USDA employees had an opportunity to connect with organizations, networks, and other employee communities at the Department’s first Employee Resources Day held in mid-March. About two dozen groups exhibited, introducing themselves and their work to nearly 200 employees. The “Get Connected” event will occur on an annual basis and is sponsored by the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) Division of Diversity, Recruitment, and Work/Life.

Employee Responses
I love the one-stop shopping approach.

I thought this event was very informative.

Wonderful event!

I met some great coworkers and did some reconnecting & got great advice from several people.

I think this is a brilliant idea.

Keep doing these!

Exhibitor Responses
The event was very well organized. The table set up was perfect for us....
We did connect with other USDA organizations. Looking forward to partnering with you in the future.

—Blacks In Government

We want to thank OHRM for hosting this event. In the 18 years I’ve been here it’s a first and much appreciated. We hope this signals an improving relationship with all groups. —USDA GLOBE
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"About six months ago, I approached my manager to discuss a possible long-term medical teleworking accommodation. I had used both the EEOC.gov and JAN.org sites in preparing for this meeting and had copies of everything I felt would assist in our discussion. I had a copy of the Job Accommodation Network’s specific recommendations for reasonable accommodations that supported my disabilities. Fortunately, a large portion of my work can be done in a telework environment with minimal supervision and I didn’t require any additional equipment or technology beyond what USDA already provided me.

I presented my manager with summary letters from my physicians regarding disability conditions, limitations, and proposed accommodations. Further, as a service-connected disabled veteran, I was able to provide my manager with VA documentation of my disability rating and specific disabilities. Together, we reached an acceptable telework agreement of four days per week, without having to further involve a formal request for reasonable accommodation.

My productivity level, which has always been considered high, has remained high, and I am able to work in harmony in an environment made specifically for me. This success is in no small part due to the open-mindedness of my manager to improve business processes, while assisting employees to be successful. This has been a no-cost, win-win situation for both the USDA and me!"

-Raymond Brown, Risk Management Agency
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The Winter Olympics Come to USDA!

Congratulations to all our Olympians! It may not have had all the pageantry of the Winter Olympics in Russia, but we certainly had the commitment. The 2014 USDA Winter Olympics have ended after eight weeks of arduous workouts, heavy lifting and vigorous competition!! There were 224 entries representing 35 states and the Virgin Islands, and hail- ing from 15 Mission Areas/Agencies. In the end, 68 competitors made it to the finish line, and they did so through 91.7 thousand minutes of activity and 13.9 million steps. Any competitor that completed at least five of the eight weeks of completion was scheduled in the finals. And, the winners of the 2014 USDA Winter Olympics are:

- Gold Medal in the Lion category for most steps: Lawrence Parker, Farm Service Agency, VT
- Gold Medal in the Fox category for most steps: Jennifer Stephenson, US Forest Service, ID
- Gold Medal in the Turtle category for most steps: Cindy Stuefer-Powell, Natural Resources Conservation Service, NE
- Silver Medal in the Lion category for most steps: Edith Breitmeier, Farm Service Agency, MT
- Silver Medal in the Fox category for most steps: Michelle Eder, Farm Service Agency, MT
- Silver Medal in the Turtle category for most steps: Jean Schott, Farm Service Agency WI
- Bronze Medal in the Lion category for most steps: Steven Schultz, Food Safety and Inspection Service, WI
- Bronze Medal in the Fox category for most steps: Mariene Tidwell, Farm Service Agency, MT
- Bronze Medal in the Turtle category for most steps: Kimberly Jones, Farm Service Agency, KS
- Gold Medal in the Lion category for most minutes: Jennifer Simon, Farm Service Agency, MT
- Gold Medal in the Fox category for most minutes: Debra Arnold, Departmental Management, Office of Human Resources Management, TN
- Gold Medal in the Turtle category for most minutes: Cindy Stuefer-Powell, Natural Resources Conservation Service, NE
- Silver Medal in the Lion category for most minutes: Camron Keshavarz, Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration, MO

USDA Wellness At Its Best

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) ‘Gets Movin’ participants just held their celebratory soup and salad luncheon! What are they celebrating, you ask?

NIFA had 17 employees participate in a six-week competition that ran from February 3rd thru March 16th. Competitors tracked and reported their miles and/or hours of activity on a weekly basis. The group as a whole completed 855 miles and 317 hours—and there were many anecdotal stories of concurrent weight loss and strength gained, as well as motivation to do more as a result of the competition.

The photo to the right includes all four winners (from l-r) Chance Wiley, Patty Fulton, Susan Shockey, and Brent Elrod. Chance and Susan won in the miles category. Patty and Brent were winners in the hours category. The employees pictured left were all participants in ‘NIFA Gets Movin.’
USDA has developed a ten-step framework to establish a culture of coaching throughout the Department. Coaching fosters continuous learning, facilitates effective organizational changes, engages and empowers employees at all levels, and supports the fulfillment of USDA's mission and vision.

USDA recently sent five employees to the Health and Human Services (HHS) Internal Coaching Boot Camp, a rigorous six-month training program. All five USDA employees graduated and received the Graduate Internal Federal Coach Certification. They are among the first cohort receiving this newly created Federal Coaching certification sponsored by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM.) Here are some observations from three of USDA's newly graduated coaches:

“I didn’t know anything about coaching. I have never been coached before and did not know what to expect other than the course was going to be a lot of work and commitment. After going through the course and completing the program, I am excited, committed, vested, it is a gratifying and rewarding experience to help others.”

