

## USDA Designates Sixteen Washington Counties as Agricultural Disaster Areas

(Spokane, WA Jan. 12, 2006) - James F. Fitzgerald, State Executive Director for the Farm Service Agency office in Washington state, announced today that a U.S. Department of Agriculture disaster designation may help agricultural producers recover from losses due to the 2005 drought and to a hailstorm in Pacific County. USDA identified sixteen counties as primary agricultural disaster areas.

"This designation may enable producers in those counties to be eligible for long-term, low-interest loans from the Farm Service Agency," said Fitzgerald. Producers who suffered losses in neighboring counties may also be eligible for assistance. Primary counties include Benton, Clark, Columbia, Cowlitz, Douglas, Franklin, Garfield, Kittitas, Klickitat, Lincoln, Skamania, Wahkiakum, Walla Walla, Whitman and Yakima for drought and Pacific County due to a hailstorm.

Family farmers who experienced agricultural damage in the designated areas may qualify for Farm Service Agency emergency loans with 3.75% interest and payment terms up to 40 years with real estate security. Loans based on losses to foundation livestock or chattels can have up to 20-year terms. FSA is accepting loan applications in county offices until September 11, 2006.

"Because the federal government does not intend to compete with private business, applicants must be unable to obtain credit elsewhere to finance their needs at reasonable rates and terms," said Fitzgerald. An applicant must be a United States citizen or an alien legally admitted for permanent residence, must be an established farmer and must have suffered an agricultural loss in a designated or a contiguous county. An applicant's farm must be family-sized. FSA will consider each loan application on its own merits, taking into account the extent of losses, security available and repayment ability. FSA has a variety of programs available, in addition to the emergency loan program, to help eligible farmers recover from adversity.

Interested farmers may contact their local FSA office for further information on eligibility requirements and application procedures for Emergency Loans and other programs. The Farm Service Agency is listed under U.S. Department of Agriculture. Additional information is also available online at: <http://disaster.fsa.usda.gov/fsa.asp>.

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