

NASCOE 58th Annual National Convention

August 2-5, 2017, Embassy Suites & St. Charles Convention Center, St. Charles, MO

2016-2017 NASCOE Officers

President: Wes Daniels
Vice President: Dennis Ray
Secretary: Deborah Esselman
Treasurer: Curt Houk

Area Executive Committee Persons & Alternates

Northeast: Richard Csutoras & Larry Parker
Southeast: David Curtis & Mike Mayfield
Midwest: Chris Hare & Jackson Jones
Northwest: Jenae Prescott & Jessi Colgrove
Southwest: Darvin Collins & Jay Goff

National Committee Chairpersons

Awards/Scholarships/Emblems Chair: Micki Crider
Benefits Chair: Christy Randall
Legislative Chair: Jackson Jones/Donny Green
Membership Chair: Marcinda Kester
NAFEC Chair: Billy-Wayne Dennison
Programs Chair: Dana McKinney
Publicity Chair/Webmaster: Kristal Jackson
Parliamentarian/Resolutions Chair: Dennis Ray

Negotiation Consultants

Northeast: Jamie McLane
Southeast: Sabrina Conditt
Midwest: Sara Bateson
Northwest: Harold Boggs
Southwest: Lynette Bond

Agenda & Activity Report

Wednesday, August 2

Tours throughout the day included Anheuser Busch/Gateway Arch; Monsanto Research Center/Purina Farms; and Augusta Wine Trail. The annual golf outing took place at Bogey Hills Country Club.

The NASCOE Executive meeting for Officers, Area Executives, Alternate Executives and National Committee Chairs was held from 8:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Hospitality rooms were open from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. An informational meeting for state officers and delegates was held from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Evening reception & registration was held at Embassy Suites hotel.

Thursday, August 3

Thursday's meeting was called to order at 8:00 a.m. by President Wes Daniels. The invocation was delivered, followed by the Presentation of Colors by members of the American Legion Post #312. Connie Gibson sang the National Anthem, followed by members reciting The Pledge of Allegiance. At 8:10, the roll call began with Secretary Deb Esselman announcing each state and the number of members and guests present. MASCOE President Jared Singer & Vice President Mandi Bird led Missouri's introduction and announced 77 members and guests in attendance. All Missouri attendees walked in as a group and gathered at the front of the meeting room during the introduction, which included an audio/video presentation produced by Jared Singer. Following roll call, NASCOE Officers, Area Executives and Committee Chairs were introduced. The agenda was then approved and adopted and a first-timer's contest was presented by Micki Crider. The bid for the 2019 National Convention was presented by Marla Hammer, to be held in Manhattan, KS. Missouri Acting SED Kim Viers took the stage and welcomed all members and guests to Missouri. MASCOE President Jared Singer also gave a welcome announcement. Following his remarks, Missouri Department of Agriculture Director Chris Chinn took the stage to deliver opening comments. Bob Stevenson, Acting Chief of Staff, presented welcome remarks from Washington D.C. on behalf of Rob Johansson, Acting Deputy Under Secretary. He discussed Conservation efforts at the national level and used the term "historically awesome" to describe NASCOE's actions, specifically its roll in securing Key PT positions. He spoke on the Secretary's mission to leave the land better than we found it and his intent to have all offices in all USDA agencies running smoothly, thus improving customer service. FSA is a customer-reaching agency and serves under a new mission area with NRCS and RMA, so it's important to get input from employees in all agencies. Co-location is just the beginning as they are looking at the full team effort among FSA, NRCS and RMA. This includes a unified online customer portal and streamlined application process, helping to maximize resource to improve customer service on all levels. A survey will be conducted to share views on how to improve. Stevenson re-iterated the fact that USDA employees are the finest, most dedicated employees in U.S. Government.

