

**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 March 27, 2008 in St. Simons Island, Georgia at the King and Prince Beach & Golf Resort.

Those present were: Chad Scruggs, President      Barbara Jackson, Vice-President  
Pam Wilkes, Treasurer      Denise L.Otto, Secretary  
Cliff Fussell – SEA Executive  
District 1A – Carolyn Taylor  
District 1B – Chris Camp and Dianne Westmoreland  
District 2 – Phil Howell and Callie Redmond  
District 3 – Mike Turner, CED Alternate and Delores Hartley  
District 4 – Math Johnson and Donna Dykes  
District 5 – Wanda McCurdy  
District 6 – Keith Willis and Krista Knight  
District 7 – Pam Dennis and Judy Anderson (For Monica Watson)  
District 8 – Joe Hester and Marcia Baker  
Past President – Roger D. Swain  
Others Present - Deborah Gregory, Deborah Dotson, Carolyn Taylor, Terrie Wolford, Susan Register, Mary Parker (STO), Virginia Lovering (COR), Ronnie Morris (COR), Leigh Wilson (FL), Rita Brooks (FL), David Lassiter (FL STO), Robert Tyson (FL STO), Theresa Windham (FL), Elaine McGarity (STO), Clark Weaver (STO), Sandra Hammond (FL), William Bagwell(STC), Charles Lee (STC), Mary Alice McGee (STC), Dr. Harry Lee Kemp (STC Chairperson), Kula Moore (STO AO), Ginger Rider (STO)

The President, Chad Scruggs, called the GACOE meeting to order at 1:30 pm and he welcomed everyone. Dr. Harry Lee Kemp gave the invocation. The Treasurer, Pam Wilkes, went over Rally Report as of that day. Chad went over our travel and meeting authorization for the meeting. He then went on to make some comments about the Rally.

Chris Camp announced our Scholarship winners for 2008 and they are Michael Swain, (son of Roger Swain, CED in Webster-Stewart), Laura Beth Vaughn (Daughter of Kellie Vaughn, PT Gordon Co.), Megan Fields (Daughter of Kellie Fields, PT Jenkins Co.), Jessica H. Haygood (Daughter of Shanon Haygood, PT Hart Co.). Each recipient will receive a \$1000.00 for the college of their choice. Next Chad Scruggs announced the awards for GACOE with Deborah Dotson winning the FSA Agriculture Award and Cathy Summerhill winning the Service to Community Award. Chad also presented the Honorary NASCOE Membership Awards to Grace Clower, Retiree and Jackie Stewart, Retiree.

We then moved on with the Q & A session of the meeting. Dr. Harry Lee Kemp asked if we would all introduce ourselves and then he made several remarks and comments. GACS president Theresa Windham presented the Questions for GACS and Chad Scruggs presented the Questions for GACOE. These questions and answers are attached to these minutes. Kula Moore the Administrative Officer mentioned several things going on in Administrative that she thought were informative. Leasing has changed to adhere to GSA rules and Washington has to sign off on the lease before it is approved, Omnibus Bill stopped office closures, New Purchase Card System coming soon, New Hyperion Software coming soon, Paperless Check Conversion, Personnel Folders will be scanned into online electronic OPF so that employees can go online to view there OPF folders, and Star Web to new T & A's by October 1, New Activity Reporting System(Workload) will be entered through web T & A. These are just some of the highlights Kula mentioned at the meeting. Clark Weaver made a few remarks about CDP Quality in the works and coming soon, GIS specialist has been chosen for Georgia, and Dairy Part 3 Disaster Program is here.

They're being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise L. Otto  
GACOE Secretary

## GACOE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Work Item 2113 (Geographical Information System) is being reported inconsistently throughout the state. 12-AO (Rev. 21) Amend. 10, Exhibit 13 says: Geographical Information System. Report 1 unit for each workday. Note: The main activity reported in this work item is digitizing maps and completing the CLU layer.

Do include time for:

- correcting field boundaries, etc., for discrepancies reported by producers upon review of the initial maps, only up until the 30 calendar days for producers to respond passes
- GIS training for completing the CLU certification process
- handling appeals, requests for reconsideration, audits, and

investigations

- labeling imagery and correcting CLU's on initial digital imagery
- participating in pilot program using GIS only for time not captured in another work item
- preparing and mailing initial set of maps to producers
- transferring land use determinations and other information from aerial photography to digitized imagery for HELC, WC, CRP, etc.

