

## **2017 Midwest Area Rally**

*March 30 – April 1, 2017, Marriott Hotel, Dayton, Ohio*

### Missouri Attendees

Dennis Ray, NASCOE Vice-President  
Jackson Jones, MWA Alternate Executive  
Tina Young, MWA Emblems Chair  
Jared Singer, MASCOE President  
Jessica Claypole, MASCOE Secretary

### Agenda & Activity Report

*Thursday, March 30*

Registration opened at 5:00 p.m., followed by the meet and great event/dinner at Carillon Brewery Restaurant and welcome from Ohio Board.

*Friday, March 31*

The opening session began at 8:00 Friday morning with invocation, presentation of colors, Pledge of Allegiance, and National Anthem. Char Stone, Ohio, led the roll call of delegates. Chris Hare, MWA Executive, introduced the Acting SED from Indiana and Ohio State Committee Member Jim Zumbrink. Both were called to the podium for a few short comments. Kathy Balbaugh announced the first-timer contest for any new attendees to gather signatures and win a prize. Chris Hare and MWA Alternate Executive Jackson Jones then addressed membership and gave brief highlights of the past year serving the Midwest Area.

NASCOE President Wes Daniels took the floor. He reiterated the need for a Secretary of Agriculture confirmation, and the fact that the President's budget proposal is just that, and the House and Senate will go to work on it from here. NASCOE Legislative Consultant Hunter Moorhead has been working hard during the transition and feels the agency is in pretty good shape. Some of the comments made in the Farm Bill negotiations confirm FSA is getting the job done. Wes reminded membership that we've been through this many times before and our reputation will take care of us, and urged us to keep working hard and keep doing our job. NASCOE will be in Washington D.C. next week for negotiations meetings. The negotiation process has been working well, with 27 items currently in queue. The language regarding office closures remains in the appropriations bill and Wes acknowledged the need for some office closures across the nation. A new workload tool and model is being developed and will drill down to the county level as SEDs and their staff need to have some ability to manage their state. NASCOE's position is that we do need a tool, and if NASCOE is consulted and data is provided, and an office closure is justified, then maybe it's time for the language to be removed that prohibits the office closure policy. Wes is concerned that many newer managers are not aware the COC is their supervisor. He reiterated the need to make sure people are aware. Although upper management has expressed

there are issues with the COC supervisory and hiring role, that doesn't mean we need to do away with system. District Directors are getting fewer and fewer and are not able to meet or visit with COCs as often. Wes said his goal is provide some training on the issue to get COC more involved. Wes also addressed the high number of adverse employee issues that have been run through the NASCOE attorney. He reminded membership to follow the rules and procedure as outlined but if there is an issue, the attorney is a benefit available to all of us. In his closing remarks, Wes said he is going to miss being President and time is starting to wind down. He thanked membership.

NASCOE Vice President Dennis Ray then gave remarks on recent and ongoing activity at the national level. He thanked Wes for all his efforts and recited a quote he heard recently and took note of: "If you don't have a seat at the table, you're probably on the menu." He said over the past several years, management has been very willing to have NASCOE representation on task forces, workgroups, etc. Currently, there is a taskforce working on the 2-CP handbook revision and an ACRSI Work Group, which is chaired by NASCOE Treasurer Curt Houk. Kristal Rader is the NASCOE representative currently serving on an IT Steering Committee, and Samantha Garrison represents NASCOE on the Counter Skills Training Initiative. Regarding the PT classification initiative, Dennis said NASCOE was willing to pay for a desk audit, but decided not to because there was no guarantee that management would use it. Currently, past NASCOE President Mark VanHoose is working on position descriptions. Dennis also informed membership that KSAs are in the process of being replaced with a questionnaire that will still provide the needed information as part of the hiring process. The COC authority is being eroded in handbooks, so a workgroup has formed to work on this issue. There is also a taskforce working on share-management procedure. The National Convention handbook is currently in revision process as well. Regarding managerial cost analysis, Dennis said the main concern is that there needs to be a consistent workload tool nationwide. To this point, Dennis and Wes both reiterated the need to be recording time and attendance accurately. Otherwise, the data is not going to be accurate for workload purposes. Dennis said he feels the project is headed in the right direction, but not sure when it's going to be available. Dennis asked membership not to wait until the last minute to let him know there is an issue going on with regards to personnel. In many cases, he and Wes have been able to leverage relationships with SEDs and AOs to work out issues before escalating to the NASCOE attorney. He asked all members to please consider contributing to the PAC and be sure to offer NAFEC membership to COC members. He invited all membership to come to Missouri in August for the National Convention.

