



governmentattic.org

"Rummaging in the government's attic"

Description of document: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Food and Agriculture Council (NFAC) Minutes of Quarterly Meetings March-December 2014 and Biweekly Meetings January-November, 2014

Requested date: 06-February-2017

Release date: 10-October-2017

Posted date: 14-October-2019

Source of document: FOIA Request
Department of Agriculture
Departmental FOIA Officer
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
South Building
Room 4104
Washington, DC 20250-0706
Email: USDAFOIA@ocio.usda.gov
[USDA FOIA Public Access Website](#)

The governmentattic.org web site ("the site") is a First Amendment free speech web site, and is noncommercial and free to the public. The site and materials made available on the site, such as this file, are for reference only. The governmentattic.org web site and its principals have made every effort to make this information as complete and as accurate as possible, however, there may be mistakes and omissions, both typographical and in content. The governmentattic.org web site and its principals shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused, or alleged to have been caused, directly or indirectly, by the information provided on the governmentattic.org web site or in this file. The public records published on the site were obtained from government agencies using proper legal channels. Each document is identified as to the source. Any concerns about the contents of the site should be directed to the agency originating the document in question. GovernmentAttic.org is not responsible for the contents of documents published on the website.

From: Christian, Spencer - FSA, Washington, DC <Spencer.Christian@wdc.usda.gov>
Date: Tuesday, October 10, 2017
Subject: Control Number 2017-FSA-02146-F
Control Number 2017-FSA-02146-F

This is in response to your Freedom of Information (FOIA) request (copy attached) received via electronic mail and dated February 6, 2017, to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO). The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) received this request from OCIO on February 10, 2017. We assigned your request control number 2017-FSA- 02146-F.

In response to your request, we are releasing one electronic file in PDF format to you in full.

If you have any questions about any of the issues discussed in this letter, you may contact Spencer Christian at 202-720-0544; by email at Spencer.Christian@wdc.usda.gov; or by mail at 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 4070-S, STOP 0506, Washington, DC 20250.

Sincerely,

Gwen Sparks
Deputy Director, Farm Service Agency
Farm Service Agency

Attachments

This electronic message contains information generated by the USDA solely for the intended recipients. Any unauthorized interception of this message or the use or disclosure of the information it contains may violate the law and subject the violator to civil or criminal penalties. If you believe you have received this message in error, please notify the sender and delete the email immediately.

National Food and Agriculture Council

Minutes of Quarterly Meeting Held on March 19, 2014

Attendees from NFAC Member Agencies

- Farm Service Agency: Juan Garcia, Greg Diephouse, Rick Pinkston, Dana Richey
- Natural Resources and Conservation Service: Kirk Hanlin, Dan Lawson
- Rural Development: Doug O'Brien

Attendees from other Offices and Agencies:

- AMS: Anne Alonzo
 - Departmental Management: Gregory Parham, Max Finberg, Chris Nelson
 - FNS: Audrey Rowe
 - GIPSA: Larry Mitchell
 - NASS: Dania Ferguson
 - Office of Tribal Relations: John Lowery
 - RMA: Brandon Willis
-

Agenda Item 1 – Opening Remarks

Mr. Garcia, as the NFAC Chair for 2014, called the meeting to order. He and NFAC member Jason Weller welcomed the attendees:

- It was explained that the NFAC members—Mr. Garcia, Mr. Weller and RD's Patrice Kunesh—meet biweekly and that leasing issues are a primary topic at these meetings.
- The expectation is that quarterly meetings provide an opportunity for USDA agencies and offices to share information, spark ideas, and leverage across agencies.

Agenda Item 2 – Presentation on Secretary Vilsack & GIPSA Initiative

Larry Mitchell described a new initiative being developed at the request of Secretary Vilsack that is intended to expand opportunities for small and mid-sized livestock and poultry operations (PowerPoint presentation attached):

- GIPSA has just 55 resident agents around the country. To reach a greater number of ranchers and companies, the agency is planning a StrikeForce-like approach for this initiative, including:
 - Outreach to Land-Grant Universities and food hubs
 - Brochures and fact sheets
 - Grants
 - AgLearn module, particularly for service center agencies as part of cross-training

- The attached presentation describes some tools and partners, including FSA, NRCS, RMA, AMS, eXtension's Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network, and Land-Grant Colleges and Universities through NIFA
- Discussion about cross-training
 - About twenty thousand USDA employees have participated in cross-training, which is 20% of the Department's workforce, Max Finberg reported
 - The service center agencies are revising their cross-training modules and Mr. Garcia said that they would look into adding this GIPSA module to the portfolio in Autumn 2014, which is when the service center training modules and GIPSA's module would be ready
- Discussion about Farm-to-School

Audrey Rowe asked how schools could be connected to small and mid-sized livestock and poultry processors. She and Mr. Mitchell discussed schools sourcing protein locally and their being a potential emphasis on regional foods and ethnic preferences. Food hubs also represent a similar opportunity. Mr. Mitchell said there had been a recent meeting with a FNS office in the Midwest.

Agenda Item 3 – Space Management, Management Strategies, StrikeForce

- Space management

Gregory Parham described a recently-completed space survey, including the current amount of space used in the Capitol Region, its cost, and projections based on future staffing needs. Other details reported by Dr. Parham:

- The cost of rent and security will no longer be a single budget item but will be disbursed among agencies
- There are approximately ten thousand people in the Capitol Region, with 5,200 currently occupying the South and Yates Buildings. The two buildings could be re-configured to hold ten thousand people if they were placed in smaller spaces, a process that would take about ten years to accomplish. There are studies that demonstrate increased productivity and collaboration in spaces with fewer walls.
- Part of the re-configuration of the Yates Building retired records or e-managed/scanned them, which increased the square footage available for staff placements.
- StrikeForce and management strategies for outreach to field offices and customers

Dr. Parham described the three-prong emphasis on Workforce, Work Place, and Stewardship of Resources in conducting the important effort of outreach to field offices and customers. He had visited offices in West Virginia on March 14, in the company of Ms. Rowe and other senior managers. There were good turnouts of staff; farmers, including beginning farmers; and media.

These field visits are important: To make sure that programs are available in persistent-poverty counties, and visits by senior staff reinforces the significance of this message.

Discussion with other attendees:

- Ms. Rowe reported that feedback from customers includes the need to simplify guidance such as regulations, notices and fact sheets, including the use of acronyms
- Mr. Finberg described these visits as the opportunity to also highlight the continuum of USDA through a suite of tools, such as farm-to-school, cooperatives, and marketing information
- StrikeForce accomplishments since its inception in FY11, reported by Mr. Finberg, include: Partnerships with 400 different organizations, across 8,300 projects, and generating \$9.7 billion in economic activity

Agenda Item 4 – Summer feeding programs

Ms. Rowe described the increasing outreach and participation by children in summer feeding programs as a high priority of the Department and Secretary Vilsack.

In the 2013 summer breakfast and lunch programs, 21 million children received lunch meals and 11 million children received breakfast. Part of the growing participation is due to the increasing number of distribution sites and sponsors, and outreach to families and sponsors. Although sequestration impacted program availability, FNS exceeded its goal by five million meals served in summer 2013.

For summer 2014, FNS plans include:

- Secretary Vilsack has set a goal of serving 10 million more meals than in 2013, with FNS setting a higher stretch goal of 15 million more meals provided
- Among the states targeted are Alabama, Illinois, Missouri, Nevada and Texas; other agencies involved are RD, FSA, NIFA and HUD
- Rural areas will be emphasized because they are the most food insecure. Tribal reservations will also be targeted, with Vista associates participating.
- Schools are often closed in the summer. Thus, churches and other sites are targeted.
- FNS has talking points available that can be distributed to agency headquarters and field offices

Discussion with attendees:

- Greg Diephouse suggested that State Food and Agriculture Committees be tasked with identifying sites which could serve as distribution points for meals.

Note: Since the quarterly meeting, Mr. Diephouse asked FSA's State Executive Directors (SED) to present the FNS materials to their State Food and Agriculture Committees and plan a OneUSDA event to promote the need for sites and sponsors. SEDs were also provided a template to report back on April 18, 2014 and June 6, 2014 to FSA's Office of Outreach about the partnerships formed, specific promotional activities conducted in their state for FNS and the number, if any, of additional feeding sites/sponsors recruited.

