

VICE PRESIDENT REPORT JOEL FOSTER

As I approach my 25th year in the Agency (January of 2016), I have been reflecting about the future of SDASCOE and FSA. The fact that next year I will also be hitting a certain age milestone has probably added to that thought process. I began working for the Agency in January of 1991, and during that first week of my employment is when Desert Storm began. One of my best friends, Bob, was over in that desert along with Lynn Stoltenburg of the State Office. It just happens that Bob and Lynn were both from Clear Lake so I am sure Bob educated Lynn on this new COT before Lynn and I ever got to work together.

Don McManus was also a COT at that time, and he was hired in Jones County immediately after training was completed. Evidently I needed extended training that allowed me to experience several levels of FSA before I got my first CED job in Ziebach County in May of 1994. During that time of extended training, I took aerial pictures out of a plane, assisted several County Offices with disaster, worked with Paul Bishop and Kevin Steckelberg in the State Office, and spent a few weeks at the National Office working on disaster codes under the guidance of Lynn Tjerdema.

One of the first items the State Office discussed with me as a new employee was this association called SDASCOE. As I went from county to county during my training, I was quick to find out the importance of SDASCOE. I was initially intimidated by these leaders of SDASCOE as I was trying to negotiate my new life within the Agency. However; I soon found out how hard people like Gene Vognild worked to get us the benefits that we enjoy today.

Gene Vognild (former Minnehaha County CED) and others like him formed this organization called NASCOE and SDASCOE to fight for the benefits that we as CO employees take for granted. Yes, you read that correctly, Gene is a charter member of SDASCOE and at one time he did not have the benefits that we now take for granted.

There is a distinct difference between CO and GS employees in that our benefits are not guaranteed to always be the same as GS employees. If you go on the OPM website, you will not find one mention of a CO classification of employees as the only place CO employees exist is within the County Committee employment system of FSA. It takes resources to make sure our jobs and benefits are protected so that is why contributing to PAC is very important. I am contributing \$3 per pay period, and I encourage everyone else to do the same. In Milbank, it cost \$3 for a drink or beer so I simply have to consume one less drink every two weeks to for my job and benefits. Now, if I actually consumed one less drink every two weeks, then my doctor would also be happy. This link <http://www.nascoe.org/Pages/Legislative.aspx> will provide more information on contributing to the PAC.

During the NASCOE National Convention, it was pointed out that NAFEC (National Association of Farmer Elected Committees) can deliver our message in a much more effective manner than we can as employees. Sit down with your County Committee to explain the importance of them joining NAFEC, and we as CO employees need to send NAFEC \$20 to become an association member. There are some insurance benefits that might be of interest to your County Committee that become NAFEC members. This link <http://www.nascoe.org/Pages/NAFECCommittee.aspx> will provide talking points to talk with your County Committees and an application form.

As we all know, the number of our employees continues to decrease. Due to the decrease in number of employees, there is less money coming into SDASCOE and NASCOE. This is why your membership and dues are very important. SDASCOE and NASCOE needs everyone to become a member. If there is a new employee in your office, then please sit down with them to explain the importance of being a member of SDASCOE. If there is someone out there that is not a member of SDASCOE, then my question is why are they not a member? Do they not care about their job and benefits?

As I was riding along in the Lamb Van to the NASCOE National Convention in Milwaukee it occurred to me that I was the youngest person from SD attending the convention. Everyone else had either retired or were making plans to retire. We need our younger employees to become more involved in SDASCOE as in two to three years several of our SDASCOE leaders will be retired and move onto becoming members of RASCOE. We need to maintain a strong membership in SDASCOE and NASCOE with every employee contributing to our PAC to help protect our jobs and benefits.

I hope everyone has a great Fall, and hopefully our customers have a safe harvest. We have worked hard this past year to implement the farm bill so make sure to take time for yourself. Annual Leave is also one of our benefits.