



March 2006

DMASCOE DISPATCH

Volume II, Issue 1

DMASCOE 1004 Littlestown Pike Suite C Westminster, MD 21157 410-848-2780 Extension 2

Inside this issue...

From the President

Officers & Committee Reports

National & Area NASCOE News

In the Spotlight...

Highlighting a DMASCOE Member

Antics & Anecdotes

Around the States

Concerns & Updates

DMASCOE/NASCOE Events

The DMASCOE Dispatch is published quarterly, around the 15th of the month. Submissions for each publication must be presented to the Editor by the 1st of that month.

Publication Dates:

- March
- June
- September
- December

Carole Hill, Editor



FROM THE PRESIDENT, PATSY WILES...

Happy 2006,

Having just returned from the Legislative Conference, I am so excited about our meetings with congressmen! I am proud to say our DC congressional folks are starting to know about FSA from the many past visits, e-mails, and letters from all members and farmers. We visited with 8 Congressional members – 7 Maryland and 1 Delaware. They wanted to hear our concerns and seemed to understand our message. This is how it is -- Congress needs to provide our FSA and its employees the proper staff and funding for the work that we have to accomplish now in 2007. Major talking points were about baseline staffing, funding, and employee benefits needed for FSA. We are a customer-driven agency of diverse and multi-talented dedicated employees, administering and delivering major farm assistance programs. Funding for FSA needs to continue for the success of our nation's major farm policy and to continue to achieve an economically and environmentally sound future

for American farmers. I think Congress knows FSA matters, and we need to continue to educate our leaders and the public of our purpose in FSA, and continue to take pride in our jobs. Legislative position papers are included in this **DISPATCH**.

We are all excited to have Teresa Lasseter as our new Administrator. She has come with high hopes and fondness of FSA. She believes in open communications, and she seems to be very sincere, attentive, and concerned.

Maryland has been in the headlines in recent press releases with the new consolidation plan proposal. With the new plan on the table, officials are promising to be less aggressive, have many voices involved in final plan decisions, and therefore be able to make better decisions for the needs of each individual state. I have sent letters to our SEDs and their respective STCs asking for a DMASCOE voice in evaluating office efficiency and effectiveness, and wishing them well in the difficult decisions for MD and DE. Liz Anderson has so kindly provided us with the MD budget ceilings and sent us information about her direction for the consolidation proposal plan at this point. I have not heard anything from DE.



Membership is at 93% and I need to thank all members for joining, and more importantly, I need to also thank you for all the hard work you do for DMASCOE. I thank all members holding DMASCOE and Area Offices, those chairing DMASCOE and Area committees, the many folks attending DMASCOE/NASCOE events, and all members whom I have asked to help me in any way. I know that DMASCOE folks have been great in support of FSA by attending Ag Forums and many other agricultural organizational meetings, and I thank you again. I thank Susan for all her hard work, especially her personal contact with non-members. Special thanks go to Carole for editing this *DISPATCH*. I truly think this has become a wonderful communication line for us.

The Pre-Negotiation Session meeting went well this year

according to Carole, our NE Area Consultant. She was not sold on Vegas, but the job was done. Again this year, there were many Negotiation/Consultation items to be reviewed and prepared for the upcoming Negotiation Session with DC Management in May.

We need to support NAFEC! All County Offices need to express the importance of this organization to their County Committees. We need to support and encourage fellow committee members and all farmers in general to be involved.

Delaware Folks are preparing for the DMASCOE Annual State Meeting on March 18th at the Delaware Agricultural Museum in Dover, DE. Special guests attending will be Steve Connelly from DAFO, John Lohr from NE Area, Roger Richardson from NAFEC, Jim Mace from JM Marketing, and our own

Robin Talley from NADD. Delaware is planning special things for this meeting, so mark your calendar! I cannot wait to tour the Museum.

Some items on the agenda are:

**Awards and Scholarships
Dues Increase and Fund Raisers
Changes in By-Laws
Election of Officers**

Please register now and remember to bring your items for the Silent Auction. [*Editor's Note – Registration deadline is next Wednesday, March 8th. Registration form and information follows on the next pages.*]

Sincerely,
Patsy Wiles
DMASCOE President

2005 has sped by!
Now we need to face 2006.
There may be risks involved,
We may need to face roadblocks.
So stay alert!
Share time with friends,
Jump over obstacles
With care and caution,
Face challenges,
Remember to laugh,
Cooperate, Discover,
Make new friends.
Above all.....be ready for adventure!
Stick together
And you will be able to go far.
Always take time to smell the flowers.
Don't forget to relax and enjoy.
And never forget to love those dearest to you.

MAY GOD BLESS YOU IN 2006!



Delaware-Maryland Association of FSA County Office Employees Annual State Meeting

Mark your calendar & please join us for an excellent day!

Saturday, March 18, 2006



Delaware Agricultural Museum
866 North DuPont Highway
Dover, DE 19901
www.agriculturalmuseum.org

Order of Events

8:30am Registration w/ Beverages & Danish
9:00am Call to Order
10:00am Break
10:15am Resume Meeting
11:45 am Tour of Museum & Mingling
12:30pm Lunch
1:30pm Meeting Conclusion & Auction Results

Registration is \$15.00, with a portion of the proceeds to benefit the Delaware Agricultural Museum.
Please reply with payment made payable to "DMASCOE" by March 8, 2006.

(Attached is the registration form, directions & overnight accommodations.)

Remember to bring your items for the Silent Auction to benefit DMASCOE.



DMASCOE 2006



Directions:

**Delaware Agricultural Museum
866 North DuPont Highway
Dover, DE 19901**

Comfort Suites
1654 N DuPont Hwy
302/736-1204

Holiday Inn Express
1780 N DuPont Hwy
302/736-3500

Fairfield Inn
655 N DuPont Hwy
302/677-0900

Hampton Inn
1568 N DuPont Hwy
302/736-3500

Sheraton
1570 N DuPont Hwy
302/678-8500

Dover Downs
1131 North DuPont Hwy
1/800-711-5882 or 302/674-4600



Please search Map quest for more detailed directions from your location.

Registration Form

Please register, reply with payment made to “DMASCOE” by March 8, 2006, and send to:

**Susan Hardinger
1004 Littlestown Pike, Suite C
Westminster, MD 21157**

Name of DMASCOE Member: _____

Number Attending: _____



DMASCOE 2006

The Delaware Agricultural Museum and Village

866 North DuPont Highway
Dover, Delaware 19901
302-734-1618 / fax 302-734-0457

Agricultural History comes alive!

For the child who believes milk comes from the grocery store instead of a cow, for the woman who remembers using a cornsheller on her grandmother's farm, the family who takes twentieth century technological advances and the farmer for granted, the *Delaware Agricultural Museum and Village* offers a memorable and educational experience. By preserving the quickly fading agricultural heritage of Delaware and the Delmarva Peninsula, the Museum stands as an important legacy for future generations.



The Delaware Agricultural Museum Association was formed by a group of people dedicated to preserving the agricultural heritage of Delaware and the Delmarva Peninsula. The Museum opened its doors to the public in August 1980. A main exhibit building and fifteen historic structures associated with a nineteenth century farming community bring the fascinating story of agriculture to life. More than 4,000 artifacts are displayed in the main exhibit building - from butter churns to threshers, from an eighteenth century log house to the first broiler chicken house.

The artifacts convey the story of technological growth and change in Delaware and Delmarva's agricultural industries and farm home life through permanent and temporary exhibitions. The historic buildings collectively illustrate a day in the life of a nineteenth century farmer. They are the following:

- *mill *train station *schoolhouse
- *blacksmith & wheelwright shop *country store
- *farmhouse, garden, & outbuildings *barbershop *church

Since its opening, more than 500,000 visitors have toured the Museum and learned about Delaware and Delmarva's agricultural history through long-term exhibitions focusing on grain harvesting, the evolution of the tractor, and the poultry, produce and dairy industries. Temporary exhibits offer insights into other facets of rural life. In addition, the Museum hosts a number of annual special events which highlight the activities of nineteenth century farmers.

Delaware's Bill of Rights Returns to the Delaware Public Archives, December 7, 2005 through July 4, 2006.

Members traveling to Dover for the DMASCOE meeting will also have the opportunity to view an original copy of the Bill of Rights at our Public Archives building.

On loan from the National Archives, Delaware's copy of the Bill of Rights is unique in that the Constitutional amendments approved by the Delaware General Assembly in 1790 were noted on the bottom portion of the document. The document was returned to the Federal Government and locked away for more than 200 years.

Exhibit times:

Monday, Tuesday, Friday 9:00am - 5:00pm
Wednesday, Thursday 9:00am - 8:00pm
Saturday 9:00am - 5:00pm

Contact Robin at robin.talley@de.usda.gov for directions to the Public Archives facility. It is only a couple of miles from the Ag Museum.

