

The NASCOE Convention was well organized. Jamie Garrett, Indiana chair, is to be commended for organizational skills and professional attention to convention details. She shared her Indiana hospitality by working with her committee to provide easy on-line registration, hotel changes, and evening events making the convention enjoyable.

Each day delegates and spectators entered the convention center with temperature checks. A Safety Announcement-mandatory masking, social distancing, hand washing, and report sickness to Marcinda Kester, NASCOE Vice-President, was repeated each day. Washington D.C. staff did not participate in the Convention due to COVID concerns. Wisconsin delegates encourage WASCOE members to go to the NASCOE website to review the agenda and read the 2020-2021 Annual Report. There is good information in the report underscoring what the organization has accomplished this year and NASCOE convention activities.

Brandon Wilson, president shared 2021 NASCOE policy on Thursday morning. Reaching out to county office personnel has been difficult with the COVID climate. COVID has become politicized. It was said that the reality of the situation is that our boss is the most important person in the world. He has given the vaccination directive as one of the keys to bringing the pandemic under control. There needs to be respect for his decision.

There is a divide between rural and urban security. What works in one place may not work in another. For instance, the covid infection rate may be different in one location than in another. Local control will be a consideration in the decision-making process in office program administration.

Wilson continued by outlining NASCOE accomplishments in 2021. County hiring was headed to the business center as a pilot program. NASCOE worked with Washington D.C. to keep the hiring process with the Farm Service Agency. CO employees were granted paid parental leave. Emergency leave program was not granted. There is an ongoing review of Title 7 whereby the Business Center questioned the authority of NASCOE to negotiate for salaries and benefits

Wilson commented on the Unmet Demands Survey. Don't be intimidated and do the best you can filling out the survey. Congress knows FSA gave 150% the last two years. This was work that was not finished because other program responsibilities.

Finally, 2022 goals were outlined. Wilson noted that the labor management agreement was signed by NASCOE and FSA and not the USDA. One of the 2022 goals is to complete the signing of the labor management. An atypical situation occurred when handbook 27-PM was rewritten without NASCOE involvement. This will be a situation that will bear watching. A shared management task force has been formed and the study of shared management is ongoing.

Systematic racism is a concern of this administration. Socially disadvantaged people are tired of being boxed into a group and not supported with federal funding. Wilson noted that Zach Ducheneaux, Appointed Administrator for the USDA, understands the role FSA plays in agriculture. This will help us in our promoting NASCOE philosophy. It was said that if you were not a party to bad behavior don't worry about it, move on. Continue to do your best.

COC structure continues to be an education piece. There is concern that the COC may have been part of the racism problem and in the distribution of federal money. NASCOE is working with NAFEC to reach out to minority groups to discuss the purpose and scope of the COC system.

Wilson continues to promote the Political Action Committee (PAC) to move NASCOE interests forward. Educate yourself on the PAC and contribute. He mentioned the need to grow new leaders for the organization and promoted the 2021 Leadership Convention in Kansas City, KS. He encouraged state leadership to pay attention and grow membership. He praised the Convention Cash Club to help future leaders attend the convention. Wilson noted the creation of a WASCOE technical coordinator and the filing of this position as well as a paper newsletter sent to all CO offices.

Hunter Moorehead, Crossroads Strategies, addressed the convention on Friday morning. Mr. Moorehead is NASCOE's legislative consultant. He outlined the political climate in Washington D.C., how this affects the Farm Service Agency, and what NASCOE members can do to further agriculture concerns.

It was said that the American people like a divided government because it keeps special interests in check. This is true in the House of Representatives as the House Democratic majority is dependent on six to eight votes. Budget reconciliation is very tight making it a slow process. The 2022 House budget approved \$32.7 million above 2021 for FSA salaries and expenses and the Senate \$32.7 million above 2021. Hunter indicated that this kind of funding means that Congress supports and invests in the work FSA contributes to the American farmer.

The House Agriculture Committee has changed focus. David Scott, Congressman from Georgia, is the new Chair of the House Agriculture Committee. Four of the 27 members of the House Agriculture Committee are involved in production agriculture. The committee's buzzwords are domestic nutrition, racial equity, and climate change. There is a different crowd in charge with a different list of priorities.

NASCOE has friends in Washington with the appointment of Zach Ducheneaux as appointed Administrator for the USDA. Mr. Ducheneaux has worked closely with FSA to improve participation in USDA programs as he was past executive director for the Intertribal Agriculture Council of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. Senator Tammy Baldwin is chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for agriculture.

A lot of things are not happening because of the COVID environment. A person can't go to Congress and meet in person because of COVID protocols. State Executive Directors have not been seated because Robert Bonnie has been nominated as USDA's Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation. His confirmation will happen as he is respected for his conservation and racial equity stance. Once he is confirmed, SED's vacancies will be filled.

In the meantime, Moorehead encourages membership to develop a relationship with their congressmen. Look up the resources provided on the NASCOE website. Use those ideas to inform legislators of our role in providing food and fiber to the American public. Tell your congressmen what you do and what FSA is about when they hold local meetings. Be positive.

**Midwest Area (MWA) Rally** was held Tuesday, August 2, 2021. Delegates from Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio were in attendance. Christine Pannier attended the meeting for Wisconsin.

Kayla Mattson, Minnesota, took over as Midwest Area Executive on Sunday, August 1, 2021. Mary Roberts, Iowa, stepped down due to personal reasons. On Saturday, Kayla was elected MWA Executive, and Amy Mormon was elected the MWA Alternative Executive.

There was a presentation by Derek Hobbs, representative of Silveus Financial. Silveus Financial is an RMA provider. Derek discussed how crop insurance and FSA programs work in tandem. He demonstrated how RMA insurance is used to cover risk and how farmers can use his financial program to determine the benefits of whether to use ARC or PLC to further minimize risk. Chris found this to be an informative presentation.

Kayla Mattson continued the meeting with topics that would be discussed again during the Midwest Area breakout sessions on Thursday and Friday. These topics included:

- The MWA has 700 more members than the second largest area of NASCOE (Southeast Area). What happens in the MWA is indicative of the health of NASCOE.
- It would benefit members to review exhibit 22 of 22-PM. This is the labor management agreement that NASCOE has with the Farm Service Agency. This agreement allows NASCOE to negotiate with Department of Farm Operations for fair & equitable salaries, working conditions, and retirement benefits for all CO employees.
- COVID position. Department of Justice has ruled that mandatory vaccinations are legal. Employers can do what they need to do to keep business moving including the Federal government. (More about this from the NASCOE lobbyist). No word on how this will be implemented.
- Remote duty stations means you do not have an assigned office. General rule, if you need to print anything, you cannot have remote duty station. There is 0% chance of CED or PT working remotely 100%.
- Telework decisions will be made locally. Expect initiatives. The Farm Service Agency has proven that a quantity of work can be accomplished. Accuracy of work must be always protected.
- Temporary hours toward retirement buy back was introduced with HR 4268. This is a budget item. It may be an item that could be negotiated with FSA only.
- Low morale in MWA due to just being tired from administering multiple programs along with Farm Bill programming, concerns with shared management, hiring, and retaining office staff.

### **Committee Reports**

**Awards and Scholarships.** Julie Goetzman, Committee Chair, noted that there is an intense discussion about trade schools and two-year universities scholarship programs. The divisions between these institutions have blurred. There is a movement to offer trade school scholarships: \$500 for National and \$250 for state scholarship for trade schools. The discussion continued with a scholarship for dual credit in high school. Many high schools will allow students to take college credits in high school. Some high schools require students to pay for those credits. A \$250 National and \$125 Area Scholarship is being considered. Fourteen percent of the sale of clothing and other items from Superior Emblems is contributed to scholarship. On Friday night, 75% of the scholarship money goes to the National scholarship and 25% goes to the host state. At the Mid-West Area Rally 75% goes to the host state and 25% goes to the National scholarship program.

There were 39 scholarship applications. Wisconsin had seven scholarship applications and one Distinguished Service Award nomination. Jake Bourget was given the

Distinguished Service Award for NASCOE on Sunday night. See convention highlights. Christine Imhoff, Marathon County, received 1000-hour sick leave certificate.

Friday night the scholarship auction netted \$11,860 (\$2,950 from silent auction). Wisconsin items contributed \$435. Peach Crown Royal received the highest bid.

**Benefits and Emblems.** Professional liability insurance for supervisory positions has been added to the benefits according to Chris Lary, Benefits Chair. Up to half of the insurance will be reimbursed. The insurance will last three years beyond retirement. A cancer policy is offered by Dillard Financial. NASCOE membership pins are available for purchase. There has been an interest in past president pins as well. An updated list of benefits will be on website soon. Emblems by Superior contributed \$6,900 to the scholarship fund.

**County Office Advocacy.** The brand for National Association of Farmer Elected Committees (NAFEC) has been expanded and retitled County Office Advocacy. NASCOE County Advocacy Chair Morgan Limmer, worked on the task force with Washington D.C. to create the new COC orientation materials. See Notice AO-1763. A NASCOE task force has been created to study shared management. Issues arose with the lack of COC meetings during 2020 due to COVID. COC meetings were held infrequently leading to a lack of knowledge of what was going on in program delivery. There is a continual need to protect the COC system and its local authority. Anyone can become a member of NAFEC for \$20/year.

**Membership.** COVID has taught us that human interaction is necessary commented Brandon Wilson, president. We are currently at 73% and should be at 80-85%. A state will lose its affiliation with NASCOE if their membership drops below 50%.

