

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

GENERAL SESSION

The Executive Committee and Officers of the Georgia Association of FSA County Office Employees met August 13, 2004 at the Buccaneer Beach Resort at the Georgia GACOE Convention in Jekyll Island, Georgia.

Those present were: Cliff Fussell, President Roger D. Swain, Vice-President
Pam Wilkes, Treasurer Denise L .Otto, Secretary
District 1A - Glenn Forrester and Ruby Postell
District 1B – Chris Camp and Rita Rogers
District 2 – Carol Streetman and Lori Faulkner
District 3 – Kyle Brown and Renee Peace
District 4 – Walon Smith and Emily Flanders
District 5 – Chuck Riley and Barbara Webb
District 6 – Jerry Timmons and Cindy Brown
District 7 – Chad Scruggs and Monica Arnold
District 8 – Elaine Sherrod and Marcia Baker
Jay Arnold – Past President

Others Present: Craig McCain, Southeast Area Executive
Larry Segars, NASCOE Treasurer
Robert Redding, NASCOE Lobbyist
June Faulk, GA-RASCOE President
Clayton Bruce-RASCOE President

The President, Cliff Fussell, called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. The Presentation of Colors, Pledge of Allegiance, and National Anthem were given. Invocation was given by John Rudowske. Roll Call was taken by GACOE Secretary, Denise Otto, in which the District attendees are as follows: District 1 was the winner with 12 attendees, District 2 had 9, District 3 had 5, District 4 had 7, District 5 had 9, District 6 had 5, District 7 had 10, and District 8 had 6. The Retirees had 16 and we had 7 Past Presidents present. Recognition of Past President's and Retirees were recognized by Vice President of GACOE, Roger Swain. Rita Roger's then came forward to draw a winner for the \$100 due's drawing in which Lori Deloach was the winner.

Jay Arnold introduced Mr. Robert "Bob" Redding at this time. Mr. Redding discussed several Ag issues such as the Tobacco Buyout, Hearings on Animal ID, and baseline permanent staffing for FSA employees. He mentioned about the Farm Bill field hearings starting in FY05. He discussed matters about WTO Cotton, budget reconciliation and payment limits. Mr. Redding also introduced to us a new program called CAPWIZ in which will be a tool for NASCOE members to go online and send letters to congress on issues. He stated that when this tool becomes available we can not use our government email address to send these letters; we have to make sure it is from a personal email address.

Cliff then introduced Larry Segars, NASCOE Treasurer and Larry discussed some of the same issues as Mr. Redding. Such as CAPWIZ. Mr. Segars also talked a little about workload and how Washington uses it when it benefits the situation.

Next on the agenda was a RASCOE representative. Mrs. June Faulk gave a background of RASCOE and what the organization does for Retirees and members. Mr. Clayton Bruce then went over some retiree benefits and present issues with RASCOE.

Jim Mace was our next speaker discussing several benefits through J M Marketing with the Dental Plan being the most informative. He stated that some color brochures will be mailed to each County Office soon and that the Open Season would start on September 1, 2004 through September 30, 2004. Open Season after that would be 30 days after the beginning date of each State Convention.

We then had a break and started the Questions and Answers session with the SED, State Office and the State Committee.

Those present were Steve Newton, SED, Kula Moore, Ron Carey, Clark Weaver, David Laster, Mike Gibbs, Duke Lane, STC Chairperson, Dr. Harry L. Kemp, Jessie Rhodes, Pete Waller, GACOE Executive Committee, District Directors, GACS Officers and convention attendees.

Mr. Steve Newton welcomed everyone and made a few introductions and remarks. Duke Lane also made a few remarks and welcomed everyone. Mr. Newton then proceeded with the Questions.

- 1) What are the current staffing levels for CO and GS?

Non Federal (CO) – 319, Federal (GS) – 78, 38 STO (includes GIS and SED Secretary vacancies); 40 FL Field (includes FLOT vacancy)

Current permanent employees – 397

Georgia's FY 2004 revised State Ceiling: Non-Federal = 286; Federal = 78;

Total = 364

We are currently 33 over our ceiling.

- 2) What is the timeframe for the attrition of the 39 employees, referred to in the 2004 staffing levels?

Mr. Newton stated that there is no timeframe and that we are fully funded for the current level of employees that we have as of today.

- 3) Has a Plan been developed for the staffing cuts in Georgia?

Mr. Newton stated only through attrition.

- 4) If a plan has been developed, GACOE requests that it be made available to GACOE.

