The National Association of Farmer Elected Committees

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: NAFEC Concern over Staffing Cuts at USDA Threaten Farm Program Delivery

In recent weeks, USDA officials have publicly denied concerns posed by the National Association of Farmer Elected Committees (NAFEC), that FSA offices are critically understaffed. However, at recent meetings with leaders from the Farm Service Agency, they have indicated staffing levels of county office employees are now under 6,000, as compared to several thousand more, just a few years ago. "NAFEC has County Committee members in every county in the nation and the word we are consistently hearing is our county office staffs are critically understaffed, said Jim Zumbrink, President of NAFEC, a Grain and Turkey grower from Ohio. As such, our staff will find it very difficult to perform the complex work of the new Farm Bill, combined with Disaster programs and ongoing programs, with the speed agriculture producers in America, both expect and desperately need."

These same USDA officials recently cited the speed FSA offices issued disaster payments as the reason FSA offices are not understaffed. However, according to NAFEC, USDA failed to give an accurate picture of what it takes to get to the point of issuing payments. A full years' worth of work in FSA offices allowed the Administration to quickly send out checks, based upon all of the work already performed in 2024 and 2025. For the new programs, this work is yet to be performed, and FSA cannot just send out checks for new programs without having on file acreage reports, eligibility forms, farm record updates, leases, etc.

Reports coming in to NAFEC from Texas (the state with the largest number of county office employees) indicate there are many offices in Texas without County Executive Directors and some with very little staff to get the programs administered. "The new Farm Bill is going to require millions of new base acres to be established which is going to take a lot of work. We also know that ongoing programs like the Livestock Forage Program (LFP), critical to our nation's livestock producers, is a program that takes a lot of staff time to administer." said Kevin Dale a retired CED from a large beef producing County in Oklahoma. For example, continued Dale "with my staff of myself, two permanent program assistants and a full-time temporary employee, it took us about six months to enroll, review leases and eligibility forms, obtain county committee approval, and issue payments to our 700+ Bryan County

livestock producers. Currently this same Oklahoma office has only two employees. Issuing payments quickly under this program will be impossible, without additional staffing."

David Senter, Legislative Consultant for NAFEC and also the President of the American Agriculture Movement also weighed in; "We are facing a farm crisis unlike any we have seen since the late 1970's when farmers drove tractors to Washington DC. We need every resource possible to ensure our agriculture sector is protected. Having adequate staffing in every FSA office across the nation is a critical part of that protection", continued Mr. Senter.

"With the recent buyouts, not only are FSA offices depleted of warm bodies, but a tremendous amount of knowledge and experience also walked out the door of our offices. Replacing this experience will take a good amount of time", said Bob Braden a NAFEC officer and Corn/Soybean grower from Iowa.

Jim Densberger, NAFEC Officer and corn grower from Nebraska summed it up. "We want to ensure the situation is addressed before the crises, not after it. Our office staffs are working hard to do all they can with reduced staffing levels and more programs on the horizon to administer. Without more employees to perform the work, our employees and county elected committees will take the heat for being unable to deliver funds as quickly as normal. Now is the time for our agriculture organizations to sound the alarm."

-32-

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://www.nafecfsa.com

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