



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

# MyUSDA

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

Volume 2, Issue 7

May 2012

### USDA's Cultural Transformation Action Items

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

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### A Message from Secretary Tom Vilsack

On May 15, we recognized the 150th anniversary of the founding of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. On that date in 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed into law an act of Congress establishing USDA.

Two and a half years after he established the Department, in what would be his final annual message to Congress, Lincoln called USDA "The People's Department."

President Lincoln knew the importance of agriculture to our prosperity – particularly at a time when about half of all Americans lived on the farm. And while that number today stands at about 2 percent, our values are still rooted in rural America.

As the United States has changed and evolved over the years, at USDA we have not lost sight of Lincoln's vision. Through our work on food, agriculture, economic development, science, natural resource conservation and a host of other issues, USDA has impacted the lives of generations of Americans. And over the past three years, we have furthered that commitment to this nation.

USDA has supported producers – making a record number of farm loans, maintaining a strong safety net, and expanding markets to drive record exports.

We've stood by rural communities – supporting more than 6,000 community facilities projects, providing more than 50,000 loans to help rural businesses create jobs, and investing in thousands of infrastructure projects that have delivered

modern broadband, water and electric services to millions.

We've enrolled a record number of acres in conservation programs, and laid out a sensible new planning rule for 193 million acres of National Forests to promote job growth while conserving the environment.

USDA has continued its history of groundbreaking research. For example, we've invested about \$320 million to accelerate research on the next generation of renewable energy – so we can create jobs and ensure America's energy security for years to come.

And we're helping families lead healthy lives. USDA provides nutrition assistance for one in four Americans, enabling them to put healthy meals on the table, even when times are tough, and we're serving healthier school breakfast and lunch to 32 million kids a day.

Today, USDA truly remains a "Peoples' Department" that touches the life of every American. Folks depend on us. That's why I'm committed to leveraging the efforts of our Department and more than 100,000 hardworking USDA employees to continue creating jobs, supporting rural communities, and helping our country prosper.

As we commemorate 150 years of accomplishments, USDA is looking forward to addressing the changing needs of agriculture and rural America. For our small towns and communities looking to compete in a globalizing world, we'll be there with access to broadband, critical infrastructure and support for new



businesses. USDA will continue its support for the next generation of renewable fuels and help promote advanced, bio-based products.

And we'll keep working closely with America's agricultural producers to maintain a dependable safety net for their work – which ultimately is connected to 1 in 12 American jobs – and ensure the food supply we need to feed a growing world population.

I hope Americans will join us in our commemoration of 150 years of USDA. This is a great time to learn about this Department's contributions to the strength of our nation, and to see how we can continue to partner with Americans working to provide a better life for their families.

I invite everyone to visit [www.usda.gov/usda150](http://www.usda.gov/usda150) to learn more about USDA's history and our plans for the future – as the "Peoples' Department" continues serving all Americans, every day and every way. You can contact the staff of My USDA via email at [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov), and visit the [USDA Cultural Transformation Website](#).

Thomas J. Vilsack

# USDA Celebrates 150 Years

(Right) **Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack** views a video statement by **President Barack Obama** at the United States Department of Agriculture's 150th Anniversary celebration in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday, May 15, 2012.

The USDA 150th Anniversary celebration was part of the MSNBC program, "Morning Joe."

(Below Left) Secretary Vilsack explained the history and importance of American agriculture to the United States and the rest of the world to 150th Anniversary Masters of Ceremony **Mika Brzezinski** (center) and former Congressman **Joe Scarborough** (R-Fla.) hosts of "Morning Joe."

(Below Right) The Secretary met with **Art Monk**, Washington Redskins National Football League (NFL) Hall of Famer, prior to the celebration. Monk and fellow Redskin, three-time Pro-Bowler **La Var Arrington**, participated in the Fuel Up to Play 60 demonstration, an in-school nutrition and physical activity program launched by the National Dairy Council (NDC) and the NFL, in collaboration with USDA. The program was designed to combat childhood obesity. **USDA photos by Bob Nichols.**



## Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) Responses Due June 11th

### Let your voice be heard!

The deadline is quickly approaching for participation in the 2012 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). As of the second week of the FEVS, USDA has a 33% response rate.

The FEVS must be completed by June 11, 2012. If you received an invitation from the Office of Personnel Management (including a link to the survey), please take a



few moments to share your opinions and to make your voice count!

For those employees who have completed the survey, I want to express my appreciation.

I personally review the data and use it to support decision-making that moves employee initiatives forward. Thank you, and know that your opinion counts!

**—Tom Vilsack, Secretary**

### OPM Director John Berry Describes the 2012 FEVS



The annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) is an important management tool for Federal leaders.

This Government-wide survey initiative has been in place since 2002.

In 2011, as in many years past, the opinions and concerns voiced by over 266,000 employees provided the basis for positive change.

This year will be the first time in the history of the survey that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) will conduct a full census of the Federal workforce including all permanent, full- and part-time employees.

OPM, responding to the agencies' increased interest in survey results at all organizational levels, will invite over 1.8 million employees to provide their opinions—triple the number of employees surveyed in 2011.

While a Government-wide census will not be conducted every year, having large numbers of respondents will allow agencies the opportunity to analyze results and develop action plans at lower levels in the organization this year.

