



## *The National Association of Farmer Elected Committees*

*News from*

For Immediate Release

Contact: Craig Turner: 806-269-0610  
[turner\\_and\\_turner@yahoo.com](mailto:turner_and_turner@yahoo.com)

### ***From the President's Desk***

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County Committees (COC's) continue to do their job and work while the country tries to move back to whatever the new normal will be. We know your County Offices are already overworked and are understaffed. However, our dedicated county executive directors (CED's) and county office program technicians (PT's) continue to deliver programs to our famers and ranchers. Even during this time of uncertainty, the one thing that will remain certain is the role that COC's play in connecting FSA programs and administration with our local farmers and ranchers.

NAFEC continues to provide advice and information to COC's when they have issues in their offices. NAFEC has already heard from some COC's stating they have not been having meetings or calls to conduct county committee business. With "social distancing" and alternative ways to conduct meetings, it's more important now than ever to keep your county committees connected. We are pleased to hear that some FSA State Executive Directors have been proactive by reminding district directors, CED's, and COC's the importance of having monthly meetings, even if it means conducting the meetings by conference calls or online meetings. Whether in-person or on a conference call, COC members should be paid and minutes should be recorded, just like when meeting in-person; whether they are regular sessions or executive sessions. Please remember that COC members must be paid for them to have liability protection because they are officially working on behalf of USDA and the Federal Government. If anyone is being told they are limited or prohibited from having monthly county committee meetings, please make sure NAFEC is made aware of such directives.

If you have issues in your office that you need advice on, the District Director serves as the State Committee's liaison to the County Committee and can help answer questions. With that said, the State Committee is the direct supervisor of your local

County Committee. Any request made to your committee should be in writing so it can be put in the meeting minutes. Complete and thorough documentation will ensure there are no misunderstandings. The County Committee hires and supervises the County Executive Director. The County Executive Director hires and supervises the county office staff. NAFEC is aware that a new hiring process has been implemented by the FPAC Business Center. However, Handbook 27-PM remains very clear that County Executive Directors are to receive all applications and determine all qualifications for all applicants. If CED's are being cut out of the process by state offices or higher, please notify your NAFEC representative so that we can address this at the proper level.

NAFEC is also concerned that the performance appraisal method is being done according to policy. The County Committee has the sole authority for performing the CED's performance reviews and appraisals (quarterly, mid-year, and summary rating). To our dismay, NAFEC has heard from a few COC's that some District Directors have changed or written their own evaluations and entered them into the system. In some bizarre cases, District Directors have performed reviews and ratings without even meeting or discussing with the County Committee. To be clear, this is not acceptable. County Committees are the rating officials and they do the evaluation in consultation with the District Director. District Directors are not authorized to enter the documentation from the review or rating until the COC has agreed and the County Committee Chairperson has signed the hard copy of the performance plan. The signed copy of the performance plan should be on file in the county office. The District Director can disagree with COC's review/rating determination, but they cannot change what the County Committee approves. District Directors can send their disagreements to the State Committee, but only the State Committee can change the COC's determination. In addition, we remind everyone that Handbook 5-PM states that the employee should be present during the review or rating determination. The bottom line is to make sure all actions, or non-actions, are clearly documented in the COC Executive Minutes. If procedures are not being followed, please let NAFEC know.

NAFEC's mission is to protect County Committee Authorities. NAFEC does not take positions on farm policies, but NAFEC supports delivery of the programs through the locally administered FSA Offices using Farmer-elected County Committees. With that said, NAFEC has several reference documents available that summarize County Committee authorities and roles. Anyone can contact me or any of the NAFEC officers to obtain copies of these documents.

During these unprecedented and uncertain times for Rural America, FSA is blessed to have the security and integrity of our local county committees as they oversee the operations of our county FSA offices. The legacy of trust and accountability that FSA county committees brings to the table will continue to be assurance in which our farmers and ranchers can take comfort.

Craig Turner NAFEC President

***The National Association of Farmer Elected Committees is a non-profit organization composed of and led by farmers, nominated and elected by farmers, and serving all farmers in each of their county USDA Farm Service Agency offices. To learn more about NAFEC or to join please go to <http://fsacountycommittees.org>***

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