

## PART 11—NATIONAL APPEALS DIVISION

### Subpart A—National Appeals Division Rules of Procedures

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#### APPENDIX A TO SUBPART C OF PART 11—LIST OF ADDRESSES

AUTHORITY: 5 U.S.C. 301; Title II, Subtitle H, Pub. L. 103-354, 108 Stat. 3228 (7 U.S.C. 6991 *et seq.*); Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1953 (5 U.S.C. App.).

SOURCE: 64 FR 33373, June 23, 1999, unless otherwise noted.

### Subpart A—National Appeals Division Rules of Procedures

#### § 11.1 Definitions.

For purposes of this part:

*Adverse decision* means an administrative decision made by an officer, employee, or committee of an agency that is adverse to a participant. The term includes a denial of equitable relief by an agency or the failure of an agency

to issue a decision or otherwise act on the request or right of the participant within timeframes specified by agency program statutes or regulations or within a reasonable time if timeframes are not specified in such statutes or regulations. The term does not include a decision over which the Board of Contract Appeals has jurisdiction.

*Agency* means:

- (1) The Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC);
- (2) The Farm Service Agency (FSA);
- (3) The Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC);
- (4) The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS);
- (5) The Risk Management Agency (RMA);
- (6) The Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS);
- (7) Rural Development (RD);
- (8) The Rural Housing Service (RHS);
- (9) The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) (but not for programs authorized by the Rural Electrification Act of 1936 or the Rural Telephone Bank Act, 7 U.S.C. 901 *et seq.*);
- (10) A State, county, or area committee established under section 8(b)(5) of the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act (16 U.S.C. 590h (b)(5)); and

(11) Any predecessor or successor agency to the above-named agencies, and any other agency or office of the Department which the Secretary may designate.

*Agency record* means all the materials maintained by an agency related to an adverse decision which are submitted to the Division by an agency for consideration in connection with an appeal under this part, including all materials prepared or reviewed by the agency during its consideration and decision-making process, but shall not include records or information not related to the adverse decision at issue. All materials contained in the agency record submitted to the Division shall be deemed admitted as evidence for purposes of a hearing or a record review under § 11.8.

*Agency representative* means any person, whether or not an attorney, who is authorized to represent the agency in an administrative appeal under this part.

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*Appeal* means a written request by a participant asking for review by the National Appeals Division of an adverse decision under this part.

*Appellant* means any participant who appeals an adverse decision in accordance with this part. Unless separately set forth in this part, the term “appellant” includes an authorized representative.

*Authorized representative* means any person, whether or not an attorney, who is authorized in writing by a participant, consistent with §11.6(c), to act for the participant in an administrative appeal under this part. The authorized representative may act on behalf of the participant except when the provisions of this part require action by the participant or appellant personally.

*Case record* means all the materials maintained by the Secretary related to an adverse decision: The case record includes both the agency record and the hearing record.

*Days* means calendar days unless otherwise specified.

*Department* means the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

*Director* means the Director of the Division or a designee of the Director.

*Division* means the National Appeals Division established by this part.

*Equitable relief* means relief which is authorized under section 326 of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962 (7 U.S.C. 1339a) and other laws administered by the agency.

*Ex parte communication* means an oral or written communication to any officer or employee of the Division with respect to which reasonable prior notice to all parties is not given, but it shall not include requests for status reports, or inquiries on Division procedure, in reference to any matter or proceeding connected with the appeal involved.

*Hearing*, except with respect to §11.5, means a proceeding before the Division to afford a participant the opportunity to present testimony or documentary evidence or both in order to have a previous determination reversed and to show why an adverse determination was in error.

*Hearing Officer* means an individual employed by the Division who conducts

the hearing and determines appeals of adverse decisions by any agency.

*Hearing record* means all documents, evidence, and other materials generated in relation to a hearing under §11.8.

*Implement* means the taking of action by an agency of the Department in order fully and promptly to effectuate a final determination of the Division.

