

MINUTES
of the
Georgia Association of FSA County Office Employees
Executive Committee

The Executive Committee and Officers of the Georgia Association of FSA County Office Employees met February 20, 2007 in Perry Georgia at the Houston County FSA Building.

Those present were: Roger D. Swain, President Chad Scruggs, Vice-President
Pam Wilkes, Treasurer Denise L. Otto, Secretary
Cliff Fussell – Past President
District 1A – Glenn Forrester and Kellie Vaughn
District 1B – Chris Camp and Dianne Westmoreland
District 2 – Phil Howell and Callie Redmond
District 3 – Barbara Jackson and Jo Cook
District 4 – Wayne White and Julia Sharpe
District 5 – Gary Wilson and Wanda McCurdy
District 6 – Keith Willis
District 7 – Deborah Gregory and Monica Arnold
District 8 – Joe Hester and Marcia Baker

The President, Roger Swain, called the meeting to order. Monica Arnold gave the invocation. The minutes from the last meeting were motioned and approved by the committee. The Treasurer, Pam Wilkes, reviewed the financial status. She stated that the dues are current and paid as of October 2006. Pam also gave out a membership list. She stated that she has sent our membership to J M Marketing so they can update their records. Roger went over our travel to the meeting and he stated that we are authorized travel to the meeting from State Office but annual leave must be taken for the GACOE meeting starting at 10:00 am until lunchtime.

We then went on to discuss old business with Monica Arnold mentioning that she is getting plaques for the Peanut and Cotton Commission, she just needed help with the wording on the plagues. Also mentioned by Roger was that we had NAFEC hats and visors left for any office needing to sell them or sign up their new County Committee persons when elected.

Next was any New Business. Barbara Jackson commented on her public meeting that her office had. She said that the Congressional people were not aware of the closings. She had 120 in attendance. She also stated that at the meeting it seemed to be a done deal. Darby Hall came in and discussed his meeting he had and stated that the meeting went real well. He stated that the Houston County Commissioner stated that they would

renovate and charge no rent if Peach-Crawford-Bibb would come to Perry. Macon County would stand on its own. Gary Wilson commented on producers not getting their letters timely enough to know about the meetings. Two producers showed up at the Wheeler County meeting.

Next each 2007 committee reported as follows:

Legislative – Chad Scruggs, Chairperson

Chad mentioned that the legislative conference will be March 4-7. He stated that GACOE will be taking six GACOE members and two County Committee members. The County Committee members are from Floyd and Irwin counties. They will have six appointments on Tuesday and a luncheon with key contacts on Tuesday night. Cliff went on to mention that the position papers would hit three topics: 1-Benefits, 2-Farm Bill Implementation, and 3-Administration for all Conservation in the new farm bill. He mentioned that Cole Sims with NAFEC will be talking to the two County Committee members going about getting NAFEC started in Georgia.

Membership – Wanda McCurdy

Benefits – Dianne Westmoreland

Dianne mentioned that if you were going to sign-up for the Cingular discount that you would need to tell them that you were a Forestry Service employee.

Awards – Monica Arnold, Chairperson

Monica Arnold mentioned that we had a nomination for Service to FSA and were going to resubmit Elaine Sherrod and Barbara Webb, last year's winners, to NASCOE.

Archives and Emblems – Callie Redmond, Chairperson

We still have shirts for sell.

Elections-No Report

Publicity- Denise Otto, Chairperson

Denise reminded everyone on getting her some news for the Gazette. She will not be sending the Gazette for print until the week of March 12th. She is waiting on Legislative Conference report.

Scholarships- Chris Camp, Chairperson

Chris stated that we had 7 applications turned in at this time.

Parliamentarian- Cliff Fussell-No report

Roger Swain gave NASCOE news. The National and SEA Rally will be held in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in August of 2007. He stated that he would contact Barbara Webb and see about information on a bus if anyone is interested in going this way. He will send out an email on this to see how many would possibly want to commit.

