

NEWS RELEASE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dece mber 10, 1964

HOLLY SPRINGS, MISSISSIPPI-- Recent Agricultural Stabilization Committee Community elections in Mississippi which saw five Negroes elected to committee posts for the first time, will be contested because "more Negroes might have won if there had not been such discrimination and intimidation", a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) worker said here.

Cleveland Sellers, SNCC project director here, said Negro farmers from Holmes, Issaquena, Madison, Panola and Marshall Counties had decided to contest the December 3rd elections in their counties that saw five Negroes elected. Sellers said Benton County elections, where Negroes won the three top posts, would not be challenged.

Workers from the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) said "intimidation and discrimination of Negro farmers and COFO workers prevented more Negro victories across the state."

Sellers said some white poll watchers misinformed Negro farmers, others refused to let eligible farmers vote, and some eligible Negroes were not given ballots.

COFO Federal Projects worker Jane Adams said farmers from the contesting counties would ask the state ASC Director and Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman, to provide government supervision of voting lists and ballot counting in future elections and to set up an investigating committee, elected by farmers, to look into claims of discrimination.

Agriculture Secretary Freeman said ASC elections were open to "persons who own farms or who have a direct financial interest in the crops grown on the farms in any county". Freeman said if Agriculture Department investigations of complaints "show corrective action is required, it will be taken immediately."

SNCC and COFO workers helped farmers in twelve Mississippi counties organize for the elections. The ASC Community Committees, which give out extra crop allotments, are elected by farmers and sharecroppers once a year. Each farming county usually has from 3 to 11 communities, composed of a chairman, vice-chairman, a member, and two alternates.

Negroes won posts in December 3rd elections in Madison, Holmes, and Benton Counties.

The ASC Committees are crucial to small farmers who depend on cotton and other crop acreage alottments for their living.