

For Immediate Release

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NAFEC Travels to the Nation's Capitol to Meet with Key USDA Leadership
FSA County Committee Members Discuss Their Critical Role in Farm Program Delivery and Outreach with Deputy Secretary Merrigan and Administrator Coppess

WASHINGTON (RuralWire), March 24, 2010 – Craig Turner, President of the National Association of Farmer Elected Committees (NAFEC) led his organization's board of directors to the nation's capitol this week to meet with key leadership at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Turner's group met with United States Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan, Farm Service Agency (FSA) Administrator Jonathan Coppess, FSA Deputy Administrator of Field Operations Karis Gutter, FSA Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs Brandon Willis as well as his assistant Craig Trimm.

Also in attendance were The National Association of Farm Service Agency County Office Employees' (NASCOE) President Myron Stroup and Vice President John Lohr.

"County committee members are an important component of the operations of FSA and provide a link between the agricultural community and the USDA. Farmers and ranchers who serve on county committees," said Turner. NAFEC members work hand-in-hand to help NASCOE members deliver FSA farm programs at the local level, applying their knowledge and judgment to make decisions on: commodity price support loans and payments; conservation programs; incentive indemnity and disaster payments for some commodities; emergency programs and payment eligibility. FSA committees operate within official regulations designed to carry out federal laws."

NASCOE President Stroup declared, "NASCOE appreciates the opportunity to work with NAFEC on issues of mutual concern together, strengthening the working relationship of our two organizations, and maintaining an open line of communications."

Key issues addressed in the meetings held at USDA's Washington headquarters were improving outreach and education to farmers, especially socially disadvantaged and minority farmers, recent budget cuts, information technology (IT) challenges, improved selection of minority representation on county FSA committees, and FSA county office closures.

"The challenge of delivering a growing multitude of highly complex programs to a much larger customer base has been, and continues to be, exacerbated with an ever-declining FSA workforce and an ever-shrinking number of county offices," declared Turner, a farmer and rancher from Matador, Texas. "We need to work hard to retain our current workforce, work hard to recruit new talent for our workforce, declare a moratorium on any further county office closures and accelerate the acquisition and deployment of a modern IT platform."

"NAFEC is dedicated to work with NASCOE in assisting Secretary Vilsack, Deputy Secretary Merrigan and Administrator Coppess to ensure that all farmers and ranchers are included in the fair and equitable delivery of FSA programs."

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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>