

SEA Rally Legislative Report

April 18, 2015

It just doesn't get any better than being with good friends, coworkers, and fellow NASCOE members at a Southeast Area Rally, especially when it's in New Orleans!

Your Legislative Team has been working hard. During the week of March 30th, 2015, NASCOE members were in Washington, D.C. negotiating with FSA Management. While some were negotiating with Management, Jackson Jones (NASCOE Legislative Chairperson), myself (Southeast Area Legislative Chair/NASCOE PAC Coordinator), Curt Houk (Midwest Area Executive Committeeperson), and Hunter Moorhead (NASCOE Legislative Consultant) took time to conduct Capitol Hill meetings regarding our 2015 legislative priorities. We met with 7 congressional offices and staffs of both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees. We focused considerable attention to the House and Senate Agriculture and Appropriations Committees, which provide oversight of Farm Bill programs/implementation and appropriations for FSA salaries and expenses.

Here are highlights of the topics we discussed during our meetings:

Advocacy issues

- Appropriations – Our meetings focused on the President's budget request which would cut last year's salaries and expenses level by about \$12 million. If accepted, the President's budget would significantly reduce FSA staff while we are working diligently to implement the new farm bill and deliver livestock programs. In addition, we highlighted the \$100 million provided for Farm Bill implementation activities. Once exhausted, this funding will likely result in the loss of some temporary staff.
- 2016 Budget – The House and Senate are working toward finalizing their budget blueprint for the next 10 years. The two bodies are considering forcing federal employees to increase their current retirement contribution. We are working to continue the current retirement structure and avoid higher employee contributions. Our opponents claim that this change is necessary so that federal retirement benefits are more similar to private sector programs.
- GSA Leasing – We discussed challenges with FSA office leasing and our preference to return to the county committee leasing system. It is important that our employees be located in favorable locations that allow production agriculture to conduct their business without excessive rental costs and burdensome security measures.
- Acreage Reporting – The new Farm Bill directed the Department of Agriculture to establish some type of program allowing farmers to file acreage reports with FSA, RMA, and the private sector. In general, the advocates for this change hope the Department can establish one computer program that allows the information to be shared with all appropriate agencies. The Department is conducting pilot programs that may or may not prove successful. Acreage reporting is an important part of FSA's process and we are working to continue these activities regardless of future programs and computer software.

NAFEC was also in Washington, D.C. and had very productive meetings with Management to discuss issues about frequency of county committee meetings, improving employee morale through the proper use of awards, and face-to-face County Committee Training, to name a few. Val Dolcini, FSA Administrator, made it very clear that Farm Bill funding was put in place specifically for this type of training. Mr. Dolcini emphasized his plan for workforce engagement. He fully intends for Management to be listening to the needs of the field and to promote an open-door policy and transparent relationships so that we can get resources in the field.

I would be remiss if I finished this report without tell you how extremely important NASCOE's PAC is to the success of our legislative mission. Our members should be very proud of our PAC and the relationships we have built. Without these vital relationships, we cannot expect to have a "listening ear". I will admit that I was not fully convinced about the necessity and effectiveness of our NASCOE PAC when I first become a contributor back in 2005. I was dead wrong! After thinking about this, I realized that the reason I wasn't convinced was because I was not aware of how our legislative process must work to be successful. 10 years later, I can honestly tell you that I am honored and proud to say that I'm a NASCOE PAC contributor and that I have absolutely no doubt that every penny we contribute to PAC is an wise investment in our jobs, our benefits, and the well-being and livelihood of our county office structure. I, along with many others who have worked hard to promote our PAC, strongly believe in this effort and we want you understand more about PAC so that you will believe too! I honestly do not understand how any FSA employee can look at our current workload and budgeting situations, as we look at the dawn of the 2014 Farm Bill, and not be convinced that NASCOE's legislative efforts have made a huge difference! Retirements and attrition are challenging us to maintain and grow our PAC. We need your help! We need you to help recruit new enrollees and encourage current enrollees to increase their allotments, if they can. NASCOE must be passionate about telling our members about the doors that our PAC has opened for us. To assist in this effort, we have a NASCOE PAC Fact Sheet and PowerPoint Presentation that have been used by many area/state legislative chairs to promote the PAC. Both are available at www.nascoe.org. PAC is not a secret! Ask us any question and we'll be more than happy to answer! We are asking each state's leadership to make PAC education and promotion a priority at state conventions, Farm Bill training settings, and any time we can come in contact with our members. To sign someone up, all we need is the completed enrollment form. Just fill in the name, email, and phone number on the form and I'll get in touch with the new enrollees and finish the rest! We just rolled out our 2015 PAC Promotion and the details are available at our PAC table here at the Rally or on www.nascoe.org. The Southeast Area has always been the leader when it comes to PAC participation. Let's work hard to show the rest of the areas that we are willing to lead the charge for legislative successes! In the meantime, if you need any educational or informational materials about NASCOE's PAC, I'm your man! My focus assignment, as a member of the Legislative Committee, is to coordinate and direct our PAC. You can contact me at 615-464-7176 or by email: chief300@dtccom.net.

Respectfully,
Donny Green
Southeast Area Legislative Chairperson