Chris Beyerhelm, Acting FSA Administrator, then took the floor and acknowledged NASCOE President Wes Daniels for all of his efforts during the past 2 years. He spoke on the fact that we are 7 months under a new President and the train is still on track, even though we've had to get creative in finding ways to accomplish what's necessary. As always, we've just rolled up our sleeves in the county offices to get the job done. He touched on the idea that FSA does economic development and what we do vs. the outcome. In 2016, FSA invested \$22 billion in rural America, generating \$15 billion in household income. We are creating jobs and wealth. He asked employees to be advocates for FSA because what we do makes a difference in people's lives. In terms of hiring and staffing, FSA was 98.5% to staff ceiling

at the beginning of the year. Then the hiring freeze hit, causing uncertainty. There is currently a request for an additional 200 external positions to be advertised/filled and express-lane hiring has also been utilized to fill critical-need positions. He said it is more important than ever to give our elevator speech because FSA is too important to rural America to not tell our story. He spoke on the success of leadership training and importance of succession planning. He also mentioned the increase in nominations for Administrator Awards for 2017. He gave a shout-out to Darren Ash for his continued efforts in improving IT across the board, adding that a more collaborative approach has aided in the recent improvements. Handbooks are still in the process of being updated and The Harvester newsletter is a new communication tool that is getting positive feedback. Beyerhelm discussed the activity reporting system, emphasizing the fact that we need 3 years of information before anything can be done with it in terms of staffing levels. He stressed the importance of recording time to a specific program/activity and limiting the use of "common". The next farm bill is now in the planning phases. PT counter skills training will be coming in the near future. Bridges to Opportunity continues to be a work in progress. The Secretary will be in Iowa on Saturday to unveil a new initiative to help beginning farmers gain access to land, capital and technical assistance. Currently, 30% of landowners in the U.S. are non-operators so it's important to coordinate resources to bridge the gap in order for our programs to be helpful to and successful for beginning farmers. In closing, Beyerhelm described his appointment as Acting Administrator as a wonderful experience in which he has learned a lot about farm programs. Wes Daniels presented Beyerhelm with a NASCOE support award and recognition.

Brad Karmen, Acting Administrator for Farm Programs, took the stage and said it's just business as usual at FSA. Recently, emergency haying and grazing has been released for areas affected by drought and disaster relief has aided those affected by wildfires this spring. FSA has done a great job delivering farm programs to producers this year. There has been concern about county yields and variations with respect to ARC/PLC programs and payments. RMA and NASS yields are expected to be released to the public tomorrow, to provide full disclosure for yield data. Karmen added that producers tend to have more faith in RMA yields but there will continue to be differences across county lines because small changes in yields result in large differences in payments. Regarding CRP, currently trying to figure out the best course of action moving forward. ARC/PLC programs can rely on math, but with CRP, there is really nothing to go by in terms of a good formula to use. He touched on the push to add cotton back as a covered commodity and the downfalls of the MPP. There are many "asks" in the next farm bill that will have to be addressed. Karmen said there are a lot of "lifers" at FSA and we always rise to the top, always taking care of the farmer. Wes Daniels presented Karmen with a NASCOE appreciation award.

John Chott, Acting Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, followed with thanks and appreciation to FSA for the work we do and service we provide. Since 2001, the number of county office employees has decreased from 9,000 to 7,000, and 75 COTs are currently waiting to be placed nationwide. Additional critical-need requests are in queue and there continues to be a need for temporary employees. He touched on the Key PT program and the need for growth and further utilization. Counter-skills training is currently in the works to train more than 6,000 PTs, and National Leadership Training is ongoing. The Fellowship program has been a success, and the Aspiring Leader Program is anticipated to gain momentum. Chott closed by saying he truly loves coming to work every day. Wes Daniels presented Chott with a NASCOE appreciation award.

Radha Sekar, Chief Financial Officer, took the stage and expressed her love for what FSA does, adding that she wants to do what we do because she has our interest at heart. She spoke on how the nature of our work has changed, so communication and knowing producers is important and valuable. She spoke on the importance of knowing what FSA does, that our agency puts food on the table. Customer service

does not come cheap and cannot be automated. In terms of budget, she said it is looking decent for 2018. The department understands our pain and supports most of what we have asked for. She mentioned the importance of accurate timesheets and that we need to capture the tasks that don't get done and be accurate in accounting for our daily time and hours in delivering all programs. We need to think about the things that aren't getting done so we can communicate needs and shortfalls. Temporaries have been implemented to assist with disaster recovery and also serve a role in succession planning. Wes Daniels presented Sekar with a NASCOE appreciation award.