Jackson Jones addressed membership and talked about the importance of not only getting someone to join NASCOE, but also be engaged. The current FSA workforce encompasses two to three generations, and in order for NASCOE to survive, we need to bridge the generation gap. Millennials are the new group coming into the workforce, and more than half of them have a college degree, compared to 30 percent of baby boomers. However, as millennials enter the workforce, they're actually not so different from generations before them, anxious to go and hit the ground running. Jackson stressed the importance of getting to them early to show them why NASCOE is important, how it benefits them and what NASCOE is doing for them right now. It's important to approach these new employees on an individual, personalized level, instead of a large group. Start early, accentuate each individual's

qualities, and get them involved by letting them serve on the board, as a committee chair, etc. In closing, we need to match their talents to tasks in NASCOE to maximize the benefit to both parties.

Following NASCOE board member presentations, staff from Washington D.C. took the floor and addressed membership.

Chris Beyerhelm, Associate Administrator of Operations and Management and current Acting Administrator, addressed some of the hard questions and topics early. He talked about the current transition occurring as part of the Trump Administration, emphasizing they worked hard to get the big decisions made with regards to the agency, prior to the administration change. Chris stressed there are many good “acting” officials currently in place and we just need to keep doing what we’re supposed to do and everything else will work out. Regarding Governor Perdue, Chris said the soft confirmation hearing deemed positive and he will be ready to go to work as soon as he can, noting he will be the kind of Secretary we’re going to enjoy. He will listen and then make decisions. FSA is in the best position to provide government services to rural America, investing \$22 billion in the rural economy in 2016, resulting in nearly 600,000 jobs created, increased household wealth, and an overall boost in GDP. In his words, “We help create healthy, abundant food supply for the world. Agriculture is infrastructure.” Chris challenged membership to have an elevator speech such as this to take to the public so when someone asks what we do, we can tell our story effectively. It starts with one conversation at a time.

Regarding budget, we are currently operating under a continuing resolution for 2017, with rent rates up by \$5 million and salary increases costing \$14 million, despite carrying \$30 million into 2016. For the next fiscal year, Chris said don’t panic, a lot of things have to happen between now and 2018. If there is a reduction, plans are in place so we’re ready. He referenced the decrease in cash awards as a result of more employees onboard, more outstanding ratings achieved and a smaller budget to work with.

In regards to hiring, currently we are at 98.5% of our ceiling, with 90 county office exceptions, and 25 GS exceptions. Chris referred to the current situation as a hiring slush, not hiring freeze, compared to two years ago when we were down 1000 positions. Express Lane hiring has helped decrease the processing time. He cautioned against changing position descriptions or trying to advertise at multiple grades as this causes much more delay in the process. Regarding Workforce Engagement, Chris said he considers it a performance evaluation of the agency. A new Employee Viewpoint Survey will be out soon. Three years ago, we were 174<sup>th</sup> in best places to work nationwide; two years ago, we were 74<sup>th</sup>; last year, we ranked 54<sup>th</sup>, and most of the agencies ahead of FSA were much smaller. When compared to other agencies over 10,000 employees, FSA is second only to NASA. Currently, FSA has 12,000 employees, half of which participate in the Employee Viewpoint Survey. Other Employee Engagement items include Harvest Recognition Pins, Poster Pros and Song contest, Wellness Challenge and Administrator Awards. Chris challenged membership to challenge fellow employees to reach a goal of 5,500 nominations for Administrator Awards next year.

Regarding Managed Print Services, MPS phase 1 contract has expired, and the new MPS phase 2 contract has been secured with Xerox and is currently in the beginning stages, with 200 machines ordered. The plan is to replace leased copiers, then replace agency-owned copiers, and finally replace

MPS 1 machines. The process will take time, but Chris assured membership that MPS phase 2 contractors will assess individual office needs and it won't be one size fits all. Additionally, Chris thinks we're on the right track in terms of IT and software issues, noting that it has been quite a while since we experienced any significant meltdowns. Darren Ash has quickly understood our agency needs and realizes how debilitating computer and software issues can be to a county office. Equipment is now on a three to four year refresh plan, and Darren and his team are currently in the process of developing a dashboard for which all FSA systems will be tied to serve as a centralized reporting desk for all IT issues.