OFFICER & COMMITTEE REPORTS

2004-2006

DMASCOE OFFICERS, COMMITTEE CHAIRS & DIRECTORS

Officers

<i>President</i>	Patsy Wiles
<i>Vice-President</i>	Susan Mackey-Taylor
<i>2nd Vice-President</i>	Barbara Large
<i>Secretary/Treasurer</i>	Susan Hardinger

New officers will be elected at our Annual Meeting in March. Have you considered running for office?

The new President will appoint the Committee Chairs.

Committee Chairs

<i>Awards & Scholarship</i>	John Burtman
<i>Benefits</i>	Eva Delp-Cole
<i>Emblems</i>	Lynn Manges
<i>Legislative</i>	Kelly Hereth
<i>Membership</i>	Susan Hardinger
<i>Publicity</i>	Carole Hill

Directors

<i>Delaware</i>	Greg Hudson Leolga Wright <i>Alternates –</i> Lynn Manges MaryAnn Reed
<i>Maryland</i>	
<i>District 1</i>	Eva Delp-Cole Jean Knight <i>Alternate –</i> Melissa Donnelly Rebecca Clark
<i>District 2</i>	John Burtman Kathy Whitby <i>Alternate –</i> Amy Farrell Elizabeth Ridgely

DMASCOE TREASURER'S REPORT - March 1, 2006

Checking Account Beginning Balance - March 19, 2005 5,322.30

Income + 7,933.01

Dues	4,286.36
2005 DMASCOE mtg. registration	75.00
2005 DMASCOE Silent Auction	369.00
B'more in 2004 refunds not cashed	75.00
Cookbook sales	202.00
NASCOE National Convention aid	727.00
Donations	122.65
DMASCOE picnic	956.00
Transfer from Money Market account	1,120.00

Expenses - 12,002.55

NASCOE dues	3,080.00
NASCOE Scholarship Fund	100.00
2005 NEA Rally Delegate	290.27
2005 DMASCOE mtg.	598.45
NEA Exec travel to DMASCOE mtg.	154.70
Postage	97.73
NEA Rally Auction donation	34.93
NAFEC donation	100.00
To Money Market account	564.00
To DMASCOE Scholarship Fund	2,769.00
NASCOE Convention auction donation	165.48
NASCOE Convention delegates' expenses	2,455.32
NASCOE Katrina Relief Fund	300.00
DMASCOE Picnic	1,292.67

Checking Account Balance - March 1, 2006 1,252.76

Money Market Account Balance - March 1, 2006 1,484.44

Total Cash - Checking & Money Market - March 1, 2006 2,737.20

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DMASCOE Scholarship Fund Balance - March 1, 2006 2,769.00

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Hardinger, Secretary/Treasurer

Have I Got a DEAL for You? Oh, Yeah.

-Susan Hardinger

As you can see from the Treasurer's Report, DMASCOE needs money if we're going to be able to meet our obligations to NASCOE, to our Scholarship Fund and to ourselves. Our expenses for sending our delegates to represent us regionally and nationally are only going to increase in the near future.

I know we'll discuss this "money issue" at the upcoming state association meeting, but I have a short-term proposition to run by you right now. We still have Star-Spangled Recipes, DMASCOE's cookbook, left from "B'more in 2004." Since the end of the convention we've sold about 40 for the original price of \$10.00 each, mostly to farmers and their wives from the Carroll County office and a few for \$12.00 from the mail order form in the back of the cookbook. We have 55 cookbooks still available, however.

I propose keeping nine of them here in Carroll County to continue selling to "walk-ins" and by mail order, and dividing up the other 46 by sending two cookbooks to 23 of the county offices in Maryland and Delaware. (There's one county office with no DMASCOE members.) I'm asking each county to give DMASCOE \$20.00 for two cookbooks, which could then be sold, given as gifts, preserved forever in your DMASCOE history folder – I'm sure each office has one of those, right? – or whatever you choose. I'll bring the books to the state meeting to give out, and I'm asking each county to bring or send \$20.00 to the meeting for this effort.

This is one quick way we can liquidate a DMASCOE asset that is just sitting here and add a quick \$550.00 to the treasury. And, this should be relatively painless for everyone.

So . . . try to figure out how you want to handle this from your county. One member might want to buy both cookbooks for gifts, or you might want to chip in for the \$20.00, and then reimburse yourselves when you sell them. And, if you want more than two, let me know now. I'll be happy to accommodate – and even happier to turn this asset into much needed money for our organization and get these books out of the boxes and off the shelf.



AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS

I am so pleased to announce that DMASCOE has received 2 scholarship applications and 2 NASCOE Distinguished Service Awards this year! All of these have been forwarded to the NE Area competition. More will be announced at the DMASCOE State Meeting.

John Burtman, Chair

BENEFITS

The January 26, 2006 issue of NASCOE Now featured an article by national Benefits Chair, Becky Zirpel. The article discussed the Federal Telecommunications Act of 1996. This Act entitles certain federal employees to discounts on their wireless telephone service.

“All Federal Employees and Military Personnel are entitled to a discount on their cell phone service according to the Federal Telecommunications Act of 1996. The discount is not advertised so you have to call and ask for the discount by calling the following cell phone companies and referring to the Fed Tel Act, and they will implement on the spot:

- A. CINGULAR – 19% Discount – website, <http://www.cingular.com/ldiscounts>
- B. T MOBILE – 22% Discount – 866-646-4688. You will need to request a migration form from this email: dein.luu@t-mobile.com
- C. SPRINT – 15% Discount – 888-322-3961. This will transfer your account into a corporate account.
- D. NEXTEL—18% Discount – 800-639-6111.
- E. VERIZON – 15% Discount – 866-456-7892. You will be asked to fill out a form and fax back (or register online).

Each cell phone company and each company location seems to have a different policy. At this point, my advice to anyone seeking this discount would be to simply contact your cell phone company in your area to verify the company policy and request the discount if it is available. I apologize that I do not have more information, but feel it would be impractical for me to try to address every situation with every cell phone company in every location.

This benefit is worth checking out. Some requirements to keep in mind:

- The monthly access fee must be \$34.99 or higher to qualify for the discount
- Family Share Secondary lines are NOT eligible.

As stated in the NASCOE Now article, this is not a NASCOE Benefit, but a benefit to all federal employees. Check it out; it may be worth your time, and you may make plans for future changes to your wireless service.

Submitted by,
Eva Delp-Cole
DMASCOE Benefits

PROGRAMS

Following in the steps of NASCOE and the Northeast Area, DMASCOE needs to establish a PROGRAMS Committee. If you would be interested in chairing this committee, please let Patsy know.

PUBLICITY

Carole Hill, Publicity Chair

The “unofficial” word is that DMASCOE received Honorable Mention for the **DMASCOE DISPATCH** in the NEA Publicity Contest. The official notice of NEA Publicity Contest winners will be announced at the Annual DMASCOE Meeting, if they are received in time.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

As Trice Smith of Iowa, National Legislative Chairperson, says, "Not knowing what the future may hold for FSA and production



agriculture, we all need to Man the Oar! Every member of DMASCOE/NASCOE needs to become a member of the rowing team, pick up their oar, do their part, and

that means you. Every team member must row fast, hard, and in the same direction, if we are to come out in the lead in this race for Agriculture."

Everyone, please sign up for CAPWIZ, and let others know that are not signed up, how important and simple the process is.

Send your congressional person a letter stating that DMASCOE/NASCOE has never argued the fact that some office closings should take place, but we are opposed to mass closings without the consultation and input from the STO, SED, the Employee Associations, and other agricultural organizations.

Follow up with PERSONAL e-mails, letters, and phone calls to your congressional member.

Working together, we can minimize the impact on FSA and Agriculture. Keep talking!

DE & MD REP's ADDRESS UPDATE

Michael N. Castle (Rep., At Large DE)
1233 Longworth HOB, WDC 20515-0801
Phone: (202) 225-4165

Wayne T. Gilchrest (Rep., 1st)
2245 Rayburn HOB, WDC 20515-2001
Phone: (202) 225-5311

C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger (Dem., 2nd)
1630 Longworth HOB, WDC 20515-2002
Phone: (202) 225-3061

Benjamin L. Cardin (Dem., 3rd)
2207 Rayburn HOB, WDC 20515-2003
Phone: (202) 225-4016

Albert Russell Wynn (Dem. 4th)
434 Cannon HOB, WDC 20515-2004
Phone: (202) 225-8699

Steny Hoyer (Dem., 5th, and Min. Whip)
1705 Longworth HOB, WDC 20515-2005
Phone: (202) 225-4131

Roscoe G. Bartlett (Rep. 6th)
2412 Rayburn HOB, WDC 20515-2006
Phone: (202) 225-2721

Elijah E. Cummings (Dem. 7th)
2235 Rayburn HOB, WDC 20515-2007
Phone: (202) 225-4741

Chris Van Hollen (Dem. 8th)
1419 Longworth HOB, WDC 20515-2008
Phone: (202) 225-5341

Go to www.house.gov to view their personal web pages and local office addresses and phone numbers. Local contact throughout the year is the most effective method to reach our Congressional members. Visit www.senate.gov to find your Senator.

