From the Desk of the SWA Executive

This report will be my last report as SWA Executive to be published in our SWA Bulletin. The last two years have passed quickly with many changes and issues coming before the NASCOE Executive Board. I would like to thank Jay Goff, SWA Alternate and our SWA Committee Chairs that have served in leadership positions during my tenure as SWA Executive. Nothing can be accomplished without a team effort from each team member. Let’s take a moment and reflect back over the last two years in the SWA. Our SWA Bulletin has continued on a quarterly basis and has become the model within NASCOE of communication between area leadership and members. Our SWA Publicity Chair Carla Spencer has done a wonderful job with continuing the great tradition of our SWA Bulletin as well as putting SWA updates on the NASCOE Face book. I believe communication to our membership is one of the most important benefits as NASCOE membership. Secondly, Robert Payne, our SWA Legislative Chair has done a wonderful job increasing PAC membership within the Southwest Area. As we begin 2018 Farm Bill Hearings and enter the era of reorganization of USDA, our NASCOE PAC will be needed to protect our FSA jobs and benefits. Our SWA NAFEC Chair, Jay Goff has a passion for our FSA County Committee System and has did a great job in promoting NAFEC membership in the SWA and working side by side with our NAFEC President, Craig Turner. LaCresha Dale, SWA Program Chair and Lynette Bond, SWA Legislative Consultant both have facilitated ideas and concerns from membership on ways to improve our work environment, program software, program procedure, and numerous other concerns and negotiating issues which have been brought to the attention of FSA management in WDC. Our NASCOE negotiation meetings in 2016 and 2017 have been most productive with many concessions won from management. Hopefully our final resolution of 2017 negotiation items will be publish soon. Darcie Tietjen, SWA Awards/Scholarship Chair, has done a great job in timely processing and scoring our SWA scholarship and DSA applications this year. Thanks to Angie Bierman for stepping up this year as our SWA Benefits Chair and also are proud of Brenda Estrada stepping up and serving as NASCOE Benefits Chair. Probably the hardest job goes to Ruth Ford our SWA membership chair who followed Angie Bierman chairing this important committee. Membership is without a doubt the greatest challenge facing NASCOE as an employee organization in the coming years of declining staffing. In 2016 Nevada came back over 50% membership and that made the SWA 100% in states with NASCOE state affiliated associations.

Where are we at today as an agency and as county office employees within FSA? First, don’t get overly excited over all the rumors that you hear...
and read. Yes the President’s budget call for reductions in USDA and FSA but rarely is the President’s budget passed as proposed. Reorganization of USDA is still an unknown at this time as each agency within USDA is submitting plans of efficiencies which are due June 30th. Until USDA Under Secretaries are appointed along with FSA Administrator, SED, and STC’s, don’t expect to see much movement on reorganization.

My concerns for FSA county offices and our county office employees are as follows:

- Workload measurement system that accurately reflects the work completed and work not completed by inadequate staffing must be developed and used to staff our FSA county offices. FSA management has been working over the past couple of year developing such a system using ARS and metrics but so far unwilling to implement this system.
- Vacant PT and CED positions in COF’s which are under ceiling should be backfilled to alleviate workload on over stressed employees that remain in the COF and ensure customer service to producers is maintained. Currently, 1 PT and myself are the staff of 2 COF’s (ceiling of 4) covering 3 counties in TX. This is not only inefficient use of staffing running between two offices, but is causing undue stress and fatigue on employees. Similar understaffed COF’s can be found across the SWA during times of drought, wildfire, tornadoes, and flood.
- Any reorganization of USDA should utilize the program delivery system of our FSA County Committees which were in fact designed from private sector corporate board of directors. Our history and efficiency in administering federal farm programs is unmatched.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity and privilege to serve you as SWA Executive! We held two awesome rallies in San Diego and San Antonio with CHASCOE and TASCOE stepping up and hitting it out of the park! It was truly a joy and exciting ride and the best part of serving membership was getting out and meeting each of you along the way!

Thank You and God Bless!
Darvin Collins, SWA Executive

SWA Exec Report, cont.

Check out the several NASCOE Scholarship opportunities for 2018 and get your application submitted!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholarship Type</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional</strong></td>
<td>for graduating high school seniors and college freshman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area is $1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National is $2500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open Continuing Scholarship</strong></td>
<td>Is a catchall, anyone that has won the traditional scholarship, children of members that are in their second, third, and fourth years of college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area is $250</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National is $1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Member Continuing Education</strong></td>
<td>Open to Members only</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Area is $250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National is $1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult Child Continuing Ed</strong></td>
<td>5 hours or less as required by their employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National only $250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grandchildren of Members</strong></td>
<td>National only $500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Associate Member</strong></td>
<td>National only $500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**DSA’s**
Take the time to nominate - recognition motivates and inspires.

Distinguished Service Awards come in all sizes!! NASCOE awards three DSA’s each year

- **Service to FSA Agriculture**
- **Service to Community**
- **Service to NASCOE**

All state winners get submitted for Area consideration and those winners go on to the National level to compete. Each state winner could be a 3-time winner!!

If you have a PT or CED that is deserving of a DSA, submit your nominations by January 1, 2018.