Other items Chris noted included handbook updates, consolidated national office newsletter, NAPA study and activity reporting system, and Bridges to Opportunity, stressing BTO provides data to support our agency. The year-to-date figures on receipts issued show FSA at 1 million, NRCS at 90,000 and Rural Development at 45,000. Chris also discussed the Land Tenure program rolled out under former Secretary Vilsack. Access to land is crucial as 10% of all farm land in the U.S. will change hands in the next five years. The pilot program rolled out in 6 counties in Iowa and so far has shown positive response and impact. Chris discussed a new partnership between FSA and SBA's SCORE program to help bridge the gap, building and fostering relationships between retired professionals and beginning farmers in rural communities. FSA will play in role in providing resources, including meeting space at the local county office. In closing, Chris gave a message in honor of Women's History Month, touting the accomplishments of all the women who have touched his life, and thanked those sitting in the room.

Brad Karmen, Acting Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, followed Chris's message by reiterating FSA's role in the USDA mission, noting there's always something to do at FSA with very little down time. Brad is currently serving a role in the FFAS Undersecretary's Office and has heard many remarks indicating the staff is aware of just how busy FSA is, accounting for half the time of the FFAS mission area, not as a problem, but as a solution. Brad posed the question to membership of "What does the transition mean for us?" His response – "Basically nothing – our work continues." FSA is a highly political agency comparatively, and we tend to have many regional differences, but we are not highly partisan. FSA is ready to brief the new Secretary when he comes onboard of the importance of the agency and what we have to offer. Some of the key concerns that will be addressed immediately include the hierarchy in ARC-CO yield calculations, premium concerns related to MPP, and CRP. Brad has heard positive feedback and accolades from many in response to the recent wildfires across the Midwest and western states. Recent software updates include 2018 crop reporting in CARS, open April 2, and some changes to practice screens in COLS. Brad also discussed the Fellowship Program, noting last year there were 5 participants, all of which were highly commended for their work in farm programs and management. He stressed the importance and value of the Fellowship program and encouraged membership to seek out interested employees and urge them to apply.

Following lunch, JM Marketing gave a presentation on their benefits and offerings.

Chris Beyerhelm and Brad Karmen, accompanied by NASCOE President Wes Daniels and Vice President Dennis Ray, hosted a Q & A session with membership, as follows:

- Q: MPS – All offices should have at least two printers in case one breaks down

- A: We currently have more printers at FSA than employees, and appreciate any input from the county office level. Keep it coming!
- Q: MPS – Difficulty with machine automatically ordering supplies
- A: Keep the feedback coming on MPS or printer issues
- Q: Handbooks – Delays in procedure and updates when new Farm Bill came out
- A: Most of procedure was available, with the exception of NAP, either through handbooks or notices, but will continue to take feedback on this
- Q: COC – Their role appears to be getting diminished with new program introduction, specifically OCCSP and CRP
- A: There is no deliberate attempt to diminish the role of COC. Specifically with the OCCSP, there wasn't a lot for COC to "approve", but management will continue to look into this.
- Q: Hiring – Can we request a waiver to get certified COTs into a county office?
- A: We don't need to request a waiver for this action, and the hiring freeze is expected to end after April 22. If a waiver request was sent up now, it probably wouldn't be acted on.
- Q: COC – How will their role and responsibility change with regards to supervisory role over CEDs?
- A: No changes are expected and it is not up for discussion at this point
- Q: HR – Is there a process for appeal or relief for PT who missed promotion by accident?
- A: There should be a way – will check on official regulations and send it up.
- Q: RMA – Is there a process for appeal or relief for producers who miss filing form AD-1026 by June 1 deadline each year?
- A: Significant outreach efforts were administered to inform producers of this deadline. The handbook does allow for relief provisions, and relief cases are sent to Brad Karmen. To date, 50 to 100 cases have been submitted and 99% have been granted relief.
- Q: Leasing/Building – Recent Security Assessments calls for expensive alarm systems, panic buttons, etc., so who is paying for this? Also, what is required vs. recommended?
- A: Not sure the exact requirements or recommendations at this point – will check into this process.
- Q: MPP – What are the authorities of the Secretary in terms of revamping the program? Can the formula be changed to make it a better, more beneficial program?
- A: This would require a Congressional change. Policy is a math formula and the Secretary does not have the authority to change it. Program proponents had to cut costs right before it passed, and say if they could have implemented their original plan, producers would be happier. Everyone is wanting something from the next farm bill.
- Q: Software – Continued issues with basic program applications makes it hard to conduct business. What can be done to take care of the systems we have?
- A: The original software wish list had to be cut significantly because we just can't do it all. Any ideas from the county level should be submitted through the IT Steering Committee.
- Q: STO – What should a CED do if they are not getting any response from their state office on program matters or producer issues
- A: Work through the STO and email Brad Karmen directly. Chris Beyerhelm stated the process needs to work better but there's no good answer.
- Q: Information – Need for a Task force to streamline information flow

