

**2007 Iowa Joint Convention
IASCOE/IACS
Friday, March 30, 2007**

Place: Stoney Creek Lodge, Johnston, IA
Time: 1:00 pm

Call to Order: Dee Ann Simmons-Lehn, IASCOE
President



Derryl McLaren-Iowa SED: His goal was to be a hog farmer, but needed some other jobs to pay for it. He discussed how much agriculture has changed in a year. He discussed how REX affected Iowa and that 60% of CRP acres were affected by REX, while doing all the signature reviews at the same time. He also discussed how much things have changed for FSA in the last year. GIS reconciliation has been difficult but everyone has worked hard and things are being accomplished. This has been a time of hard work and frustration for employees. He discussed the Farm Bill proposals set forth by the Secretary and the role FSA has in American agriculture. He discussed how the number of retirements are beginning to have an impact on the experience of FSA employees. He congratulated the leadership in Washington. He described Mark Keenum's background and stated how good it was for FSA to have a person with his background and ability to lead USDA, he described Mr. Keenum as the "pick of the litter".

Judy Rains-President IACS introduced Ms. Lasseter and described her background.

Teresa Lasseter-FSA Administration: She wants learn what works and what doesn't work and by coming out to the field, it enables her to find out what is needed. She loved FSA from the day she walked in the door as a temp and agriculture is very important. She talked about her background and how the background probably prepared her for her present position. She thought she was retired until 2005 and was called to interview for the Administrator position. She wanted the job ONLY if she were the most qualified person and feels confident that she WAS the most qualified. There are 2 associate administrators and 5 Deputy Administrators and they meet every week with the Administrator to discuss hot issues. Communication is very important. She discussed the following topics:

- **IT:** This has been a terrible situation and finally we have the attention of the Secretary. He has provided OMB-300 plan and that was delivered to the Hill. This is to find a way to finance our IT system. The cost is phenomenal: \$50 million to get it stabilized and \$20 million is needed immediately. Will cost about \$500 million dollars to update our present IT system. All of the contractors have said that we need to find a different way to deliver our service. The problem should be fixed sooner than later since everyone is aware of the problem. We will have a better operation.
- **Farm Bill Proposal:** Every county office will receive a copy of the Secretary's proposal. The Secretary needs to be commended on his effort. He held 52 listening sessions in 48 states with 4,000 comments that were analyzed. The Secretary does not write the Farm Bill, but this provides a basis for starting discussion on the Farm Bill debate started early. This will be an exciting year for FSA with the new Farm Bill development.

- **Reorganization:** She had to come up with a plan to provide better service. Please help when called on because some people will be asked to help. We need to do business in a better way.
- **OIG:** Some offices are being reviewed and they are to determine if the COF's are doing a better job according to the Administrator's certification. Everyone must be very careful to do the second party review and do a good job. OIG is examining the review process that FSA is using. She feels good about the results of the reviews.
- **Dr. Mark Keenum-Under Secretary for USDA:** He comes to the administrator's office and reviews problems with her staff. He is an advocate for FSA. He has a doctorate in Ag Economics. He is a very careful person and weighs all factors before he makes a decision:
- **Office Restructure:** This must happen across the county. If we are structured properly, then we don't have to change. 58 offices have no employees and over 100 offices have only one employee, however, due to present legislation, there is a set process to follow before any office can be closed. She described the very slow and time-consuming process before an office closure can be approved. FSA Tomorrow was one of the main reasons why she came back to FSA and felt that FSA Tomorrow was not the right solution. We all want to stay focused on the mission of the agency and that is to be where the farmers need us and the offices have to be sufficiently staffed based on today's needs, not from the 1930's. She has lost some close personal friends over office restructuring, but she will remain focused on the needs of our country's farmers.
- **Security:** We need to be aware of security and let the STO know of any type of breach. We need to be aware of how we do business and be careful of information.
- **Moral:** She reminded everyone that we live in the greatest country in the world and ag is one of the top things that we can be thankful for. FSA plays a major role in helping farmers be successful and we need to be thankful of the impact we have on agriculture. She appreciates all employees and the job they do.

Q: Workload: Why did they cease the last workload counts before they replaced it with something else?

A: Lasseter: Was not aware that they did not get the new system in place at this time. She will look into this when she gets back to Washington.

Q: Budget: Have tremendous backlog of Beginning Farmer funds and how is the budget going to handle this?

A: Lasseter: Ms Cooksie has reported to congress that we need to have more money to fund the needed loans, but money is hard to get.