*From [OPM Director John Berry's Transmittal Letter to Department and Agency Leaders](#)*

The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) measures employees' perceptions of the various conditions that characterize successful organizations. It has been in use since 2002, but this is the first year that the survey is intended to reach all Federal employees.

FEVS takes about 25 minutes to complete, and this year, there are three new demographic questions.

These additional items focus on disability status, sexual orientation, and veterans' status.

## Your Input Leads to Improvements In Employee Development

**By Karlease Kelly**

A number of improvements have taken place at USDA as a result of employee feedback shared in the FEVS. The USDA Virtual University (VU) is one of the groups that has been closely monitoring employee responses to the FEVS and responding to requested changes. The VU is USDA's global training entity that focuses on preparing managers, employees, student interns, and executives in USDA for professional excellence and career advancement.

The VU grew out of feedback that was shared by USDA employees in listening sessions that were held at various locations throughout the country. At every session, managers and employees requested additional access to training and development opportunities. Employee development programs are essential to employees' morale and performance. As employees learn new skills and gain in personal growth, they become more motivated to meet new challenges.

One of the key resources developed by the VU in response to employee feedback shared through the FEVS is a Departmental Regulation requiring the development of Individual Development Plans (IDPs). (See a copy at: <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR4040-410.pdf>.) The IDP represents a commitment USDA makes to growing and developing employees. It demonstrates that employees are valued. IDPs

are an important part of succession planning in that they help employees develop skills that will be needed both now and in the future. As part of long-term career planning, employees, supervisors and training managers can use IDPs to outline training, and more importantly, create activities that will lead to a more engaged, effective, and skilled workforce.

The FEVS responses indicate that work life balance is an important factor for employee engagement. Telework can be used to increase productivity and promote work life balance. To help increase telework opportunities, the VU brought USDA managers training on the Executive Order related to telework, including tips for overcoming barriers to telework and strategies on how to promote teamwork in a telework environment. The training focused on honing important leadership skills that translate to successful team-building and employee engagement no matter where employees are located.

The on-line Detail Registry is another tool provided to USDA employees by the Virtual University. Through the Registry, offices can post available details and/or shadowing opportunities and employees can search the database for developmental opportunities. The link to the Detail Registry site is: <http://opportunities.usda.gov/>. Through the Detail Registry, employees can access announcements for details, and

apply following the instructions in the announcement (not through the web site). Employees can also use the site to post a Detail Request. (A Detail Request lets Human Resources professionals throughout USDA know that you are interested in a detail.) A detail experience is one way to help employees enhance their skills, pursue areas of interest, and explore career options.

In response to the FEVS, the VU also has issued a Departmental Regulation to promote a mentoring culture throughout USDA. The regulation (posted at <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/doc/DR4740-001.pdf>) follows the best practices guide on mentoring that is offered by the Office of Personnel Management. (See the guide at: <http://www.opm.gov/hrd/lead/BestPractices-Mentoring.pdf>. Mentoring resources can be found at the USDA Connect Community located at <https://connections.usda.gov/communities/service/html/communityview?communityUuid=0f04b8d9-4ffd-4331-84c0-1f1390461712>.)

All of this shows how the input you share through this year's FEVS can continue the positive changes at USDA. So, if you haven't already done so, be sure to complete the survey, tell us what is working, and tell us about the areas needing improvement.

## As a USDA Employee, You Can Directly Influence Change!

**By Mary Jo Thompson**

*You Are the Reason for Change at USDA!*

In order to continue making improvements at USDA, we need to hear from you. FEVS launched in other agencies, about the same time, are averaging a response rate of 23 to 43%, with only one out of five at 43%.

**USDA's response rate is awesome at 39% at the close of the third week.**

If you received an invitation from OPM that included a link to the survey, please take a few moments to share your opinions and to make your voice count. With the survey closing on June 11th, your participation is critical if USDA is going to continue its ongoing Cultural Transformation.

If you have any questions regarding the survey please contact Mary Jo Thompson at [maryjo.thompson@dm.usda.gov](mailto:maryjo.thompson@dm.usda.gov) or

Ed Cierpial at [edwin.cierpial@dm.usda.gov](mailto:edwin.cierpial@dm.usda.gov) or your agency as listed below:

- **Marcus Brownrigg (DM)** [marcus.brownrigg@dm.usda.gov](mailto:marcus.brownrigg@dm.usda.gov)
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## Food, Nutrition & Consumer Services (FNCS) Implements Employee Feedback.

By T. Geoffrey Gay

Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services (FNCS) has been working since its review of the 2011 FEVS to expand and promote the broad array of training and career development opportunities it presents through its FNS University educational structure. Though its overall scores were relatively high and the 2011 survey results indicated that many employees were pleased with existing opportunities, it was apparent that opinion was not shared as broadly as FNCS had hoped.

Collaborative discussions led to the identification of leading areas of concern and opportunities to address gaps in program offerings. Objectives included creating opportunities for more direct interaction with the senior executive team, adding training to facilitate the Department's ongoing cultural transformation, and enhancing individual, team and organizational communication.