- Anne Alonzo suggested that Vets Feed could be connected to and leverage the summer meals programs

- Dr. Parham said that school meals provide an opportunity for farm-to-fork efforts to connect producers to markets. Aggregators want to buy from local, small producers and can transport product from farmers to schools and others buyers. He suggested that AMS accompany him on his next field visit.

Agenda Item 5 – Farm Bill updates

In the brief time available, several agencies provided information about their current Farm Bill efforts.

Meeting adjourned

National Food and Agriculture Council

Minutes of Quarterly Meeting Held on June 19, 2014

Attendees from NFAC Member Agencies

- Farm Service Agency: Juan Garcia, Rick Pinkston, Dana Richey, Mark Rucker
- Natural Resources and Conservation Service: Kirk Hanlin, Dan Lawson, Dianne Guidry
- Rural Development: Patrice Kunesh, Edna Primrose, Bobby Goode, Janie Dunning, Tom Hannah

Attendees from other Offices and Agencies:

- AMS: Rex Barnes
 - ARS: Colette Wood
 - Departmental Management: Gregory Parham, Max Finberg, Chris Nelson, Abeni Ogun, Jamie Edmunds
 - FS: Dave Atkins
 - GIPSA: Candice Harvey
 - NIFA: Bill Hoffman, Tim Grosser
 - Office of Tribal Relations: John Lowery
 - RMA: Michael Alston
-

Agenda Item 1 – Opening Remarks

Mr. Garcia, as the NFAC Chair for 2014, called the meeting to order. He and NFAC member Patrice Kunesh welcomed the attendees:

- It was explained that the NFAC members—Mr. Garcia, Ms. Kunesh, and NRCS’s Jason Weller—meet biweekly to discuss a range of topics, with field office leasing issues as a primary topic.
- The expectation is that quarterly meetings provide an opportunity for USDA agencies and offices to share information, spark ideas, and leverage across agencies.

Agenda Item 2 – Center of Excellence for Leasing

Dr. Parham described the number of past, current and future holdover leases, objectives to reduce the number of holdover leases, provide governance, and equitably manage leasing workloads among regions and staff. This included:

- By calendar year end 2014, eliminate 95% of holdover leases. There are 754 holdover leases as of June 19, reduced from over one thousand. An additional 1,054 leases expire by calendar year end 2016.
- In 2014-2015, equalize workload across months in the calendar year
- Governance Board has decision making authority and data integrity oversight

- Service Center Agencies are the current focus but efforts will be expanded to include all agencies with field offices
- Use of broker services to provide assistance is being considered. A sense of the cost of using contractors is expected in August 2014.
- Leasing tools are being developed to provide consistency
- Workload should be distributed equitably across regions and RPLO staff. A handout (attached) depicts the current distribution of leases across regions. Intend to have RPLO staff working on property issues on a full-time basis rather than on a collateral-duty basis.

In talking with stakeholders about space-management issues, it is important to emphasize that office closures does not equate to diminished services but enhanced service delivery as USDA improves efficiency and effectiveness of systems and processes.

Lastly, the 2015 House and Senate Budget markup closes the USDA's central rent account and returns budget responsibility to individual USDA agencies.

Agenda Item 3 – FSIS Use of Field Office Space Held by Other Agencies

Ms. Ogun and Mr. Nelson described the need FSIS field staffs have to periodically share space with agencies which have office space available, called “touchdown locations.” This included:

FSIS is conducting a survey of its requirements, including locations, frequency/days/hours of visits, and IT equipment access needed. The survey is expected to be completed by July 18, 2014. FSIS is also developing a MOU that it will share with agencies.

There is an urgent need by FSIS to share space in Columbus, NE and the agency is planning a pilot in the Dallas, TX area.

A handout (attached) summarizes this initiative.

Note: Since the June 19 quarterly meeting, NRCS and FSIS are developing an MOU for FSIS to share space at the Columbus, NE service center occupied by NRCS and FSA. NRCS is the lead leasing agency for this space.

Agenda Item 4 – Activities of the Office of Tribal Relations

Mr. Lowery provided a walk-through of his handouts (attached):

- Council for Native American Farming and Ranching – Overview
- Letter to Secretary Vilsack from Council chairman Mark Wadsworth containing recommendations to reduce barriers to participation by Native Americans in USDA programs

Mr. Lowery said he is following-up with individual agencies about how they can help to fulfill the recommendations contained in the letter to Secretary Vilsack from the Council. In addition to implementation of programs by agencies, their support of the Office of Tribal Relations is important. For example, their travel budget is provided by funding from agencies and not the Department.

Mr. Garcia added that all agencies are impacted by Native American issues because ninety-nine percent of them live in rural areas.

Agenda Item 5 – Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program

Mr. Grosser provided details about the Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program (FRTEP), including its scope and sample projects:

- Created 22 years ago with the goal of placing cooperative extension in Indian Country and implementing USDA programs
- \$3 million annual grant budget
- 1862 schools apply to receive grants
- 76 of more than 500 recognized Native American tribes participate
- To leverage the modest FRTEP grant awards, pooling resources are 1862 schools, NGOs, USDA and other Federal agencies, and State governments
- There is a broad range of activities funded by the grants, including those related to STEM, agricultural, youth, social, support for women and new farmers, waste disposal, weed control, loans, and economic analysis

A description of FRTEP-funded activities was provided to the White House for President Obama's forthcoming trip to North Dakota this month.

Meeting adjourned

National Food and Agriculture Council

Minutes of Quarterly Meeting Held on September 25, 2014

Attendees

- Agricultural Marketing Service: Rex Barnes
 - Agricultural Research Service: Colette Wood
 - Departmental Management: Max Finberg, Chris Nelson, Jacqueline Davis-Slay
 - Economic Research Service: Robert Gibbs
 - Farm Service Agency: Val Dolcini, Greg Diephouse, Latrice Hill, Linda Treese, Rick Pinkston, Bill Cobb, Dana Richey
 - Food Safety Inspection Service: Abeni Ogun, Ronald James
 - Foreign Agricultural Service: Patrick Kerrigan
 - Forest Service: Kim Christensen
 - National Agricultural Statistics Service: Greg Preston
 - Natural Resources and Conservation Service: Gayle Barry, Dianne Guidry, Dan Lawson, Louis Aspey, Astor Boozer, Jennifer Dubendorf, James Tillman
 - Office of Inspector General: Gil Harden
 - Risk Management Agency: Brandon Willis
 - Rural Development: Patrice Kunesh, Edna Primrose, Michael Matthews, Derrick Allen, Dominique Young, Whinlesha Jeter
-

Agenda Item 1 – Agency Updates

FSA's Administrator Val Dolcini, as the NFAC Chair, called the meeting to order. He welcomed the attendees and invited all agencies to provide any updates:

- DUS Patrice Kunesh/RD: Rural Development is gearing-up to take over the chair of NFAC in CY 2015.
- Deputy Chief for Management Gayle Barry/NRCS: Receipt for Service, as required by the 2014 Farm Bill, will be implemented soon. Second, NRCS is forming a team to develop recommendations for NFAC concerning handling underutilized space.
- Mr. Dolcini: The agency continues to have a significant focus on Farm Bill implementation. The Secretary is scheduled to announce the rollout of ARC/PLC today.

Agenda Item 2 – Space Leasing Challenges

Chris Nelson/DM, Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Administration, described that USDA spends approximately \$1 billion/annually on leasing, security and operations costs. Sequestration is ongoing. The goal is to be cost efficient and meet customer service needs. Initiatives underway:

- Improve space utilization, including a pilot in Minnesota

- Center of Excellence for Leasing has been established to address holdover leases among other things.
- In 2015, the proposed budget distributes funds in the central rents accounts to agencies. Agencies should start planning now for this turnover to them.

Today, focus of discussion is USDA's partnership with GSA. GSA is no longer inclined to provide blanket approvals. USDA is creating a framework for managing the leasing delegation it receives from GSA and is scheduling a meeting to discuss its partnership with GSA.

Examples of two space requests that face obstacles:

- St. Albans, VT: GSA would like FSA and NRCS to relocate this office to a Federal Building. The agencies believe being a Federal Building is a challenge to providing optimal customer service.
- Puerto Rico: The local office is asking that its square footage be increased, which is counter to the Secretary's Blueprint.