Mr. Newton stated no plan.

- 5) The recent retirement training was excellent, we request that further training on retirement be given to those employees that are over 5 years away from retirement, with FERS planning is essential.

For FY 2005, Kula stated that they plan to have some additional seminars. Kula stated that they would like to focus these proposed seminars on mid-career retirement planning. She also stated that the classes would be limited.

- 6) Will the STO provide a list of the overstaffed and understaffed offices in the state?

Mr. Newton stated that the District Directors have a tool that he has prepared, not a plan and will share with the county offices.

- 7) Will employees in overstaffed offices be reassigned to understaffed offices?

Mr. Newton stated that employees will be reassigned on a voluntary basis and he encourages employees to do so if they know of a situation where they think they may be overstaffed.

- 8) What is the status of a COT Program?

The SED has requested DAFO approval of 5 COT positions. If approved, these positions will be filled by FSA permanent employees only.

- 9) What is the formula used by the STO for calculating staffing in COF's? A few years ago, the State Office used the Section A total plus leave minus COC time divided by 260. The Budget Division in Washington has stated that they assumed that State Offices are including leave in workload Item 9076 in their County Office staffing formula. Why has the State Office changed the formula for determining staffing needs in county offices? What are other states in the SEA area using for a workload formula?

Kula reports that Report 1, County Office Workload and Funding Report provides updated workload by county. This report is used by the State Office to analyze individual County Office workload. Section A, Regular Measured Workload, divided by 260 (number of normal work days) guides the State Office in staffing. Item 9076, Leave, under Other Data, is not included in the formula used by the State Office. DAFO uses Item 9076 to pro rate GS & CO leave. DAFO also uses Sections A & C and then factors the numbers down to the budget. DAFO uses Item 9076 for all states in figuring the staffing ceilings. DAFO independently pulls information from workload to figure staffing. If county offices accurately reflect leave in work item 9076, then DAFO is pulling the correct information. There is no state measurement formula that each state submits. Per Vicki Larson, each state is directed to individually use workload reports. There is no set method or procedure. Because of the differences in each state and county office, there is not an established FSA-wide workload formula used for staffing.

- 10) In understaffed offices that lost temporary employees it is now “beyond difficult” to continue meeting deadlines and program requirements. If these situations are not filled by permanent employees will these county offices be able to hire temporaries soon?

Mr. Newton stated that if we are approved to hire, we will hire. He also stated that we have a deficit of \$100,000.

- 11) Could the STO send out vacancy announcements for the understaffed offices?

Mr. Newton stated if we get approval from DAFO they could.

- 12) With the upcoming CLU certification requirement, will DD’s be able to approve compensatory time, on an as needed basis?

Mr. Newton and Clark Weaver both discussed the situation where we may not be crushed for time on the 90 days on the CLU certification; therefore comp time may not be an issue.

- 13) Agencies now have permanent buyout authority according to an article under GovExec.com; will buyouts be used to meet the mandated staffing levels?

Mr. Newton stated that not yet in FSA.

- 14) Some counties are not receiving a copy of the monthly newsletter. Counties are receiving inquiries pertaining to the information in the newsletter, and are not sure what producers are trying to ask about. Can the newsletter contents be emailed to all employees?

Mr. Newton stated yes to this question.

- 15) Would it be possible to begin some “Georgia” notices for the GIS process? We have received numerous notes and emails. There are rapid changes occurring at times with the GIS/GPS process. Through numbered notices we would know in the county offices if we had all up to date information that had been sent out?

Clark Weaver stated that he thought that was a wonderful idea and the STO would do this.

- 16) Are there currently any employees working under an intern program in Georgia? If so are these considered permanent full time employees or temporaries? Could these positions be used in understaffed offices? Are these interns receiving benefits? How are they eligible to interview for permanent vacancy announcements? What constitutes eligibility to apply for permanent vacancy announcements?

Kula reports that at the present time we have 1 employee working under a career intern program in Georgia; FLOT in Bulloch Service Center. The Federal Career Intern Program is designed to help agencies recruit and attract individuals and is intended for positions at grades GS-5-7 and 9. Individuals are appointed to a 2 year internship. Upon successful completion of the internship, they may be eligible for permanent placement. If a position is filled through the Career Intern Program, then that position is considered

filled by a permanent full time employee. There is no nominating process nor are there any public notice requirements for Career Intern appointments.

- 17) In the near future many programs will be web based; we ask that training be developed to adequately train employees to use these new applications?