- We continued our implementation and refinement of USDA's Cultural Transformation Initiative. Our widely presented diversity and inclusion awareness-enhancing course, *Walking Each Other Home*, was singled-out by the Secretary as an impressive effort, and was presented in 30+ sessions to over 400 FNCS employees, supervisors and managers agency-wide.
- FNCS doubled down on its awareness-enriching employee engagement programs, like our recent highly successful Multicultural Day celebration consisting of three separate events over two days.
- Learning and Development refreshed the promotion and implementation of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) as

vehicles for careful consideration of and commitments to supporting employee training needs and aspirations. Ninety-eight percent (98%) of all non-bargaining unit employees now have IDPs and the number of bargaining unit employees pursuing them is increasing.

- The Agency is pursuing more technical and program training for employees; Project Management training was provided as part of the most recently completed FNS University Leadership Institute Class, a standardized Records Management course is being fine-tuned for delivery, and supplemental supportive telework training is in the works.
- To inform planning and more directly address needs, pulse surveys are being more extensively used. The FNCS Labor Management Forum sought baseline perspectives from employees in three areas: training, merit promotion and employee workload distribution. The Agency also recently surveyed employees to better position it to address child-care needs and service availability as well as employee preferences for local food options. Always important, employee input has become an increasingly critical part of the FNCS decision-making process.
- We have reduced reliance on contracted trainers and increased the use of our talented employees. As a result we are rapidly developing FNS University staff to teach proprietary training programs such as Myers-Briggs, DISC, Emotional Intelligence, and Hermann Brain Dominance.
- We are continuing our monthly "Lunch with Leaders" event, our popular opportunity to have

lunch or breakfast with the Administrator or other senior executives.

- Communications with employees have greatly increased. Trying to avoid adding to information overload, FNSU is regularly announcing and synopsisizing opportunities and important events, particularly those that contribute to cultural transformation.
- Administrator Audrey Rowe has instituted quarterly "all hands" meetings, broadcast to employees nationwide. These meetings with leadership are opportunities to keep the workforce up-to-date on the state of FNS, programs, policies and issues and to solicit meaningful feedback.
- FNSU launched the FNCS Nationwide Mentoring Program this past spring, which resulted in the matching of 18 pairs of mentors and mentees. The waiting list is substantial.
- A full suite of training and career development opportunities for employees at all levels within the organization, from WG-5 through SES positions, is being finalized for roll-out in the near future. This comes in response to our Administrator's demand that opportunities for those at the top of the career ladder be expanded only as fresh opportunities for those at all levels are being made readily available. In that regard, FNS University is training its spotlight on an Aspiring Leader program for WG/GS-5 through GS-11 employees, and is already consulting with experts to streamline the path to program finalization.

While FNCS hopes that its continued heavy emphasis on strengthening our workforce by providing up-to-date information and opportunities to share and learn will be reflected in the 2012 FEDVIEW survey data, it is confident that the training, sharing, learning and contributing course the Agency has charted is the right thing to do!

## Food Safety & Inspection Service (FSIS) Listens to Employee Feedback for Improving Morale and Customer Service

FSIS is “one team, with one purpose.” And that is to protect public health. FSIS employees take pride in the fact that their jobs help prevent foodborne illness.

FSIS knows that its employees are its most important asset. It clearly demonstrates its commitment to employees by including measures in its Strategic Plan that link directly to employee feedback received from previous Federal Employee Viewpoint Surveys (FEVS). These measures ensure that FSIS has an engaged, high-performing, and satisfied workforce that understands how their role impacts public health and the success of the agency’s mission. FSIS has a critical mission to protect consumers by ensuring that meat, poultry, and processed egg products are safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged. FSIS also has a goal to empower their workforce with the training, knowledge, tools, and resources needed for success in protecting public health. Employee feedback drives changes that lead to FSIS’ success.

FSIS survey ratings have steadily shown improvements over the years. For example:

- Questions related to performance management continually show upward trends in the following survey areas: 1) The work I do is important; 2) I know how my work relates to the agency’s goals and priorities; and 3) Employees are willing to put in the extra effort to get the job done because they believe in and support the FSIS mission. This is a clear indication that FSIS employees see how their role in the agency, regardless of what they do, supports the mission. The alignment of individual performance goals with the Strategic Plan sets the stage for this continual improvement.
- A key objective at FSIS is the commitment to build a high-performing workforce that strives to attract and hire a diverse workforce that possesses and demonstrates the competencies needed to achieve the agency’s public health mission. FSIS recruiters, who represent all agency occupations, state that the top reason they serve as recruiters is, “I strongly believe in the mission of the agency.”

### By Cecilia Matthews

There is a strong correlation between the recruiters’ belief in the mission and the FSIS FEVS employee responses to the survey question, “My agency is successful at accomplishing its mission.”

FSIS survey results indicate that FSIS employee satisfaction is on an upward trend. All areas of the survey are showing improvements. Employees are pleased with the policies and practices of senior leaders, and the leadership of FSIS recognizes and appreciates their dedicated workforce of over 10,000 strong, who worry about the safety of the meat, poultry and processed egg products that the American public consumes every day.

The OPM theme of “Employees Influencing Change” is the FEVS tagline this year. Therefore, FSIS wants to continue encouraging employees to participate in the 2012 FEVS so their voices can be heard to influence change. The agency values employee feedback and will continue to use the FEVS results to drive improvements.