*Participant* means any individual or entity who has applied for, or whose right to participate in or receive, a payment, loan, loan guarantee, or other benefit in accordance with any program of an agency to which the regulations in this part apply is affected by a decision of such agency. The term does not include persons whose claim(s) arise under:

(1) Programs subject to various proceedings provided for in 7 CFR part 1;

(2) Programs governed by Federal contracting laws and regulations (appealable under other rules and to other forums, including to the Department’s Board of Contract Appeals under 7 CFR part 24);

(3) The Freedom of Information Act (appealable under 7 CFR part 1, subpart A);

(4) Suspension and debarment disputes, including, but not limited to, those falling within the scope of 7 CFR part 1407 and 2 CFR part 417;

(5) Export programs administered by the Commodity Credit Corporation;

(6) Disputes between reinsured companies and the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation;

(7) Tenant grievances or appeals prosecutable under the provisions of 7 CFR part 1944, subpart L, under the multi-family housing program carried out by RHS;

(8) Personnel, equal employment opportunity, and other similar disputes with any agency or office of the Department which arise out of the employment relationship;

(9) The Federal Tort Claims Act, 28 U.S.C. 2671 *et seq.*, or the Military Personnel and Civilian Employees Claims Act of 1964, 31 U.S.C. 3721;

(10) Discrimination complaints prosecutable under the nondiscrimination regulations at 7 CFR parts 15, 15a, 15b, 15e, and 15f; or

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(11) Section 361, *et seq.*, of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, as amended (7 U.S.C. 1361, *et seq.*) involving Tobacco Marketing Quota Review Committees.

*Record review* means an appeal considered by the Hearing Officer in which the Hearing Officer's determination is based on the agency record and other information submitted by the appellant and the agency, including information submitted by affidavit or declaration.

*Secretary* means the Secretary of Agriculture.

[64 FR 33373, June 23, 1999, as amended at 85 FR 31938, May 28, 2020]

### § 11.2 General statement.

(a) This part sets forth procedures for proceedings before the National Appeals Division within the Department. The Division is an organization within the Department, subject to the general supervision of and policy direction by the Secretary, which is independent from all other agencies and offices of the Department, including Department officials at the state and local level. The Director of the Division reports directly to the Secretary of Agriculture. The authority of the Hearing Officers and the Director of the Division, and the administrative appeal procedures which must be followed by program participants who desire to appeal an adverse decision and by the agency which issued the adverse decision, are included in this part.

(b) Pursuant to section 212(e) of the Federal Crop Insurance Reform and Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994, Pub. L. 103-354 (the Act), 7 U.S.C. 6912(e), program participants shall seek review of an adverse decision before a Hearing Officer of the Division, and may seek further review by the Director, under the provisions of this part prior to seeking judicial review.

### § 11.3 Applicability.

(a) *Subject matter.* The regulations contained in this part are applicable to adverse decisions made by an agency, including, for example, those with respect to:

(1) Denial of participation in, or receipt of benefits under, any program of an agency;

(2) Compliance with program requirements;

(3) The making or amount of payments or other program benefits to a participant in any program of an agency; and

(4) A determination that a parcel of land is a wetland or highly erodible land.

(b) *Limitation.* The procedures contained in this part may not be used to seek review of statutes or USDA regulations issued under Federal Law.

### § 11.4 Other laws and regulations.

(a) The provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act generally applicable to agency adjudications (5 U.S.C. 554-557), and the Equal Access to Justice Act (5 U.S.C. 504) and its implementing regulations at 7 CFR part 1, subpart J, shall apply to proceedings under this part except for proceedings under § 11.5 and § 11.6(a).

(b) The Federal Rules of Evidence, 28 U.S.C. App., shall not apply to proceedings under this part.

[64 FR 33373, June 23, 1999, as amended at 74 FR 57401, Nov. 6, 2009]

### § 11.5 Informal review of adverse decisions.

(a) *Required informal review of FSA adverse decisions.* Except with respect to farm credit programs, a participant must seek an informal review of an adverse decision issued at the field service office level by an officer or employee of FSA, or by any employee of a county or area committee established under section 8(b)(5) of the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, 16 U.S.C. 590h(b)(5), before NAD will accept an appeal of a FSA adverse decision. Such informal review shall be done by the county or area committee with responsibility for the adverse decision at issue. The procedures for requesting such an informal review before FSA are found in 7 CFR part 780. After receiving a decision upon review by a county or area committee, a participant may seek further informal review by the State FSA committee or may appeal directly to NAD under § 11.6(b).

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(b) *Optional informal review.* With respect to adverse decisions issued at the State office level of FSA and adverse decisions of all other agencies, a participant may request an agency informal review of an adverse decision of that agency prior to appealing to NAD. Procedures for requesting such an informal review are found at 7 CFR part 780 (FSA), 7 CFR part 614 (NRCS), 7 CFR part 1900, subpart B (RUS), 7 CFR part 1900, subpart B (RBS), and 7 CFR part 1900, subpart B (RHS).

