



National Association of FSA County Office Employees Committee Name

NASCOE Legislative Committee Post Convention Report National Convention College Station, TX

August 2-6, 2023

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We would like to first say THANK YOU to the Texas delegation for hosting a fabulous convention in College Station. It absolutely was a great convention! The hotel and the activities planned were wonderful.

The NASCOE Legislative Committee meeting was called to order by Clint Bain, Co-Chairperson. We recognized all area chairpersons, as well as other past and present NASCOE leadership in the room. Thank you to each of our Area Legislative Chairs that were in attendance. We appreciate all the incredible work they have put in during the year and especially at the convention assisting with the promotion of the PAC. We have the best committee members in all NASCOE.

David and Clint covered the following topics during the first Legislative Committee Break out session:

1. Secure FY2024 Appropriations for FSA Salaries and Expenses
2. PAC Promotion
3. Outreach and Advocacy Initiative
4. HR 4268 Federal Retirement Fairness Act
5. Changes to LFP Application and supporting documentation deadline.
6. Increase in pay for PTs and Shared Management CEDs
7. 2023 Farm Bill

We would like to thank Hunter Moorhead, NASCOE Legislative Consultant, for attending and presenting information pertaining to the 2024 Agriculture Appropriations and the 2023 Farm Bill. Hunter does an excellent job of representing our members in Washington D.C. We took note of every item discussed during his time meeting with each respective Area.

Farm Bill Workshop

We also were fortunate to have both Hunter Moorhead and Dr. Joe Outlaw, Professor of Agriculture Economics at Texas A&M University host a question-and-answer session during our second Legislative Committee breakout session. Both gave their perspectives on the 2023 Farm Bill timeline as well as what changes they believe could be in the upcoming bill. This was a great introduction to Dr. Outlaw and segway to his breakout session held later that afternoon. Dr. Outlaw has played a crucial role in multiple Farm Bills over the last 3 decades and was instrumental in the writing of the ARCPLC program in the 2014 Farm Bill. On Friday afternoon, Dr. Outlaw hosted what turned out to be a standing room only workshop on 2023 Farm Bill policy in which over 65 members attended including FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux and Brenda Carlson, FSA Chief Communications Service.

Stakeholder Engagement Workshop

Vice President Joel Foster asked the Legislative Committee if there would be interest in hosting a Stakeholder Engagement Workshop during one of the breakout sessions, and we immediately jumped on this opportunity to have Amanda Ahrens, KASCOE Outreach and Advocacy Team Leader, to lead the workshop during the convention. We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude towards Amanda for sharing her knowledge and firsthand experiences during the breakout session. She did an outstanding job representing KASCOE and NASCOE. Thank you, Amanda!

Legislative Issues

The Legislative Committee discussed what it will be working on this year, and the list continues to grow. Each year, agriculture appropriations is a primary focus as we work to ensure FSA funding for salaries and expenses is sufficient to support our on-board employees, back-fill vacancies, and account for the increases due to cost-of-living adjustments, the agency portion of health insurance and TSP contributions. One of the Committee's primary responsibilities each fiscal year is the Agriculture Appropriations bill which ensures FSA has the necessary salary and expense funding to support the on-board employees, back-fill vacancies, and account for the increases due to cost-of-living adjustments, the agency portion of health insurance and TSP contributions. The NASCOE Legislative Committee worked with Ag-related stakeholders and Congressional members to help secure a \$53.9 million increase in the FY 2023 Agriculture Appropriations Bill signed by the President in December 2022.

For FY 2024, many USDA Government Agencies have had their funding reduced; however, FSA funding levels are encouraging. On June 15, 2023, the House Committee on Appropriations proposed a \$1.521 billion dollar budget which did not increase or decrease FSA's salaries and expenses funding from the FY 2023 level. On June 22, 2023, the Senate Committee on Appropriations approved the FY 2024 Agricultural Appropriations Bill. The Senate's bill proposed a \$15.8 million increase in funding of FSA Salaries and Expenses above the FY 2023 funding levels. The Legislative Committee continues to monitor how the recent Debt Ceiling legislation will impact the upcoming FY 2024 budget negotiations and funding levels which could present potential monetary challenges for Government Agencies.

