

Minnesota Association of FSA County Office Employees

Annual Newsletter— Winter 2017/2018



President's Corner: Liz's Lines

Last night I worked on a crossword puzzle and one of the clues was about Paula Abdul. Some of you know her from American Idol, but I remember her from high school. No, she didn't go to school in Northern Iowa, but we played her music loud and proud. One song I remember has lyrics that say, "Straight up now tell me..." Another favorite of mine was Janet Jackson's "What have you done for me lately?" Why are we talking about 80s music?

When I visit with the few Minnesota FSA employees that are nonmembers, I hear things like, "Yeah, I understand that without NASCOE we wouldn't have the same benefits (i.e. health insurance, sick time off, etc.) as other federal employees, but what has NASCOE done lately?" "Sure NASCOE was able to stop the transfer of salaries and expenses toward IT initiatives, but what have they done this year?" "I get that NASCOE was able to secure the KEY PT position (grade 8), but I'm not a Key PT." "What has NASCOE or MNASCOE done for me lately?"

I hope that as you read this newsletter, you'll see that there are many members working to make your job better every day. I'm a big proponent of the programs and negotiations submissions process. If you have an idea to improve our work processes, or software, or work life, please take the time to submit those suggestions on the www.NASCOE.org webpage. Those suggestions are taken to our FSA leaders in WDC and discussions take place. Changes can't always happen, but if we never submit suggestions, change WON'T happen.

You'll also notice that we have a legislative/benefit chair, awards/scholarship chair, and negotiations chair, among others. Each district has a PT and CED representative on the board of directors. All of these people are working for you. Bi-monthly I meet with the SED (or Acting SED) and bring your concerns and questions directly to the top of our chain of command. Last year MNASCOE worked with the SED and Dillard Financial Solutions to provide retirement training (and 4 hours of Admin leave) for all employees. This year, the fall retirement training is focused on those eligible to retire in the next 5 years. That's approximately 50% of our members!

NASCOE currently is working on several task forces including one that is looking at reclassification of the PT position. In the past, PTs began at a grade 3. Years ago, NASCOE was able to help prove that the PT position was more difficult and employees were actually working at a grade 7 level. This process took time and a lot of effort on behalf of our leadership. But the change helped retain excellent employees. Today, NASCOE is suggesting that it is even more complex and should possibly be rated at a grade 8. We have members working on this task force right now. Your membership in this association helps to make these arguments believable and relevant.

If only a small group of people belonged to the association, national FSA leaders wouldn't pay attention to our requests. But because we as a large group are working hand in hand with those that can make a difference, they take notice.

One other benefit, that I hope none of you ever need, is one free hour of legal advice. If you get into a situation at work where you need legal representation, NASCOE will assist by providing an hour of legal help at no cost. Even before your situation gets to the point of needing legal advice, MNASCOE and NASCOE leaders will help you navigate the grievance process. It's a topic that I don't like to discuss, but when you are in a tough situation at work, we'll have your back.

Do you have to be a member to reap the rewards? Yes and no. Yes – some of our member benefits such as access to www.workingadvantage.com or Sam's Club discounts require proof of membership. But on the other hand, no – our efforts benefit all employees. I highly encourage you to become a member. Don't sit on the sidelines and watch others work and play – join us! It'll be way more fun!!

If you have questions, please ask. I'll do my best to help you.



MNASCOE LEADERSHIP

President	Liz Ludwig
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Secretary/Treasurer	Gabe Power
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District 1	Dustin Spaeth Jacalyn Schwab
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District 3	Trisha McMonagle Jennifer Achman
District 4	Veronica Curfman Marilyn Dunn
District 5	Scott Newberg Jennifer Behrends
District 6	Dan Mahoney Lisa Campbell
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Scholarships/Awards	Nathan Peterson
Emblems	Marilyn Dunn
Publicity	Julie Welter
Convention	Darlene Johnson
Negotiations	Kayla Mattson
Ways & Means	Jennifer Achman
Legislative	Kelly Turgeon

— LIZ

Go Ahead... Try Something New!

MNASCOE Convention

by Lisa Campbell, PT in McLeod County

My mom said it to me, and I have said it to my own kids, “Just give it a try you might find you like it”. Last year I saw the emails from MNASCOE, as well as my district board of directors promoting the 1st timers attendance for the convention. A chance for one person from each district to win \$50.00 cold hard cash!

Let me tell you about the convention itself. I was skeptical at first, but I can say I had fun. All first time attendees were called to come forward to be recognized. It really wasn't bad, really not like we had to talk or anything! It was a great group of first time attendee's. Each person was given a NASCOE pin, and then they announced the district winners of the first time attendee contest, I did receive the district 6 prize. I will not lie, it was nice to receive the cash! Some districts did not have any first time attendee's so names of all first timers were put in the hat to be drawn for those spots. So technically if you put your name in you had more than one chance to win!

I had the privilege to sit at the same table as our Midwest Area Chair – Chris Hare. If you have not met him, but get a chance to attend an event he is at, I suggest you introduce yourself. He asked what programs I had, how long had I been with FSA, what did I like about things, what I could see that may need improvement. He did certainly make me feel like I was just as important as the individual he had known for many years. I was very impressed with him and his excitement for NASCOE! I also sat with the President of NASCOE at the time, Wes Daniels. Again I did not feel like someone he was introduced to and felt he had to perform the niceties, he really cared about what I thought as a first time attendee. He was very receptive and very funny. During the conference as I was sitting at the table with the two pretty important members of NASCOE, I was amazed at the notes they would take. The comments more to themselves, but great feedback from what they were hearing.

Not only were they paying attention but when it was time for them to speak they addressed information they heard, it wasn't a straight forward speech they had preplanned before the convention. It was information they heard from other speakers and why that information was important.

I listened to the State office personnel discuss what was going on in their sections. I must say it is nice to put faces with some of the individuals I had never seen before. You hear the voice on the conference calls, but putting a face to that voice is nice. Opportunities to ask questions either in person or on a note card to be read by someone was a great way to give you the opportunity to clarify points, or ask that question you have been wondering about. You know what they say, if you have a question someone else out there does as well.

During the breaks you could walk around and meet people or you could visit the booths set up in the hallway. BlueCross Blue Shield, Dillard's, and Social Security. Of course everyone loves free stuff! I was able to



2017 First Time Convention Attendees!

Back Row: Marie Rognstad (Wadena),

Dustin Spaeth (Roseau/Lake of the Woods/Koochiching), Carolyn Omdahl, Marshall, Lori Stevens (Yellow Medicine), Abby Goff, Kari Melbostad (LacQuiParle), Alex Dohmeier (Becker), Lyndsey Weber (Yellow Medicine)

Middle Row: Alyssa Hughes (Chippewa), Ashley Olson (LacQuiParle), Klynn Thompson (Roseau), Lisa Campbell (McLeod), Andrea Grimm (Becker)

Front Row: Judy Pablen (Marshall), Shelly Onken (Nobles), Shannon Groetsch (Douglas), Mary Oberloh (Nobles)

chat with the lady at Blue Cross Blue Shield about some questions I had when I was originally researching what insurance to enroll in. She was able to pull up the information on her computer and reviewed some information with me. The representative was great! Plus the free stuff, pens, dental floss, magnets...you know the things you don't always need, but hey it's free! The day flew by. We had a great lunch served buffet style. I met a few more individuals while waiting to get through the line.

We heard a speech written by the winner of the MNASCOE scholarship. Proceeds of the raffle tickets go to fund the scholarships. We also had the District prizes. Each district came up with a great prize you could purchase tickets for and drop your tickets in the basket for each prize. While I must admit, I did not intend to splurge, the cash I won for the first timer's gave me the opportunity to try my luck. I, like all other attendees, walked the line and viewed the many different baskets. The themes were different and unique. I put my tickets in the baskets. Names were being drawn for door prizes and I was able to take home a great back pack! Unfortunately it was claimed by my daughter as her laptop fits perfectly! Then the moment I was waiting for, they began drawing names for the district prizes. I truly did not expect to win anything, but then my number was called! YES! I won a fantastic basket with wine, stoppers, chocolate, two glasses, a wine bag, a great magnet from a winery that still adorns my fridge because it has one strong magnet to it, a great salt lamp that decorates my desk at work, and some extra spending money! What a fantastic way to end my first ever MNASCOE convention!

I had so much fun that I was asked if I would be interested in the District 6 PT position on the board of Directors. I wasn't sure at first. I didn't know what that would entail, but after some questions, I decided why not! It is a great group of individuals and as I continue to learn more and more of the MNASCOE/NASCOE, I am even more grateful that I decided to try it. So go ahead, give the convention a try and who knows you might end up having a spectacular time, and win some spending money too! I hope to see you there in April!

save the date!