**Do not include time for:**

- preparing daily backup for updates to GIS (work item 111)
- using digital imagery and GPS to complete paid for measurement services in the field (work item 202)
- using digital imagery to complete paid for measurement service in the office (work item 209)
- outlining maps in preparation for digitizing training and using GIS maintenance tool correcting field boundaries as the result of changes, such as new

breaking or changes discovered when flight imagery does not match CLU and subsequent updating of cropland and tract file including completing changes

outstanding after the initial 30 day response period passes for producer report of discrepancies (work item 302)

- delineating CRP fields for new contracts on digital imagery providing maps to digitizing centers for CRP layer (work item 528)
- entering new land use determinations on digital imagery (work item 1417)
- using digital imagery to complete acreage determinations, including collecting missing data (work item 1421)
- training and using GIS land use tool (work item 1401).

**Estimate what activity is anticipated for FY 08.**

**The COF where the CLU layer is certified shall not estimate time beyond the 30 day producer response period in this work item.**

Probably is inconsistent. COF inputs different stages. Once counties are certified they are allowed 30 extra days for corrections. After that initial 30 days, all activity is then counted back into the programs. It's just like transferring data to a new set of maps.

2. What is the reason for the number of COF's having different days from what they reported on the 55-1 and Report 1 being changed and some COF's reporting days on the 55-1 and Report 1 having the same number of days?

DC does review in consultation with State Office specialists.

3. Why did automation go down when nothing has changed in that area?  
BUD had a task force of county office employees out last May to help us review the 2005 work measurement formulas to account for changes in county office activity applicable to FY 2007. As stated in notices AO-1389 & AO-1407, BUD was very satisfied with the results of the task force as the total workload came back very close to the number of employees on board in FY 2007. The formulas for work items 101 and 111 were among the formulas revised during the review. With all the additions of time for new software or procedure and IPIA requirements for numerous program area work items, the task force agreed that some offsets needed to be made. The consensus was that Admin is an area that takes a back-seat when there is an overload of program work to do. It was also the consensus that IT responsibilities in the CO were less than in FY 2005. those are the only 2 formulas that were adjusted down – 35 program work item formulas were adjusted up.

4. Some counties are reporting that Section C total from last year had less unit count with greater NWDS and this year had greater unit counts with ½ NWDS. Can anyone explain this?

Units don't count – only workdays entered by COF. Units are for information purposes only.

5. Based on report one, item 2113 has no data and there is data on the FSA-55 on item 302. Where is my workload credit? How can this happen to counties?

WI 302 was a query; WI 2113 does not directly correlate with WI 302. WI 2113 does create a count in WI 302, but other work items put numbers in WI 302. WI 302 is affected by more than just WI 2113..

6. How do you have one PT working on Conservation with assistance from COR's, COT's, the CED and others for 12 months and still get 68 days credit?

A lot of work is done without getting unit counts; could be doing a lot of things that do not cause a unit count. This system is based on unit counts.

7. Suggestion on workload is to take the entire workload figure and compare to the ceiling. For example; if the state workload shows 500 staff years and the state ceiling is 400 then a factor 80% should be applied to each individual counties workload to determine the staffing. The idea of using part of leave and selected workload items would depend on the activity in the county. Items not used may be a large portion of that counties workload. Also GIS was included in item C. This should be considered a permanent position and staffed accordingly.

Part C is unmeasured; changes from year to year.

8. In the past we have always been told that the worksheet to divide workload between Farm Loans & Farms Programs is not right.

This year we plan to again use DC prorated worksheet.

We need a tool in place that IS right so that these offices can effectively project staffing in the event of retirements.

Beginning October 1 FSA is scheduled to begin using STAR which in turn will support the Activity Reporting System (ARS)

9. What happened to the work item 117, BWEP? This is also a big decrease to COF that had the same number of acres last as this year and the NWD's went down. Please explain?

I will check with Washington.

## **GACS(Georgia Association of Credit Specialists) Questions and Answers**

I. Training : (BU 707: \$7,740 + \$0)

- a. **Provide cross training on the use of GPS units for all FLP employees.**

- i. All Farm Loan actions require an environmental review which may involve locating certain items with map coordinates. At this time we have not been trained in the use of GPS units which would allow us to map points and provide those points on a location map.

### **PROGRAM**

- b. **Provide access to all FLP employees to print maps, aerial photos, etc.**

- i. Access to at least print up to date maps is needed due to the required information that must be provided to other

federal agencies on a Class I or II environmental assessment.

- ii. Also, useful when preparing a real estate appraisal, real estate inspection, crop inspection and other actions that are required so we can minimize the government's exposure to loss.

