

2018 National Convention
Sioux Falls, SD
August 2, 2018

Present:

Bill Northey, Under Secretary
Richard Fordyce, Administrator
Steve Peterson, Acting Associate Administrator
Brad Karmen, Acting Deputy Director Farm Programs
Terri Meighan, FPAC Business Center
Peggy Browne, Director of Field Operations
Linda Treese, Deputy Director Field Operations
Steve Stark, PECD
Darren Ash, OCIO FPAC
Ameer Ali, FPAC Contractor
Rebecca Dudley, FPAC Contractor

1. Background: We know some STO's have been proactive in sharing workload data with COF's. Other STO's have been far less forthcoming. NASCOE is concerned about consistency and transparency in sharing of data.

Q: Can you tell us when this data will be available down to the field level?

A: Mr. Fordyce responded stated that moving to the workload model is a new way to distribute staff. It is a tool for SED's, AO's and EO's to determine where staffing should be placed. The ability to distribute the information is left up to each STO. There is nothing secret or hidden about the data. The staffing model looks at metrics such as contracts and farm loan products and then time coded to those activities runs through a formula to determine where the staffing should go. Once those are established the optimal office to place those positions. OPO 2.0 is coming with improvements. It is up the SED discretion on how they want to share that information. This tool is going to continue to evolve and improve.

2. Q: With the low number of staff we have on board for 2018 can you explain how the FY18 ceilings were established since there should have been funds left over from the last year when not hiring?

A: Linda Treese responded that going from 17 into 18 the funding that was provided for 18 was less staffing and funding for FSA. Yes, we saved money by not putting people on and it would not have been smart to hire and change the staffing levels this late in the season not knowing what the 2019 levels will be. There were ways that we utilized the extra money and put it back out to the field.

3. Q: There are numerous CED's at retirement age. Is it possible to bring on COT's above the ceiling anticipating these retirements?

A: Mr. Fordyce responded that the agency recognizes that we have several CED's about to retire. He stated that there are a lot of folks ready to retire and we have hopes to tackle this issue and respond by placing some COT's across the country. We are hoping to get very inventive to start planning for attrition.

A: Linda Treese responded stating that we use to have the non-ceiling number of FLOT's and COT's and not lose out on ceiling numbers. We did that for several years based on a lack of funding. There have been discussions to utilize this again. Until the budget is known for 19 it might be hard to put that out now.

A: Peggy Browne stated that it is key to succession planning. Those discussions will be happening, and we are on board to find a solution.

4. There is a lot of printers and equipment that is not working in the field?

A: Darren Ash responded that OCIO is aware of the issues. There is a workgroup established for a long-term solution to these problems. There is a work around that should help with some of those issues therefore offices should contact their IT person.

5. We have new ARCPLC regulations for Seed cotton if a producer had grass on it from 08-12 will it always be unassigned, or will they allow you to go back and claim?

A: Brad Karmen stated that seed cotton only looks at 12 however the next farm bill may address this issue.

6. Recently I was shown the staffing model for my office. I have a farm in my county that has 20 plus tenants on a farm. When I am doing acreage reports and other contracts I am touching that form several times. Can you tell me how acreage reports are being counted?

A: Acreage reports are looked by field type.

7. Has the issue of a physical county verses the admin county has been addressed for ARCPLC? I can service other counties for several other programs but not ARCPLC.

A: Fordyce responded we are making adjustments in the workload model for situations like this. Therefore, it is important that there is state control because they are aware of these situations. That is where there is flexibility for exceptions.

A: Steve Peterson responded stating that they do know that is a discussion on the Farm Bill. It should address the issue to allow farmers to be serviced in the office of their choice without forcing them.

8. With the extension of the DEC 7 sign up date for the cotton seed program will this affect the current roll over date?

A: Brad Karmen, the grand plan was to get everything done before rolling over. The decision was made last week by the Sec. to extend and now that will be effect farm records. They are working to get a fix in the system to be able to take and application regardless of which year

9. What is the time frame for the PT excellence program? Is it being considered as an alternate to the COT program?

A: Linda Treese stated we will be starting FY19 it is more of a leadership program with mentoring and virtual. It will not be set up as a replacement for the COT training. It is a leadership and skills training.

10. Seed cotton election ends Dec 7 farms that is for generic and non-generic farms will have to come in twice is there any way we can help them, so they won't have to come in twice?