To help Departmental Management prepare for this upcoming meeting with GSA, Mr. Nelson asked the agency representatives what their needs are and what their experiences working with GSA have been:

- Mr. Dolcini/FSA: Relationship has been uneven. GSA does not understand rural space needs and the kinds of services we provide. From his experience in California as State Executive Director, it is a matter of educating them about local needs. Perhaps there could be a joint communique from Assistant Secretary Gregory Parham and NFAC, or other informal conversations with GSA. Decisions by GSA need to reflect the nuanced needs of USDA agencies.
- Ms. Kunesh/RD: The 1010 reorganization and Congressional notification processes can be challenging. A holistic approach to the challenges is needed.
- Ms. Barry/NRCS: Where agencies do not have direct customer interaction, it may be possible to be more accommodating towards GSA.
- Greg Preston/NASS: The experience of NASS in working with GSA has been spotty: Chicago was good, Atlanta less so, and in Texas space has not been found to meet the need.
- Rex Barnes/AMS: There has been commute burdens placed on employees. GSA is placing staff at downtown locations rather than on the outskirts of town where customers are largely based.

Agenda Item 3 – Wildfires status, impact and management efforts

Kim Christensen, Deputy Director of Fire Operations, Forest Service, and based in Boise Idaho, described the impact of fires on the public, land and Forest Service during this fire season.

Fire season activity:

- East of Mississippi River, the weather has been cooler with predictably less activity.
- In western states, only the Pacific Northwest and northern California experienced an above normal fire season, both driven by a combination of extended drought conditions, dry fuels and lightning and wind events. Other States experienced normal to below normal levels of activity.
- California's protracted drought may cause more fire activity in both southern and northern parts of the State. Over the long term, the amount of moisture needed to reverse drought conditions is not expected.
- 2014 to-date:
 - 40,404 fires have occurred, which is 67% of the ten-year average
 - 3,036,493 acres have been burned, which is 46% of the ten-year average

Funding: Currently, the Forest Service's budget is adequate. A fire transfer—transferring funds from other USDA agencies—is not expected to be necessary.

Safety: The fire season this year has been relatively safe. While there have been no Forest Service personnel fatalities, some have been seriously injured and there have been fatalities experienced by local and State partners during fire suppression efforts.

Property damage: The value of property damaged by fire this season has not been extraordinarily high but it has generally been increasing over the past 10-15 years.

After Ms. Christensen's presentation, Mr. Dolcini noted that NRCS's DUS Ann Mills may speak about her agency's efforts on drought resiliency at a future NFAC meeting.

Agenda Item 4 – StrikeForce update

Max Finberg, National Coordinator of StrikeForce, provided an update about the activities and progress of StrikeForce efforts:

- Chair of StrikeForce rotates from FSA to RD in 2015.
- The service center agencies (FSA, NRCS, RD) have provided a foundation for the efforts of StrikeForce, and now it is branching out beyond these three agencies.
- StrikeForce is 1-1/2 years old and is operating in 770 counties, parishes and boroughs within twenty States, which have poverty rates of twenty percent and higher.
- \$14.8 billion has been invested by USDA across 116 thousand projects.
- Success achieved through outreach and coordination, not new funding
 - CY 2014 to-date 5,100 jobs have been created or retained

- FY2013 to-date
 - FSA loans have increased by 214%
 - RD loans and grants have increased by 14%, having started from a higher base
 - NRCS applications have increased
- Upcoming activities:
 - Brandon Willis/RMA, Anne Alonzo/AMS, and Sonny Ramaswamy will be visiting StrikeForce projects as part of USDA outreach efforts to promote collaboration
 - Cooperative agreements with agencies are being finalized, including with RD and NRCS

Agenda Item 5 – Farm Bill’s Receipt for Service

Latrice Hill, Director of Outreach, Field Operations, FSA, provided a walk-through of the attached slides. Additional highlights:

- Nationwide implementation of providing receipts to FSA, NRCS and RD customers begins November 3.
- Prior to the November 3 rollout, letters providing implementation and training guidance to the field from Deputy Secretary Harden and NFAC members will be issued in early October.
- Staff training will be conducted in October.

Agenda Item 6 – Bridges to Opportunity update

Greg Diephouse, Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, FSA, described the purpose of Bridges to opportunity and near-term activities:

Secretary Vilsack has challenged FSA to think about how it can use field offices and staff as a gateway for providing additional customer services. Examples:

- FSA field staff provides customers with direct information and/or educational resources
- FSA field staff provides customers with referrals to local staff at the appropriate agency. It would not be FSA’s role to take applications or provide detailed information, but serve as a conduit to get a customer to someone at the appropriate agency that can help the customer.
- FSA facilitates community events for learning and conversation

The pilot will be in five states, with a few counties in each State targeted. The pilot kick-off is planned for mid-October.

Agenda Item 7 – Fourth Quarter NFAC Meeting

The December 2014 will be the final quarterly meeting hosted by FSA. Rural Development becomes the chair agency on January 1, 2015.

Suggested topics for the fourth quarter meeting are updates on StrikeForce and Bridges to Opportunity.

Meeting adjourned

National Food and Agriculture Council

Minutes of Quarterly Meeting Held on December 18, 2014

Attendees

- Agricultural Marketing Service: Anne Alonzo
- Departmental Management: Max Finberg, Chris Nelson
- Farm Service Agency: Val Dolcini, Greg Diephouse, Rick Pinkston, Dana Richey, Linda Cronin
- Foreign Agriculture Service: Janet Nuzum
- Forest Service: Andrea Bedell-Loucks
- National Agricultural Statistics Service: Greg Preston
- Natural Resources and Conservation Service: Dan Lawson, Jennifer Dubendorf, James Tillman,
- Office of Inspector General: Gil Harden
- Office of the Ombudsperson: Joanne Dea
- Risk Management Agency: Michael Alston
- Rural Development: Patrice Kunesh, Edna Primrose, Michael Matthews, Ed Duval, Sharon Randolph, Whinlesha Jeter, Katherine Ferguson, Vernita Dore

Attachments

- Rural Development: Regionalization Initiative Overview Presentation
 - Office of the Ombudsperson: Role and contact information
-

Agenda Item 1 – Transition of NFAC Chair from FSA to RD

FSA's Administrator Val Dolcini described some of NFAC's accomplishments during 2014, including establishing systems and protocols and reinforcing cross-cutting cooperation. On January 1, Rural Development takes the chair of NFAC and becomes the lead agency over StrikeForce.

RD's Deputy Under Secretary for Operations and Management Patrice Kunesh described some goals for 2015, including outreach and how agencies work on leasing issues and the Center of Excellence for Leasing. She invited suggestions about goals and issues that NFAC should address in the coming year.

Agenda Item 2 – Field Offices, Leasing

Discussion of space needs in the field and leasing protocols:

- Chris Nelson described that Departmental Management (DM) is working with GSA on their understanding how programmatic needs influences USDA's space requirements, as well as covering with them strategic sourcing and fleet management. He is discussing with OGC how a delegation of authority would work to expand cooperation, which would be accomplished via a Secretary's memorandum.
- The Omnibus Bill's language concerning requirements when an office action impacts five or more employees was discussed; for FSA, the trigger is two or more employees being impacted. It may be open to various interpretations. DM will be discussing with OGC and Office of

Congressional Relations OCR) whether the current process needs to change as a result of the Omnibus Bill.

- The 1010 directive is undergoing a revision. A draft will be shared with agencies for their comments.
- Agencies described their efforts to streamline their field-office footprint:
 - RMA: Streamlining is underway.
 - RD: Working through the existing 1010 and OCR processes can be challenging. RD has about twenty offices it wants to close but is experiencing delays caused by internal Departmental processes, not by Congress. DUS Kunesh requested further discussion with Mr. Nelson concerning the requirements in the Omnibus Bill.
 - NASS: It has reduced its number of offices from 46 to twelve regional offices. The California office is collocated with the State Food and Agriculture Office.
 - FS: For several years, they have been working with the Department of Interior to collocate.
- FAS currently has no offices outside of Washington, D.C. to cover domestic outreach and issues but is considering different options to establish a domestic footprint, including creating an Office of Outreach and assigning staff to cover a portfolio of States on a TDY basis.

