

NASCOE National Convention Notes

Mary Behm and John Baird

Delegates

The convention in Corpus Christi Texas was very hot, hot, hot. Temperatures were above 100 degrees for the entire time. My sources in Texas say it's always over 100 in Texas this time of year. They do need rain, however. Corn was harvested just after the 4th of July with average yields. Cotton is off the field. There is some grain sorghum and peanuts still out in field. River beds are empty. Definitely different season than we are enjoying in Wisconsin.

I will highlight some of the convention activities for you. There were 482 in attendance. We did have a hands-on presentation of MIDAS. I must tell you that the model works wonderfully. All producer information is in one place. I would emphasize that we need to do good job of entering into the business management file to make this work well. Junk in will give you junk out. It was great being able to use the system and see how it is supposed to work for us. It connects acreage reports to GIS as it populates the tract and field numbers and overlaps to MAL, DCP, etc.

“Different isn't always better but better is always different.”

FSA Administrator, Bruce Nelson, was at the convention and participated in a Q & A session. Some of the items include:

- AGI 927 and 928 will have some changes. There may be only one form and will be collected by the COF. Wait and see.
- Business File needs to be completed for 2011 and 2012. So that means after rollover COFs will have to enter both.
- Authorities given in CRP were meant to streamline activity by having CED sign. It was not meant to deplete COC authority.
- BUDGET, Budget, budget....
Of course this was a big topic. VERA was used in 2011 to reach the current budget. It is an entitlement program. There is a request by FSA for additional 2nd VERA and a VSIP. There could also be a third VERA. Again, we will have to see.

What is the plan for COC meetings? Wash DC is looking at whether COC may be paid from program dollars. It is a challenge but the Administrator does believe in the COC system. Probability is that we will be having quarterly meetings for awhile.

We also are to be sure that the COC is representative of the communities we live. This is important to the Secretary.

The Administrator indicated that everything is on the table to meet the budget. National, KC, St Louis, and STO's as well office closings. All structure will be open to cuts.

It was also suggested that FSA and partnering agencies find ways to share more resources such as vehicles.

The negotiation sessions with NASCOE were cancelled by the previous administrator but Mr. Nelson indicated he will have a session with NASCOE. This one is important to us.

John and I attended the Legislative Committee meetings. The national chairs were looking for membership to tell them what we wanted as part of the Farm Bill. Memberships answer was everything we can get for FSA. There is not a tremendous amount of force driving our Congress for the ag community at this time.

It will be important that we utilize the PAC and push forward. To date only 475 members are contributing. This is our only way to get to the congresspersons at this time.

The office closing bill expires in October. There are 30 FSA offices with no employees, 115 with 1 employee, and 195 with 2 employees. Do we want to retain staff or "bricks and mortar"? What the criteria for closures is not yet available.

Our benefits could be affected as a salary freeze for 5 years. CSRS could pay an additional 1.5% to retirement, making it 7.5%. FERS would go to 2.3%

We also heard from Bob Redding, PAC advisor. There is a hostile, partisan environment in Washington. One-half of the House Ag Committee is new. Traditional FSA programs do not do well in this environment. We can look for changes; perhaps no direct DCP, \$250,000 AGI limit. All other ag interest groups are suffering as well in this environment. On October 14th, the House Ag Committee will present its needs to the DEBT SUPER TEAM committee. This will be an important time for FSA.

The elected officers for 2011-2012 are: John Lohr, PA President, Mark VanHoose OH, VP, Annette Hyman NY, Secretary and Shelley Odenkirk OH Treasurer.

I wish I could give you more positive news but so much is still up in the air. John and I thank you for the opportunity to serve our WASCOE membership and will keep you posted in the future months.