FRIDAY, APRIL 6TH – MNASCOE CONVENTION
ARROWWOOD LODGE IN BAXTER, MN

Awards & Scholarships Committee

BY: NATHAN PETERSON

This year MNASCOE has been busy working to improve the scholarship program and what better way to do that than to add an additional scholarship opportunity for 2018. It was only a few years ago that we were able to start offering one scholarship in the amount of \$1,000 to one lucky individual. This year, due to our members' generous donations to the scholarship program we are able to offer one \$1,000 and one \$500 scholarship. Any members who has children graduating from high school and/or entering up to their 4th year of college are eligible and encouraged to apply. Along with the two scholarships that MNASCOE is offering, NASCOE is also offering an additional 6 scholarships. For the second year in a row I get to say that that is the most scholarship opportunities that have ever been offered by our association!

Again this year, members, members' children, spouses and grandchildren all had opportunities to apply for scholarships. The six scholarships available are: 1) Traditional for high school seniors or first year college freshmen, 2) Open Continuing Education for college students in their 2nd to 4th year, 3) Member Continuing Education for NASCOE members continuing their education, 4) Continuing Education for member's adult child, legal dependents, or member's grandchild who are required by their employer to continue their education, 5) Grandchildren for member's grandchildren who are enrolled full time, 6) Associate Member for an associate member, an associate member's spouse, child, grandchild, or legal dependent. For more information regarding these scholarships please visit NA-

SCOE's website at www.nascoe.org.

I would also like to congratulate last year's winner of the MNASCOE scholarship Evan Welter. Evan Welter of New York Mills was the 2017 MNASCOE scholarship winner. Evan is a freshman at NDSU. Evan plans to major in Civil Engineering. He is the son of Darin and Julie Welter. Julie is the CED in East Otter Tail County.



The process to apply for the 2018 scholarship is done electronically on NASCOE website. It is important to note that a complete application includes completing the application, submitting two recommendation letters and submitting the most recent posted transcript by January 1. Without all three submissions, the application will be determined incomplete and will result in disqualification. So please take a look at the NASCOE website, specifically "Awards and Scholarship Handbook, 2018 edition" for additional information regarding all of these scholarship opportunities and feel free to contact Nathan Peterson at npete03@hotmail.com with any questions regarding the scholarship program. I look forward to seeing a lot of scholarship applications from Minnesota. If you missed this year's January 1 deadline, put it on your calendar for next year!

SICK LEAVE AWARDS – PRESENTED AT STATE CONVENTION

Each year at our banquet MNASCOE recognize employees who have reached milestones in their sick leave balances. Awards are given to employees who accumulate 1,000 hours of sick leave and again recognized for every additional 500 hours accumulated thereafter. If you or one of your employees who is a MNASCOE member had accumulated 1,000, 1,500, 2000, 2500 or 3000+ hours and have not already received an award please send Nathan Peterson the name of the individual and the number of sick leave hours they have accumulated. An employee may only be recognized at each level once in their career. Plaques are awarded for any sick leave balance of 2500 and 3,000+ hours. Please send all names to Nathan Peterson at npete03@hotmail.com by February 1, 2018.

Important Note: sick leave balances are considered protected information. Please confirm with the employee prior to sending Nathan their names so that MNASCOE has the employee's permission to recognize them for their achievement and read their names at our banquet.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS – ONLINE NOMINATION PROCESS

Do you know someone who has made a difference in their community, in service to agriculture or to our great employee association? If you answered yes, do you know that MNASCOE and NASCOE recognizes individuals for their contributions in these areas? These awards are called distinguished service awards and our employee associations recognized winners in three categories: 1) Service to Community, 2) Service to FSA/Agriculture, and 3) Service to NASCOE. Last year we had submissions in each of the three categories.

Are You Receiving the MNASCOE Emails?

If not, please send your personal email address to mnascoemembership@gmail.com



Service to Community

Nicki Miranowski was recognized for her outstanding work with our veterans, helping collect toys and food for those less fortunate, her work with our youth bringing Ag to the classroom and her generous sharing of her knowledge and experience. You may have even read on share point about some of her and the offices service to her community during national Ag week last year. I am also pleased to share that not only was Nicki this year's Minnesota recipient she was also recognized as the recipient for the Midwest Area for her service.



Service to Agriculture

Kevin Beekman was recognized for his contributions to agriculture. Kevin has worked for FSA for about 30 years and has worn many hats for the agency throughout his career. He has served as a trainer and a mentor for many of us within the agency. He is well known for his great sense of humor and for a job well done. He has always held his staff and producers in an extremely high regard, so much so that after leaving the county office to become a state specialist he found he missed them too much and made the switch back to working with producers directly at the county level.



