



July 18, 2011

To: MACS & MNASCOE Employee Associations

From: Linda Hennen  
State Executive Director

Subject: Response to February 17, 2011, Employee Associations' Negotiation Session

---

Thank you for participating in the spring negotiation session. As your State Executive Director (SED) I am committed to open communication with the employee associations, and all employees. The official Minnesota FSA responses to the joint and respective associations' concerns are provided herein.

### **Common MNASCOE & MACS Concerns**

#### **1. 2010 Performance Rating Distribution**

**ISSUE:** Much discussion was held in FY 2010 regarding performance ratings and the challenge of obtaining a rating higher than "fully successful". Employees have expressed interest in obtaining the number of "superior" and "outstanding" ratings issued in Minnesota, including the GS/CO breakdown for those ratings

**MNASCOE POSITION:** MNASCOE would like the breakdown of "superior" and "outstanding" ratings issued in Minnesota and the number issued to GS and CO employees.

**FSA POSITION:** *The final FY2010 ratings for GS employees include 1 "Outstanding" and 7 "Superior," and for CO 1 "Outstanding" and 4 "Superior."*

#### **2. Future Performance Ratings – What Constitutes "Exceeds"**

**ISSUE:** In FY 2010 there was a lot of discussion held on 2010 performance ratings and what constitutes a rating above "fully successful". All ratings that were above "fully successful" had to go to the STO for SED review before they could be issued to the employee.

**Continued on Next Page**

**MNASCOE POSITION:** MNASCOE has been contacted by employees who initially had ratings that were above “fully successful” and they were now being turned over by the SED. MNASCOE is concerned if this process is continued it will bring the morale of the employees down even farther than it is now. Employees want to know what it will take to get a rating higher than “fully successful” in future ratings as some employees had good documentation to support the rating and it was overturned. If it is the goal to have all employees “fully successful” than that is how employees will be. They will not work any harder than a “fully successful” level. MNASCOE is requesting the number of ratings that were overturned by the SED and that this process is reconsidered for next year.

**FSA POSITION:** *For FY2011, final ratings will not require SED review (other than those required as part of the routine rating-reviewer concurrence process); SED review of all Superior and Outstanding ratings in FY2010 was to ensure rating consistency, statewide—which has been a issue of concern raised by the associations in prior years. As for the number ‘overturned’ by the SED in FY10, seven proposed ratings were not concurred by the SED (4 GS & 3 CO). However, it is important to note that supervisors should never inform their employees of ratings prior to concurrence or non concurrence by the rating reviewing official.*

*Determining what exceeds fully successful performance for any given element is determined on a case-by-case basis. Exceptional performance within an element must be evident and documented throughout the rating period in order to justify a rating exceeding fully successful. Ongoing discussions by the Leadership Team regarding ratings will facilitate consistency, statewide, for FY11 and beyond.*

### **3. Activity Reporting System/WebTA**

**ISSUE:** Consistency in reporting activities in ARS

**MNASCOE POSITION:** A task force was formed and they met to discuss ARS and how certain activities should be reported in ARS. We were told some time ago a guide would be issued from the STO to help COF report activities to ensure COF’s are reporting reoccurring work items uniformly. One COF may report the same work activity differently than the next COF so the information that is obtained from ARS will not be useful. MNASCOE is requesting the status of the recording guide and if it will be issued shortly.

**FSA POSITION:** *A Minnesota amendment to handbook 21-AS is in development; however, limited STO staffing has delayed progress on the document. The amendment is still projected to be released this FY, so that it can be used for all of FY12.*

#### **4. ALL CED email group**

**ISSUE:** Extra emails employees don't need to receive

**MNASCOE POSITION:** With the amount of email that goes out it would be nice to have them targeted to the user group. Many times an email will come out stating "attention CED's" or "attention FLM's", etc... so it would be nice if those could be targeted to the appropriate user group.

