



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

**USDA's Cultural Transformation Action Items**

- LEADERSHIP
- RECRUITMENT & RETENTION
- TALENT MANAGEMENT
- EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT
- CUSTOMER FOCUS & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

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# MyUSDA

## A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

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May 2014

### USDA Helps Veterans Return to the Workforce

By Sarah Haymaker

Operation Warfighter is a unique federal internship program that allows recovering service members to begin the transition to the civilian workforce while still on active duty status and undergoing rehabilitation. Administered by the Department of Defense, this program demonstrates to participants that military skills are transferable into civilian employment. In Louisiana, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has benefitted greatly from this program in the person of Staff Sergeant (SSG) Mark Norman.



SSG Norman served honorably in the US Army for over 12 years before suffering a traumatic injury while deployed in Afghanistan. In addition to leading combat patrols and battalion missions there, SSG Norman worked with poppy growers to convert their operations into food and fiber production systems that were profitable as well as sustainable. He assisted five villages in identifying better management practices relative to fertilization and irrigation. He also served as a liaison and built relationships between growers and the US Government.

Upon his return to the United States, SSG Norman was stationed at Fort Polk in Southwest Louisiana to continue his recovery and rehabilitation near family. When SSG Norman began his federal internship through Operation Warfighter (OWF), he sought information about federal agencies that work with local farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners. SSG Norman derived great satisfaction working with Afghani farmers and hoped to find some way to help American farmers in Louisiana as well.

SSG Norman began his internship with the USDA-NRCS in March 2014 in Alexandria, Louisiana. SSG Norman quickly adapted to Agency culture. He learned the primary tasks of a soil conservation technician and developed a passion not only for conservation; but also, for restoration of the declining longleaf pine ecosystem found in Southwest Louisiana. "Mark is eager to learn and prosper as a fellow NRCS'er," said Corby Moore, USDA-NRCS District Conservationist in the DeRidder and Leesville Field Offices (pictured above with SSG Norman).

"Mark has quickly learned the value and importance of restoring this precious and vital ecosystem (longleaf pine) and is providing valuable service to producers in our local agricultural community." Today, SSG Norman has begun the process of being discharged from the US Army. Because of the skills he learned during his Operation Warfighter Internship, he has been offered a full time soil conservation technician position with the USDA-NRCS in Southwest Louisiana.

## Get Ready for Wellness in June!

**By Debra S. Arnold**

In June, USDA will observe the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual National Employee Wellness Month! Providing employees with the tools and support necessary will help to create healthy cultures, improve overall health and well-being while lowering healthcare costs and driving engagement. With these issues and healthcare costs directly impacting the bottom line, National Employee Wellness Month highlights the workplace's role in helping to create healthy employees – and how they can mold a better USDA.

For employees located in the D. C. Metropolitan area, USDA will be hosting a month filled with health conscious activities and events and we encourage Agencies across the country to participate:

June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 'Employee Fitness Day'. The South Building Fitness Center will open its doors to employees for a FREE 'Core' fitness class from 11-11:30 and a FREE 'Zumba' class from 12-12:30 on a first come basis, tours of the facility every hour from 11-2:00, and a healthy smoothie sample (while supplies last). They will also be offering a 'Membership Special' to those who visit during this time – NO processing fee and first month free! A savings of over \$50! (Sponsored by the South Building Fitness Center and the Office of Human Resources Management);

June 6<sup>th</sup>, the USDA Farmers Market opens with fresh produce, entertainment and other goodies. (Sponsored by Agricultural Marketing Service);

June 12<sup>th</sup>, 10-2:00 p.m., 'Annual Health Fair' will be held in the South Building Cafeteria. More than 30 exhibitors, activities, consultants, giveaways and more! (Sponsored by multiple Agencies at USDA and OPEDA);

June 17<sup>th</sup>, 'Stress Free Day'. A FREE Yoga class from 11-11:30 and a FREE guided meditation session from 12-12:30 will be held in the South Building Fitness Center on a first come basis. (Sponsored by the South Building Fitness Center and Farm Service Agency);

June 24<sup>th</sup>, 11-1:00 p.m., 'Healthy Choices Day'. The South Building Cafeteria will have dieticians on-site to help employees choose healthy foods and portions. There will be display tables set-up with FREE healthy snacks, great resources and information, healthy recipes, and a demonstration on the Supertracker! (Sponsored by: I. L. Creations (USDA Food Service Contractor) and Food Nutrition and Consumer Services); and,

June 28<sup>th</sup>, 'Team USDA', will wrap up the month by 'tailgating' at a D.C. United game! (Pending interest). More details forthcoming! (Sponsored by Departmental Management).