- A: Valid point! Committee to work on this issue.
- Q: IT – Does IT personnel receive training, specifically on phones and fax2mail?
- A: Our IT system is really about 5 different system, but this is specifically a CTS issue, and yes, they are supposed to receive training. These are often people problems and not necessarily training problems. County offices should email Chris with issues and he will pass on.
- Q: HR – PT in Charge never upgraded to CO-9 level due to hiring freeze. Why?
- A: This probably shouldn't have happened.

One final thought from Chris Beyerhelm was in regards to a notice coming out on the Activity Reporting System. His message was simple: Don't have more time logged in your timesheet than hours accounted for in actual daily work. When Chris has gone to the Hill and asked for staffing the last three years in a row, the response is that there are no complaints about FSA not getting the job done.

Following the Q&A Session, Dillard Financial Solutions gave a presentation on retirement and a brief overview of the portfolio of products and services they provided.

Members dismissed by 5:00 to enjoy the hospitality room, ice breaker event and evening entertainment.

### *Saturday, April 1*

The morning session began at 8:00 with Chris Hare addressing the state directors and the board. Following this session, he presented awards to the Midwest Area Committee Chairs. Kathy Balbaugh, MWA Awards Chair, presented the Distinguished Service Awards and Charlene Stone, Ohio Association President, presented their state awards and the Traveling Trophy for Membership. Scholarship awards were also presented, followed by the 2017 NASCOE National Convention presentation led by Jared Singer. Each state association President gave a report on their respective activities, as follows:

- Illinois – Plan to do an outreach event where families are invited
- Iowa – Director at-large positions – odd and even years rotate
- Michigan – Motivational speaker at state convention
  - Launching a NASCOE – specific email account for state use
- Minnesota – Monthly SED calls and Friday update
  - 50% of staff will retire in next 5 years
  - 1-day state convention, with \$50 first-timer prize per district
- Missouri – National Convention and Website
  - Redistricting & maintaining working relationship with management
- Ohio – Co-membership chair to focus on current non-members
- Wisconsin – Quarterly meetings with State Committee and STO

Following President's reports, each Committee Chair gave a report on their respective activities, as follows:

- Awards – 20 nominations for Distinguished Service Awards
- Benefits – Time for attending meetings; area retirement trainings
  - Possible NASCOE Credit Card
- Scholarships – Online Applications – 39 total
- Emblems – Orders for state conventions and rallies

- Legislative – Confirmation from state chairs on communication
  - Goal to increase PAC contributions by 10%
- Membership – 35 offices in MWA with no members currently
- Negotiations – 15 of 32 items submitted for negotiations came from MWA
- Programs – 102 program submissions nationwide
  - WebTA, MIDAS
  - Goal is 10 submissions for each state by September
- Publicity – Subscription to NASCOE website
  - Proposed MWA Website
  - No official decision until May after all state conventions

NAFEC Chair Mary Roberts gave an update on membership and ways to increase membership across the board.

Chris Hare called for candidate nominations for the 2017-2018 NASCOE Executive Board. Dennis Ray announced his candidacy for President. Curt Houk announced Brandon Wilson's candidacy for Vice President. Tammy Eibey announced her candidacy for Secretary. Curt Houk announced his candidacy for Treasurer.

Jackson Jones called for candidate nominations for the 2017-2018 Midwest Area Executive and Alternate Executive positions. Chris Hare announced his candidacy for MWA Executive. Jackson Jones announced his candidacy for MWA Alternate Executive.

The meeting adjourned by 12:30 p.m.