Darren Ash, Chief Information Officer, then took the floor with a focus on communication with regards to IT. He said IT will never be perfect but it shouldn't be a guessing game if the software will work or not. In terms of what has changed and what is new vs. what is worse and what is better, he said communication is key. Regarding MPS, it is the intent to accelerate replacement of old units and printers to fill current needs and gaps in county offices. Computer refresh is also top of mind, and staff is working to get a cycle established to stay on top of this. He said having data to assess and analyze trends and gaps is key. Loss of productivity results in a waste of money. His staff is also focusing on the what-ifs of different scenarios to put recovery systems and plans in place. The IT Steering Committee has been positive and resulted in good feedback and support. The recent roll-out of the Enterprise Data Warehouse has been successful and useful. Regarding the new mission area, IT efforts will continue to be effective and supportive of the cause, which is ultimately investing in rural America. In closing, Ash thanked employees and was presented a NASCOE appreciation award by Wes Daniels.

Teresa Dillard of Dillard Financial Services presented the award for most increased membership to Rhode Island.

The morning session was then adjourned for lunch recess. Hot and cold concessions were available in the common area. COC members attended a working lunch and met with members of NAFEC and Management.

At 1:30 p.m., the afternoon session reconvened with an address by Francisco Salguero, OCIO. He spoke on the department's efforts to modernize the network, which includes upgrading to Ethernet. They are currently in the planning stages of migration to Office 365, with Sharepoint and OneDrive coming in May 2018. Outlook web access is now available on personal computers using an external LincPass port. Overall, he said they are working as one community to deliver systems and support. Wes Daniels presented a NASCOE appreciation award to Salguero.

Thomas Mulhern, Human Resources Director, took the floor with further details about hiring and staffing. He said the hiring freeze has to be lifted before we can move forward. Express lane is an important piece of the equation. Currently, 25% of federal employees and 20% of county office employees are eligible to retire. He gave credit to leadership and the engagement aspect to retain new employees coming in. The current retention numbers are a testament to NASCOE's efforts.

Jim Radintz, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs, followed with a message of thanks for all we do. He said it was his first time attending a NASCOE convention. Last year, \$6.3 billion was loaned but there continues to be funding challenges. Congress has increased appropriations but the percentage of farmers depending on FSA for loan money has increased.

Mark Rucker, Deputy Administrator for Management, spoke briefly about relationships and thanked Wes Daniels for his efforts related to NASCOE.

Following National Office remarks, the Labor Management Agreement was signed by Chris Beyerhelm and Wes Daniels.

All members of management then participated in a Question and Answer Panel, led by Acting Administrator Beyerhelm. Questions and related items during this discussion are as follows:

- Is there any relief for getting HEL determinations back from NRCS more timely?
 - Working under 1 secretary should provide more streamlined interagency processes.
- When can states see the results from workload survey and proposed staffing needs?
 - Pilot reports have been distributed and a nationwide release is expected soon. Revamping staffing levels is another phase of the process and requires agreement and alignment across all channels.
- What criteria is considered to grant positions and how long with the hiring freeze last?
 - Hiring freeze is implemented due to unknown budget. The critical needs and hires are at the forefront. Currently there are 75 COTs certified waiting for placement, with a blanket waiver on internal hires and request for an additional 200 external.
- Will there be any relief for buying back temporary time in service?
 - Any time prior to 1989 has been reinstated. Statute limits any time from that year to present to be reinstated.
- Will all counties receive full training for Bridges to Opportunity?
 - In-depth training should be provided.
- What were the results of Bridges to Opportunity-related questions on the Workforce Engagement Survey and how have they been implemented?
 - The results of the survey were honest, with many comments pertaining to the receipt-for-service aspect, which is only 1 component. The software is powerful but needs to be refined to be more user-friendly. We will look at all comments to make improvements.
- Where is the President's picture?
 - We have not received it yet. Any other agency who has it posted did it on their own (reference to VA).
- Does a change to a position description actually delay the hiring process?
 - Any change to a position description does delay the process.
- Regarding counter skills training, would this become mandated to be more uniform and required?
 - It is each state's discretion on how to implement the program but it is important.
- Regarding time and attendance, we need guidance on how to manage overtime, comp time and credit time. Are you giving us permission to fail in terms of serving producers and delivering programs?