A few items were discussed to improve upon membership. The first is a touch card was sent out to every office celebrating the achievements of NASCOE. Look at your card and ask nonmembers "Why don't you belong to NASCOE?" Secondly, the state directories have been updated. Thanks to State Officers who provide the contact information and stay on top of updates. As a side note, Indiana achieved 100% membership due to a generous donation from a retired staff member. This staff member believed in NASCOE and wanted to pass on the benefit of membership. It has been recorded that many people aren't currently members simply because they haven't been asked or educated. Lastly, state membership chairs will be invited to participate in a call every second Tuesday of the month to discuss membership and share ideas. Glenn Thomas, Membership Chair, is developing a do-and-don't card for recruitment.

**Publicity.** NASCOE publicity committee awarded a \$500 stipend to eligible NASCOE members to defray the cost attending the National Convention. There were four area winners including Chris Pannier from MW area. Teresa Holmquist, Publicity Chair, explained that NASCOE news is distributed to membership by Facebook, Instagram,

YouTube, and mail chimp for e-mail blasts. Last year there was 130 messages distributed all vetted by officers. Please view the membership power point developed last year on the NASCOE website. It has great information. Currently, a hard copy newsletter is being development for mailing to county offices. Its contents will contain combination of membership recruitment and publicity. A cover sheet will be wrapped around the newsletter to explain its contents.

**Programs and Negotiations.** Chris Hare, chair, discussed the 198 submissions by NASCOE members (81 from Wisconsin) and explained the difference between programs and negotiation submissions. He reminded members to review the NASCOE website to contribute your ideas which can be done during work time. All ideas are reviewed weekly by the committee. Two noteworthy NASCOE program submission included changing the CRP Deceased letter to be sent out from 10 days to 30 days and the paid parental leave. IB-10000 mentioned that the suggestion was made by a NASCOE member. Chris continued that our "can do" attitude was the reason FSA was tasked with completing the PCCP cover crop program and not RMA. He encouraged everyone to complete the Receipt for Service as it is user friendly, and we just need to do it. Chris noted that Washington D.C. (DAFO and DAFP) are our biggest supporters because our work ethic and creditable program delivery. Negotiations for 2020 were done virtually and will continue in this way for 2021. There are few people allowed in Washington D.C. due to COVID concerns.

**Legislative.** Clint Bain and Neil Burnette discussed legislative contributions. The NASCOE legislative consultant has been working with both sides of the aisle in Congress to support NASCOE's priorities. 2022 appropriations for the Farm Service Agency were considerably higher than 2021 salaries and expense funding. Details of the appropriations are being monitored closed by the NASCOE legislative consultant. Other legislative priorities include temporary time buyback, funding COC meetings, prohibiting FSA office closures and relocation of staff without Congressional approval, and concerns about FSA staffing shortages.

Focused Leadership Development is another task for the legislative committee. It will be held in October 2021. Finally, the chairs encouraged the contributions of time and money to the Political Action Committee (PAC). The PAC is a separate donation from the NASCOE dues. This donation helps further NASCOE priorities by supporting legislators who support agriculture. The PAC does not support congressman that attach agriculture. A PAC option is being sought for retirees.

**Other Business:** Dillard Financial Services discussed the difference between Roth IRA vs Traditional IRA, how to read your FERS and TSP statements, and plan for retirement.

Jamie Garriot of Indiana spoke about her struggles transferring from the county office to Washington D.C. Three of last four CED's in her county were being targeted and

forced out (one was a short timer only there for a few months). Jamie came into county and was targeted almost immediately by seasoned PT's and lack of support by District Director.

Jamie started to document situations in her office and sought help from her District Director and State Office. She was told that she did not document correctly. Documentation should be a running record of what happened, what should have happened and how it affected producers. She was referred to the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) by her State Office through Department of Field Operations (DAFO).

Alternative Dispute Resolution is available to anyone and you do not have to be referred to it. It is a confidential service that could be called "professional therapy." It helps you see how you are being portrayed by others in your office. Her entire office was given the opportunity. Two took advantage of the program and work relationships changed considerably.

Jamie also spoke about National roles and why things seem to be why they are. Jamie took position as ARC/PLC Specialist and has learned that the way things happen on county and state level also happen at the national level. She learned that a notice takes no less than 6-8 weeks to get through the national approval channels which is why we often see notices at the last minute. You are thrown into a position with little to no training and learn by reaching out to your network.

On the ARC/PLC front. There is a new cancellation report coming out that will show the reason for the cancellation of a contract. There is also a new program called Food Safety Certification for Specialty crops. There is also a DAFP training intranet site that has all training modules from across the nation available.

Lastly, after some discussion, Wisconsin offered to host the 2022 Midwest Area Rally in March 2022 and the MWA voted to accept the offer. The host MWA state schedule was rearranged with Illinois hosting in 2023, Minnesota in 2024, and Indiana in 2025.

Shelby Niskanen and Chris Pannier thank WASCOE for their financial support to the national convention. We came back inspired to move forward with NASCOE's priorities and enjoyed networking with other people who share the same concerns, ideas, and love of the American farmer.

Respectfully submitted,

Shelby Niskanen  
Chris Pannier