



Building Rural America
National Association of Credit Specialists
of the
USDA – Farm Service Agency
MANAGEMENT / PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

THE MANAGEMENT / PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MET AT THE ASTOR CROWNE PLAZA HOTEL IN NEW ORLEANS, LA, ON JUNE 24-26, 2019 TO REVIEW RESOLUTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE MEMBERSHIP.

THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTIONS ARE RECOMMENDED FOR ADOPTION:

Resolution 1

CONCERN: Newly appointed Farm Loan Analysts are currently hired at a GS 9. They are required to complete phase one of the Farm Loan Officer Training program and pass the final test. In many cases, this process extends far beyond the one-year expectation, consuming the time of the trainer and those involved in the management of the FLOTRAK process. By comparison and contrast, Farm Loan Officer Trainees are expected to complete all of phase one of the training, including passing the tests before being promoted to a GS 9.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Adjust the full performance level position description of the GS 9 Loan Analyst to include “Has completed Phase one of the Farm Loan Officer training program.”

Resolution 2

CONCERN: Many NRCS offices have government issued cell phones for use when completing field work. FSA does not have similar phones. The use of these phones would be extremely beneficial to loan officials completing farm visits so personal cell phone numbers are not provided in the event that calls to customer are necessary for schedule changes, etc.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Provide 1 cell phone per FLP duty station for Farm Loan teams to share as related to field duties.

Resolution 3

CONCERN: Currently there is management or leadership training for all sectors of our FSA employees - both GS and CO - with the exception of Farm Loan Officers.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Implement a leadership training program available through application for Farm Loan Officers and Farm Loan Specialists who desire to attain additional leadership skills

Resolution 4

CONCERN: New Farm Loan Program PTs are starting their jobs unable to perform the duties required. Farm Loan Managers and Farm Loan Officers do not have the time nor ability to adequately train new PTs.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: The Creation of a formal Farm Loan Program PT training program similar to the FLOT program via the national Office with set structure, goals, case studies, and mastery requirements.

Resolution 5

CONCERN: The workload analytics reports that had been prepared and provided to the states which converted all the program & activity coding in WEBTA to a digestible format. The basics of this information is a major component of the OPO (Optimal Productive Office) which is the staffing tool currently being used. However, the workload analytics report is no longer being made available. This is a concern as this report provided very digestible information to help the supervisors and managers ensure that the employees were / are coding all their time correctly.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Although the entire report may no longer be needed, at a minimum the portion that provided the overall summary of hours as compared to work units is very beneficial to all the offices. A portion of the data can be obtained currently from OBIEE (hours reported by program/ activity); however, it is not in a format that is digestible as it is the hours reported. Have DAFO bring at least that portion of the workload analytics report to the FLMs, DDs, and CEDs so that we can all better monitor this information.

Resolution 6

CONCERN: Newly appointed District Directors who do not have Loan Approval Authority are immediately enrolled in the Farm Loan Officer Training Program. In many cases, District Directors languish for a significant period of time beyond the timeframe specified in 1 FLP prior to receiving their loan approval authority.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Adjust the performance plan standards in the Supervision Element for a Supervisory District Director to include "Has completed Farm Loan Officer Training Program in accordance 1 FLP Paragraph 25".

Resolution 7

CONCERN: The Vehicle Management Tool is creating some issues in field offices with scheduling vehicles because the local managers cannot see the schedule of the vehicle and who has it reserved. This leads to inefficiencies in trying to schedule a vehicle and having communication regarding the most efficient use of the vehicle, i.e. who will be travelling the furthest, who could most effectively use which vehicle and timing scheduling around vehicles, as well as access to the keys.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Provide local managers who are responsible for the vehicles in the Service Center access to the schedules for the vehicles, as well as an email notification when a vehicle has been scheduled, in order to allow them to more efficiently schedule the vehicles, know when they will or will not be available, and to facilitate access.

THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTIONS ARE RECOMMENDED FOR NON-ADOPTION:

Resolution 8

During the extended furlough FLM's were told that the offices were to be opened for 3 days to process checks and that we had to decide which of my employees to bring back to do this. Then we were told the next day that even if we finished this processing we had to remain open to accept payments and take calls (many of which were from angry and frustrated farmers who weren't worried about making payments, but more worried about when they would get their applications processed). Then on the last day we were told we were going to be brought back full time and they had everyone come in (with less than 24 hours notice) on the 23rd, only to be told we were still waiting for guidance and to not process anything. Then we were told that everyone our supervisors would decide if we could telework but that offices had to be staffed. Then we were told under no circumstances were we allowed to telework.

This whole thing caused a LOT of confusion, frustration, and inter-office resentment between co-workers. If we are all "One USDA" why were FLP workers brought back but FP weren't? Why was it up to the FLM's to have to decide who had to come back without pay and who didn't? Why were we forced to come to work without pay at all when we are not "essential employees".

I understand that our closing put a lot of strain on farmers who rely on our services but going to work isn't free. We had to pay for childcare and gas to come in on those days after not having been paid, not to mention that several people couldn't apply for unemployment or work a temporary job during this time. Back pay does not make up for the stress and does not pay the interest on credit card bills that had to be rolled over to the next month to keep us going.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: I propose that NACS discusses the procedures for a situation like this in the future and looks into the legality of forcing employees back to work without pay when it is not an issue of national security or public health.

EXPLANATION FOR NON-ADOPTON BY THE COMMITTEE: Referred to Legislative Committee

Resolution 9

CONCERN: I would like to submit a proposed change to the rules of temporary employment. Currently employees that have worked with the agency as a temporary and were hired as permanent employees are not allowed to count the temp time toward their retirement. example: My service comp date is 04-09-97 but my retirement date isn't until 6-2-2002 making me loose 5+ years of time. I know the agency has many employees like myself that this has affected. Employees should be given credit for the actual time that they were employed with the agency.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Allow employees the opportunity to buy their temp time so that it can be credited toward their retirement. If employees were allowed to make contributions for the temp time worked it would allow employees to retire with the years that they actually worked for the agency and give them the full credit they deserve.

EXPLANATION FOR NON-ADOPTON BY THE COMMITTEE: Referred to Legislative Committee

Resolution 10

CONCERN: It is getting to be common for FLP offices to only have one PT. This creates a problem when that PT leaves or retires. There is nobody in the office to train the new PT. The FLM/FLOs may or may not be familiar enough with the details of the PT's job to provide good training, and many times the next closest FLP-PT is several counties away.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Create Legislation that provides contract funds to hire retired employees as Technical Service Providers for training purposes

EXPLANATION FOR NON-ADOPTON BY THE COMMITTEE: Referred to Legislative Committee

Resolution 11

CONCERN: Newly Appointed Farm Loan Officer trainees go through a thorough two-year training program prior to becoming Farm Loan Officers. However, their current probation period is one year. This disparity between the length of the probation period and the training period has an impact of the Farm Service Agency holding on to employees that are unable to perform their duties. In many cases, one year is not enough to evaluate one's ability to adequately undertake their duties. Office of Personnel Management rules allow for and the DOD (for instance) has instituted a two-year probation period for newly hired employees.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: Institute a probation period that is commensurate with the duration of the Farm Loan Officer Training Program.

Respectfully submitted by the 2018/2019 Management / Personnel Committee:

John Oosterman, Zone A

Kristina Wilcox, Zone B

Juanita Ballman, Zone C - Chairperson

Chana Thompson, Zone D