

Farm Service Agency Allocates Funds

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) allocates a portion of its farm loan program funds specifically for socially disadvantaged applicants (SDA) including minority and women producers.

"FSA farm loans are available to all qualified applicants, but by setting aside funds specifically for minorities and women, the Agency ensures members of these specific groups can receive a portion of available funds - assuming they meet FSA loan eligibility requirements," said Tim Respondek, Farm Loan Manager for Colorado County FSA.

By FSA definition, an applicant is considered socially disadvantaged if he or she is a member of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice, without regard to individual qualities.

FSA has identified socially disadvantaged groups as Women, Blacks, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asians, and Pacific Islanders.

FSA offers both direct and guaranteed farm loans. Farm loan funds can be used to purchase farms, livestock and equipment.

They may also be used to operate a farm, build or repair service

buildings, pay for soil and water conservation practices, and in some cases refinance debt.

For direct loans made by FSA to purchase a farm the terms may extend to 40 years with a current interest rate of five (4.875%) percent.

Direct operating loans may be made for one to seven years with a current interest rate of three and three fourths (3.750%) percent, which is subject to change.

"Applicants requesting direct real estate loans should be aware that funding for this program is limited and may require a waiting period before funds are available and applications approved," said Respondek.

FSA guaranteed loans are made by banks or other commercial lenders and are guaranteed by FSA for up to 90 percent of any loss.

The guaranteed loan program includes both operating and real estate loan programs.

If a loan applicant is able to obtain financing from a private lender equal to 50 percent or more of the total funds needed to jointly finance the purchase of the farm, the interest rate on the FSA direct loan would be fixed at five (5.000%) percent.

SDA loan applicants do not receive automatic approval. Individuals must be U.S. citizens with a satisfactory history of meeting credit obligations, have sufficient education, training or experience managing or operating a farm, possess the legal capacity to incur debt, and be unable to obtain credit through traditional lending means.

"Qualified loan candidates are provided information and assistance to develop sound management practices, analyze problems and utilize available resources essential for successful farming in the ever-changing agricultural environment," said Respondek.

For more information regarding FSA loan programs, contact the Austin County FSA office at 979-865-3138 or visit the USDA Web site at <http://www.usda.ciov>.



The Catholic Daughters of Eagle Lake recently participated in Read Across America with Eagle Lake Elementary School children and children in a Parish of the Nativity program.

Catholic Daughters Read Across America

Approximately fifteen members of the Eagle Lake Catholic Daughters of the Americas (CDA), Court of Our Lady of the Fields # 2465, participated in the National Read Across America Celebration.

The members donated their time, refreshments, and over fifty new books to two local organizations.

Read Across America is the nation's largest reading celebration. Since it's inception eleven years ago, the National Education Association's (NEA) Read Across America program is designed to get kids excited about reading.

NEA has acted as a vehicle to talk about a serious issue in a fun way: children's literacy. This past March 2nd marked the eleventh annual celebration of reading and Dr. Suess's 104th birthday.

Here in Eagle Lake the CDA members fulfilled their promise to support Read Across America by reading to elementary age students.

On March 3rd one CDA member and several school staff members had the pleasure of reading to over seventy-five students at the Eagle Lake Elementary School.

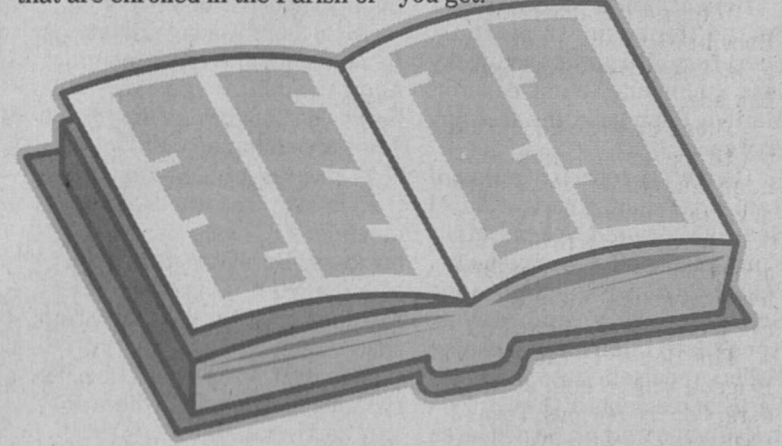
Students explored several of Dr. Suess's books and then either wrote a recipe or took part in a recipe experiment.