Distinguished Service Awards are a great benefit to membership! As public servants, most of us don’t do this job for recognition or appreciation. But, being recognized - feeling appreciated - sure does feel good when it is earned, deserved, and genuine!
Thinking back over my time at FSA, as many of us can do, you will quickly realize how much change has happened over the years. This agency continually strives to provide the American Agricultural Producer with service and resources. Obviously some of the changes are more welcome than others, and that is what NASCOE/NAFEC and state affiliates are charged with protecting. It’s always reassuring to see the passion of so many employees across the nation, not only for their jobs, but for the people we serve. This concept of personal relationships between the federal government and the people we serve is a hard concept for many to fathom in today’s world. Understandably so, that is why we need to be more diligent in telling our story and bringing the concept of our organization/COC system to light. This seems like a simple, and possibly meaningless task, but is it? I look back over the past few years and reflect on legislative trips and outreach meetings where the realization of not only our impact, but our knowledge and relationships built across the counters in our offices has not been realized. For many outside of the COF we are revered as a facilitator of programs. While that may be a task that we perform, I believe we are much more than that when it comes to our services. After participating in outreach meetings in a few states, it is invigorating to see the opportunities to tell our story and play a part in molding our future, Today! I want to encourage everyone to take an active role, whether it be in your state affiliate or possibly on your own, having conversations and telling our story. Thru educating the public, they will realize the relevance and value of what we do comes back to them three times a day! If your state does not currently have an outreach plan, please don’t hesitate to contact Darvin, Robert, or myself, because we will help you get it off the ground and rolling so you too can see the opportunities and help plant the seed for our future, Today!

Lastly I want to give a special thanks to Darvin, for his leadership, time, efforts, countless hours of dedication to NASCOE and all employees of this great agency. It’s invigorating and contagious, as many of you that have served well know, to be a part of something that is bigger than yourself with integrity. Also want to thank all of the leadership, not only in the SWA but within all state affiliates, because of your efforts to help make this agency better, not just for employees, but also for an industry that helps feed the world!

God Bless,
Jay Goff

Be sure you are following the NASCOE blog at www.nascoe.org for real-time updates on blog postings. NASCOE continuously posts program submission responses, legislative updates, News Flashes and much more here. As soon as a blog post gets submitted, you receive an email notification if you are following!
Don’t Let the Next Opportunity Pass You By!!

This new administration is certainly doing things differently than we have seen in the recent past. The Trump Administration has been slow to place people in the roles we are accustomed to seeing filled soon after Inauguration. Does that mean that things have stopped moving for USDA in Washington, D.C.? That question could be answered in a variety of different ways depending on your point of view.

From a programs standpoint, things have slowed down considerably. From a personnel standpoint, hiring has come to a screeching halt and employee vacancies have started piling up. With different announcements from the Office of the President and the Secretary of Agriculture, rumors have run rampant about reorganization, retirement benefits and the direction of USDA-FSA.

The two most common questions I have been asked over the past several months are "What are we to make out of all of this?" and ‘What is NASCOE doing about it?’ NASCOE continues to work tirelessly on your behalf. There is non-stop effort being applied to a multitude of different issues from expanding the Grade 8 Program Technician to the future of FSA and everything in-between.

I know! I know!! I can talk about those things all day long. How in the world does the run of the mill member know anything about those things? They don’t and they won’t. There is only one way for you to really know what is going on within your State organization and/or NASCOE. I encourage you to get more involved! If you are interested, there are some great opportunities coming up to help you get more plugged in.

TASCOE and OKASCOE are both having state conventions over the third weekend in July. TASCOE’s State Convention is being held in Lubbock, Texas at the Overton Hotel and Conference Center. For more information about the TASCOE Convention, see the following website: https://tascoe.org/why-join/ convention/. OKASCOE’s State Convention will be held at Sequoyah State Park on Fort Gibson Lake. For more information about the OKASCOE State Convention, see the following website: http://www.okascoe.org/tp40/page.asp?ID=334935. If you are able to participate in one of these events, it will be well worth your time. Both events will have NASCOE Officers in attendance as well as members of the SWA leadership team, and NAFEC. If you are interested in hearing more about what’s going on, this is a great opportunity and may be close enough to home to make it possible. There is still time to register for these events.

If you really want to be in the know, the NASCOE National Convention is the place to be. This year’s convention will be held in St. Charles Missouri on August 2nd through August 5th. Not only will you have an opportunity to hear NASCOE Officers and Executives speak, you will have an opportunity to attend breakout sessions under each of the different chair positions and area meeting where business will be conducted that is more focused on the region in which you are a member. One of the highlights of the meeting is getting to hear from FSA brass. To be able to hear from National Office personnel and have an opportunity to voice your questions and concerns face to face is a real eye opening experience. For more information on the 2017 NASCOE National Convention, see the following website: http://nascoe.org/2017NASCOEConvention.htm.

If you are interested in getting more involved or finding out what your association is doing for you, this is a perfect opportunity. If you are interested in the direction the agency is heading, you will not get a better opportunity. If you want to be able to express yourself about frustrations in the office, there is not a better group of people to listen and to help you carry your message. There is still time to register for national convention. If you have passion about the work we do and concern for the future of this agency, the time to get involved has arrived.

Don’t let this opportunity pass you by!!

Robert Payne, SWA Legislative Chair

The main purpose of the NASCOE Legislative Committee is to stay abreast of current legislation and bring our views and issues to the attention of our representatives. This is accomplished in a variety of ways, from phone calls and visits, to PAC funds and even as far as conducting legislative conferences in Washington, DC. Our Committee strives to keep membership, management, and our elected officials aware of issues that County Offices are facing and offer our input into developing solutions to address these issues.

As with any change, the new Farm Bill presents a variety of challenges to FSA Administration, State Offices, and County Offices throughout the nation. It is during these times that voices of County FSA employees needs to be heard to provide insight into implementing a new Farm Bill from the “grassroots” level. After all, who gets to see the Farm Bill programs in action more than those whose job it is to administer the program at the local level?

NASCOE has a legislative consultant, Hunter Moorhead of Crossroads Strategies, who lobbies for our interest with Congress and has been able to work with department management on our behalf when needed. Hunter has been serving as the legislative consultant for NASCOE since Spring 2013. He joined Crossroads Strategies following 12 years of government service. He has an extensive background in agriculture, including a bachelor of science in agricultural economics and time as a legislative assistant and staff director for the Special Crops and Foreign Agricultural Program Subcommittee. Hunter’s knowledge and connections throughout government make him particularly able to service NASCOE members as our legislative consultant and our mission to drive positive change for American agriculture and the Farm Service Agency.