A: Brad Karmen, I do not have an answer today but will get back with us with an answer. The December 7th deadline only pertains to cotton seed.

11. Workload data is up to the discretion of the SED to share the information. Can we get your support to share that data with the field by the SED's? This is causing a great deal of consternation among employees because they don't see the number and get worried.

A: Peggy Browne workload model is a tool. We are a proponent of transparency. The bottom line with that tool is that when we get request from your state for different situations. The state management needs to be empowered to make these decisions. Of the waivers we have been asked to grant we have approved approximately 90% of them.

12. Budget concerns drive staffing. How does this work with the other workload model?

A: Fordyce the staffing model is one thing the optimal office is a separate thing. The staffing model is distributive and predictive. What the right number of staff FSA needs to do their job. There is also a part that is based on funding. Equally distributes them based on funding

A: Northey in general we will see that we don't have enough people to get the workload done manage the money we have by filling the deepest holes we

have. What is the size of the optimal office. There is no one optimal size. Each office and county are different.

A: Ameer Ali for what is good for county A may not be good for county B. One office may have the resources, but the other office may not. As our model evolves we may progress depending on the Farm Bill.

13. CRP once a cost has been paid the application continues to show up on the ULO report which causes the county office to enter zero data to clear it off the ULO report. Is there an option to resolve the ULO issues? The rental rates are a problem and discrepancies are showing across county lines. Is there any initiative to resolve this issue?

A: Karmen stated we are working on the ULO issues bringing in teams from the field and we are expecting to have a fix. Rental rates use the NASS data. Previously people thought our rates were too high. The SEC wanted us to use the NASS data. The producers are reporting data to NASS so that may be were the discrepancies. Resolving all our ULO's is very important to our auditors. 98% of the last report was resolved but the auditor wants us to resolve 100%.

A: Northey CRP is tough to balance the line to have a rate that is competitive and take land out of production verses lowering the rate and keeping it in production. There is some land in some counties where it is justified to spend a higher rental rate than the rental rates because of the type of land. Congress is looking as NASS as the driver in the next farm bill. If you increase acres the only way to control that is by lower rental rates.

A: Fordyce stated that the timing of the ULO issue is more about fiscal year and trying to get the audit cleaned up. We have asked for departments to be more considerate of the timing of the request to the field on cleaning up the ULO. The rental rates in the mid-west we had some rates that were competing with cash rents. When the Federal government is paying the highest rate in the county that is not a position that we need to be in. Out bidding young farmers is not a way for FSA to help beginning farmers. NASS data is bad because we have low participation by the farmers and we should promote to our farmers for them to complete the surveys.

14. MPP - The program was a retroactive program going back to January and producers who had sold their dairy before the sign up are not allowed to sign up because they are commercially producing milk at the time of sign.

A: Brad Karmen stated we will have discussions and get a good answer back. When the language was written it was not intended for a retroactive sign up.

15. Workload and optimal performance tool- I have been told that offices that earn comp or credit time its make that office look less efficient than those offices that chose not to work late and earn comp or credit time?

A: When you earn comp and credit time does not show until you use comp or credit time. Unfortunately, at the mercy of the data. Working on the issue to resolve.

16. The shortage of staffing is causing county office burnout and people to retire. What is management doing to encourage people to utilize things such as EAP?

A: Fordyce the assets of this organization is people and if we are going to continue we must figure out ways to encourage our staff. Encouragement, support we want to do more than that. We are going to have to get innovative and think out of the box to invest in our assets.

A: Northey- especially when we were not hiring positions has caused such a burden. We would love to have ideas from the field of what we can do to show the field that we appreciate them. We know there are some that field under appreciated. There are some of there pieces that we are working on some processing agreements to make our office more efficient and improving service. What do we need to do that will give encouragement to the field?

17. Suggestion for FPAC NRCS is good with technical and we are good with paperwork is there any way that NRCS can do the field work for FSA for CRP?

A: Fordyce stated that all possibilities must be explored.

A: Northey that is a question I don't have the answer to but those are the type of things that we are looking at.

18. Thank you for trusting us with MFP but when this rolls out we won't be able to measure all the bins since we don't have a field reporter can we use RMA data?

A: Northey the premise is we are going to make it as simple as possible and keep the shoe boxes out of the office. RMA records will not be able to be populated by tract, but it still should be easy to use acres and other data for the program. It needs to be done by self- certification without doing field visits. We have an issue with hogs and how they will certify. Utilize the COC with the local knowledge to make some of those determinations on the self- certifications.