Service to MNASCOE/NASCOE

Darlene Johnson was recognized for her service to MNASCOE. It is hard to think of MNASCOE or NASCOE for that matter without Darlene coming to mind. She has served as national secretary, national convention chairperson, negotiation chairperson, state secretary, event coordinator just name a few and, yes, I am sure we are forgetting a title or three as well. It is impossible to list all of the contributions she has made to the organization during her career. No matter how busy she is, she is always willing to take on additional work to support our great association.

2018 MNASCOE State Convention

Darlene Johnson

Make plans to attend the 2018 MNASCOE Convention at the Arrowwood Lodge at Brainerd Lakes in Baxter, MN on April 6, 2018!! It will be a one-day convention held on Friday and will be an excellent opportunity to connect with other MNASCOE members, STO personnel, our insurance carriers, and, of course, Dillard Financial Solutions, Inc!

Steve Dillard is planning to discuss the new aspects of TSP and how it relates to the new tax bill, how to invest in TSP using the various funds and will be available for one-on-one meetings with members the day before our convention and the day after. There will be a Board of Directors meeting Thursday evening, April 5, 2018 along with great hospitality sponsored by MNASCOE.

The room rate for Thursday evening is \$91.00 and the rate for Friday evening is \$139.00 which includes 4 water park passes. The normal rate for Friday night is \$189.00 so the Arrowwood Lodge is offering us a great deal!

Make your plans now to join us April 6, 2018 for our annual "family reunion" – our MNASCOE family – our FSA family! Make your reservations NOW by calling the Arrowwood Lodge at Brainerd Lakes at (218) 822-5634. To receive the reduced rate, reservations must be made by March 6, 2018. After this date, reservations will be accepted on a space and rate available basis only.

Arrowwood Lodge at Brainerd Lakes, 6967 Lake Forest Road, Baxter MN 56425, 218-822-5634.

Find us on Facebook @MNASCOE—Minnesota Association of FSA County Employees

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

by Kelly Turgeon

2018 FARM BILL

Ready or not 2018 has arrived and promises to be an interesting year for agriculture and FSA. As you are all aware, the Agriculture Act of 2014 (Farm Bill) expires September 30, 2018. Agriculture is currently facing challenging times with current and projected low commodity prices. Discussions on the formulation of the 2018 Farm Bill are underway. Some of you recall the delays of 2014 legislation and wondering can a farm bill be passed prior to expiration of the current bill. Congressional hearings have been conducted by House and Senate Ag Committees. Now we watch the formulation of the new farm bill as it will have a direct impact on FSA county office employees laying a road map for the future. When the 2014 Farm Bill was passed there were strong commodity prices and a decreasing interest in conservation programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Times are different now with low prices and increasing interest in conservation. Those two factors may help drive the efforts of Congress to move in a timely manner to finalize legislation sooner than later. The reality is that elected officials have struggled and fought in getting legislation that can pass both chambers. Recent passing of the tax bill may serve as a launching pad for other bills including a disaster relief being considered for hurricanes, wildfires, and drought. The initial disaster legislation includes language for dairy and cotton producers which are considered safety net fixes being addressed prior to the farm bill could potentially help move farm bill efforts. Election pundits believe farm bill legislation needs to move prior to spring as with mid-term elections coming legislative matters are sometime delayed during periods of campaigning.

NASCOE LEGISLATIVE CONSULTANT & UPDATES

NASCOE understands the importance of following farm bill legislation from start to finish. Hunter Moorhead, WDC Legislative Consultant under contract with NASCOE, provides regular updates on legislative issues impacting our membership, farm bill developments, and employee's benefits. The updates are shared on the NASCOE Legislative page at: <https://nascoe.org/legislative/> and are also forwarded out via our state membership

email listing. If you are not on the email group to receive the updates and wish to be added, please feel free to email myself or Danielle Skindeliem. Having a Legislative Consultant located in WDC working for NASCOE and serving as the watchdog for legislative or agency matters which may impact our membership is critical in today's environment. Your membership in MNASCOE helps support these efforts!

POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE (PAC)

NASCOE formed its PAC in 2005. Federal Law prohibits NASCOE from using membership dues for political purposes. The NASCOE PAC is funded through voluntary contributions of members. FSA employees, for your own benefit, need to be engaged in the legislative process. Political Action Committees are an integral part of the legislative process and allow employees to have legislative input from home. The most influential and effective agricultural organizations have PACS. NASCOE's PAC works to develop friendship in the legislative halls and to assure those friends are reelected to Congress. The PAC is funded through employee contributions with approximately 650 members participate contributing over \$64,000 in 2016. Member's

Invest in Your Employment and Future

average contributions are \$3 per pay period. MNASCOE strives to grow our PAC participation. We realize members have financial obligations but ask for your consideration in investing in your employment. If you are not currently contributing, we need your participation! Consider starting with a donation of \$1 or more per pay period. Increased participation will help further PAC effectiveness in working towards issues which impact FSA employees such as benefits, staffing, workload, technology, and legislation. The PAC enrollment and increase forms can be found on NASCOE's website at: <https://nascoe.org/the-nascoe-pac/>.

