FRIDAY morning Session:

Frank Lucas, U.S. Congressman, 3rd District of OK:

* 1933 Agriculture Adjustment Act
  + A version on supply and mgmt. until 1996

\*1996-2013 – Freedom to Farm, but was unsustainable

Provided resources to let farmers plant what they want and spend the $$$ where it was needed/safety net for them to make the right decisions.

\*2014 Bill – farmer decides what kind of price protection they want

\*2018 Bill will likely be the same. Liberal colleagues didn’t want to spend any money on liberal America. Friends on the right don’t want to spend $$$ on anything. House and Senate were close on number during this time.

\*2023 incredibly high probability that Republicans will be in control in the US Senate in November. The people who crafted the 1996 and 2014 farm bills will hopefully be in power again.

\*There WILL be another farm bill, there MUST be a farmer. We are the frontline implementers.

\*Most of the commodity money is mandatory money.

Steve Peterson, FSA Associate Administrator:

\*He started in a county office, then the state office. Has worked for the agency for 37 years. Encourages us to get outside of our comfort zone. He knows we’ve been under trying times for at least the past 5 years. The folks @ the NO work for us – they work to make sure we have the tools to get things done. Zach wants to hear our concerns. He always gives out his email address and his cell phone number. He wants to be able to hear how they can fix our issues.

\*Budget – discretionary fund/salary & expenses 1.173 billion dollars. Ag Ins Fund=294 million dollars. Bottom line is salary line. Maximum ceiling for 2022 is 10,970 employees. That’s how many employees we can fund based on those number. Currently we have 10,293 employees. We’re about 93% staffed. 7,188 of that are county office staff. Reserve of temporaries 717 full-time can come from this number.

2023 changes – President’s Budget has a 70-million-dollar increase. 1.273 billion is the discretionary amount. 43.3 million covers the salary increase coming Jan 1 – 6.4%. That’s the COL increase. Add’l 16.3 million to IT – 3 million to farm loan modernization effort. Trying to get farm loan more automated. 13.3 million covers data warehouse. Transition to enterprise analytics tool. The old EDW system is expired. We are running on ether. That software system has met it’s life expectancy. Adding 20 staff to help urban ag effort. 17 locations have been identified. Will be setting up COCs here. Asking for some reimbursement here. Secretary’s office doesn’t really get its own budget. 100 million goes to FSA to access gen’l activities (working capital fund – all agencies contribute to this.)

\*Staffing – current posture with CO’s 98.1% of our CO’s @ 100% staffed. We were one of the earliest agencies to get fully staffed. NO is struggling with people returning to the office to work. Hiring – 3% above ceiling hiring CO’s due to attrition. Can start bringing people on board for succession training. They have maximized the amount of money to awards: 16.2 million dollars – double what we had last year. Has to be tied to extra effort/above and beyond. They want to make sure these hard-working employees are recognized. Incentives: FSA used to be one of the better paying jobs in states. The increase in minimum wage has shown that we can go to WalMart and get better pay and benefits. They are looking into this/re-evaluating. Hiring incentives – hiring managers are going to get some training regarding what they can afford for re-location. Continually evaluate on how they can do better with the funds they have. Programs: last Sept Pres signed bill to continue us working 10 billion dollars for events that occurred: 2020, 2021, 2022. Trying to mitigate the amount of CO workload. ERP: NO is pre-filling applications and sending them in the mail. Producer has to verify the disaster happened, have to agree to purchase ins for the next 2 crop years, have to identify other producers with an interest in the crop. They are using RMAs data. crop ins covered it under phase 1, then cover it and drive on. We can build upon the RMA info. He appreciates all the hard work that we do. He understands it.

Q&A:

OPO – Staffing numbers in relation to disaster programs. The tool is forward looking. Only through attrition will an office lose employees.

5-tier perf plan system – is there a possibility to bring that back. This is not driven by FSA, it’s driven by OPM. He knows there are conversations about this. Under pass/fail – technically everybody is treated the same. People who work hard feel like they are being cheated. Really important that supervisors recognize the hard-working employees.

Delay in equipment getting out – we had to install our own software on the new laptops. Bottom line is the reason for this new system is to save money. Batteries are dying very quickly on the new laptops. On-boarding is being conducted remotely. This is creating a lot of the issues with receiving equipment. These are all things out of the agency’s hands.

DDs and their expertise – the reason they are classified at 13 is because they are knowledgeable in all aspects of FSA programs, including farm loan. He recommends that CEDs talk to the STO if they feel that their DD is not knowledgeable in all programs call their STO to see if training can be had with DDs in certain programs.