## FEVS Trends

Last year’s Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) results showed an increase in positive responses for **53 of the 77** survey questions, or 69% of the items, as compared to the 2010 survey. A review of the top 10 items for USDA indicated that employees have a very positive perception of the quality of their work, and that they embrace the concept of individual continuous quality improvement. This may be driven by the fact that employees like the kind of work done at USDA, and know that the work we do is very important.

Overall, employees had a positive view of their immediate supervisors,

indicating that supervisors support work life balance, treat employees with respect, and talk with employees about performance. The survey results also showed that employees understand how their work relates to the agency’s goals and priorities. All of this showed that the level of employee engagement is increasing at USDA.

Although the results from the 2011 FEVS were encouraging, there were still some areas that needed improvement. Some of the lowest rated items from the 2011 survey included employee satisfaction with pay, dealing with poor performance, and recognizing differences in performance.

### By Karlease Kelly

To increase employee satisfaction and engagement at USDA, a set of strategies was shared with USDA leaders. These strategies included increasing opportunities for two-way communication with employees; working collaboratively with labor organizations; increasing training and employee development opportunities; supporting workplace flexibilities such as Telework; recognizing differences in performance; and promoting a diverse and inclusive workforce. These strategies were implemented throughout the Department to foster the high performing and inclusive environment we need to drive improved mission accomplishment.

# USDA Honored By FAPAC



First- Front Row from left to right: Jay Mar-NRCS, Parveen Setia-APHIS, Monshi Ramdass- DM, Fred Cheng-DM, Thomas Tran –NRCS, Oliver Miranda -NRCS

Second back Row from Left to right: Yi Kum – NRCS, , Carlito Yambao-APHIS , Satya Vishnubhakat-FSIS, Teresa Brown–FS, Jeanetta Tankson-FSIS, Damali Carr – FSIS, Lula Bell- NIFA, Justin Rhee –ASCR, Fahmida Chhipa-NASS, Altheria Myers – ARS, Bosoon Park-ARS, Rose Rodrin, Dan Rodrin-FS

More than 30 USDA employees participated at the Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) 27th Annual National Leadership Training Conference held recently at the Grand Hyatt Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia.

This year’s theme was “Striving for Excellence in Leadership, Diversity and Inclusion.” The honorable Brian Ronholm, Deputy Under Secretary for Food Safety, U. S. Department of Agriculture presented the opening keynote speech.

USDA employees across the nation benefited from the workshops and plenary sessions that provided an excellent opportunity for critical leadership and communications training. In addition, several USDA Senior Executives contributed their expertise in mentoring to addressing leadership challenges throughout the Federal workforce.

USDA recruiting and outreach teams from the Forest Service (FS), National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Agricul-

tural Research Service (ARS), Rural Development (RD) and Departmental Management (DM) were on hand to answer questions from students and veterans during the FAPAC sponsored career day.

FAPAC recognized three USDA employees, William P. Milton, Jr., from Departmental Management (SES level); Frederick Cheng, Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) (GS-11 through GS-15 level), and Chor Yang, from the Forest Service, intern level, for their outstanding performance in the field of “Diversity of Excellence”.

Congratulations on their achievements!



Left: Kin Wong (President of FAPAC) left, and Samuel T. Mok (Managing Member, Condor International Advisors, LLC) right, present USDA Forest Service employee Chor Yang (middle) with FAPAC’s Excellence in Diversity award, intern level. Right: Kin Wong and Samuel T. Mok present USDA employee Frederick Cheng with FAPAC’s Excellence in Diversity award, level GS-11 through GS-15). USDA Chief Human Capital Officer William P. Milton, Jr (not pictured) received the same award, SES level.

## USDA Disability Employment Program: Hiring Individuals with Disabilities



Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack has set a goal that 3% of all new student interns and permanent hires will be individuals with targeted (or more severe) disabilities. During the months of April to August, Secretary Vilsack receives bi-weekly reports on our Mission Area and Agencies' progress in achieving this goal. There are several key resources to help with this endeavor.

### Internal Resources

The USDA Disability Employment Program Team (DEPT) is a centralized group of Mission Area and Agency points of contact that develop and implement strategies, information, and resources to support our increased and improved employment and inclusion of individuals with disabilities. Each USDA Mission Area has a Disability Employment Program Manager and a Reasonable Accommodation Designee to help refer qualified individuals with disabilities into internship and job opportunities, and to provide effective accommodations for ensuring equal opportunity in our workplace, respectively.

### External Resources

#### The Council of Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

Deputy Secretary Pearlle Reed signed a USDA Memorandum of Understanding with the Council for Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) in December 2011.

CSAVR hosts a national Employment Team (The NET) that includes 80 state level Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs that employ more than 25,000 staff members who work every day to support nearly one million individuals with disabilities in the development of careers plans, training, employment and independence through economic self-sufficiency.

If you have any questions or have best practices to share, please contact Alison Levy, USDA Disability Employment Program Manager: [Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov). We look forward to hearing from you soon!

### What is Vocational Rehabilitation?

State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies furnish a wide variety of services to help people with disabilities obtain and retain employment, or return to work. These services are designed to provide the client with the training and other services needed to get and keep a job or return to work.