Thanks, Kelly Hereth

For Legislative Conference Position Papers & Talking Points, please see following pages...



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FSA USDA COUNTY OFFICE EMPLOYEES
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED ASCS-FSA USDA COUNTY OFFICE EMPLOYEES**

NASCOE President
Daniel Root
1400 W Main St
Albert Lea, MN 56007
(507) 373-0725 – NASCOE
(507) 373-7960 – Office
Email: dlroot@myclearwave.net

RASCOE President
Clara Ruth Saint
PO Box 262
St. Francisville, LA 70775
(225) 635-6280
Email: crsaint@bellsouth.net

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The 109th Congress of the United States attempted passage of several pieces of legislation supported by NASCOE and RASCOE. NASCOE and RASCOE applaud those Congressional Representatives supporting this legislation. It is hoped Congress will, at a minimum, address the inequities described below;

- ❖ **Social Security Windfall Elimination Provision.** The formula for calculating a federal employee’s retirement under this provision reduces the earned annuity by as much as 60%. HR 147 and SB 619 address this inequity.
- ❖ **Government Pension Offset.** The law requires two-thirds of a government annuity be offset from a spousal social security benefit. HR 147 and SB619 correct this situation.
- ❖ **Retirement.** Federal County Office Employees dedicate their career to serving the Agricultural Community with a promise of certain retirement benefits. Many federal employees would be very disappointed if Congress made a change in the retirement formula at this time.
- ❖ **Cost of Living Adjustments.** The 1990 Federal Employee Pay Comparability Act was designed to equalize pay between federal and non-federal workers within 10-years. The average pay for FSA employees lags 8 to 12% behind comparable jobs in the private sector. Congress needs to act to correct this disparity.
- ❖ **Health Insurance.** NASCOE and RASCOE support several changes to the health insurance programs offered our employees. Items of concern include; premiums continue to rise approximately 10% each year, non-participants should receive monetary compensation, the age of discontinuing coverage for dependents should be raised from 22 to 25, the law should allow participants to use pre-tax dollars to pay health costs, and we support the availability of affordable dental and vision coverage. HR 994 and HR 3751 address our last 2 concerns.
- ❖ **Leave.** Federal Employees covered under the Federal Employee Retirement System (those hired since 1/1984) should be rewarded for conserving their sick leave. We support removal of the requirement that GS and CO employees be from the same employee system to utilize donated leave. Finally donated leave should not be limited to annual leave.
- ❖ **Liability Protection.** Congress must act to revise 7 CFR Subtitle A to include former USDA employees.

NASCOE and RASCOE ask that Congress consider ways to make federal employment more comparable to the private sector. We believe enactment of legislation to address the above issues will allow USDA to continue providing the high quality of service the farm community has become accustomed to, and to continue to attract high quality employees in the future.

TALKING POINTS FOR EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The 109th Congress of the United States attempted passage of several pieces of legislation supported by NASCOE and RASCOE. NASCOE and RASCOE applaud those Congressional Representatives supporting this legislation. It is hoped Congress will, at a minimum, address the inequities described below;

- ❖ **Social Security Windfall Elimination Provision.** This provision greatly reduces the Social Security benefit of a retired or disabled worker receiving an annuity based on his/her own earnings. The formula for calculating a federal employee's retirement under this provision reduces our annuity by as much as 60%. Our employees earning income from sources subject to social security deserve to have their benefits calculated the same as someone earning all their income from social security covered sources. This provision should be repealed to make federal employment comparable to the private sector.
- ❖ **Government Pension Offset.** This provision affects government retirees collecting a government annuity based on their own work and social security benefits based on their spouse's work record. The law requires two-thirds of the government annuity be offset on whatever social security benefit would be paid as a spouse of a social security covered worker. Many workers receive retirement benefits from sources other than social security, yet this provision unfairly targets government employees. Action to make federal employees comparable to the private sector must include repealing Government Pension Offset.

NASCOE and RASCOE express appreciation to members of the 109th Congress who have introduced or voiced support via co-sponsorship of legislation to correct the discrepancies described above. All Members of Congress are encouraged to join in this effort of "fairness."

- ❖ **Cost of Living Adjustments.** Cost of living (COLA) adjustments for employees and retirees should be maintained and increased in the same general amount received in the private sector. Congress must grant and improve these adjustments for its employees and retirees to maintain a quality workforce. The 1990 Federal Employee Pay Comparability Act was designed to equalize pay between federal and non-federal workers within 10-years. According to the American Federation of Government Employees' website www.afge.org, the average pay for FSA employees lags 8 to 12% behind comparable jobs in the private sector. Congress needs to assure federal salaries continue to attract a quality workforce.

An article by Karen Rutzick, from www.govexec.com cites the tools used by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) to retain high quality workers. Higher pay, higher contributions toward health insurance, subsidized vision and dental coverage, additional retirement savings accounts with matching agency contributions, agency match to TSP for CSRS employees and special accounts for "life cycle" needs are part of FDIC's compensation package. Glen Bjorklund, the agency's deputy director in administration, attributes the above average compensation package to a need to retain a high quality workforce and to the requirement that pay and benefits must be negotiated with an employee union.

- ❖ **Health Insurance.** NASCOE and RASCOE support several changes to the health insurance programs offered our employees. Increasing the government contribution would assist in alleviating some of the salary discrepancies, now in effect, between government employees and the private sector. Current and former employees are

experiencing a decrease in their purchasing power as health insurance premiums continue to increase by 10% each year since 1998.

Many employees in the private sector receive remuneration for declining participation in health insurance programs. Federal employees given this option may opt to be covered under other programs with possible cost savings to the government. Employees choosing not to participate in a government sponsored health plan should receive monetary compensation.

The age of discontinuing health benefits for dependents should be raised from 22 to 25. In many cases, students are unable to complete their studies by age 22 and they are dropped from the employee's health plan. As a non-wage earner, this creates a hardship for the employee's family.

NASCOE and RASCOE support revisions to the law, which allow retirees to use pre-tax dollars to pay health costs. This will help our retirees maintain a portion of the COLA Congress gives them each year. We also support dental and vision coverage, which is affordable. We believe the health benefits afforded FDIC employees should be made available to USDA employees. Our workforce assures a stable food supply for the Nation. Is this task any less critical than that of FDIC? We need to assure retention of the capable workforce within FSA by providing health benefits similar to those provided FDIC employees.

- ❖ **Retirement.** Federal County Office Employees dedicate their career to serving the Agricultural Community with a promise of certain retirement benefits. Congress must assure employees that their retirement benefits will be calculated using the high three salary years. Many federal employees would be very disappointed if Congress made a change in the retirement formula at this time.
- ❖ **Leave.** Federal Employees covered under the Federal Employee Retirement System (those hired since 1/1984) should be rewarded for conserving their sick leave. Civil Service Retirement allows retirees to credit unused sick leave to their years of service. FERS employees should be afforded the same opportunity. NASCOE and RASCOE support a General Accounting Office (GAO) study to determine how this loss of benefit affects the usage of sick leave among federal employees.

Congress has provided employees with some very useful tools to protect employees suffering from a catastrophic illness. Fellow employees can donate unused annual leave to needy individuals if they are in the same employee system (CO vs. GS.) We support removal of the requirement for the employees to be from the same employee system. We also support removal of the limitation that donated leave be annual leave. Many employees fully utilize their annual leave but would consider donations if it was sick leave. This would help those in need and would encourage FERS employees to conserve sick leave for those truly in need.

- ❖ **Liability Protection.** Congress must act to revise 7 CFR Subtitle A to include former USDA employees. Current employees have the benefit of OGC representation and the Freedom of Information Act. Former employees should be afforded this same protection for acts taken while working for USDA.

NASCOE and RASCOE ask that Congress consider ways to make federal employment more comparable to the private sector. We believe enactment of legislation to address the above issues will allow USDA to continue providing the high quality of service the farm community has become accustomed to, and to continue to attract high quality employees in the future.

FARM SERVICE AGENCY 2007 BASELINE STAFFING AND FUNDING

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is a customer-driven agency with a diverse and multi-talented workforce, dedicated to achieving an economically and environmentally sound future for 65 million rural Americans by administering 51 programs designed to meet the demands of a diversified agricultural landscape.

As Congress begins to address the new fiscal year appropriations, the National Association of FSA County Office Employees (NASCOE) encourages Congress to provide FSA county offices with funding that will fully support the continuation of all current activities associated with the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002. We also request that Congress provide additional funding associated with the administration of any future Ad Hoc programs.

