

**2015 NASCOE NATIONAL CONVENTION  
AUGUST 13, 2015 – AUGUST 15, 2015  
DELEGATE REPORT  
BECKY ZIRPEL AND JOEL FOSTER, DELEGATES**



Joel & Becky Delegates, Stan President

The trip to the NASCOE National Convention to Milwaukee began on Tuesday, August 12. Joel Foster drove to Watertown to meet Stan Lamb in Watertown to jump into the Lamb Van. The Lamb Van proceeded to Sioux Falls to pick up Becky Zirpel and Lynda Steichen (RASCOE) before proceeding across MN and WI to Milwaukee. We arrived in Milwaukee at about 4:30 PM on Tuesday.

drove herself to Milwaukee as area. RASCOE members from convention were Gene and Edlund, and Jim and Eleanor person with a SD Connection former Faulk County CED. In regular members and 5 along with 2 guests for a total of 12 people from



Larry Olsen was already in Milwaukee for preliminary meetings as he is on the Executive Board. Mary Johnson she had relatives in the SD attending the Shirley Vognild, Leon Iverson. One other was Jerry King, the end there were 5 RASCOE members SD in attendance.



of Milwaukee.

Wednesday reserved for other activity the Stan Lamb went Tour of CASEIH Davidson Museum. The other attendees did not attend any scheduled tours. Joel used Larry's pickup to attend the PGA Championship Practice Round on Wednesday as it was being held about 50 miles north



activities were scheduled tours or any attendees desired. on the WI Industry and the Harley



The Convention convened on Thursday, August 13 at 8:30 AM. Roll call was taken and as always SD makes their presence noticed with a chant to announce the attendance. This year's chant was:

The Wheat is good the Corn is Great  
We're pretty proud of our Rushmore State  
Sturgis hosted the 75<sup>th</sup> Bike Rally  
With more people in attendance than the population of the our State

We may be small in numbers but large in enthusiasm  
SD has a 12 pack in attendance

Brad Pfaff, WI SED, opened the convention with a welcome message that included a history of agriculture in Wisconsin. Did you know that Wisconsin led the nation in Cranberry production?

The first WDC speaker was Val Dolcini, FSA Administrator, who was the California SED before becoming the FSA Administrator. Mr. Dolcini discussed the Workforce Engagement Initiative with a goal to improve communications in an effort to propose solutions to problems and engage with supervisors. He acknowledged there are various issues ranging from IT to personnel, and he encourages everyone to be patient as change does not happen overnight. Mr. Dolcini has challenged IT to think about downstream customers. Regarding leasing, the real challenge is working with GSA.

Chris Beyerhelm, Associate Administrator, was born in Africa as his parents were missionaries. IT, budget, and hiring is dominating the talks. Mr. Beyerhelm talked about increasing the circle of influence to be closer to the circle of concern. Regarding the OPM Security Breach, everyone should have gotten an email, and he encourages everyone to visit the OPM website for information. The next phase is contacting family and friends of those who were having a background check being conducted as that information was compromised. If anyone did not get an email or was hacked, you can call 1-844-777-2743

Mr. Beyerhelm continued with discussions on staffing and hiring. In January, FSA was 900 to 1000 below the staffing levels. They hired up HR first so they would have the resources to help others. There are three levels of hiring with CEDs/FLMs being internal, PTs being external, and COTs/FLOTs being internal and external. One of the issues is the current announcements have several grade levels for each vacancy as this creates extra work in obtaining the certificates for each grade level. FSA has been focusing on external customers due to the farm bill implementation, but now it is time to focus on internal customers (the employees). Mr. Beyerhelm stated he was disappointed in the number of Administrator Award nominations so he hopes for more in future years.

Regarding the budget, Mr. Beyerhelm said that the States got what they requested in 2015. It would appear we are headed for a continuing resolution for 2016. The President has not yet proposed a 2017 budget.

Congress has dictated a 3<sup>rd</sup> party study regarding workload. ARS does have some good tools, but no matter the workload model the question is are we prepared to make changes? Are we prepared to implement the model for offices that are more staffed versus less staffed?

Mr. Beyerhelm explained that IT has many moving parts. We can cuss, be upset, but understand the challenges of mixing FSA IT with external IT components. The goal is to have the AS400 retired by the end of the year. They are working on the printer issues, and it looks like future printers will be leased.