Plans for the 2007 GACOE Convention were discussed. Roger stated that we will be having a 2008 SEA RALLY in Savannah in late March-First of April. The convention committee will be working on a hotel and we will need to be deciding on some good dates within that timeframe. Some ideas for events were mentioned such as a Georgia Night, golf tournament, Paula Dean Restaurant, a raffle for a gun and a saltwater rod and reel with a Charter trip. Also Roger stated that the Southwest and Midwest are interested in joining. More details will be coming as we get a hotel in line.

After a break for lunch we all met for the Questions and Answers session with the State Committee, Harry Lee Kemp, Duke Lane, Ronnie Lee and Charles Lee(came in late), Mary Alice McGhee(not present), AO-Kula C. Moore, and the SED, Susan Holmes.

Duke Lane made a few introductions and comments and then we proceeded with the questions.

1. What is our 07 ceiling federal and county office?

75 Federal

280 Non-Federal

On board – 70 Federal- 2 vacancies advertised

272 – Non Federal – 2 PT's, 2 CED's and 4 COT's vacancies advertised

2. We currently have 10 CED openings, what is the state office plan for these counties and when can we expect some of the vacant county offices be advertised? Some of the counties are not scheduled to be closed.

As of February 13, 4 COC's have requested that their CED vacancy be filled.

The State Office will advertise Candler and Laurens.

3. Will there be a COT program, if so when and how many will Ga. Get?

Georgia was authorized 1 non-ceiling COT position which has been filled.

In addition we will advertise 4 ceiling COT positions.

4. What is the status of the budget for 2007? How much longer will we be operating under a continuing resolution?

Kula stated that Full Budget has been passed as of 2-20-07. Travel can now be done on a "B" authorization for COC's, CED's and people with routine travel.

5. Is it accurate to say that there is no money available to fix the computer problems that we have currently been experiencing? If this is accurate, how are we supposed to service the farmers and get our jobs done timely?

Per IT the web-based systems are going to work again. IT had to procure additional capacity in St. Louis telecommunications. Procurement started February 7 and is being treated as an emergency request. Changes in firewalls and pipelines will be installed in a couple of weeks. They did mention that end-user experiences being reported are very helpful.

6. Years ago, we had quite time on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, with the implementation of the 770 checklist, county offices need time to complete these and process payments, is this a possibility, few office close anymore on Wednesday afternoon.

In 2000, SED Hanson Carter authorized quiet time on Wednesdays from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Per SED's memo, "all offices will continue to answer all phone calls and NOT turn away any producers who might visit the office during this time." Kula will send out sign and put in the newsletters about quite time on Wednesday's.

7. Will there be any more and do you expect any more consolidations than was in our original plan?

SED comments. Possibly

8. On February 7, Jim Baker at the STO stated that some of the software that we are using is too much for our computers. Why load software that our computers can't handle?

I am not aware of this.

9. Why can't GA have any Temporary employees? How are other states operating under the continuing resolutions and able to keep a minimum amount of temps?

Georgia has employed approximately 35 temporaries since the beginning of FY 2007. We were allocated money to support 10.5 staff years for temporaries and COC. Per District Director's recommendation, temporaries were extended or hired in designated counties at the beginning of the fiscal as opposed to later on in the year. That money has now been exhausted. Based on our budget, Georgia has used all temporary money.

Other states have money for temporaries because they managed their money different than Georgia.

If we are out of temporary money how can county offices have County Committee meetings? Where does the money come from for the COC?

COC time is included in temporary money. AO has reserved money to cover COC costs.

Is this money earmarked temporary employee money? **No, it is earmarked for COC.** If this is true maybe during lean times we could start having COC meeting every other month and hire some temps. **Always a good management practice to not hold COC meetings if not needed, but even if COC's only met every other month, there is not enough money left to hire temps.**

10. Field reporters are a key part of FSA, with no temporary money these have been released in the state, how are we to provide Measurement service to producers. CED's do not have the time to manage offices, assist farmers, complete checklist and be in the field all week. How doe's the SED and STC expect the CED to get all of this done?

DD's reviewed their district staffing needs before any temporaries were extended or hired in October. A decision was made whether to hire temporary office or

temporary field and also whether to use temp money at the beginning of the FY or later on.

11. The current situation with regard to counties without a CED is growing longer by the passing months. There are currently 10 offices without a CED that formally had one. 4 of which are on the “targeted” list. What is the plan for the others? Is there going to be COT program? If not, are they going to combine them with an adjacent office or go back to “shared management”? I for one believe that shared management is the way to solve the dilemma of how to keep the offices open and keep the chain of command in tact, but also meet the goals of FSA to provide service to Georgia’s Ag. Community. Shared management is a tool that is still at the disposal of the Agency to use to meet this growing problem of lower staffing levels. If current trends continue we could see 8 + co’s in a group. Is the plan for the future to consolidate?

See #2 and #3.

12. In the past all Georgia CED vacancies and PT vacancies were announced with relocation expenses. The last ones have not included relocation expenses. But vacancies from other states include relocation expenses why is Georgia different?

Budget restraints. Each state is individual on this.

13. When a COC request to announce a vacancy in a County why can't this be answered? You have request being sent to the STO and you do not get any acknowledgement.

All requests for CED vacancies received as of 02-13-2007 have been addressed.

We are currently answering PT requests now that workload has been evaluated.

14. There is some confusion at the county level as to what and when counties are available to advertise for permanent openings for PT's. If it is based on a list of understaffed offices, can this be provided; it appears there is no consistency to this process?

We have used the same process for the past 4 years. Staffing is based on budget and workload. List of workload and staffing has always been shared with DD's and employees.

Kula will get list out. DD's have a copy of the list.

15. WEB access has improved since February 9, 2007. Is this the beginning of a “fix”? When can we expect the system to be fully operational at acceptable speeds?

See #5

16. Will the number of DD's remain the same after the closing of COF's?

SED comments “for now”.

17. Will understaffed offices receive any relief following the closing of offices?

SED comments

18. Rumors are on the grape vine about the STO being moved from Athens. Is there anything to this rumor?

SED comments "There are talks about it".

19. My workload went down due to understaffing in 2006. Will my staffing be reduced based on the 2006 workload?

SED comments. Type 1 offices are overstaffed. Will not take an employee. Example is when an office is .68 overstaffed and you take an employee, then that makes them understaffed .32.

20. Do the COT's count against the current ceiling?

See #3

21. Training for inexperienced and new employees is greatly needed. WEB and teleconferencing is fine for some situations but training for inexperienced PT's by the experienced PT's would be best. We have experienced PT's with lots of knowledge and helpful advice that could be passed on to others if allowed. Is funding available for training like this? **Unknown until we get our FY 2007 allocations.** We should use this pool of knowledge before they all quit or retire. **DD's need to handle this per District.**

22. In an e-mail sent on Feb. 13 about compensatory time it was suggested that in lieu of compensatory leave, supervisors should consider temporarily suspending compressed workdays or alternative work schedules. Here in my office and about 95% of all other offices are on a compressed work schedule and work 80 hours every two weeks. If the alternate work schedule is suspended how will this increase the number of hours an employee can work? This work schedule is needed and should not be taken away.

A compressed work schedule is when an employee works eight 9-hour days and one 8-hour day with 1 nonworkday each pay period. An alternate work schedule includes on in which an employee works less than 5 days per week. The email was not referring to those employees working 10 days a pay period, but rather those with 5/4/9 or 4/10

23. When will the public meeting be held for the proposed relocation of the STO? This was part of Ga approved plan.

SED comments

24. When new staffing guide numbers are determined with 2006 workload data, are workload figures going to be used to determine staffing levels for Farm Loan Program employees like they are being used to determine staffing levels for County Office employees? In other words, is part of our state ceiling going to continue being used to leave Farm Loan offices overstaffed and cause the County Office employees to be left understaffed on the Farm Program side?

Budget in DC has formulated a worksheet to prorate workload into staffing for FL. This worksheet was used for all Type 1 offices. We have separate ceilings for Federal and non-Federal employees. At this time overstaffing has not been addressed in either FP or FL offices.

25. When will there be some additional retirement training? This was done several years back but is needed again.

The State Office contracted with GRB in July 2005 for mid-career retirement planning. Before that we did training in 2004 for those within 5 years of retirement. As soon as we get a budget, and if funds are available, we will arrange for additional training.

This concluded the question session. Roger made a few closing comments.

They're being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise L. Otto
GACOE Secretary

