



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

USDA's Cultural Transformation Action Items

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

Inside this issue:

Veterans Go Outward Bound 2

USFS Celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month 3

RD Employees in Hawaii Get Healthy 4

TARGET Center Hosts Disability Mentoring Event 4

USDA Kicks Off Combined Federal Campaign 5

HR Fact Sheet: What Is a Quality Step Increase? 6

MyUSDA

A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

Volume 7, Issue 2

November 2016

Rural Development Recognizes Veterans Service

By Jay Fletcher, Rural Development

USDA Rural Development is extremely proud of our employees who serve –and have served–our nation’s Armed Forces. As part of this year’s Veteran’s Day observance, the agency is acknowledging their service with a photo display on the First Floor in Wing Three of the South Building in Washington, D.C. The display features banners with pictures of 37 employees, as well as their military status: current, retired, or reserved.



These employees are among more than the 100 in Rural Development who remind us that service, in all of its many forms, is an essential part of our agency’s mission, as well as of our collective duty as federal employees and U.S. citizens.

USDA Rural Development thanks all of our military members for their service!

FNS Honors Veterans and Feeds the Hungry

By Susan M. Siemietkowski, Food and Nutrition Service

Employees from the Food and Nutrition Service’s Mid-Atlantic Regional Office (based in Robbinsville, NJ) gleaned 3,500 pounds of beets on November 10th at a farm in New Egypt, NJ, as a way to honor veterans who served and currently serve. “Farmers Against Hunger” used the produce to supplement Thanksgiving meals made for local families who are in need.



Backpacking for Vets with Outward Bound

By Mario A. Hernandez, Food Safety and Inspection Service

The challenges of life are great. At times we do not realize that. We are always on the go and don't often take the time to slow down and enjoy the moment. More than that, we forget to look within ourselves for deeper understanding and meaning. This is true for most, but especially for Veterans, who in some instances have experiences that cause great challenges.

I spent six days in Joshua Tree National Park with a group of nine other veterans. We all came from different places and from all branches. We were all unknown to each other. We embarked on this backpack trip with Outward Bound, an outdoor education program founded by Kurt Hahn in 1941. He believed in developing leadership, character, and a sense of service via wilderness experiences. Outward Bound in the United States followed in 1961 with programs aimed at youth as young as 12. In 2006, Outward Bound created a program aimed specifically at veterans to promote readjustment via wilderness experiences. It enabled us to relive some of our military adventures without many of the negative emotions that came with them. It also allowed us to bond, as veterans and as human beings.



Food Safety and Inspection Service employee Mario Hernandez.

For me, it did all this and more. But let us start from the beginning. I served in the United States Marine Corps from 2006 to 2010. I had two combat tours, one in Iraq in 2007 and one in Afghanistan in 2009. I remember the heavy rucksacks and the rifle slung around me; I was tired, cold, and sweaty. After I got out, I didn't have the rucksack anymore or the rifle, but I still felt the weight. However, I also had lots of brothers and sisters while I was in the Marine Corps. We had some good times in one of the places in the world where most would not consider taking a vacation (I probably would). It was through that comradery, shared experiences, and instilled values that we did more with less and did it well.

Upon taking the first steps into Joshua Tree National Park, the sense of comradery was immediately there. We were veterans with shared and similar experiences, so there was no need to break the ice. Some of us were quiet at first, but at the end, we shared things we probably would not have in another setting. The setting in this case also played a role in the experience. The desert can be brutal, but it also can be peaceful. Although the trip was a group experience, we also spent some time alone. For me, it was a moment of clarity. A friend and fellow Marine veteran had told me a week prior that peace is to live in the present. I did not quite understand at the time. As I wandered the desert, I came to realize he was right.

Remember to stop and slow down once in a while. You do not have to trek the desert to find understanding, but it does help to get away from all the noise. Honor and remember those that have gone. We are all veterans of our experiences; we are our own masters that can find insight. Happy Holidays!

Food Safety and Inspection Service employee Mario Hernandez was one of ten United States veterans who backpacked through Joshua Tree National Park in California as part of a readjustment program sponsored by Outward Bound.



