

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 on June 6, 2006 at the USDA Service Center in Perry, Georgia.

Those present were: Roger D. Swain, President Chad Scruggs, Vice-President
Denise L. Otto, Secretary
Cliff Fussell – Past President
District 1A – Glenn Forrester
District 1B – Chris Camp and Dianne Westmoreland
District 2 – Callie Redmond
District 3 – Barbara Jackson and Jo Cook
District 4 – Martha Kent and Julia Sharpe
District 5 – Wanda McCurdy
District 6 – Ty Godfrey
District 7 – Deborah Gregory and Monica Arnold
District 8 – Joe Hester and Marcia Baker
Others Present – Darby Hall, Steve Newton, Duke Lane Jr., Harry
Lee Kemp, Mary Alice McGhee, Kula C. Moore, and Brian
Stuckey.

The President, Roger D. Swain, called the meeting to order. Prayer was offered by Monica Arnold. President Swain welcomed the State Executive Director-Steve Newton, State Committee-Duke Lane Jr., Harry Lee Kemp, and Mary Alice McGhee, Kula C. Moore-State AO, and Brian Stuckey, DD.

The SED, Steve Newton made comments at this time. Mr. Newton stated that the plan had been submitted but he did not know the status of when it would be approved or returned. He discussed that Georgia has 83 offices and that he believes we needed to downsize to be more efficient. He stated that we needed to do this with the least amount of impact on the employees and farmers. He is hoping that we can find away to make this happen. If anything needed to be revisited it could possibly be incorporated into the plan. He made the comment that Alabama has 50 FSA Offices to our 83. It can be done.

After Mr. Newton spoke the President, Roger Swain proceeded in asking the State Committee, SED, and State Office AO, Kula some questions sent in by employees on their thoughts and concerns.

1. How soon after the implementation of the current office closures will the ‘next phase’ occur? It is my suggestion that future ‘opportunities’ be handled as they arise instead of trying to do so many at once, this leads to confusion and discomfort among employees.

Mr. Newton stated that it was impossible to say what will be the next phase.

2. What will happen to the employees in a county office that is targeted for closure? Will they be able to choose which office they want to relocate to? In past conferences with Mr. Newton, he informed us the employee and farmers would be able to choose.

Mr. Newton stated that the employee can choose which office they want to relocate to, but it has to be in an understaffed office. Farmers may use another office. In the farmers doing this it will take workload from one and move to another. There is no talk of a RIF.

3. Emails from STO are still not being numbered by divisions for referencing back to. The Administrative Division and Stephanie Brown are the only ones doing this.

Mr. Newton and Kula stated she would get something out to mention to program chiefs.

4. I know that there are limited funds for equipment but the county offices need computer desks. In our office we are using printer tables to put computers on and then stacking up books or whatever to make the monitors eye level so that we don't hurt our necks, elbows, and backs. We have to use those old gray tables for a normal desk, which isn't any better. I think this is a health safety issue and the computer desks would really help us in the county offices and surely help our stress levels.

Kula stated that she would poll District Directors and have them rank offices in their Districts by need of equipment. She will then send up a proposal to Washington for updated furniture. Equipment money is limited.

5. Why can't the whole office have access to the CLU layer to make changes? Our office works real well together and I think that if we all could have access to fix changes that it sure would make things easier. We have all fixed cropland and made changes in the past as we find them. Could this be possible after the certification process is over?

It was mentioned that maybe it could be up to the CED. No real answer.

6. I would like to know if there are any plans to update our computer system. Number one to make it faster and to replace the old system 36.

Kula mentioned that maybe the servers needed to be updated, not the computers. We have good computers but servers are slow. No answer on if or when they may update computers.

7. Would it be possible for the plan to include actions that would be carried out 1 to 2 years in the future? Some consolidations that are planned now could be delayed until later when retirement eligibility could make things much easier.

Due to the current budgetary situation, time is of the essence in carrying out the plan.