**PROGRAM**

- c. At the last meeting, October 2007 in Moultrie, there was a great deal of discussion about meeting the training needs of the field staff. Has there been any follow-up on any of the suggestions?

Yes. As for the Administrative Division, we discussed the need for training with the District Directors and found a need for general Hyperion training for Program Technicians. Net meetings were held with six of the eight districts. Some meetings were held for Admin PT's while CED meetings were also held and some were held just with Admin. PT's – this was up to the DD. We received positive feedback from the DD's, CED's and especially the PT's.

II. Equipment: (BU 707: \$15,000 + \$125,685)

**a. Purchase network cards for all copiers.**

- i. ITS has indicated that copiers can be placed on the network. Having copiers on the network would be beneficial to the Agency in many ways.

1. Saves money:

- a. A network copier can act as scanner; this eliminates the need to purchase scanners for all offices.
- b. Items don't have to be printed on the printers, reducing the usage of printer cartridges and equipment wear.

2. Saves time:

- a. Print jobs can be sent directly to the copier reducing the wait time at the copier allowing more efficient use of our time.

Emailed IT to ask their opinion of this to get input on IT staff workload needed, cost of cards, etc. If copiers are networked then they no longer belong to FSA which I believe is not an option for us at this time.

**b. STO Purchase cross-cut, confetti, paper shredders for all offices.**

- i. PPI requires information to be secured, especially in its disposal.

Checking with Kathy for cost of buying shredders vs. shredder service – BUDGET item

**c. Follow-up on equipment request.**

- i. Annually a notice is sent out requesting any equipment/furniture request be sent to the State Office. A response as to the fulfillment of this request would be appreciated.
  - 1. If the request involves a FLP office, please copy the FLM on the request as well as the CED.
  - 2. An indication of where the request falls into priority. (Need v/s Money)

The Georgia AS notice for equipment goes out to County Offices and Farm Loan Program Offices. I'm guessing that offices are requesting a response as to whether a piece of equipment is purchased or not – if so, then I will check with Kathy Shepherd for a method of letting the field know.

- d. PPI requires that all FLP files be in locked filing cabinets, FP files also require secure storage. As space and money is an issue for storage of files then FRS is the next option. The only problem is that preparing files for transfer to FRS is time consuming and is not a priority for most offices do to staffing issues. **Temporaries could be the perfect solution as the project is short term and would not require a great deal of training.**

Understand and agree - unfortunately we are limited on budget for temporary employees. We are unable to provide temporary employees to all offices for this item.

### III. Personnel

- a. **We have had three recent vacancies in FLP staff, when will these positions be advertised?**

Two field FLP employees recently retired – Penny and Jennifer. Up to SED if positions will be filled.

- b. The past several years, 3 federal positions have been flexed to the county office side. **When will these positions be filed as Federal instead of being flexed?**

Up to SED to decide how to best manage the workforce between Federal and Non-federal.

- c. As the use of alternatives like Telework, Flexiplace, etc have been encouraged; will FSA and Georgia FSA be revisiting the use of these work options?

It is management's decision to offer alternate worksites. Appears that with current PII regulations and the workforce dynamics of the field offices, managing Telework or Flexiplace is more and more a security concern.

- d. **What is the ceiling for 2008?** (Federal and County)

2008 ceiling = 75 Fed, 280 non Fed –

3 flexed from Fed to Nonfed = 72 Fed, 283 Non Fed

- e. **Transfer of Knowledge, what can be done?**

- i. When a person retires their knowledge base is lost to the Agency and hiring a person to replace them does not replace that knowledge.
  - 1. When a person retires can they be contracted, or something, for a few a months to provide a transfer of knowledge interface with the person that will be assuming their position?

Because of budget and ceilings, currently there is no option for re-hiring a retired person to have them work with the person that replaced them. Management would encourage supervisors to cross-train current employees to lessen the impact of the retiring employee.

IV. Office Closure

**a. What is the current status of the offices to be closed in Georgia?**

Omnibus halted the office closures.....need actual reference and wording for this.

- i. Have they all been closed? If not, which offices have not been closed?

Of the original plan, Seminole, Taylor, Ben Hill, Irwin and Baker Counties have not been combined.

- ii. What was the "magic date" that offices had to be closed by that allows them to be closed even with the current ban?

Closures were made effective not earlier than December 9, 2007 as listed in Secretary of Agriculture's memo dated August 10, 2007.

- iii. For the offices that have not been closed as planned, what is the plan for them this year, next year?

Omnibus halted the office closures.....need actual reference and wording for this

- b. Potential rearrangement of districts and future concerns.
  - i. The impact to the delivery of FLP is not being considered in the initial stages of planning.

