

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 October 19, 2004 at the USDA Service Center in Moultrie, Georgia.

Those present were: Cliff Fussell, President Roger D. Swain, Vice-President
Pam Wilkes, Treasurer Denise Otto, Secretary
Jay Arnold, Past President
District 1A - Glenn Forrester
District 1B – Chris Camp and Rita Rogers
District 2 – Adaire Bishop and Lori Faulkner
District 3 – Barbara Jackson and Renee Hamrick
District 4 – Gay Harris and Emily Flanders
District 5 – Chuck Riley and Barbara Webb
District 6 – Ty Godfrey and Cindy Brown
District 7 – Chad Scruggs and Monica Arnold
District 8 – Elaine Sherrod and Marcia Baker
Others Present – Connie Guined and Math Johnson

The President, Cliff Fussell, called the meeting to order. President Fussell introduced and welcomed the new and all returning Executive Committee members.

The minutes from the last meeting were approved by the committee. The Treasurer, Pam Wilkes, gave the financial report. Chuck Riley asked if we got any money from GACS for their part of the convention. Cliff said he was working on that and would get back to us on it when he discussed it with Mike Gibbs. Also in listening to the treasurer report Cliff mentioned about the losses that Florida FSA employees had incurred during the recent hurricanes. He asked the committee if we would be interested in sending some money to the Florida FSA employees to help with their losses. Everyone agreed upon Cliff calling the Florida FSA Employee Association and asking exactly what the employees needed. After the call the committee then would be polled on an email about how much money to send. Also in discussing the amount of money in the bank account of GACOE Jay Arnold mentioned how that the money we have made is a large amount compared to other states and he commended us on all the hard work we all did on the convention held in Jekyll. Cliff mentioned about putting some of the money into some kind of investment. Pam said she had talked to the banker about what would be the best investment for our organization and he said he would consider a 6-month CD. Pam Wilkes said she would look further into investing the money and discuss with us what she finds out. Roger also brought up the idea of spending more on Scholarships. The scholarship issue is discussed in more detail in the new business.

Election of Officers – Elections were held as follows:

The floor was open for any nominations for Secretary. Roger Swain nominated Denise Otto for the Secretary position. It was motioned and seconded that all nominations be closed on the said

one name. It was motioned and seconded that Denise Otto be elected Secretary by acclamation. All motions passed. Denise Otto was elected Secretary.

The floor was open for any nominations for Treasurer. Roger Swain nominated Pam Wilkes for Treasurer. It was motioned and seconded that all nominations be closed on the said one name. It was motioned and seconded that Pam Wilkes be elected Treasurer by acclamation. All motions passed. Pam Wilkes was elected Treasurer.

The floor was then open for any nominations for Vice-President. Chad Scruggs nominated Roger Swain for Vice-President. It was motioned and seconded that all nominations be closed on the said one name. It was motioned and seconded that Roger Swain be elected Vice-President by acclamation. All motions passed. Roger Swain was elected Vice President.

Cliff Fussell opened the floor for any nominations for President. Chuck Riley nominated Cliff Fussell for President. It was motioned and seconded that all nominations be closed on the said one name. It was motioned and seconded that Cliff Fussell be elected President by acclamation. All motions passed. Cliff Fussell was elected as President.

After the elections, there were brief remarks made by the new officers.

We then went on to discuss old business with the Family Host Program being first. Chuck Riley mentioned setting up something on the website with names of contacts for this program so that it would be a service to our employees when needed.

Next Barbara Jackson brought up the issue of having two filing cabinets at her home that she used when she was Treasurer. These cabinets are GACOE's and will be brought to Pam Wilkes and Denise Otto to use for their duties.

New Business was discussed. Cliff Fussell, President, discussed our travel and meeting authorization. He stated that everyone there was authorized travel time to the meeting and back home. For the people who are staying over in Albany, we would use the M&IE for Moultrie and the Lodging for Albany.

Cliff Fussell continued on with the agenda discussing the dues next. It was motioned that the associate member's dues continue to be \$25.00 and the dues for regular members stay the same at .002 times salary starting with PP1. It was seconded and approved.

The Scholarship Program was discussed. Chuck Riley motioned that we set aside \$2000.00 for scholarship allowing up to 4 at \$500.00. If we get 3 applications we will pay \$500.00 each and the rest of the money will not be issued. Also Chuck mentioned that he would like to see a representative from GACOE for the district in which the scholarships are chosen be available to present the scholarships at the student's awards day at their school or where it may be. These issues were seconded by Pam Wilkes and approved.