8. Was there a specific workload figure that was used as the cut off in the Double Blind test and if so were any adjustments made for the Sub-Office regarding Administrative and Automation workdays? These items are based on the number of employees, but are only counted by the headquarter office.

Yes, there was a specific workload figure used as the cut off, but Mr. Newton was not sure of the exact figure used. The workload was used as reported for each specific office. (No adjustments)

9. Was any consideration given to how future consolidations might be possible in an effort to avoid boxing in certain areas, as was done the last time with places like Walker County?

(There was no real comment made to this question.)

10. If we completely eliminate all shared management offices today, do you not envision that in 2 to 3 years we will be going back to more shared management as CED retirements take place?

Certainly possible, but shared management is being discouraged by the National office at this time.

11. When and how will we see people being moved to the understaffed offices?

Newton replied .75 and over overstaffed county offices are being used to fill in and help in understaffed counties. District Director's are supposed to be doing this.

This concluded the questions session.

The question was asked to Mr. Newton, when will the plan be approved. Newton was uncertain maybe the end of June and he was unclear on how the announcement is going to be made to the producers on office closings. He made the comment that we will do cards or whatever it takes to get the word out to the producers about the public hearings. Mr. Newton was also uncertain about how they would schedule 16 offices to have public hearings in a 30 day period. Mr. Newton announced that Stephanie Brown would be leaving the State Office and going to work in Washington. He also mentioned that her position would be advertised inside FSA and outside FSA.

Kula gave us the current staffing levels as of June 3, 2006. Nfed – 281, Fed-72. The 2006 ceiling is 287. The 2007 ceiling is 280 NFed and 75 Fed.

The question was asked about the State Office being in the plan to be moved. Mr. Newton stated that it is still in the plan but no public hearing would have to be held if it is approved to move.

Roger then invited the State Committee, SED, and Kula Moore to the GACOE Convention in Atlanta in September. They accepted the invite with an open question and answers session as we have done in the past.

The Executive Committee broke for a lunch break at this time.

The President asked if any changes needed to be done to the last meetings minutes. The Executive Committee approved the minutes from the January meeting.

The President gave the financial report and stated that membership was at 90%. The Executive Committee approved the Treasurer to pay \$125.00 for the Agribusiness Council Membership dues. Roger discussed our travel authorization. He passed around an expense sheet for everyone who drove to claim travel which would be paid at \$.445 by GACOE. The President stated that annual leave had to be taken for those attending the meeting.

The President asked for any old business. Roger Swain brought up the NAFEC Incentive and what to do with the remaining hats and visors from the NAFEC Incentive. The Executive Committee voted that we sell the remaining hats and visors for \$6.00 each. Denise Otto stated that the website needed more maintenance time for the last few updates on the website for the year. She stated she would find out the cost of extra time and put out an email with cost for an approval by the committee.

The President asked for any new business. The Executive Committee then discussed the plan about closing county offices. The Committee wanted to come up with a stance on where GACOE stands with this plan. GACOE wants to make sure all employees are treated fairly. GACOE had no input in the plan. GACOE was asking for specifics but kept getting general information. It was mentioned that the President write the SED a letter asking for the specific details on how he came up with the offices to close. Next the Committee discussed their feelings on an Administrative PT for Districts. It was decided that we come up with a committee that can get together some pros and cons on this issue and get back with the Executive Committee.

The GACOE committees then reported as follows:

Legislative – Chad Scruggs, Chairperson

Chad mentioned that they had a good conference in Washington in March. Chad will be going to Washington on an outing with Jack Kingston. NASCOE feels they need to get farmers involved with Congress. Chad mentioned that the new farm bill is coming down and we need to get FSA involved in appropriation. GACOE bought his flight ticket and NASCOE is reimbursing GACOE for the cost of the trip. This is a NASCOE event. Cliff Fussell reminded members that they need to sign up for CAPWIZ. This is an important time for FSA employees. Cliff also mentioned that Saxby Chambliss will be at Albany State College for a Farm Bill Debate on June 23rd for a meeting on Farm Bill issues. These debates are going to be deciding on our jobs and farmers. It was mentioned that John Barrows wants to meet with farmers in his district so invite him to meetings if you are in his district.