High priority has been placed on the expansion and enhancement of automation technology. U.S. Department of Agriculture budget shortfalls for Information Technology Initiatives have been met by transferring funds from the FSA Salaries and Expense Accounts to the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) to service and expand the Information Technology (IT) needs of the Agency as governed by the Freedom to E-File Act 2000. For FY 2005, \$65 million was appropriated by Congress for IT initiatives. An additional \$101 million to support the IT initiatives of the Agency was transferred from the Salary and Expense accounts of FSA in that same fiscal year. This transfer of monies has created a shortfall of funds for the administrative operations of County Offices. FSA is currently reviewing a plan to help meet the shortfall in IT needs of the Agency.

NASCOE is concerned that the current and future budget shortfalls could create serious delays in program rollout, lead to inadequate program oversight, and inhibit timely distribution of benefits to eligible program participants.

- **NASCOE supports establishment of a permanent employee baseline to ensure program delivery will be completed in the most timely and efficient manner.** The most current Farm Service Agency workload analysis indicates a need of 11,120 County Office (CO referred to as Non-Federal in USDA budget request) Employees to carry out program activities that they administer. FSA CO employees are currently working at a staff ceiling of 8775. NASCOE requests a baseline staffing level of **9500** Permanent County Office employees and **1500** Temporary employees to secure FSA infrastructure and program delivery.
- The FY 2007 agricultural appropriations process presents an opportunity for Congress to assure that funds appropriated for FSA staffing and offices will be used to deliver farm programs as intended in the 2002 Farm Bill.
- During the development of the 2007 Farm Bill, Congress will have the opportunity to create a long-term, reliable, budgeting system for the Farm Service Agency. This will assure the Agency will be accountable to the needs of the customers and taxpayers it is mandated to serve.
- NASCOE also supports language included in the Fiscal Year 2006 Agricultural Appropriations bill stating, “in that no funds made available by this Act may be used to pay the salaries or expense of any officer or employee of the Department of Agriculture to close any local or county office of the Farm Service Agency unless the Secretary of Agriculture, not later than 30 days after the date on which the Secretary proposed the closure, holds a public meeting about the proposed closure in the county in which the local or county office is located, and after the public meeting but not later than 120 days before the date on which the Secretary approves the closure, notifies the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry and the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate, and the members of Congress from the State in which the local or county office is located of the proposed closure.”
- NASCOE supports Congress’s long-standing intent that office closures and relocations should occur based on a rigorous analysis to ensure actions are cost-effective and will better serve the public.

FSA is the primary Agency for the administrative delivery of the major farm assistance programs. A reliable long-term office structure and adequately staffed workforce are essential elements to the success of our nation’s major farm policy.

Talking Points ---FSA Budget and Staffing Paper

- Staffing levels continue to be reduced while outlays from U.S. farm programs are at an all time high. From 1993 to 2001 FSA staffing levels decreased by nearly 40%. Since that time Staffing levels have stayed around the 2001 level using Temporary Employees to help in busy times. FSA jobs have become increasingly technical therefore the need for a talented and diverse workforce is vital. Future budgets must allow for the hiring and recruitment of permanent employees to maintain the long term stability of the Agency.
- Our current system of workload is used by the Administration to request appropriate Salary and Expenses for the agency. The system used by the Agency to measure work completed can be very accurate, but formulas and estimates applied by the Agency has proven to show some inequities. The use of 3 years data (2 years actual and one year estimate) can be misleading and show inequities between CO/GS staffing needs. NASCOE feels that using 3 years of actual workload would be a truer picture of our staffing needs and what the Administration should be requesting from Congress.
- The ultimate goal of the FSA structural review is the modernization of the agency by upgrading equipment, improving service to our clientele and provide training for FSA employees. Will OMB provide the agency the opportunity to maintain any derived savings? For the review plan to be successful NASCOE feel that FSA must reinvest any savings in fully staffing the remaining county offices.
- NASCOE continues to support the Service Center Concept “One Stop Shop” We do not support the elimination of the Service Centers that now provide the most convenient service possible. Should not all USDA agencies be under the same review?
- NASCOE supports the IT initiatives of the Agency and providing producers the opportunity to use these types of service options. We also understand that they must become more “user” friendly before our clientele will feel comfortable in their usage. The idea that the average producer uses a laptop from his pickup in the field to transact his business is the exception not the rule. E-LDP filing by producers is still minimal. A January 27, 2006 filing report indicates that only 16,462 of the total 1,232,761 LDP’s filed were producer submitted by the E-File process. This is just slightly more than 1%. The county office staff must be maintained to service our clientele. The most recent LAP program was delivered by use of a Web based system which was put into place before it was ready to be implemented. Problems existed within the program that caused many applicants to be paid “late payment interest” at the expense of the taxpayer.
- The Agency has spent \$500M to date in developing Web Based Applications. Many of the Web Based operations have and continue to experience major problems and the Agency estimates that it will take \$400-\$500 million dollars in the next 3 years to transfer the remainder of our programs to the Web. We support congress in requesting to see the benefits of the initiatives before any new money is appropriated.
- Salary and Expense funding should not be used for IT. We do not believe that this is the intent of Congress.
- The 2007 Presidents budget indicates a decrease in expenditures by \$3B. This comes from the assumption that there will be no emergency funding or emergency supplemental funds needed. We find that history does not support this assumption. Presidential and Secretarial Disasters have been declared in 16 years since 1988.

Membership Report - March 1, 2006

There will be a detailed report of membership covering the entire dues year at our meeting on March 18, but, briefly, here's the good news:

We have several more paid members since the last *DISPATCH* report, and our membership percentage is now 93%.

We should never be satisfied with our membership percentage - unless it's 100%, of course - but the DMASCOE members who have worked to convince their colleagues to support ALL county office employees by paying their dues should be very proud.

In a nutshell, here's our membership snapshot:

* Delaware is a 100% state.

*We've recently gained members from every segment of both states - regular members from county offices, FLP members, and state office associates. Most new members express concern about the way "FSA Tomorrow" was handled and rising concerns about the looming "FSA Tomorrow-Lite reorganization" as their motivation for their support of DMASCOE and NASCOE now.

*All county offices are 100% except five in Maryland, and all county office employees are members except five PTs and one CED.

So . . . let's keep working at it - 100% is not that far away!

Susan Hardinger, Membership Chair

[Editor's Note - Anyone wishing to join or to pay ahead on their dues, the DUES SUBMITTAL FORM is available on the DMASCOE website, <http://www.geocities.com/dmascoe>.]



NATIONAL & AREA NASCOE NEWS

NOTICES & NOTES FROM OUR NEA EXEC, JOHN LOHR...

- FY2006 staff ceilings according to NASCOE sources - nationwide CO went down 370, GS went down 103, and Temps are down to 650. I'm not sure when these reductions will hit the states. As states get their travel allocations, at least one state in the nation is reporting that no one there can travel at this time. This will probably be all over the board in our NEA states.
- Farm Bill - The farm bill process begins. See the website below for details.
http://www.agweb.com:80/get_article.asp?pageid=124458
- **WDC Conference Call with Employee Associations - Tuesday, January 10, 2006**

On Tuesday, January 10, 2006, David Vidrine and I participated in a conference call that the Administrator, Teresa Lasseter and some of her staff held with all the Employee Associations including NAFEC. The purpose of the conference call was to talk about FSA, its structure and the need to review its current structure due to a number of different reasons. The Administrator conveyed to the Associations that any office restructure plans have been on hold since FSA Tomorrow was halted and due to the ongoing budget concerns, it is imperative that FSA look at its structure so resources can be better utilized and our customers can continue to receive the service they truly deserve. The Administrator has had brief discussions with both the House and Senate Ag Committees in regards to the situation FSA is in and she indicated to us that none of this will happen if it in any way hurts the Agency, our employees or most of all the service we provide to our customers.

The Administrator has directed SED's to form a review committee to identify the optimal office structure to best utilize allocated resources for their state. SED's will be encouraged to involve all stakeholders including employee associations. SED's have not been provided with any numbers, guidelines, goals, timelines, etc. Plans will be developed at the state level and will be submitted to DAFO for review. SED must have STC concurrence before their plan can be submitted. DAFO will review plans to ensure they are sound plans and all plans must contain rigorous analysis to support any structural change. If DAFO determines a state plan makes good business sense, then the plan will be shared with the appropriate congressional delegates. At this point, appropriate public meetings would need to be advertised and held. These meetings would be held in the counties that would be affected by possible office closing and/or consolidations.

The Administrator indicated that any actions that would have an impact on office structure would have to follow the guidelines set forth in the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, of 2006. This act set forth the requirement that the Secretary is to hold public meetings and notify the House and Senate Agriculture Committees on any proposed closures of a local or county office.

