

**National Association of District Directors
WDC Visit with National Leadership
April 29-30, 2019**

Office of the Administrator

Richard Fordyce, Administrator

Steve Peterson, Associate Administrator

David Matthews, Special Assistant to the Administrator

- The first piece of the Farm Bill to be rolled out will be the Dairy Market Coverage (DMC) program. Signup is planned to start 6/17/2019.
- Farm Bill implementation training is critical, so budget constraints must be weighed as informed decisions are critical.
- WHIP 2.0 will be rolling out soon, as a result of Midwest flooding and hurricanes from last fall. The software must be fixed as it was taking up to 4.0 hours to process an application.
- There are changes to LIP and ELAP and training is scheduled for 05/20/2019-05/24/2019.
- ARC/PLC, NAP, and Farm Records training will be conducted around August 1, 2019.
- CRP training is planned for November 2019.
- The OPO model is a tool used to tell management where additional staff are needed.
- The level of staffing will not go back to where we once were. Reviewing processing rates to identify areas where we can improve.
- Evaluating an abbreviated COT training program for PTs in charge when a CED leaves the position in that office. A work group will be meeting the week of 5/13/2019 to review and develop.
- Consistency of FLOT training is critical and there are a lot of variations across the country. It has been determined that conducting FLOT Orientation at the beginning of the program has caused a lot of break downs. Looking at regional orientation training rather than nationwide.
- We need to look at producer technology that customers have available to take acreage reports.
- There has been a Management Task Force established to look at ways to improve delivery, develop innovative ways of doing things, and developing best practices to use.
- There is some strong external support to conduct a continuous CRP signup in June 2019. Lots of discussion and not sure if this will occur. There will be a general CRP signup in December 2019.
- There is a new structure in FSA at the WDC level.
- Retired Annuitant program similar to the ACES program in the Farm Bill is being researched. This was extended to other agencies however FSA was excluded.
- The hiring and onboarding process improving by the BC-HR. BC-HR staff is very low which has caused some slowness. There are 15 vacancies and only 2 HR staff were hired. HR needs are in high demand not only in government but in the private sector. There has been a lot of 'learning' in the BC-HR as the FSA and NRCS staffing and positions were very different (especially with GS and CO). Improvements continue to be made.
- No decision has been made whether STO Administrative staff will be transferred to FPAC.
- The HR Tracker System allows management to track vacancies and progress in hiring and the system indicates improvements.

Deputy Administrator for Field Operations (DAFO)

Peggy Browne, Deputy Administrator for Field Operations

- Rather than have all Associations travel to WDC during the same week for leadership meetings, the goal was to establish a more personal relationship with each association and meet individually. DAFO intends to make communication a priority moving forward, including the following:
 - Quarterly conference calls with Associations, beginning FY 2020 first quarter.
 - Disperse time sensitive information to all Associations concurrently and timely so that each Association is able to then share that information timely with the field.
 - Engagement of Associations for insight.
- Moving forward, DDs will be critical to internal controls.
- Succession Planning is a priority and DAFO currently has a memo drafted to send to the Business Center; specifically, DAFO is asking for the tools available through the Business Center to assist with FSA's Succession Planning.
- Given current available levels, states can continue to ask for Temporary Employees and Travel Funds.
- The budget for 2019 is comparable to 2018 funding levels; new ceilings will be released to states soon.
- DAFO continues to work on improving the directives process.
- DAFO is being proactive to address employee concerns and morale.
 - Using tools currently available to FSA but also being innovative and creative with new tools.
 - DDs are encouraged to assist with employee morale as a result of the furlough – help employees move past negative attitude.
 - Encouraged to come to DAFO with solutions and ideas.
- A memo will be released to states shortly to standardize the flow of information in relation to OPO.
 - The intended flow is SED to DD to respective CED/FLM.
 - OPO is a tool, not a rule.
 - 80% of waivers requested have been granted; however, metrics should be taken seriously; states need to look at current staffing needs and not necessarily base decisions on the fact that historically an office has had a certain number of staff employed.