(c) *Mediation.* A participant also shall have the right to utilize any available alternative dispute resolution (ADR) or mediation program, including any mediation program available under title V of the Agricultural Credit Act of 1987, 7 U.S.C. 5101 *et seq.*, in order to attempt to seek resolution of an adverse decision of an agency prior to a NAD hearing. If a participant:

(1) Requests mediation or ADR prior to filing an appeal with NAD, the participant stops the running of the 30-day period during which a participant may appeal to NAD under § 11.6(b)(1), and will have the balance of days remaining in that period to appeal to NAD once mediation or ADR has concluded.

(2) Requests mediation or ADR after having filed an appeal to NAD under § 11.6(b), but before the hearing, the participant will be deemed to have waived his right to have a hearing within 45 days under § 11.8(c)(1) but shall have a right to have a hearing within 45 days after conclusion of mediation or ADR.

### **§ 11.6 Director review of agency determination of appealability and right of participants to Division hearing.**

(a) *Director review of agency determination of appealability.* (1) Not later than 30 days after the date on which a participant receives a determination from an agency that an agency decision is not appealable, the participant must submit a written request personally signed by the participant to the Director to review the determination in order to obtain such review by the Director.

(2) The Director shall determine whether the decision is adverse to the individual participant and thus appealable or is a matter of general applica-

bility and thus not subject to appeal, and will issue a final determination notice that upholds or reverses the determination of the agency. This final determination is not appealable. If the Director reverses the determination of the agency, the Director will notify the participant and the agency of that decision and inform the participant of his or her right to proceed with an appeal.

(3) The Director may delegate his or her authority to conduct a review under this paragraph to any subordinate official of the Division other than a Hearing Officer. In any case in which such review is conducted by such a subordinate official, the subordinate official's determination shall be considered to be the determination of the Director and shall be final and not appealable.

(b) *Appeals of adverse decisions.* (1) To obtain a hearing under § 11.8, a participant personally must request such hearing not later than 30 days after the date on which the participant first received notice of the adverse decision or after the date on which the participant receives notice of the Director's determination that a decision is appealable. In the case of the failure of an agency to act on the request or right of a recipient, a participant personally must request such hearing not later than 30 days after the participant knew or reasonably should have known that the agency had not acted within the timeframes specified by agency program regulations, or, where such regulations specify no timeframes, not later than 30 days after the participant reasonably should have known of the agency's failure to act.

(2) A request for a hearing shall be in writing and personally signed by the participant, and shall include a copy of the adverse decision to be reviewed, if available, along with a brief statement of the participant's reasons for believing that the decision, or the agency's failure to act, was wrong. The participant also shall send a copy of the request for a hearing to the agency, and may send a copy of the adverse decision to be reviewed to the agency, but failure to do either will not constitute grounds for dismissal of the appeal. Instead of a hearing, the participant may request a record review.

(c) If a participant is represented by an authorized representative, the authorized representative must file a declaration with NAD, executed in accordance with 28 U.S.C. 1746, stating that the participant has duly authorized the declarant in writing to represent the participant for purposes of a specified adverse decision or decisions, and attach a copy of the written authorization to the declaration.

#### § 11.7 *Ex parte* communications.

(a)(1) At no time between the filing of an appeal and the issuance of a final determination under this part shall any officer or employee of the Division engage in *ex parte* communications regarding the merits of the appeal with any person having any interest in the appeal pending before the Division, including any person in an advocacy or investigative capacity. This prohibition does not apply to:

(i) Discussions of procedural matters related to an appeal; or

(ii) Discussions of the merits of the appeal where all parties to the appeal have been given notice and an opportunity to participate.

(2) In the case of a communication described in paragraph (a)(1)(ii) of this section, a memorandum of any such discussion shall be included in the hearing record.

(b) No interested person shall make or knowingly cause to be made to any officer or employee of the Division an *ex parte* communication relevant to the merits of the appeal.

(c) If any officer or employee of the Division receives an *ex parte* communication in violation of this section, the one who receives the communication shall place in the hearing record:

(1) All such written communications;

(2) Memoranda stating the substance of all such oral communications; and

(3) All written responses to such communications, and memoranda stating the substance of any oral responses thereto.

(d) Upon receipt of a communication knowingly made or knowingly caused to be made by a party in violation of this section the Hearing Officer or Director may, to the extent consistent with the interests of justice and the policy of the underlying program, re-

quire the party to show cause why such party's claim or interest in the appeal should not be dismissed, denied, disregarded, or otherwise adversely affected on account of such violation.

#### § 11.8 Division hearings.

(a) *General rules.* (1) The Director, the Hearing Officer, and the appellant shall have access to the agency record of any adverse decision appealed to the Division for a hearing. Upon request by the appellant, the agency shall provide the appellant a copy of the agency record.