VR assists individuals with disabilities in securing gainful employment commensurate with their abilities and capabilities through training, rehabilitation, provision of assistive technologies and support, as job placement support. In addition to VR, some states have separate agencies serving individuals who are blind or visually impaired, as with service agencies for deaf and hard of hearing individuals

### What Does the NET Partnership Provide to USDA?

The NET provides USDA with "one point of contact" for tapping recruitment by way of resume referrals and recruitment, reasonable accommodations, and job retention support at the national, regional, state, and local levels. For example, when a hiring manager has a vacancy to fill, the job announcement may be emailed to the VR network of 25,000 staff and 10,000 community partners.

The NET also supports USDA in assessing the reasonable accommodation needs of our current employees as disabilities are acquired, taps state funded resources to help improve USDA cost efficiencies, and helps alleviate managers' time in providing information and resources at the local level to assist USDA in maintaining a productive work environment that is inclusive of all employees, especially those with disabilities. To market your internships, permanent job opportunities, and to obtain more support, please contact:

Kathy West-Evans,  
Director of Business  
Relations, CSAVR,  
Phone: 206.999.9455  
email: [KWest-Evans@rehabnetwork.org](mailto:KWest-Evans@rehabnetwork.org)



### Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP)

The Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) is a free, on line federal resource for managers and human resources staff to identify and hire qualified temporary and permanent employees from a variety of fields. Applicants are highly motivated postsecondary students, recent graduates (including many veterans), who are eager to contribute to the federal workforce.

### What Does the Program Offer Managers?

- Over 2600 job candidates, pre-screened through face-to-face interviews
- Information about each applicant's qualifications
- Ability to search for candidates tailored to specific job requirements
- Access to candidates across the nation from over 270 colleges and universities
- Flexibility to hire for summer internships or permanent positions
- Opportunity to evaluate summer interns for permanent staffing needs
- Freedom to conduct independent interviews
- Ability to identify self-reported Veterans and Schedule A eligible candidates

### How Does the Program Work?

Trained recruiters from federal agencies conduct personal interviews with interested students on college and university campuses. Student information is compiled in a database that is available to all federal agencies. Interested managers and human resources staff can visit the WRP website at [www.wrp.gov](http://www.wrp.gov) to obtain a password to access the database.

### Who Provides Reasonable Accommodations?

The WRP is co-sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy and the U.S. Department of Defense, with support from other Federal agencies. The Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP) provides centralized reasonable accommodations to student interns hired through the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP). For more information, go to <http://cap.mil/Programs/Employment/WRP.aspx>.

To hire student interns with targeted disabilities, contact your Student Employment Coordinator or Disability Program Manager.

## Cultural Transformation In Action at APHIS

During the recent Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service –Plant Protection & Quarantine (APHIS- PPQ) All Hands Meeting, Deputy Administrator Rebecca Bech asked employees to take care of themselves and each other. The PPQ National Civil Right Leadership Committee ( NCRLC) was ready to answer the call, having developed a new PPQ Employee SharePoint site to house **Employee Support Groups (ESG)** at the suggestion of WR PPQ employees.

The PPQ NCRLC developed this site to provide resources, support, and information to PPQ employees with children, family, or friends who have special needs. The Committee hopes the site will also increase awareness of the issues facing

PPQ employees in the workplace and the communities where they live.

Currently, the ESG home page includes three webpages: **Autism, Neurological Disorders, and Alzheimer’s**. Employees are encouraged to take the initiative to lead a discussion, post information, or suggest a new support group. A new page was recently added entitled **“Living Well”** which provides additional resources and information from Federal Occupational Health, the Centers for Disease Control and other sources related to the support group topics.

The Employee Support Groups are based under the APHIS-PPQ Disabil-

**By Tess Acosta-Williams** ity

Employment and Awareness Program. Many employees have signed up to share their stories and valuable lessons with each other. The PPQ NCRLC is committed to the principles of diversity, inclusion, and retention of a diverse workforce. The ESG SharePoint Site is one item developed by PPQ NCRLC for the PPQ and APHIS Cultural Transformation Action Plans and is based on the Diversity Roadmap and the Secretary’s Cultural Transformation action items.



**Rebecca Bech,  
Animal and Plant  
Health Inspection  
Service Deputy  
Administrator**

## USDA Recognized for Leadership Excellence in Diversity, Inclusion, and Work/Life

USDA was recognized by the Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC), the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), Telework Exchange, and the Alliance for Worklife Progress, and the Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) for excellence in partnership, sponsorship, and leadership in diversity, Inclusion, and Work/Life progress. In the past two Months, USDA received the following Awards of Excellence:

- FAPAC Excellence in Diversity Leadership, SES Level received by William P. Milton, Jr. USDA Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO)
- FAPAC Excellence in Diversity, received by Chor Yang, USDA Forest Service
- FAPAC Excellence in Diversity, received by Frederick Cheng, USDA Departmental Management
- FAPAC presented USDA with the Diamond Sponsorship Award for Excellence in Diversity Partnership
- SAIGE Agency Level Award, received by Secretary Thomas Vilsack
- SAIGE Exceptional Leadership Award, received by Monshi R. Ramdass, USDA Diversity, Recruitment, and Work/Life Division
- CSAVR Excellence in Partnership For Disabled Employees Award presented to Secretary Thomas Vilsack
- CSAVR Excellence in Partnership For Disabled Employees Award presented to US Forest Service
- USDA received the 2012 Excellence in Telework Leadership Award
- USDA received the 2012 Mid Atlantic Telework Advisory Council Telework Driver Award received by William P. Milton, Jr. USDA Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) and Mika Cross USDA Telework Manager
- The Alliance for Worklife Progress presented USDA the 2012 Worklife Seal of Distinction Award for advances in Work/Life Programs

The aforementioned awards are a result of USDA Cultural Transformation progress in Diversity, Inclusion, and Work/Life programs.

