

The 2017 NASCOE Convention Delegates Report  
St. Charles, Missouri  
August 2 – 5, 2017  
Jake Bourget – Delegate  
Jodie Groeschel – Delegate

We were honored to represent Wisconsin at the 58<sup>th</sup> Annual NASCOE Convention this year. On Thursday, the first day after the St. Louis area tours, 401 NASCOE members were present in the convention hall. 77 of which were from Missouri and 11 from Wisconsin!! We had lively activities as well as lively discussions with our Washington representatives that were present this year. Below we have highlighted a few of the speakers at the convention.

**Chris Chinn** – Director, Missouri Department of Agriculture

She started the convention out and explained how agriculture is the number one industry in Missouri at over \$88 billion per year. She recognizes that FSA is the boots on the ground and a driving force. She understands we are always asked to do more and unfortunately it's always with less. A huge issue in this country is that agriculture is an aging industry and we need to find ways to bring the next generation into farming. She told the true story of a mother who would only buy organic food for her child and at times didn't have enough money to feed herself. This told Chris that education about farming is so needed and we need to educate the public about our industry's safe food to eat. She also recognizes what a tremendous task this is going to be and will continue to be.



*The Wisconsin Attendees: Jodie, Deb, Lisa, Jake, Tom, Jan, & Teresa.*

**Bob Stevenson** – Acting Chief of Staff

He talked about the combination of RMA, NRCS, and FSA at the DC level having a different look but at the field level he did not see us having very much of a different look. Much of this has to do with common themes and goals. He mentioned how together these agencies already infuse millions and millions of dollars into the American economy but now we are one department instead of several departments. The Secretary has a common message, "Leave the Land Better than We Found It" and we are expected to work together to see that happen. This means we need to show cooperation and increased efficiencies between the agencies. We do all this in the name of continued, better, "Customer Service".

**Chris Beyerhelm** – Acting FSA Administrator



*The Gateway Arch!*

He said we are now into this transition over 7 months and the train is still on the tracks. He feels this is an incredible job well done with the challenges of the wildfires especially in Kansas and the severe drought in Wyoming and the Dakotas. This is a credit to the entire staff of FSA. He explained it's extremely important for FSA to tell our story and how important we are in economic development across this country. For more details on that please go to the website and see the Southeast Area and the Midwest Area reports that were written. He talked about the hiring freeze and with the budget uncertainties

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*The live auction raised \$11,275!*

how the hiring freeze is understandable. The Secretary understands that we are not a business with all our employees housed in one big skyscraper. We are spread out all over the nation and it's very difficult to absorb a staff cut if you only have 3 people in an office to begin with. They will continue to ask for the backfilling of FSA positions. Succession planning with the Secretary will be extremely important for FSA in the next few years. 8000 FSA employees took the last viewpoint survey and Chris is very excited to see what the results will be on this survey compared to the previous survey. He said the Administrator Awards increased from 160 last year to 400+ this year and is very happy about that and thankful as we have good people working in FSA. He thanked his team in DC for going out to various field offices to understand issues at the county office level and is proud of that. Chris talked about ARS and we now have 3 years of data so it's time to start using this data to find trends and for staffing our field offices. He said as an example congress continues to ask, "How many people does it take to administer CRP?" ARS now tells them that so the moral of this story is, it's EXTREMELY important that we all report our time in WebTA ACCURATELY!!!!!! Chris again mentioned the department's initiative to connect beginning farmers with absentee landowners across the country to help them get started in farming. He said 30% of the land farmed is owned by absentee landowners so they will be doing a postcard campaign across the nation to try to connect beginning farmers with the landowners. Our offices will be the connection point for any of these parties to contact.

### **Brad Karmen** – Acting Administrator of Farm Programs

He went through several of the programs that our offices administer and talked about how the Appropriations Committee is responsible for many of the changes or suggested changes for what may happen in 2019.

### **John Chott** – Acting Administrator of Field Operations

In round numbers John talked about how in 2001 we had 9000 employees in 2500 offices and we now have 7000 employees in 2100 offices in 2017. He feels the hiring freeze is very unfortunate for us as we have the dollars to maintain our same staffing levels that we had in 2016 through 2018. But now since we do not have the staff onboard those ceilings will



*Charming downtown St. Charles!*

likely have to be adjusted. He feels we should have a good pool of temp money into the future, especially with all the disasters out west we still need it. He supports the Key PT position and we have 50 across the nation and wants to see more of them in the states. John feels that all PTs should have counter skills training and they are developing a course. Waiting to see what form that will be in. He supports the continuation of the management leadership training course for CED's and above. He's working on the Aspiring Leader Program which is a competitive program for PT's. Maybe 25 or so would qualify for this training per year intended to teach leadership skills.



