

2009 50th National Convention Notes
Gatlinburg, Tennessee
August 11-16, 2009

Greetings from Western Indiana. Five years ago, I embarked on my first national convention in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Attending a national convention is an eye opening and motivating experience. I am honored to have been named a delegate at the 50th Anniversary of NASCOE. I have been to Gatlinburg many times in my life; however, this time would be the most memorable. I have attended 4 National Conventions during my career thus far. This is the one where I felt the most comfortable. I can honestly say I remembered names, states, positions held, and friendships this time more than ever.

Before I get on with the updates, I must say a special thank you. Who would have thought that our ACRE deadline would have wound up the same week as the National Convention? However, this did not stop the support I received from co-workers during a busy and understaffed time. THANK YOU ladies. These two words do not do justice to you. I enjoy the fact that you understand how much NASCOE means to me. I know it was a busy time for me to be gone. As always time after time, you proved to me you can handle anything!

On to the business. Election results are as follows:

NASCOE Pres.	Myron Stroup, CED Kansas
NASCOE V. P.	John Lohr, CED Pennsylvania
NASCOE Secretary	Darlene Schouten, (NEW CED, congratulations!) Minnesota
NASCOE Treasurer	Shelly Odenkirk, CED Ohio

MWA Executive - Jonathan Williams, CED, Wisconsin (re-elected)
MWA Alternate Exec. - Charlene Neukomm, PT Illinois (re-elected)

The main focus of the convention was discussions of PT Reclassification, FERS Sick Leave, Budget, and of course Modernization of USDA.

PT Reclassification - This has been negotiated by NASCOE and HRD. This will NOT be a blanket upgrade like we saw when CO-7's were introduced. This reclassification will allow certain PT's positions to be promoted to a CO-8. The plan has NOT been submitted or approved yet. I want to caution everyone, that these upgrades will come from the existing budget.

FERS Sick leave- The legislation that was presented to pay FERS employee's for their sick leave at retirement was taken out of two bills and is currently in hold status.

Budget - 2010 budget does not look good. The new ARS (Activity Reporting System) "workload" system is on its way. I wrote down that it should be rolled out to all Counties in October 2009...No WAIT, December 2009... No WAIT.... January 2010. I am sticking with that date. I spoke personally with Heidi Ware and Vickie Larson from WDC (good people I might add, who have our interests at heart). They have seen positive results in those pilot counties. They seem very excited about this program.

Modernization of USDA- Many good ideas came from the Lean 6 Sigma. Also, the plan to reorganize may have been placed on the back burner due to the Health Care Reform and Climate Bill(s), but I expect to see this surface again pretty soon. Not exactly sure what will be proposed, but I feel good for FSA. We have a well know reputation for getting the job done. Again, we were named in the farm bill to administer the ACRE program.

Featured Guests:

Brandon Willis Deputy Administrator of Farm Programs - He has been on the job for about 3 weeks now (as of the week of the convention). He is impressed by the FSA employees. Mr. Willis grew up in

northern Utah on a sheep ranch. Mr. Willis went into details on many of the FSA programs we have to offer. Such as the up and coming changes to the FSFL loans, the new Livestock disaster programs. He has three priorities. They are people, system, and programs. He realizes that we employees need the tools to do our jobs. He realizes the importance of FSA to the producers we serve. One thing that he stated that has stuck with me is this:

“A mistake is not a mistake the first time you make it, it is a learning experience. The second time it is a mistake.”

He also believes the reason for the success of this agency is the people who work for it.

Jonathan Coppess, FSA Administrator: He comes from Darke County, Ohio. The family farm is held by the 7th generation. The farming operation also has some farmland in Randolph County, Indiana. He is fortunate that he has knowledge and a background in Agriculture to help him with his job as the Administrator. He thanked all employees for a job well done and the hard work we do.

Jim Gwinn, Office of Chief Information, (OCIO): He has just taken this new position. He has been working with IT for over 20 years. He understands that there are a lot of issues with IT in county offices and is willing to help us out. (He will be good I think. He chuckled a lot in awe that we have been dealing with the issues we have.)

I was able to meet with each of these individuals and I felt comfortable with their thoughts and ideas. I also remember a comment being made that there was to be a meeting between FSA and NRCS (at the national level) to discuss issues between the two agencies.....