# TELEWORK AT USDA

## USDA Telework Among Best in the Government

U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Telework program was awarded the 2012 Tele-Vision Award for Excellence in Telework Leadership by the Telework Exchange and USDA Telework Managing Official, William P. Milton Jr., and Telework Program Manager, Mika J. Cross, were selected to receive the 2012 **Mid-Atlantic Telework Advisory Council (MATAC) Telework Driver Award**, honoring top leaders in Telework. The 7th annual [2012 Tele-Vision Awards](#) was held on May 2<sup>nd</sup> honoring outstanding programs and individuals that demonstrate tremendous leadership, enthusiasm, and innovation in Telework.

As part of USDA’s commitment to Cultural Transformation, Telework provides a flexible workplace alternative that enables USDA employees to balance their commitment to work, family, and community, resulting in positive change for the workplace culture. The Department’s significant upswing in Telework participation over the past year prompted the Telework Exchange Tele-Vision Award judges to note that, “USDA has

shown innovation and leadership in its approach to Telework,” and “the agency should be proud of its monumental growth in eligibility. This program has it all.”

Interested in how you can get involved in Turbo-Charging the USDA Telework Program? Be sure to check out the details of the May, **Let’s Talk Telework!** webinar below.

You can also find out more information about the USDA Telework Program by visiting the [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community page on USDA Connect or sending an email to [Telework@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Telework@dm.usda.gov)



**By Mika J. Cross, USDA Work/Life and Wellness Program Manager**



Pictured: Robin Bailey, Deputy Administrator for Management, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and Mika Cross, USDA Telework Program Manager accept USDA’s Excellence in Telework Leadership Award and Telework Driver Award at the 2012 Telework Exchange Spring Town Hall on May 2, 2012. The FNS has displayed superior dedication to the Telework Program where more than 80% of its workforce currently participates in Core (regularly scheduled Telework.)

### “Last Call for the Telework Train!”

**Register for the May “Let’s Talk Telework” Webinar:**

**“Last Call for the Telework Train!”**

The May session of “Let’s Talk Telework” will offer ‘tips of the trade’ for a successful Telework program, delivered by Kate Lister, President, Telework Research Network (TRN).

Mark your calendars for Thursday, May 31<sup>st</sup> from 12:30-1:30 EST and be sure to sign up in AgLearn to attend this important webinar, free to all USDA employees.

Kate will be sharing success tips valuable for both teleworkers and managers of teleworkers.

Participants will learn how to succeed in developing a robust Telework program that provides for flexibility while ensuring accountability.



**Kate Lister  
President  
Telework Research Network**

#### Registration Instructions

There are two methods for participating in the webinar. Please select the link below that describes how you will access the webinar. Due to a limited number of phone lines, it is highly encouraged to plan your participation as a group:

##### Option #1:

[I will view the webinar as part of a group \(in a conference room or co-worker’s office\). Someone else will reserve the phone line. I’ll listen to the audio through a speakerphone.](#)

##### Option #2:

[I will view the webinar by myself or will be a group leader and will need to dial-in to a teleconference line to hear the audio.](#)

Questions or technical difficulty with the registration process should be forwarded to your agency’s [AgLearn point of contact](#).

## A Telework Success Story from FSIS

I direct the Constituent Affairs Office within the Congressional and Public Affairs Office of FSIS. In this capacity, I oversee internal and external agency publications, public meetings, consumer and industry relations and meetings, constituent calls, town hall meetings, speeches and talking pts, administrator's blog and all public internal and external outreach.

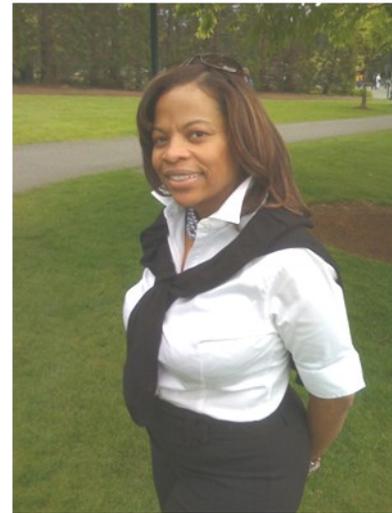
I have been managing teleworkers for about a year and a half. I successfully teleworked full-time for two years from Seattle, WA prior to my current position.

An example of how Telework worked for me personally, is when my husband got a job in Seattle. Because of Telework, my

position allowed me to take my job with me and accompany him. It worked so well that, unless you knew me, most people didn't even know that I was working remotely.

Although I teleworked full-time, most people only realized that I wasn't in the office when they noticed that my signature block had my home office number, which began with a different area code!

Linda West  
Supervisory Public Affairs Specialist  
Food Safety Inspection Service  
Washington, DC



## Deputy ASA Gonzales Delivers Telework Keynote Address



USDA's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration Oscar Gonzales presented an inspiring keynote speech at the 2012 Spring Telework Town Hall earlier this month, speaking about USDA's commitment to Telework.

You can check out his presentation by visiting [https://www.teleworkexchange.com/uploads/2000/1061-8733\\_MORNING\\_KEYNOTE.wmv](https://www.teleworkexchange.com/uploads/2000/1061-8733_MORNING_KEYNOTE.wmv)

**Do You Have a  
Telework Success  
Story?**

**Send it to**

[telework@dm.usda.gov](mailto:telework@dm.usda.gov)

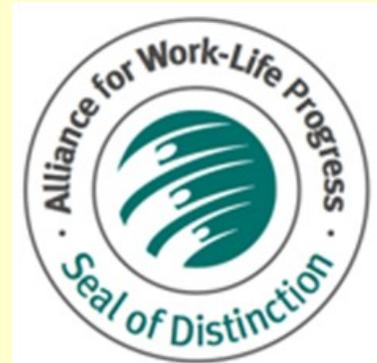
## USDA Wins AWLP Seal of Distinction



USDA's Alan Stephens, Rural Development, State Director, Arizona, (center) accepts the Work/Life Seal of Distinction Award from the Alliance for Work/Life Progress leadership

USDA's Work/Life and Wellness Programs has been awarded the inaugural AWLP Work-Life Seal of Distinction, by the Alliance for Work/Life Progress (AWLP), an affiliate of World At Work. USDA was honored for providing a wide variety of workplace policies, programs and practices that support employees in all major aspects of work-life navigation.

USDA may use the Seal in all official internal and external communications throughout the remainder of 2012 to promote its efforts and commitment to Work/Life and Wellness Programs.



## USDA Joins Federal Partnership to Work With Alaska Tribal Collaboration



Representatives from several communities, including St. Mary's, Emmonak, Kotlik, Akiak, and Tuluksak attended the USDA-led Tribal Collaboration meeting in Bethel, Alaska. Photos by Lawrence Yerich

By Tiffany Zulkosky and Lawrence Yerich

As re-posted in part from Tiffany Zulkosky, [USDA-RD West Area Director](http://blogs.usda.gov/) blogging at <http://blogs.usda.gov/>.

As rural communities begin to shake off the remnants of a record-breaking winter, the U.S. Department of Agriculture [Rural Development](#) – along with several sister agencies – recently held the first of several Alaska Tribal Collaboration meetings in Bethel, AK.

Several USDA agencies joined with other Federal Departments in holding the meetings.

Partner organizations included the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Small Business Administration, the Economic Development Administration, the Department of Energy, and the Denali Commission, an independent Federal agency designed to provide critical utilities, infrastructure, and economic support throughout Alaska.

In a state home to nearly half of our nation's Federally-recognized tribes, President Obama's mandate for federal agencies to "engage in regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration" with American Indian and Alaska Native tribes is particularly significant.

Fifteen tribal representatives and a handful of their non-profit partners from throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region, gathered at the Yupiit Piciryarait Cultural Center for a day-long session with representatives from Rural Development; [Natural Resource Conservation Service](#); [Farm Service Agency](#); [Housing & Urban Development](#); [Small Business Administration](#), and the [Denali Commission](#).

"Collaboration with Alaska's 229 Federally recognized tribes in their local areas is a considerable undertaking, but we feel this is the best way to understand the needs of Native communities. It presents an opportunity to seek their advice and provide answers to their questions on Federal programs and services," said USDA-Alaska Rural Development State Director Jim Nordlund.

Atmautluak Tribal Council member James Nicholai listens as translator Darlene Daniel of Kongiganak translates the meeting into Yup'ik.



"It's our hope to strengthen the government-to-government relationship between tribal leaders and the Federal government, provide an overview, by topic, of certain Federal programs that have an effect on tribes, and engage in constructive dialogue, respond to questions and solicit ideas regarding Federal programs," added Nordlund.

The conversation focused on housing; utilities; food production; land management and economic and community development. The needs, many said, are great and the opportunities to address them at times feel out of reach.

Designed to foster a two-way conversation, the collaboration meetings seek to strengthen the government-to-government relationship between Alaska's first people and agencies intended to deliver Federal programs in ultra-remote villages. And who better to help enhance program delivery than Alaska Native communities who have thrived for 10,000 years?

"Our way of life will always be here," Moses K. Peter of Tuluksak Native Community stated. "We are not going to move away from our villages. We will never do that. It's our birthplace. We have the right to live in our village, no matter how many hardships we may have."

It was evident during this first meeting that discovering long-lasting, sustainable solutions to rural Alaska's most unique challenges is on the horizon and collaboration is the first step in the right direction.

# NIFA Celebrates 60th Administrative Professionals Day



NIFA staff at Administrative Professionals Day

Over 100 National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) employees, from the agency's Deputy Director on down, gathered on April 26 to express their gratitude to the agency's administrative professionals.