Greg Diephouse, Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, discussed the staffing and hiring issues. There is a high demand for temps, and funding looks promising for temps going into next FY. We had a decent budget this year with a good response from Congress. They are working on a plan to hire above the ceiling so there is flexible and timely hires designed to overlap with the staff that are planning on retiring. Key PTs will be allowed in every State up to the number of districts for each State. FSA had enough funds for award money, management training, and aspiring leaders program. The aspiring leaders program is an application based process geared for PTs. Looking forward, we need to develop a succession plan, career ladders, there should be more Lead PTs, and we need to take performance ratings more seriously.

Mr. Diephouse continued by stating we need to continue to strengthen our customer service as a strong customer service equates to a stronger FSA. There will be more online services. FSA could play an expanded role in connecting customers to external resources. There are 5 pilot states implementing a “Build Bridges to Opportunities” initiative where we develop a database of external resources that can provide our customers assistance beyond our program areas.

Mike Schmidt, Deputy Administrator of Farm Programs, announced that he was being promoted to a newly created Associate Administrator of Programs position that is going to be in charge of Farm Programs and Farm Loan Programs. There will now be two Associate Administrators with one focusing on the program side of things and the other focusing on non-program side. Mr. Schmidt spoke at the NWA Rally in Cody, WY, so his presentation was basically the same as he spoke of in June. He said we got the farm bill implemented and exceeded expectations. The can do attitude of FSA is great, but we also need to take a page from NRCS in being able to tell our story as our future is dependent upon us doing a better job of telling our story. We need to finish out what is in the pipeline regarding ARC/PLC, CRP Grassland kick-off, and the CRP General Signup that will highlight the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CRP. FSA needs to diversify the customer base with NAP buy-up and premium price options, improvements to FSFL such as cold storage and micro loan options, package FSA programs across USDA, and by forming formal and informal partnerships with our stakeholders. We need to take stock of policies, procedure, and software.

Jonathon Alboum, USDA CIO, spoke about the IT issues. He stated we need to know the customer and know the mission. Mr. Alboum is fully aware of the IT issues, and he stated that outages must become fewer and fewer. It is a very complicated issue as you have multiple program systems written by several people that need to mesh together into one system. We need to simplify, be reliable, and be secure. We are using old T1 technology in several service centers that is not capable of handling the current flow of information. We need real-time intel on systems so timely submit remedy tickets. The tickets do help them resolve the problems. Submitting a ticket on something that happened a few weeks ago does not help solve the immediate issue.

Mr. Alboum stated that employees need to visit the OPM website for updates on cybersecurity. We need to be smart, be suspicious, protect yourself, and check your financial accounts often. Do not click on links unless you know they are legit. He showed a Bank of America URL that looked legit, but once you looked at the URL it was too complicated to be Bank of America so we need to be very cautious on the URL we access. If it looks suspicious, do not click on the URL. Keep the lyncpass secure.

Tony Cossa, Director of ACRSI Program, was the final WDC speaker. He spoke about the acreage report streamline. FSA will launch a customer self-service portal in September of 2015.

The Thursday session ended with a Q&A with the WDC staff. There were 11 staff members present from WDC. The majority of the questions revolved around IT, staffing needs and future of acreage reports. These Q & A’s will be posted for all to read through NASCOE.

Hunter Moorhead, NASCOE Legislative Consultant, opened up the Friday session. They are going to put Mr. Moorhead’s power point presentation up on the NASCOE webpage so you can view the details of his report. The budget is all about defense v. non-defense spending with \$600 billion of the \$1.4 trillion dedicated to defense. The Republicans are backing the defense side of the budget where the Democrats are backing the domestic side of the budget. A government shutdown does not benefit anyone so there is a good chance of there being a continuing resolution. If the continuing resolution goes past the end of the year, then the budget defaults to the 2015 levels. The House and Senate side includes language in the budgets that disapproves reductions in non-federal work force, prohibits funds to close offices, and prohibits employee relocations without notification and approval by Congress. The House budget implements a one

year delay in conservation compliance and the use of commodity certificates for those who exceed the payment limitation. The Senate budget does not delay conservation compliance and does not authorize the use of commodity certificates.

Mr. Moorhead stated the Senate budget includes cybersecurity legislation that will enhance the Department of Homeland Security to protect the .gov domain. There is \$37 million for OPM to complete the planned security upgrades. There are funds being proposed for liability protection along with legislation to propose lifetime credit protection.

The pilot testing for acreage reporting was very positive for FSA. There are lots of questions on whether or not the local agents want to do acreage reporting versus the insurance companies that want acreage reporting. The other side of the issue is that we have our software for acreage reporting and each crop insurance has their software so integrating the various software packages is a challenge.

The rest of the Friday session was NASCOE Committee Reports and the area meetings. In South Dakota, we need to do a better job of promoting NAFEC to our COC members. NAFEC is able to tell our story at a different level than NASCOE is able to. We encourage everyone to become an associate member. There are Dillard Financial benefits that might be available to NAFEC members so please go to the NASCOE website to get information on NAFEC.

There was not much new discussion in the NWA break-out meeting beyond what was discussed at the NWA Rally. Jenae Prescott of Idaho is the new NWA Executive Committeeperson with the alternate being Jessi Colgrove, NE. Dillard Financial spoke to us briefly about the potential retiring training such as at the upcoming CRP Training. Dillard is willing to put on retirement training if we can organize a central location. There are several employees around the nation that are having background investigations being completed, but it was temporarily suspended due to the cybersecurity attack. They are now resuming the background checks. There are some investigators that are asking inappropriate questions so if an investigator is asking inappropriate questions, then please report it to your supervisor as it will be taken to the national level. We need to make sure our database is accurate so please make sure your email is correct, etc... so that you are receiving the emails that contain important information. Please verify with your director that your information is correct so that we can get your correct information in the database. There was a lengthy discussion on how to increase memberships. There has not been a final decision made yet on the location of the 2016 NWA Rally. There are discussions of having a joint Rally with the SWA area at a site to be determined, but it looks like it might be in Las Vegas.

Joel attended the Legislative Committee - *The message is that we need to do a better job of telling our story along with being more engaged with stakeholders. The stakeholders can carry the message better than federal employees so we need to partner with Ag groups that have a common interest. The reality is Congress listens to COC members and farmers better than listening to federal employees. Two employees from Oklahoma stood up and told a story of how during a meeting with a legislative aid how they were trying to tell our story and they could tell the legislative aid was not engaged in the meeting. They went back to Oklahoma thinking of how they could change the process to get the legislative aids more engaged in our story. They started to meet with Ag groups. The initial response from the stakeholders were "why are you guys here?" to eventually being "what can we do for you?". It has taken a couple years for them to build the relationships. They now have a great relationship with the various ag groups in Oklahoma that help tell our story, and together they are making a cooperative effort to move ag forward versus just moving FSA forward.*



Becky (NWA Publicity Chair) attended the Publicity Meeting and there was much discussion on Face Book, News Letter and Publicity Awards as they are now. The Committee wrapped it up with the 2 recommendations as follows:

**Recommendation #1**

*The Publicity Committee recommends elimination of the digital newsletter. To keep members informed, the committee proposes a strategy involving brief, concise news flashes as needed to be distributed through the home email database and Facebook. The committee also requests funding for one printed newsletter to highlight NASCOE activity for the year as well as benefits and convention information.*

**Recommendation #2**

*The Publicity Committee recommends replacing the Publicity Contest with a First Timer's Contest. The contest would allow members who have never attended a national convention to compete for a scholarship by submitting a one page essay explaining why they wish to attend. One winner would be selected from each area for a total of five scholarships.*

**Mary attended the Programs meeting**

*Chairman Richard Csutoras opened the meeting with an update on the number of Programs submissions that were received this year and quick review of the process to submit programs suggestions.*

*The rest of the time was spent in a Q&A format with the following people in attendance:*

*Brenda Carlson, Gov Delivery*

*Mike Schmidt, Deputy Administrator of Farm Programs*

*Tony Cossa, Director of ACRSI Program Larry Gross, FSA CIO*

*By phone conference: Brent Orr, ARC/PLC Program Manager*

*The majority of the time was spent discussing all the various computer and software issues that have frustrated the field office staffs. Larry Gross explained that he and his staff have visited several county offices and they truly have empathy and understanding of what we are dealing with in regards to unresponsive applications, MIDAS problems, GIS, etc. However, they are dealing with several different issues related to different platforms.*

*Mr. Gross urged employees to submit remedy tickets – because we pay for the service to be responsive and he uses the reports to track the problems and whether issues are truly getting fixed and how prevalent the problems are throughout the nation.*

*One question asked was, “How do we report in ARS the lost time spent waiting for the spinning wheel of death?” – meaning we should be able to report “IDLE” time. Larry agreed with the point made, but we must still tie the down time to the program area we are working on. There is no way to capture down time.*

**Stan attended the Membership meeting** the following topics were discussed:

1. **National Database** – Quite a bit of time was spent discussing thoughts about the current database structure. Results is the new data base and need to express that everyone take the time to complete this in order to stay informed.