The Administrator and Steve Connelly wanted us to know that this process will be open and transparent and that all stakeholders will be included. Teresa told the group there will not be a national plan to restructure and/or consolidate offices nor will there be a time frame to complete it. SED's have been encouraged to share information of such plans as much as possible. The review committee must include the State Committee, but they have not mandated anyone other than the STC. However, again, they have encouraged SED's to involve all stakeholders as much as possible, which means that SED's are not prohibited from utilizing others such as STO personnel, COC's, CO employees in the field and/or state employee associations.

➤ **Northeast Area Report for the January 22-23, 2006 NASCOE Meeting**

Our members appreciate the timely information from Dan on the new FSA structure process being initiated by Administrator Lasseter and are encouraged by having the employee associations involved from the beginning of the planning. There is some skepticism that this is just another FSA Tomorrow plan. Most members realize that shrinking budgets will mandate changes in the way we do business.

Only Pennsylvania is reporting continuing with office consolidations. These changes were approved before FSA tomorrow and only involve the combination of shared management offices. Soon after receiving the state's FY06 staff ceiling and administrative allocation, the Pennsylvania SED plans to right size field office staffing using directed reassignments if needed.

The Delaware-Maryland association is encouraged by their membership increase and a better relationship with their state office. A dedicated core group of members is working hard to get New Hampshire's membership percentage up to the affiliation level.

This year's NEA rally will be held May 19 and 20 in the Wilson Lodge at the Oglebay Resort in Wheeling, WV. Reservations must be made by March 20, 2006. See the NASCOE website for more information.

"NASCOE Now" continues to be a big hit with our members, who have come to expect the timely information sent right to their email addresses. Thanks, to Cindy and all the other members who are contributing articles, for all the hard work in keeping this project going. Our newsletter is also well received and provides information to our associate members and friends without computer access.

The NEA plans to be well represented at this year's legislative conference. A few of the smaller states are having problems finding enough volunteers and funds to cover this year's conference.

Thanks to Keith Richmond for attending the last several meetings as my alternate. The severe trauma to my elbow's connective tissue is causing extra bone growth that may need surgically removed to give me a functioning joint. I will know more after my next doctor's appointment in mid February.

➤ **Retirement Info at the NEA Rally**

Pat Farmer from HRD is available to provide attendees at our 2006 NEA Rally with retirement information. Several other NASCOE areas plan to use her at their rallies and believe that her presentation will be both informative and that it will help increase attendance.

Pat is prepared to present retirement information as simply as staffing a table with retirement information during the rally to as extensive as making a several hour presentation as part of our meeting agenda.

[Editor's Note – Information and Registration Form for the NEA Rally is on the following pages.]



NORTHEAST AREA RALLY *REMINDERS!*

🕒 ROOM RESERVATIONS:

DUE NO LATER THAN MARCH 20, 2006

🕒 RALLY REGISTRATION

DUE NO LATER THAN MAY 5, 2006

🕒 AUCTION ITEMS

WE'RE ASKING THAT EACH STATE PROVIDE
ONE ITEM FOR THE AUCTION [PROCEEDS TO
BE DIVIDED BETWEEN WVASCOE & NASCOE
SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS]

🕒 QUESTIONS:

- 🕒 Patti McDowell
- 🕒 mcdowell123@adelphia.net
- 🕒 (304) 329-1923 Ext 101
- 🕒 (304) 983-8826 Evenings

NORTHEAST AREA RALLY

ROOM RESERVATION FORM

Oglebay Resort & Conference Center RT 88 North Wheeling, WV 26003	Group: WV Assoc of Co Office Employees Farm Service Agency Meeting
Phone: (304) 243-4000 or (800) 624-6988	Package: None
Fax: (304) 243-4070	Check-in: Friday, May 19, 2006 Check-out: Sunday, May 21, 2006
	Cut Off Date: Monday, March 20, 2006
	How to make your reservation: By phone fax email U.S. Mail – using the information to the left

Room Rates: \$ 105.00 Standard Rooms per night
\$ 140.00 Intermediate Rooms per night
\$ 170.00 Premium/Hospitality Rooms per night

Name: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: Office: _____ Home: _____

Arrival Date: _____ Departure Date: _____

Name(s) of persons sharing room with you: _____

Room Type: Single Double Smoking Non-Smoking

Please advise us of any special needs you may have during your visit to Oglebay's Wilson Lodge:

Reservations are to be accompanied by a deposit equivalent to one night's room charges plus 6% Sales Tax and 3% City Hotel Tax. Oglebay's Wilson Lodge accepts deposits made by check or credit card. Deposits made with a credit card are charged on the date the reservation is processed. **Refunds/Adjustments will be made only when cancellations/changes are received at least 10-days prior to May 19 2006. All requests for lodging must be received no later than the Saturday, February 18, 2006.**

Check-in/Check-out: Check-in time is 3:00 PM. Checkout time is 11:00 AM.

American Express Discover Diner Club MasterCard Visa

Credit Card #: _____ Exp. Date: _____

Signature Card Holder Name: _____

Print Card Holder Name: _____

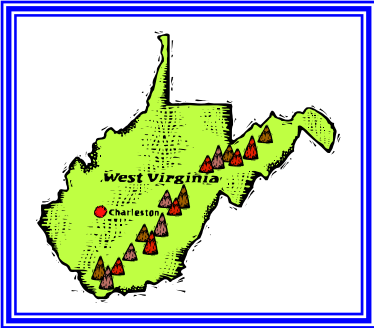
*Reservations received after **March 20, 2006** will be confirmed on a space available basis only.
*Room location cannot be guaranteed. Pets are not permitted.
*Cribs and Rollaway Cots are available at \$5.00 each per night stay. Limit (1) per room.
*Weekend reservations must include Friday and Saturday nights.

Northeast Area Rally

Hosted by WVASCOE

May 19 & 20, 2006

Oglebay Resort, Wheeling, WV



REGISTRATION FORM (By 05/05/06)

Send to: Patti McDowell
425 E Main St, Ste 420
Kingwood, WV 26537-1793

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone #: _____ Email: _____

FEE **\$55** ALL INCLUSIVE [everyone 12 & over]
Fee Includes: Registration = Picnic = Break, Lunch, Banquet, & Transportation on Saturday
Under 12 Fee: \$27.50

Number Attending _____ Amount Enclosed: \$ _____
[List other Names Below] [Checks Payable to WVASCOE]

“THINGS GOING ON”:

- ✚ Friday Registration 3:00 - 6:00 p.m. [Hospitality Room open at the same time]. Picnic starts at 6:30 p.m. “Entertainment” after picnic.
- ✚ Saturday Morning Registration beginning at 7:45 a.m. until 9:00 a.m.
- ✚ Saturday LUNCH provided
- ✚ Saturday 4:00 – 5:30 p.m. Transportation to and from *Cabela’s*
- ✚ Saturday HOSPITALITY beginning at 6:00 p.m. - BANQUET at 7:00 p.m.
- ✚ Scholarship Auction & Music after BANQUET until 12:00 midnight

“ROOM RESERVATIONS” [MUST BE MADE by March 20, 2006]

Oglebay Resort & Conference Center (800) 624-6988
Rt 88 North, Wheeling, WV
Interstate-70, Exit 2A (Either Direction)
\$105 + tax/Night for Single // \$115 + tax/Night for Double == Breakfast Included
Group Name: WV Association of County Office Employees





Robin Talley

Robin Talley, District Director for Delaware, says “I belong to DMASCOE as an associate member because I want to support friends and co-workers in county offices in Delaware and Maryland.”

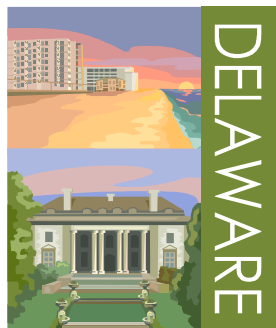
Robin grew up on a dairy farm north of Wilmington, Delaware, and majored in Agricultural Economics at the University of Delaware. She decided in high school that she liked economics and wanted to work in an ag-related field, and that she has accomplished. Robin feels very fortunate to have a career in the Farm Service Agency that provides such an important service to farmers. She tells her friends “I don’t know anything about animals or equipment—just know how to count money!” But growing up on a dairy farm, how could she not know about the farm animals, and equipment!

Robin started with ASCS/FSA as a Program Assistant at the Delaware New Castle County Office on 04/09/1984. She was lucky enough to be chosen to enter the COT program in June of that same year. In June of 1985, she became the CED of the Delaware Kent County Office. Then in December of 1995, she became the District Director of Delaware, a position she still holds today.

