

The Farm Service Agency (FSA), a branch of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), plays a pivotal role in supporting American farmers and ranchers while promoting the resilience of the nation's agricultural economy. As a vital conduit between agricultural producers and the federal government, the FSA implements agricultural policy, manages credit and loan programs, and delivers critical support services designed to address the unique challenges faced by rural communities and the broader agricultural sector (USDA, 2022).

1. MISSION

“To deliver timely, effective programs and services to America’s farmers and ranchers to support them in sustaining our Nation’s vibrant agricultural economy, as well as to provide first-rate support for domestic and international food aid efforts.” – FSA Mission Statement

FSA’s mission is comprehensive, seeking to empower agricultural producers through a broad range of services and programs that span financial assistance, disaster relief, conservation, education, and inclusion. At its core, the agency is committed to creating long-term value by addressing the diverse needs of American farmers and ranchers.

To guide its work, FSA has outlined four strategic goals:

1. Provide a financial safety net to sustain agricultural production.
2. Enhance environmental quality through responsible stewardship of natural resources.
3. Strengthen food security by ensuring effective production and equitable distribution.
4. Modernize the agency through innovation, education, and organizational transformation.

Central to FSA's work is the **Farm Loan Program**, which delivers both direct loans and loan guarantees to support farm ownership, operational continuity, conservation efforts, and disaster recovery. These programs are especially critical for new, underserved, and generational farmers, offering both technical and monetary resources to help them achieve long-term success.

In addition to domestic priorities, the FSA recognizes the global dimensions of agricultural sustainability. Through its administration of the Commodity Credit Corporation, the agency supports both domestic and international food security by managing the purchase, sale, and donation of agricultural commodities.

FSA also leads conservation efforts that assist producers and landowners in implementing environmentally responsible practices—helping to conserve soil, water, air, and wildlife resources. These initiatives promote sustainability not just for today's farmers, but for future generations.

Finally, the agency is committed to modernization—improving internal systems, investing in workforce development, and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. These efforts reflect a broader transformation aimed at ensuring the FSA evolves to meet the complex needs of modern agriculture and the communities it serves.

2. Management Challenges/Solutions

Overseen by the Secretary of AG, the FSA utilized a hierarchical model ensures a clear line of authority and accountability. However, implementation requires a decentralized approach to provide adequate services to address the varying regional challenges encountered across the nation. As a result, each county office maintains a County Director who reports directly to their respective State Executive Director (USDA, 2023). While this provides a “bottom-up approach”

to information collection, significant challenges exist for those in management positions at the county level:

- No tailored mission/goals
- Understaffing
- Historical shortcomings in diversity

County Offices lack a clearly articulatable mission and goals. Due to the independent needs and challenges faced by each office, it is imperative that such is achieved to provide direction and unity of effort. This can be achieved by hosting a strategic planning meeting aimed at harnessing the creativity and knowledge of employees/stakeholders within the given area (Denhart, 2020).

Staffing concerns limit the effectiveness of programs and resources. Understaffing and transitions reduce the opportunities for in-person engagements. As a result, farmers and ranchers are unaware of federal support available to them. This requires County Directors to implement a creative process to generate and test ideas amongst their team on how to best cultivate and maintain relationships with local farmers (Denhart, 2020). In doing so, farmers can act as proxies in spreading information and awareness.

Lastly, County Executive Directors must continue to prioritize outreach to minority and disadvantaged farmers. While efforts have been made in the past to rectify this shortcoming, a continuous emphasis must be maintained. This includes sustained efforts in creating opportunities for these farmers most in need and promoting the hiring of minority employees (Nahavandi, 2014).

References:

- Denhardt, R. B., Denhardt, J. V., Rawling, K. C., & Aristigueta, M. P. (2020). *Organizational behavior*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated
- FSA. (n.d.). *Strategic Plan Framework* [Press release].
https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/fsa_strategic_framework.pdf
- FSA handbook for state and county offices*. (2021). FSA.
https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/27-pm_r01_a12.pdf
- History and mission*. (n.d.). <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/about-fsa/history-and-mission/index>
- National Academy of Public Administration. (2026). Farm Service Agency: A clear path forward to providing the highest level of customer service. In <https://s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/napa-2021/studies/farm-service-agency-a-clear-path-forward-to-providing-the-highest-level-of/FSA-Final-Report-8.26.2016.pdf>.
- Nahavandi, A., Denhardt, R. B., Denhardt, J. V., & Aristigueta, M. P. (2014). *Organizational behavior*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated
- News & Information*. (2023.). <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/outreach-and-education/news-and-information/index>
- Structure and organization*. (2023.). <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/about-fsa/structure-and-organization/index>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2022, March). *Capacity Assessment*.
https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_Notice/pm_2870.pdf
- USDA. (2004). *Introducing FSA's Budget and Performance Management System*.
https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/finalombbpmspresentation.ppt
- USDA. (2022). *USDA conservation programs at a glance: farm production and conservation*. United States Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency.
https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/2022/conservation_at_a_glance_22_final.pdf
- USDA. (2023, February). *USDA-Farm Service Agency Positions Chart* [Press release].
<https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/State-Offices/New-York/pdfs/position%20chart.pdf>