**FSA POSITION:** *This recommendation/idea is being adopted by the STO; however, individual employees and their supervisors are responsible for ensuring that employees are listed in the correct user group. The STO is working on a comprehensive plan to establish consistency standards for communicating both within and outside Minnesota FSA.*

#### **5. Retirement Contact Person**

**ISSUE:** The paperwork is complex and it takes too long to process

**MNASCOE POSITION:** MNASCOE feels the STO needs a retirement contact person to assist employees with more complex questions and concerns. The basic training we have received has been good but we need a person employees can contact with more complex questions and more detailed concerns.

**FSA POSITION:** *Administrative Specialist Jane Ray (651-602-7704 or [Jane.Ray@mn.usda.gov](mailto:Jane.Ray@mn.usda.gov)) is the primary contact for retirement counseling; Chief Administrative Officer Mary Aukes is her back-up and supervisor.*

### **MNASCOE Negotiation/Consultation Items**

#### **1. Administrative Leave for First Responders**

**ISSUE:** The STO has taken the stance that those individuals who are on their local fire and rescue squads will have to take annual leave when called to respond to an emergency. Paragraph 161E of 17-PM indicates that it is the supervisors discretion as to whether the employee can be spared. This would only apply when a 911 call is made through the sheriff's office that would be paging either the fire/rescue or ambulance. In other words, if it's an emergency then those responding should not be required to use annual leave. Rural communities are finding it more difficult to find people willing to commit to all the training and classes needed to become eligible for any of these departments. We allow 40 hours for the employees to participate in the "Peoples Garden" but we will not allow someone to help save a person's life or someone's property.

**MNASCOE POSITION:** This determination is the call of them employee's supervisor and for CO employees the CED is the supervisor of the PT's and the COC is the supervisor of the CED. The STO should not dictate whether the employee is needed on the call. If they are called to respond it is at that point an emergency.

**Continued on Next Page**

**FSA POSITION:** *The STO does not dictate whether employees are needed for emergency response situations; the agency unequivocally supports employees' work as first responders by having a liberal leave policy for these situations. However, granting administrative leave for first responder work is at the discretion of the agency, not individual supervisors; as such, the SED sets this policy for the state in this situation. The supervisor only has discretion as to decide whether the employee can be spared from the office (subparagraph 161E of 17-PM). As such, we encourage all supervisors to make the best effort to accommodate employee absences for first responder work without restrictions.*

*Nevertheless, it is a long-standing policy in Minnesota FSA that administrative leave is not granted for work as first responders. In many cases such work is done by volunteers, which typically does not carry the expectation of receiving additional benefits in order to do so.*

## **2. Government Computer Usage**

**ISSUE:** Last year the STO requested a list of ways MNASCOE would like to use our work Email to make contact with members and employees. Recently NASCOE has worked with DAFO on an agreement that will allow NASCOE and state affiliates to use work email for a number of different things. (Please see Attachment: "Government Computer Usage" letter from NASCOE Executive Board)

**MNASCOE POSITION:** MNASCOE is requesting that the request they made last year be reconsidered and they be allowed to notify members of NASCOE related this as outlined in the "Government Computer Usage" letter from the NASCOE Executive Board.

**FSA POSITION:** *The NASCOE Executive Board letter regarding the "DOs and DON'Ts" of computer usage (see attached), while helpful, still does not—and perhaps could never—precisely address every situation in question. However, in general government computers can be used by association members to communicate with each other and the agency regarding **agency** issues, matters and concerns; internal association business is not allowed. It cannot be used for anything remotely related to the solicitation of money or political lobbying of any kind. That said, common sense should guide such usage.*

## **3. Using up travel dollars for DD Meetings**

**ISSUE:** With the tight budget situation, we don't have sufficient travel money to properly train COF Staff on programs. Why do the DD's still have to travel to meet in person with the STO staff?

**MNASCOE POSITION:** To conserve what precious travel funds we have or may get, DD & Leadership Meetings could be conducted via Conference Calls or Live Meetings. If those types of training venues are considered sufficient to train COF staff on programs, then those methods should be utilized for the DD & Leadership Meetings, rather than face-to-face meetings with the STO. All discussion items, reports, etc. could be sent to the DD's in advance of the call or Live Meeting via email or have items available to print from the STO shared drive.