Programs Committee Update

Lauren VanTassel

Are you ever frustrated with our job? Do you have ideas on how to improve what we are doing? I am challenging you to make a program suggestion today to better improve our program policy and software. Head on over to the NASCOE website to submit your idea! <https://nascoe.org/forms-downloads/programs-submission/> Be sure to also follow the blog via email to receive all future program submission responses while you're there.



MNASCOE GIVES BACK TO MEMBERSHIP

MNASCOE will continue to do a Membership drawing each quarter and all members will have a chance to win a **\$25 gift card**. Look for more information to come in Membership Emails.

Congratulations to this past year's Membership Drive winners: Sandy Jergenson/Swift, Klynn Thompson/Roseau, Lynnea Challander/Isanti-Chisago, Lynn Maasch/Redwood



National Association of Farmer Elected Committees

Have you heard of NAFEC? Where you aware that you could be an Associate Member? If you want more information regarding NAFEC, visit their website at fsacountycommittees.org or contact Nicki Miranowski.

VP

VICE PRESIDENT UPDATE — KAYLA MATTSON

Greetings to all. I hope the holidays went well for each of you and that the New Year is treating you well. I thought I would take a moment to talk a little bit about the opportunity that you have to attend the upcoming National NASCOE convention in Sioux Falls, SD. This year's convention will be held August 2nd-4th at the Best Western Plus Ramkota Hotel. At the convention you will get to meet numerous people from across the nation that work for FSA. Within minutes you will be able to see that we are all one big family and that no matter where you are located in the nation we all come together for the same purpose. The organizers of the convention work hard to be certain that each person has an outstanding time. During the General Session we have the opportunity to listen to our Executive Committee and hear all of the things that they have been working for on our behalf and also there is a panel of WDC folks that share updates to the audience. Following the updates there is a Q & A session. If you have never attended a National Convention please consider it this year as it is again very close in proximity to us. The MNASCOE board has again agreed to offer 2 \$500 scholarships to individuals that have never attended a National NASCOE convention. All you need to do is email me (mattson56567@gmail.com) and let me know that you are interested in attending. Two names will be randomly selected and announced the week of Memorial Day 2018. The winners of the scholarships

will be required to attend all General Sessions and the Saturday evening banquet. Following the convention the winners will also be asked to submit an article about their experience at the convention. We would love to see Minnesota well represented again this year. If you have any questions regarding the please let any board member know.

This past August I was able to travel to Missouri to attend my second National NASCOE convention. My husband and I met up with Teresa Holmquist in St Charles to represent Minnesota. We had a fantastic time reconnecting with old friends and having the opportunity to meet many new friends as well. The Q & A session went really well and it was interesting to hear some of the struggles that people are having across the nation and the ideas that they have to help solves some of the issues. My favorite part of this past year's convention was the breakout sessions. On Friday we broke apart from the General session and I went to meet with others regarding Membership. During the breakout we worked with the Membership Chair to discuss ideas to promote membership, changes that could be made to the different awards, and we shared ways that others were helping to improve communication with members, their STOs, NASCOE leadership, etc. Following this session we met with attendees from our area to hear the outcomes of the other breakouts and to share thoughts and concerns that we have. There is just so much information shared during this



Teresa Holmquist and Kayla Mattson

time that it is difficult to put it down here. The people that attend the convention are so passionate about their jobs and the employees of our area. It is amazing to witness all of the people working together for each and every one of us. I continue to learn so much at each convention and rally that I attend. My big takeaway this year is this - At every moment of every day there is someone working hard to make sure your job, your interests and our agency are being thought of and represented here at home and all the way to Washington DC.

Here is my challenge to you: If you have never attended the MNASCOE convention please make the commitment to join us this April in Baxter, and if you have attended a MNASCOE convention but have not gone to an Area Rally or National Convention please consider it. You will LOVE IT! Thank you to each of you for allowing me to serve as your Vice President and Negotiations Chair. I have truly enjoyed it and look forward to continuing to work hard with and for each and every one of you.

MN National Convention 1st Timer's Scholarship: Email Kayla Mattson at mattson56567@gmail.com to enter for your chance to win a \$500 scholarship to help offset the cost of attending the National NASCOE Convention!



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Your NASCOE National Benefits Provider

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