Then on March 6th nine members and two guests read to approximately twenty-five students that are enrolled in the Parish of

the Nativity's religious education program.

These students not only enjoyed being read to, but also enjoyed cookies, punch, and a new book to take home. There were twelve members that donated the new books and three members that provided the refreshments.

The Eagle Lake CDA members encourage everyone to join in on the fun and pick up a book and read with a child every chance you get!



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LCRA Slates Landowner Seminar For March 25

The Multi-County New Landowners Educational Series will have its second seminar on Friday, March 28, at the LCRA Cooper Farms near Waldeck. This month's program will focus on Soils and Soil Testing and Brush Control for Small Acreages.

The program is open to anyone that wants to attend, but it specifically

targets new landowners in the Austin, Colorado, Fayette and Washington County areas.

The programs are held on the third Friday of the month, and all begin at 1:30 p.m. and last until about 4:30 p.m. Registration is \$5 per person and includes refreshments and your educational materials. Two CEU's will be offered to all pesticide applicators.

The program for April will focus on pasture management and forage production. This program is set for Friday, April 18 at the John Howard Farm, near Kenney.

The field day will include an overview of the value added hay production, information on irriga-

tion to maximize production, and the how to's of adding value to your hay crop.

The field day will begin at 1:30 p.m. with registration at the farm, with the program and field tour to follow.

The \$5 registration fee applies. Anyone interested in coming is asked to contact the Extension Office prior to coming so we can know how many to plan for.

Two CEU's will be offered for all pesticide applicators. May's program will cover Stock Pond Management. This program will be held on Wednesday, May 16, at LCRA Cooper Farms, near Waldeck.

The program will begin at 1:30 p.m. with registration and con-

clude at 4:30 p.m. Aquatic weed control, pond construction, stocking recommendations, management of shoreline and tank dam vegetation, and fertilization will be the topics of discussion.

The standard registration fee of \$5 applies for attending the program and anyone interested in attending is asked to contact the Extension Office and let us know you're coming.

Three CEU's will be given to pesticide applicators.

Anyone wishing to have pond weeds identified is asked to bring their weeds freshly pulled and in a mason jar or zip lock bag.

For information, contact the Extension Office at 979-732-2082.

USDA Offers Community Facilities Loans

USDA Rural Development is accepting applications for the Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan (CFGL) Program. This program allows the Agency to partner with private lenders to finance public facilities in rural Texas communities.

The USDA Rural Development CFGL Program may guarantee up to 90% of a loan made to construct or rehabilitate community facilities that provide essential public services in rural areas with a population of up to 20,000.

A broad range of community facilities are eligible for guaranteed loans. These include facilities used for culture, education, transportation, recreation, health, support services, public buildings, fire, rescue and public safety.

Eligible applicants include municipalities, counties, special-purpose districts, nonprofits and tribal governments.

Eligible nonprofits must have significant ties to the local rural community, have a broad membership base, be controlled by members of the community, and be legally organized.

In this flexible program, below-market direct loans or grants may be combined with a guarantee. This option reduces the overall interest rate, improves cash flow, and may make a larger amount of financing available.

Benefits of bank participation include a reduced credit risk as a result of the guarantee.

The guaranteed portion of the loans can be sold on the secondary market, increasing the lender's return.

USDA Rural Development

worked with Farmers and Merchants Bank to assist Cross Timbers Health Clinic with the purchase of a 5,000 square foot building and equipment for the facility in Brownwood, Texas.

"Farmers and Merchants Bank was proud to partner with the Rural Development Guaranteed Loan program. Cross Timbers Health Clinic provides an invaluable service to our area, and the guarantee provided by the Rural Development loan program allowed us to fund their request in full. The Rural Development Guaranteed Loan program is an excellent way for us to achieve our goals," shared Calvin H. Spindor, President of Farmers and Merchants Bank serving De Leon and Eastland, Texas.

The applicants and lenders interested in using the program may submit a pre-application to determine project and sponsor eligibility. USDA Rural Development will recommend that a full application be prepared if the project appears to be eligible and funds are available.

USDA Rural Development is dedicated to delivering programs in a way that will support increasing economic opportunity and improve the quality of life of rural Texas residents.

For further information regarding USDA Rural Development Community Programs, contact the Texas State Office at (254) 742-9789 or visit our website at <http://rurdev.usda.gov/tx/>.

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