Action Items:

1. DM to discuss with agencies changes to office closures and consolidations processes resulting from discussions with OGC and OCR about Omnibus Bill.
2. DM to provide agencies a draft of the revised 1010 directive for comment.
3. NFAC to set a meeting for agencies to discuss the Service First agreement and how they may use this mechanism to streamline their office and resource sharing needs.
4. RMA is experiencing space constraints. It requests to be included in SFAC discussions and decision making concerning space/leasing.

Agenda Item 3 – RD’s Regionalization Effort

Described by Edna Primrose, on October 1 RD launched a regional approach to managing human resources and real estate appraisal functions. This initiative was born out of a commitment to Blueprint goals and a necessity due to budget reductions.

A working group was formed to create four models—one in each region—and then create a pilot to narrow to one model. The initiative has had robust employee engagement and ownership at the State level. It has improved National and State coordination. In several months, an assessment will be done to determine lessons learned, and then expand regionalization to other operations areas.

Ed Duval gave a system demonstration of the site used to manage regionalization.

Ms. Kunesh said that regionalization is transforming the way that RD does business by streamlining processes and automating tracking. Challenges exist in managing workflow and supervisor oversight but expansion is being planned.

Action Item:

Mr. Dolcini asked that the first quarter 2015 meeting include in the agenda Greg Diephouse giving an overview of FSA’s regionalization effort.

Agenda Item 4 –Farm Bill Updates by All Agencies

- FSA: Receipt for Service (RFS) was launched on December 1 by NRCS, RD and FSA. Thanks to NRCS, it is an automated process. December 1-18, 75 thousand receipts were issued. The procedure is to always issue a receipt, whereas previously it was issued only at the customer's request. Phase I was to have the Service Center agencies implement RFS. Phase II is to have other USDA agencies look at implementation requirements in 2015.

Mr. Dolcini gave an overview of the programs implemented by FSA in 2014 and those that will be implemented in 2015, including the 30th anniversary of FSA's Conservation Reserve Program. Also, more farm loan officers will be hired.

- RD: Katharine Ferguson described that the Rural Energy for America Program's (REAP) Final Rule was published in December and the Notice for Funds Availability will be released in early February. This is a very high priority program for RD that provides cost-share assistance for energy efficiency improvements for farmers and small business owners. Additionally, RD is working to ensure the Value Added Producer Grant program is up and running under new regulations as soon as possible, with a goal of making the application window available before planting season. Broadband regulations are also expected to be implemented soon.
- NRCS: For the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, intend to announce grants in January with 1-2 projects per State. Administrative streamlining is a priority, including:
 - Shared services with FS for human resources, IT, safety, and other efforts.
 - Conservation planning automation to expedite work with farmers and ranchers.
 - Managing excess field office space resulting from office closures, office consolidations, or FTE reductions.
- AMS: There are grants for farmers markets. There are currently twenty-two Checkoff Programs. Other agricultural industries/sectors are expected to submit a request for a Checkoff Program.
- NASS: The Omnibus Bill was neutral for NASS. Travel caps set in the Farm Bill are having a negative impact on program delivery.
Action Item: At a recent conference attended by Mr. Dolcini, Native Americans in Alaska attending the conference expressed an interest in NASS's work. NASS is to follow-up with Mr. Dolcini directly about this inquiry.
- FS: Concerning fostering forest resiliency, the Good Neighbor Program is expanding with other agencies.
- RMA: The Federal Crop Insurance Program is expanding. The Farm Bill allowed for the expansion of Whole Farm Insurance. Conservation Compliance in RMA has brought RMA in the fold with NRCS and FSA.
- DM: Concerning the budget, the USDA central rent account has gone away. Agencies are reflecting in their individual budgets this expense.
Action Item: Due to OBPA for Congress in mid-late January are organizational charts at the sub-division level.

Agenda Item 5 – Role of Ombudsperson

Joanne Dea described the role of the Office of the Ombudsperson, which will open in January - February 2015. She is not taking phone calls or visitors at this time. See attachment for specific details and contact information. A summary of highlights:

- The Office of the Ombudsperson (Office) helps minority/socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers raise shared concerns on access to USDA programs. Already, USDA has done a lot in this area, but the Office will work on issues from another vantage point. The purpose of the Office is not to solve issues on an individual case-by-case basis but to assist customers and all perspectives be heard and help identify the core issues of concern.
- The Office seeks to raise shared issues and concerns to USDA employees and senior leaders as early as possible and to apply fair processes and fair administration.
- Ms. Dea looks forward to working collaboratively with agencies and is available to meet with each of them.

Agenda Item 6 – StrikeForce Update

Max Finberg thanked field agencies for their leadership and support and provided an update about the activities and progress of StrikeForce efforts:

- StrikeForce has met the goals that Secretary Vilsack set for it.
- Non-field based agencies are being brought in to implement StrikeForce.
- Among StrikeForce accomplishments:
 - 7,500 jobs have been created or retained
 - \$6.5 billion has been invested through programs of field-based agencies; for example, loans have increased by 130%
 - RD and NRCS have created a number of cooperative agreements
 - RMA has one grant program and has made sure it was put under StrikeForce
 - AMS conducted a certification webinar for companies to grow their business
- Project example:

Ute Mountain Farm and Ranch Enterprise, located in Colorado, received a RD producer grant to grind the corn it grows into corn meal, which has created jobs. The company has also become a supplier of corn meal to another company making tortilla chips. This project has used a full range of USDA services, including conservation and marketing.

Agenda Item 7 – Bridges to Opportunity Initiative Update

Due to time constraints, the update will be given by FSA at a future quarterly meeting.

Meeting adjourned

National Food and Agriculture Council

Minutes of Bi-Weekly Meeting Held on January 16, 2014

Attendees from NFAC Member Agencies

Farm Service Agency: Juan Garcia, Greg Diephouse, Rick Pinkston, Dana Richey
Natural Resources and Conservation Service: Jason Weller, Dan Lawson
Rural Development: Patrice Kunesh, Janie Dunning

Additional Attendees for Discussion of GSA Leasing Guidance and USDA Center of Excellence for Leasing – These minutes begin on page xx

Departmental Management: Gregory Parham, Malcolm Shorter, Chris Nelson

Minutes

Juan Garcia, Chair of NFAC for calendar year 2014 called the meeting to order.

Agenda Item 1 – Introductions and Minutes

- a. Introductions were made.
- b. Mr. Garcia said that minutes of each NFAC meeting will be taken, distributed for correction via email and then approved at the next bi-weekly meeting. Ms. Richey will take the minutes.

Agenda Item 2 – Transitioning Chair from NRCS to FSA

Mr. Garcia described that each NFAC member had received a copy of the letter documenting the transfer of the chair from Mr. Weller to Mr. Garcia. FSA has also transmitted this letter to its field offices with instructions to distribute the letter to other agencies.

Agenda Item 3 – Congressional Notifications and Quality of Decision Making by SFAC & NFAC

- a. Process for Congressional notifications

Ann Wright was unable to attend today's meeting but is scheduled to attend the next NFAC meeting on January 30.

There was discussion by attendees about the process to notify Congressional members in the affected State and county. In particular, discussion is needed with the Office of Congressional Relations about:

- How it determines if a Congressional notification is needed
- When during the SFAC and NFAC analyses and review processes notifications should be given
- The 30-day period of response by Congressional officials and how it is managed
- Congressional interest in bundling office changes rather than one-off changes

- OCR's process being timely because the current or future lease of a field office may have a near-term deadline

These issues will be discussed with Ms. Wright and the process will then be documented for agencies and OCR to follow.

b. SFAC & NFAC decision making and 1010 process

Attendees discussed that office action packages from States do not follow a consistent checklist concerning the documents and items to be included. To improve the quality, consistency, and efficiency of decision making at the field and NFAC levels, the members agreed that a single checklist that will provide a template for agencies' field offices to follow is needed.

Action Item: A sub-group will be formed to review the various checklists being used and propose to the NFAC one version to be used by all agencies' field offices. The sub- group will be composed of Ms. Richey, Mr. Lawson, Ms. Dunning, and Mr. Pinkston.

c. 1010 process

Some office actions involve the 1010 process for organizational changes and may require approval by the Assistant Secretary for Administration. The office actions and 1010 process may be duplicative and offer the opportunity to synchronize and streamline processes. It was thought that Dr. Parham is assessing the 1010 process for office closures and the potential to bundle Congressional notifications on field office changes. [See pages 4-5 of discussion with Dr. Parham for more about the 1010 process.]

NRCS is trying to tie the office action and 1010 processes together.

