

**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 19, 2005 at the Buccaneer Beach Resort at the Georgia GACOE Convention in Jekyll Island, Georgia for the annual GACOE Convention.

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 – Rita Rogers  
District 2 – Lavern Pate  
District 3 – Barbara Jackson  
District 4 – Martha Kent  
District 5 – Chuck Riley and Barbara Webb  
District 7 – Chad Scruggs and Monica Arnold  
District 8 – Elaine Sherrod and Marcia Baker

Others Present: John Chott – Assistant Deputy Administrator (DAFO)  
Morris O’Quin, Southeast Area Executive  
Larry Segars, NASCOE Treasurer  
Robert Redding, NASCOE Lobbyist (Telephone call in)  
June Faulk, GA-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 Neal Leonard. 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 9, District 4 had 11, District 5 had 5, District 6 had 3, District 7 had 7, and District 8 had 5. The Retirees had 9 and we had 7 Past Presidents present. Recognition of Past President’s and Retirees were recognized by Vice President of GACOE, Roger Swain.

Cliff Fussell introduced Mr. John Chott, Assistant Deputy Administrator from Washington who discussed the three big issues going on in Washington right now, that being budget and staffing, buyout, and FSA Tomorrow. Mr. Chott touched base on the steps in coming up with a budget and how much of a shortfall we are having. He said that

on the buyouts each state submitted a plan and that a PM notice will be out very shortly on taking applications for the buyout. The notice will list each states plan. He stated that nine states did not have to reduce. We have two weeks to apply and who ever is accepted will be off the books by 11-3-05. He also stated that if the first go around does not get enough people then the next step would be possibly reopening the buyout to everybody and office consolidations. Next, FSA Tomorrow. This plan has been put on the shelf, nothing ever occurred. This plan is still in the works on office consolidation but reducing temps caused problems with lack of staff, stress, and lack of help to farmers. Mr. Chott then touched base on the 5 Tier Performance Plan coming up and Animal ID.

Cliff then introduced Robert “Bob” Redding who called in on telephone and shared his views with us. He mostly stressed the importance of CAPWIZ and letting our congressmen and women know our concerns. We need to stress our concerns on he FSA Tomorrow plan not only to congressmen but the members of the Ag Committee also.

Morris O’Quin, Southeast Area Executive spoke next on the importance of NAFEC. He stated that NAFEC was formed in the late 60’s. He stated that in the mid 70’s NAFEC wrote farm bills. He said that we really needed to focus on getting members involved in helping form NAFEC in Georgia. He stresses on how important it is that we make contacts and educate political leaders on cuts. After Mr. O’Quins’ speech, Cliff made a proposal to members that in the October meeting we vote on an incentive for COC members to join NAFEC. We would vote on each CED presenting a cap and payroll deduction form in January to each COC member. Cliff stressed for us to go back and think about it and get back with executive members on any more ideas they may have. He hopes that we have a joint meeting with NAFEC and GACOE next year.

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.

Patrick Parham a J M Marketing representative was our next speaker discussing several benefits through J M Marketing with the Dental Plan being the most informative. He stated that every September is an Open Season for the Dental Plan. He reminded employees about faxing in their screening test for a \$100.00 refund if they had a cancer policy. He also stated that if NAFEC members pay their associate dues to GACOE then they will be eligible for dental and cancer benefits also.

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, Ron Carey, Clark Weaver, David Forbes, David Laster, Mike Gibbs, Duke Lane, STC Chairperson, Dr. Harry L. Kemp, Ronnie Lee, Mary Alice McGhee, and Charles Lee, GACOE Executive Committee, District Directors, GACS Officers and convention attendees.

Mr. Steve Newton welcomed everyone and made a few introductions and remarks. Duke Lane made a few remarks and welcomed everyone. Duke Lane also introduced the new State Committee members. Cliff handed out the questions that were sent to the Administrative Division with Kula's answers. He said for everyone to read over and if they had any questions on answers let him know. Below are the questions and answers given at the meeting.