Forest Service Celebrates Hispanic Heritage

By Lupe Rodrigues, U.S. Forest Service

Forest Service employees at the Albuquerque Service Center in Albuquerque, NM, celebrated Hispanic Heritage month on September 28, 2016. The event, sponsored by the Hispanic Emphasis Program, included an inspirational speaker and delicious, traditional New Mexican food. More than 50 employees attended.

The guest speaker was Rebecca Avitia, the first Hispanic female Executive Director of the National Hispanic Cultural Center in Albuquerque. The Center is dedicated to the preservation, promotion, and advancement of Hispanic culture, arts, and humanities. It presents over 700 events each year.

Avitia's presentation highlighted the importance of celebrating the customs of diverse cultures and how we can all thrive together. She shared how communities who embrace diversity produce positive outcomes by sharing different points of view. She went on to say that diversity extends beyond cultural differences and that we are more alike than different.



Pictured left: Guest speaker Rebecca Avitia (left) and USFS Hispanic Employment Program Manager Lupe Rodrigues (right).

Pictured right: Forest Service employees participate in the Hispanic Heritage Month celebration at the Albuquerque Service Center.



Photos by John Freeman, U.S. Forest Service

AMS/APHIS Student Day at Navajo Technical University

By Karen T. Comfort, Agricultural Marketing Service

Recently, Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Deputy Associate Administrator Karen T. Comfort participated in the first Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)/AMS Student Day at Navajo Technical University in Crown Point, NM.

Students from both Dine College, located in Phoenix, AZ, and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, located in Albuquerque, NM, also attended the event.

At the student day, Karen provided students with an overview of AMS's programs and services, and internship and recent graduate opportunities through Pathways.

Several of the students who interned with both AMS and APHIS this summer gave presentations on their experiences at the agencies.

All of the summer interns expressed an interest in returning to both AMS and APHIS for future internship and career opportunities.



Agricultural Marketing Service Deputy Associate Administrator Karen T. Comfort with Darell Yazzie, Jr., a summer intern with the Livestock, Poultry, and Seed Program Quality Assessment Division.

Rural Development Employees Get Healthy in Hawaii

By Lori Nakoba, Rural Development

Looking for ways to help keep employees happy, healthy, and productive, USDA Rural Development's Hawaii State Office had 63% of its staff members sign the Blue Zones Project Pledge in February 2016. Seven months later, the Hawaii State Office achieved an Approved Worksite status becoming the First Federal Agency to be Blue Zones Project Approved.

The term "Blue Zones" was born from National Geographic explorer Dan Buettner's study of communities around the world where people were happily living the longest. Buettner found that these communities shared common traits where people were living vibrant, active lives well into their hundreds. These communities were deemed "Blue Zones" and inspired his book, "Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest."

The **Blue Zones Project** idea originated from the health and well-being company Healthways, headquartered in Franklin, TN. It is described as an area in which citizens, schools, employers, restaurants, grocery stores, and community leaders have come together to optimize residents' longevity and well-being. It is a community well-being improvement initiative designed to change the way people experience the world around them.



Employees of Rural Development's Hawaii State Office, including (from L-R) Don Etes, Chris Agpoon, Denise Oda, Samantha Shimizu, Lori Nekoba, Chris Kanazawa (State Director), Loretta Okamoto, John Antonio, Havelyn Tosie, and Brian Daily.



On its journey to become Blue Zones Project approved, the Hawaii State Office formed a Well-Being Advisory Committee, planned group lunch walks to the local farmers' market, held plant-based staff potlucks, plant-based appetizer contests, and vegetarian cooking demonstrations.

Employees were exposed to the Blue Zones principles of Moving Naturally (exercising), Plant-Slant (eat more plants and less meat), Downshift (finding ways to reduce stress), and Purpose (volunteer experiences and thinking about ways in which to give meaning and purpose to our own lives).

Several employees of Rural Development's Hawaii State Office participate in a Chair Zumba wellness event as part of the Blue Zones Project.

Do you have an article to submit to MyUSDA?