For more information on National Employee Wellness Month, or planned events, send emails to [wellness@dm.usda.gov](mailto:wellness@dm.usda.gov). If you are not located in the D.C. Metro area, we encourage you to host similar activities in your area to help promote a healthier USDA workforce and promote National Employee Wellness Month in June. If you already have plans in the works, please share them with us so we can share with others.

## 360 Degree Assessment for All USDA Senior Executive Service Employees

**By Marisol Rodriguez**

Leadership is critical to the success of USDA work. Continual learning, one of the foundational requirements of executive development, involves understanding one's own strengths and areas for improvement, and using that information to plan one's own executive development activities. Co-workers, peers and colleagues provide insightful input needed to develop an effective executive development plan. This is why most effective organizations use 360 degree/multi-rater reviews to provide feedback to help executives grow and improve.

In support of the FY 2014 USDA Cultural Transformation (CT) Action Plan's Leadership action item which states that "All SES personnel will have a 360 degree assessment through FY-14," the USDA Virtual University (VU) and AgLearn have scheduled multiple dates for SESers to receive a 360 degree assessment in order to meet this CT milestone. The USDA 360 degree assessment tool is based on the OPM Leadership Competency Framework.

The results from USDA-delivered assessments are completely confidential, may not be used as part of a performance evaluation, and are only for use by the individual leader for his or her own executive development. For more information about USDA 360 degree assessments, please visit the [Virtual University](#) website.

# Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day

By Debra Arnold

On April 24<sup>th</sup>, the hallways of USDA Headquarters were filled with smiling faces, some adorned with milk mustaches, as we observed National Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day and Earth Day! Strawberry, Chocolate, or Vanilla? The Williams couldn't decide so they opted for all three flavors. Pictured (right) are Patrice Williams, Food Nutrition and Consumer Services with daughter Nora, son Aaron, and Milkshake the Dairy Program Cow from the Agricultural Marketing Service.



Agencies partnered together to bring a spectacular day filled with interactive events, goodies, and special guests for our children to enjoy as they learned first hand what their parents do at USDA. This year's theme was 'Plant a Seed, Grow a Future'. So, of course we put our kids to work planting seeds, grinding wheat, and more! Watch this great video of our [Children at Work and Play at USDA!](#)

Food Nutrition and Consumer Services traveled from the Park Office Center in Alexandria, VA, with a group of children to participate. They started the morning with a warm up and stretches with 'Power Panther' followed by photos with Undersecretary Kevin Concannon (right) in front of the People's Garden.



Charles John and Jeanette LaPradd (left) visit their mothers at work

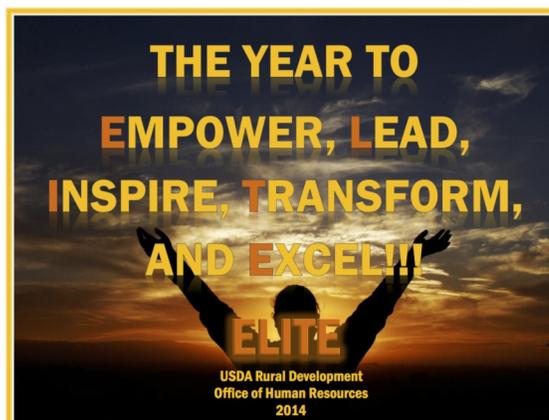
for the day as Farm Service Agency, Miami, Florida hosts a similar event for their children. The children planted seeds for a vegetable and flower garden, made a "Happiness Mini-Quilt" to symbolize what it looks and feels like to be happy, joined a District conference call and greeted customers. Olive Garden donated free lunch passes to the children in honor of Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day. At the end of the day, every child received an Official Themed Lunch Bag filled with goodies and a PowerPoint presentation of their day to take back to their school and present to their classrooms.

## Secretary Vilsack Hosts Town Hall Meeting

By Bennett Powell

Recently, Secretary Vilsack hosted a town hall meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico where he stressed the importance of improving employee morale and working more efficiently.

The town hall meeting was part of the Rural Development Office of Human Resources/Office of Civil Rights' Cultural Transformation Open House. The purpose of this event was to strengthen the partnership among the Office of Human Resources, the Office of Civil Rights, and its customers. The event provided an opportunity for Rural Development employees to network, share experiences, ask questions, and learn about the services provided by the two programs.



