



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

MyUSDA

A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

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USDA's Cultural Transformation Action Items

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

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USDA Marks 50th Anniversary of Food Stamp Act

By Susan Siemietkowski

USDA recently marked the 50th anniversary of the Food Stamp Act of 1964 with a special event on the Whitten patio. It featured speakers who chronicled the history of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and its role in reducing food insecurity and poverty over the last half century.

Secretary Vilsack welcomed Peter Edelman from the Georgetown University Law Center, Robert Greenstein from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, and Olivia Golden from the Center for Law and Social Policy. The special guests participated in a panel discussion moderated by Jim Weill, President of the Food Research and Action Center.

Approximately 150 anti-hunger advocates, state partners, and USDA employees participated. The ceremony capped a series of events sponsored by the Food and Nutrition Service to commemorate legislation which expanded the Food Stamp Program from a select group of pilots to a nationwide program. For more information, please visit the [SNAP History](#) page or read SNAP's [blogs](#).

Photos by Bob Nichols



Secretary Tom Vilsack (left) and Food and Nutrition Service Administrator Audrey Rowe (right) welcomed guests to the ceremony marking the 50th anniversary of the Food Stamp Act.

USDA Human Resources Programs Achieve Recognition

By Karlease Kelly The USDA Office of Human Resources Management USDA-wide programs were recognized with three awards at the Human Capital Management for Government Conference on December 3rd. The conference brings together key stakeholders from throughout the Federal Human Resources community to discuss best practices for managing human capital, improving efficiency, and advancing innovation.

- One USDA HR IT Enterprise project won third place for the Public Sector Innovation Award.
- USDA's Workforce Recruitment Program won second place for the Most Innovative Recruitment Program Award.
- USDA's Virtual University Leadership Programs won the first place award for Best Leadership Development Program.

The selection panel included top leaders in the human capital field in the Federal government.

USDA Improves in Best Places to Work Rankings

USDA moved up in the Best Places to Work rankings released earlier this month, rising from 16th to 13th among 19 large agencies. The Best Places to Work rankings are provided by the Partnership for Public Service and based on the results of the most recently Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey.

This improvement in our ranking is due to ongoing efforts across the Department. The top ranked USDA sub-component continues to be the Economic Research Service. Agencies and Offices that improved in the sub-component rankings include RD, Forest Service, OGC, NASS, NIFA, APHIS, GIPSA, and FSA.

In the 10 sub-categories used by the Partnership for Public Service in formulating the ratings, USDA ranked 3^d among the large agencies in Support for Diversity. Continuing efforts to improve are already underway for 2015. The ranking is a measure of employee engagement that is a key feature of high performing organizations. To see the results of the 2014 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, [go to this link: http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/vu/docs/2014%20FEVS%201st%20Level%20Sub%20component%20Comparison.pdf](http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/vu/docs/2014%20FEVS%201st%20Level%20Sub%20component%20Comparison.pdf)

Food and Nutrition Service Focuses on “Farm-to-School”

By Susan Siemietkowski The Southwest Regional Office of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, based in Dallas, Texas, recently organized an “Out and About” event which focused on Farm-to-School. It included a working lunch followed by a visit to an elementary school for a hands-on experience.

Alyssa Herold, from the Texas Department of Agriculture, spoke to employees during lunch. She discussed how Farm-to-School operates at the state level, including how the program impacts local procurement with schools.

During their visit to the Merando Elementary School, employees met with the Dallas school district's food service director, talked with students and toured the school's garden. They also received an official welcome created by the students (pictured right.)

FNS will continue to pursue such activities throughout the country to connect employees to the agency's mission as well as support Cultural Transformation's “Customer Service and Community Outreach” pillar.



Registration Open for 2015 USDA Winter Olympics

By Debra Arnold

USDA is committed to providing opportunities for employees to “get fit–stay fit” to help reduce absenteeism and increase productivity throughout the Department. One way to do that is by registering now for the USDA Winter Olympics.



This fitness challenge will run from January 12–March 8, 2015. Participants will track their minutes of activity and submit weekly reports. All the minutes will be tallied for a final count on March 16th. Those with the most minutes at the end of competition will be declared winners in their respective categories. There will be a total of 9 winners – 3 each Gold, Silver and Bronze. Winners will be announced in the Work/Life and Wellness Weekly Newsletter, highlighted in the Secretary’s MyUSDA Newsletter and will receive a certificate. Most importantly, this event will help you to keep moving during those cold, winter months and lead to improving or maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Registration is open now! You can choose from three categories based on your personal goal. For example, if you are currently exercising 90 minutes a week, you might want to challenge yourself by signing up for the Fox category, or if your goal is to maintain, you might choose Turtle instead. Choose the category that best fits your lifestyle and fitness goals.