You can email MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov with your submissions. They may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline, a first-person account, or any work-related activity or event demonstrating the Secretary's Cultural Transformation Action Items:

Leadership
Recruitment & Retention
Talent Management
Employee Development
Customer Focus & Community Outreach

TARGET Center Hosts Disability Mentoring Day

By D'Ann Clayton, USDA TARGET Center Director

On October 26, 2016, the Technology and Accessible Resources Give Employment Today (TARGET) Center in USDA's Office of Operations hosted its 3rd Annual Disability Mentoring Day event. Eleven students and recent graduates with disabilities from Northern Virginia Community College, Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy School, and St. John's Community Center participated in the event.



This TARGET Center activity provided opportunities for participants to engage with senior leadership, including job-shadowing where they could see how work is accomplished. They learned how to apply for employment at the USDA and discover the power of assistive technology at the TARGET Center. A participating student indicated he attended the event to "explore roles in communications and discover what happens at USDA." At the end of the event, the student reported that he "now had a better idea of what happens in a federal agency and would like to work at USDA. You know, the people here are so welcoming."

Michelle Sherbondy, a TARGET Center Accessible Communications Program Team Member, is a mentor to participating students, including Tyuan Barbour from St. John's Community Center.

USDA Kicks Off 2016 CFC

By Peggy Javery, USDA Combined Federal Campaign Manager

The Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) began September 1st for the National Capital Area. USDA's planned activities are underway. The CFC is the world's largest workplace-based giving campaign. President John F. Kennedy began the campaign in the early 1960s.

There are more than 18,000 organizations that can receive assistance. USDA employees who wish to donate to a specific cause can search the CFC website at www.cfcnc.org. If you work outside the DC Metro Area, you can find your local CFC at <https://www.opm.gov/combined-federal-campaign/find-local-campaigns/locator>.

This year's theme is "Show Some Love." We encourage federal employees to give back to their community through pledging charitable donations or volunteering. The goal is to reach \$1 million dollars by early December. We would like to thank the coordinators and keyworkers who reach out to USDA employees and plan exciting CFC events. Every little bit helps someone in need. Our overall goal is \$1.5 million this year. Check with your agency's coordinator to learn about all the events and "Show Some Love!"

Upcoming Special Observances at USDA

Martin Luther King, Jr. and National Day of Service Observance
Thursday, January 12, 2017

Black History Month
Thursday, February 15, 2017

10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at the Jefferson Auditorium in Washington, DC

View recordings from many of USDA's Special Observances at

<http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/observances.htm>.

Employees receive one hour of diversity training for each USDA Special Observance attended.

HR Quick Facts:

What is a Quality Step Increase (QSI) and how does it affect a Within-Grade Increase (WGI)?

A QSI is a faster-than-normal WGI used to reward employees at any General Schedule (GS) grade level who display high quality performance.

Eligibility:

- Be below Step 10 of their grade level;
- Have received the highest rating available under their performance appraisal system;
- Have demonstrated sustained performance of high quality; and,
- Have not received a QSI within the preceding 52 consecutive calendar weeks.

Source: 5 U.S.C. 5336, 5 CFR part 531, subpart E, and <http://www.opm.gov/performance/articles/1999/apr99-7.asp>

For more information contact your HR Office.

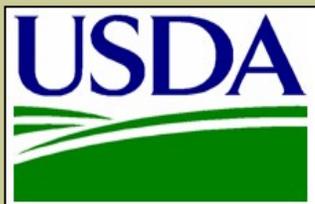
If you'd like to share your feedback about Cultural Transformation, telework, diversity, or any other aspect of work/life at USDA, send an email to: MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov or visit USDA's [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community website if you have access to [USDA Connections](#).



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To see previous issues of MyUSDA, please visit:

<http://www.dm.usda.gov/newsroom.htm>



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If you have ideas for future articles, contact us at MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov

Submit Your Article to MyUSDA

The monthly deadline for submissions is the end of the first week of each month.

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. The ideal submission includes photos or graphics along with a brief description of the event. The ideal word count for articles is 150-200. All submissions are subject to editing and Departmental review.

Submissions may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline, a first-person account, or any work-related activity, event, or observance demonstrating the Secretary's Cultural Transformation Action Items: Leadership; Recruitment & Retention; Talent Management; Employee Development; and, Customer Focus & Community Outreach.

Email submissions or further inquiries to MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov.