

National Association of County Office Employees (NASCOE)
Mid-West Area (MWA) Rally, Branson, MO
March 5-6, 2020

Jackson Jones, MWA Executive, called the Rally into session. Dennis Ray, former NASCOE president, lead the Invocation. Presentation of Colors, National Anthem, and Pledge of Allegiance was led by Vietnam Post 913. Drew Walter, Vice-President of MASCOE greeted the assembly thanking them and the Missouri State Committee for their attendance, reminding the Rally to visit the Silent Auction, and thanking the Missouri District Directors for hosting the hospitality room on Thursday.

Jackson continued the introductions with the introduction of:

- Marc Allison, STC Chair,
- Kim Viers, Missouri Acting SED,
- Kathy Sayers, Chief of Staff for Peggy Browne, Deputy Administrator for Field Operations (DAFO),
- Bill Beam, Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs (DAFP),
- Pat Westhoff, Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute (FAPRI),
- Brandon Wilson, NASCOE President,
- Mary Roberts, MWA Alternate Executive,
- Steven Dillard, Dillard Financial,
- Kim Corlew-Anthem Blue Cross.

Marc Allison was invited to the podium. He noted that there are 100,000 farms contributing \$88 million to the Missouri economy. Kim Viers began her career in the County Office as a PT then became CED, State Administration Officer, and now temporary SED. She appreciates the work going on in the county offices. Missouri has many retirements and that one-third of Missouri has less than three years' experience. It has been stressful training the new workforce and implementing the 2018 Farm Bill. Viers commended the "Can-Do" attitude of the county office employees and participation in NASCOE that contributes to the professionalism of the county staff.

Kathy Sayers, Chief of Staff for DAFO, started her career as a program technician in Texas, then in the Texas state office from 1991-2012 and moved to Washington DC in 2017. Kathy reported that \$35 million was set aside in the 2018 Farm Bill for hiring new FSA staff in addition to the \$27 million left from the 2014 Farm Bill. This will be used to replace the 42% of the FSA staff ready to retire. Funds were appropriated in the 2018 farm bill for overtime and hiring of temporary staff to fill the gaps in staff shortage. These uses of resources will be monitored and delivered by the SED's.

\$330 million were placed in the budget for IT. Most of this money is used for maintenance of present systems. As systems are retired more money will be put towards development. Improvements were made to CRP cost share and CITRIX.

Ms. Sayers commented on the hiring process. It currently takes 88 days to hire CO staff. DAFO is creating jump teams to improve and modernize the hiring process as well as improving the CED training (not COT training). A dashboard is now available to monitor workload analytics in county office.

Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, William "Bill" Beam addressed the assembly next. Mr. Beam is a crop farmer from eastern Pennsylvania. He has a side business collecting and

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distributing sawdust from cabinet and furniture businesses for among other things, animal bedding.

Mr. Beam reviewed the importance of Farm Programs and their contribution to the economic welfare of the rural communities. He commented on the modernization of acreage reporting – software is being developed so that by clicking on the CLU on the field maps you can load crop data in CARS and generate the crop report. 2018 Farm Bill requires that hemp is to be reported to FSA and a license must be included with the crop report (it lists the producer certified license number).

Mr. Beam attended the Agriculture and Food organization meeting in Rome, Italy. The topic was precision agriculture. By 2050, the goal is to provide producers with the science and technology to increase food production by 40% using 50% less energy for marketing, fertilization, and pesticide use.

At this point, the Assembly was opened for questions for Sayers and Beam. Topics included software development, shared management, the CO hiring and training process, and workload. The Washington DC folks were good listeners. They commended the NASCOE leadership for their time, effort and professionalism as they work together with DAFO.

A discussion on obtaining signatures for the ARC/PLC election process did break out. Mr. Beam said he was proud that they got passed the fact that owner signatures were not required for the 2018 election and things were going much smoother than in 2014, but when asked about getting all the required signatures for those with small bits of idle, pasture, or hay ground aside from the main operator that want nothing to do with the base acres; he had a very hard time understanding that. Can't remember if he was from the Virginia's or Carolina's but he said he rents 37 farms and has no issue with that at all! Come to find out, when they report acres down there they just put the whole farm in the "operators" name as he explains he rents the "farm" not by the "acre" as we in the Midwest apparently think of it as. So, the owner's horse pasture, hay field, etc., just go in his name on the 578 and they have no problem with signatures at all!!!!!! When asked about if there was ever a program such as a Disaster Program that would affect the owner or other operator the response was, we can always revise it if needed!!!!!! Okay.....no comment.

The next speaker was Pat Westhoff from the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute. He noted the items that have affected trade in 2019 – 2020 including the trade negotiations with China, African Swine Flu, and the coronavirus (which was not at pandemic portions at the time of the MWA Rally). There is a lot of corn and soybeans in storage. This abundance will continue until trade increases around the globe. Debt to asset ratio continues to increase and will continue to be a problem even with historically low interest rates.

Brandon Wilson, NASCOE president, addressed the convention. He noted the legislative successes including the \$35 million for hiring over the next two years, program submissions by CO staff which are presented to Congress, and workload analytics used to create 19 dashboards to analyze workload data. This dashboard data is available to CED's. NASCOE contributed to the training programs for County Committee and State Committee training. NASCOE and NAFEC met together for the first time with the Peggy Browne, Deputy Administrator.

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Workload analytics continues to be a concern. Workload data needs to be as accurate as possible to have good results. This is a time to educate the CO (accurate recording of activity in the county office) and Congress as to what it takes to administer farm programs.

Brandon noted that on average the county office donates seven hours per week during heavy sign up periods. We do this because we go back to our communities to participate and volunteer. We feel responsible for our neighbors. This time is not reflected in the analytics. FSA integrity may become an issue if improper payments are issued. There is a perception by the administration that workload is not a problem because the work is being done. Brandon stressed the need to have data flow from the County Office to the State Office to Washington DC to have an intelligent conversation about staffing.

Brandon noted the work being done within NASCOE. A Leadership Development Program was completed in Dallas, TX. The program was designed to actively engage with NASCOE leadership to recruit new members, learn the history of NASCOE, sample the legislative process, and network with other county office staff. NASCOE program and negotiation committees were combined to conserve funds and human resources. Brandon commended the accomplishments of Teresa Holmquist during furlough and her ability to keep membership up to date through the NASCOE website.

Brandon noted that state organizations need to maintain their non-profit status by filing the proper forms with the Internal Revenue Service. Procedure and training by NASCOE are being discussed for the officer positions on the state board.

Kevin Beckman was introduced as the new representative to Dillard Financial. Steve Dillard described the changes to retirement in the 2020 Secure Act. Dillard donated \$2000 to the MWA Rally to cover Rally expenses.

Kim Corlew was introduced as the representative from Anthem Blue Cross. She was thanked for the journal provided in the welcome bags by Anthem Blue Cross. She encouraged members to participate in the Wellness Activities available online to maximize their health benefits.

Chad Hart, RASCOE, reminded membership that RASCOE protects the retirement of all by following the legislation as it develops. RASCOE can go to Washington DC to advocate for continued benefit maintenance.

Mary Roberts, MWA Alternate Executive, encourages membership to participate in NASCOE. You come home energized and learn you are not alone. Mary is a member of the County Advocacy committee. National Association of Farmer Elected Committees (NAFEC) is alive and well and will partner with NASCOE to increase awareness of the County Committee system.

Jackson Jones, MWA Executive, notes that the Farm Service Agency is known as the "can-do" agency since the creation of the agency with the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) in 1933. Politicians want to 'wean' farmers off farm subsidies and as a result NASCOE must re-educate people that when times are bad, the FSA is in place to serve producers. County office employees are not GS because they are supervised by the county committee. The NASCOE

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negotiation committee exists to educate legislators and protect benefits. Continue to submit negotiation items to the NASCOE website.

Membership is stable for the time being but not sustainable. It will not help to increase dues. Need to talk to new employees on one-on-one to tell the NASCOE story. As new benefits are legislated into existence for GS employees, CO employees are forgotten (the 12-week parental Leave Act is the perfect example). NASCOE exists because of grassroots effort to educate legislators, protect benefits and engage membership in their organization. NASCOE fights for us when we are forgotten such as in the mentioned example. People forget all the time and NASCOE must tell the story, so nobody forgets about our service to American farmers and ranchers.

Jackson reminded the assembly about quarterly dues transmitted to NASCOE treasurer by April 10, 2020. If dues are not paid by June 30, 2020 the state is not affiliated with NASCOE. File the state's non-profit status. Watch your use of government computers for NASCOE business. The meeting adjourned for the day for supper on Branson Landing.

Friday commenced with committee reports, president's reports, and national convention updates. The following candidacy announcements were made. The election for these offices will take place at the National Convention to be held in Savannah, GA in August 2020. MWA Alternative Executive, Kayla Madson, MN; MWA Executive, Mary Roberts, IA; Curt Houk, NASCOE Treasurer; Brandon Wilson, President; Miranda Kester, Vice-President; Rick Csutoras, Secretary.

Thank you for the opportunity to go to the MWA Rally. Branson is a wonderful place to hold a convention with lots of reasonably priced family activities and decent shopping. The District Directors hosted the meet and greet activity on Wednesday night for a fun time for all.

Shelby Niskanen
Jake Bourget