(2) The Director and Hearing Officer shall have the authority to administer oaths and affirmations, and to require, by subpoena, the attendance of witnesses and the production of evidence. A Hearing Officer shall obtain the concurrence of the Director prior to issuing a subpoena.

(i) A subpoena requiring the production of evidence may be requested and issued at any time while the case is pending before the Division.

(ii) An appellant or an agency, acting through any appropriate official, may request the issuance of a subpoena requiring the attendance of a witness by submitting such a request in writing at least 14 days before the scheduled date of a hearing. The Director or Hearing Officer shall issue a subpoena at least 7 days prior to the scheduled date of a hearing.

(iii) A subpoena shall be issued only if the Director or a Hearing Officer determined that:

(A) For a subpoena of documents, the appellant or the agency has established that production of documentary evidence is necessary and is reasonably calculated to lead to information which would affect the final determination or is necessary to fully present the case before the Division; or

(B) For a subpoena of a witness, the appellant or the agency has established that either a representative of the Department or a private individual possesses information that is pertinent and necessary for disclosure of all relevant facts which could impact the final determination, that the information cannot be obtained except through testimony of the person, and that the testimony cannot be obtained absent issuance of a subpoena.

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(iv) The party requesting issuance of a subpoena shall arrange for service. Service of a subpoena upon a person named therein may be made by registered or certified mail, or in person. Personal service shall be made by personal delivery of a copy of the subpoena to the person named therein by any person who is not a party and who is not less than 18 years of age. Proof of service shall be made by filing with the Hearing Officer or Director who issued the subpoena a statement of the date and manner of service and of the names of the persons served, certified by the person who made the service in person or by return receipts for certified or registered mail.

(v) A party who requests that a subpoena be issued shall be responsible for the payment of any reasonable travel and subsistence costs incurred by the witness in connection with his or her appearance and any fees of a person who serves the subpoena in person. The Department shall pay the costs associated with the appearance of a Department employee whose role as a witness arises out of his or her performance of official duties, regardless of which party requested the subpoena. The failure to make payment of such charges on demand may be deemed by the Hearing Officer or Director as sufficient ground for striking the testimony of the witness and the evidence the witness has produced.

(vi) If a person refuses to obey a subpoena, the Director, acting through the Office of the General Counsel of the Department and the Department of Justice, may apply to the United States District Court in the jurisdiction where that person resides to have the subpoena enforced as provided in the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure (28 U.S.C. App.).

(3) Testimony required by subpoena pursuant to paragraph (a)(2) of this section may, at the discretion of the Director or a Hearing Officer, be presented at the hearing either in person or telephonically.

(b) *Hearing procedures applicable to both record review and hearings.* (1) Upon the filing of an appeal under this part of an adverse decision by any agency, the agency promptly shall provide the Division with a copy of the agency

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record. If requested by the applicant prior to the hearing, a copy of such agency record shall be provided to the appellant by the agency within 10 days of receipt of the request by the agency.

(2) The Director shall assign the appeal to a Hearing Officer and shall notify the appellant and agency of such assignment. The notice also shall advise the appellant and the agency of the documents required to be submitted under paragraph (c)(2) of this section, and notify the appellant of the option of having a hearing by telephone.

(3) The Hearing Officer will receive evidence into the hearing record without regard to whether the evidence was known to the agency officer, employee, or committee making the adverse decision at the time the adverse decision was made.

(c) *Procedures applicable only to hearings.* (1) Upon a timely request for a hearing under § 11.6(b), an appellant has the right to have a hearing by the Division on any adverse decision within 45 days after the date of receipt of the request for the hearing by the Division.

(2) The Hearing Officer shall set a reasonable deadline for submission of the following documents:

(i) By the appellant;

(A) A short statement of why the decision is wrong;

(B) A copy of any document not in the agency record that the appellant anticipates introducing at the hearing; and

(C) A list of anticipated witnesses and brief descriptions of the evidence such witnesses will offer.

(ii) By the agency:

(A) A copy of the adverse decision challenged by the appellant;

(B) A written explanation of the agency's position, including the regulatory or statutory basis therefor;

(C) A copy of any document not in the agency record that the agency anticipates introducing at the hearing; and

(D) A list of anticipated witnesses and brief descriptions of the evidence such witnesses will offer.

(3) Not less than 14 days prior to the hearing, the Division must provide the appellant, the authorized representative, and the agency a notice of hearing

specifying the date, time, and place of the hearing. The hearing will be held in the State of residence of the appellant, as determined by the Hearing Officer, or at a location that is otherwise convenient to the appellant, the agency, and the Division. The notice also shall notify all parties of the right to obtain an official record of the hearing.