## What is FOIA?

By Karlease Kelly

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), enacted in 1966, establishes a statutory right of public access to Executive Branch information in the Federal government. The basic purpose of the FOIA is, "to ensure an informed citizenry, vital to the functioning of a democratic society, needed to check against corruption and to hold the governors accountable to the governed." "A democracy requires accountability, and accountability requires transparency." The FOIA "encourages accountability through transparency." Ensuring compliance with both the letter and the spirit of the FOIA is the responsibility of everyone at USDA. The Office of the Chief Information Office in collaboration with agency FOIA Officers developed a short training [course](#) to help employees learn more about FOIA, the Department's FOIA process, your role in the Department's FOIA process, and the complexities of determining whether material requested under the FOIA are agency records for purposes of the statute. To access this training, click on the link above.

## USDA Cyclists Rally Across the Nation for Bike Month

Bike enthusiasts ushered in May as National Bike Month and showcased the benefits of bicycling. Whether it is for commuting, or for health benefits, bicycling is a fun way to get outside and enjoy the ride. From Iowa to California to Ohio to DC, agencies across USDA participated. USDA employees did their part in reducing the carbon footprint while encouraging employees to get fit. The Rural Development State Office in Ohio hosted a 'Biking and Breakfast' morning on May 16<sup>th</sup> for 'Bike to Work Day'. They started the morning with a group ride followed by breakfast with the Mayor.

Also, Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) Administrator Phil Karsting (center, right) hosted a lively early morning event in his office to kick off National Bike Month with healthy breakfast snacks. Phil was so pumped by the conversations that he agreed to cover the sign-up fee for FAS employees to join the Capital Bikeshare program and is paying up to \$20 per month for

the cost of health and fitness center memberships. What a champion for the bikers and USDA Wellness Programs!

Meanwhile, Sharon Hestvik, (left) Insurance Management Specialist for Risk Management Agency's Risk Management Services Division, also biked to work in May! She says, "I bike to work --16 miles round trip, three days of the week. I commute to work via the Custis Bike Trail in Arlington, Virginia, and the Mount Vernon Bike Trail, which goes along the Potomac River. I also pass the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, my favorite part of my morning commute. Biking is a great way to commute to work to the Risk Management Agency in Washington, D.C."



## 2014 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

This year, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) randomly selected 30,846 permanent full and part-time employees to receive the survey. The survey comes by email from OPM with the subject, "2014 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey." At the time this newsletter was published, only about 50% of those randomly selected had completed the survey. Please check to see if you were randomly selected, and if so, take time at work to complete the survey and tell us what is working well and what we need to improve in the workplace. We need your input and ideas to make USDA a best place to work.

## UPCOMING USDA SPECIAL OBSERVANCE

- **Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) Pride Month**  
Thursday, June 5, 2014

**The observance begins at 10:00 (EDT) at the Jefferson Auditorium, Washington, DC**  
**Employees receive one hour of diversity training for attending USDA Special Observances.**

## New Group for Deaf & Hard of Hearing Employees

By **Brianne Burger**

In November 2013, deaf and hard of hearing employees in the National Capital Region established the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Employee Association for USDA (DHH USDA), complying with Department Regulations. The organization has been approved and supported by Secretary Vilsack, and Brianne Burger (NRCS) serves as the first President, Linda Whitmore (FAS) serves as the Vice President, and John Rogers (AMS) is the Secretary for DHH USDA.



USDA has more than 40 deaf and 70 hard of hearing employees within the National Capital Region, and more than 1,000 deaf and hard of hearing employees across the country. These employees serve in a variety of jobs, ranging from administrative leadership to field work. Their communication styles vary from those who are proficient in speech and can talk on the phone to others who primarily communicate in American Sign Language or use interpreters and Video Relay Services to talk with co-workers and serve the public. They continue to exemplify excellent service in supporting the USDA mission, often staying committed to working for USDA their entire careers.



To join DHH USDA, you can be a deaf, hard of hearing, or hearing person. Many supervisors and co-workers enjoy joining the organization to support their employees. Membership is free. Alison Levy serves as the Department Disability Emphasis Program Manager and is available to provide trainings on how to communicate with deaf and hard of hearing employees, and on the Reasonable Accommodations process. If you would like to join DHH USDA, contact Brianne at [brianne.burger@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:brianne.burger@wdc.usda.gov). If you would like to request a training, contact Alison at [Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov).

Pictured (above left) A group of National Capital Region deaf employees. From left to right: Neal Polzin (FSIS), James Mantooth (AMS), James Campbell (NRCS), Mary Ann Ball (FAS), John Rogers (AMS), Garri Azrelyant (NFIS), and Matthew Lockhart (NFIS) Front row: Jennifer Hartung-Williams (FAS), Brianne Burger (NRCS) and Linda Whitmore (FAS)

Pictured (below left): Deaf and Hard of Hearing Employee Association USDA Board. From left to right: John Rogers, Secretary (AMS), Linda Whitmore, Vice President (FAS), and Brianne Burger, President (NRCS).