Q: Moral: States used to have a wellness day for the employees. Most counties also have a YMCA or something similar, could USDA work out some type of discount for membership?

A: Lasseter: this is a great idea and perhaps the employee association could work on this. The government is very restricted on this type of activity, so perhaps the employee associations would have greater latitude in this respect.

Q: Signature authority: FSA-211 is the acceptable form, but why can't a form be put together that would be acceptable for payment limitation purposes?

A: Lasseter: KC-616 has been introduced to work on this very item. She is working on this item very hard because signature authority has been the biggest problem this year.

Q: Budget: Staff ceilings are supposed to be tied to workload, but it seems to be more budget driven.

A: Lasseter: Ceilings are tied into workload. However, everything must follow the allotted budget, but at the same time, FSA has not been funded properly for the last 3 years. Travel has been a large issue. If there had not been some carryover, we would be in big trouble. NRCS and RD have the same problems.

Q: Restructuring: Have some offices actually closed so far?

A: Lasseter: 2 offices have closed in Alaska. Virginia proposed 9 office closures and this is to begin in July. Other states proposals to close offices: Texas-25, Georgia-19, Kentucky-14, Wyoming-2. We must keep service to our farmers as our first priority. There are 28 plans submitted so far, Iowa is not one of them. Any states that have no office closures already have so few offices they cannot close any more.

Q: Consolidating state offices: has there been discussion on consolidating state offices?

A: Lasseter: there were no recommendations to consolidate any state office. There will be a National office review done soon. DERRYL They want some presence in each state. State offices are classed as small, medium and large. There have been studies on efficiencies based on the number of employees needed for the workload. There was at least one model office in each area to compare with. Must look at program complexity, not just volume, even for the state offices.

Q: Training. Need training for all the new employees.

A: Lasseter: She knows that we need training and proper equipment, but this is something that she discusses with congress, but she is hindered by lack of resources. As far as COTS and FLOTS, Carolyn Cooksie had come to Teresa with the number of future retirements and suggested the pool for FLOTS and Teresa added the COTS to this pool. 50 positions were approved for this pool for the states to use to get new employees trained and it would not count against the state's budget. DERRYL: discussed the levels of retirements in Iowa. The number of eligible retirements will increase in the near future, but the difference between new hire salaries and older salaries is not significant enough to make a difference.

Q: How can we streamline new employee clearance? Can take 3-4 months to get clearance.

A: Lasseter: FSA is limited to the security requirements demanded by congress. This same thing happens even in Washington with new employees. Derryl: This creates a problem with managing because many times a person will reverse their decision to retire and this creates a disruption in the entire process. Iowa put out authorization for 28 hires in January based on anticipated retirements and this has proven to work well with backfilling those positions timely.

Award to Ms. Lasseter; She was presented with a IASCOE Certificate of Appreciation for her Service to IASCOE. She thanked everyone who is an employee association member. She was given gifts from Iowa. (an Iowa T-shirt, John Deere item and some Blue Cheese made in Newton)

J.M. Marketing-James Mace: Introduced his wife and another agent: Discussed the following:

Cancer Policy: you can get \$100 for Wellness Benefit. The intensive care policy is part of the cancer policy. This is an excellent benefit that is available due to the extreme costs of air e-vac and intensive care. Have paid \$21 million to NASCOE members to date.

Long Term Care: actual risk of ending up in nursing home is over 50%, the average cost for home care is over \$38,000 and nursing home care costs over \$50,000. The average couple will be broke in about 13 weeks of nursing home care. Medicare pays \$.18 on the dollar needed for long term care. Loyal America provided a brochure showing the the American Hospital Association endorsement of the long term care policy that JM Marketing has available. JM Marketing can provide information on costs of long term care. 30% of all nursing home stays is for people under 50 years old. Pays for assisted living, home health care, or nursing home care. It is a **life-time benefit**, not only for 3 years. 25% discount for each spouse if enroll together. He described the policy for married couples. There is inflation protection built into the policy. 4 people in MO signed up in the last week after comparing to the Long Term Care offered by the government. There are many good features for this policy and everyone should at least look at it. It is an outstanding program and the only one endorsed by the American Hospital Association. He reviewed a chart that described policy benefits.

COC is eligible if a member of NAFEC or an associate member of NASCOE.

Legislative: Cindy Mensen: Did role call for each district. Booklets were passed out and the minutes were published in the booklet. Motion was approved to waive the reading and approve the minutes.