(4) *Pre-hearing conference.* Whenever appropriate, the Hearing Officer shall hold a pre-hearing conference in order to attempt to resolve the dispute or to narrow the issues involved. Such pre-hearing conference shall be held by telephone unless the Hearing Officer and all parties agree to hold such conference in person.

(5) *Conduct of the hearing.* (i) A hearing before a Hearing Officer will be in person unless the appellant agrees to a hearing by telephone.

(ii) The hearing will be conducted by the Hearing Officer in the manner determined by the Division most likely to obtain the facts relevant to the matter or matters at issue. The Hearing Officer will allow the presentation of evidence at the hearing by any party without regard to whether the evidence was known to the officer, employee, or committee of the agency making the adverse decision at the time the adverse decision was made. The Hearing Officer may confine the presentation of facts and evidence to pertinent matters and exclude irrelevant, immaterial, or unduly repetitious evidence, information, or questions. Any party shall have the opportunity to present oral and documentary evidence, oral testimony of witnesses, and arguments in support of the party's position; controvert evidence relied on by any other party; and question all witnesses. When appropriate, agency witnesses requested by the appellant will be made available at the hearing. Any evidence may be received by the Hearing Officer without regard to whether that evidence could be admitted in judicial proceedings.

(iii) An official record shall be made of the proceedings of every hearing. This record will be made by an official tape recording by the Division. In addition, either party may request that a verbatim transcript be made of the hearing proceedings and that such

transcript shall be made the official record of the hearing. The party requesting a verbatim transcript shall pay for the transcription service, shall provide a certified copy of the transcript to the Hearing Officer free of charge, and shall allow any other party desiring to purchase a copy of the transcript to order it from the transcription service.

(6) *Absence of parties.* (i) If at the time scheduled for the hearing either the appellant or the agency representative is absent, and no appearance is made on behalf of such absent party, or no arrangements have been made for rescheduling the hearing, the Hearing Officer has the option to cancel the hearing unless the absent party has good cause for the failure to appear. If the Hearing Officer elects to cancel the hearing, the Hearing Officer may:

(A) Treat the appeal as a record review and issue a determination based on the agency record as submitted by the agency and the hearing record developed prior to the hearing date;

(B) Accept evidence into the hearing record submitted by any party present at the hearing (subject to paragraph (c)(6)(ii) of this section), and then issue a determination; or

(C) Dismiss the appeal.

(ii) When a hearing is cancelled due to the absence of a party, the Hearing Officer will add to the hearing record any additional evidence submitted by any party present, provide a copy of such evidence to the absent party or parties, and allow the absent party or parties 10 days to provide a response to such additional evidence for inclusion in the hearing record

(iii) Where an absent party has demonstrated good cause for the failure to appear, the Hearing Officer shall reschedule the hearing unless all parties agree to proceed without a hearing.

(7) *Post-hearing procedure.* The Hearing Officer will leave the hearing record open after the hearing for 10 days, or for such other period of time as the Hearing Officer shall establish, to allow the submission of information by the appellant or the agency, to the extent necessary to respond to new facts, information, arguments, or evidence presented or raised at the hearing. Any such new information will be

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added by the Hearing Office to the hearing record and sent to the other party or parties by the submitter of the information. The Hearing Officer, in his or her discretion, may permit the other party or parties to respond to this post-hearing submission.

(d) *Interlocutory review.* Interlocutory review by the Director of rulings of a Hearing Officer are not permitted under the procedures of this part.

(e) *Burden of proof.* The appellant has the burden of proving that the adverse decision of the agency was erroneous by a preponderance of the evidence.

(f) *Timing of issuance of determination.* The Hearing Officer will issue a notice of the determination on the appeal to the named appellant, the authorized representative, and the agency not later than 30 days after a hearing or the closing date of the hearing record in cases in which the Hearing Officer receives additional evidence from the agency or appellant after a hearing. In the case of a record review, the Hearing Officer will issue a notice of determination within 45 days of receipt of the appellant's request for a record review. Upon the Hearing Officer's request, the Director may establish an earlier or later deadline. A notice of determination shall be accompanied by a copy of the procedures for filing a request for Director review under § 11.9. If the determination is not appealed to the Director for review under § 11.9, the notice provided by the Hearing Officer shall be considered to be a notice of a final determination under this part.

### **§ 11.9 Director review of determinations of Hearing Officers.**

(a) *Requests for Director review.* (1) Not later than 30 days after the date on which an appellant receives the determination of a Hearing Officer under § 11.8, the appellant must submit a written request, signed personally by the named appellant, to the Director to review the determination in order to be entitled to such review by the Director. Such request shall include specific reasons why the appellant believes the determination is wrong.