The NASCOE political action committee (PAC) has grown to become a useful tool for building vital support with members of Congress. For just a few dollars per pay period, you can make a big difference for NASCOE and your own job security. For more information and answers to common questions about the PAC, visit http://www.nascoe.org/the-nascoe-pac/
Join us in Missouri!!

Be sure and check out the NASCOE Convention website for hotel reservation information, convention registration, and tentative agenda info!

http://mascoe.org/2017NASCOEConvention.htm

Tuesday, August 1—Registration

Wednesday, August 2
Registration continues
NASCOE Executive Meeting
Tours & Activities

Thursday, August 3
Registration continues
NASCOE Convention Convenes
Dinner and Scholarship Auction

Friday, August 4
NASCOE Convention Continues
RASCOE Luncheon
Pub Crawl in Historic Downtown St. Charles
Entertainment

Saturday, August 5
NASCOE Convention Continues
Social Hour—Cash bar
NASCOE Banquet, Awards, and Entertainment

In an effort to offset the costs of hosting a national convention, MASCOE is conducting a raffle. Area Execs and State Presidents have raffle tickets to spread throughout our states, so if you want in, let them know.

The potential of a $20 bill is unbelievable here!!
Let’s help MASCOE put on a great 2017 National NASCOE Convention!!
What does NASCOE do for me?

If this is a question you have, we need to get you linked in!!

Program submissions are one of the highest profile items showing NASCOE at work for us. We, the COF employees, send in suggestions on how our programs could be administered more efficiently or our software could serve us better. The National Office responds to these submissions and those actions, explanations, and NASCOE’s response gets posted to www.nascoe.org. These postings are done in a blog style so when new responses are posted, you can get an email notification right at home. Be sure and follow the NASCOE blog to get updates. What have you missed?

- On June 19th, a response was posted on the TAP filing requirements of form CCC-899
- Also on June 19th, a response was posted on updating the 902 land contribution using a “select all” option
- On May 15th, a response was posted to a request to have automated CCC-666 for MAL/CLPS

* On March 31st, a response was posted to questions concerning corn, ACRSI, and intended uses of silage vs. forage
* On March 31st, a response was posted on LFP software availability vs. trigger dates

The list goes on – access the archives just below the blog postings and search all postings for any given month.

NASCOE President, Wes Daniels, updated us on April 13 about his whirlwind Spring! He talks in his April report about rallies, Negotiation meetings in WDC, and state conventions. There is even a video clip of President Daniels live in DC from April 4! Speaking of Negotiations . . . did you know that every January NASCOE takes important items to WDC that you have submitted for making your work environment better? Our negotiation team just got 2017 responses back and the 2016 responses were posted in May 2016 for you to review. To review the responses from the 2017 meeting, see the first line item under “Recent Posts” and to check out the work of last year’s negotiation team, access the May 2016 archives of the NASCOE blog at www.nascoe.org.

One of NASCOE’s great accomplishments is the benefits we receive. Did you know that as of 1958, the ASCS employee had:

- No leave policy
- No retirement
- No health insurance
- No life insurance
- a CO 7-1 earned $3700/yr

In 1958, congress was unaware that ASCS employees were federal employees at all – they thought we were state, county or city workers. NASCOE had all that remedied by the 1960’s. Visit the NASCOE website and access the NASCOE Through the Years link under the WHO IS NASCOE? tab to learn more about what NASCOE does for you.

Convention reports are a great way to see what NASCOE has accomplished over the last year. The 2016 Convention reports follow the 2016 Q&A with Management under the “Convention” tag on the NASCOE website, but first, read the 2017-18 Candidacy announcements and get to know the folks that will be representing you this next year!

Carla Spencer, SWA Publicity Chair

Why Support NAFEC?

NAFEC speaks on behalf of the County Committee System like no one else can for the betterment of agriculture nationwide and has earned the respect of both Congress and USDA leadership.

NAFEC can address issues with Congress and USDA leadership that NASCOE cannot.

NAFEC recognizes the importance of the FSA County Office and the CO Employee and goes to the mat for them every day.

www.fsacountycommittees.org
Awards/Emblems/Scholarships Chair Report

Do you have a NASCOE gear idea?? A great slogan?? A great product idea?!

Wow! This year is flying by! I know everyone is busy with certification and ARC/PLC deadlines, but take some time out of your busy days for yourself and go to NASCOE Gear and check out the new products that are on the website. There are a lot of new shirts to pick from, and at reasonable prices. Don’t forget that each purchase from the NASCOE Gear goes towards the Scholarship fund.

If you have any requests or ideas that you would like to see offered on the NASCOE Gear sight, please let me know and I will forward it on up for you.

Darcie Tiejen,
Awards/Emblems/Scholarship Committee Chair

Membership Chair Report

While we are still awaiting the new leadership to come on board, one thing holds true; throughout FSA the commitment we keep to our customers, and getting the job done, is steadfast.

The Southwest Area association membership numbers are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SWA States</th>
<th># MEMBERS AS OF PP11*</th>
<th>% MEMBERS AS OF 06/01/17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<tr>
<td>CA/Hi</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>56%</td>
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<td>CO</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*As per Union Roster & Activity Reports

Customer Service Notification
Microsoft Home Use Program (HUP)

Federal government employees are entitled to use Microsoft Office software on their home computer as part of the Microsoft Home Use Program (HUP). In the past, to participate in the program, the customer was required to certify a 1:1 ratio that went to the USDA level. This process is no longer needed.

Through the Microsoft Home Use Program, employees can download and install one of the following software packages for $10 each.

