



## *News from The National Association of Farmer Elected Committees*

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Hello NAFEC Members -

### **SOUTH DAKOTA MEETING**

The County Office Committee (COC) system within the USDA-Farm Service Agency has a unique grassroots level of governing. Our farmers, ranchers and landowners work hand in hand with the local Farm Service Agency and the relationship with the County Committee is crucial for the delivery of USDA Farm Programs within our communities. One of the key components to a successful COC is the fact that it is very dynamic. The COC members must continually grow in their knowledge base to keep up with the ever-changing programs they are faced with and the decision-making process that goes along with it. The COC understand that the decisions they make are not just an approval or disapproval on a piece of paper, but it is a farmer, rancher or landowner they are addressing. The COC understand that the decision that is made will have a direct impact on that individual farming operation's livelihood.

During the NASCOE convention in Sioux Falls, SD on August 2, 2018, approximately 70 COC members from South Dakota, Iowa, and Minnesota attended a day long Orientation, training and information session at Hefty Seeds in Kimball, SD. As part of the training sessions, the COC members were able to hear from State Specialists concerning their role as a County Committee member. The training received at Hefty Seed Company was outstanding and the COC members that attended were able to gain or refresh knowledge to better aide them in their positions. In addition to the State Specialist, the COC members were able to hear from USDA Under Secretary Bill Northey, FSA Administrator Richard Fordyce, and others. The National USDA leaders reinforced the importance of the County Committee members' roles within the USDA Farm Service Agency. While addressing the members in attendance, the leadership expressed gratitude to the COC members for their willingness to continue to serve in their positions. The leadership spoke with understanding as they themselves have served in the same or similar roles as the COC. The day's events also included lunch and ended with an afternoon tour of the Hefty Seeds facility.

As part of National Association of Farmer Elected Committees (NAFEC), it is always nice to see and hear what these training programs can do. During the afternoon tour you could hear the COC members sharing experiences that they have had with one another, some similar and some completely different. The conversations between members ranged from the Livestock Forage Program and how it has helped so many producers stay in business to making a hard decision on a CRP disapproval. It is those conversations where the members can share their experiences that continue to strengthen the COC system, therefore becoming a stronger advocate for their producers and their counties.

A huge thanks to the South Dakota Delegation; Larry Olsen, Bill Chase, Joel Foster, Jim Anderson and all the other SDASCOE members for their planning this event and making it so successful for the attendees and the NAFEC Officers.

### LET'S MEET OUR NEW 'NASCOE NAFEC CHAIR', CARLA SPENCER, FSA FROM ALPINE TEXAS

Since 2012 I've been to 6 state conventions, 2 area rallies and 2 national conventions. I've spent hours in front of my computer at home working on publications, websites, and event promotions for our employee association. Occasionally, I've had to defend this behavior to the people I live with. It takes me away from family time, house chores, and cow works. I tell them it is worth it - I believe in it - FSA is special and unique.

"What is so special about FSA?" the 15-year-old asked. "What do you mean there is no other agency like this one? What is it that you believe in?"

There is no other agency in all of the United States of America's federal government where employees report and answer directly to an elected committee made up of the very same people they provide service and program

assistance to. There is no other agency in all of the United States of America's federal government where employees are interviewed, hired, evaluated, promoted, and fired by the tax payer. There is no other agency in all of the United States of America's federal government where elected employees determine payment eligibility, approve federal contracts, and hear appeals on adverse decisions. The County Committee system that provides oversight for the Farm Service Agency is just about the most unique form of government that I can think of and I am proud to be part of it.

I am a PT in a single person office serving 3 counties in the high desert of the Texas Big Bend. It takes 100 acres to run a momma cow here, water is scarce and the land is hard. My office covers 5 million acres of rangeland. My headquarters office covers two more counties and has been without a CED twice in the last 3 years. I have leaned on both of my COCs - used them hard, believe in the purpose they serve, and have learned more from them than through any other training program FSA has to offer.

I have worked for FSA since 2006 and have been a NASCOE member from day one. I met Craig Turner in 2012 and have been an associate member of NAFEC since that day. I served as the Texas association publicity chair for 3 years and as the publicity chair for the Southwest Area for two years. I have two teenagers - one of which is a senior this year - who are active in all things extra-curricular. My husband and I have 200 head of momma cows on almost 30,000 acres of lease country and do everything horseback. My dad has another 8,000 acres here doing the same thing. I serve as a board member for a private property rights association, volunteer for football concession stand duty, grow some flowers in front of the house and try to keep the horses from eating them, and am desperately trying to figure out how to grow a tree with no water or dirt to speak of. I have served on ranch rodeo committees, been a treasurer for softball associations and president of band boosters. I am currently Acting CED in a shared management situation with 60 miles between my two offices and two COCs. I have gone from NAP on NAG-GZ and CCRP on riparian buffers, to seed cotton base reallocation and yield updates, NAP on FAVs, CRP with mid-contract management and routine grazing, and LDPs. I like my job best when I am busy and learning.

In September of 2018 I was asked to be the National NAFEC Committee Chair for NASCOE by sitting President, Dennis Ray. NAFEC Chair. Wow. Somehow, that felt like an opportunity to give back to my COC. It felt like an opportunity to help NASCOE keep the COC system strong, viable, and powerful. The best way for us to do that is to educate our incoming staff and remind our COCs that they are The Boss. Sometimes, that is hard. We are scattered, we are busy, sometimes we forget to include the boss in our day-to-day goings and comings. We need to do better. The goal of the 2018-2019 NASCOE NAFEC Committee is to grow NAFEC membership, increase awareness and keep our COC system strong. This year's team includes Teresa Vonn from the Northwest Area, Marla Hammer from the Southwest, Mary Roberts from the Midwest, Pam Rhoades from the Southeast and Dan Shockey from the Northeast. Together with all of our state chairs, we hope to reach each and every county office this year and pick up new COC members for NAFEC as well as associate members in our CEDs and PTs. Our COCs not only stand behind the county office employee, but sometimes have to stand in front and take the lead. Our COCs need our support as much as we need theirs - and NAFEC is a great way to show our county committee men and women that they are important to us.

## LEGISLATIVE REPORT

I want to update both the effort to pass a new Farm Bill and the status of the Agriculture Appropriations for 2019. There were signs that House and Senate negotiators were on the road to finding common ground during August, but it's now clear that there are still wide differences between House and the Senate positions. To this point, the House has refused to compromise on the welfare changes included in the SNAP Program work rules but there are also major differences in other Titles. As time passes, chances for a possible extension of the current expired Farm Bill increases, however there is increasing concern that no agreement will be reached, and work will have to start over in the New Congress. Hopefully common sense will prevail and following the election during the Lame Duck session a new Farm Bill will be passed. Each day without a Farm Bill becomes more difficult because many programs have expired and cannot be operated.

Not having a Farm Bill will also make it more difficult for producers that are already dealing with low prices, plus having to work out financing for their 2019 crop year with their bankers. The uncertainty will leave many unable to cashflow and unable to continue farming. To further complicate the Lame Duck session, much of government is currently operating on a Continuing Resolution which funds agencies at last year's level. This CR runs out in early December which means there could be a Government shutdown unless an extension is passed, or a deal is made to fund Government for the next year. December could be filled with deadlock and partisan upheaval and a time when we will look in our rearview mirrors next year and say thank goodness it's over.

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*The National Association of Farmer Elected Committees is a non-profit organization composed of and led by farmers, nominated and elected by farmers, and serving all farmers in each of their county USDA Farm Service Agency offices. To learn more about NAFEC or to join please go to <http://fsacountycommittees.org>*