(2) Not later than 15 business days after the date on which an agency receives the determination of a Hearing Officer under § 11.8, the head of the

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agency may make a written request that the Director review the determination. Such request shall include specific reasons why the agency believes the determination is wrong, including citations of statutes or regulations that the agency believes the determination violates. Any such request may be made by the head of an agency only, or by a person acting in such capacity, but not by any subordinate officer of such agency.

(3) A copy of a request for Director review submitted under this paragraph shall be provided simultaneously by the submitter to each party to the appeal.

(b) *Notification of parties.* The Director promptly shall notify all parties of receipt of a request for review.

(c) *Responses to request for Director review.* Other parties to an appeal may submit written responses to a request for Director review within 5 business days from the date of receipt of a copy of the request for review.

(d) *Determination of Director.* (1) The Director will conduct a review of the determination of the Hearing Officer using the agency record, the hearing record, the request for review, any responses submitted under paragraph (c) of this section, and such other arguments or information as may be accepted by the Director, in order to determine whether the decision of the Hearing Officer is supported by substantial evidence. Based on such review, the Director will issue a final determination notice that upholds, reverses, or modifies the determination of the Hearing Officer. The Director's determination upon review of a Hearing Officer's decision shall be considered to be the final determination under this part and shall not be appealable. However, if the Director determines that the hearing record is inadequate or that new evidence has been submitted, the Director may remand all or a portion of the determination to the Hearing Officer for further proceedings to complete the hearing record or, at the option of the Director, to hold a new hearing.

(2) The Director will complete the review and either issue a final determination or remand the determination not later than—

(i) 10 business days after receipt of the request for review, in the case of a request by the head of an agency; or

(ii) 30 business days after receipt of the request for review, in the case of a request by an appellant.

(3) In any case or any category of cases, the Director may delegate his or her authority to conduct a review under this section to any Deputy or Assistant Directors of the Division. In any case in which such review is conducted by a Deputy or Assistant Director under authority delegated by the Director, the Deputy or Assistant Director's determination shall be considered to be the determination of the Director under this part and shall be final and not appealable.

(e) *Equitable relief.* In reaching a decision on an appeal, the Director shall have the authority to grant equitable relief under this part in the same manner and to the same extent as such authority is provided an agency under applicable laws and regulations.

#### § 11.10 Basis for determinations.

(a) In making a determination, the Hearing Officers and the Director are not bound by previous findings of facts on which the agency's adverse decision was based.

(b) In making a determination on the appeal, Hearing Officers and the Director shall ensure that the decision is consistent with the laws and regulations of the agency, and with the generally applicable interpretations of such laws and regulations.

(c) All determinations of the Hearing Officers and the Director must be based on information from the case record, laws applicable to the matter at issue, and applicable regulations published in the FEDERAL REGISTER and in effect on the date of the adverse decision or the date on which the acts that gave rise to the adverse decision occurred, whichever date is appropriate under the applicable agency program laws and regulations.

#### § 11.11 Reconsideration of Director determinations.

(a) Reconsideration of a determination of the Director may be requested by the appellant or the agency within 10 days of receipt of the determination.

The Director will not consider any request for reconsideration that does not contain a detailed statement of a material error of fact made in the determination, or a detailed explanation of how the determination is contrary to statute or regulation, which would justify reversal or modification of the determination.

(b) The Director shall issue a notice to all parties as to whether a request for reconsideration meets the criteria in paragraph (a) of this section. If the request for reconsideration meets such criteria, the Director shall include a copy of the request for reconsideration in the notice to the non-requesting parties to the appeal. The non-requesting parties shall have 5 days from receipt of such notice from the Director to file a response to the request for reconsideration with the Director.

(c) The Director shall issue a decision on the request for reconsideration within 5 days of receipt of responses from the non-requesting parties. If the Director's decision upon reconsideration reverses or modifies the final determination of the Director rendered under § 11.9(d), the Director's decision on reconsideration will become the final determination of the Director under § 11.9(d) for purposes of this part.

#### § 11.12 Effective date and implementation of final determinations of the Division.

(a) On the return of a case to an agency pursuant to the final determination of the Division, the head of the agency shall implement the final determination not later than 30 days after the effective date of the notice of the final determination.

(b) A final determination will be effective as of the date of filing of an application, the date of the transaction or event in question, or the date of the original adverse decision, whichever is applicable under the applicable agency program statutes or regulations.