Agenda Item 4 – Pending Field Office Changes

- a. The members concurred that the list of CY 2013 office actions would be closed out except for the three pending actions, which would be transferred to a CY2014 spreadsheet for tracking.
- b. Remaining from CY 2013 are three SFAC requests, which concern Puerto Rico, Georgia, and Utah. The status of each request is described as Congressional "notification letter being processed (12/5/13)" by OCR.

Action Item: Ms. Richey is to contact OCR's David Howard to get an updated status of each request. On January 16, she left a voice mail message for him and sent him an email with the CY 2013 office actions list attached. Members will be advised of OCR's response when it is received.

Note that Mr. Howard is expected to attend the January 30 NFAC meeting with Ms. Wright.

c. Request to De-collocate a RD Oregon State Office (dated January 15, 2014)

Members reviewed and discussed the request submitted. Approval was given by each member pending receipt of a complete package.

Action Item: Ms. Richey is to follow-up with Leslie McBroom/RD to obtain a complete request package. She is also to provide Ms. Richey an email addressing three questions:

impact of change on employees, impact of change on customers, and impact of commute on employees and customers. This email will be forwarded by Ms. Richey to OCR with a request to determine if Congressional notification by OCR is warranted. (Note that the January 15 request describes Congressional notifications made by the State office.)

Update: Ms. McBroom is due to receive the SFAC's package the week of January 20 and will forward it to Ms. Richey.

Agenda Item 5: Interest of Chris Nelson/Departmental Management about a Space Management Project

This item was not discussed.

Agenda Item 6: NFAC Handbook

FSA is conducting a general review of the Handbook. It will provide the proposed modifications to the NFAC Council for approval. NRCS and RD are welcome to provide their comments.

Agenda Item 7: StrikeForce

The NFAC members discussed SFACs including StrikeForce in their meetings.

Agenda Item 8: Quarterly Meeting

The next quarterly meeting will be planned for February. The members acknowledged that recent quarterly meetings have not been well attended by other agencies and would look for ways to broaden participation. Mr. Garcia said that he had advised administrators at another USDA interagency meeting held the week of January 9 that the NFAC quarterly meeting would be held soon and encouraged their attending.

Action Item: Possible agenda items and dates for the meeting will be solicited by Ms. Richey.

Agenda Item: Other Business – Cross-Training for FSA, NRCS and RD Field Staffs

Earlier efforts at cross-training have been too time consuming for participants. Longer and more detailed training is appropriate for new employees within the agency developing the curriculum but not for other agencies' staff. NRCS is working now on developing the training content and it will be a more reasonable length of time. FSA will include new programs that are identified in the pending 2014 Farm Bill, and will undertake its curriculum analysis and development after the status of the Farm Bill is decided.

Cross-training will be mandatory and conducted in AgLearn.

Action Item: The members will discuss within their respective agency the potential curricula, with the goal of starting the cross-training by the end of 2014.

Extra Agenda Item: Discussion with Dr. Parham, Mr. Shorter, and Mr. Nelson about USDA's Agreement with GSA on Rented Space and Payments

Referring to the handout (attached) provided by Dr. Parham, he described a meeting with GSA's administrator held on January 15 and raised issues about how to proceed with addressing space challenges:

- Despite USDA experiencing a decline of 12% in staff years over the last decade, its rental obligations have not. (60% of space is owned by USDA, 40% is rented directly by USDA or through GSA.)
- GSA has asked that USDA provide it a leasing plan for 2015 and future years. Dr. Parham asked for NFAC's support of this effort.
- This issue presents both challenges and opportunities, such as:
 - USDA has an effort underway to develop a Center of Excellence for Leasing (COE). Is the COE best positioned to manage this issue? Should the COE be located within the USDA or apart from it and administered by a different organization?
 - Explore an exchange for services. If USDA has property it no longer needs, it may provide an opportunity to exchange the building or land for services needed elsewhere in the country that we do not have the funds to pay for. The availability of the FBI's building in Washington, D.C. is an example of this. A second example is that the Agricultural Research Service has campuses and old buildings that could be used for an exchange.
 - The Forest Service has closed three offices in Rosslyn and moved the staff to the Yates Building, which has resulted in a \$4.5 million annual savings.
 - The South Building has one million square foot of workable space and a capacity to hold 8-9 thousand people, although it is occupied by only 4.6-4.7 thousand people currently. The South Building needs upgrades and investments, with climate control mentioned as an example.
 - This issue is identified among the 42 White Board items of Secretary Vilsack and is a high priority for the Administrative Business Council in 2014.
 - Each USDA agency will have to develop a plan to reduce by approximately 25% its number of offices; for some agencies more office closures is appropriate, for others it will be less.

Mr. Shorter said there is concern that if GSA does not improve its leasing efficiency, GSA could withdraw the rental authority it has delegated to USDA.

Discussion with NFAC attendees:

- Mr. Garcia: FSA, NRCS and RD have a large space footprint. To Dr. Parham, he asked what is suggested. Dr. Parham answered that the passback is expected in approximately one week. OMB could request USDA trim its footprint in 2014-2015.
- Mr. Garcia: Congress always gives direction about how to close an office. It addressed this in the 2008 Farm Bill and there is an amendment in the pending 2014 Farm Bill about this.
- Mr. Diephouse: Downsizing leases provides an opportunity due to reduced FTEs.
- Mr. Weller said that NRCS is interested in the exchange for services concept and was told that the point of contact for this is Paul Walden.
- Mr. Garcia: He understands GSA's concern on the leasing issue but GSA has also imposed new standards, which FSA is retraining its staff to implement. Dr. Parham responded that GSA acknowledges that it needs to provide more training.
- Ms. Kunesh: RD wants to be aggressive in managing its facilities and has targeted 66 offices for closing in the next three years. There are some obstacles, including burdensome processes such as the 1010 process that can delay implementation. Dr. Parham responded that some agencies manage the 1010 process more efficiently than others, and he is trying to determine the differences.

- Dr. Parham said that the three agencies had made huge progress in managing its field space but that this story has not been told.

The NFAC members decided to have a brief update on the status of the COE for Leasing at the next meeting on January 30. (Note: FSA Deputy Administrator for Management Mark Rucker will provide this briefing.)

Extra Agenda Item: Discussion with Dr. Parham about Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

Dr. Parham said:

- Secretary Vilsack wants to improve the survey scoring results of USDA. Discussions are being held with the survey implementer, Partnership for Public Service, about how USDA can accomplish this.
- Recently, he visited the RD office in Richmond, Virginia. Dr. Parham discussed the survey with those employees. He conveyed to them that field staff should know that people at headquarters understand some of the issues faced at the local level and are committed to engaging with them. He is the champion for this.

The meeting adjourned at 10:00am.

National Food and Agriculture Council

Minutes of Bi-Weekly Meeting Held on January 30, 2014

Attendees from NFAC Member Agencies

- Farm Service Agency: Juan Garcia, Candy Thompson, Dana Richey, Linda Treese, Rick Pinkston, Mark Rucker, Ezekiel Dennison, Chris Finley, Marsha Pruitt, Matthew Leddy, Patrick Spalding
 - Natural Resources and Conservation Service: Jason Weller, Dan Lawson, Ron White, Dianne Guidry, Gayle Norman Barry
 - Rural Development: Katharine Ferguson, Edna Primrose, Sharon Randolph
-

Minutes

Agenda Item 1 – Introductions and Minutes

- a. Mr. Garcia called the meeting to order and introductions were made.
- b. Minutes of the January 16 meeting were approved.

Agenda Item 2 – Center of Excellence for Leasing (COE)

Each handout referred to in these minutes is listed below and is attached.

- a. COE USDA Service Center Agencies (SCA) / Real Property Leasing Program Plan, draft dated January 27, 2014, distributed by FSA
- b. USDA NRCS Leasing Tiger Team / Overview and Summary of Results Achieved, dated January 29, 2014, distributed by NRCS
- c. USDA Real Property Leasing – COE / A Proposal to Integrate FSA, NRCS, and RD Efforts, dated January 29, 2014, distributed by NRCS

Introductory Remarks by FSA, NRCS and FSA

Mr. Garcia said that he met with Secretary Vilsack on January 28 about leasing issues involving FSA, NRCS, and RD. He made the Secretary aware of NFAC's January 30 meeting on this topic. Secretary Vilsack requested:

- The agencies develop a consensus or he will make the decisions needed
- A concept paper for his consideration within two weeks (due February 11)
- Dr. Parham and his team be involved in the process

Mr. Weller said that NRCS wants to get to a consensus too and has good ideas to put forward. Ms. Primrose agreed with the need for consensus and said that the groundwork has been set for us to achieve it.