- There is a time and a place to work extra hours. We just need to be more judicious about how we utilize after-hours time. Old habits die hard. The new remote access to email also raises concerns about employees working from home and not accounting for this time.
- Regarding WebTA, we need specific codes to account for processing AGI forms, other PL activities and crop reporting tasks.
 - We can look at this. It may be a good topic/task for the IT steering committee.
- Current policy states we cannot accept a late-filed crop report after the current year's final acreage reporting date. Can this be revisited?
 - It is tough to do this with grain crops especially because after 12 months, there is rarely evidence left in the field to spot check. 12 months seems to be an adequate amount of time for producers to late-file.
- Regarding the issue of employees working extra time, what about the pressure from higher up to get everything done and meet deadlines?
 - We need to get a better handle on what is expected in an 8 or 9 hour day.
- Question about revising a hay/pasture report for intended use to corn after the November 15 deadline.
 - Will look into this.
- Can the activity reporting system be tied to an actual person doing the work as it relates to doing work for other counties?
 - This is currently being looked at. We would need a code to account for work being done for another county.
- Why can't Bridges to Opportunity take over for MIDAS?
 - It is more complicated than it might seem. We now have to factor in NRCS so we need a capability to support both agencies. Licensing is also a factor with the software.
- Would Geospatial Reporting Software ever be brought back for crop reporting?
 - Geospatial is a big item for the IT Steering Committee. Less than 10% of data comes from crop insurance to FSA, meaning 90% comes from FSA to crop insurance.
- Regarding donated leave, is there a way for time to be broken down as a dollar amount so 2 hours from a CED would count as 4 hours for a PT to receive?
 - Reworking regulations would be required to achieve this. It's also a budget issue. But, it goes both ways so look at the bigger picture.
- Question regarding acting CEDs and shared management – can these folks get more compensation?
 - There is no move to do this right now. Positions are capped at grade levels.

- Regarding beginning farmer initiatives and disaster programs – a memo was sent to the field from a state office telling them that late-file fees should not be waived. Since when are memos procedure?
 - There are currently lots of provisions for beginning farmers. Memos are not policy but are instructions. Continuous certification should be a solution for some of this.
- What is the vision for NRCS, FSA and RMA?
 - Reorganization is not affecting daily work. It is more about customer service.
- The prior question raises concern about NRCS employees often being in the field and not in offices to assist customers – this adds to FSA’s workload. Also, where does SWCD fit in?
 - The integrity of information within these offices is a concern. Joint staff meetings with NRCS will be important to have conversations about schedules and each other’s programs.
- Question/concern about postcards sent to beginning farmers discussing the new initiative. How should we address concerns raised by current farm operators and landowners?
 - Need to think of a good answer on this one.
- Concern about software and computer access for volunteers in county offices.
 - It is a challenge. Ultimately, they are not federal employees so they are restricted on access and permissions.
- What type of quality control is being done with activity reporting system data?
 - Training has been developed for AgLearn and job aides are available online. Currently working on some changes and exploring options for coding time for work performed for other offices.
- Regarding MPP and the floor for feed costs, farmers are going broke. What can be done?
 - Changes are being implemented and we will be starting over with the program.
- Shared management has become the standard, not the exception. What can be done about accounting for work in sub-office?
 - A task force has been formed to address shared management. We need to establish uniformity for how it should be handled. The same goes for time and activities and how and where it should be coded.
- Regarding MIDAS and crop certification issues – is there any way to “freeze” records at some point during the year so linework can be done without affecting other programs/flags?
 - No answer but will research further.
- Regarding time-off awards, 10 hours can be granted by an immediate supervisor, so why does this get stopped at the state office level?
 - We will talk to state offices.
- Question/concern raised about GS and COF supervisory roles under the new RMA, FSA, NRCS mission area.

- This has not been discussed.
- State raised concern about state office instructing COFs to limit COC meetings to prolong temporary appointments.
 - We will talk to your state office.
- GovDelivery is a good idea but not working in terms of reaching all of our customers. What can be done?
 - An average of 6,000 text subscribers are being added each month. Current engagement rate nationwide is 58%. The return on investment is high. It is also important in terms of a tracking system when appeals are on the table.
- Regarding timesheets and activity reporting system, there is concern about accounting for the amount of time it takes to deliver different programs – i.e. CRP contracts take more time than ARC/PLC contracts.
 - Data is there to distinguish between programs and activities – i.e. signup and eligibility vs. service and maintenance.
- WebTA is a problem and needs fixed. What’s the timeline for this?
 - The project management team has a timeline and proposed changes can be submitted throughout the process.
- Will CRP acreage cap increase before next farm bill?
 - No
- Can the November 15th reporting deadline for hay and pasture be changed back to July 15th for farms without crop insurance?
 - The intent is to streamline acreage reporting dates across the board.
- Concern about district directors overstepping boundaries and disregarding county committees and their role.
 - We don’t deny the fact that the COC is the CED’s boss, but the district director does have supervisory authority on some aspects of the job.

Following the Question and Answer panel, additional speakers from NACS and NASE took the stage, and Robert Payne from Oklahoma addressed attendees with a message about PAC and its importance. The afternoon session adjourned at 4:00. Area and state photos were taken in the lower level of convention center and hotel. A hospitality room was hosted by South Dakota and Kansas from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Social hour began at 5:30 in exhibit hall south, followed by buffet dinner from 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. and scholarship auction from 7:30-9:00 p.m. The evening concluded with a DJ, cash bar and dancing.

Friday, August 4

Friday morning’s session convened at 8:00 a.m. with Vice President Dennis Ray presiding in the Exhibit Hall. Candidacy announcements were made for President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer for the 2017-2018, as follows: Dennis Ray, President; Brandon Wilson, Vice-President; Tammy Eibey, Secretary, Marcinda Kester, Secretary and Kurt Houk, Treasurer. Hunter Moorhead with Crossroads

Strategies and NASCOE Legislative Consultant then took the stage and said he was grateful to members of management for being in attendance. He spoke on President Trump's agenda, including reorganizing government and renegotiating NAFTA. He also spoke to the Secretary's effort to align FSA, RMA and NRCS, and that service to rural America will continue. The Secretary is focused on building a better system to deliver programs to our customers to build a better USDA. A continuing resolution must be passed to keep the government running after September 30. The farm bill will likely not be a full re-write. The House Ag Committee is currently conducting field hearings. Moorhead also touched on the importance of the PAC and contribution funds.

Upon completion of his comments, attendees were dismissed to attend individual break-out sessions for each committee, as follows: Awards, Scholarship & Emblems; Benefits; Legislative; Membership; NAFEC; Programs; and Publicity.

At 10:45, break-out meetings for each area were hosted as follows: Midwest – Chris Hare; Northeast – Richard Csutoras; Northwest – Jenae Prescott; Southeast – David Curtis; Southwest – Darvin Collins. Guests at each meeting included Wes Daniels, Dennis Ray, Brandon Wilson, Tammy Eibey, Hunter Moorhead, John Chott, Marcinda Kester, Chris Hare on behalf of Curt Houk, Teresa Dillard and John Lohr.

Attendees were released for lunch break at noon and hot and cold concessions were available in the commons area. The RASCOE luncheon was held during this time in junior ballroom A&B, with meeting following the meal.

At 1:00 p.m., a joint meeting of all NASCOE committees was called to order in the Exhibit Hall and each committee chair presented reports from their respective meetings. From 1:00 to 3:00, NADD and NAFEC held respective meetings for their membership. Dillard Financial Solutions also held retirement training for interested attendees during this time.