A: Browne stated we are very aware of the workload this program will bring and we will be reaching out to STO's to determine the number of temps that will be needed.

19. We have a county office that was approved for a position that required a waiver. You said 90 percent have been approved where are we with the other 10 percent?

A: Browne stated for the justification we need very specific data provided. Depending on the justification will determine whether it will be approved. We are going to continue to work super hard to make sure that comp and credit time is not used against us.

20. MSP installations what is the plan for the new installations where there is no plan to put one there before the Lexmark is pulled out?

A: Ash stated we know we have old Lexmark systems out there and we must get off them. We have ordered several and we recognize the issue and we will address the problem.

21. If the national office looks at the workload for efficiencies why do we have to load so many components in ARS?

A: Rebecca Dudley stated the way I understand is FSA request funding based on activities and ARS is built around activities.

A: Trina Brake we are looking at alternatives to make things better

22. We have multi county and centralized work these will only show up if the county keeps track of this. We need a generic code in the system for work completed for other offices?

A: Rebecca Dudley that is one of the points of conversation we are discussing right now.

23. What is the ceiling how does it work, what does it mean to DC and what should it mean to the CO?

A: Fordyce the ceiling is when the time coded and metric generated are ran through the model and it generates a number which is the number we need to conduct our business. Staffing ceiling which is based on funding. The model can do both of those. The number needed and the number available based on budget.

A: Treese it split CO and GS there is a flex between ceilings

24. Is there any consideration in revamping the county office training programs?

A: Fordyce that is a really good question. We find ourselves in a position where we have several vacancies. I am very well aware of PT's that are long employees of the agency and the PT in charge becomes the defacto CED. The PT in Charge is doing pretty much the same work as a CED. What can we do

from program policy stand point to allow for these PT's to become CED's? There should be able to have a shorter path to becoming a CED. We need to be innovative to get these PT's into CED's.

25. Do you have any idea what kind of language will or will not be in the Farm Bill?

A: Northey not a forecast but a constant conversation about how to be more efficient. Are we in the right places and right counties? The plan taken to congress to close offices needs to be bullet proof and not be of convenience. We need to justify to Congress that this will provide better service.

26. Recently procedure came out regarding 2-CP that if an office made an error we could not fix those errors causing producers to have to come back into the office instead of us making those corrections?

A: Karmen stated we will have to look into this a little bit more.

27. Are we going to have any training on farmers.gov or is the only training AgLearn?

A: Ash sated the only type of training that will be giving will be within the program as they are rolled out.

28. If going forward and the staffing model is our only gage for hiring is there a way in WebTa to document things better rather than having such broad categories?

A: Brake stated yes, we are looking into developing more categories.

29. Linc Pass card get wiped out during the sign up and had to get passwords every day to sign and they had to wait for the new cards? Can we look at the one finger reset?

A: Ash although Linc Pass is not part of our responsibility it is part of the business center and will pass the comments on to the people that are running that portion.

30. Has the experience levels of employees being taken into consideration when looking at staffing models?

A: Ameer stated that the short answer is no State view and county view on the site. They have not been able to establish tenure of employee's, but this is where the local management team would have input on.

31. A CED is told that because they are fully staffed they will go help other counties is that a State decision or coming from the top? This could cause the workload tool to become a point of contention between offices.

A: Browne- We need to think outside the box and we need to do whatever we can to help these folks however these are state leadership decisions. We might get asked to do things we haven't done in the past.

32. WebTa coding is absolutely necessary to document where work is getting done. Is there any way we can get WebTa codes in our handbooks by program?

A: Treese stated there is a handbook for WebTa but that is a very good question. Good idea for us to do in the future. Regarding, the competition ideally in time there will be more availability of information down to the SED's and DD's.

A: Fordyce stated that the staffing model was accelerated so that we could staffing out to the field. Ideally it would have been nice to have it perfected before we rolled it out. The staffing model is going to be pretty close of where it should be because we are using a three-year average. The establishment of ceilings will go down to metric and time.

A: Meighan stated it will take the WebTa coding issues back because they are having these conversations now. This is where the business center can help.

33. November 15th for warm season grasses date is too early for certification is there any way we can change?

A: Fordyce agrees and understands there is a lot of issues with changing that date however we are working on that and they will get back with us.