



WASCOE Legislative Conference Report February 7th and 8th, 2012 – Washington, DC

NASCOE Legislative Co-Chairs – Dan Root and Kevin Wooten welcomed the delegates from all around the Country. When asked for a show of hands, it looked like close to ½ of the 150 delegates were in WDC for their first Legislative Conference.

NASCOE President Lohr spoke to the delegates about the Informa Economic report that we would be learning more about later in the day that he and the NASCOE Executive Board felt will be very received on the Hill as it has significant cost savings all Congresspersons and Senators are interested in.

Craig Turner, President of the National Association of Farmer Elected Committeepersons (NAFEC) welcomed us to WDC. Mr. Turner told the delegates that NAFEC would be meeting with members of Congress and with the FSA Administrator to try and resolve the current requirement that COC's are only authorized to meet once per quarter due to budget issues. He stated that pay for COC members had always been paid with CCC funds from program dollars. NAFEC was told that when the check writing was removed from the FSA County offices to Kansas City, for what ever reason the pay for COC members were paid using FSA Temporary Employee funds. Mr. Turner stated that they are determined to get this reverted back to COC's being paid via CCC funds and allow FSA Temp funding to be used for actual temporary employees.

Mr. Turner also reminded/informed the delegates about:

- with the COC system, FSA is the only ground driven agency
- We need to keep the COC informed of potential changes to programs/office structure, etc.
- FSA employees and COC members can and should become NAFEC Associate Members
- We need to push to allow the SDA COC Advisor to have voting rights.

Representative Collin Peterson, MN, Ranking Member of the House Agricultural Committee spoke to the Delegates. Here are the notes he highlighted:

- How to pay for the payroll tax – use Farm Bill money – not likely to happen, increase the tax on the wealthy, again not likely to happen. If all expire and are not extended, 4 trillion dollars could be saved.
- Senator Stabenow, Chair of the Senate ag Committee has scheduled the first Farm Bill meeting for March 21st.
- The House Ag Committee will let the Senate Ag Committee start the process, then take the proposals to the House Ag Committee and hope to have everything completed prior to the August recess.

- Sees a lot of push back, sees PL and HELC being required for crop insurance, and a limit of \$100,000 in insurance premium subsidy's amounts to a farming operation.
- If sequestration happens, it would cut 16 billion dollars, the farm bill would revert to the 1949 law, meaning we would have to figure out base and yields from 1949, and with parity, corn loan rates would be around \$9 a bushel and wheat would be around \$14 a bushel.
- He stated that he and Congressman Lucas (Chair of the Ag Committee) have a very good bi-partisan working relationship.
- Felt that the way the office closures were being proposed were reasonable and manageable.
- He is committed to keeping the MIDAS project going.
- NRCS is working on a computer system to complete the work in the field and transmit back to the office.
- Feels that Direct Payments will go away in the next farm bill.
- There will be a safety net in place.
- May have a shallow loss program that would replace ACRE and SURE along with another option that farmers would have to choose from. Would be a one time decision that would last through the Farm Bill.
- Increase target prices
- Go to planted acres and not base acres (safety net would be tied to base acres).
- Will find out why COC's are being paid with "Temp" money and not CCC funding.
- He is working on putting language back in the Farm Bill to put leasing authority back in the hands of the COC.
- Working on a dairy compromise, get rid of the MILC program and go with an insurance type program. The first \$4 above feed costs would be free, but producers could buy up to \$6 above feed costs (about the break even amount)
- Chairman Lucas has it a priority to have livestock programs included in the next Farm Bill.

Chance Fenoglio, Vice President of TASCOE spoke to the delegates about the importance of us and our COC members belonging as Members and Associate Members to NAFEC. He asked us to send him email addresses of our rural Ag Partners so they can send them the electronic Rural Wire newsletter and updates. With 900 NAFEC Members and counting, NASCOE and NAFEC have set a goal of 2,500 members. There are currently close to 8,500 COC Members so we should be able to reach the goal of 2,500. Chance asked States to push hard as they have issued the "\$100 Challenge" - \$100 for the States that can increase NAFEC membership by 15%, \$100 for the State with the highest number of new NAFEC Members and \$100 to the State with the highest % of increase. They will also have a drawing for the "Royals Royce" of coolers (Yeti coolers) and a 770 Remington rifle or a \$500 VISA gift card. This will happen during the NASCOE convention in Boise in August 2012. Membership applications can be found on the NAFEC website (www.fsacountycommittees.org).

Robert Redding – NASCOE’s Legislative Consultant spoke to the delegates. The following are the highlights of his presentation:

- This will be his 7th Farm Bill, and he has never seen one like this before
- We are at a critical juncture as the Farm Programs will change dramatically.
- Last week the Commodity Groups were in WDC trying to find common ground on programs that work/don’t work and what all could agree to.
- Specialty crop producers also held meetings to try and decide what type of programs would work for them – some type of crop insurance?
- The two choice programs Congressman Peterson spoke about is supported by him (Peterson), Congressman Lucas and Senator Stabenow.
- House Leaders counseled us to get the Informa Economics Study out to all Congressional Members immediately.

Amy Allison of the MIDAS Group spoke to the Delegates to provide updates and timeline of the MIDAS project. Here are the highlights of her presentation:

- MIDAS is now in the building phase and that should be completed by the end of August.
- Train the trainer is planned for late summer.
- She will deploy training and MIDAS when we go live in November (she does not want the training to be too early as it should be done immediately before we go live).
- MIDAS will be live for 90b days as the first release. We will tweak as comments come in from around the country.
- The 1st release will have crop reporting, business files, along with building the foundation of the producers’ information.
- The foundation will be laid out for current and future use – think of it as building a house – we need a foundation to support a 1,500 square foot house but we are only putting the structure on 1,000 square feet now, and the addition of the remaining 500 square feet will come in phase two.
- Phase 2 will include MAL’s and prepare for anticipated Farm Bill programs.
- The question was asked if we will have the infrastructure in place when MIDAS is deployed – Amy stated that MIDAS is a complete business transformation that will meet today’s business environment. This is not a complete reconfiguration of our hardware. They are constantly evaluation whether building a “pipe line” to transfer data is cost effective or of it would be more cost effective to load information directly into MIDAS from the field.

On Wednesday, February 8, 2012 the WASCOE legislative team (WASCOE President Mary Behm, along with Jennifer Dempsey, Aaron Moore and Tom Oasen) hit the hill to present the position papers along with the Informa Economics Executive Summary (please see www.nascoe.org for the copies of the position papers and the Informa Economics Executive Summary).

We were very fortunate this year as we were able to meet one on one with 7 of our 10 Representatives. The day was full of hearings and voting, so in many cases our time with our Representatives was very limited, but very productive. The Informa Economics Executive Summary report was well received and all 10 of our Representatives offices requested that we send them the full report as they are very interested. All four of us were so impressed with the dedication and passion that our Wisconsin Senators and Congresspersons have to reduce the monumental budget deficit and their willingness to take the “Bull by the Horns” to make programs more efficient and cost effective for all program recipients and tax payers alike.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you as your WASCOE Legislative Team.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Behm, WASCOE President
Jennifer Dempsey
Aaron Moore
Tom Oasen