

not participating in an FSA program, the opportunity to vote in a referendum will be provided at the FSA county office serving the county where the person owns or rents land. If a person's operation is located in several counties, the voting office shall be determined based on the major portion of the operation's location. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, FSA, DAFO, P.O. Box 23704, Washington, DC 20026-3704 shall be the polling place for all cotton importers.

(b) *Register of eligible voters.* The FSA county office shall establish a register of known eligible producer voters prior to the referendum. AMS shall establish a register of known eligible importer voters prior to the referendum and provide the list to FAS.

(c) *Voting.* (1) For Upland producers to vote, eligible persons may obtain form CN-100 in-person, by mail or by facsimile from FSA county offices or through the Internet during the voting period. A completed and signed CN-100 and supporting documentation, such as a sales receipt or remittance form, must be returned to the appropriate FSA county office. Forms obtained via the Internet will be located at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/Cotton>. Upon request by Upland producers, ballots shall be mailed by FSA county offices.

(2) For cotton importers to vote, eligible persons may obtain form CN-100 in-person, by mail or by facsimile from USDA, FSA in Washington, D.C. or through the Internet during the voting period. In addition, before the referendum, USDA shall mail a request form to each known, eligible, cotton importer. A completed and signed CN-100 and supporting documentation of CBP Form 7501, must be returned USDA, FSA, DAFO, P.O. Box 23704, Washington, DC 20026-3704. Forms obtained via the Internet will be located at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/Cotton>.

(d) Returning ballot to polling place. Each person to whom a ballot is issued by Internet, mail, facsimile, or in-person shall only be allowed to vote in the referendum by completing and signing the ballot, placing it in an envelope, and delivering or mailing it to the appropriate polling place. In order to be eligible for tabulation, voted ballots must be received at the polling place

during the period established for holding the referendum. A ballot shall be considered to have been received during the referendum period if:

(1) In the case of the ballot delivered to the polling place, it was received in the office prior to the close of the work day on the final day of the referendum period, or

(2) In the case of the mailed ballot, it was postmarked not later than midnight of the final day of the referendum period and was received in the polling place prior to the start of canvassing the ballots.

(e) *Placing ballots in ballot box.* Notwithstanding the fact that a ballot(s) may be later challenged by FSA county office or a representative of FSA, envelopes containing ballots received at the polling place during the referendum period shall remain unopened and shall be placed immediately in a ballot box provided by FSA for producers and importers. Such ballot box shall be arranged so that ballots cannot be read or moved without breaking the seal on the container.

#### § 1205.205 Canvass of ballots.

(a) *Canvassing procedure.* Canvassing of returned ballots shall take place as soon as possible after the opening of the FSA offices on the fifth day following the close of the referendum period. Such canvassing shall be in the presence of at least one member of the FSA county office for producer ballots or an FSA representative for importer ballots and shall be open to the public. The canvassing and ballots shall be handled in such a manner so that no member of the public may see how any person voted in the referendum. The county office or FSA representative shall supervise the opening of the sealed ballot box, the opening of the envelopes containing the ballots and a determination as to:

(1) The number of eligible voters favoring the Order and where necessary, the amount of cotton represented by them,

(2) The number of eligible voters disapproving the Order and, where necessary, the amount of cotton represented by them.

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(3) The number of ballots cast by voters found to be ineligible to vote in the referendum, and

(4) The number of spoiled ballots. The ballots determined to be spoiled or cast by ineligible voters shall not be considered as approving or disapproving the Order, and the persons who cast such ballots shall not be regarded as participating in the referendum.

(b) *Spoiled ballots.* A ballot shall be considered as a spoiled ballot if:

(1) It is mutilated or marked in such a way that it is not possible to determine with certainty how the ballot was intended to be counted, or

(2) It does not contain the signature of the voter, or the voter's properly witnessed mark.

(c) *Challenge of ballots.* A producer ballot may be challenged by the member of the FSA county office and the importer ballot may be challenged by the representative of FSA. Before a challenged ballot is either counted or declared invalid, a determination shall be made by the FSA county office or representative of FSA as to the eligibility of the voter to vote in the referendum.

### § 1205.206 Reporting results of referendum.

(a) Each FSA county office shall transmit a written county summary of ballots showing the results of the referendum in its county to its State office.

(b) Each State office shall transmit a written summary of the referendum results from the county offices within its State to DAFO, and DAFO will provide a copy to the AMS. AMS will make the results available for public inspection for a period of 5 years following the end of the referendum period.

(c) AMS shall prepare and submit to the Secretary a report as to the results of the referendum. The Secretary shall then publically proclaim the results of the referendum.

### § 1205.207 Challenge of correctness of county summary of ballots.

The FSA state offices shall make a prompt investigation and decision in case of any dispute or challenge regarding the correctness of the county summary of ballots in any county: *Provided,*

That no dispute of challenge shall be investigated unless it is brought to the attention of the State FSA office within 3 days after receipt by the FSA State office of the county summary of ballots from such county.

### § 1205.208 Disposition of ballots and records.

The FSA county office shall seal the voted ballots, challenged ballots found to be ineligible, spoiled ballots, register sheets, and summary sheets for the county in one or more envelopes or packages, plainly marked with the identification of the referendum, the date and the names of the county and State, and place them under lock and key in a safe place under the custody of the FSA county office for a period of 45 days after the referendum period. If no notice to the contrary is received by the end of such time, and after the ballots and other records have been examined by a representative of the State FSA office, the voted ballots and challenged ballots shall be destroyed, but the registers and county summary sheets shall be filed for a period of 5 years in the office of the FSA county office.

### § 1205.209 Confidential information.

(a) The ballots cast or the manner in which any person voted and all information furnished to, compiled by, or in the possession of the referendum agent shall be regarded as confidential.

(b) The ballots and other information or reports that reveal, or tend to reveal, the vote of any person covered under the Order and the voter list shall be strictly confidential and shall not be disclosed.

### § 1205.210 Additional instructions and forms.

AMS is hereby authorized to prescribe additional instructions and forms not inconsistent with the provisions of this subpart for the use of State and County FSA offices in conducting a referendum. Such additional instructions may include procedures for FSA county and State offices to report and announce the results of the preliminary count of the votes in the county and the State.