Handout: COE USDA SCA / Real Property Leasing Program Plan (Prepared by FSA)

Messrs. Rucker and Dennison provided a walkthrough of this document. Discussion points:

- a. The number of 950 holdover leases described in the plan was calculated in November 2013. Mr. Garcia requested this number be updated and provided to each agency, even though it is a dynamic number.
- b. The FTEs described in the staffing plans would all be warranted and have collateral duties. Each realty specialist and real property leasing officer would have a workload of 40 leases.
- c. The timeline to acquire a non-complex lease is given as three to twelve months. Mr. Garcia asked why there is such a long duration for a non-complex lease. This timeline guidance is based on GSA numbers. Ms. Thompson asked that estimates using USDA experience be provided since this data exists.

Handout: USDA NRCS Leasing Tiger Team / Overview and Summary of Results Achieved (Presented by NRCS)

Mr. Weller described the results achieved by the NRCS Tiger Team since it was established in December 2013: eighteen percent reduction in holdover leases and nearly nine percent reduction in expiring leases.

Handout: USDA Real Property Leasing – COE / A Proposal to Integrate FSA, NRCS, and RD Efforts (Presented by NRCS)

Mr. Weller provided a walkthrough of this document, with some summary comments:

- a. The COE would have a tri-agency matrix organizational structure with employees retained by their home agency but integrated across the COE to provide services across agencies.
- b. Critical success factors include having a well-defined governance structure with effective oversight and rigorous metrics to assess performance.
- c. There could be opportunities for the COE to serve other USDA agencies with leasing needs.
- d. This proposal builds on FSA's workload analysis.

Discussion points:

- a. Mr. Garcia was supportive of the NRCS proposal, noting that employees may wish to stay with their home agency.
- b. Mr. Weller said that NRCS will be undertaking a team-structured transformation similar to FSA's initiative because its current structure is unsustainable. The structure that he has presented for the COE is befitting to this approach by both agencies.

- c. Ms. Thompson, referring to governance of the COE, said that a strong and explicit team charter used on other initiatives has been successful. It can be specific about roles, functions and responsibilities, and is useful in managing expectations. Mr. Weller added that common policies, performance measures and standard operating procedures will be critical.
- d. The Office of Procurement and Property Management will have a role that is formalized in the charter.

Concurrence

Mr. Garcia, Mr. Weller and Ms. Ferguson gave concurrence to a tri-agency matrix structure for the COE and that governance would be the responsibility of the NFAC.

Next Steps

Representatives from each agency will jointly develop a COE concept paper. A tri-agency briefing will be planned for on/about February 5.

Final Remarks and Adjournment

Mr. Garcia said that a solid concept paper is needed, which Secretary Vilsack can present to GSA. If GSA revokes USDA's leasing authority, the alternative arrangement will be an expensive cost to USDA.

The meeting adjourned.

National Food and Agriculture Council

Minutes of Bi-Weekly Meeting Held on February 27, 2014

Attendees from NFAC Member Agencies

- Farm Service Agency: Juan Garcia, Mark Rucker, Ezekiel Dennison, Rick Pinkston, Dana Richey
- Natural Resources and Conservation Service: Jason Weller, Dan Lawson, Dianne Guidry
- Rural Development: Patrice Kunesh, Vicki Walker

Other Attendees: Acting Assistant for Congressional Relations Ann Wright

Minutes

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of January 30, 2014 Meeting

After agreement on one edit, the minutes of the January 30 meeting were approved.

Agenda Item 2 – Center of Excellence for Leasing (COE)

A draft of the COE proposal was discussed by the attendees:

- Organizational chart:
 - There was discussion about having a direct relationship with GSA rather than with OPPM. Excluding OPPM is not a viable option because the Department expects OPPM to have a role in the COE. Second, a different option than the one presented in the draft proposal could jeopardize the Department's delegated leasing authority from GSA. OPPM's role in the COE does not mean that SCAs are relinquishing their role in managing their leases and personnel but the roles of OPPM vis-à-vis the agencies need to be defined.
 - There was agreement by the members to include OPPM Supporting Staff in the organizational chart but delete "(one FTE funded by SCAs)."
- Timeline
 - The timeline for establishing the COE is assertive and doable.
 - Adjustments to the timeline are to be made that describe accomplishments made already (e.g., Tiger Teams' work).
- Staffing
 - Graph of Proposed COE Staffing and Staff to Lease Ratios: Ensure that the fluctuation in the ratio across FY14-FY17 is documented and that this information is placed near the graph.
 - It was asked if there is an industry standard for this kind of ratio. The appropriate ratio for the COE cannot be answered until the complexity of leases is analyzed.
 - Staff was instructed to add information about the number of FTEs being evaluated as offices close or move.

- Proposal was submitted to Secretary Vilsack on February 28, 2014.

Agenda Item 3 – Ann Wright and Clearance of Office Actions through Office of Congressional Relations

- Comments from Ann Wright
 - OCR and OBPA always need to be informed about any office action, whether it is a closure or not.
 - Customer service delivery and employee impact are critical data needed as part of OCR's review. A relocation of an employee, for example, is a significant issue. If there is no impact on employees or delivery of customer services, then notification may be unnecessary.
 - Congress expects thirty days advance notice.
 - Email process used in 2013 between Dan Lawson and Ann Wright in managing OCR's review of requests was successful, and should be used by Dana Richey in 2014.
- Current office actions
 - Oregon State Office of Rural Development: Assistant Secretary Wright gave her approval to proceed with the office move because no Congressional notification is needed. [OBPA's Don Bice has since given his approval.]
 - Georgia, Puerto Rico, Utah: Rural Development is researching the status of notification letters.
- Upcoming office action in Lubbock, Texas: Some employees will be transferred from the FSA Lubbock office to College Station, a distance of approximately 400 miles. These employees provide services to the State office and not to external customers.
- Ms. Kunesh and Mr. Garcia discussed having a future NFAC bi-weekly meeting with OCR and Don Bice of OBPA jointly attending. Dana Richey will arrange this.

The meeting adjourned.

National Food and Agriculture Council

Minutes of Biweekly Meeting Held on May 8, 2014

Attendees

- Farm Service Agency: Juan Garcia, Rick Pinkston, Dana Richey
 - Natural Resources and Conservation Service: Dan Lawson
 - Rural Development: Patrice Kunesh
-

Minutes

Item 1 – Minutes of April 24

Minutes were approved.

Item 2 – Office Action Request: RD Request to Relocate from the Manhattan, KS Service Center

- A. Ms. Kunesh gave a walk-through of the request package. She said that Office of Congressional Affairs has concerns because they have received letters from a representative who describes that some people will be relocating away from Manhattan.
- B. Questions that RD is to provide answers to:
 1. What modifications to the space are needed to make it marketable and who is financially responsible for this?
 2. Who is financially responsible for the expenses of shared space that were heretofore split among three agencies but would be split two ways if the office action proceeds?

Item 3 – Office Action Request: FSA, NRCS and RD offices occupying space at Tuskegee University in Alabama

- A. This office action originated with a SFAC request letter dated May 16, 2011. A second SFAC request letter dated April 29, 2014 was provided.

Request:

 - RD relocate an area office from Lee County (Opelika), vacating a service center shared with FSA
 - NRCS relocate its current office within same city
 - FSA would establish a new program delivery point
- B. Ms. Kunesh explained that the building that the three agencies would occupy has been under construction for several years and will tentatively be ready for occupation in July 2014.

Next steps:

- A. FSA and NRCS will research the background of the requests within their respective agency
- B. Ms. Kunchsh will research the status of the building's construction and when the building is expected to be ready for occupancy

Item 4 – Future office closures and consolidations

There will be an increasing number of office closures and consolidations in the future. Mr. Garcia suggested there be a broader discussion about this among the NFAC members.

The meeting adjourned.