Starting salaries for PT's continue to be a serious obstacle to the Agency's ability to hire and retain quality employees. The House Committee on Appropriations is concerned about FSA's ability to attract and retain field staff to do FSA's critical work in rural communities. The Committee is also concerned that local FSA offices are tasked with implementing new programs with little notice. The Committee directed the Secretary to report on a plan to address retention and communication between FSA offices and the national office. The House Committee included language directing the Secretary to focus hiring efforts on USDA field offices to fulfill USDA's mission and serve the nation's farmers, ranchers, and rural communities.

There are continuing priorities for the Legislative Committee including securing legislation that allows employees to buy back temporary time so it can be applied towards retirement calculations. This is a big ask that affects all federal employees, but it remains our number one priority when it comes to benefits legislation. This year we have added a couple more legislative bills to our wish list. The first of those is HR 82, Social Security Fairness Act or better known as the Windfall Elimination Repeal Act. This legislation affects retirees that had outside income in

addition to their federal career. We expect to see this bill come to the floor during this Congress for a vote and based on recent conversations with congressional members as well as the bill having over 288 co-sponsors, we think it has a good chance of passing. The final bill we are endorsing is HR 866, Equal COLA Act. This bill is of tremendous interest to FERS employees. Passage of this legislation would allow FERS retirees to participate in the full calculated COLA each year just like CSRS retirees. We are hopeful these bills will gain additional support.

Outreach and Advocacy

The Legislative Committee will continue to encourage states to work aggressively to develop their own outreach and advocacy initiatives with congressional members and farm organizations. There is a great deal of work needed in this area, but the tools are there to successfully train and prepare state association advocacy groups to meet with these representatives to discuss issues that affect our offices. We have developed talking points for congressional and stakeholder meetings as well as similar talking points for meetings with FSA personnel. We commend the Kansas Association for its continued efforts to further the stakeholder relationships they have built over the years. This is a rewarding endeavor, and we look forward to assisting more states this coming year.

Equity Commission

A priority for the Legislative Committee again this year will be the close monitoring of the Equity Commission Committee meetings held in March and June 2023. This past year, the commission issued 31 interim recommendations including re-evaluating the purpose and role of FSA County Committees. The USDA Equity Commission Recommendations have been released via the FPAC- FSA Equity Action Plan-July 2023. We will continue to voice our support for the Elected FSA County Committee System and direct our attention and efforts towards any group who seeks to terminate the most unique grassroots system in the Federal Government.

Leadership Development Training

The Legislative Committee will be leading the way in planning a 2024 Leadership Development Training. The Executive Committee approved funding in the 2024 Budget to accomplish this goal. We will be seeking out two individuals to serve as Co-Coordinator of the event. This event has become an outstanding springboard for NASCOE leadership at the State, Area, and National Levels.

The NASCOE PAC

The importance of the NASCOE PAC cannot be overstated. The money spent on political campaigns these days is staggering. The fundraising machine never stops in WDC. A major part of the funding for these campaigns comes from PAC donations. Although the NASCOE PAC might not be flushed with hundreds of thousands of dollars, our collective contributions have a considerable influence. It is the adage, "you help me, and I'll help you" game. It is imperative that NASCOE continues to work hard to promote our PAC. The formula is simple: No PAC = No influence = No voice = No benefits. If we do not have a seat at the table, we may just find ourselves on the menu. It is quite a simple equation; we need every member to support the PAC!

During the NASCOE Convention, the PAC generated a total of 18 new enrollments and 14 increases for a total increase of \$161 per pay period. This brings the total contributions per pay period to \$3,319.