*Delegates during the convention.*



*Trolley transportation to downtown St. Charles.*

**Rahada Sekar** – Chief Financial Officer

Her goal is to always make sure FSA gets the staffing from the department that FSA deserves! Now, this is a very tough position when she looks at the numbers and, “we get the job done” but on the other end we are saying we are understaffed! By the numbers this doesn’t make sense but she knows why and that gets back to the issue of people working and not putting the “extra” time on their time sheets because simply, we can’t. This is an ongoing issue with no solution really as we are here to do the job even if it takes a little extra because we are conscious of our customer’s needs. Yet, since we

don’t claim it, it doesn’t show in the numbers as staff needed to cover all this. We have to come up with a way to count all the “widgets” that we are not taking credit for in ARS. She went on to talk about the budget approach. It’s like building a business case and she needs all the information possible to build a good case for FSA. She said FSA has a good name, the department feels our pain, and we are looking in good shape for 2018. In regards to addressing disasters that suddenly appear nearly every year somewhere in the nation, she has requested from USDA channels to have a permanent pool of temporary money set up for these reasons only.

**Darren Ash** – FSA Chief Information Officer

An accomplishment this year is we didn’t have the issues we had last year with CARS so that was very good. He talked about a life experience for his two teenagers this summer. While they were on vacation he took them to an FSA office in Iowa on the way through. He showed them he’s not just a computer program guy but there is reason and purpose and accomplishment in what he does. He feels it was a very “grounding” experience for his teenagers to see what happens in an FSA office in the country all the way from DC or KC. “Everything you do in life is linked to someone else in life.” He talked a little on the Managed Print Service project. He talked about how necessary it is because we have such a smorgasbord of different print systems from owned to leased across the states that it’s making this project difficult and is costing way more money than it should. They are moving as fast as they can to fix this and early reports are that the Xerox systems are working well in the offices. He said his team continues to work on the data available in the Data Warehouse to provide us with valuable daily reports.

**Thomas Mulhern** – Human Resources Division

He talked about USDA and said that 25% of our workforce is eligible to retire as we speak. In 2022, 46% will be eligible to retire. The truth is 75% of all those people are in leadership roles. He cautioned that each department must take action and must prepare for that. Because of this, he places a lot value on each department creating an environment that concentrates on retaining the employees that we are hiring today and in the future.



*New FSA friends that took a ride to the top of the Arch!*

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### **Hunter Morehead** – Crossroads Strategies NASCOE Legislative Consultant

Hunter said he now has 16 people on staff, all with expertise in different areas to negotiate on the Hill which has been a huge advantage for NASCOE. Some of the Trump effects on agriculture is the rolling back of many regulations concerning the environment and renegotiating NAFTA. The results of these may effect what we do in our offices and he continues to watch this closely. He talked about appointments to offices and he said at the present rate it will be 11 years before the Trump administration gets nominees confirmed! Obviously this has to speed up but the moral of the story is it's still going to be a while before we see SED's. Hunter said back in 1993-94 they reorganized USDA and now we are reorganizing again. Unfortunately, he expresses, agriculture has lost a lot of its power and we have to build a better system in order to build a better USDA. Hunter believes FSA is in a good position in this rebuild as FSA is being heard on the Hill. Congress has not followed the President's budget cut proposals and congress is working on a budget which is more favorable to us.

Hunter's power point that he used for his presentation will be posted on the NASCOE website with all the budget posted to the website will be all the Q&A's that were discussed during the convention Q&A session. There were 18 people on the panel representing DC and it was impressive as they covered many areas that affect our everyday work lives! Keep checking the site for that!

There were no proposed changes to the NASCOE Bylaws at this convention so the voting of the state delegates was confined to voting on the officers for the NASCOE Board. Please see the NASCOE website for all the results of the 2017 NASCOE elections.

Again we were very proud to represent Wisconsin at the NASCOE convention and thank you to all WASCOE members that allowed us to do this. One last parting thought, please everyone that reads this, please make sure that everyone in your office sees it, member and nonmember and help them to go to the NASCOE and WASCOE websites to find the answers to the questions during the Q&A session and other valuable information. You will find it interesting. Also on the websites are the minutes and reports from all the area breakout sessions that happened during the convention. Continue to check for those. During the convention break-out sessions each of us attending from Wisconsin attended different committee meetings in order to represent Wisconsin in as many of the meetings as we could. Please thank all Wisconsin members that attended the convention for this and any questions at all on anything about NASCOE, WASCOE, or the convention itself contact Jake Bourget, Jodie Groeschel, Tom Oasen, Jon Williams, Teresa Zimmer, or Deb Esselman-Baird. We were all there!

Thank you,  
Jake Bourget  
Jodie Groeschel



*The Convention Hall.*