1. What are the current CO and GS staffing figures?

**As of August 10 the numbers are: 311 Non-Federal; 71 Federal**

2. Has the buyout plan been approved by DAFO?

**Yes**

3. GACOE requests that the plan be released to all employees?

**Posted to Georgia website on August 10**

4. How does Georgia stand regarding the 2005 budget through the end of the FY?

**Possibility we will be negative in both Federal and non-Federal travel; other allocations are within limitations.**

5. How much funding was left on the books at the end of the FY 2004 year?

**Minimal. Reminder that any allocations left at the end of the FY cannot be carried over to the next year.**

6. With the IT convergence, can someone explain what we (FSA) are being charged for IT service, and how is this kept up with, county offices never receive anything to verify or to question. Is this paid at the national level or state level?

**IT costs are paid at the National level. The State Office submits to DC a list of charges for IT space, phone usage and Fed Ex and UPS charges.**

7. What is the status of GACOE receiving copies of the July STC meeting transcripts/minutes?

**FOIA request will be provided within the guidelines of 2-INFO.**

8. Payroll deductions for COC members for NAFEC, This is an issue that GACOE is interested in but we need some clarifications before a large scale sign up. Can this be done?

**Yes. Administrative Division will process any action submitted on form FSA-444, Request For or Termination of Voluntary Allotment of Pay.**

9. When will understaffed offices be advertised to all employees?

**Will revisit when buyout is complete**

10. With the targeting of shared management offices, what is the plan for these offices?  
**No Direct Answer was given.**

11. What happened to the numbering of e-mail messages from each division? This will be an easy way for County Offices to keep up with the information coming from the State Office via e-mail.

**Section and Division messages are being assigned numbers. Not aware of email messages being numbered.**

12. If an employee is eligible for the early-out/buy out's, and does not apply, and then is caught up in the RIF, is there any compensation?

**An employee that is separated through RIF shall receive severance pay if the employee is not receiving or is not eligible to receive an immediate civil service retirement annuity and does not decline an offer of continued employment in an Office within the local commuting area at the same or higher salary rate.**

13. Can you give an example as to when an employee could be included in both Early-Out and Buy-Out Program? Could this be more than the \$25,000.00, or is it limited to the \$25,000.00?

**If an employee applies and is accepted for the VSIP and in addition the employee is eligible for an immediate annuity, then they will be eligible for both VERA and VSIP.**

**CSRS and FERS employees are eligible for an immediate annuity under voluntary early retirement (VERA) plan or early out if they are at least age 50 with 20 years of service or at any age with 25 or more years of service.**

**Voluntary separation incentive payment (VSIP) or buyout is an incentive payment not to exceed \$25,000. VSIP amount is the lesser of a lump-sum payment that is equal to the employee's calculated severance pay entitlement or \$25,000.**

14. Can you provide an example on how severance pay will be figured?

**Attached is form FSA-689, Severance Pay Computation.**

15. We have several Counties that have more than 1 County to complete the CLU's, and several Counties that have only 1 Program Technician, can the 90 day limit to have the CLU's completed in the County Offices be extended? **Yes per Clark Weaver, see GACOE Question #3**

16. Due to the necessity to complete CLU certification in 90 day period is there a possibility of carrying over annual leave in excess of 240 hours? **Mr. Newton answered doesn't see this happening, if you have time, take it. There will be an extension given on the 90 days if needed in bigger counties with lots of polygons.**

17. When new computers are brought to the service centers, whom makes the decision on what year model computers go to what agency? It seems that FSA is receiving 2003 model high end computers, with NRCS and RD receiving 2004 model high end computers. Does FSA have any input as to where, to whom, and what year model of computers are being placed in the service centers?

**Presently each agency is responsible for ordering their equipment. The State Office submitted a request for high ends and we were cut back. We then resubmitted our request based on GIS/ CLU needs and DC FSA shipped us 2003 high end. The 2003 high ends meet our needs. By receiving 2003 high ends, this kept all the GIS computers the same across the state.**

18. What is the possibility of FSA using the COT's and DCA's in the areas needing assistance? Example: The understaffed offices.

