

2018 MWA Rally – Des Moines, Iowa

March 23 & 24, 2018

The 2018 Midwest Area Rally was held March 23rd and 24th in Des Moines, Iowa. Having never attended a rally before, we were not quite sure what to expect. We were pleasantly surprised at the great array of speakers attending the convention as well as the information they brought with them.

After a welcome from Amanda DeJong, the Iowa State Executive Director, we had the privilege of having a live meeting via Skype with the USDA Undersecretary of Farm Programs, Bill Northey. Undersecretary Northey is from Iowa and had only been in this position for 13 days. He stated \$2.36 billion has been allocated for disaster and other programs. He spoke about the realignment of FPAC and mentioned there are currently 15 teams consisting of about 80 people. He likened FPAC as someone trying to change a tire on a wagon going 70 miles per hour down the road. These groups are working on hiring, office rental, etc. with first round new hires being 150 people in each agency. Currently, most of the people are in Washington D.C. However, there will be people from local levels involved going forward. It is Secretary Purdue's desire to complete the realignment in "weeks, not months." The plan is to have hiring levels back to "normal" by October. He also spoke about the need to get a budget signed and thanked the employees that went on disaster jump teams as well as those who stayed behind and kept the offices running and the work done.



Midwest Area Executive Chris Hare opening the rally



Live Teleconference with Undersecretary Bill Northey

Undersecretary Northey mentioned the 1997 reorganization combined CO and GS. FPAC is not a reorganization, but a realignment of agencies. Each unit (FSA, NRCS, and RMA) will each maintain their own identity. The hiring of 300 employees are planned for this year by FPAC. These will be split between the three agencies. The plan is to be back to October levels by the end of this fiscal year, including back fills due to promotions from within.

There was a question and answer session with Undersecretary Northey with many excellent questions asked. A question was asked about COC's role in the FPAC and if they would still be the CED's supervisor. Undersecretary Northey

stated the County Committee roles will not change with FPAC. It was brought up if there was a possibility of office combinations or consolidations and at this time the answer is no. CRP also came up in a question wondering if there will be a sign-up this year or possibly for a one-year extension. It is currently unknown if these are possibilities. Undersecretary Northey thought allowing GovDelivery to include NRCS and RMA information was a good idea and makes sense. Undersecretary Northey was with us for about 45 minutes.

He was followed by Steve Peterson, WDC Acting FSA Administrator, who has been with the agency for 30 years. He stated producers receive \$20 billion annually from our offices and that 2016/17 was the busiest loan years yet. He also reiterated each agency will maintain its own identity with the FPAC realignment and there will be more engagement at the local level to provide the best service. The Business

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Center focuses on HR, IT, and other non-program processes to make these areas more effective and efficient. The idea is to leverage processes across agencies for more efficiency.



Acting Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs Steve Peterson

Mr. Peterson, spoke on behalf of Brad Karmen, the WDC Acting Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs. On policy changes, he said meetings are being held every week. When programs are ready to roll out, there will be national training as well as the possibility of temps.

Mr. Peterson discussed the Bipartisan Budget Act that was signed on February 9, 2018 and the changes included. The ECP program had run out of money. This Act added an additional \$400 million prescribed for disaster and \$2.36 billion for ad-hoc assistance for fires and hurricanes. Producers can obtain 85% coverage for loss if they have RMA or NAP. 65% coverage is available to those without RMA or NAP, but they must obtain either for the next two years.

LIP/TAP/ELAP/LFP were retroactive back to January 1, 2017. The \$125,000 payment limitation for LIP and TAP was lifted. LIP had only paid on death losses. The Act added language for sold at a reduced price. The \$20 million funding cap for ELAP was removed. Currently, the factor is being removed and the hope is to issue full value of loss without waiting for over a year. TAP increased from 500 acres to 1000 acres. No changes were made to LFP. There are changes in the works for the MPP program and an open sign-up is forthcoming. Premiums will be greatly reduced, month-to-month rates, MPP tool and we will already know January and February rates when sign-up is going on. Work is being done to transition to the new farm bill. Since the buy-up provisions in NAP expire in 2018, currently only CAT coverage will be available for 2019. As far as CRP, nothing is certain. As of October 1, 2017, there are 23.5 million acres enrolled. The possibility of increasing the acre limit to 31 million is being discussed along with other changes to the CRP program.