- 30 – 120 minutes per week – Turtle
- 121 – 240 minutes per week – Fox
- 241 and above minutes per week – Lion

To register send an email to wellness@dm.usda.gov by COB on Wednesday, January 7, 2015, that includes your name, agency, location and the category in which you want to compete. You can also read our blog on the [Work/Life and Wellness](#) USDA Connect site. Weekly results will be posted on the blog and in the Weekly Work/Life and Wellness Newsletter. Visit the blog frequently to share your exercise routines, encourage others, and provide us with feedback. If you haven’t joined the Community of Practice, please consider doing so now. Good luck Olympians!!!

USDA Recognized for Workplace Effectiveness and Flexibility

USDA has been named a winner in the ‘When Work Works Award’ (formerly known as the Alfred P. Sloan Award) for Excellence in Workplace Effectiveness and Flexibility! “When Work Works” is a research-based initiative led by the partnership of Families and Work Institute (FWI) and the Society for Human Resource Management to highlight how effective and flexible workplaces can yield positive business results and help employees succeed at work and at home.



The award program honors model employers of all types and sizes across the U.S. for their innovative and effective workplace practices. FWI uses a rigorous scoring methodology that emphasizes the real-life experiences of employees and incorporates national benchmarks for employer practices. Congratulations to all of you!

Ready, Set...SNOW!!



Do you have guidance in place for your employees in the event of inclement weather and office closures?

Do your Core and Ad-Hoc Teleworkers know how to respond?

Be prepared – have guidance in place and available to all employees BEFORE an incident arises!

For more guidance or information, contact your Telework Coordinator, or send emails to telework@dm.usda.gov.

Nondiscrimination Training a Priority for NRCS-CA in FY2015

California State Conservationist Carlos Suarez, of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), has designated *Gender Stereotypes: LGBT Nondiscrimination in the Federal Workplace* as the FY2015 mandatory civil rights training for all NRCS CA employees. The training was delivered by Bill Scaggs, the Senior Training Coordinator with the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR), and Dr. Sharon Nance, NRCS West Region StrikeForce Representative. During a two-week period, over 300 NRCS employees attended training sessions that were conducted throughout the state.

Employees from the Merced, CA NRCS Field Office (pictured below left) lined up wearing shirts in the colors of the Pride rainbow as a means of showing support of and unity with the LGBT community. The picture includes (from LR): Jennifer Foster, Resource Conservationist; Jenna Dunn, Soil Conservationist; Tomas Campos, Soil Conservationist; Malia Hildebrandt, District Conservationist; Curt Metcalf, Civil Engineering Technician; and, Pamela Hertzler, Soil Conservationist. Pictured (below right, from L-R): Carlos Suarez, NRCS CA State Conservationist; Bill Scaggs, OASCR Senior Training Coordinator; and Sharon Nance, NRCS West Region StrikeForce.



USDA Partners with State Dept in Azerbaijan

USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) Director Duane Voy was in Azerbaijan recently as part of a State Department funded Professional Fellows Exchange Program. Director Voy met with the Azerbaijan Insurers' Association, the Azerbaijan Risk Professionals Association, Khazar University, Azerbaijan State Economic University, the Ministries of Finance and Agriculture, and the U.S. Embassy. The funded project was to inform Azerbaijan people about the American system of crop insurance as they work to build investments in the agriculture sector. They are also studying the Turkish model of crop insurance.

RMA Director Duane Voy (pictured right) on top of Qiz Qalasi (Maiden Tower) built in the 12th Century and overlooking the Caspian Sea.



UPCOMING USDA SPECIAL OBSERVANCE

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Observance
and
National Day of Service Award Ceremony

Date: Thursday, January 8, 2015

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.

USDA FSIS Emphasizes Employee Engagement

By Cecilia Matthews

One of the main focuses at the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is employee engagement, which is center stage for good reason: Engaged employees are better producers, more committed to the organization, and in it for the long haul.

Let's look at why employee engagement is a focus for FSIS. From leadership's point of view, employees are FSIS' most valuable asset and the focal point of employee engagement. Engaged employees aren't just motivated by money, status or power, they're motivated by shared values, integrity, purpose and mission. FSIS is actively engaging its workforce and implementing innovative ideas to keep employees engaged and to make FSIS a better place to work. More importantly, management needs to be engaged and lead with passion. Leaders set the tone for engagement in the workplace. Here are some of FSIS' FY14 accomplishments through our employee engagement efforts:

- Revised SES performance standards to include specific employee engagement activities.
- Published a book titled *One Team, One Purpose – Protecting Public Health and Preventing Foodborne Illness* to promote understanding of FSIS' mission/goals.
- Implemented a New Supervisor Training pilot program.
- Added an employee engagement performance measure for all FSIS supervisors.
- Implemented an Agency-wide mentoring program pilot.
- Implemented a Supervisor Refresher Training pilot program for current supervisors.
- Implemented mandatory use of a 360 assessment tool for SES employees to gauge feedback from their subordinates, peers, and managers.