- Office Professional Plus 2016 for $10
- Office Home and Business 2016 for $10

To order products, click on the following link: [Remote Use Certificate Link]

Next, complete the form by entering your e-mail address and checking whether.

Be sure and take advantage of this great opportunity over the next year!

This is not a benefit exclusive to TASCOE/NASCOE so be sure and spread the word to members and non-members alike!

Offer expires in 2019, so if you are looking at upgrading your personal PC in the next year or so this would save you a TON in software expenses!

This notification went to all of us at work, but if you missed it, reach out to your IT folks - this is for ALL of USDA.

Thank you to each SW Area State Association for all your hard work in keeping your numbers up.

Please remember to reach out to new, or on board employees, to share your positive experiences with NASCOE.

Have a wonderful and safe summer!

Respectfully submitted,
Ruth Ford, SWA Membership Chair
Dear Southwest Area NASCOE Members,

I wish to announce my candidacy for the position of Southwest Area Executive. Serving as the SWA Alternate Executive for the past year and half has been a great experience. It has been a pleasure to serve with Darvin and the SWA team, the comradery and teamwork have been very rewarding. As we continue into the future my goal is to make a positive difference not only within NASCOE but FSA and Agriculture in general, like I’ve said many times I suffer from and agricultural addiction.

That being said I have things I like to focus on:

♦ Collaboration – This agency and association have been blessed with very talented people and I believe in the collective effort of many can be beneficial in attaining our objectives.

♦ Outreach – I believe we can empower our associations/membership to help educate/change the perception of the agency in the public’s eye as well as its effectiveness for our producers and their representative organizations. Currently, OKASCOE, CASCOE, and KASCOE have been active in developing the SWA Outreach Initiative.

♦ NAFEC – promote membership by our current FSA county office employees and COC members across the Southwest Area.

♦ Communication – maintain an open line of communication to collaborate efforts and knowledge.

My involvement within my state association started with a nomination by a co-worker at the state convention my first year as a CED, obviously I haven’t looked back since. I appreciate all of the support along the way, and encourage those not currently involved to step out of your comfort zone and you will make a difference.

Your support and consideration is greatly appreciated!

Sincerely,

Jay Goff
My name is Kristal Jackson and I would like to announce my candidacy for the position of Southwest Area Alternate Executive. I have served in various capacities at the state, area, and national level, and feel that I am ready to step into a leadership role as one of your representatives to the NASCOE Executive Board. The Southwest Area is fortunate to have a strong leader in incoming Executive Jay Goff, and I would be honored to serve alongside him on your behalf.

I grew up in the small town of Commerce, Texas about 60 miles northeast of the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. While my family was not involved in production agriculture, I became very involved in 4-H and FFA and developed a passion for agriculture at an early age. I attended Texas A&M University for my undergraduate studies (Whoop!) and then returned to Texas A&M University-Commerce where I earned a Master’s degree in agricultural science. I currently reside in Commerce with my husband, Blake. In our spare time, we enjoy watching football, golfing, and riding ATV’s.

I began my career with FSA in April 2010 and was fortunate enough to complete COT training in my home county and then move into the CED position when my trainer retired…I guess after 18 months with me he’d had enough! I have two amazing PT’s and I am grateful for their continuous support of my NASCOE endeavors. I am also thankful for a career in which I can serve the producers who are the backbone of this great nation.

It was during my COT training that I met Darvin Collins, current Southwest Area Executive and a great leader in our agency. Though I was a member from day one, my involvement with NASCOE began when Darvin asked me to create a Christmas card to e-mail out on behalf of TASCOE. That project turned into re-designing the TASCOE website, which then turned into an offer to be the TASCOE Publicity Chair and then Southwest Area Publicity Chair.

I began as NASCOE Publicity Chair in 2013 and it has been an eye-opening experience. I was always appreciative of the time and effort our NASCOE leadership put in, but I gained a whole new perspective once I began to see the behind-the-scenes work of our association. FSA employees are blessed to have such a talented group of individuals representing their interests to management and Congress.

Our agency and our association are currently facing a lot of unknowns with the new administration and upcoming Farm Bill debates. It is times such as these that representation and leadership are critical for FSA employees. NASCOE has a lot of work to do, both internally and externally. As FSA employee numbers decline, we must grow our membership to continue our collaborative efforts with management and outreach to members of Congress. We also have to improve our ability to tell the FSA story to external stakeholders to ensure that our agency is recognized for the outstanding work that we do despite a significant lack of resources. We are the “Can Do” agency, and our employee association is no different!

If elected to serve as the Southwest Area Alternate Executive, I cannot promise to deliver on every want and need of our membership. I cannot promise that our budget and employee ceilings will not be reduced even further. I cannot promise that software will get better or that we will get more training. What I can promise is to be a voice on your behalf, to stand firm in my beliefs, and to put in the time and effort that this position demands. I am optimistic about our future and I would be honored to serve as a member of the NASCOE leadership team that will help shape it.

Kristal Jackson
ITEM 1: LOAN APPROVAL AUTHORITY

Issue: Currently, 1-FLP, Par. 25 outlines that SED’s, in conjunction with FLC, should identify areas of their State that could justify and benefit from CED having loan approval and servicing authority. The office or area where CED would be designated by SED to obtain loan making and servicing approval authority must meet both of the following conditions:

- Direct and/or guaranteed caseload in the office or area is high, complex, or geographically challenging and FLM, SFLO, or FLP team servicing the office or area needs additional help.
- CED has sufficient time for additional responsibilities required to obtain and maintain loan making and servicing authority without negatively impacting CED’s current farm program obligations.

The announcement of the new Microloan-FSFL program is an exciting opportunity to reach a new customer base with a streamlined loan product, but an already heavy workload of FLP loans may be an obstacle in this implementation.