**Continued on Next Page**

**FSA POSITION:** *Leadership Team (LT) meetings are important to ensuring that the agency operates smoothly and employees' needs are met; as such, face-to-face meetings are the most effective means of fully discussing critical matters. However, consideration has always, and will continue to be, given to ways to reduce the costs including having supplemental LT conference calls, etc. It is important to note that over the last few years the frequency of regular LT meetings has been reduced from monthly to bimonthly, and even less frequently; we now hold the meetings on an as-needed basis, sometimes in outstate locations to reduce cost.*

*From the perspective of overall operations, LT meetings are not frivolous and do not take away from other training; the meetings are needed to ensure that the most appropriate and effective training is provided in the areas of greatest priority. The cost of LT meetings falls into the category of essential operating needs, and has been reduced proportionately with other areas of the budget.*

#### **4. Making employees eat where the meeting is being held**

**ISSUE:** Employees are being required to eat at meeting places to get free meeting space. Employees should not be required to eat where a meeting is being held unless they are told ahead of time that this is an option and that they still have the option to eat at a place of their choice. Employees should not be told they have to eat at the meeting place when they get to the meeting.

**MNASCOE POSITION:** Make sure employees are not required to eat where the meeting is being held unless they choose to eat there. Employees should be told ahead of time if this is a requirement and this requirement needs to be made to the DD's

**FSA POSITION:** *This is not currently considered a major issue or concern.*

#### **5. Office Hours**

**ISSUE:** Requirement that COF's have to keep their office open from 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM.

**MNASCOE POSITION:** It should be up to the CED, FLM and COC to set the hours their office will be open to the public. If local management feels that having the office hours open from 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM rather than 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM will better serve the producers for that county then that decision should be made at the local office. 17-PM Paragraph 31 states "Official office hours shall be 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday, unless otherwise decided by an office director or equivalent: such as FAS, RMA, or FSA National Office Director, an SED for State Offices, or the **STC based on a recommendation from the County Office Manager.**

**FSA POSITION:** *Closing the office before 4:30 p.m. will not serve our customers better. However, extending office hours by opening prior to 8:00 a.m. and closing after 4:30 p.m. may well serve our customers better, and office managers are encouraged to consider enhancing customer service whenever possible. CEDs, in consultation with the FLM (in FLP Headquarter Offices) and the DD, may extend office hours without approval by the STC or SED.*

## 6. COR notification

**ISSUE:** A number of offices have received IPIA COR's this year and they were called a couple of days before COR showed up to conduct the review. It is our understanding the STO had knowledge of the offices on the list and it would have been nice to have some kind of notification ahead of time so offices could plan.

**MNASCOE POSITION:** It is our understanding the STO has advance knowledge of counties selected for IPIA reviews. MNASCOE requests County Offices scheduled for IPIA reviews be notified of COR's arrival date with sufficient lead time to allow counties to plan accordingly.

**FSA POSITION:** *Minnesota Notice COR-47 outlined the approach to COR for the state in which the standard policy for COR notification was established; County Offices should be receiving a five-workday notice of a forthcoming COR. However, in some situations, particularly with IPIA reviews due to the short duration of the reviews, it is not always possible for the COR to provide notification five workdays prior to arrival; the CORs are doing their best to provide adequate advance notice to County Offices.*

*This notice will be reissued annually around October 1 with the ensuing fiscal year's COR plan and schedule. However, with prevailing budget constraints reviews are now being completed remotely. A revised approach for FY2012 will be released, through which reviews will likely become more targeted and frequent.*

## 7. STO Structure

**ISSUE:** What is the STO structure and who is responsible for what?

**MNASCOE POSITION:** A while ago, employees were told that changes have been made to the STO structure and that programs have been shifted around. We were also told an official notice will be issued to outline these changes and who will be covering what programs. MANSCOE has been contacted by a number of COF employees requesting help with what the STO structure now is. COF's are struggling with whom to contact when they have a reason to contact the STO about a program related issue.

**FSA POSITION:** *Minnesota Notice AO-63 has been issued outlining the revised STO structure and contact information. It will be routinely updated, as necessary.*

## 8. Multiple security plans with duplicate information

**ISSUE:** Procedure requires a number of different security plans to be updated and submitted to the STO every year. When reviewing these plans, most of them tell us the same thing but in a different format.