Mr. Newton stated that training will be available any chance they get to hold training.

- 18) New computer technology has allowed FSA to move forward to more modern times with the shifting of more and more System 36 applications to web based applications. Under the current system, only System 36 workload is queried and counted along with some manual counts. How will this shift to web based applications be incorporated to measure the workload as a result of the new technology and in turn, how will this affect staffing?

PerotSystems conducted an assessment of the FSA Work Measurement and Workload Systems; in the next few years WM & WL will change as we know it.

- 19) Wayne County was recently advertised under the "Hard to Fill" procedure. If COT program is not approved for Georgia, will this be the procedure for CED vacancies?

The SED has requested DAFO approval of 5 COT positions. If approved, these positions will be filled by FSA permanent employees only. If DAFO does not approve these COT positions, then CED vacancies will continue to be advertised under the Hard-to-Fill procedure.

- 20) Can the small grain acreage reporting date deadline be changed to a date earlier than May 1? This is needed due to the Graze Out Program.

Clark Weaver stated that we did need to do this and he is pushing for March 1 for FY05 possibly.

- 21) Can the STC meet with GACOE in October in Moultrie during the Expo?

Mr. Duke Lane says yes.

This ended the questions for the GACOE Association. Cliff Fussell stated that he appreciated the State Committee and Mr. Newton and others for listening to their questions and answering them to the best of their knowledge.

The floor was then turned over to Mike Gibbs with GACS.

- 1) Farm Loan offices have been advised that it was state policy that when there is a need to purchase new filing cabinets that only lateral filing cabinets can be ordered. It appears we are prohibited from purchasing vertical cabinets. The vertical cabinets are really more functional for FLP use. Depending on the availability of funds, is there a possibility that we could have a choice in the styles of cabinets we can order?

It is National Policy that only lateral filing cabinets may be purchased. Per Handbook 27-AS and National AS Notices, FSA must buy only lateral cabinets.

- 2) Recently Georgia FSA employees that were within 5 yrs of retirement had a day of retirement benefits training. Due to funding constraints, we were advised that all employees could not participate in this training at this time. Depending on fiscal year 2005 budget, is it possible the remaining employees have this training in 2005?

See GACOE Question # 5 Answer.

- 3) Does the State Office have a training budget in which employees can request individual training courses to meet their development plans and work objectives? If so what is the procedure on requesting any individual training?

Kula reported as follows:

AgLearn – PM-2425 will allow agencies to:

- Manage and deliver training to employees;
- Eliminate single-agency approaches;
- Be in direct support of the President’s Management Agenda, specifically the eLearning initiative;
- One-step service for delivering, scheduling, & managing learning events nationwide

When fully implemented will allow an employee to:

- View and print training history;
- Search for and complete online courses currently offered though OPM’s site;
- Search for and enroll in classroom and online training offered by FSA or USDA;
- Access the system 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

ID’s and passwords to AgLearn will be coordinated with eAuthentication. All employees must have a working eAuthentication User ID & Password by September 30; Notice IRM-355.

- 4) At present all advertising for positions to be filled must be approved by the National Office due to budget constraints. For FY05, will this policy change? Is there a possibility that some positions that become vacant, may not be filled due to the budget?

Mr. Newton stated that they are trying to fill every position when they can. Budget issues play a part in this action.

- 5) When to expect administrative convergence.

Kula reports that transfer letters went out to all IT employees August 2. The actual convergence is expected to occur October 3, 2004. IT is being transferred to Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO). Transfers will be processed as a transfer of function.

6) FLM's being hired as DD's.

Mr. Newton stated that the interview process had changes. The selection panel interviewed and rated for the DD positions and from then the selection panel made recommendations to SED. From that recommendation, SED can only go against that with DC approval. Keep applying if you are interested. The selection panel is selected based on their relationship to the person being hired.

7) Cross training.

See Number 6. Keep applying if you are interested.

8) Internal promotions vs. external hires.

Mr. Newton stated they wanted to hire best qualified. Any future FLOT positions, they will look at positions to be filled and where positions are needed all over the state. Not budget driven, position driven.

9) Future of COC duties in CO functions.

Committee system will have a few changes. Mr. Newton stated that the COC terms may be changing from 3 to 2. They were looking at giving advisor rights, setting up LAA's to get minorities covered, completing slate of nominees.

Closing remarks were made by Mr. Newton, Mike Gibbs, Duke Lane and Cliff Fussell.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise L. Otto
GACOE Secretary