NASCOE Position: Many Farm Loan teams already have a broad portfolio of direct and guaranteed loans, including microloans. Their workload in some locations is at a level that already equates to delayed processing of FSFL applications. This impacts our ability to deliver Microloan-FSFLs, which by nature are intended to be streamlined, easily accessible, and quickly processed.

A good number of CED’s have either educational background or work history that includes finance, and equips them to be a candidate for Farm Loan approval authority.

When loan applicants present to FSA with a proposed project and are assigned to work with FLO/FLM to determine credit worthiness, we may see situations where customers could be redirected to the FLP Microloan program, instead of the FSFL.

A change in policy that would allow for CED’s to have a limited Loan Approval Authority specific to FSFLs up to $50,000 or $100,000, this would allow for a much more streamlined implementation of the FSFL Program, specifically the recently announced Microloan-FSFL.

A suggestion is for CED’s to be required to complete Phase 1 of the FLOT program as currently prescribed in 6-PM, Part. 13, but then complete Phase 2 in a modified format to include meeting the state-established credit quality standards on a prescribed number of independently prepared files, which consist only of FSFLs up to $50,000/$100,000, or comparable direct microloans.

This delegation of authority would apply to loan approval only for FSFLs. It would accomplish a significantly improved delivery of service for FSFL applications, particularly in counties without a full-time FLP presence.

DAFLP Response: According to 1-FLSFL Handbook, the COC or STC is the approval official for FSFL loans, and FLP loan approval officials only provides a recommendation. FSFL loans are not mentioned in the loan delegation section of FLP Handbook (1-FLP), only Exhibit 15 for FBP, which describes how to document the recommendation. Our FLP handbooks only cover FLP functions and program policies and procedures. We believe changes for approval of FSFL Microloans would be a Price Support/DAFP, rather than DAFLP, decision.

DAFO Response: This would be a sea-change in CED duties requiring major discussions with DAFO, HRD, and FLP. Likewise, any such changes in the duties of the CED would require the assent of respective county committees to determine if the CED would be able to assume added duties.

DAFP Response: We appreciate the suggestion submitted requesting a change to FSFL policy where CED’s can be trained to have limited loan approval authority for FSFL’s up to $50,000 or $100,000.

The National Price Support Division and Farm Loan staff will work together to develop a modified “no cost” loan approval authority training package. At a later time, we will share more details about the loan approval authority training package and intended audience.

Agreement: As resources may permit, DAFLP and DAFP agreed to put together a pilot program to give CED’s authority to conduct financial analysis on Farm Stored Facility Loans under the County Committee approval limits. The COC would still have final approval up to $100,000.00 for all FSFL loans. NASCOE accepts the response.
ITEM 2: MAILING CONTRACTS TO OTHER COUNTIES

Issue: Mailing of original FSA-578 certifications and ARC/PLC contracts after they are faxed or emailed to the office when working in nationwide customer service. I took a certification for a county and emailed the signed 578 & map to the county, now I have to take the time to also make out an envelope, make a copy of the original and mail the original to the county office that I just emailed the paperwork to. What a waste of time and finances (46.5 cents for each certification I have to mail to different offices.) Plus, why do I need a copy of the contract since I have the copy of the email that I sent?

**NASCOE Position:** According to procedure State and County Office Action, State and County Offices that process nationwide customer service FSA-578’s must:
- immediately FAX a copy of the signed FSA-578 and map to the producer’s administrative county
- mail the original signed FSA-578 and map to the producer’s administrative county
- maintain a copy of the signed FSA-578 and map.

When taking a FSA-578 or ARC/PLC contract under Nationwide Customer Service we must immediately fax or email the administrative county a copy of the certification or contract and then we must mail the original to the administrative county and keep a copy.

To remove the redundancy of having a lot of paperwork in both offices by eliminating the mailing of the FSA-578 and/or ARC/PLC contract when working in Nationwide Customer Service because it will already either faxed or emailed the information and the original can be kept on file in the office. The forms should be emailed or faxed and the original filed in the office that took the form. The emailed form could be stored in a sent folder with the County’s name on it, but the original would still be available if needed.

**DAFP Response:** DAFP is not opposed to only requiring the emailed or faxed copy of the document being sent to the administrative county of the farm, however, there are some concerns that must be addressed. Generally, the policy for sending/receiving contracts and certifications is outdated when compared to the technology available. While this technology is usually reliable, there are times when it fails. Also, the scanned and emailed copy of a map or the faxed copy of a map is not of the best quality which would necessitate the mailing of at least the map from one county to the other.

Policy for the sending and receiving of certifications and contracts needs to be removed from each program’s policy handbook and included in handbook 1-CM. DAFP will move towards developing a more user-friendly format in handling producers that are using the Nationwide Customer Access function to enroll or certify farms.

**Agreement:** NASCOE accepts the response.

ITEM 3: AGLEARN TRAINING

Issue: Training on various topics is provided for through the AgLearn website and employees are to log on and take the required training when the training has been posted to AgLearn and before the deadline.

**NASCOE Position:** Notification of training requirements are ongoing throughout the year, some have several months to complete, some have a relatively short timeframe to complete the training. During heavy workload times, it is difficult to complete the trainings with the short turnaround timeframe.

Have all required training issued and posted to AgLearn at the beginning of the FY and have the year to work on the required training, or at least be able to see all the training at once and when it is due to be completed and be able to manage the completion of it more efficiently.

**HRD Response:** HRD appreciates NASCOE’s idea in this area. However, the AgLearn courses are typically created by a specific program area (Civil Rights or IT) or at the Department level. As a result, HRD cannot load the courses prior to their availability from the appropriate area. HRD will; however, make a note and load the course just as soon as it is available thus giving employees the maximum amount of notice to complete their training requirement and meet the established deadlines.
**ITEM 4: STAFFING/PERSOENNEL**

**Issue:** The SWA RSO pilot has become an approved organization and consists of employees in state offices throughout the southwest area. There have been several job opportunities within the RSO, but they only list state offices as potential duty locations.