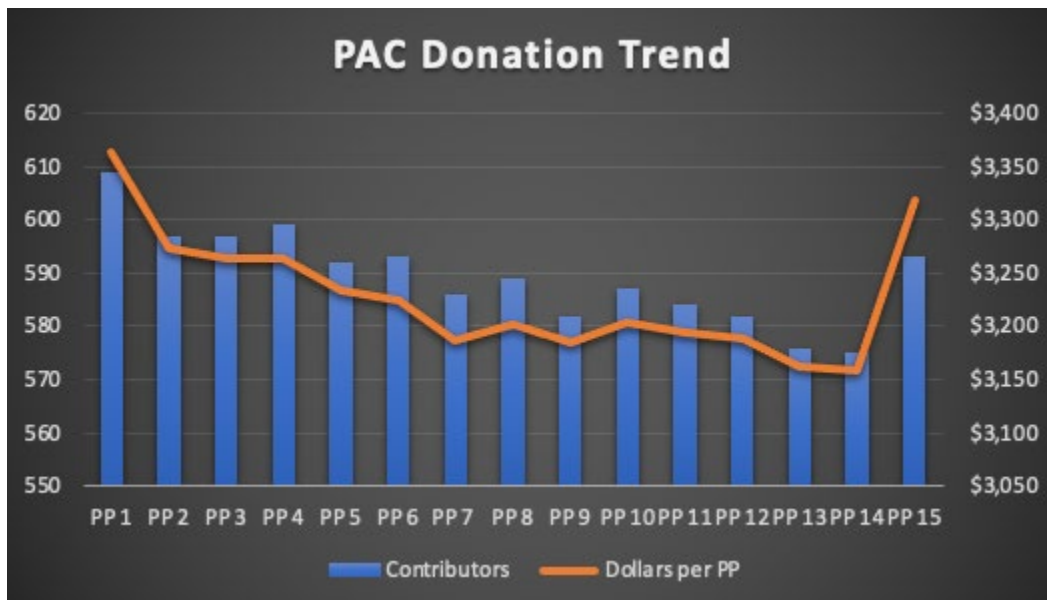
This is testament to how successful we can be when face-to-face meetings are conducted with membership. The NASCOE Legislative Team will continue to work hard to build NASCOE's PAC so we can thrive as an association, but we continue to need YOUR help to continue our rise. Nancy Ensminger has done an outstanding job managing and coordinating the PAC.

PAC Signups from convention:

14 increases \$64

18 new enrollments \$97

Resulting in total contributors 593 @ \$3319



Legislative Consultant

Hunter Moorhead, our NASCOE Legislative Consultant continues to maintain and build relationships with key congressional members. He presented a Legislative update to the membership during the General Session, and answered questions during the Legislative Committee Breakout Session, and area meetings. He is well connected within the political circles inside the beltline on both sides of the isle. Hunter does an excellent job in representing our members. However, occasionally, an urgent need for member relationships could be called upon to help reinforce NASCOE's position. It is important that each of us do our part to build and cultivate congressional relationships and use every opportunity to educate those leaders on the role of NASCOE, FSA and production agriculture.

Conclusion

This past year has been another exciting but challenging year for the Legislative team. We look forward to the upcoming year as we build new relationships with dozens of new members in Congress. It will be a year that will motivate us to work harder to communicate the story of NASCOE and the challenges our members face on the front lines of agriculture in America. We will also look for new ways to educate FSA employees on the value of NASCOE membership and the value of the NASCOE PAC.

The chairpersons would like to express our sincere appreciation to our Area Chairs, and to our Executive Officers for the assistance they have provided us with during the past year. Our effectiveness would be diminished if it were not for their hard work and the amazing work of our Legislative Consultant, Hunter Moorhead. We would like to thank President Kester for her confidence in us to lead NASCOE in our legislative priorities and affording us the opportunity to serve the members of this great association.

Respectfully Submitted,

Clint Bain and David McBryde
NASCOE Legislative Committee Co-Chairpersons