#### § 11.13 Judicial review.

(a) A final determination of the Division shall be reviewable and enforceable by any United States District Court of competent jurisdiction in accordance with chapter 7 of title 5, United States Code.

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(b) An appellant may not seek judicial review of any agency adverse decision appealable under this part without receiving a final determination from the Division pursuant to the procedures of this part.

### § 11.14 Filing of appeals and computation of time.

(a) An appeal, a request for Director Review, or any other document will be considered "filed" when delivered in writing to the Division, when post-marked, or when a complete facsimile copy is received by the Division.

(b) Whenever the final date for any requirement of this part falls on a Saturday, Sunday, Federal holiday, or other day on which the Division is not open for the transaction of business during normal working hours, the time for filing will be extended to the close of business on the next working day.

(c) The time for filing an appeal, a request for Director review, or any other document expires at 5:00 p.m. local time at the office of the Division to which the filing is submitted on the last day on which such filing may be made.

### § 11.15 Participation of third parties and interested parties in Division proceedings.

In two situations, parties other than the appellant or the agency may be interested in participating in Division proceedings. In the first situation, a Division proceeding may in fact result in the adjudication of the rights of a third party, e.g., an appeal of a tenant involving a payment shared with a landlord, an appeal by one recipient of a portion of a payment shared by multiple parties, an appeal by one heir of an estate. In the second situation, a party may desire to receive notice of and perhaps participate in an appeal because of the derivative impact the appeal determination will have on that party, e.g., guaranteed lenders and reinsurance companies. The provisions in this section set forth rules for the participation of such third and interested parties.

(a) *Third parties.* When an appeal is filed, the Division shall notify any potential third party whose rights may be adjudicated of its right to partici-

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pate as an appellant in the appeal. This includes the right to seek Director review of the Hearing Officer determination. Such third parties may be identified by the Division itself, by an agency, or by the original appellant. The Division shall issue one notice to the third party of its right to participate, and if such party declines to participate, the Division determination will be binding as to that third party as if it had participated. For purposes of this part, a third party includes any party for which a determination of the Division could lead to an agency action on implementation that would be adverse to the party thus giving such party a right to a Division appeal.

(b) *Interested parties.* With respect to a participant who is a borrower under a guaranteed loan or an insured under a crop insurance program, the respective guaranteed lender or reinsurance company having an interest in a participant's appeal under this part may participate in the appeal as an interested party, but such participation does not confer the status of an appellant upon the guaranteed lender or reinsurance company such that it may request Director review of a final determination of the Division.

## Subpart B—Organization And Functions

AUTHORITY: 5 U.S.C. 301 and 552; 7 CFR part 2.

SOURCE: 63 FR 44773, Aug. 21, 1998, unless otherwise noted.

### § 11.20 General statement.

This subpart provides guidance for the general public as to the organization and functions of NAD.

### § 11.21 Organization.

NAD was established on October 13, 1994. Delegation of authority to the Director, NAD, appears at § 2.34 of this title. The organization is comprised of three regional offices: Eastern Regional Office, Indianapolis, Indiana; Southern Regional Office, Memphis, Tennessee; and Western Regional Office, Lakewood, Colorado; and the

headquarters staff located in Alexandria, Virginia. NAD is headed by a Director. NAD is assigned responsibility for certain administrative appeals as set forth in subpart A of this part.

#### § 11.22 Functions.

(a) *Director*. Provides executive direction for NAD. The Director is responsible for developing and implementing nationwide plans, policies, and procedures for the timely and orderly hearing and disposition of appeals filed by individuals or entities in accordance with subpart A of this part. The Director will respond to all FOIA requests concerning appeal decisions and case records maintained by NAD.

(b) *Deputy Director for Hearings and Administration*. Responsible for all administrative functions of NAD, including budget, correspondence, personnel, travel, equipment, and regulation review and development.

(c) *Deputy Director for Planning, Training, and Quality Control*. Responsible for NAD strategic planning, including the organization's compliance with the Government Performance and Results Act, Pub. L. 103-62, employee training, and the establishment and maintenance of a quality assurance program.

(d) *Assistant Directors for Regions*. Responsible for oversight of the adjudication process for cases filed in the NAD regional offices. Assistant Directors ensure statutory and administrative time frames are met, and oversee the administrative functions, training, and supervision of the support staff located in the regional offices and the large dispersed staff of professional hearing officers located throughout the regions. The three regional offices serve as the custodian for all NAD determinations and case records.

### Subpart C—Availability of Information to the Public

AUTHORITY: 5 U.S.C. 301 and 552; 7 CFR 1.1-1.16.