How do we get producers paid on ACTUAL use instead of INTENDED use. WHIP threw producers out who had grass for GZ certified, but ended up haying end. Steve pointed out this is an added benefit for the producer. Just because the weather changed and benefitted the producer doesn’t mean we should pay on a disaster program.

Marcus Graham – DAFO:

\*SED Update – Presidential appointees. This administration has taken a little more than usual. They have 44 or 45 SEDs on board. Most in attendance do have SEDs. AZ, MT and HI do not. They are coming in the next few weeks. During this transition time, they’ve had acting SEDs. STC are secretarial appointees. As SEDs coming on board, they are tasked with recommending STC members. These are then approved by the secretary. Still moving this process as SEDs come on board.

\*Big priority for the administration is hiring. Recruit and retain. Salaries are increasing. Hard to compare with companies and employment that are outside of federal gov’t. They are looking at strategies to increase these. Reclassifications are being looked at. These concerns are being taken to the top.

\*Diversity in hiring another big priority. Looking for people who can bring a skillset to the agency. Working thru Path and Tribal associations. Have had the opportunity to increase Pathway.

\*Urban Ag another big priority. Initiated in the 2018 farm bill. Secretary has tasked his administration with implementing. Making sure we bring in our specialty crop and urban ag producers.

\*Training – need to bring this back. Pandemic put us in a different state of mind. They want to make sure we have the proper amount of training. He recognizes the importance of this for all employees. Leadership training was an example. SED trainings are coming up. COT and FLOT trainings.

\*Awards – they have sent out nat’l allotments. These have doubled from previous years. Should be processing soon.

\*Data Analysts – new tools, dashboard; new analytic tools. Trying to update and upgrade this daily.

\*Added more staff to the legal team – a lot of prior positions went to FPAC; they wanted to make sure things were covered for county office staff.

Q&A:

\*FSA Logo – we are proud of our logo and would like to continue using this on our awards. We using our logo make sure is it tasteful and used in respect to the agency.

\*Using INDEED or other outside sources for our hiring. This was a negotiation item. PPOD team is working on this and expanding how we can advertise for jobs. They want to make sure we are reaching everyone that we can.

\*Can you explain the 5% process regarding CO to GS???? When a CO employee does GS work?? States are allowed to flex at discretion of the SED up to 5% GS funding to CO. The flexing is for 1 year, states must come back every year to ask for funding. Farm loan program work for example. Provisions are provided. Is DAFO involved in the use of CO staff to do GS work? If more than an AdHoc, they may want to talk to the state with this question. DAFO typically doesn’t try to get involved. They allow SEDs to

utilize those resources.

\*Fellows Program Notice – we would LOVE to see a reverse Fellows Program. They are looking at all Pathway Programs, Fellows Programs. Martin – they have sent conservation employees to offices in the past and he encourages this for the opportunity the types of work these employees perform every day.

Scott Marlow:

\*We’ve seen the roll out of ERLP & ERP. ERP is structured off RMA and NAP date. Farmers will receive a pre-populated application in the mail. CO work will be minimal. They are still working on Phase 2 for both programs.

\*They are very concerned with disasters happening around the country: derecho and wildfires. They are continuing to work to facilitate and speed up the programs for these events.

\*They are VERY aware of the amount of work that we have had the past 2 years. Even through the pandemic. Shout out to the folks who have school-age kids. He’s very glad his kids were out of school when this whole thing hit.

Q&As:

\*ELAP – beef lost prior to wildfire prior to the grazing season – is this correct and can we consider getting this changed. Something they are working on.

\*New register requirements – is there any way that consideration can be given to the timeline – 3 weeks is quite short. Timeline itself is hard on county offices. They try to be as flexible as they can. Looking at the whole body of what’s coming next. There is going to be an amendment for 1CM this summer.

\*Self Certification Programs – this is something they offer in order to speed up the process. They understand our concern. It is something to take under consideration, they are happy for the feedback.

\*Is there anyway to change SORG from CWT to BU – he doesn’t know the complexity of changing this. He will look at it.

\*2CP, Para 25D – county offices can now have producers sign a producer print to certify all farms instead of each 578. Do not see anything in the handbook stating if a signed copy of the prod print goes in each farm folder? They are having a series advisory teams in the next 2 years – they encourage folks to apply for this.

\*Limitations on career ladder positions that are advertised where grade 7s or grade 8s are not eligible. We need to be able to advertise why these are only offered to Grade 9s.

\*Continuous certification of CRP – any chance of bringing that back? Looking at the process and looking at how we can make that more efficient is something they are looking at. This is something that is currently part of the conversation.