At 2:30 p.m., area meetings reconvened in their respective rooms to finish committee reports, executive nominations and voting and awards. In the Midwest Area, the following states are represented: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin. During the morning session, Jennifer Comer (IA) announced plans for the 2018 Midwest Area Rally, to be held March 22-23 at Marriott Downtown, Des Moines, IA. Candidacy announcements were made for Chris Hare for Midwest Area Executive and Jackson Jones for Midwest Area Alternate Executive. Additional comments were made by Chris Hare regarding contacting zero-member offices, importance of working extra time/overtime without tracking and the SuperPT Task Force to work on reclassification of PT positions. During the afternoon session, Robert Payne addressed membership on the role and importance of the PAC. Voting then took place for Midwest Area Executive and Alternate Executive positions, with Chris Hare and Jackson Jones winning the vote respectively. Committee chairs then presented their reports as follows: Awards – Kathy Balbaugh (OH); Benefits – Jon Williams (WI); Legislative – Kay Lumsden (MI); Programs – Jamie Garriott (IN); Publicity – Teresa Holmquist (MN); Emblems – Tina Young (MO); Scholarship – Charlene Stone (OH); NAFEC – Mary Roberts (IA); and Membership – Leeann Oltmanns (IL). Upon conclusion of committee reports, certificates and awards were presented to members who had served as committee chairs, scholarship judges, and membership/service awards. The MWA meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

The evening's activities included the hospitality room hosted by South Dakota and Kansas from 4:00 to 6:00, and buses began boarding for the Pub Crawl in historic downtown St. Charles at 4:30. Busses continued to run through 7:00 to transport attendees downtown for the pub crawl, dinner and nightlife.

Saturday, August 5

Saturday morning's session convened at 8:00 a.m. with President Wes Daniels presiding in the Exhibit Hall. The "In Memoriam" presentation was shown as a tribute to those who have passed during the last year. Val Dolcini then took the stage on behalf of Dillard Financial Solutions to welcome members. Craig Turner, NAFEC President, followed with a brief recap of the past year's activities and invited membership to join the organization. Jim Iverson, RASCOE President, then addressed membership with a video presentation, highlighted with messages from RASCOE members. South Dakota addressed attendees with remarks about the 2018 National Convention, to be held in Sioux Falls. A motion was then made for the 2019 National Convention to be held in Manhattan, Kansas. No new resolutions were presented on the floor. President Wes Daniels then addressed attendees with a final farewell and thanks to all membership, Committee Chairs, Area Executives and Executive Board. Secretary Deb Esselman took the stage and made her final farewell, encouraging members to take time out of FSA to spend with family and friends. She also spoke on the importance of negotiation items. Treasurer Curt Houk also addressed membership, stressing the importance of the budget and that scholarship money comes directly from donations and the NASCOE account is growing. Following Executive Committee remarks, committee reports were then presented. With no new business to add, instead committee chairs gave a send-off to President Wes Daniels by recognizing him for all his efforts and presenting him with a few fun gifts and recognition. Members voted to accept the committee reports as filed.

Area reports were then presented by Executives, respectively, and members voted to approve as submitted. Vice President Dennis Ray presented Resolutions of Support and Appreciation to NAFEC, RASCOE, and MASCOE. Tina Young announced results and winners from the silent auction. The nomination and election of NASCOE Officers for 2017-2018 then took place. Curt Houk was nominated and delegates voted for his position as Treasurer. Marcinda Kester and Tammy Eibey were nominated for the position of Secretary. Delegates voted via silent ballot and Marcinda Kester won the vote unanimously. Brandon Wilson was nominated and delegates voted for his position as Vice President. Dennis Ray was nominated and delegates voted for his position as President. MASCOE President Jared Singer made a few closing announcements and thanked membership for their attendance. Robert Payne then announced winners of the PAC contest. Wes Daniels gave his final thanks to membership. A motion to adjourn was made at 11:10 a.m.

Following the morning general session, all current and newly-elected officers, executives and committee chairs met from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday evening festivities included social hour beginning at 5:00 p.m. in Exhibit Hall South, dinner served beginning at 6:30 p.m., followed by the banquet and program. Awards and scholarships were presented for First Timer's, Distinguished Service Awards and special recognition to Area Executives, Committee Chairs, Executive Board and MASCOE. Following the banquet, Jared Singer and Daryl Raithel pulled the winners for the MASCOE raffle and announced the results. Following the raffle drawing, attendees enjoyed live music and dancing through midnight.