Office of Management & Strategy

Perry Thompson

- DDs need a huge amount of help in the near future to do all the tasks that are required of them
- IPIA corrections; currently an office is permitted 10 days to find any missing documents. By 2020, they will have 3 days.
- We need a common process to complete reviews; could have contractors completing some of our reviews
- As we know, all reviewers went to the BC and now FSA has to do our own internal reviews
- Need to use performance plans to improve accountability
- Find what FSA does right and then provide training

- There are 3 lines of defense; 1st hire right, 2nd is Agency oversight and 3rd is accountability (first 2 are within FSA and third is all agencies in FPAC)
- We need to look for weaknesses and risks
- 10 years ago we had 75 CORs and now are down to 32
- Individual COR reviews can be done for a county and for only one program
- Need software that is data driven for internal reviews; pull samples and then enter results; would cost roughly \$550k to implement by December 2019.

Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs (DAFP)

Bill Beam, Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs

Bradley Karmen, Assistant Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs

Sean O’Neill, Assistant to the Deputy Administrator

Jody Kenworthy, Agricultural Program Specialist

Kimberly Graham, Acting Director, Safety Net Division

Lisa Berry, Director, Program Development Division

- Bill Beam has been on board since November 2018; he is a farmer from eastern Pennsylvania.
- Message to field:
 - Big THANK YOU – state and county offices are the face for WDC; appreciate DDs because sometimes the message that needs delivered to the field is not the most popular.
 - DAFP knows the field is working hard and we have more work to come.
 - Secretary Perdue made dairy a priority; producers need it as soon as possible and FSA is on target with implementation and a June 17 signup.
- DD accountability in relation to program oversight.
 - A discussion was held regarding tools currently available to DDs to assist with oversight.
 - Some IPIA rates are going in the wrong direction – an effect of less staff and more work; although “short-cuts” may be necessary in some cases, we still have a job to do; this is an agency-wide issue.
 - DDs should help offices do a better job; be proactive and find small problems before they become large problems; manage “repeat offenders”.
 - Need better reports; for example, a dashboard for trend analysis; reports are being worked on for State Office use although a timeline is unknown; format might be Tableau (using day old data); these reports may help prioritize DD oversight in the field.
 - DAFP would like to see NAP payments overlaid with weather data for possible fraud purposes.
 - DAFP wants NADD input for program accountability – DD review of COC Minutes and applications.
 - Explanation in COC Minutes varies across states. Even for approvals, DAFP would like to see who, what, when, why, data used, etc. in the COC Minutes; it’s a balance – the documentation in the file and associated COC Minutes need to be sufficient and provide adequate explanation in all cases and offices also need to issue payments timely. The point of weather data being absent from NAP files or not being documented in the COC minutes was specifically notated.

- DDs would like the ability to generate random selections for file reviews or a risk management tool to identify payments/files DDs *should* review; transparency is important; reviewing initial applications mitigates errors.
- No DD oversight or reviews are currently required for NAP; DAFP will look into this.
- NADD offered some recommendations regarding FSFL oversight; sometimes DDs look at the same FSFL multiple times (i.e., before approval, before disbursement, servicing); delinquencies are low (losses less than 1% nationally), loans are often over-secured. There are comprehensive FSFL checklists because, typically, COR reports show lots of findings; regional offices for FSFL may also help mitigate the number of findings.
- It was suggested by NADD that the multi-peril crop insurance requirement does not work for all commodities (i.e., ensiled forages, milk) and impacts the attractiveness of the program. DAFP recommended submitting this suggestion to Toni Williams.
- DAFP has several ongoing task forces (i.e., dairy, ARCPLC, livestock, conservation) and will look into NADD representation.
- National Dairy and Livestock Program Training in May; in terms of attendance, intent of notice was for fair representation (i.e., DD from every state).
- A discussion was held regarding directions, information bulletins, and the ability to search for information.
 - DAFP explained that information bulletins are for automation and should not be used for policy; ideally, if policy is included in an information bulletin, a notice or amendment should follow; however, information bulletins are sometimes used for policy if the information is time sensitive. NADD also noted that notices are not necessarily being added to handbooks via amendments like the process is supposed to work. In being short staffed, we need to make it easier on our staff to research information, not more difficult by having pertinent information in many places.