SED/STC input.

V. Workload

**a. What is the plan on how to determine workload until Activity Reporting System (ARS) comes on-line?**

- i. Any projection on when ARS will be rolled out?
- ii. While we are waiting on ARS to roll out what will be used to determine staffing needs?

Web T&A is slated to be implemented in September. This system is the Department's choice for all of USDA. It is through Web T&A that ARS will be implemented.

Activity Reporting System (ARS) will not use the WM work items from 12-AO, Individual work items varied considerably, with some covering all

activities for a program, some a specific activity, and others individual tasks. ARS will standardize the way we capture work performed at all levels of the Agency by concentrating on activities at all levels. This approach will provide the Agency with data that is more consistent and that can be more effectively analyzed. In ARS, there are significantly less activities than there were work items in the WM system. The number of activities should be sufficient to effectively capture all FSA work at the same time as improving the accuracy and efficiency with which employees select activities. Many activities will be used at all levels of the Agency. In ARS employees will enter their own T&A and Activity Reporting Data into STAR.

Georgia will use the 07 workload figures along with DD input.

**b. Actual staff requirements v/s factored staff**

i. It is our understanding that workload is a tool to determine staffing needs, and the actual number of employees allowed is determined by budget. If that is the case then,

1. When are finalized workload numbers expected to be available?

Report 1 was mailed to all field offices according to Notice PM. The State Office will meet with DD's and discuss.

2. What factor will be used? If the factor is changed each year and then those factored results are compared to the next years counts, wouldn't that lead to an error in statistical variation?

As discussed with the DD's while working on 07 staffing needs, workload figures alone cannot be used for staffing due to the budget Georgia is given each year.

3. What is goal in factoring workload?

Management would like to hire based on workload alone, but the funds just aren't available. Factoring allows management to see what is needed vs. what is available to work with based on budget.

4. The budget office has provided a worksheet to separate the workload in Type 1 offices, but it is never used in Georgia? How are we getting an accurate picture of staffing needs without using this worksheet? Would it not skew the results?

Each year we have used Budget's worksheet along with the input of State Office Farm Loan personnel. The National worksheet is a tool to determine staffing needs, and the actual number of employees allowed is again determined by budget.

5. How can a tool that is fundamentally flawed be used to determine staffing needs?

Do not believe that the tool is fundamentally flawed.

6. Each CED/FLM needs to know where they stand in staffing needs v/s the rest of the state for future planning and general office management. Make available a staffing priority list.

The staffing list we currently use is a management tool and is shared with District Directors each year and in turn shared with the field.

7. Will workload counts finally be combined for offices that were closed:

a. Prior to 10-01-07?

b. After 10-01-07?

STO has worked with WDC to combine workload figures. Per Exhibit 12, the constant of the work items that the sub-office has been removed and that should take care of combining their workload. Work items 101, 102, 111, 120 were left alone.

#### VI. Performance Plans

a. Before performance plans will become the effective tool for personnel management for which they are designed, a better understanding of their development is needed for ALL supervisors.

**i. We would like to have a workshop for all supervisors, FLM, CED's and DD's, where we can develop measurements to use for our employees.**

1. Guidance from the STO, (ADM, FLP, FP) would be beneficial; however, we are not requesting that anyone lead us through the development of a plan but allow us to "brain storm" and develop a pool of measurements so we aren't starting from scratch.

ii. If a supervisor cannot answer these fundamental questions, then the performance plans are of no use:

1. What is expected of me as your employee?

2. What can I do to be more than fully successful?

Understood and agree. Performance was reviewed with DD's for FY07. DD's were then to review within their Districts for a "brain storming" session. Unfortunately, the consensus is that Admin is an area that takes a back-seat when there is an overload of program work to do. Meetings for Supervisors by District could be planned.

#### VII. Awards

a. "The new 5-tier performance appraisal system was designed to make meaningful distinctions in employee performance. This along with the new award policy provides supervisors with the tools to recognize the workforce fairly and equitably for the level of performance being delivered. There is now a direct correlation between an employee's performance and awards." (Excerpt from PM 2631)

- i. As 75% of the awards budget is targeted toward performance then it is even more essential that effective performance plans be developed and correctly rated. SEE VI

**AGREE**

b. Per PM 2631:

- i. Who will be the Award Pool Manager?

The Award Pool Executive will be the SED - the Award Pool Manager will be the AO.

- ii. Will the "awards committee" be used and how will they be chosen?

Georgia's awards program is currently being reviewed by the SED.

- iii. When can we expect a GA Notice or GA Instructions providing who will be on this years committee and which method of allocating award money will be used?

April – naming committee members and giving instructions for award nominations. States had been instructed by WDC to wait until funding was received. As of March 13, States were instructed to not approve or process any awards, but could continue their analysis and review in preparation for awards distribution.

- iv. As the names of the employees receiving a QSI is protected information; therefore, it cannot be shared. And, the number of QSI's that can be awarded is based on 1 ½ % of the ratings giving:

- 1. How many QSI's could Georgia have, based on 2007?

As per PM-2361, QSI's awarded by State is determined by 1.5 times the number of ratings given each year.

Federal ceiling –  $72 \times .015 = 1.08 = 1$  award in the GS QSI award pool

Non-Federal ceiling –  $283 \times .015 = 4.245 = 4$  in the CE QSI award pool.

- 2. What is the procedure for determining who gets a QSI if more than the allowed number met the criteria as outlined in PM 2631?

Cash award option may be used for other employees.

VIII. Budget (BU 707)

- a. At the last meeting there was a discussion about providing more information in regards to the allocation of funds.

- i. Travel and training; will this be provided this year?

What sort of information is being requested?

- b. Money for overtime is allocated each year; however, claims for overtime have not been allowed. (\$5,000 + \$30,000)

Overtime is a tool for management and should be requested as needed.

- i. If offices have employed the management techniques available to them to address work and our still legitimately

behind, then what is stopping overtime from being authorized?

1. Having an understaffed office is stressful enough, but having an understaffed over worked office with no compensation of the additional time that is given (unasked) with no end in sight is mentally and physically demoralizing.
- c. The budget included \$62,000 for transportation. Is this used to cover the cost of GSA vehicles?

Yes, the \$62,000 in the Federal budget for "transportation of things" is for GSA vehicles.

- i. Why isn't the cost of maintaining vehicles for the DD's and COR's prorated between federal and county budgets? The majority of travel for the DD's and COR's is related to work with the FP not FLP.

GSA vehicles are a federally budgeted item.

- ii. Has a cost benefit analysis been done to determine that it is more cost effective to have the DD's and COR's drive the GSA vehicles home?

Yes and it is. Another factor is that their time is money. Per 30-AS, COR's & DD's are the only employees who do not need to request approval for storing vehicles at or near their residences..

#### IX. Other

- a. NRCS recently sent out a memo about sharing government vehicles, which indicated that a written agreement is not in place.
  - i. Has any or will any action be taken on this?

This will be reviewed at the State level.

- ii. How do we stand with RD in the sharing of vehicles?

I have not received any negative feedback regarding RD sharing their government vehicles.

- b. As PPI is a major issue not only for our external customers but our internal customers as well, please address the following:
  - i. A PM notice came out which indicated that the SSN should be marked through on all travel documents, T&A's, etc., past and future. And that this information would not need to be provided on the forms. However, this is not being done universally. A GA PM notice providing additional guidance on this issue may be warranted.

State notices are not issued unless there is added detail or modification. National procedure should be followed by all employees. Notice was detailed and STO staff felt it was an easy read with no need for further clarification. We can send out an Administrative Message reminding supervisors and travel PT's of the requirements of the National notice. I cannot find this notice to reference.

c. Some FLP offices have issues with obtaining the daily office supplies that are needed. A sub-allocation of supplies and materials budget provided to the county office may help resolve this issue.

i. This would only be for those items only specifically used by FLP like the 4 and 8 position folders for example.

Issues need to be brought to the AO's attention. FLM's should request needed supplies from Admin PT. Admin PT's are responsible for ensuring funds are available for ordered supplies. Is this a wide-spread problem?

d. Is there a timeframe in which travel vouchers should be processed? 118-FI states five workdays after completing the trip or period of travel or every 30 calendar days if employee is in a continuous travel status.

i. If not, then a Georgia Notice clarifying the timeliness of this process would be appreciated.

X. Farm Loan Program

a. Is there a projection of when any of the revised Georgia Instructions will be available?

Instructions for what?

b. Has the non-ceiling FLOT slots being allocated by the national office yet?

No

i. Will Georgia be receiving any?

State Office has requested 3 additional FLOT's.

c. Based on the vast amount of changes we have undergone, many questions have probably been received by you and your staff for clarification of the regulations/forms. A summary of the Q&A, posted to the GA website, might be useful and save everyone some time.

Summary of what questions?

d. Of the three FLP vacancies, when do you anticipate those being advertised? And what/where will the positions be?

Georgia currently has two federal vacancies. Filling positions is up to SED with input from Farm Loan Chief and District Directors.

