



National Association of Farmer Elected Committees

Representing Farm Service Agency County Committee Members since 1965

NAFEC Recommended COC Training Plan of Action

I. Background:

The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's ASCS/CFSA/FSA County Committee (COC) delivery system has successfully administered USDA farm programs in every county in the nation and territories for decades. The COC system is unique in government. Locally elected producers oversee and implement agricultural programs through the County Office staff under the direction of the County Executive Director, who is supervised by the COC. This system affords accountability at the local level, the State level with the COCs under the authority of the FSA State Committee, and nationally with the State Committees (STC) under the authority of the Secretary of Agriculture.

Unlike most of government agencies, the COC system is not bureaucratically driven (top down). Every FSA program participant has the opportunity to bring issues and appeals directly to an authority at the local level. The COC system has been extremely successful in terms of responsible delivery of CCC and farm programs for almost 100 years.

Both before and after the merger of the former FmHA and ASCS, there have been allegations of discrimination, inequity and unfair treatment. The former FmHA advisory committees and the Farm Loan staff of FSA were not, and never have been under the authority of the COC system. USDA has dealt with and settled many of these allegations, but ironically enough, the increase in allegations against COC's has occurred during a period of time that actual training of COC members on both programs and the function of their office has been on the decline.

II. Former Training:

In the past (pre-1996) ASCS Committees were provided annual state wide training conferences (2 or 3 days) for the primary purpose of training COC's on successful and equitable delivery of CCC and other commodity farm programs. Since the beginning of the Farm Service Agency (1996) this training has been slowly but steadily diminished. Today in many offices the training may be a very short overview of COC duties provided by a District Director. However, NAFEC has heard that the most commonly used training method in many states is a few minutes discussion from the CED during the first COC organizational meeting of the year. Many states seldom have district, area or state wide annual face to face training of COC members.

As the officially (USDA/FSA) recognized association with exclusive rights to represent FSA County Committees, the National Association of Farmer Elected Committee's (NAFEC) are deeply concerned about the former discrimination cases and any future allegations of discrimination, inequity or unfair treatment in USDA/FSA programs. NAFEC is and has been committed to ensuring the COC system remains in place for the administration of CCC and Commodity farm programs. NAFEC is equally committed to ensuring all committees and all FSA County Offices treat everyone with respect, dignity and fairness. We believe one of the ways to ensure this occurs is to provide adequate face to face training of each newly elected



committee member across the nation each year. NAFEC has asked for adequate training of COC's on many occasions. At the National Meeting in College Station last summer the Administration invited NAFEC to provide their recommendations for National training to the National office for consideration. As a result, we have developed a multi –faceted training plan to ensure every COC member is adequately trained.

III. NAFEC Training Recommendations:

We recommended utilizing the current COC Training Modules (COC Training Guide; February 2021 Version 6) with any update or relevant needed changes made (we would welcome the opportunity to serve on a review committee to review the current modules) since the current committee training modules were last updated in February of 2021. These training modules will provide the basis for the necessary information to ensure well informed FSA County Committees.

A. Training Modules: NAFEC believes the COC training modules are underutilized and, in some cases, not utilized at all. NAFEC recommends the following plan be implemented.

1. We recommend the Administrator send a directive/notice to all State Offices SEDs in the nation directing that all current year elected COC member(s) both first time elected and incumbents, receive a minimum of no less than 6 hours of actual face to face training each year utilizing the current training modules.
2. Required COC Training should be implemented by the National Office to the State Offices utilizing chosen trainers in the states for a “Train the Trainer” process. The concept has been used with much success in other program roll outs across the country. This process also would enforce that the training be uniform from state to state and county to county, across the nation. Trainers should include STO specialist, CED's, PT's and COC members.
3. The required training should be completed for all applicable COC members by March 31st each year, with a report filed from the SED to the DAFO regarding training completion. This training requirement should be made part of the SED's annual performance plan.
4. A NAFEC representative should be invited to attend each face-to-face training meeting with an opportunity to provide information to participants about membership, and other relevant information regarding the NAFEC association, which represents COC's nationwide. NAFEC is providing a list of National Officers and Area directors that can be contacted by SED's regarding the COC training meetings in their respective state. (See exhibit 1 for a list of National Officers & Area Directors.)