Working in the Kent County Office, where folks have always been very active in DMASCOE, she chose very early in her career to become an active member, and is still an active participating member of the organization. She has been President and Vice President, director and alternate director, and served as chairman for various committees for DMASCOE. Right at this moment, she is very involved with the upcoming DMASCOE State Meeting being held on March 18, 2006 in Dover, DE. She has attended a bunch of National Conventions, serving several times as a delegate or alternate delegate for DMASCOE. She has attended NE Area Rallies, and remembers the fun job hosting the area rally in Rehoboth in 1995. Since Robin is Delaware’s District Director, she also has been a great supporter of NADD.

Robin is married to Rich, and they live in Dover, DE. Rich is a high school math teacher, coach, and lifeguard, and she says “He is basically a big Kid.” They love to travel, ski, and go to the beach. They spend a lot of time renovating their old house in Dover.

Robin has always been a hard working employee for the farmers of Delaware, and the FSA way. We need to commend her for the great job she has done!



ANTICS & ANECDOTES

VIVA LAS VEGAS! A Pre-Negotiation/Consultation Session Vegas Style



You will find John's Report from the Meeting under the NATIONAL & AREA NASCOE NEWS Section.

After enjoying the warmth and sun of Texas last year, I was looking forward to going to another warm climate in the middle of January this year. And where did they send us? Las Vegas - where the high temps are in the 50's and the overnight temps are in the 30's - definitely not much of an improvement over our Northeast weather! However, I braved the chill of "Sin City" and got down to business. Here are my notes from the meeting:

President's Report - New FSA Administrator Teresa Lasseter is a "breath of fresh air." He has talked more with her in six weeks than with the previous administrators in six years. Dan's perception is that she will not harm the agency as much as she can (within her power to do so).

-Memo to SED's - Dan will be sending a letter out to state presidents talking about this memo and the language used therein that calls for the SED's to do a review of the efficiency and effectiveness of offices in their states. This is NOT FSA Tomorrow - that's dead! **NASCOE will refer to this as the FSA Structural Review.** SED's and the State Review Committee (only required members are the STC) are to review everything - not just structure, and try to work with sister agencies when possible. They are reminded in the memo to adhere to the Appropriations Act - public meetings, etc. Lassiter wants a local, grassroots plan and encourages getting input from all stakeholders. She and Steve Connelly, as well as NASCOE, want to know if any SED is doing their own thing. No direction is given for a timeline or criteria, but State Review Committees must provide rigorous analysis and cost effectiveness of plans submitted. Lasseter said that within her power there will be no RIF's or furloughs; however, the budget is dire. The new ceilings should have been out this week, but hopefully will be out next week.

Vice-President's Report - Reminder to read the last NASCOE newsletter that talks about the NASCOE one-hour legal counsel. Remember to go through the proper

chain to get approval and then the counsel that NASCOE has will contact you.

Adverse Action - still no written procedure and update to handbook (Bonnie checked with John Chott last Wednesday and he said it was still not ready), but they **are** following the new procedure [should be able to find this under VP on NASCOE website].

OTHER INFO...

**PT Reclassification Task Force - Steve Connelly has approved (didn't blink an eye when asked about a Task Force). Will be made up of CED's, SED's, AO's, etc. Connelly did say that we're not going to get across the board upgrades.

**NAFEC is joining us for the Legislative Conference - in fact, Officers and Execs will meet with NAFEC on Sunday night (Feb. 26th) at 7:30 PM. [Bonnie told me that she and Dan have talked several times with Roger Richardson.]

**RASCOE will also attend Leg Conference - looking forward to working with PAC.

AREA REPORTS - gave to Patsy, except NWA - didn't receive a copy.

COMMITTEE REPORTS...

Awards/Scholarships/Emblems - State and Area meetings can have a First-Timers award, but this comes from state and area funds.

Scholarships - all state applicants, not just the winner can go on to the area.

Emblems - annual sweatshirt sale in January

Benefits - JMM Life Insurance Open Season has ended, but special enrollment of 30 days is available after State Convention if JMM is invited [like last year's dental].

Federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 - not a NASCOE benefit, but is available to any federal

employee as a discount on cellular phone service [see Jan. 26th NASCOE NOW for more info].

Membership - Gave report to Susan - includes the dues structure of each state association grouped by area. Also includes a letter from National chair to any new members listing benefits available.

Programs - Gave report to Patsy - includes a form change and a listing of all submissions to date [list is also available on the NASCOE website, I believe].

Publicity - lots of positive feedback on the website and NASCOE NOW.

Legislative - PAC - a representative (NASCOE member) will be at the NASCOE convention and each area rally. Still working on payroll deduction. Currently in PAC account is around \$3,000 -- \$1500-2000 has been given out - website [don't know which one] will show who given to and what amount. Solicitors for funds CANNOT be members - that's why NASCOE is helping out.

CAPWIZ - Bob McGrath left for WDC and Mike Zook has taken over. Learning the CAPWIZ system and adjusting [personal note - in the midst of an adoption].

Annual award to Legislator of the Year - 2 - one red and one blue - named after Clyde Paine. Bob Redding is giving recommendations for awardees.

Leg Conference - Agenda

Monday - Registration - 3:00 - 5:00 PM

Tuesday - Registration 7:00 - 8:30

Welcome by Sec Johanns [hopefully] and Administrator Lassiter

Legislative Awards Presentation
Russ Middleton to give address - focus on one issue!

Lunch

Area Meetings - Training -
Position Papers

Wednesday - Visits to Hill

Luncheons/dinners (concerns about lobbying rules for dinners, but shouldn't effect yet)

Position Papers plus talking points...

1. Budget and staffing - Farm Bill
2. What we can do for your money - tooting our own horn
3. Benefits - FERS sick leave (this one only to Gov't Reform committee members)

Of course, the above is regular NASCOE business that as a Consultant I have the privilege of sitting in on - what an eye-opening experience. Thank you, Officers and Execs, for all the work you do and all the effort you give to ensure the best possible representation of all FSA employees.

Part of this representation is where I come in - presenting the Negotiation and Consultation items to WDC in May. There were approximately 60 items submitted this year, and 30-40 will be presented before management. All items submitted were discussed and each submitter will receive a letter from their Area Exec informing them of what's happening with their item. If you took the time to submit an item - thank you! If you did not, I hope you will take the time this year to do so. The deadline is December 15, 2006. It is not too early to consider ways to improve our agency and organization.

As you can see, we actually did business while in Vegas. We also took in some sights (not necessarily ones I always wanted to see, but were there in front of you anyway - they don't call it "Sin City" for nothing), some played the slots (my roommate, Peggy Groen from South Dakota, went home with almost \$21.00), and some had a hilarious cab ride with an Oklahoman claiming to be Miss America. Las Vegas was definitely not on my list of places to see, but I enjoyed my stay visiting with NASCOE friends.

Usually a consultant serves a two-year term, so this may have been my last January NASCOE trip. I am so grateful for the opportunity to have traveled and seen the sights, as well as learn about the inner workings of NASCOE. I am honored to again represent the NEA this year in May and I thank you for this privilege.

Carole Hill, NEA Negotiation Consultant
(PT - Carroll County, MD)



CHRISTIAN WAYS TO RELIEVE STRESS

An Angel says, "Never borrow from the future. If you worry about what may happen tomorrow and it doesn't happen, you have worried in vain. Even if it does happen, you have to worry twice."

1. Pray
2. Go to bed on time.
3. Get up on time so you can start the day unrushed.
4. Say No to projects that won't fit into your time schedule, or that will compromise your mental health.
5. Delegate tasks to capable others.
6. Simplify and unclutter your life.
7. Less is more. (Although one is often not enough, two are often too many.)
8. Allow extra time to do things and to get to places.
9. Pace yourself. Spread out big changes and difficult projects over time; don't lump the hard things all together.
10. Take one day at a time.
11. Separate worries from concerns. If a situation is a concern, find out what God would have you do and let go of the anxiety. If you can't do anything about a situation, forget it.
12. Live within your budget; don't use credit cards for ordinary purchases.
13. Have backups; an extra car key in your wallet, an extra house key buried in the garden, extra stamps, etc.
14. K.M.S. (Keep Mouth Shut). This single piece of advice can prevent an enormous amount of trouble.
15. Do something for the Kid in You everyday.
16. Carry a Bible with you to read while waiting in line.
17. Get enough rest.
18. Eat right.
19. Get organized so everything has its place.
20. Listen to a tape while driving that can help improve your quality of life.
21. Write down thoughts and inspirations.
22. Every day, find time to be alone.
23. Having problems? Talk to God on the spot. Try to nip small problems in the bud. Don't wait until it's time to go to bed to try and pray.
24. Make friends with Godly people.
25. Keep a folder of favorite scriptures on hand.
26. Remember that the shortest bridge between despair and hope is often a good "Thank you Jesus."
27. Laugh.
28. Laugh some more!
29. Take your work seriously, but not yourself at all.
30. Develop a forgiving attitude (most people are doing the best they can).
31. Be kind to unkind people (they probably need it the most).
32. Sit on your ego.
33. Talk less; listen more.
34. Slow down.
35. Remind yourself that you are not the general manager of the universe.
36. Every night before bed, think of one thing you're grateful for that you've never been grateful for before. GOD HAS A WAY OF TURNING THINGS AROUND FOR YOU. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

Who Needs Sun to Have Fun!

By Stacey Karnes, PT – Carroll County, MD



If you have never seen the world through the eyes of a child, then grab one (preferably one whose parents are friends of yours, or that is yours). I almost forgot what excitement and fun a snowfall, the FIRST snowfall of the year brings. Mid-morning February 4th, the first snowflakes started to fall at our Frederick home. My son, Liam, who will be two years old in March, was watching out our picture window trying to grasp the concept of something other than rain coming from the sky. “Rain, MOMMY, Rain” I said, “No, Buddy, it’s snow.” To which Liam quickly responds, “NO, Mommy, it’s NO!!” Well, anyone that has the pleasure of a two-year-old attention span knows that the slowly falling snow soon became more of an after thought while finger painting, lunch and the greatest time in the world, nap, came into the picture.

Half way through naptime the snow started to come down harder and was quickly covering the ground. Thinking of the way that Liam was so excited in seeing the snow fall, a stroke of brilliance hits me; we’ll go outside. Liam has never been outside to play in the snow - last year at this time he was just starting to walk and hadn’t got the balance aspect of it down. This year, though, he’ll be able to have the pure enjoyment of just walking through the snow. I burst into our home office where my husband had been working since the beginning of the snowstorm and wasn’t aware of how much had fallen. I said, “Baby (that’s what I call my husband, his real name is Mike) let’s take Liam outside and play in the snow after he gets up from nap - he’s never been out to play in the snow before.” Which my darling husband responds, “Are you sure it’s because he’s never played in the snow before, or because a brand new snowsuit has been hanging in his closet since September?” “If you can kill two birds with one stone, so be it, and may I remind you that the snowsuit cost 4 bucks at the outlets,” I quipped. After a few minutes of commenting on the snowfall and wishing it had hit on Sunday afternoon instead of Saturday, the conversation turned to reminiscing about the sled-riding adventures as kids with our siblings and friends, trying to top each other’s stories - from the tall tale of sledding the hill that no other kid would attempt, to tubing behind the ATV’s on the farm. Conceding that office work is now off the plate, we began finding clothes, jackets and shoes that would withstand our arctic trek out to our back yard with Liam.

As if all the energy that was starting to bubble up as we were gathering items, Liam pops up from the family room. My son is all boy, and with that I mean he loves to be outside, running, digging in the mud, jumping into rain puddles, playing any sport that ends with -ball and roughhousing. So after just mentioning the word “outside,” Liam runs into our sitting room and pulls the football out and heads for the door. Grabbing him as he rounds the kitchen I explain that we have to put our snow clothes on before we go out because it’s chilly. Well, 15 minutes into struggling with a toddler getting into snow pants, snow boots, mittens, gloves, and a hat, I’m starting to think that my stroke of brilliance is nothing more than a brief encounter of mental unbalance. I’ve already broken a sweat and I haven’t put my first layer of extra clothing on. When we finally made it outside,

the struggle with clothes was all worth it. To see his eyes light up and

the immediate giggle that escaped his mouth when he made his first little tracks in the snow-covered driveway. Our driveway started to look like a pack of unidentified animals had used it as a shortcut to parts unknown. Navigating Liam into the back yard opened up a totally different world then he had



been in before. By the time we got outside, the snow was still coming down and we had approximately 5-7 inches on the ground, which measures to about Liam's knees. The free walking in the driveway gave way to a "snowplow type shuffle". Falling in the snow is never graceful, especially when you are dressed similarly to Ralphie's little brother in "A Christmas Story" (think, I can't put my arms down). No sooner did that comment slip from my lips than did Liam take a nose dive trying to walk across the yard to his dad, who was becoming a child again himself making snowballs. Pulling him out of the snow, consoling while trying not to laugh too hard, we cleaned him up and brushed the snow off, and sent him back on his way.

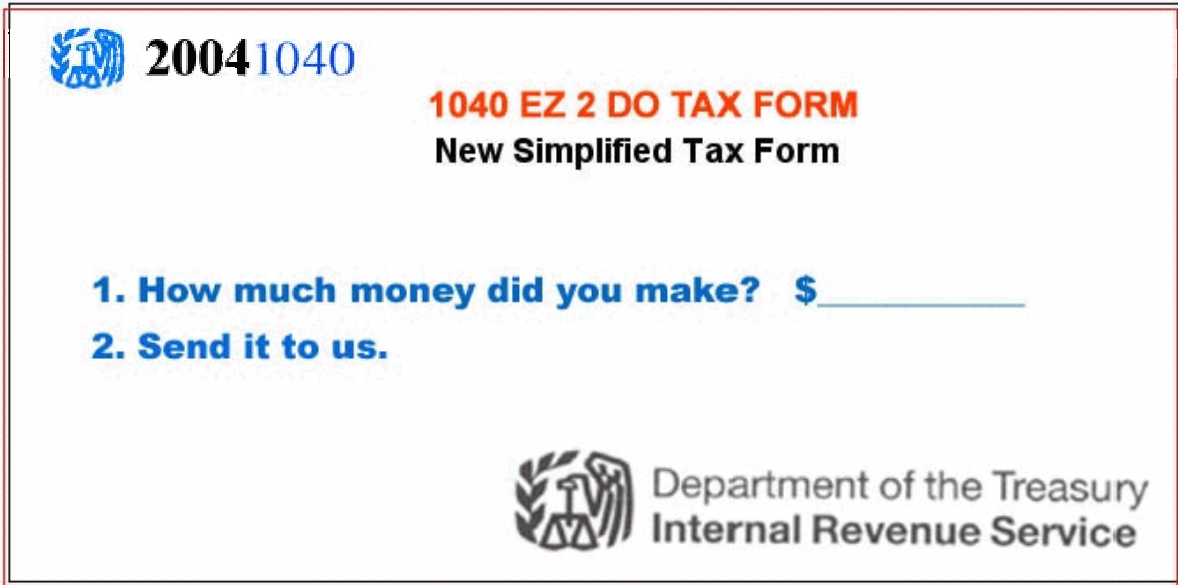


Our little adventure in the arctic depths lasted about an hour, and even then as we were dragging Liam kicking and screaming inside, we were wondering to each other when we became too grown up to enjoy an entire afternoon in the snow. We began remembering the days of that type of excitement -

getting out of school early, or school closing, spending the day outside sled riding, building forts, having snowball battles, and making snow angels until your mom made you come in and thaw. That is what wintertime is made of. Those memories are much better than the thoughts of dreading traffic, dealing with crowds at the grocery stores, and shoveling the driveway, which is what most of us think of when the mention of snow is shown on the morning news. So, next time it snows (which if we keep our fingers crossed can still happen this winter) borrow a child, or drag yours from in front of the TV, gaming system, the phone or, in my case, away from the trucks, cars and tractors, and have some good old family fun outside. Remember the joy that you had when you were a child and pass it along.



Just in time for tax season...



(Luckily, it's the wrong year!)

Horrible Thought for the day ...

As income tax time approaches, did you ever notice: when you put the two words "The" and "IRS" together it spells "THEIRS"?





Welcome Back

Welcome to Valerie Brown-Roath, who has returned to the MD STO in the SED Secretary position. Liz Anderson, Maryland SED, says, "I am thrilled to have her on board. She brings such sunshine to the office."

Barbara Clugston Retires

After 27 years of service to FSA, Barbara Clugston is retiring, effective Friday, March 3, 2006. Open House Celebrations were held for her this week at both the Harford and Cecil County offices. It was announced at the Harford County Open House that Barbara has been nominated for a Distinguished Service to NASCOE award by DMASCOE President Patsy Wiles. Congratulations, Barbara, on both your retirement and nomination. Best wishes as you enter this next chapter in your life.



A New Puppy

Maryland STO Program Specialist, Elizabeth Miller, has acquired a new black lab puppy named Freddie. If she visits your office, be sure and ask to see his picture. This is their second black lab – he joins Spencer in their family.



CONCERNS & UPDATES

FSA Structural Review

FSA Administrator Teresa Lasseter sent a memo in January to each SED asking them to review the structure and efficiency of the offices in their state. A review committee made up of the STC and other stakeholders as they choose is to be established, and after extensive research and cost-analysis, the proposal is to be sent to WDC for approval. (See copy of memo on pages 32-33.)