Membership – Wanda McCurdy, Chairperson

90% Membership

Benefits – Dianne Westmoreland, Chairperson

Dianne has been sending emails with information on benefits.

Awards – Monica Arnold, Chairperson

Monica Arnold announced the award winners for Georgia. They were William “Billy” Sirmons – Service to Agriculture, Billy also won the Southeast Area Award and NASCOE Award for Service to Agriculture. Elaine Sherrod won the Service to Community Award and Barbara Webb won the Service to NASCOE award.

Emblems – Marcia Baker – No Report

Elections-Deborah Gregory – No Report

Publicity- Denise Otto – No Report

Scholarships-Gary Wilson

Wanda McCurdy announced that the Scholarship winners were Reiko Williams, Son of Tomika Sales, PT in Marion County and Jill Marie Slaton, daughter of Dianne Westmoreland, PT in Hall County.

Archives- Ruby Postell –No Report

Parliamentarian-Cliff Fussell-No Report

The committee appointed a GACOE Representative for District 2. He will be Phil Howell and Darby Hall will serve as alternate.

Next the committee appointed a Program Chair Committee. This committee will send up issues that employees have on Programs. The committee will be Callie Redmond, Monica Arnold, Phil Howell, and Darby Hall as an alternate. If any employees have any issues that they would like to be looked into, they will need to contact this committee.

The President mentioned that we needed to delegate a person to go with him to the NASCOE Convention in Ohio being that Chad, Vice President will not be able to attend. The committee voted that Pam Wilkes and Roger Swain be the delegates for the National Convention.

The Committee then went into discussion on the Convention that will be held in September. The committee voted doing a gun raffle again this year. They voted on getting a 20-gauge Over and Under Shotgun.

Next we went into discussion on sponsorship and needing to get letters out to the CED’s so that they can start sending them to different buying points and other ag related business. Monica Arnold made the comment that she had a copy of all of the letters from last year and would email Ty a copy since he was the head of the Sponsorship Committee. Monica also mentioned that last year we got \$600.00 from the Peanut Commission and \$400.00 from the Cotton Commission.

It was decided that Deborah Gregory and Monica Arnold pick out the menu for the Auction hors'deurves and the banquet meal from the menus that the hotel emailed to us. The banquet price was voted on and everyone agreed that it would be \$25.00 a person and GACOE would supplement anything over the \$25.00.

Roger mentioned that Mr. Newton would like to give a “Week’s Stay” at his Cabin in the Mountains in North Georgia for an auction item. It was mentioned that we somehow keep scholarship money separate from other funds collected at the convention because a lot of the items brought were given because we mentioned it was for the scholarship fund. It will be looked at to see how we could handle this situation. Next the registration fee was voted on. We voted that the fee be \$10.00 for FSA Employees and Retirees Only. This fee will help offset the food costs.

The speakers were discussed next and the ones mentioned were Steve Connelly, Bob Redding, Jim Mace, Morris O’Quin, the Georgia State Committee and SED.

Chris Camp then supplied us with the entertainment groups he had contacted for a price and the committee voted on having a DJ from Spectrum Entertainment come for both nightly events. They are located about 6 miles from the hotel and gave a price of \$1050 for both nights to play from 9:00pm to 12:00midnight. That way we could have a better variety of music and the cost would be a lot cheaper than hiring a band. The need for auction items and small items for registration bags was mentioned. Everyone needs to work on this. Glenn Forrester said he would get an email out to get a head count on a golf tournament. There were several courses around.

Roger said he would call Mike Gibbs with GACS to see if they wanted to go in with us in the convention.

It was then voted on and approved that GACOE pick up one night lodging at the convention for the GACOE Executive Committee.

They’re being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise L. Otto
GACOE Secretary