**MNASCOE POSITION:** If policy allows, MNASCOE requests security plans be consolidated or combined to simplify the process.

**Continued on Next Page**

**FSA POSITION:** *With the exception of the “Pocket Response Guide,” all security plans are required. While the Pocket Guide is a Minnesota initiative, it has proved useful in emergency situation having all necessary contact information on one document. With the release FSA Handbook 1-SEM, the National Office is reorganizing the agency’s emergency planning and reporting requirements; this should address some of the duplication of plans and efforts. Nevertheless, we are working on a state notice to provide a matrix of the various emergency plans and reports so all employees can better understand the requirements. Mapping and Emergency Management Specialist Sarah Steinhilber is our primary contact for emergency reporting requirements; please contact her with questions at 651-602-7724 or [Sarah.Steinhilber@mn.usda.gov](mailto:Sarah.Steinhilber@mn.usda.gov).*

## 9. Shared Calendars

**ISSUE:** The use of a Service Center Shared Outlook Calendar

**MNASCOE POSITION:** A number of Service Centers have asked about the ability to develop a shared outlook calendar for the whole office to use to schedule appointments, meetings, leave, etc... MNASCOE requests that the STO research the ability to develop a shared calendar for the whole office to use so it does not have to be tied to someone’s current outlook as this affects the size limit for that person.

**FSA POSITION:** *The state and agency are in the process of moving more toward a SharePoint-based Web environment. We are currently working on expanding County Office access to SharePoint; a County Office calendar will be available at that time. Setting up a unique Outlook Calendar is not a viable or recommended approach to common County Office calendar.*

## 10. Outreach

**ISSUE:** CED’s and FLM’s still do not understand or know just what is expected of them for tracking Outreach activities in OTIS.

**MNASCOE POSITION:** At the Managers training last August some outreach training was completed but there still was not a good explanation as to what is required to be loaded into OTIS. As an example, do we load newsletters into OTIS as an activity when it is intended for the general public? MNASCOE is requesting the STO give COF’s some good guidance on what is required from managers as it pertains to OTIS and outreach activity reporting.

**FSA POSITION:** *An online Outreach Tracking and Information System (OTIS) training was provided last November for those interested; additionally, each district has an Outreach Coordinator (DOC) as a resource. Additionally, there are OTIS training resources in the OTIS Web application under the “Help” section; the resources include training videos and guides.*

*However, we will consider providing more training on OTIS, as well as issuing an explanatory notice, if necessary. In the meantime, if County Outreach Coordinators need assistance or have questions on OTIS, they should contact their DOC or State Outreach Coordinator Nigatu Tadesse at 651-602-7705 or [Nigatu.Tadesse@mn.usda.gov](mailto:Nigatu.Tadesse@mn.usda.gov).*

## 11. Shredders

**ISSUE:** Shredders at the COF are slow, unreliable and labor intensive. There are many companies that will stop at the COF and do the shredding for a reasonable fee. The RD STO has a contract with a company that periodically stops at the COF when they are called.

**MNASCOE POSITION:** Could the FSA STO either combine with RD or set up our own contract? It would be much more economical and save time.

**FSA POSITION:** *We have researched using the STO's service for COFs, but found the area of service was limited. However, CEDs are encouraged to research local shredder services in their community or region and provide Administrative Specialist Naomi Yang with some cost estimates (contact Naomi at 651-602-7730 or [Naomi.Yang@mn.usda.gov](mailto:Naomi.Yang@mn.usda.gov) or [ug-mn-fsa-bud](mailto:ug-mn-fsa-bud)). If cost-effective, this service will be considered in County Offices for FY2012.*

## 12. Training

**ISSUE:** Recent COR reviews have revealed common findings throughout offices. It appears from these reviews that a large number of errors are still being found in certain program areas. As an example, there still appears to be a large number of findings in CRP cost-share.

**MNASCOE POSITION:** MNASCOE feels training should concentrate on common findings when COR reports are evaluated. It appears that if more than one office has common errors then that might be a good area to concentrate state training on. MNASCOE is requesting the STO to develop training for COF that concentrate on common COR findings.