Personnel Policy and Operations Division (PPOD) @ 11:00 am

Janice Kolvet, Acting Division Director for PPOD

James Douglass, Administrative Management Specialist

Jean Knight, Management and Program Analyst

Teresa Martin, Administrative Management Specialist

Rick Pinkston, Administrative Management Specialist

Kyle Rogers, Management and Program Analyst

Donna Smith, Management and Program Analyst

- DD conference training material was presented and discussed. Kara mentioned that it might be challenging this year due to farm bill training and funding. Overall there is widespread support for a DD/SED conference.
- 301 training was discussed. Currently there is a notice that is waiting for approval. Target dates are for an August session in Kansas City, and a September session in Ohio. The selection process will work like the NLT. Each state would get an email and list who needed to go, and who was available to go. Then the national office would select people from that list. Looking at SED's getting their own training separate from the DDs.

- With FSA operating at below critical mass on employee numbers we asked about the possibility of rehiring newly retired employees. The ACES program that NRCS currently uses seems to be having a lot of success. Donna mentioned that is an Agency specific program, and that FSA's program was re-employed annuitants. Re-employed annuitants are only approved after a lot of screening and the process is cumbersome. The FPAC business center is the approval official for FSA's re-employed annuitants. The ACES program won't work for FSA based on how funding is allocated for that program.
- A discussion was had on how difficult and slow the hiring process has become. They are currently working to try to speed up the process. There is nothing that DDs can do currently to speed up the hiring process. There is concern about hiring FLOTS. Most certificates are filled with veterans who have no Agricultural background. One solution is to use schedule A or internal only advertisements. Currently PPOD is working with the business center on selective placement factors. The factors would require applicants to have a specific "skill set". Looking at making Ag. Background a selective placement factor for FLOTS.

Outreach

Latrice Hill, Esther Lin, Cynthia Cuellar, and Sharon Hayden

Agriculture Stress Employee Resources and Training (Notice AO-1722)

- Objectives
 - The Training will assist FSA Field Employees to:
 - Communicate with producers experiencing financial stress
 - De-escalate tense or aggressive interactions
 - Facilitate difficult conversations where there may not be a clear or positive outcome.
 - Connect farmers to relevant mental health and other resources
 - Identify signs of stress and warning signs of suicide, and reduce the stigma related to mental health concerns
- Training
 - This will be a Pilot Training the first 550 employees in 27 States with in person training for the 550.
 - Remainder of Employees will receive training via ag-learn.
 - Ag Mental Health Experts were brought in to help develop this training
- Employee Assistance Program
 - EAP has a team that will come work with employees when dealing with issues of suicide or producer suicide
- OTIS
 - There are minor updates being made to OTIS
 - Adding new Farm Bill Programs into OTIS program list and new Ag census demographics to replace the 2012 demographics currently in OTIS
 - Everyone can have access to OTIS in the office

- Outreach
 - State Outreach Coordinator Training coming for the first time since 1993
 - County Outreach Coordinator does not have to be a Manager
 - When requesting Outreach Funds States need to request the amount that they need for the fiscal year in the annual budget request submitted to DAFO by the AO & SED
 - Contact OEA for clarification on Executive Order 13859 regarding purchase of excessive promotional items. Request copy of USDA directive stating agencies are not allowed to purchase ANY items, even when a small amount for a targeted event.

Environmental Activities

Ben Horter and Sherry Ivanov

- FOIA - Rebecca Denton works on FOIA requests. If we get FOIA requests at the state level that need to be elevated Rebecca is our contact.
- Quarterly Field Calls - Starting in the first quarter of next fiscal year Sherry was welcomed having NADD representation on policy calls
- Task Force – Next month a task force will be convening at national office to discuss various environmental issues. Environmental programs are under the FPAC business center. The task force will include up to 25 FSA/NRCS field personnel. The task force will split into 4 separate groups to discuss the following: FLP, FP, GIS, and NRCS. Sherry supports having DD representation on the task force. The task force will meet the first week in June
- EQ updates- Handbook updates through notices are needed.
- Training – NADD expressed our appreciation for national environmental training. We cited national training performed through a regional approach in FY 16 as a big success. We encouraged similar trainings in the future. Also, we recommended that future trainings contain a FSFL segment. All training should relate to the specific programmatic area(s) being covered.
- Environmental Coordinators – FPAC will be hiring three regional environmental coordinators soon.
- Best Management Practices – Development of an information piece surrounding state best environmental management practices was discussed. The group believed that this would be helpful to develop and circulate to the states to aid in program efficiency and consistency.