Trice Smith, NASCOE Legislative Chair: Trice discussed her co-chair and the Legislative Conference. There were 200 people who came for the conference, including some farmers. She talked about the general session and the speakers at the session. On Tuesday, visits were made on the hill. Later on Tuesday, there was a reception held for key contacts held at a restaurant. They felt the reception was successful. NASCOE presented McIntire of North Carolina and Chambliss from Georgia the Clyde Payne Award for work with ag. Position papers are on the NASCOE website. Please review the papers and the talking points. She discussed each position paper and highlighted the important points in each paper. NACD and NASCOE are working on a joint paper to present to Congress that will bring out the point that FSA should administer conservation programs and NRCS provide technical support. A bill was introduced on the Whistleblower act and probably will come up again soon. S-944 has been introduced that would stop all county office closures until a review should be done on national and state offices. There is another bill that would stop office closures until the next farm bill is passed.

Tammy Eibey, Midwest Area Legislative Chair She discussed the points in the position paper describing employee benefits and that FSA employees are not covered by the Whistleblower Act. Health insurance coverage for children up to 25 is also something that was discussed with congress. **CAPWIZ:** The Midwest has 34% of the nation's total. Iowa has 187 (37.7%) members. She reminded everyone that they have to scroll to the bottom of an alert, you must scroll down to the bottom of the alert and hit SEND. Otherwise, the alert does not go to the congress person. Renewal for CAPWIZ will be decided at the National Convention. There are 37 state CAPWIZ coordinators that Tammy works with and she monitors CAPWIZ activity. **PAC:** NASCOE decided this was a necessary tool and she hoped everyone would consider using. PAC money is used to help congress people who support NASCOE/FSA to get reelected.

Barry:Terhark Discussed his experience at the Legislative Conference as a new participant. He told about how important it was to send the same message to ALL legislators at the same time.

Benefits: Kathy White: Telephone discounts available from many companies. Can contact Kathy for more information on this and any other benefit available. Ag Learn does have retirement training available. She discussed many benefits that members can take advantage of. The site www.gov.purchasingpower.com has more information.

Administration :From the IA STO: Dennis Olson and Patti Murray:

Dennis: Has handouts for employees to review. Discussed retirement and what information the handouts have regarding that topic. Have about 10 people in the administrative division. Good to get new people in the agency. He discussed retirement issues and topics. The handbook states that training is to be given every two years, but circumstances are such that training has not been held as outlined in the handbook. Have partnered with Federal Executive Council and have been able to provide yearly training. He discussed the changes in the agency in the last year. There are 40 people could retire right now in Iowa; next year would be 64. In five years 221 could retire (this includes GS employees). Have had 65 COF and 20 GS retire in the last 5 years. Iowa has hired back 150 people. Put on 41 new employees just last year.

Patti: Discussed retirement benefits and told how important it is to understand your retirement benefits. She reviewed some common questions that they have received. Suggests looking seriously asking about benefit printouts about 6 months in advance. Discussed the process of hiring a new employee. The process can take up to 3 months if forms are not completed properly. It is different for temps. Cost about \$100 per employee to process security clearance. There was a question and answer session after their presentations.

Financial Advisor: Ed Brown and Joshua Katcher: Discussed retirement planning and what their company can do to aid in such planning. Their services are not available in all states.

Conventions Midwest Rally on May 4-5. Information is on the Midwest Website

IL/MO Next year's convention will be March 14.

Indiana: March 30

Iowa: March 30-31 Administrator is scheduled to be there

Wisconsin: April 20-21 at Green Bay.

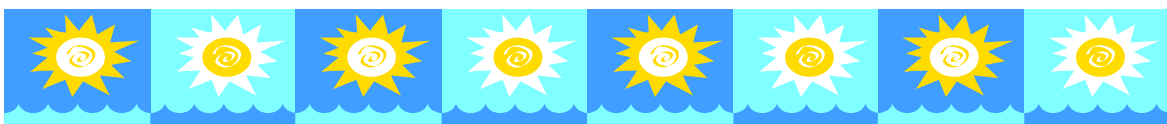
Minnesota: July, date to be announced

Ohio: November

Adjourned at 5:00 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Deborah Esselman, WI
Guest Attendee



**2007 Iowa Joint Convention
IASCOE/IACS
Saturday, March 31, 2007**

Place: Stoney Creek Lodge, Johnston, IA

Time: 8:30 am

Call to Order: Dee Ann Simmons-Lehn, IASCOE President

Awards Presentation: Scholarships and Distinguished Service Awards were presented.