**FSA POSITION:** *STO sections routinely look at common COR findings to formulate training; the STO will continue to do so in the future.*

## 13. DD Schedules

**ISSUE:** DD schedules are not up to date

**MNASCOE POSITION:** DD should be required to keep their calendars up to date so COF's know where they will be. MNASCOE requests DD's set up their schedules by the first of the month so COF's know in advance where they will be. We understand travel plans and schedules can change, but at least a tentative schedule could be posted.

**FSA POSITION:** *District Directors are expected to populate their calendars by the first of each month, for the whole month, and make necessary updates thereto on a regular basis.*

#### **14. MN Notice FLP-449**

**ISSUE:** FP employees helping FLP delivery

**MNASCOE POSITION:** MNASCOE understands the needs for all employees to assist in all programs that are delivered by FSA. The recent FLP-449 notice list what FP employees are expected to do as it pertains to the FLP programs. MNASCOE is requesting that a notice goes out that instructs all employees to assist in all programs. We always see instructions for FP to help FLP but have never seen instructions on how FLP can assist FP.

**FSA POSITION:** *Minnesota Notice FLP-449 provides guidance on tasks with which FP staff could assist FLP staff. Prevailing workload in the agency is such that FLP needs assistance now; the converse was true for FP a few years ago. In many offices FLP staff members have assisted FP staff during heavy workload times. FLP-449 simply initiates the process of easing spreading out the workload where needed. DDs are responsible for ensuring that all employees assist with all programs, when needed.*

#### **MACS Negotiation/Consultation Items**

##### **1. WebTA Taskforce Follow-up:**

*See MNASCOE Item No. 3.*

##### **2. WebTA; Is it possible to color code categories to make data entry quicker and with less errors for better efficiency.**

*No.*

##### **3. FSFL 9 Form – doesn't follow FINFLO or FBP so when completing it's difficult to use**

*This optional form was developed to be used as a tool to facilitate Agency Officials in making recommendations to the COC for facility loans. Credit staff may use other tools as they see fit.*

##### **4. Retirement Contact person – retirement paperwork is complex and taking way too long to process.**

*See Common Concern Item No. 5.*

##### **5. "AllCED" email group needs to be used versus emailing "UG-MN" and stating "attention CED's"**

*See Common Concern Item No. 4.*

**6. Special Emphasis Program Manager – what does this mean? Any added duties for Nigatu or new title?**

*The Special Emphasis Program Manager works to identify barriers to the recruitment and advancement of special emphasis groups, devise solutions, and draft plans to implement the solutions. See Minnesota Notice AO-63 for duty assignments for all STO staff.*

**7. Where are we at with FTE's – any right sizing?**

*For FY2011 we had full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing ceilings of 135 GS and 385 CO. Over the past three years we have very aggressive in maximizing our staffing levels and have actually exceeded our ceilings at various points in time.*

*For FY2012, however, our FTE ceilings have been reduced to 122 GS and 356 CO; this represents a 9 percent reduction in staffing. As is well known, the agency is attempting to achieve these reductions through voluntary early retirements and buyouts.*

*There was no "right-sizing" applied to the staffing reductions across the nation; all states were cut 9 percent.*

**8. More SED email messages would be beneficial on happenings. There is a lot of talk of actual pay freeze, furloughs, etc. This causes anxiety and low morale with the employees. SED messages could at least address some issues as to if some of these talks are facts or rumors.**

*SED Hennen will make an effort to provide more SED updates throughout the year.*

**9. Budget**

*As we are all aware, FY2011 budget is very tight. Staffing salary and expenses will be covered; discretionary spending is very restricted.*

**10. NRCS vehicle use – any updates?**

*The recent agreement between NRCS and FSA allows use of NRCS vehicles. Any problems should be immediately reported to the District Director.*

**11. Performance reviews from 2010 - 2 outstanding and 12 superior out of 525 employees (2.67%). What is the breakdown of those granted – CO/GS-field/GS-STO?**