**NASCOE Position:** By limiting duty stations to state offices, numerous highly-qualified candidates do not apply because they don’t want to move across the state. If a job can be carried out across state lines, it doesn’t make sense that the same job couldn’t be carried out remotely in a county office. RSO positions, as well as many other NOF jobs that allow STO duty stations, should allow the selected employee to work out of a county office.

**HRD Response:** HRD will defer to DAFO on this issue for the RSO positions. If DAFO wishes to pursue this option, HRD can certainly accommodate the “area of consideration” in the vacancy announcement process. As a side note, there are some STO positions which are located in county offices.

As far as National Office positions, this would be left up to the selecting official’s discretion. However, once again, HRD could certainly accommodate the “area of consideration” in the vacancy announcement process.

**DAFO Response:** The previous SED RSO Council established a policy, which strongly encouraged the duty station of RSO employees in SWA STO’s; however, they also afforded some latitude to the Selecting Official (in consultation with RSO Manager) to duty station an employee in a County Office. A compelling reason for doing so was required. Only one such request has been approved.

DAFO has discussed this item with the Manager of the RSO, who feels that the RSO needs its employees co-located, not scattered. Concentrations of employees provide for a number of benefits including training, cross-training, and enhanced privacy protection because of the nature of the work performed, all of which ultimately provide payback to the end-user/customer in form of available and informed personnel to respond rapidly and efficiently.

There is also the issue of space to accommodate both the newly hired RSO employee in small offices.

**Agreement:** This item will be considered in the future. They will discuss the possibility of doing remote positions with the RSO management. NASCOE accepts the response.

**ITEM 5: CRP CONTINUOUS CONTRACTS**

**Issue:** 7 CFR 1410.22 states “For general signup and continuous signup contracts except grasslands, mid-contract management must be conducted to implement management activities, such as diskng and prescribed burning according to an approved conservation plan, as part of the CRP contractual obligation on all contracts entered into under general signup and continuous signup, as specified in 7 CFR 1410.30”.

**NASCOE Position:** Continuous CRP offers are made and approved based upon a determined resource need on the offered land. By requiring that the cover established on this resource concern be disturbed by a mid-contract management activity, it defeats the purpose of establishing a practice to correct a resource need.
To maintain the intent of the Continuous CRP program, which is to address a resource concern and incorporate the appropriate practice to correct the resource concern, an update to the regulations needs to be made. Not all CRP contracts need to have mid-contract management practices which will disturb the established cover.

**DAFP Response:** The requirement for at least 1 management activity during the contract period for all practices, except CP87 and CP88, is to ensure the approved cover, applicable plant diversity and wildlife benefits are maintained, while ensuring the resource concern(s) continues to be addressed. Management activities are site specific, developed in coordination with the appropriate technical agency with the experience necessary to ensure the resource concern(s) are not jeopardized during the approved management activity, and are included as part of the producers conservation plan of operations. This is applicable to all practices, not just those enrolled under the continuous CRP signup provisions. In addition, participants may receive cost-share for approved management activities to lessen the cost of such activities and further ensure the approved cover is in compliance with the practice standards and conservation plan of operations. Over 30 years of experience with CRP cover establishment, maintenance, and management activities has shown that appropriate management activities performed at the appropriate time helps ensure the approved cover, plant diversity, and wildlife benefits are present and maintained throughout the contract period. Such activities also assist participants in maintaining compliance with their contract requirements, which results in fewer contract violations for non-compliance, fewer contract terminations, and fewer required refunds of payments. In addition, the required management activities ensure that tax payer funds are used in an efficient and effective manner for the benefits obtained, while treating all participants in a fair and equitable manner.

Though not specifically referenced in 2-CRP (Rev 5), Mid Contract Management is required by the CFR and Statute. As you have referenced, 7 CFR 1410.22 states "For general signup and continuous signup contracts except grasslands, mid-contract management must be conducted to implement management activities, such as disking and prescribed burning according to an approved conservation plan, as part of the CRP contractual obligation on all contracts entered into under general signup and continuous signup, as specified in 7 CFR 1410.30".

Further, Section 1232(a)(5) DUTIES OF OWNERS AND OPERATORS (a) IN GENERAL — Under the terms of a contract entered into under this subchapter, during the term of the contract, an owner or operator of a farm or ranch shall agree (5) to undertake management on the land as needed throughout the term of the contract to implement the conservation plan.

**Agreement:** Farm Bill discussions are going on currently and there could be some discretion used in the future to work with NRCS technical determinations. At this point, mid contract management could be modified but it must be followed. NASCOE accepts this response.

**ITEM 6: COC ELECTION BALLOTS**

**Issue:** There are no clear instructions on the election ballot that a title is required if the voter is an entity.

**NASCOE Position:** Clear instructions should be added to the election ballot stating that a title for an entity is required. Under Step 3, Sign on label to the right, it says "You must sign on the label next to Signature (By) or your ballot cannot be counted." We could add an additional sentence that states, "If you are an entity, trust, corporation, partnership, etc., you MUST include a title such as trustee, member, etc. or your ballot will not be counted." This sentence could even be in bold or red print.

**DAFO Response:** The suggested addition could be added under the directions for Step 3. The label has not changed for years, and there have been no issues so far. However, it is doable. We will have to discuss this matter with MSD and the various contractors involved in the ballot process.
**ITEM 7: COT OPENINGS AND PLACEMENTS**

**Issue:** Currently COT’s are hired, trained and then apply for county office openings. During 2015 negotiations, NASCOE proposed hiring COT’s for the county office where the COT would be permanently placed and then training would take place. NASCOE noted that this proposal would increase applications from individuals who wanted to be in that specific county which would lead to a stable county office into the future. Management expressed openness to consider NASCOE’s suggested changes and NASCOE provided a white paper with concepts on how these changes might benefit county committees looking for stability and provide more opportunities for county office employees.