2. **Creation of a Membership Packet** – After some research the majority of states don't have some kind of official membership application and/or packet. It was discussed that this would be a great help to membership chairs (and others recruiting) to have a uniform tool that has all the pertinent information and forms necessary to explain the goals and accomplishments of NASCOE as well as to sign a person up as a member.

3. **Membership Recruitment** – States are expressing having a tougher time gaining new members. Some “out of the box” ideas were discussed after being successful in a few states. The most used idea has been having a drawing for members that sign up in a specified time frame (often during a state meeting). Another suggestion was to have a separate drawing for the person that recruited the new member as an incentive to get out and talk to non-members.

4. **Membership Training** – A leadership conference was held by the SWA in Dallas, TX earlier this year. A training packet was created and reviewed with all in attendance. We took time to go thru this same packet in the breakout session. Items such as deadlines and responsibilities were discussed.

5. **Jump Teams** – The idea of jump teams was reviewed, as there were several in attendance that were not familiar with the concept. After a short description of the goals of jump teams, three different states requested to be considered for a visit.

Some suggestions and thoughts from the attendees included having an online application for NASCOE, stressing the importance of using the FSA-444 and having a good working relationship with State Offices to obtain names of new hires and employees that leave, retire, etc.

#### **Larry attended the Benefits meeting**

The Benefits Chair has been busy the last few months working with Working Advantage to secure online discounts from Nationwide Merchant Partners. They offer a wide variety of services such as Walt Disney World, Universal Studio, Six Flags, Sea World, Major League Baseball tickets, NBA tickets, Broadway shows plus many more. We hope the membership takes full advantage of these offers. Sign up is quick and easy. You must have a NASCOE membership password.

After extensive research on the Sam's Discount Card we have learned that a “National Sam's Discount Card” is not available. Sam's cards are issued on a state basis only.

The Benefits Committee worked with Dillard Financial Solutions to offer Life Lock at a discounted rate for all NASCOE members. Life Lock offers several levels of protection at an affordable rate. The coverage offered by the Government is just a basic notification nothing more.

The Benefits Committee Chair has updated the information in the Benefits handbook, updated the NASCOE Benefit Brochure and the Benefits Fact Sheet.

If there are any concerns or issues with our current benefits please feel contact Debra Holmes, NASCOE Benefits Chairperson or any Area or State Benefits Chairperson. They welcome all suggestions/ideas for potential new benefits.

*Communication is important to make these benefits the best they can be for our membership. The Benefits Committee will continue to work together to provide the best benefits possible for our membership.*

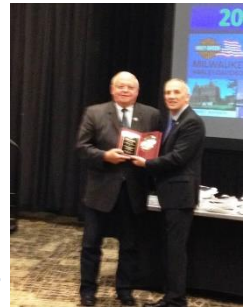
With the lack of membership from SD attending it was not possible to attend all breakout meetings so the team determined the coverage with the 5 members able to attend.

The efforts of Hunter Moorhead, NASCOE Legislative Consultant, are funded through our PAC. Every employee should be contributing to PAC even if it is just a few dollars each pay period. Everybody has a PAC so if we do not support the PAC, then we will be losing out to other interest groups who support a PAC. It is not about buying votes, but getting the opportunity to build relationships with the legislative contacts so we can tell our story. Employees can obtain the form from the NASCOE website to begin contributions to PAC.



During the Friday banquet, Stan Lamb read a letter from Sherry Ternes of SD who was the winner of National DSA award for Service to Community. Stan also accepted 50 year consecutive membership plaques for several offices.

Accepting award for Sherry



of our

Due to unforeseen circumstances, Stan, Lynda, Becky, and Joel had to leave Saturday morning so we were not able to attend the Saturday session. SD was well represented as Larry Olsen and Mary Johnson were in attendance at the Saturday business session.

Newly elected NASCOE Officers are:

- President Wes Daniels, SC
- Past President, Mark VanHoose, OH
- Treasurer, Shelly Odenkirk, OH
- Secretary, Deb Esselman- Baird, WI

There was no bid for the 2017 convention. The 2016 Convention will be held in Cedar Rapids, IA.



Your 2015 SD Delegates (Becky & Joel)