2005 GACOE Committees were discussed. Cliff said he would be making contact with a few people to see if they would be interested in be chairs and would let us know the results in an email. Each 2004 committee reported as follows:

Legislative – Chad Scruggs, Chairperson

Chad mentioned the importance of the new program for sending letters to your congressmen on CAPWIZ. He stressed about the importance of using your home computer for this program. The simplicity of this program was discussed also. He stated you must go to the NASCOE website and there is a link to CAPWIZ. All you have to do is sign up and start using it.

Membership – Rita Rogers, Chairperson

Rita Rogers stated that we have 30 Associate Members as of this date and Roger Swain mentioned that we were at 93% membership to date.

Benefits – Renee Hamrick, Chairperson- No Report

Deadline for Dental Insurance is October 31st. Chad Scruggs and Jay Arnold both mentioned that benefits would be discussed at the legislative conference this year.

Awards – Barbara Webb, Chairperson

Barbara went over the 2004 award winners and sick leave award winners. These awards were presented at the banquet at the 2004 GACOE Convention.

Emblems – Marcia Baker, Chairperson

Marcia mentioned that she still has shirts for sale.

Elections-Monica Arnold, Chairperson

Monica stated that she had emailed out a report on the new elected member of Grade 9 or higher. The new members were Ty Godfrey, Adaire Bishop, Gay Harris, and Barbara Jackson.

Publicity- Denise Otto, Chairperson

Denise reminded everyone that the deadline for the December Gazette News would be November 24th.

Archives- Ruby Postell, Chairperson –No Report

Scholarships-Glenn Forrester, Chairperson

It was noted that a letter will be in the December Gazette about Scholarships for 2005. It was also mentioned that the GA-RASCOE gave an additional \$200.00 each to the 2004 Scholarship winners. This money was presented at the 2004 GACOE Convention banquet.

Parliamentarian- Jay Arnold-No Report

The 2004 Convention was discussed. Chuck Riley stated that the 2004 Convention was a success and he thanked everyone for the good job they had done to make this happen. We had 135 registered for 2004.

Cliff Fussell gave NASCOE news. The NASCOE Convention will be held in Rapid City, South Dakota for 2005. The exact dates were unknown at this time. The SEA Convention will be in Asheville, North Carolina for 2005. The dates were unknown at this time. We discussed getting a bus committee together for the North Carolina trip. Barbara Webb will be the Chairperson for this committee.

Plans for the 2005 GACOE Convention were discussed. Cliff asked if anyone had any ideas of a place to have the convention this year. Monica Arnold motioned that the 2005 convention be held separate from any State Office training and Chuck seconded the motion, and it was approved. Glenn Forrester stated that since we were not going to have to reserve rooms for training that Unicoi would have plenty of rooms for a convention without training and ask if we could look into having it there again. Cliff stated that he would ask Thomas Verner to call and check on the available dates and rates. Also we were going to check on Jekyll Island available dates and rates. With this in mind it was decided to meet around January to decide exactly where the 2005 Convention would be held and the dates.

Next Cliff stated that a full Legislative Conference would be held on February 26 – March 2, 2005. He asks for volunteers for going to this conference and the importance of going to Washington. Volunteers are as follows: Chuck Riley, Chad Scruggs, Rita Rogers, Pam Wilkes, Elaine Sherrod, Cliff Fussell, Denise Otto, Gay Harris, Marcia Baker, and Roger Swain. Out of these volunteers, 8 will be going to Washington. Jay Arnold motioned that GACOE pay for the airline ticket, motel room and M&IE for each person attending the Legislative Conference.

The selection of delegates was decided upon at this time. They are Cliff Fussell and Roger Swain for the South East Area Rally and the National Convention.

We then reviewed over the questions we were presenting to the State Committee. No changes were made.

After a break the State Committee Members, Duke Lane-Chairperson, Scott Cagle, Pete Waller, Jessie Rhodes and Dr. Harry Kemp, State Executive Director-Mr. Steve Newton, District Directors, Phil Addy, Berry Laslie, Jeffery Harden, Barry Alexander, Leon B. Collins, John Rudowske, David Nichols, Charles Stuckey, COR's- Ronnie Morris and Virginia Lovering, STO Staff-Kula Moore – Administrative Officer, Clark Weaver-State Office Chief, David Laster-State Office Chief, Ron Carey-State Office Chief, David Forbes-PA section, Cynthia Portalatin and Mary Parker, Outreach Coordinator joined the meeting. Also GACS officers Mike Gibbs, Leigh Wilson, Jane Hobbs, and Robert Tyson joined in.

Duke Lane made a few comments and then GACS, President Mike Gibbs was asked to start the questions session.