## Multi-Cultural Days at FNCS

By **Manny Ramirez**

Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNCS) celebrates Multicultural Day each April. Throughout the month of April, FNCS employees in Headquarters and in seven Regional Offices celebrated diversity through a variety of activities.

These included popular potluck style events and trivia games, as well as group dialogues about the different backgrounds of FNCS employees.

On April 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> the FNCS National Office hosted the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Multicultural Day festivities. This year's winner was the Supplemental Nutrition and Safety Program (SNAS), with the great team name of "Pizzazz of SNAS,"

FNCS also hosted the "Flavors of Culture," drawing on the culinary skills of scores of FNCS Headquarters employees to prepare and offer a panoply of inviting dishes. As part of the festivities, FNCS chefs compete for the People's Choice Award and the Healthiest Dish Award.

Lana Rae Tapia from SNAP won the 2014 Healthiest Dish Competition for her spectacular White Chicken Chili. Hundreds of FNCS staff participated in cultural education through food prepared by our multi-talented staff.

The impressive assortment of foods included Polish borscht, African rice, Spanish Chicken Enchiladas, Japanese Sushi, Vietnamese dumplings, German potato salad, American peach cobbler, and more.

# Art & Agriculture 2014

By Carolyn O'Connor

Calling all artists! We are accepting entries through June 30, 2014, for our third annual juried exhibit, [Art & Agriculture, 2014](#). All USDA employees are invited to participate, and judging from

the entries so far, it promises to be another spectacular show. Art and Agriculture offers an opportunity to showcase your work in the Nation's capital, connect with fellow artists, and discover your colleagues' hidden talents. The shows have generated tremendous enthusiasm among artists, visitors, and employees alike—notably Secretary Vilsack, who displays selected works in his office on a rotational basis. More work is viewable in the Deputy Secretary's office and elsewhere. Artists can submit entries at <https://www.eservices.usda.gov/apps/artag/>.



At the close of the entry period, the website will open for viewing and voting. All employees are encouraged to vote for their favorite work in each of 10 categories. **Your votes will determine the first round of finalists.** Once the exhibit is installed, a panel of distinguished art professionals will choose a winner in each category and a best in show.



To buy a piece of art, please contact the artist directly. Many pieces have been sold already, and others have been donated to USDA's art collection. Art and Agriculture staff cannot participate in these transactions; however, we welcome any questions about the program.

Look for details, guidelines, and last year's finalists on the Cultural Transformation website's [Art and Ag page](#). We invite you to share our excitement about USDA's artists, and we hope you enjoy the show.

## USDA Hosts Nat'l Association of Hispanic Federal Executives

By Tatjana Fernandez

On the morning of May 2, 2014, the Diversity, Recruitment, and Work/Life Division of the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) hosted the National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives (NAHFE) in the celebration of the annual Cinco de Mayo Networking Breakfast. The event was kicked off by NAHFE National President Al Gallegos, followed by welcoming statements from Under Secretary Ed Avalos and guest speaker Veronica Villalobos, from the Office of Personnel Management. Following breakfast, NAHFE National Secretary Kelly Cruz opened the networking event. NAHFE members from over a dozen federal agencies were in attendance.

Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Ed Avalos (L) hosted Al Gallegos, President (R), and the National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives for a celebration of Cinco de Mayo. Assistant Secretary Dr. Gregory Parham and other agencies hosted additional observances of Cinco de Mayo to celebrate Mexican American culture and inclusion at USDA.



You can contact MyUSDA by emailing [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov), and be sure to visit the [USDA Cultural Transformation Website](#).

If you'd like to share your feedback about Cultural Transformation, telework, diversity, or any other aspect of work/life at USDA, send an email to: [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov) or visit USDA's [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community website if you have access to [USDA Connections](#).



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**If you have ideas for future articles, contact us at [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov).**

### Submit Your Article to MyUSDA

The deadline for June submissions is Monday, June 16, 2014.

### **Guidance on Submissions to MyUSDA**

Submissions to MyUSDA should indicate progress that you, your agency, or your mission area have achieved toward implementing some aspect of the Secretary's Cultural Transformation (CT) Initiative. Submissions may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline (with accompanying photos strongly preferred), a first-person account (describing a personal work-related experience relating to CT progress), or a "brief" (just a few sentences describing a successful Cultural Transformation event, group, initiative, or activity...or some other relevant worklife issue with an accompanying photo. Send photos as separate attachments and make sure they are high quality. **The ideal submission is a great picture with about 75-150 words to go along with it. Maximum length of articles is 250 words.**

Email submissions or further inquiries to [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov).