

July 2010 KASCOE President's Report

Recently each County Office has received a 2010 KASCOE Dues Notice. For those of you who are not familiar with the KASCOE dues notice, it is a process where employees make their annual commitment to membership with KASCOE. When you become a member of KASCOE you also become a member of NASCOE. These are both unique organizations that are managed by County Office employees just like you. A portion of your dues are paid to KASCOE and the rest are forwarded to NASCOE. Members have the choice of paying their dues on a yearly basis by check in a lump sum or they can have dues withheld on a bi-weekly basis by completing the form FSA-444. Either method is acceptable; however you are encouraged to utilize the FSA-444 form because it streamlines the dues collection process for KASCOE. Full details on the membership process, including fill-able forms are found by clicking on "membership" at the KASCOE website: <http://kascoe.org/default.aspx>. Please review your KASCOE Dues Notice for further instructions and be sure to submit it to your District Secretary by the due date.

As you may recall from earlier correspondence, 2010 marks the first year that dues will be increasing since 1998. This process started two years ago when NASCOE voted to increase its dues effective for 2009 (this had also not been done for quite some time). This action increased the amount that each state owed NASCOE on an annual basis. After the increase, KASCOE Directors were left with the task of deciding how KASCOE would handle the national dues increase. Instead of raising dues for 2009 to cover the NASCOE increase, the Directors decided that they would pay for the 2009 increase with reserve funds that KASCOE had in its account. This allowed KASCOE members to go one more year without a dues increase. The Directors thought that this was the prudent thing to do since KASCOE had the extra money. According to the KASCOE by-laws, any dues increase must be authorized by the members. The membership would have to vote on any needed dues increase during the 2009 State Convention held in Salina.

After a careful evaluation the Directors proposed to the membership at the convention to only raise the dues to cover the new NASCOE expense. The Directors were surprised at two things during the 2009 convention: 1) Attendance was very exceptional, 2) Membership rejected the Director proposal to only raise dues to cover the NASCOE expense. Instead, members voted to increase dues enough to cover the NASCOE expense plus have a little more additional money for cushion in the event an emergency took place. Members in attendance were concerned that KASCOE wouldn't be able to function in the event of an emergency because it only had enough money in the account to cover the NASCOE dues. It was underscored by the membership that in recent times FSA seemed to be on an unpredictable path and that it could be very likely that employees may need a unified voice to express their concerns during turbulent times.

Our yearly dues notice is a good time to talk about the importance of KASCOE membership. I remember that when I first joined the agency I didn't want to become a member. In fact, it took a concerted effort by one of my COT trainers and a Program Technician to convince me to join. To this day I am thankful that they took the time to convince me to join and that I took the initiative to become involved and have ownership in our employee organization. Since then I have learned a couple things about our organization that are worth mentioning:

1) County Office employees (CO) are technically not federal employees and not entitled to anything other than minimum wage. Think about that for a moment – no minimum wage, no sick leave, no annual leave, no health insurance, no life insurance, no retirement benefits, no vacation time or no flexible work schedules! Any benefits we have that mirror federal employee benefits are because the employee organization has asked for them at some point. For example: many FSA veterans remember when at one point PT's and CED's used to be graded at CO-4 and CO-9 respectively. NASCOE had to ask to get 7's and 12's. In the future I believe that NASCOE will still be on the forefront of this issue and has the goal of having PT's become possibly 8's or 9's.

2) NASCOE is the only voice that is officially recognized by USDA/FSA to speak on behalf of county FSA employees. NASCOE speaks for members and non-members alike. A collective voice speaks volumes and more members add credibility to what is spoken. For example: if we had a large group of people and everyone spoke for themselves it would be hard to understand what everyone had to say. You wouldn't be able to understand one single person. However, if the group stood together and said the same thing in unison they would be understood with clarity. It is also important to point out that when membership drops below 50% the employee organization loses official agency recognition. If this would ever happen there would be no one to speak for the employees. At present KS has an outstanding 94% membership rate.

NASCOE is a means of effectively carrying our message to management and Congressional representatives in ONE UNIFIED voice. It has proven means of accomplishing much and the results are some of the great benefits we enjoy today. A good example of NASCOE speaking for members is demonstrated when we have the opportunity to meet with management and ask for benefits. Management also uses the employee organization as a resource for input on new programs and software. Earlier this month NASCOE was asked to testify before a congressional subcommittee in WDC for the second time this year. Our testimony was credible because of our high rate of membership. The testimony given before the subcommittee benefitted FSA employees, it benefitted the agency and most importantly it benefitted our service to farmers.

In summary please take this time to renew your commitment to your employee organization. I also encourage you to take ownership in KASCOE by becoming an active member. You can help your organization by attending a local district meeting, attending the National Convention, attending a State Convention, attending a state employee organization joint meeting, submitting employee suggestions to NASCOE, submitting employee suggestions to KASCOE or taking any chance you get to volunteer.

Please let me or the membership chairperson know if you have any questions about membership or wish to get involved. Contact information for all KASCOE Directors and committee persons can be found on the KASCOE website.

Yours Truly,

Brandon J. Wilson
KASCOE President