National Food and Agriculture Council

Minutes of Biweekly Meeting Held on July 31, 2014

Attendees

- Farm Service Agency: Juan Garcia, Rick Pinkston, Dana Richey, Patrick Spalding, Mark Rucker, Ezekiel Dennison, Debra Crusoe, Linda Treese, Glen Schafer
 - Natural Resources and Conservation Service: Jason Weller, Gayle Norman Barry, Dan Lawson, Don Baloun, Colleen Oestreich
 - Rural Development: Edna Primrose, Colleen Landkamer
 - Department Management: Chris Nelson
-

Minutes

Item 1 – Minutes of previous meetings

Draft minutes of the June 5 biweekly and June 19 quarterly meetings were distributed for approval by Mr Garcia, Ms. Kunesh, and Mr. Weller. Approval and edits are to be provided electronically to Ms. Richey.

Item 2 – USDA Modern Office Pilot in St. Paul, Minnesota

Documents distributed (attached with these meeting minutes):

- A. “USDA Modern Office Pilot Project” paper was used to guide discussion
- B. “National Engagement Pilot Project Workplace Strategic Brief,” dated January 23, 2014, (embedded on slide 9 in document A).
- C. Letter from Ms. Crusoe, SFAC Chair, to Mr. Dennison dated March 1, 2014

Mr. Nelson described the initiative as an effort to optimize space utilization, reduce costs, and to implement a pilot that can provide best practices. He added that GSA has provided an initial analysis describing various space layouts and this can be used as a reference to discuss concerns, challenges, and next steps. Mr. Rucker said that he has met with his counterparts in NRCS and RD about the project and there will be coordinated communication among them.

A walk through of the USDA Modern Office Pilot Project paper was led by Mr. Dennison.

Discussion by attendees:

Concerns

1. The lease on the St. Paul office expires in 2016. With so little time left on the lease, should this office be used for the pilot?
2. GSA designs do not reflect the organizational structure of each service center agency, but use the Forest Service as a guide.
3. USDA funds for this pilot are limited to \$93K for the architectural design of the St. Paul space, roughly divided among FSA, NRCS and RD. Do the funds come from State or national budget within an agency? State budgets do not have the funds to pay for this. Are

- there additional costs in the future? If this initiative is expanded to other locations, who will pay for these costs?
4. There is an insufficient amount of space allocated. Telework analysis describes 40-45% of staff being out of the office on any given day but the correct figure is closer to 20-25%. Large offices for each agency's leadership are not a concern. Unless the agencies are paperless, the designs of GSA are not feasible; amount of paper used is increasing and not decreasing.
 5. An agency's processes in Washington have to change for States to be able to adapt.
 6. Communication with the local offices has been poor.
 7. Survey conducted by GSA does not reflect what the agencies do. [Survey questions included What do employees do throughout their day, When do they telework, What are their IT needs]
 8. If the goal is to reduce the space footprint of the St. Paul office by 25%, then why not let the State leaders develop a proposal to accomplish this? However it may be implemented, no modifications should hamper the ability of an agency to accomplish its mission.

Next Steps

1. The process to this point has been GSA driven. There is the opportunity to "scrub and refine" to reflect the needs of USDA and individual agencies.
2. A meeting will be held with Minnesota State leaders in the next several weeks to discuss concerns, challenges and opportunities, and what will and will not work. The meeting will address:
 - a. Concerns of State leaders
 - b. That State leaders want to have ownership of this initiative for their office
 - c. How headquarters can support their State leaders
 - d. Duration for planning
3. NFAC members are the decision makers on implementing this initiative.

Item 3 – Office Action: St. Albans, VT (Franklin County) relocation to a Federal Building

Documents distributed (attached with these meeting minutes):

- A. Background materials on the waiver request to GSA
- B. Congressional letter to GSA Administrator, dated July 21, 2014
- C. St. Albans Messenger newspaper article, dated July 25, 2014

Ms. Richey summarized the major points describing why the local FSA and NRCS offices are opposed to relocating to the Federal Building. Rural Development does not occupy space in this office.

In addition to discussion about the St. Albans request, the need for a national approach was considered. It is expected that similar requests will be forthcoming to the NFAC as USDA seeks to reduce its footprint and GSA seeks to find occupants for underutilized Federal Buildings. The agencies do not have the capacity to deal with each request individually and flexibility is needed from GSA because the USDA's ability to meet its mission is a high priority.

Next Steps

- A. It was decided to gather additional information from FSA and NRCS about how their mission will be impeded by moving to the local Federal Building.
- B. Similar data will be gathered for a national analysis.
- C. Deputy Secretary Harden or Assistant Secretary Parham will be briefed on this material for their considering contacting GSA about:
 - A GSA waiver for St. Albans that avoids their relocating to the local Federal building

- Flexibility by GSA when considering other future requests. A Federal building may not always lend itself to USDA meeting its mission, which is a high priority of the Department.

The meeting adjourned.

National Food and Agriculture Council

Minutes of Biweekly Meeting Held on August 28, 2014

Attendees

- Farm Service Agency: Juan Garcia, Rick Pinkston, Dana Richey
 - Natural Resources and Conservation Service: Dan Lawson
 - Rural Development: Michael Mathews, Dominique Young, Eileen Kurtz
-

Minutes

Item 1 – Minutes of July 31 meeting

Draft minutes of the July 31 were distributed for approval. Mr. Garcia gave his approval. NRCS and RD will provide edits and approval electronically to Ms. Richey.

Item 2 – Revisions to SFAC Handbook

- Ms. Richey described the primary changes to the Handbook, distribution process, and the plan to host a VTC for States to discuss policies and procedures.
- A memo documenting NFAC members' approval is being circulated for signature. The signed memo will be included in the Handbook.

Item 3 – Office Actions

- A. Tuskegee University: A memo giving NFAC members' approval is being circulated for signature.
- B. Walker, MN (Cass County):
 - Mr. Lawson provided attendees a request package and described the details required by the Handbook checklist. The office is not shared with FSA or RD. Mr. Garcia signed the approval memo.
 - As a next step, Mr. Lawson will submit a request to OBPA and Congressional Relations about whether Congressional notification by the Secretary is required, with a copy to Ms. Richey.

Item 4 – Unused Space in Field Offices

NRCS is developing a paper concerning how NFAC may want to provide guidance to field offices about planning the lease process when less space is needed. It will present this paper at a future meeting.

Item 5 – Locating Field Offices in Federal Buildings

- A draft paper was distributed that describes service center agencies' need for greater flexibility by GSA when requesting field offices locate in Federal buildings. The paper uses the pending request by GSA that FSA and NRCS relocate their St. Albans, VT (Franklin County) office to a Federal building. Content of the paper is based on the recommendations of Chris Nelson, Departmental Management, made at the July 31 NFAC meeting.
- Agency comments on the draft paper are due no later than September 4. Then a draft of the paper will be provided to Mr. Nelson for comment along with a discussion of next steps, which he earlier indicated could be a conversation with GSA's Administrator by either Deputy Secretary Harden or Assistant Secretary Parham.

Item 6 – FSIS Request to Share Field Office Space with SCAs

A summary document of FSIS's needs for "touchdown" space in the field was distributed:

- Estimated space is needed for 300 employees with most employees needing space for 4-8 hours/week
- If enclosed space is needed for a private meeting this would be arranged in advance
- No equipment or IT connectivity is needed because employees will be entirely mobile
- Begin the initiative in January 2015
- There would be no reimbursement to the SCAs

Based on the discussion by attendees, Ms. Richey called Abeni Ogun/FSIS on August 28 about the following:

- Encouraged Ms. Ogun and Associate Administrator Bill Smith to have a meeting with NFAC in late September or October to discuss the details of their needs
- NFAC would likely wish to start with a pilot of 6+ months to develop procedures and lessons learned, such as FSIS originally proposed for the Dallas area. Ms. Richey asked that a project plan and details involving the SCAs be provided in advance of the Sept/Oct meeting.
- While the initiative would likely start with a pilot, it would be useful to see the list of States and counties where space is needed to determine if the SCAs have space in the vicinity

The meeting adjourned.