Michelle Motley spoke for the National Associate of District Directors. She stated there are 190 district directors (92%) participation nationwide.

The next speaker was NASCOE President, Dennis Ray, stated NASCOE is the only organization that can consult with management and negotiate on behalf of CO employees. We also have Hunter Moorehead as our attorney who works for us in Washington. Mr. Moorhead is available to deal with federal employee issues. As a NASCOE member, we have the benefit of one free hour with a NASCOE attorney for work related situations.

Jackson Jones, the Midwest Area Alternate Executive, discussed how we are the only place in government overseen by a local committee and legislative items.

After lunch, a question and answer session was held with DAFO, DAFP, and NASCOE. Some topics included:

- The town hall meeting talked about 10 employees per supervisor. Maybe unable to at the county office level, but should be able to at the state office and national office levels.
- Are temps the most efficient way? There are problems with onboarding. There needs to be a more efficient process. There is a need to take advantage of temps with the older workforce.
- As of October 1, 2017, there were 10,380 employees. High numbers have left since. This number should be around 11,000

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- FPAC changes affecting the county offices to include cross-training of programs.
- A legislative contact sheet to be available listing the legislators within each state.

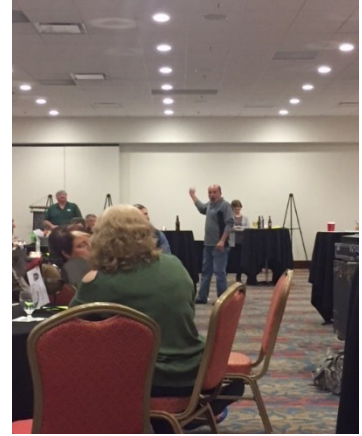
Bob Braden, the NAFEC Secretary/Treasurer discussed buying an air freshener and saving time. ☺

Cindy Hall discussed RASCOE.

Chris Hare, the Midwest Area Executive, talked about the negotiations going on in Washington. He is trying to bring back mentoring for employees. He also discussed shared management staffing and workloads as items to negotiate. Mr. Hare stated that NASCOE is working for employees and making sure we are being taken care of.

The meeting adjourned for the day after Dillard's Financial presented an information portion on retirement options.

That evening, there was a dinner and scholarship auction followed by a live band.



Scholarship Auction

Saturday morning, the meeting reconvened at 8:30 a.m. with a welcome from Midwest Area Executive, Chris Hare.

Joel Foster spoke about the National Convention being held in Sioux Falls, SD July 31 – August 4. He provided information on three tours available on Wednesday. Tour options include a South Dakota State University Ag Research tour, EROS Data Center/Rosenbauer South Dakota/J&L Harley Davidson/POET Biorefining, or a walking tour of historic downtown Sioux Falls. Thursday will include meetings and Sturgis night as well as the scholarship auction and a hypnotist/magician. Friday is Falls Park and the Downtown First Friday vendors. Saturday activities include an awards banquet and entertainment.

It was also announced that the 2019 NASCOE Convention will be held in Manhattan, Kansas and a video was shown inviting us to come and see Manhattan.

Each state presented reports of things going on in their respective states. Committee break-out sessions and committee reports were given.

Candidacy announcements were made with Jackson Jones running for Midwest Area Executive and Mary Roberts for Midwest Area Alternate Executive.

The upcoming rally schedule was given as follows:

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| • 2019 – Illinois | • 2023 – Michigan |
| • 2020 – Missouri | • 2024 – Indiana |
| • 2021 – Wisconsin | • 2025 – Iowa |
| • 2022 – Minnesota | • 2026 – Ohio |

We found this convention very informative. It was nice to put faces with names and network with like-minded people. We thank you for the opportunity to attend. ☺

Respectfully submitted,
Jodie Groeschel
Karen Propson