*See Common Concern Item No. 1.*

**12. Any issues to Comp time approval? We are assuming there are no Overtime dollars.**

*Comp-time may be approved by supervisors as needed; however, approval and subsequent usage shall be monitored closely so that the employee doesn't earn too much and they are able to use it within one year of earning it.*

**13. Condolences emails – could those be sent out by district or bi-district?**

*We do not feel that sending statewide condolence emails is a problem.*

**MACS FLP Concerns/Issues**

**1. 1-FLP Paragraph 29 (D) increases loan limits with SED/FLC consultation. How does the STO view this and any thought on how it will be handled?**

*This change was driven by states with limited staff to approve larger loans. A state supplement, pre-approved by the National Office, is needed to outline criteria to implement any policy on this issue. Some elements that could be considered in determining who may qualify for increased loan limit authority are: goal accomplishments, performance plan ratings, scores on credit quality reviews; loan losses, loan delinquencies, number of bankruptcy accounts, DD & SFLS recommendations, demonstrated ability to follow State Office guidance, loan-to-value ratios, time in grade, needs driven, etc.*

*The STO FLP Section is concerned, from a program integrity standpoint, that the existing limits are already quite high without the need for a second set of eyes on high risk loans. We also do not want to put in place a system that will take more time to implement and monitor than what it will save. We hope to see what other states come up with for criteria. As a whole, the number of loans that may fall into this area is likely to be relatively small compared to all loans made.*

*However, the SED supports pursuing the implementation of this provision in Minnesota to the greatest extent possible. Any input from MACS on this matter would be greatly appreciated.*

**2. Follow-up thoughts to FLP restructuring. The transition has cause caseload issues and space problems. When will there be a resolution to office space issues. Some employees have less than professional office settings (storage rooms, behind file cabinets). Is there pressure put on WDC for remodel requests?**

*Space issues are being addressed, albeit slowly; however, progress is being made. Pressure is being applied to MSD to resolve the most critical situations as soon as possible.*

**3. Update on FLOT hiring.**

*Eleven FLOTs were hired, effective February 27, 2011.*

**4. The STO needs to be more involved in the overall training of the FLOT's. Some of this was addressed in Stuart's email dated 12/09/2010 but is there a set guideline of involvement for statewide consistency? Combined training sessions (district or bi-district) would improve efficiencies instead of 11 FLM's covering everything.**

*While there are no set guidelines due to the diversity of needs of trainees and geographic issues, FLMs and DDs are encouraged to engage FLP Specialists in identifying training opportunities and scheduling of meetings to accomplish training needs. For example, if a Specialist is going to conduct a file review that includes a credit quality evaluation, nearby trainees can be invited to meet with the Specialist and participate in the review.*

*In addition to the one-on-one training that occurs, the following group training is provided:*

- 1. Farm Business Plan & Direct and Guaranteed Loan Making Training—32 hours*
- 2. EDALRS, Special Servicing, FBP Follow-up Training—24 hours*
- 3. Real Estate Administrative Appraisal Review Training—16 hours*
- 4. Chattel Appraisal Training—16 hours*
- 5. Attendance at New Lender Training via MBA—12 hours (if #1 not done)*
- 6. Environmental Risk Assessment—8 hours*

*Any specific suggestions on what type of additional training by the STO FLP Section to trainees from MACS would be welcome.*

**5. Senior Farm Loan Officer – has MN implemented this title to grandfathered FLM's and have those employee's affected been notified. How many employees does this affect Hallock, Roseau and Bagley?**

*The SFLO title has been implemented and all SFLOs have been notified. FLMs in Hallock, Roseau and Bagley are not impacted, as their positions were approved by DAFO in the FLP restructuring plan.*

**6. Can computer permissions per county be removed and have statewide permissions? Jurisdictions cause inefficiencies with detailed help.**

*Generally, this is an FSA Security Office issue. Permissions are based on what is required, authorized and is subject to quarterly review to ensure only those authorized to access FLP borrower account information do so. Detail Help is usually considered a temporary request and therefore permissions are removed after a prescribed period of time. The FLP Direct Loan Servicing Division has no specific issues with FLP employees being given statewide access if an authorized supervisor requests that via an FSA-13-A.*