National Food and Agriculture Council

Minutes of Biweekly Meeting Held on October 9, 2014

Attendees

- Farm Service Agency: Val Dolcini, Rick Pinkston, Dana Richey, Mark Rucker, Ezekiel Dennison, Patrick Spalding
 - Natural Resources and Conservation Service: Dianne Guidry, Dan Lawson
 - Rural Development: Patrice Kunesh, Michael Mathews, Dominique Young, Whinlesha Jeter, Derrick Allen
 - Departmental Management: Chris Nelson
-

Minutes

Item 1 – Handbook revision

Ms. Richey provided a description of next steps to distribute the update Handbook and hold a VTC for State leaders and their staffs. An agenda and summary of major changes to the Handbook are being prepared and will be sent with the Handbook in a meeting announcement. The VTC is scheduled for October 22, 3-4:00PM ET. NFAC members will be invited to make opening remarks and participate in the presentation and Q&A.

Second, there was discussion about the revised checklist contained in the Handbook, its current requirements and possible future changes.

- If an agency wishes to close or relocate from a current office location it is required to submit to NFAC more detailed financial data, particularly the financial impact on remaining agencies, if any.
- Standardized letters from the three agencies headquarters and State offices to local Congressional delegations should be considered; RD will take up this issue after it assumes the NFAC chair in January 2015. Additional guidelines for coordination and timing by an agency's headquarters with its State offices may also be desirable.

Item 2 – Office Actions

- A. Tuskegee University: Currently, the building is expected to be ready for occupancy on December 1, 2014.
- B. Walker, MN (Cass County): Mr. Lawson reported that the Office of Congressional Relations has advised NRCS that no further Congressional notification of appropriating committees is needed. Mr. Lawson and Ms. Richey are preparing a letter for Mr. Dolcini's signature that advises the State conservationist of the final approval by the NFAC and next steps.

C. Payette, Rupert and St. Anthony, Idaho office closures

Mr. Lawson provided a walk-through of the NRCS request package submitted to the NFAC. The Payette office does not share space with FSA or RD. The Rupert and St. Anthony offices are co-located with FSA. It is believed that NRCS's vacated space reverts to the landlord, with NRCS responsible for expenses to make the space marketable. FSA will assume responsibility for previously shared expenses, including common areas and IT costs. Mr. Dolcini and Ms. Kunesh gave their approval to the request.

Ms. Richey will obtain Mr. Dolcini's signature on the letter from Mr. Weller asking for approval by the NFAC chair. Then, NRCS can proceed with asking Office of Congressional Relations and Office of Budget and Program Analysis whether notification of appropriating committees is needed. If no further notification is needed, a letter from the NFAC chair to the NRCS State conservationist will be prepared. If further notification is required, the letter will be prepared after the notification is given and the 90-day waiting period has ended, assuming no objections from the committees.

NRCS is to provide to Ms. Richey the following information within two weeks for offices co-located with FSA:

- Amount of square footage being vacated by NRCS
- NRCS's portion of IT costs that will shift to FSA
- Number of years remaining on each lease.

Additional general discussion concerning office closures and leasing:

- A tri-agency team has been formed to prepare proposed guidance from NFAC to field offices concerning the lease process when less space is needed, particularly the handling of cost issues on agencies remaining at the location and their obligations to assume costs. The team is conducting a survey of Department and agency literature and will be making recommendations to the NFAC.
- RD has placed a hold on closing additional offices due to issues related to Congressional notifications and the 1010 process.
- Once vacated space reverts to the landlord, USDA has no control over who the next tenant may be.
- As future leasing decisions are being made, remaining agencies should be involved as early as possible so they can assess and reconfigure their needs to reduce costs if possible, and unneeded space can be made marketable.

Item 3 – Locating Field Offices in Federal Buildings

Comments from Mr. Nelson:

- Assistant Secretary Parham will be meeting with GSA's Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service, Norman Dong, to come to some general agreement about locating field offices in Federal buildings and how to work better together. There are times when it makes sense for a field office to be in a Federal building but there are instances when it is less desirable because of programmatic concerns.
- In the case of St. Albans, Vermont, GSA has advised Departmental Management that it will not reverse its original denial of the waiver request from FSA and NRCS. Also, Departmental

Management does not feel that this case is a good example of one to fight GSA. The argument that a USDA escort is needed of visitors in the St. Albans Federal Building is not accurate, which removes the burden on FSA and NRCS to have staff escort 5,000+ visitors annually. Second, there have been complaints about visitors to the current location in tractor trailers or other large vehicles parking illegally or otherwise blocking the view of other drivers and creating a safety hazard; although parking may not be improved at the Federal building location. Finally, detailed cost information of the current location versus the Federal building has not been provided. However, GSA has space in the Federal building that is vacant and is accruing a cost, and this cost will continue if FSA and NRCS do not move into the space.

Concerning discussions and coordination with Vermont's Congressional delegation, Mr. Nelson will contact USDA's Office of Congressional Relations. Mr. Nelson will advise NFAC about the outcome. Mr. Dolcini will discuss developments with the FSA SED, and NRCS will do the same.

Item 6 – FSIS Request to Share Field Office Space with SCAs

FSIS has requested to present to NFAC on October 23 a project plan for a pilot to place FSIS staff at the field offices of FSA, NRCS and RD. For this pilot, it wants to place twelve people at offices in the Dallas and Denver areas.

(Note: Since the October 9 NFAC meeting: Ms. Richey has confirmed that FSIS will present and be available for Q&A on October 23, 8:30-9:00am. FSIS is to provide an advance copy of the project plan no later than October 21. The location of Des Moines, IA has been added to the list of locations for a pilot.)

Item 7 – Future meetings and chair transition

- RD anticipates having someone on-board by December 1 who will be responsible for managing NFAC activities when it takes over the chair position on January 1, 2015.
- The NFAC fourth quarter meeting is tentatively scheduled for December 4, 8:30-9:30am. Ms. Richey will distribute a meeting announcement and draft agenda. She will invite attendees to submit proposed agenda items.

Currently, agenda items are:

- Regionalization of HR and Appraiser Services demonstration by Rural Development
- StrikeForce update
- Bridges to Opportunity update
- USDA agencies and offices propose issues for 2015 that NFAC should consider and discuss in quarterly meetings

The meeting adjourned.

National Food and Agriculture Council

Minutes of Biweekly Meeting Held on November 6, 2014

Attendees

FSA: Val Dolcini, Dana Richey, Jonathan Alboum
NRCS: Dan Lawson
RD: Edna Primrose, Michael Matthews, Sharon Randolph
DM: Chris Nelson
FSIS: Bill Smith, Abeni Ogun

Minutes

I. FSIS Field Office Space Sharing

- A. Walk-through by Bill Smith of FSIS handout describing their office-sharing needs was given. Summary points:
1. FSIS has 274 supervisors in the field, with total of 7,500 total field employees.
 2. Previously, field supervisors commonly had office space at processing plants but companies are phasing this out. Supervisors telework to some extent and typically spend 80% of their time on-the-road; working out of their cars, hotel lobbies, libraries, and the like.
 3. A pilot would comprise touchdown space for twelve supervisors with them having their own phones, laptops or tablets, portable printers, and use of the internet connectivity at the touchdown office. The number of days per week or month and number of hours per day will vary by supervisor.
- B. Discussion among attendees about potential pilot
1. Each supervisor's schedule will be standardized, usually varying only in the case of emergency. She/he will adapt their schedule to the hours that an office is open, with consideration by the host agency(ies) in the case of emergency to accommodate additional hours, such as a food recall. No keys will be provided. FSIS staff do not carry weapons.
 2. Internet connectivity at Service Centers may not be very good. Dana Richey will ask in a survey of pilot site availability about connectivity performance. The pilot conducted at each site will demonstrate the actual performance level.

C. Action Item

Ms. Richey will prepare a survey form for the SFAC overseeing the pilot site locations to complete. The survey will solicit:

- Whether space is available and what type it is (e.g., cubicle, desk in open office, conference room)
- Days/hours the space is available based on the schedule provided by FSIS for each supervisor
- If Wi-Fi is available

II. MIDAS

Jonathan Alboum provided an update of the implementation schedule of Business Partner, set for December 2014 / January 2014, and described the capabilities of the module for producers and staff.

III. St. Albans, Vermont Office Lease for FSA and NRCS

Discussions between all parties involved concerning the office re-location are ongoing.

IV. Receipt for Service

Chris Nelson reported that RFS has a go-live date of December 1. Requirements for FSA, NRCS and RD staff training are being finalized.

V. President's Management Agenda for Customer Service

Mr. Nelson described that this is a Government-wide initiative being led by OMB. A regional pilot is being planned. An initial meeting is set for December 2 in Denver. He will send email to State directors about their attendance.

The meeting adjourned.