Introduction of new officers: Steven Kennedy took over as president and resided at the balance of the meeting.

Invocation: Alan Donaldson

National Anthem: Rex Wittrock

Pledge of Allegiance: James Magel

Military Tribute: Deb Esselman-Baird, WI

Committee Reports: The chairpersons read the reports from the meetings held on Friday, March 30.

J.M. Marketing-James Mace: He discussed Long Term Care: reminded everyone of the benefits of Long Term Care Insurance and will be available to answer any questions:

Iowa State Committee: Mr. Peterson: There is a new class of COT's that started and district COC meetings were held across the states. Communication is so very important and by holding meetings with the COC's, it enables the STC to be able to understand circumstances in the COF. He discussed how difficult it has been recently and he congratulated the employees for all the hard work they do.

Paul Clark-NAFEC past Secretary/Treasurer:

History of NAFEC: Started in 1965 in Iowa. Some of early officers were from Iowa. Iowa folks have given NAFEC a good start. He stated the mission statement and goal of NAFEC, which is to support the COC and county office system to provide good service to the farmers.

Legislative: NAFEC has encouraged congress to hold off on county office closures until the new farm bill is passed.

Office Closures: He feels the administrator is a fine leader, but she is in a tough position. NAFEC understands that offices with no employees must be looked at, but not necessarily closed automatically. He does not feel that the producers are being taken into consideration when they are proposing current office consolidations. Many producers are not happy with some proposals that have been submitted. From 1933 to 1953 the COC overlooked the county offices. In 1953, CED's were allowed to run the office. The COC was allowed to negotiate office leasing.

Leasing: County offices were allowed to negotiate leases by statute. NAFEC supports that control be given back to the COF.

COC Authority: He reminded everyone that we should be giving the COC work and be sure to keep them informed of work and situations in the COF. Many times there are regulations prohibiting COC oversight.

Moral: Very negative moral at this time and it is probably the worst he has seen in a long time.

He introduced Dennis Kuhlengel, the current NAFEC president.

Jonathan Williams, Midwest Alternate Exec: He is very impressed with the Iowa association and how organized and fun the convention is. Jon talked about his background with WASCOE. He discussed the following:

Legislative: He discussed the alliance with the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). NASCOE and NACD agree that FSA should do the administrative work for compliance and NRCS should do the technical work in the next farm bill.

Negotiation Session: Each year NASCOE meets with FSA management and that meeting will be held in April. Many items will be brought up, such as whistleblower protection, CRP, etc. Program efficiencies will also be discussed. Program committee has been effective in obtaining some program changes. The submission form is on the NASCOE website.

PT Classification: took a back burner to FSA office closures, but Mark Van Hoose is now on a task force to re-examine the classification and try to get PT's a higher grade level based on program complexity. Please submit job descriptions to Jon or Mark.

Farm Bill: Don't know what will be in the farm bill, but FSA wants to be a major player. Different roles that FSA can play in the bill have been discussed with Congress.

Office Closures: NASCOE will support state plans if the employee association agrees with it. Many SED's do not obtain the state association support for such plans and this creates problems in the state. Some offices need to be closed, but we need to look at why some offices have no employees and remain open. S-944 Bill seeks to halt office closures until state and national offices are reviewed first. Some counties need to make changes, but the service to our farmers has to be the first consideration.

Whistleblower Protection: We took the on-line training, but FSA employees are not protected by it. NASCOE is seeking legislation to change this.

Performance Plans: No real guidelines on how to do these correctly. There is a desk guide available. Contact Jon for the web address.

Membership/PAC/CAPWIZ: have been discussed prior to this. Tammy Eibey does an excellent job of tracking CAPWIZ and keeping it organized. PAC, every little bit counts and helps. Payroll allotments allow a steady cash flow to be used by the PAC when needed. The purpose is to help the congressperson who is supportive of our cause. Robert Redding, our Washington consultant proposes who and where the PAC donation should go and NASCOE approves or disproves the recommendation.

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Minnesota: July 19-20, details to be announced

Ohio: November

Candidacy Announcements:

Jon Williams announced his candidacy for Midwest Area Exec

Dee Ann Simmons-Lehn announced her candidacy for Midwest Area Alternate Exec.

Dee read an announcement for NASCOE Vice President by Myron Stroup.

Stress Relief-Becky Fleming: Gave a motivational talk regarding stress relief.

Adjourned at 12:15 pm

**Respectfully Submitted,
Deborah Esselman, WI
Guest Attendee**