Both SED's were asked if they were at liberty to share what was happening in their states. The following is the response received from MD SED Elizabeth Anderson:

Each SED has been instructed to form a review committee in their respective states. This review committee will analyze the structure of FSA locations and staffing and develop a plan for possible restructure within the state. There are no guidelines for this review committee to follow (ie: deadlines, number of offices). We may submit our plan in phases; which is the way I intend to approach this task. I will work with the STC to form the review committee and proceed with the development of the plan. My focus throughout this process will be on an FSA structure that will best serve the producers & program participants in Maryland.

Also, the following was in the February 21, 2006 issue of the *DELMARVA FARMER*:

FSA consolidations meet with less opposition

Closing Farm Service Agency offices across the country met with opposition late last year, but a new plan is on the table.

Liz Anderson, state director of the Maryland FSA office, said the new proposal is much easier to stomach: there are no deadlines and no goals or projected numbers to meet.

"This is a much better way to do it," she said. "It lets states make their own decision. D.C.'s been very adamant that this is less aggressive."

Anderson said she met with her state committee last Tuesday about the proposal, and will meet with them again in March. The committee will decide how to start the process of consolidating offices. Anderson will then establish a review committee, made up of members of the state committee and other stakeholders, like those on county committees and in agriculture.

"It will take a lot of consideration with who should be involved without making it too huge that there won't be a consensus," she said.

Anderson said she would like for Maryland's consolidation plan to be done in regional phases because the state's geography is so diverse that it is easily divided into different groups of farmers. Examining one piece at a time, she said, would be more effective in determining what farmers need.

The consolidation proposal from the review committee will go to Washington D.C. upon its completion to be either approved or denied.

In addition, Amelia Farrell and Keith Widdowson were quoted in an AP article about consolidation plans. To read that article, see the following page...

Posted on Tue, Jan. 31, 2006

Ag Department takes another run at modernizing county office system

LIBBY QUAID

Associated Press

PRINCE FREDERICK, Md. - A proposal to consolidate local farm offices, hastily scrapped last year amid outrage from farmers and Congress, is being pitched again as an effort to modernize a Depression-era network.

This time, officials are promising to be much less aggressive - even as they point out that the offices have too few trained employees and some computers so old they can't connect to the Internet.

"I don't want to close offices just to be closing offices," Teresa Lasseter, the new Farm Service Agency administrator, said in an interview with The Associated Press. "The only reason we would be closing offices is to provide better service."

No changes will happen without public hearings and talks with Congress, she said, and state-level officials will have significant control over where cuts are made.

The local office is essential to a farmer's bottom line. Producers must visit there to sign up for an array of government payments and loans.

More than 2,300 counties - virtually every rural county in the nation - have a Farm Service Agency Office. But that is no guarantee it will be open on a given day, or that a farmer will find answers in a single visit.

A business wouldn't operate that way, said Keith Widdowson, who runs the Somerset and Worcester county offices in Maryland. The offices on the Eastern Shore are 18 miles apart with two employees each.

If one staffer leaves, the other must juggle farmers lined up at the counter and tend the phones alone - and be an expert on dozens of different programs.

"It's not an efficient way to run the office," Widdowson said. "It worked years ago, when we had enough staff, but not anymore."

Merging might mean a longer drive for some farmers, but the result would be better, faster service, he said.

Still, many farmers can't get past the idea of a longer drive.

"It would mean we'd lose valuable time trying to go to an office that's far away," said Brinsfield Lowe, who grows soybeans, corn and vegetables farther north in Dorchester County. Sometimes only one employee is working at his local office, in Cambridge, but Lowe thinks he gets good service.

Amy Farrell worries about the idea of merging the offices she runs in Calvert and St. Mary's counties because some producers there would face a 90-minute drive. Still, Farrell is reassured that state-level officials, not Washington bureaucrats, are being asked to design an overhaul.

"We've built up a good trust with all our farmers and producers, and if we can understand why we may have to consolidate, we can make the farmers understand why we have to consolidate," she said.

It was Washington bureaucrats who handed down the order last fall that 713 offices, more than 30 percent, would have to close. Maryland and five other states - Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky and West Virginia - would have seen the biggest cuts, with 40 percent or more offices closed.

In Congress, word leaked before most lawmakers were briefed, and they reacted with alarm, passing legislation that blocked any closures without public hearings or notice to Congress.

Lasseter was not yet on board at the Agriculture Department. But as a former county and state FSA official in Georgia, she was not a fan of last year's plan. "It was a bit aggressive," she said.

By no stretch of the imagination is this latest plan the same, she said.

Lasseter's boss, Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns, said there won't be consolidation without involvement from lawmakers. "We'll work with Congress. We heard the message, and we heard it loud and clear," he told reporters recently.

Lawmakers are receptive so far.

"This is the kind of approach they should have taken from the beginning," said Sen. Jim Talent, R-Mo., sponsor of the measure to block the closings. "What you've got to do is make certain the process isn't hijacked at some point from Washington."

Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, said he's cautious but open to the idea. "I never said no to reorganization last year," he said. "I only said what a screwy way of bringing this to our attention."



JAN 13 2006

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Farm and Foreign
Agricultural
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Farm Service
Agency

Deputy
Administrator for
Field Operations

1400 Independence
Ave, SW
Stop 0539
Washington, DC
20250-0539

TO: All State Executive Directors

FROM: Teresa C. Lasseter
Administrator

SUBJECT: State Reviews

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) is asking each of our State Executive Directors (SEDs) to conduct an independent local-level review of the efficiency and effectiveness of FSA offices in your State. SEDs and State Committees will form a review committee to identify what the optimum network of FSA facilities, staffing, training and technology should be for your State within existing budgetary resources and staffing ceilings. Further, SEDs will explore potential joint-effort opportunities with the other Department of Agriculture (USDA) agencies.

There is no comprehensive national plan or formula for identifying the optimum network of FSA offices. Each State will review its own county office system before submitting recommendations for technology upgrades, staffing, training and facilities.

As recommendations are received from each state, FSA's Deputy Administrator for Field Operations will review and validate those proposed changes. After the recommendations are shared with the potentially affected Congressional delegation, the Agency will hold public hearings and coordinate communications efforts with area farmers, ranchers, and stakeholders.

Pub. L. 109-97, Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2006 provided a process for FSA office closures that must be followed:

That none of the funds made available by this Act may be used to pay the salaries or expenses of any officer or employee of the Department of Agriculture to close any local or county office of the Farm Service Agency unless the Secretary of Agriculture, not later than 30 days after the date on which the Secretary proposed the closure, holds a public meeting about the proposed closure in the county in which the local or county office is located, and, after the public meeting but not later than 120 days before the date on which the Secretary approves the closure, notifies the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry and the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate, and the members of Congress from the State in which the local or county office is located of the proposed closure.

Further, USDA agrees with the long-standing intent of Congress that office closures and relocations should occur based on rigorous analysis to ensure actions are cost-effective and will better serve the public.

USDA is an Equal Opportunity Employer

Page 2
State Reviews

FSA will issue public notice should an SED recommend closures or consolidations. Not later than 30 days after such notice, FSA will schedule and hold a public hearing. The public hearing will be held in the county in which the affected FSA office is located.

After the public hearing, but not later than 120 days before the date on which USDA approves a State recommendation affecting an FSA office, USDA will notify the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry and the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate, as well as the members of Congress from the State in which the affected office and staff are located, of the decision.

Local, State and national FSA employees are committed to open and transparent communications as FSA becomes better positioned for the future.

Do you have any news about our members or employees? Do you have any concerns that you would like to have addressed? Send Concerns and Updates and news from Around the States to Carole.Hill@md.usda.gov or 1004 Littlestown Pike Suite C Westminster, MD 21157.

DMASCOE/NASCOE EVENTS



NOW - DMASCOE Dues for July 1, 2005 - June 30, 2006

March 18 - Annual DMASCOE State Meeting

8:30 AM - 3:00 PM

Delaware is hosting this year at the Delaware Agricultural Museum and Village in Dover
Check out their website at <http://www.agriculturalmuseum.org/>.

May 19-20 - NEA Rally

Wilson Lodge at Oglebay Resort
Wheeling, WV

(Visit the WVASCOE website, <http://www.wvascoe.com> for details.)

August 9-12 - NASCOE Convention

Cleveland Renaissance Hotel
Cleveland, OH

(Visit http://www.nascoe.org/national_conventions.htm for more information.)

To keep up with all the latest in NASCOE, be sure to visit the following websites:

Northeast Area Website at <http://www.geocities.com/nearea2002/>

NASCOE Website at <http://www.nascoe.org/>

DMASCOE Website at <http://www.geocities.com/dmascoe/>

If you do not receive the DMASCOE *DISPATCH* by e-mail and you would prefer to receive it that way,
please send your e-mail address to Carole.Hill@md.usda.gov or Patsy.Wiles@md.usda.gov.

Thank You!