to farmers and ranchers not being able to sustain their crops and agricultural activities.

Overall, this service-learning experience has taught me many lessons and introduced me to how a federal government agency implements various programs, policies, and procedures. This opportunity has broadened my perspective on the USDA-FSA and all that this agency offers in relation to serving the public and sustaining agriculture throughout rural communities, such as the Imperial County. I have also learned more about different career opportunities offered within the USDA, as there are various agencies existing within the USDA. I truly feel that my experience serving the USDA-FSA has benefitted my educational goals and helped me further my professional skills.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my experience as an intern with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) – Farm Service Agency has helped me grow professionally and has further inspired me to gain a career in public service. I've also gotten to experience how the USDA Farm Service Agency serves the rural community in which I come from and how their programs help sustain agriculture throughout the Imperial Valley. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in the Watershed Management Internship Program and the impact it has had on my public service career outlook and for allowing me to contribute to serving others within my rural community.