SOURCE: 63 FR 44774, Aug. 21, 1998, unless otherwise noted.

#### § 11.30 General statement.

This subpart implements the regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture at 7 CFR 1.1 through 1.16 concerning FOIA (5 U.S.C. 552). The Secretary's regulations, as implemented by the regulations in this part, govern the availability of the records of NAD to the public.

#### § 11.31 Public inspection and copying.

Section 1.5 of this title requires that certain materials be made available by each USDA agency for public inspection and copying in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 522(a)(2). Members of the public wishing to gain access to these NAD records should write to the appropriate address shown in appendix A of this subpart.

#### § 11.32 Initial requests for records.

(a) Requests for NAD records should be in writing and addressed to the NAD official having custody of the records desired as indicated in § 11.22(d). Addresses are found in Appendix A of this subpart. In his or her petition, the requester may ask for a fee waiver if there is likely to be a charge for the requested information. The criteria for waiver of fees are found in section 6 of appendix A, subpart A of part 1 of this title. All requests for records shall be deemed to have been made pursuant to FOIA, regardless of whether FOIA is specifically mentioned. To facilitate processing of a request, the phrase "FOIA REQUEST" should be placed in capital letters on the front of the envelope.

(b) A request must reasonably describe records to enable NAD personnel to locate them with reasonable effort. Where possible, a requester should supply specific information, such as dates, titles, appellant name or appeal number, that may help identify the records. If the request relates to a matter in pending litigation, the court and its location should be identified.

(c) If NAD determines that a request does not reasonably describe the records, it shall inform the requester of this fact and extend the requester an opportunity to clarify the request or to confer promptly with knowledgeable NAD personnel to attempt to identify the records he or she is seeking. The

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“date of receipt” in such instances, for purposes of §1.12(a) of this title, shall be the date of receipt of the amended or clarified request.

(d) Nothing in this subpart shall be interpreted to preclude NAD from honoring an oral request for information, but if the requester is dissatisfied with the response, the NAD official involved shall advise the requester to submit a written request in accordance with paragraph (a) of this section. The “date of receipt” of such a request for purposes of §1.12(a) of this title shall be the date of receipt of the written request. For recordkeeping purposes, the NAD official responding to an oral request for information may ask the requester to also submit his or her request in writing.

(e) If a request for records or a fee waiver under this subpart is denied, the person making the request shall have the right to appeal the denial. Requesters also may appeal NAD decisions regarding a requester’s status for purposes of fee levels under section 5 of Appendix A, subpart A of part 1 of this title. All appeals must be in writing and addressed to the official designated in §11.33. To facilitate processing of an appeal, the phrase “FOIA APPEAL” should be placed in capital letters on the front of the envelope.

(f) NAD shall develop and maintain a record of all written and oral FOIA requests and FOIA appeals received by NAD, which shall include, in addition to any other information, the name of the requester, brief summary of the information requested, an indication of whether the request or appeal was denied or partially denied, the FOIA exemption(s) cited as the basis for any denials, and the amount of fees associated with the request or appeal.

### § 11.33 Appeals.

Any person whose initial FOIA request is denied in whole or in part may appeal that denial to the Director, National Appeals Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 3101 Park Center Drive, Suite 1113, Alexandria, Virginia 22302. The Director will make the final determination on the appeal.

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#### APPENDIX A TO SUBPART C OF PART 11— LIST OF ADDRESSES

This list provides the titles and mailing addresses of officials who have custody of NAD records. This list also identifies the normal working hours, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays, during which public inspection and copying of certain kinds of records is permitted.

Director, National Appeals Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 3101 Park Center Drive, Suite 1113, Alexandria, Virginia 22302, Hours: 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

Regional Assistant Director, Eastern Region, National Appeals Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 3500 DePauw Boulevard, Suite 2052, Indianapolis, Indiana 46268, Hours: 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

Regional Assistant Director, Southern Region, National Appeals Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 7777 Walnut Grove Road, LLB-1, Memphis, Tennessee 38120, Hours: 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

Regional Assistant Director, Western Region, National Appeals Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 755 Parfet Street, Suite 494, Lakewood, Colorado 80215-5506, Hours: 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

#### PART 12—HIGHLY ERODIBLE LAND CONSERVATION AND WETLAND CONSERVATION

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##### Subpart B—Highly Erodible Land Conservation

- 12.20 NRCS responsibilities regarding highly erodible land.
- 12.21 Identification of highly erodible lands criteria.
- 12.22 Highly erodible field determination criteria.
- 12.23 Conservation plans and conservation systems.