*However, there are funds control issues connected with FLP Direct Loan Making transactions that may limit access. Only State Office users are authorized to submit 1A Obligation requests. The FLP Guaranteed Loan Making and Loan Servicing Divisions have no specific issues with statewide access if an authorized supervisor requests that via an FSA-13-A. It is important to remember that DLS is FLP system of record for direct loan information and GLS is FLP system of record for guaranteed loan information, so access should be limited to only those employees who have need to access FLP borrower accounts, have received proper training and exhibit proficiency in transaction processing.*

**7. Any new revelations to the Loan Analyst Position?**

*No; but DDs and FLMs continue to consider the position when requesting to backfill positions on their teams.*

**8. Key Program Technician is being implemented for CO – anything in the pipeline for GS?**

*No.*

**9. Consistency is necessary in the credit quality reviews. Second reviewer is encouraged.**

*As a section we work hard at ensuring that there is consistency in conducting credit quality reviews. As with any credit evaluation, there is always subjectivity. Specialists consult with each other on an on-going basis to enhance consistency in the reviews. In most cases, when a docket is not likely to score 80 percent or higher, a second reviewer is engaged in the process. The Farm Loan Chief determines the final result when there is disagreement or uncertainty.*

**10. Updated MN handbooks are needed.**

*We need to be more timely in updating State instructions. Updates to 1-FLP, 2-FLP and 3-FLP will be issued shortly.*

**11. Will FSA be getting a new subscription with Doanes?**

*At this time it is our understanding that Doanes is not in the N/O budget for FY 2011, similar to 2010. In 2009 MACS assisted the STO in gauging a need for this publication by conducting a survey of its members. The outcome then was that Doanes was widely used by FLMs in working with our customers. How have the members adapted to not having access in FY 2010? Are there other online resources (free) that have filled this void? It would be helpful for us if MACS would quantify the benefits received and an overall cost of providing this subscription.*

*This is a national issue that should be elevated to NACS if MACS so desires. If credit staff feel strongly that it is needed, Stuart can raise the issue through the Farm Loan Chiefs Association as well and also directly to the Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs.*

**12. Are 2 credit presentations required when doing YEA's with a new direct loan? The direct loan credit presentation does not have radio buttons for YEA & Graduation completion.**

*There is no requirement to complete two credit presentations when completing the YEA and new loan request or loan servicing request simultaneously. The YEA can be completed in the D-Loan Making, D-Loan Special servicing, or D-Loan Regular Servicing Credit Presentation. The YEA must be labeled in the credit presentation as such. The YEA narrative should be located in the "Capacity" section of the credit presentation after loan narrative when using one credit presentation.*

*The STO would recommend completing two credit presentations in this scenario because it's easier to track. The majority of credit presentations used for YEA and loan making or loan servicing does not contain the YEA narrative. The YEA narrative is supposed to be a comparison of the plan versus actual. If two credit presentations are completed only one needs to have the classification completed.*

**13. When CO PT's attend trainings, typically the CED's attend. When GS PT's attend trainings, generally FLM's do not attend. This causes difficulty for the FLM to know exactly what certain PT processes entail. Thus, it is difficult to supervise if FLM's do not know if PT's are accurately doing their job. One example to this is the new DLS system.**

*Training is provided on an as-needed basis, so required attendance varies on a case-by-case basis. We always try to maximize attendance to the extent possible; this effort will continue.*

**14. FLP funding – the red, yellow and green light is not sufficient enough. It would be beneficial to list the dollars available, NO reserves and the backlog dollars.**

*The color coding for funding was created a while ago so county offices could easily view if funds are available or not. If this is not beneficial, we can remove it from Share Point.*

*Instead, we can list funds that are depleted. Or, since the STO is able to pull a Detail Allocation Report that lists Amount Allocated, Amount Obligated, Number of Obligations, along with Unobligated Balance we can post this to Share Point on a weekly or bi-weekly basis for direct loans.*

*We are rarely given National Office backlog dollars. But, National Office has a FLP Funding website at the following location that shows FY2011 Available Funds, Funds Used, Total Unused Funds and Number of Loans Made:*