Q&A for Steve again:

Receipt for Service – why can’t this be automated? What is it really used for? Required by Congress for FSA to acknowledge activity for producer’s coming thru the door. Even if the producer is not eligible, they wanted to have something to show that they had the opportunity to apply, and we took that application. NRCS does not do a RFS every time a producer comes thru the door. When a customer comes in, regardless of who they are, and they request a service, it is documented. It is about equity. This has evolved over time to get where we are. They are trying to improve the software to make it more automated. He understands, but please continue to do it. I understand you want to see RFS tied to the application to auto-generate the RFS – much applause to this.

\*Lindsey is on a software team – starting with CARS, there will be an auto RFS.

\*Farm bill 2023 – are they looking at the record-high inputs for farm payments? He has heard there will be very little changes to the 2023 farm bill as far as a payment kicking in prices are high.

\*When will there be a clear 30 30 notice for CRP? He wasn’t sure.

\*NAP – purchased for 2 crops – 1NAP, Para 303 – receivable?

Scott Blubaugh – AFR Cooperative President

Morgan Limmer – Nat’l COAC Chair

\*Dillards is now offering health ins to COC members – it’s still a work in progress

\*They also offer ROTH IRAs

Afternoon Session:

Marcinda Kester, NASCOE President

\*Ceilings – 7,188 is our CO ceiling. She has had a LOT of calls on this. No state lost more than 2 staff years. They look at where the workload is. The bigger states took the hits. 3% above our ceiling level is our actual ceiling level due to attrition and being able to back fill positions for cross training. There is funding left over from last. We got 8 COTS nationwide above ceiling. The funding only pays for salaries, not travel expenses. CEDs have access to the county office dashboard. It will show you the county activity on an annual basis. Which programs are you going up in and which programs are you going down in. Talk to DD and STO and they have access to the STO dashboard and can see the bigger picture better. We all need to NOT work off the clock. We must include ALL work time in ARS to show the NO that we need those bodies.

\*COAC – task force for minority advisors having voting rights. She wrote a letter to Marcus Graham. DAFO was already looking into this issue. DAFO has sent a question to OGC to see if this is a policy change or a regulation change.

\*Title V vs Title IV – Most regs passed by Congress are for Title V (GS) employees only. NASCOE then needs to go to bat and request these same benefits for CO. There is a notice coming regarding bereavement pay for CO employees.

\*Programs & Neg – We have some smart employees out in the field who submit great suggestions. Even for those submissions that do not pass, we still consider these a win because the issue is still in the back of their mind.

\*PT Grades – hot topic – NO is working on some items to make our jobs more appealing. We can’t increase pay in the middle of the year due to budget. If everyone in the nation gets the same up in pay according to the scale, then some offices are losing an employee as the budget has already passed. We need to figure out how much we need to request for future budgets.

\*KSA – they are considering taking them away and going to the GS system. GS questions aren’t nearly as detailed.

\*Big concern with the current SF50 being submitted. As a manager, encourage applicants to contact the person listed on the vacancy announcement to have them check that your paperwork is in order.

\*Membership –

\*Xerox Update – nobody was taking responsibility for the contract in the nat’l office. They now have a person who has taken ownership and is making sure everything is in order. Every state has a TMF manager. If we find ourselves without a part or toner, we escalate this to the state TMF manager.

\*Tickets being submitted – nobody is showing up or they are being “lost”.

\*NASCOE Attorney – if we ever have a situation where we need advice, contact Joel Foster, CC Marcinda. Two hour privilege that we get. The adverse action needs to be in writing and they need a timeline written record with how we got to the event.

\*Communication – she’s been doing some videos. If there is something we feel passionate about and feel needs to get out, contact Raela.

\*Task Force – If anyone would like to take place in a task force for a particular program, let our area exec know and if Marcinda ever gets an email from NO for a task force and needs names right away she reaches out to execs for name.

\*There is a shared mgmt. task force. Sounds like there will be a new handbook coming out.

\*There are 2 individuals that are starting on a records mgmt. task force for scanning records

\*NCO – dashboard for unmet demands. Task force has been turned over to Brandon.

\*They have an executive committee meeting every month. This is generally a 2-hour call.

\*Nat’l Convention – they are looking for break out session suggestions. Talk to Joel Foster if you would like to see something.

\*2024 Convention – they have not had a state submit a bid yet

\*Dillards – contract ends next year. They are opening the bid process – putting a package together. Board of directors (our delegates) will put the bids in. This will be decided at the 2023 convention.

MEMBERSHIP BREAKOUT SESSION:

Glenn Thomas & Breann Fink

\*Right now, we stand at 70% nationwide for membership (approx. 638 from being back to 80%)

\*We need to encourage those who are not members to be members and show them WHY.

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