**COT's are presently being assigned to county offices per DD requests.**

19. After review of GA Notice AO-1553 it shows that there are some Type 1 offices that are under staffed by 1 or more employees on the Farm Program side and over staffed by 1 or more employees on the FLP side that are actually COF employees. Why hasn't this situation been addressed and employees reassigned to Farm Programs? When will this be addressed? As it is now the feeling from the Farm Program PT's is that their hard work has not benefited the Farm Program side rather the Farm Loan side and this attitude is making it harder on the CED to manage staff and workload. **No direct answer was given.**

20. Why were shared management offices that are either adequately staffed or understaffed targeted in Georgia's Plan? Is it the assumption by the State Office that producers would rather drive farther if their Office was closed and relocated? **No direct answer was given.**

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

1. Has there been any poll done on who will take 26 buyouts? **Mr. Newton answered there has not been a poll, but far more inquiries on buyouts.**

2. Assuming FTE is down to where they need to be, What's the vision after we meet the 26 goal? **Mr. Newton answered we could move staff from overstaffed to understaffed offices. Will have to follow regulations on limitations.**

3. Mike Gibbs stated if they lose FLPT it would halt their business. If FLP can help on program side FLP will. Cliff then addressed the 14 FLPT situations on them helping out on program side.

Cliff then went on with GACOE's questions as follows:

1. There are currently 5 COT's with 6 CED openings. Will there be another COT class started shortly? **Mr. Newton answered "yes", need COT's right away.**
2. GACOE would like to request that STO specialists come out to heavy workload counties at the beginning of a program signup and then at the beginning of program payment issuance. This would give them hands on experience with the computer operations and program issues that come from direct contact with the farmer. Can this be done? **Mr. Newton stated that this was a great idea and he would make sure it happens.**
3. Will county offices that administer multiple counties be given extra time to complete the CLU certifications other than the 90 days? **Clark Weaver answered that if county offices are having problems "yes"**
4. Is county office staffing based on workload or is it budget driven? **Mr. John Chott answered staffing was given to each state based on workload but the numbers came from budget.**
5. After we get through this buyout, what will happen next year in 2006? What are we going to be faced with? **Mr. Newton answered that we don't really know right now what will happen after buyout.**
6. If we are considered overstaffed next year, will buyouts be considered and / or authorized? **Mr. Newton stated that we will cross that bridge when we get there.**
7. Is the 25 mile issue still being discussed regarding office structuring? **Mr. Newton answered "yes".**
8. Are office closures and/or consolidations being considered? If so, how soon will this happen? **Mr. Newton answered once we get through with buyout that they were going to look at Shared management offices then all offices.**
9. What is FSA going to do with 1 PT offices? **No direct answer was given.**
10. In the Georgia State Office, FSA has 25 employees, NRCS has 44 employees, and RD has 41 employees - Why are we considered the lead agency and why does it seem that we have taken more cuts than the other two agencies? **Mr. Newton answered that this question and the next two questions will have to be discussed with the State Conservationists and will be addressed at a State Office level.**
11. Why does NRCS have more budget money than FSA? **See answer on Question 10.**

12. Why is it that permanent Soil Technicians only work half to three fourths of a day? **See answer for question 10.**
13. What is going to be done about the county office employee on the farm loan side? Are they going to be put back on the county office side in cases where the farm loan side is overstaffed and the program side is understaffed since work load is still heavy and we are still short handed and not able to replace people as they leave? **Newton addressed this question earlier in Farm Loan questions.**
14. If it is so important to have the Strategic Plan for public review, why is it still in draft form? **Mr. Chott stated involved in bureaucracy.**
15. A shared management operation exists now with 5 PT's between 2 offices with a combined workload, according to GA PM 1553, of 1600 workdays. Can offices such as these be allowed to stand alone again? Many offices smaller than either one of these have been filled and are currently advertised to be filled. **Mr. Newton stated that we cannot increase the number of CED's.**
16. If not, and according to the buyout plan 2 PT's retire with the buyout, how are we to conduct business with 3 PT's between 2 offices with a combined 1600 days? **No direct answer was given.**
17. If the 2 offices are combined into 1 office, how will you address the understaffed condition that will still exist with an office this size? **Mr. Newton answered after buyout we will have to readdress this issue.**
18. Will the STC meet with GACOE in October during the AG EXPO in Moultrie? **yes**

This ended the questions for the GACOE Association. The floor was opened for questions and answers. A few people asked questions and Mr. Newton answered. Cliff Fussell then 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. Cliff stressed to Mr. Chott that he wanted him to take back to Washington the fact that Georgia producers were not going to do the E-LDP's, E-loans, etc... Mr. Chott stated that this was a constant struggle and most of the computer's in a farmers home belongs to their children and the farmers don't use them.

Closing remarks were made by Mr. Newton, Mike Gibbs, Duke Lane and Cliff Fussell. There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:40 p.m.  
Respectfully Submitted,

Denise L. Otto  
GACOE Secretary