B. The second part of our plan includes providing additional training during the annual NASCOE Convention/NAFEC annual meeting. As a means to accomplish this additional training and outreach, we are requesting to allow County Committee Members an opportunity to meet with the attending Administrator, DAFP, DAFO, possibly the under Secretary and any other deputies of FSA that could be in attendance. NAFEC recommends a “parallel event training/outreach” be provided each year during the National Convention. Next year the NASCOE convention is being hosted by the Illinois State Association and held in Davenport Iowa (Quad Cities), this location could serve as the launch for this new training initiative. This type training has been done in the past with great success. The most recent coordinated meeting occurred in 2018 in South Dakota during the NASCOE convention in Sioux Falls, SD. Although this meeting was voluntary, all COC members in the State not requiring an overnight stay were authorized to attend. Over 70 COC members from South Dakota, Iowa, and Minnesota (close neighboring States) attended a day long Orientation/Training session. During this session, the COC members were able to hear from State Specialists concerning their role as a County Committee member. The training provided was outstanding and the COC members that attended were able to gain and/or refresh their knowledge to better aide them in their positions. In addition to the State Specialists like Jamie White SD FSA Executive Officer (who updated the COC training modules) and SED Paul Shubeck, the COC members were able to hear from the USDA Under Secretary, the FSA Administrator and others. The National USDA leaders reinforced the importance of the County Committee members’ roles within the Farm Service Agency. The FSA leadership also expressed gratitude to the COC members for their willingness to continue to serve in their positions. The day’s events also included lunch (furnished by an outside source).

One of the highlights of this type of meeting is the COC members sharing experiences that they have had with one another, some similar and some completely different. It is those conversations where the members can network and share their experiences that continue to strengthen the COC system, therefore becoming a stronger advocate for their producers and their counties.

IV. Summary:

We believe this COC training plan provides a measurable approach to ensure consistent, COC training nationwide. It also elevates the role of COC members by providing a different group of them annual standardized face to face meetings with officials in conjunction with the NASCOE Convention. As County FSA Committee Members are elected, we believe they need to be shown the respect, dignity, and courtesy due an elected official. If County Committee Members are provided the training, respect, and consideration they deserve, we believe they will respond in kind. We appreciate the opportunity provided to develop this plan and look forward to assist the Administration in any way requested to help in delivering this plan.



Exhibit 1

NAFEC Officers and Executive Committee 8/5/2023

I. Executive Committee

A. National Officers

President, Jim Zumbrink, Ohio, - jimzumbrink@gmail.com (937) 423-8507

Executive Vice President, Craig Turner, Texas - turner_and_turner@yahoo.com (806) 269-0610

Vice President, Cole Sims, Louisiana - farmercole@msn.com (318) 282-9951

Secretary/Treasurer – Bob Braden, Iowa - robertwbraden@gmail.com(563) 320-2061

B. Area Directors

SWA Director: Arthur Chaney adcheney@yahoo.com (903) 583-0826

SEA Director: Neal Baxley Jr., South Carolina - baxleyfarmslc@yahoo.com (843) 431-8878

MWA Director: Dennis Kulengel, Illinois - dkuhlengel@hotmail.com (618)967-0667

NWA Director: Dan Noteboom, Washington - noteboom51@gmail.com (360) 815-2874

NEA Director: Dan Pillsbury jpills1019@aol.com (802) 373-3198

At Large Director: Jim Densberger - densbergerfarms@aol.com (402) 783-2563

II. Contract Support Staff

National Legislative Consultant: David Senter – dls@kscstrategies.com (202) 256-1406

III. Dillard Financial Solutions NAFEC Marketing Team

National Marketing Director: Kevin Dale – kevinldale@sbcglobal.net (580) 916-1470

Assistant National Marketing Director: Tammy Eibey – teibey@dillardfinancial.com (563) 920-7542