Administrative Professionals Day, which began in 1952 as Professional Secretaries Week, has become one of the nation's largest workplace observances. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, there are more than 4.1 million secretaries and administrative assistants and 8.9 million others in administrative support roles.

This agency relies on your knowledge to get the job done," Ralph Otto, NIFA's Deputy Director for Food and Community Resources, said. "It's really a tribute to you that we have a reputation of being good at what we do."

According to Doris Perry, Program Assistant in the Division of Agricultural Systems, the job of the administrative professional has changed dramatically over the years, thanks to new tools and techniques. "Administrative support is

one of the engines of business and government, particularly in our complex world," she said. "In a world that demands the accurate and speedy movement of digital information, the support staffs are masters of data."

By Scott Elliott

The event was sponsored by Brad Rein, Director of the Division of Agricultural Systems, and supported by Doris Perry (Division of Agricultural Systems) Chanel Young (Divisions of Agricultural Systems and Animal Systems), Rose Armstrong (Planning, Accountability, and Reporting Staff), Kenneth Millard (Division of Nutrition), Nicole Williams (Information Policy, Planning, and Training Division), Omar Lugo (Division of Agricultural Systems), and Hilary Whitfield II (Division of Animal Systems).



Deputy Director Dr. Ralph Otto, NIFA



From L to R: Chanel Young, Hilary Whitfield II, Rose Armstrong, and Doris Perry, the organizers of NIFA's 60th Administrative Professionals Day.

## OCIO-ITS Is "Building Our Community"

By Janine Gillis

The Office of Chief Information Officer (OCIO)-International Technology Services (ITS) is committed to the process of creating an environment where all employees and customers are treated with dignity and respect and provided for the opportunity for success.

As part of this commitment, we are sponsoring a 7-week (7-hour) blended learning opportunity entitled "Building Our Community." This series is built around the book, Eight Habits of the Heart: Embrac-

ing the Values that Build Strong Families and Communities by Clifton Taulbert. Building Our Community participants engage in a cohort learning experience and are guided through the basic principles of community building while they are introduced to collaboration technology, tools and techniques to promote thought and dialogue among our virtual community.

By using technology to overcome differences in geographic locations, ITS is working to ensure that all employees are pro-

vided the opportunity for success. By cultivating an atmosphere that supports the values highlighted in this program, we expect to see higher productivity, a more talented workforce, and project a positive reputation for USDA.

For more information about this innovative and creative approach to building communities, and how your agency can leverage the good work that has already been done, contact Janine Gillis @ [janine.gillis@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:janine.gillis@wdc.usda.gov).

### USDA's UPCOMING SPECIAL OBSERVANCES

- **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Pride Observance, Thursday, June 7, 2102, at the Jefferson Auditorium**

Observances are scheduled to begin at 10:00 a. m. (EST)

**IF YOU'RE IN DC, PLEASE ADD THESE TO YOUR CALENDAR**

### Hula Hoop for Hunger!

By Susan Siemietkowski



In an effort to promote Cultural Transformation, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office (MARO) of USDA's Food & Nutrition Service recently declared a "Hula Hoop for Hunger Day."

MARO staff donated canned goods for the right to compete in the Hula

Hoop for Hunger Challenge. In addition to the hoops, a variety of other activities including jumping rope and line dancing were organized.

MARO staff also walked laps around the building as part of the commitment to the "Race Across the Country," an FNCS-wide endeavor to support exercise and foster employee wellbeing.

All food collected is contributed to the Philadelphia Federal Executive Board Food Drive in support of Philabundance, the largest food bank in the region.

This is the 13<sup>th</sup> year that MARO has organized this food drive and collected more than 150,000 pounds of food.

Employees from the Food & Nutrition Service enjoyed hula hoops, dance exercise, and jumping rope as part of "Hula Hoop for Hunger Day." This is the 13th year that FNS's Mid-Atlantic Regional Office has taken part in the campaign to donate canned goods to the hungry.



### USDA Celebrates Cinco de Mayo

The 2012 Cinco de Mayo Celebration, held on the Whitten Patio at USDA Headquarters in Washington, D.C., was sponsored by the USDA Hispanic Alliance for Career Enhancement (HACE).

*Photos by Rick Chavez, HACE member and USDA retiree.*

Karime Echevarria demonstrates a Mexican folk dance.



Below: From L to R, Tony Proctor, Richard Fierroz, Dora Flores, Linda Bright, Lidia Carrera, some of our many chefs, also served food and had a lot of fun.



Employees learned dancing, including salsa and merengue.



## MyUSDA Volume 2, Issue 7

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](#).

Catch Up on Previous Issues of MyUSDA!

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[MyUSDA Volume 1, Issue 2](#)

[MyUSDA Volume 1, Issue 3](#)

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[MyUSDA Volume 2, Issue 6](#)

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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 May submissions is Wednesday, June 13, 2012.

#### Guidance on Submissions to MyUSDA

Submissions to MyUSDA should indicate progress that you, your agency, or your mission area have achieved toward implementing 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.)

The ideal submission is a great picture with about 75-150 words to go along with it.  
Email submissions or further inquiries to [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov)