

Questions for Jamie

SD was fortunate enough to receive a higher ceiling. What are the plans in SD for the use of the increased positions? Are there plans to hire more COTs?

SD FSA Leadership recognizes the opportunity the increased staffing ceiling brings to COFs. As such, it has been determined that an aggressive approach to bringing on external hires is top priority so that we achieve our maximum staffing ceiling by the end of FY2020. External CO hires will be addressed in three hiring tiers; critical need hires, succession planning hires, and strategic hiring opportunities. Currently the goal is to proceed with the vacancies for critical need and current succession planning needs in the month of March; these vacancies account for approximately 15 additional hires in SD. The third waive of strategic hiring opportunities will roll out in the months of April and May; these vacancies may include COT's, but may also strategically be utilized to address alternative staffing needs throughout the state.

The COT Training and selection process is under review. Could you review the proposed changes?

The COT selection process is not anticipated to change; however, states now have the authority to advertise a CED vacancy with an expanded area of interest to include both internal and external candidates that have not completed the COT training program. This process is an option after a CED vacancy has been advertised at least once with no selection. This will be a great opportunity for current PT's to pursue upward mobility opportunities in specific locations. The expanded area of interest also allows external qualified candidates to pursue site specific CED opportunities with FSA. Successful selectees who have not previously completed the COT training program will be required to do so.

Could you review the CO hiring process?

The CO hiring process remains under the direction of FSA's Deputy Administrator for Field Operations; however, there is also FPAC Business Center oversight and engagement. All CO hires continue to be advertised through USAJobs and processed in the USASTaffing System. All CO applicant lists are provided to the SD FSA Admin Division where initial eligibility and qualification determinations must be made. Once the initial eligibility and qualifications review is complete, the Admin division works with the designated staffing specialist to generate certificates for issuance to the applicable hiring manager. The traditional ranking and review process still applies at the county office level; however, CED's may not make a tentative offer until confirming the offer and proposed grade level with the SD Admin Division. Once the CED is given the go ahead to make a tentative offer and acceptance is received, all notifications will be issued with the assistance of the designated staffing specialist and USASTaffing. States will no longer be issuing tentative and final offers from the STO; however, the Admin Division will be engaged in this process to ensure that activities are completed in a timely manner.

Due to several reassignments, there are currently 4 Key PTs. The initial allocation was for 6 Key PTs. The plan is to increase the number of Key PTs back up to 6, which is great as it is a promotion potential for PTs. You are requesting input as to the program areas that would need to be covered. What will be the process for providing input? What is the expected timetable for selecting the Key PTs?

SD FSA Leadership is committed to maximizing the 6 Key PT positions in South Dakota. The unique position provides a great opportunity for PT promotion while simultaneously providing much needed

COF support. The District Directors began facilitating discussions at management meetings to solicit and collect feed back from CEDs and PTs. SD Leadership would also like to seek input from SDASCOE regarding the Key PT positions. There are varied approaches to how the Key PT position can be utilized and needs may change with Farm Bills, workload, and staffing availability. We want to utilize these positions responsibly and ensure that they have a positive benefit on State and County operations as a whole.

Due to the fact our current priority is external CO hires, the Key PT vacancies will likely not role out until summer of FY2020. This time table allows us to focus on maximizing our staffing ceiling and promotes strategic analyzation of Key PT needs before implementation.

Notice AO-1748 was issued on February 13 clarifying access to Workload Matrix 6.0. Every CED should be getting access to the workload matrix. The matrix does show workload data for applicable counties. However; it does not show staffing levels as that is reserved for the OPO. DDs have access to the OPO. What is the plan for SD on sharing the OPO with County Offices? Could you explain the difference between the workload matrix and the OPO? Could you share the unrestricted staffing numbers for SD (as in if we had the budget to be fully staffed, what would those numbers be)?

Currently FSA Leadership is rolling out access to workload analytics for all CEDs, FLMs, and Senior FLOs. It is currently not the intent of Agency leadership to open up access to OPO beyond State Leadership. The data captured in workload analytics is fed into the OPO platform to provide management with a tool that indicates staffing benchmarks as a result of program metrics and other quantifiable date including processing time frames, etc. Again, OPO is a tool, but this is not the only criteria that is considered when addressing staffing needs. However, if SD Leadership intends to staff above the OPO identified staffing benchmark, we have the responsibility to provide DAFO with compelling data driven information to support the vacancy prior to approval.

SD OPO data currently supports 242.6 FTE's for non-disaster workload. SD's FY2020 Staffing Ceiling is reflective of 250 FTE's. It is important to keep in mind that disaster related workload is also intended to be supported with the use of temp FTE resources, etc.

DD's have the OPO data available to review county specific data with CED's to assess efficiencies and staffing needs.

Could you go through the decision-making process as to what constitutes shared management? What is the difference between temporary shared management and permanent shared management? What determines if a Lead PT is authorized?