Engagement is a leadership commitment to the organization and its goals. The employees know that the work they do is important, but the leaders must take time to forge an emotional bond with employees and keep them engaged. FSIS employees don't want to work for just any organization; they're looking for a shared sense of purpose, challenging work, committed leaders, and excited and satisfied customers. This is why employee engagement is so important in FSIS.

Engagement isn't magic; it's a craft. Engagement is built by creating trust, which produces loyalty. It requires open communication, clearly-articulated goals and clear-cut expectations. It demands shared values and well-understood reward systems. Engagement is a journey; not a destination. It's also work that we as an Agency have to commit to. Employee engagement is not a secret! It requires emotional commitment on the part of leaders, a great culture, constant maintenance, and change. The payoffs are huge: happier, more productive employees, satisfied customers, better profits and business results. Resolve to master employee engagement. It's a worthy undertaking.

Successful Tips for Employee Engagement from FNS

By Karlease Kelly

Recently, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) hosted a Federal Employee Engagement Forum for leaders across the government. Employee engagement is measured by the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey conducted by OPM. One of the goals of the Forum was to share best practices and hear from those who have seen improvements in levels of employee engagement. Jean Daniel of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) was invited to be a panel member at the event. Jean indicated that the labor management partnership at FNS has been an important factor in improving the agency's employee engagement level. She reminded the group that improving employee engagement is a multi-year effort and must be an on-going commitment for leaders.

At FNS, one area they have focused on improving is communication. That includes not only sharing information with employees, but leaders actively listening to the input of employees. Greater employee engagement helps drive mission performance. Ms. Daniel currently serves as the Director of Change Management and Organizational Engagement at FNS where she successfully puts into practice the strategies she learned while on detail with the Partnership for Public Service, the organization that provides the Best Places to Work Rankings.

Rural Development Employees Help Colorado Students

By David Carter

The small town of Walden is located in the far northern part of Colorado. With a population of 608 souls, it is known as the “Moose Viewing Capital of Colorado.” It is also the site of a recent USDA

Rural Development project funding library improvements for the North Park School District. The improvements will include computers for the library so that the students in this small rural town can go on-line to do research in preparing their assignments. In appreciation of USDA efforts, the school district and its students recently provided a poster with “thank you” written in fifteen different languages (pictured right being held by Rural Development Loan Technician Kathi McCombs.)



In times like this, those of us in the field think a lot about our fellow employees back in the office providing the support that makes these projects a reality. These include the people in Administration and Program Support Staff. It also includes the people in St. Louis who handle the financial transactions to make these projects happen. In addition, it includes the DC staff who obtain the funding for programs through the budgetary process. We know that you and your efforts make these projects possible!



USDA Helps Native Communities Achieve Home Ownership

By Ruth O'Neill

“As a kid I moved around a lot and never really had a home to call my own”, Charles McGaa of Pine Ridge Indian Reservation reflects on the

American dream of owning a home. Through the assistance of a new collaboration of housing organizations, the [Sustainable Home Ownership Project](#) (SHOP), Charles was able to achieve the goal of homeownership on the Reservation.

Many Americans find the process of buying a home to be very scary and at times a frustrating process. Charles was able to attend homebuyer and financial literacy classes taught by the Oglala Sioux Tribe Partnership for Housing, a SHOP partner. A housing counselor at the Partnership then helped him put together the USDA Rural Development 502 Direct Single Family Housing application.

The closing process was long and a little rocky at times as his became the first Tribal Trust land application to be closed with the assistance of a titled insurance company. Pennington Title of Rapid City, South Dakota joined with Rural Development to insure both the buyer and the lender against any loss arising from problems that may have connected to the title of the property. It is with partnerships like these that Rural Development hopes to reduce the time it takes to close this type of loan.



(L-R) Charles McGaa, South Dakota Pine Ridge Indian Reservation new home owner, Rosemarie Dillingham, Oglala Sioux Tribe Partnership for Housing, and Betsy Knuppe, Pennington Title Company closing the first Tribal trust land application.

For many, owning a home may seem like an impossible dream but the SHOP organizations on the Pine Ridge Reservation and Rural Development are there to help. Partners such as Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation, Lakota Funds, Lakota Federal Credit Union, Partnership for Housing, Mazaska Owecaso Otipi Financial, Oglala Sioux Tribe Partnership for Housing and Oglala Sioux Lakota Housing Authority have joined together to create a streamlined one stop housing process.

By joining together, they enhance each other’s mission by providing credit counseling, housing education and counseling, plus IDA’s—individual deposit accounts to help families save for down payments and closing costs. The collaboration creates an ecosystem of opportunity for potential homeowners on the reservation.

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 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

Submit Your Article to MyUSDA

The deadline for January submissions is Monday, January 12, 2015.

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.