Question 1: Give update on FTE's (staffing) in Georgia. Any changes in Georgia's FTE's for FY 2005? Appears their could be two (2) FLM's retiring in 2005. IF these positions are vacated will Georgia State Office be able to immediately advertise these positions? Will there be any hiring of FLOT's in 2005?

Answer: Mr. Newton stated that a FLOT will be announced in Terrell County. If Washington approves vacancies, he will immediately advertise under Washington's conditions.

Question 2: Due to disaster declarations because of hurricanes & tropical storms (Frances, Ivan & Jeanne), the demand for FSA services will significantly increase. In the FSA Loan Program both restructuring of loans and making new EM loans will most likely place significant demands for our services. Is there possibility for additional help (Employees) in the area's that were adversely affected by these storms? IN past years, there were emergency teams that were identified/appointed to assist offices that needed help. If needed, could this be available?

Answer: Mr. Newton stated that it would depend on the disaster and the need for help in different areas.

Comment 3: The Georgia State FSA Intranet site that is presently under construction will be very useful and beneficial to Georgia FSA employees. Encouragement is given to promptly develop this site and have program chiefs fully utilize this site.

This ended the questions and comments for the GACS Association. Mike Gibbs stated that he appreciated the State Committee and Mr. Newton listening to their questions and answering them to his best knowledge.

The floor was turned over to GACOE to address their questions. Cliff Fussell then proceeded in asking the questions.

Question 1: With ECP from recent hurricanes, a Disaster Program and the Tobacco Buyout, pending, are county offices going to be allowed to hire temporary help or is overtime authorized?

Answer: Under the Continuing resolution no overtime is authorized.

Question 2: Several questions have been raised as to how Cash Award money and QSI's were decided. Can this be explained?

Answer: Kula stated that the Awards Committee reviewed award recommendations and justifications for the award and then voted on whether to recommend the award to the SED for approval or disapproval. Some award recommendations were not justified in the way they were written up by the supervisor, so the Awards Committee recommended them as cash awards instead. The majority of QSI recommendations were not justified. GA Notice PM-1541 explained exactly how to submit a justification for an award. The Awards Committee felt that certain awards should not be approved if the justification did not warrant the amount.

Question 3: Can the notice for performance awards next year, include the statement that the deadline be postmarked by, rather than received in the STO by a deadline date, county offices have no control over the USPS and this resulted in some awards not being considered?

Answer: Kula stated that next year the notice will state that the deadline will be based on postmark. Many award recommendations were mailed the day before deadline. This resulted in some awards not being considered. The Awards Committee made the decision to not accept any late received recommendations. Keep in mind that even if the awards are accepted by postmark, we will still receive several recommendations past the due date. We will make the change for 2005.

Question 4: Can performance evaluations be on calendar year?

Answer: Kula stated no. This is a regulatory item and not set up to State to change.

Question 5: Could the Outreach Report be placed on a calendar year?

Answer: Mary Parker stated that the National Office sets these dates and State Office cannot change.

Question 6: How is AO-1307 going to be implemented in the state? There is concern that the proration worksheet does not accurately reflect the correct percentages between type 1 offices. We ask that this be reviewed with the CED's in those offices.

Answer: The AO and Thomas Verner used the Workload Proration Worksheet in figuring out workload for our 11 Type 1 offices based on FY 2003 workload. The worksheet has been slightly revised since Thomas and I filled them out. What exactly is causing concerns? Kula state that she would get with the CED's in these offices and look at the workload of each office.

Question 7: What is the status of overstaffed offices?

Answer: Mr. Newton stated that he had shared those map tools with the District Directors showing where the work offices were understaffed and overstaffed. He states that there are no directions from Washington to dismiss any employees.

Question 8: What is the status of understaffed offices?

Answer: See Question 7.

Question 9: What are the current staffing levels for CO and GS employees?

Answer: FY 2005 State Ceiling
286 Permanent Non-Federal
78 Total Federal Ceiling (includes permanent, other, and all STC related staff years)
364 Total Ceiling

Current Total on Board – 319 – Permanent Non-Federal, 77 – Total Federal Ceiling (Includes vacant SED Secretary and IT position); 396 – Total on Board.

Question 10: What are the budget expectations for FY 05, and how will Georgia stand with staffing?

Answer: Mr. Newton's stated it will be the same as last year. We are currently operating under a Continuing Resolution. Indications are that FY 2005 budget will be tight.

Question 11: With the pending Tobacco Buyout, how much workload does Tobacco represent to Georgia?

Answer: FY 2003 Workload for Tobacco was 1262 normal workdays (NWDS). This equals to 4.85 positions statewide. (1262 divided by 260 = 4.8538).

Question 12: What is the status of a COT program? Will these be hired within or outside?

Answer: DAFO and the State Committee approved a COT program for 5 vacancies. These will be hired from within only, as Georgia is currently overstaffed on the Non-Federal side.

Question 13: Wayne County was approved through DAFO and advertised as a Hard to Fill Position for this vacancy. Applications were submitted and applicants recently received a letter stating that this position was cancelled. Why was this position not filled? This county office has been without a CED since January 2004. If waiting for a COT program, couldn't this result in this position not being filled? If COT's turn down this county.

Answer: Kula stated that the hard to fill provision is to be used in unusual situations. When DAFO approved us for 5 COT positions, it was decided to use this process instead.

Question 14: Will the vacancy be announced for the IT position in the state office?

Answer: Kula stated no.

Question 15: There is a concern, that CED's cannot do field work and perform their required duties in the county office, field reporters are needed to properly run a county office. Will county offices be able to hire field reporters?

Answer: Mr. Newton stated that we need to use what resources we have available. He is looking at each situation to see if the field reporter is actually needed or rather needed for traditional work.

Question 16: Computing retirement for employees is imperative when an employee is considering retirement. This is not being figured timely or at all when requested. What is the process for having retirements calculated and who is responsible for replying to employee's requests? Can the STO provide the time frame that they will respond to employees?

Answer: Kula stated that we hope the Agency will soon have the automated website back up and running for employees' personal use. For now, retirement estimates requests should be emailed to Ginger Rider. Requests are figured as timely as possible, usually once a month. If an employee is seriously planning to retire within the year, their request should state this. We get numerous requests from employees that list 5 to 10 years in the future. An estimate 5 to 10 years in the future is not accurate for the employee. As always- if an employee feels that their request

was totally ignored, let me know. She also stated that a Retirement Training for all employees will be on a yearly basis. She feels that the training is needed for employees further away from retiring also, so that they can plan now.

Question 17: How is workload going to be counted on these web based programs?

Answer: Per Vicki Larson, BUD, this is already being done. Kansas City queries off the web. They process unit counts by State and County code and overlay onto reports to pick up the counts. Kula asks us to go to NASCOE with the issue on seeing what each counties figures will be and getting a printout of these figures for reviewing.

Question 18: At the last Questions and Answers Session GACOE ask if Georgia Notices could be issued for GIS instead of all the emails. What is the status of this process?

Answer: Clark stated that yes this will be done.

Question 19: Is there any way that emails sent from the State Office to all FSA employees be numbered like the Administrative section does, so that we may at least have a number to refer to if questions arise about an email? This would be so helpful in the county offices with all the programs that are going on.

Answer: Good idea. Will be left up to the section chiefs to do.

Question 20: When the State Committee members are reviewing an appeal, could someone on the State Committee please contact the PT in charge of the program or the CED and let them explain their side of the story? We feel we need both sides heard.

Answer: Mr. Duke Lane stated that this was a good idea.

Question 21: What are the official hours for service centers to be open? 8-5 or 8-4:30? Some offices are closing at 4:30, is this ok for all offices in the service centers? Can the STO provide written documentation on this?

Answer: Kula stated per 16-AO, subparagraph 231A: State and County offices shall be open for business between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on official Federal holidays. Mr. Newton says he will research more on this and let everyone know.

Question 22: Is the STO planning on training all CED's to become certified loss adjustors for the NAP program? With the high number of NAP policies being sold in FSA this could add a burden to the allotted time a CED will be able to dedicate to office management. If CED's are required to become loss adjustors, can the STO request that the CED's travel cost be paid from e-funds within the NAP allocated funding?"

Answer: Ronald Carey stated that there are no plans to train CED's to be loss adjustors' at this time.

Question 23: We operated under a tight budget for FY 04. How much money was left on the books at the end of the FY?

Answer: Kula stated that she did not have all of the 545-1's turned in. When she receives all of them from the counties she will let us know the exact figure.

Question 24: Will the STC meet with GACOE in February of 05?

Answer: Mr. Duke Lane stated yes if we are still there.

This concluded the questions and Cliff Fussell stated that we appreciated the time and opportunity to meet with the State Committee and the State Executive Director. Duke Lane, STC Chairperson and Steve Newton, SED presented a few Length of Service Awards to Jeffery Harden for 20 years, Phil Addy for 25 years, Virginia Lovering for 35 years, and Ronald Morris for 35 years. Mr. Newton made some final closing remarks.

They're being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise L. Otto
GACOE Secretary