- Thevee Gray, Farm Service Agency

“I found this to be a great opportunity to help employees become more effective in reaching some of their personal and professional goals. The support within the coaching community and the class helped me to learn some of the best tools to evaluate and support the coaching process.”

- Caroline Thorpe, Grain Inspection Packers and Stockyards Administration

“This course was an eye opener for me; it showed me the value of coaching as a function in leadership development. Leading employees through the process of resolving their challenges and reaching their goals by answering thought-provoking questions is a valuable asset we need to embrace.”

- Suzanne Austin-Kashawlic, Natural Resources Conservation Service

USDA will continue building its cadre of internal coaches through the newly created Federal Coaching Network (FCN) boot camp, an OPM sponsored coaching training. This year, ten USDA employees will attend the FCN boot camp scheduled for April 2014. To learn more about the USDA Coaching Program, visit the USDA Virtual University.

Art & Agriculture Competition In Its 3rd Year

The 3rd Annual competition for Art & Agriculture is underway!

The contest is open to full-time and part-time USDA employees.

You can submit your entries through June 30, 2014. There are 10 themes! To learn more, about the call for entries, rules for submission, and the upcoming art show go to the Cultural Transformation website or click on the Art and Agriculture graphic.

Winning artwork will be displayed from September 8, 2014 – September 2015. Artistic expression is a creative outlet that is vital for an individual to grow and develop in their environment. If you’re an artist, we want to see your inspiration and creativity!

UPCOMING USDA SPECIAL OBSERVANCE

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

Thursday, May 22, 2014

Observance begins at 10:00 (EDT) at the Jefferson Auditorium, Washington, DC

Employees receive one hour of diversity training for attending USDA Special Observances.
The Agricultural Marketing Service conducted a first-ever special training session, AMS Research and Promotion Boards: Opportunities for Diversity, in conjunction with USDA's Agricultural Outlook Forum.

The session was held as part of USDA's initiative to encourage diverse agricultural leaders and focused on increasing the diversity of candidates nominated to serve on research and promotion boards. Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden and AMS Administrator Anne Alonzo (pictured) addressed more than 40 participants, representing 19 boards, and challenged participants to embrace the changing face of agriculture.

A panel discussion, "Strength in Diversity: Best Practices to Share," moderated by AMS Dairy Programs Deputy Administrator Dana Coale, focused on identifying barriers and solutions to serving on research and promotion boards and effectively communicating to diverse agricultural audiences.

Following the training event, board members attended the Agricultural Outlook Forum with specific focus on breakout sessions related to the training event, including "A Roadmap for Women in Agriculture," moderated by Deputy Secretary Harden.

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The first in a series of planned Leadership Conversations took place recently at the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia. The interactive events are intended to give employees a chance to meet with senior leaders and provide a forum to discuss how to make the agency an employer of choice and the best place to work in the Federal Government. The session was sponsored by the EVS Leadership Working Group and featured Associate Administrator and Chief Operating Officer, Jeff Tribiano. He serves as the Senior Executive Service Liaison to the Leadership Working Group. During his remarks, Mr. Tribiano (pictured center below), reinforced senior leaders’ commitment to engaging employees and continuing the positive momentum already started by the working groups. He took questions from several employees (below, pictured left and right).

Additional topics addressed included “Speed of Trust” training and developing a career path. It was a frank and open dialogue, and more Leadership Conversations are scheduled for April, May, and June.
Free Web Trainings Include Teleworking, Building Financial Security

USDA, OPEDA and TMGovu have partnered to bring you two FREE six-part webinar training series, ‘Let’s Talk Telework’ and ‘Building Your Financial Security’. All of the sessions are available either ‘live’ or ‘on-demand’. You can access them by following the instructions below:

- Go to www.tmgovu.org
- Click on the banner or square that corresponds to the course or program you’re interested in. A list of all courses can be found under the “Courses” tab and a list of all Certificate programs can be found under the “Certificates” tab.
- You May have to sign in or Register to gain access. When you sign in, choose the “Remember me” option so that you won’t have to remember your login in future (when you are using the same computer and browser).
- Choose “Take this Course” to subscribe to the course (it is free).

For more information on these courses, or for troubleshooting, send emails to telework@dm.usda.gov.

Learning About Hmong Culture at USDA/NRCS

By Julie MacSwain

USDA employees at the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Minnesota recently learned about Hmong Culture from Tou Ger Pha, MN NRCS Biologist. NRCS holds cultural presentations for its employees, and employees have come to understand other cultures by engaging in these scheduled events.

In a presentation to his fellow USDA/NRCS employees, Pha shared some highlights from his Hmong Culture. According to Pha, “Hmong means free people.” The Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan is home to 40,707 Hmong residents. For additional information regarding Hmong Culture in Minnesota, please contact Pha at Tou.Pha@mn.usda.gov.

USDA—A Multiple Work/Life Award Winner

USDA was recently award the prestigious 2014 Work/Life Seal of Distinction Award presented by WorldatWork, Alliance for Work/Life Progress for the second consecutive year!

In addition, USDA was recognized as the best in Government, Best in Culture Change and Best in Work/Life Flexibility Infrastructure.

Join the USDA Veteran Employees Organization (VEO)

The Veterans Employee Organization (VEO) is open to all USDA veterans and supporters of veterans. For more information or to sign up for our list-serv, send an email to worklife@dm.usda.gov or VACFeedback@dm.usda.gov.

You can contact MyUSDA by emailing 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 or visit USDA’s Work/Life and Wellness community website if you have access to USDA Connections.

Catch Up On Recent Issues of MyUSDA!

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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 April submissions is Thursday, April 10, 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.