*<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=fmlp&topic=fun>*

*Any input from MACS on this matter would be greatly appreciated.*

**15. DLM/DLS/FBP/FORMS need to talk to each other more for improved efficiency. A few examples include:**

- a. The loan approval date in FBP flows to DLM Application, the eligibility date and rejection date do not flow.**
- b. No system flows to/from DLS – when a YEA credit presentation is completed with YEA, Graduation and Classification in FBP, a manual update in DLS is still necessary.**
- c. More prefilled forms in DLM/DLS/FBP would improve efficiency on direct loans. GLS has prefilled forms.**

*These are all National Office issues that MN FSA cannot control. While it is possible for DLS to use data from FBP, FSA is not allowed to write data back to FBP. As far as eligibility dates and rejection dates flowing to DLS from FBP, it is important to keep in mind these are individual requests within a loan package, and it is not possible to separate these out by credit action. Also, with the request for additional information to document the routine servicing workflows and enhancements being made to said workflows, manual updates have to continue in order for FLP to have a more robust system from which to pull reports so that offices can more efficiently monitor their servicing actions.*

*As for as the pre-filled forms issue is concerned, due to the maintenance nightmare of keeping so many systems updated and in sync with the most current version of a form, National Office has made it clear to National Association representatives that forms are not planned for incorporation into DLS at this time.*

*MACS is encouraged to pursue these issues at the National level through NACS.*

**16. Are annual FLP meetings a thing of the past due to budget?**

*No, but training and meetings are held on an as-needed basis. Budget plays an increasing role in determining training priorities and needs.*



## National Association of FSA County Office Employees

**President**  
Myron Stroup  
11238 W 2200 Rd  
Fontana KS 66026  
(913) 294-3751 – Office  
(913) 285-3338 – Cell

**Vice President**  
John Lohr  
PO Box 59  
Norvelt, PA 15674  
(724) 853-5555 – Office  
(724) 771-3682 – Cell

**Secretary**  
Annette Hyman  
746 Perry Rd  
Strykersville NY 14145  
(716) 652-1400 – Office  
(716) 998-7234 – Cell

**Treasurer**  
Shelly Odenkirk  
PO Box 114  
Wooster OH 44691  
(330) 262-1911 – Office  
(330) 464-1475 – Cell

### Government Computer Usage

**NASCOE Members** repeatedly ask for a list of DO's and DON'Ts on FSA computers and email usage. Your NASCOE leadership agrees with this need, however, it is impossible to identify every potential situation that could result in an employee receiving a reprimand, suspension, or even someone losing their job from misuse of government resources.

This document has been reviewed and approved by DAFO on October 22, 2010.

As for the DON'Ts, here's what we do know. Government computers, internet, email and other resources can never be used to solicit monies on behalf of NASCOE or our State Affiliates. These items can definitely never be used for political purposes, including lobbying Congress for support or repeal of any legislation, program, or proposal, or frankly, anything.

**What can we DO?** The membership can be kept informed through the electronic newsletter "NASCOE Now". Information on benefits, awards and scholarship deadlines can also be offered. It is permissible to write, submit and read negotiation/consultation items. There is no problem in relating concerns and issues and how they relate to FSA. And, you may offer questions, suggestions and solutions to your NASCOE leadership.

**When in doubt...** Good Judgment and Common Sense never cost anyone their job. If you question an email's subject matter, don't send it! If you still care about earning thousands of income dollars, don't send it! While you cannot control emails received, you can control what is passed on or saved. When in doubt, throw it out!

You have heard that occasional personal use of government resources is permissible. This is a privilege not a right or entitlement. The quickest way for everyone to lose this benefit is for a few to abuse it. Limit your personal use during breaks or lunch times, or before or after work.

**Your help is needed!** NASCOE and State Affiliates are developing a database of home email addresses. Any item, issue or announcement that is controversial, questionable or lengthy can be sent directly to you at home. This is the preferred method when corresponding with each other as well.

Hopefully this message gives you a better idea of what you CAN and CANNOT do!

Sincerely,

Your NASCOE Executive Board