**NASCOE Position:** Just like the FLOT position, NASCOE feels that a COT should be hired for the county office where the CED position is needed. Further, this proposal is of high priority for our membership. Management has not formally responded to NASCOE’s suggested changes of the COT program hiring process. NASCOE requests that management respond in writing to the concepts to allow further discussion on this topic and search for solutions to NASCOE’s and management’s differences. A PT would be able to apply for a specific CED position and be trained for that position, in other than for hard to fill positions.

The COC would make the selection for the county and the state committee would actually hire the COTS. The position would be advertised for a specific county, the application is done through USAJOBS, the STC selects COTS and would submit 3 names for county openings. (This item was also submitted in 2016)

**HRD Response:** The decision on how to select and train COTs as well as place them upon completion of the training program is an agency choice. Obviously, there are pros and cons associated with the current at-large method as well as the specific location method which NASCOE supports. There is certainly value in the at-large program as it allows states the ability to hire and train COTs before actual vacancies occur. This way, when the vacancy does occur, there are individuals ready to be interviewed and selected for the CED position rather than just beginning the training process. HRD will defer to DAFO for their determination on what is best for the States and County Offices on this issue.

**DAFO Response:** Not all FLOTs are hired for a specific office, as the past. DAFO continues to believe that states cannot determine with complete accuracy where vacancies will be in the future.

**Agreement:** NASCOE accepts the response.

**ITEM 8: ENHANCING MIDAS SOFTWARE**

**Issue:** Currently MIDAS users can search farm number, tract number, owner, operator etc. Being able to search in MIDAS by CRP contract # would be useful for farms that have multiple contracts on the same tract number. For instance, if a farm was reconstituted and the farm number changed, every CRP contract would have to be revised. Every field with CRP would have to be revised in MidAS as well to add the suffix to the CRP contract #. If you could search by contract, you could ensure that all the field numbers were updated correctly.
**ITEM 9: MODIFY THE CCC-576**

Issue: The issue is that when you enter multiple losses for a producer and the notice of loss application prints, it prints to a continuous run of pages. The first page of the CCC-576 Notice of Loss, has the producer’s name, crop year and state and county code listed. However, the continued pages of the CCC-576 do not have any information listed regarding to name, crop, year, state and county code or page number. If the pages get out of order or mixed with another producer’s notice of loss you cannot tell which page goes where.

**NASCOE Position:** Modify the CCC-576 to include the producer’s name, crop year, state code, county code and page number in the header to each page of the CCC-576 when it prints.

**DAFP Response:** This enhancement is being adopted and will be implemented in the near future.

**Agreement:** NASCOE accepts the response.

**ITEM 10: USING CO SLOTS AND HIRING PROCEDURE TO FILL GS POSITIONS**

Issue: Several states have routinely utilized CO ceiling slots to fill positions for the GS side. More and more often this is being done because it is usually less complicated and quicker than going through the GS hiring procedure. Many times the intent is to convert the position to GS in a few months but there are several cases around the country where this has not been done or has not been done timely.

**NASCOE Position:** NASCOE understands that FSA is understaffed both on the CO and GS side and that SED’s have the ability to flex ceiling slot from CO to GS and vice versa. While this might be a tool that is available for states to consider it should not be a common occurrence and the slots should revert back to the original ceiling as soon as possible.

**HRD Response:** While this can be done, HRD would caution offices on doing this as a way to circumvent merit promotion hiring policies on the GS side. This hiring method should truly be used when we don’t have an FTE available for the position needing to be filled.

**DAFO Response:** The “flexing” of staff years from CO to GS and vice versa is a tool used by some SED’s to mitigate short-term staffing short falls and meet critical needs. It should be understood that positions are not flexed, rather it is the staff year (i.e., funding) that is flexed to fill a critical need. It continues to be DAFO’s policy that the flexing of staff years is a short term situation and not a common occurrence. It is DAFO’s policy that approved flexing does not carry beyond the fiscal year for which it is approved. In recent years, many State’s individual employment levels have been below their State ceiling levels and the need for flexing has been minimal.

**Agreement:** NASCOE accepts the response.
ITEM 11: INCLUDING THE NASCOE NEW HIRE PACKET PART OF EXHIBIT 6 IN 28-PM

Issue: NASCOE and management have agreed in previous negotiation meetings that State Offices shall make NASCOE membership informational brochures and application forms available to all new hires. This has been communicated to SED’s and AO’s through emails and memos from DAFO to the state offices. However, with routine turnover in SED’s and DAFO, NASCOE has to make subsequent requests that State Offices be reminded of this agreement.

NASCOE Position: If the membership informational brochure, membership application and FSA-444 were added to the new hire checklist in exhibit 6 in 28-PM it would be made available to all new employees as previously agreed to by NASCOE and Management.

HRD Response: While HRD recognizes NASCOE as an employee organization, we do not feel that putting informational material in our agency handbooks is appropriate. Exhibit 22 of Handbook 22-PM, contains a copy of the Labor-Management Relations Agreement between USDA/FSA and NASCOE, and Section 3, Item 15 of this handbooks specifically states that solicitation of membership shall be conducted during non-duty hours of the employees involved.

Agreement: NASCOE accepts the response. HRD has agreed to add the FSA-444 to the checklist of required forms in the exhibit of 28-PM in a handbook update. HRD also agreed to insert a link to all employee associations for information in 28-PM.

ITEM 12: IT CYBERSECURITY

Issue: Our Country is in an ongoing battle of cyber threats and attacks. In fact, several thousand Federal employees have had their SS#’s stolen. After which, and over the past 18 months, Federal employees have been offered a free service of identity protection through CSID.

NASCOE Position: The threats on our identity are still very real and the need for cyber security has only increased. Would like to see all employees offered Identity protection during their employment years and possibly at a reduced cost for retirees.

HRD Response: The decision as to what type of credit monitoring and identity protection employees/retirees will receive as a result of the cyber incidents falls with the jurisdiction of OPM rather than HRD.

Agreement: NASCOE accepts the response.

ITEM 13: IT/WEBTA

Issue: WebTA 4.2 is not user friendly. The screens are hard to read/follow when loading time and attendance. The screens in the new WebTA system are very hard on the eyes when reading them, and program codes are not listed in order.

NASCOE Position: Several modifications would greatly increase the efficiency of recording our time and attendance. Those would include differentiating each line, grouping the activities alphabetically and locking the header so that the day is always visible when you scroll to the bottom of the entries. In addition, it does not read very easy when the CED’s time and attendance is printed for the County Committee’s review and approval.

OBF Response: OBF concurs with this recommendation. OBF and HRD are working together to have a change implemented by the NFC to address this at a future date to be determined.
HRD Response: The WebTA 4.2 dashboard issue came up after implementation. NFC responded that the WebTA 4.2 system is 508 compliant and the current display is as designed. NFC advised that any requested screen changes to the application would be an enhancement. On February 27, 2017, HRD submitted a follow-up inquiry to OHRM to determine whether USDA has any plans to requisition the enhancements and if so, what specifically, and when might they be available in WebTA 4.2. HRD will continue to follow-up on this issue.

Agreement: The request has been made to list activities alphabetically. There has been assurance from Kronos to simplify WebTA. To ensure the headquarters team is notified of the problems, they are working on setting up a SharePoint site for state offices to input problems and issues. They are aware that there are attempts to address issues and this has bypassed headquarters and this is not a good situation. Everyone is facing the same problems. There are people from the field involved in testing. NASCOE accepts the response. A list will be compiled and submitted through STO. A NASCOE POC (Dennis Ray) will have access to the SharePoint site to submit issues.

Items from 2016 NASCOE Negotiations (Resubmitted)

ITEM 2: SHARED MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE

Issue: “Before STC approval of the establishment of a permanent shared management operation, the SED will consult the NASCOE state affiliate.” At present, many STO’s are not following this procedure.

NASCOE Position: NASCOE recommends that SED’s be reminded of applicable handbook procedures in 27-PM, paragraph 52C. SED’s are to consult in pre-decisional format before the establishment of a shared management operation.

HRD Response: We agree that the policy requires the consultation and defer to DAFO on any reminders to or reinforcement of the policy with the States. We do stand ready to assist if any clarifications or changes to the handbook need to be issued.

DAFO Response: States routinely send in requests for approval of shared management proposal. DAFO always ascertains if consultation has taken place. If this is not happening, we should be informed.

Negotiation agreement: NASCOE would like an official response from the state association attached to the decisions regarding shared management to ensure the NASCOE state affiliate is involved. DAFO will review this issue to come up with a solution to show a written NASCOE position accompanying the State request for permanent shared management. A response will be sent back to NASCOE within 30 days. This is to ensure the states are following current policy. NASCOE will provide feedback in the consultation. Written documentation of the consultation with the state association included in the submission to DAFO for permanent shared management. An email will be sufficient for a response. HRD can draft policy for DAFO review to be submitted to NASCOE.

DAFO Response: Shared management is and has been a reality for many years. Given budgetary and legislative restrictions, we see no realistic alternatives in the near future. DAFO approves all shared management requests and ensures that NASCOE affiliates have been contacted and that all requisite COC and STC approvals have been obtained.

HRD Response: HRD will defer to DAFO on this issue; however, if the decision is made to incorporate this into the handbook, HRD can certainly update Handbook 27-PM, Paragraph 52C accordingly.

Agreement: Management will agree to consulting the associations during the proposed establishment of a permanent shared management situation and having COC involvement. There will be an amendment to 27 PM to include such reference. NASCOE accepts this response.
ITEM 4: TEMPORARY SHARED MANAGEMENT-LENGTH OF TIME

Issue: Provisions in 27-PM paragraph 53C “temporary shared management operations shall not exceed 120 calendar days.” At present, many STO’s are not following this procedure.

**NASCOE Position:** NASCOE recommends that SED’s be reminded of applicable handbook procedures. Procedures shall be followed in instances where shared management operations exceed 120 days by SED’s meeting with COC’s to “work out a permanent solution. Any exceptions to the 120 calendar day limitation shall be approved in advance by DAFO.”

**HRD Response:** We concur with the statement of the policy and refer to DAFO on any reminders or reinforcement of the policy with the States. We do stand ready to assist if any clarifications or changes to the handbook need to be issued.

**DAFO Response:** All extensions are approved by DAFO after it is determined how long the shared management operation will continue and what plans the State has to end it. As was has reiterated many time, budgetary and current Congressional restrictions prevent us from taking necessary steps to ease the situation of so many shared management office.

Agreement: DAFO agreed to have temporary defined as 6 months and the review will have attached COC minutes showing the consultation with the state affiliate of NASCOE was done.

**DAFO Response:** Given the many variables is each situation, it is often difficult to determine prospectively when it might be feasible to discontinue a share management operation. DAFO always asks the state what their future plans are.

**HRD Response:** The 120 days has already been changed to 6 months in Handbook 27-PM. As soon as Revision 2 is released, this will be visible to all employees.

Agreement: Management agreed to have COC’s involved in shared management extensions. DAFO agreed to have temporary defined as 6 months and the review will have attached COC minutes showing the consultation with the state affiliate of NASCOE was done. NASCOE accepts this response.

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