



May 29, 2012

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Farm and Foreign
Agricultural
Services

Farm Service
Agency

3737 Government St.
Alexandria, LA
71302-3327

Mr. Michael Stwarka
Congressman Landry's Office
206 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D. C. 20515

Dear Mr. Stwarka:

This letter is to inform you that the proposed consolidations of the following FSA Parish Offices have been accepted and approved:

Bossier to be consolidated with Caddo

Grant to be consolidated with Rapides

Lafayette to be consolidated with St. Martin

Livingston to be consolidated with Tangipahoa Parish; and East Baton

Rouge to be consolidated with East/West Feliciana

This process will begin immediately upon the Secretary's announcement. The timeframe for closure will include all required notifications to producers, employees and office landlords to ensure they are afforded sufficient time to plan for and make decisions related to the closure. After the required notifications have been provided, the official closure date will be established and made publicly available.

USDA has worked successfully to avoid furloughs and reductions-in-force that would have had a more disruptive impact on employees and services. All workers in a consolidated county office will be offered employment options by FSA. Producers will continue to receive the same service from many of the same people in different locations. It is important to note that they will be provided the option of receiving service from a different FSA office than the office proposed if they choose, and will continue to have the opportunity to vote for representation on the local FSA committee that oversees the office serving them.

Knowing the importance of our county office presence, this has been a difficult decision for the Department. However, as a federal agency we have been affected by widespread budget reductions made by Congress. Since 2011, FSA has lost 1,230 permanent employees through voluntary early

separation and normal retirement. In addition, the Agency has been forced to reduce discretionary administrative expenses for travel, postage, and office supplies by over 30 percent in the last fiscal year alone.

In deciding which offices would be consolidated, USDA followed Congressional direction under the 2008 Farm Bill to propose first for consolidation, to the maximum extent practicable, all offices which are located less than 20 miles from another office, and which employ 2 or fewer permanent, full-time employees. In addition, USDA identified all FSA offices that currently have zero permanent employees – regardless of location. No additional criteria were used. After further review by the Secretary's Office, it was determined that the St. Mary Parish Office was not within the 20 mile radius; therefore, it was removed from the list along with five other offices in the Nation.

FSA places the utmost priority on ensuring that our services to producers remain strong as this consolidation process begins. We are cognizant of the critical times in the farming calendar, including peak sign-up periods and reporting dates, and will continue to leverage our resources, and those of our sister agencies in USDA, to provide assistance to counties and producers affected by closures.

In this era of diminishing Congressional funding, please know that FSA, and all USDA agencies, are committed to continuing our strong record of service to American farmers and ranchers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Willie F. Cooper". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W".

Willie F. Cooper
State Executive Director