There are many factors that are considered when evaluating Shared Management operations and effectiveness. While OPO data and staffing benchmarks are a consideration to ensure that we are best maximizing the supervisor to subordinate employee ratio. We also consider current staffing resources and potential viability of Shared Management success. Distance of the proposed locations is an important factor to ensure that excessive time is not spent traveling. Program and agricultural commonality is also a consideration. Permanent Shared Management allows a CED vacancy to be advertised for both office locations and allows for both COCs jointly handle the CED selection and performance process. Permanent Shared Management can be re-evaluated on an as needed basis by the STC. Temporary Shared Management arrangements are intended to be for brief periods of time until a management vacancy is filled. Unfortunately, due to hiring and staffing ceiling constraints in

recent years, there have been Temporary Shared Management arrangements that have been in place for greater than 12 months.

Lead PT's are designated at the discretion of the CED. Lead PT's shall only be designated in locations where the CED is absent at least 40% of the time and there are significant management and program activities to support a Lead PT position.

Could you describe the difference between a Charge PT versus a Lead PT?

A Lead PT is only to be utilized in Shared Management Operations. A PT in Charge is only authorized when there is a CED vacancy for more than 30 days and the PT in Charge will be serving as the Acting CED.

We thank you for holding COC Orientation during the 2018 NASCOE Convention. It was a great opportunity for our COC members. However; they were several not able to attend due to limitations on budget, distance from SF, etc. Prior to the 2018 NASCOE Convention, the last time there was off-site COC Orientation was 2015. Yes, the DDs do provide an abbreviated COC Orientation once per year. Are there plans to conduct another round of centralized COC Orientation meetings?

Joint COC orientation trainings are encouraged. This is an opportunity that SD FSA Leadership would like to pursue once we have an opportunity to evaluate our budget and travel availability.

The COC meetings are linked to the temporary allocation so there are budgetary constraints associated with face to face meetings. Due to the new budget, are there budgetary constraints related to COC meetings?

It is currently not anticipated that the budget will be constrained to the point of limiting COC meetings. At this point, COFs are guided to proceed with COC meetings in a business as usual manner if there is productive business to attend to. On average we anticipate that COC's will meet 8-12 times per year.

There are several new PTs that have been hired since the last PT Training. Are there plans to conduct another round of PT Training?

There currently are not plans to conduct another round of PT Training; however, this is an item that will be added to our training needs agenda for future consideration.

Thank you for the email authorizing limited Overtime and Comp time. Could you review the procedure for Comp Time, Overtime, and Credit Hours? At some point, the Comp time turns into real money so could you review that timeline?

It is important to note that any premium pay must be authorized by the supervisor prior to an employee earning premium pay. Credit hours may not be earned for travel and should only be earned with prior supervisory consent and should be a result of a specific Agency need. Overtime is granted to District Directors in allotments for specific program and/or workload needs. All overtime requests will be managed at the district level by the DD. Travel comp time may only be earned when physically traveling and does not result in payment to the employee if not utilized. Comp time expires after 26 pay periods and will only be paid out at the basic overtime rate of pay following the employee's request. There is

not an automated report available indicating comp time expiration, so it is the employee's responsibility to request that it be paid out prior to the expiration date.

There was recent legislation passed authorizing Paid Parental Leave. However; CO employees were not included in this legislation. Can you update us on the status of this act for CO Employees?

Statute was passed authorizing paid parental leave for births, adoptions, and foster arrangements that occur on or after 10.1.2020. FSA is currently working through the steps to ensure that paid parental leave is also available to CO employees. OPM is currently responsible for implementing the new statute.

Concerns from the field:

Software issues while trying to complete ARCPLC signup. A lot of frustration in the field with no adjustment to the deadline.

This is a topic of concern that is a primary focus of Under Secretary Northey and Chief of Staff Clover-Adams. As of two weeks ago a coding error had been identified to resolve the primary issues; however FSA Leadership continues to work diligently to identify and address software related concerns. In addition to ARC/PLC software issues, there have been challenges within the Citrix Environment that created additional work for COF staff.

"When is there time to complete Farm Record changes "in a timely matter? Seems like more and more is being loaded on with less and less time to do it."

FSA workload continues to be at a peak and with the expansion of WHIP+ to include excessive moisture and FY2020 ARC/PLC signup continuing into the summer of 2020, workload will continue to be a challenge.

We need to continue to look for opportunities to streamline workload where possible. It is also important that we assess and evaluate what work is FSA's responsibility vs. the producer's responsibility. Customer Service continues to be our number one priority, but FSA will not provide staffing resources to support workload that is not the responsibility of USDA.

The 24 FTE increase in the CO staffing ceiling and the continued use of temp FTE resources will provide a much needed reprieve to COFs who have been critically understaffed in the past.

There have been some concerns about the response time on questions from the field to the STO specialists. We realize they are busy as well.

Workload has been a challenge at all levels within FSA. In addition to staffing constraints and transition of employees as a result of retirements, the STO is also evolving. This past year has brought about multiple program signups and application periods with competing deadlines in addition to constantly evolving policy.

The programs that FSA delivers continue to have a positive impact on SD agriculture and are in demand. It is our goal to rise to the occasion and provide the necessary training and support to COFs to allow you

all to effectively and efficiently carry out your role. With that said, patience and understanding is key. We need to work together to look for opportunities to focus our work efforts in critical areas of need to maximize our staffing resources.

If there is a specific area of concern, please reach out to share your experience so we can evaluate if there is something that we can address in the immediate future. Open and proactive communication is key.