Another thing I want to add is that I have gotten to know many people in the PECD and Price Support areas in Washington D.C. These are people who have held our positions in the past. Yes, PT's, CED's, DD's, and even STO Specialists. When I asked them how they felt about the administrator they smiled and had very positive things to say. The new "regime" tends to cut out the middle. For example, Mr. Coppess has no problem going to a Program Specialist to find out details about a program. In the past, this may have gone through 3 people to get an answer to a question. (Better direct line communications!)

POINTS TO PONDER RANDOM THOUGHTS....

- I feel/wish we could get more involvement from Indiana to go to these conventions. Indiana was set up in the front row, and only 3 chairs out of 12 were filled. I also found it hard to cover each program committee when there were only three of us. (I attended membership/ Programs (Jay was with me in Programs) and I know Robert went to Legislative). Indiana did not have a presence in the other committees. There are many states that I envy (such as SD, IL, OH, WI, ND) they always have such good turnout and support at national conventions.
- I enjoy being a delegate. However, should we think of pairing a veteran delegate with a new delegate? This way we send a new person to the convention (paid), and they get the convention experience as well?
- Communication --- This has been hurt since we can no longer use government computers to do business.
- I have heard many comments of why employees are not members. I want to remind everyone that this is NOT a union. It is a membership. This membership also does NOT use your funds to promote any type of debauchery.
- WALK IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES BEFORE WE CRITICIZE! Even I have to think about this quite a bit. We are very lucky to have many people in WDC who have worked as CED's, PT's etc. They know what we do everyday. I will vouch for them. They have our best interests at heart. I know it does not seem like it, but they do. They are doing what they can for us. Same thing with the State office. Until we walk a mile in their shoes, we need to think about what it is they are dealing with as well. We need to be glad that they have been VERY UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT THE COUNTY OFFICES HAVE BEEN DEALING WITH the last few months! It sounds as if other states were worse

off than we were when it came to instructions and guidance. I would love to see more Associate membership support out of the STO.

- I know there are software issues, but look at the bright side, we are better off than we were 10 years ago! I think as an association and as an agency, **we need to keep the attitude positive in 2010.** If we present ourselves as complainers, we can lose credibility. Let's get the message across with a positive spin. (I noticed many comments at the convention were put with negative tones. I only found a few who stood up with questions and tried to make a positive note.)
- SUGGESTIONS ABOUT PROGRAMS- IF YOU HAVE A SUGGESTION, SUBMIT IT TO MARY JO KANE (DAVISS/MARTIN CO). The only way we can correct issues and make them more efficient is to suggest a change. Indiana has led the way across the nation in this area.

Finally a message to the membership:

As I sit here, I have been thinking it has been 3 full years since we have had a "normal" sign up. In 2006/2007 we had to redo eligibility. The last 2 years sign ups have been condensed into literally weeks. We have had natural disaster, upon natural disaster, ECP programs ... I can keep going if you want, but we have all lived it. I personally think we all need to take time for ourselves- mentally and physically. We need to take time for our families. I thought as I got older, time would slow down. Here we are getting ready to get into harvest and it seems like yesterday farmers were getting their planters out to plant. I personally have found my attitude to be sub-par. It's not the people I work with, the job, or the producers we serve, I think like most we strive for 110% and just need some "down time." When I get this attitude, I have to remember we have great jobs. The economy in my home state is in shambles. I have watched many of my high school classmates get laid off. I have watched out 3 out of 5 kids in my own family move to other states due to no jobs, due to a failing economy. We are VERY lucky to have jobs. We are also VERY BLESSED to have all the benefits NASCOE/IASCOE has fought to keep us..... Especially our paychecks. Keep these thoughts in your mind the next time we start to get frustrated with a PL notice or a condensed sign up, a trail run of the new webinar raining....OR a software release that wipes the permitted flags out of the entity file without us knowing.

Keep up the good work Indiana. Have a great fall.

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ Christopher L. Hare
IASCOE Membership Chair



Night at the Oscars (pictured l to r): Kathy Frost, Betsy Mace, Mindy Lolie, Chris Hare, Dee Lookingbill, Tina Schieferdecker. The Deal or no Deal Ladies, and Howie.