



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

USDA's Cultural Transformation Action Items

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

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MyUSDA

A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

Volume 3, Issue 6

June/July 2013

Secretary Kicks Off 2013 "Feds Feed Families" Campaign



This summer, USDA is leading the Feds Feed Families (FFF) campaign with the support of the Chief Human Capital Officers Council and other agency partners. The campaign is running now through August 28, 2013. The celebratory national kick off took place at the National Capital Area Food Bank on June 11, with Secretary Tom Vilsack (shown above with a sign language interpreter.)

Last year, we collected more than 7.2 million pounds of food across the government, with USDA employees donating 2.7 million pounds. This year, Assistant Secretary for Administration Dr. Gregory Parham is challenging every employee to donate 25 pounds of food. Your generous donations mean a difference to children and families in need, our senior citizens, and the homeless, including homeless veterans who have put their lives at risk for our freedom.

All USDA agencies, including field offices, are asked to participate in the campaign. Learn more about most wanted items in area food banks with this [helpful guide](#) from the Capital Area Food Bank.

Thank you for the work that you do to help your neighbors. We are looking forward to another exciting and successful FFF campaign.

Follow us on Twitter [@FedFoodDrive](#) or like us on [Facebook](#) for the latest updates from this season's campaign.

For more information, contact USDA's FFF campaign chair, [Duane Williams](#), the Acting Director of Human Resources for Rural Development at Duane.Williams@wdc.usda.gov.

USDA Holds SAIGE Pre-Conference Forum

By Gina Kerzman

The US Department of Agriculture recently held a pre-conference forum for USDA employees in conjunction with the Society of American Indian Government Employees' (SAIGE) national conference.



USDA employees who participated included individuals from the Forest Service (USFS), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Risk Management Agency (RMA), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Washington State University Extension Service, Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

Roylene Rides at the Door, State Conservationist for NRCS in Washington, welcomed all the participants and presented information regarding how NRCS works with tribes on treaty rights. Fred Clark, director of the Office of Tribal Relations for the USFS, briefed participants on departmental regulations and national policy regarding working with tribes. USDA employees also heard from Bea Herbert with FSIS about the status of American Indian representation within the USDA workforce and the barriers that the Department faces with recruiting and retaining American Indian employees. Arthur "Butch" Blazer (pictured left), Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, briefed employees on the USFS plan for cultural transformation.

USDA and LULAC: A Successful Partnership

By Jacqueline Padrón

USDA recently participated in the League of United Latin American Citizens' (LULAC) National Convention, Federal Training Institute (FTI), and Exposition. One of the convention highlights was [Secretary Vilsack's presentation](#) during the LULAC Partnership Luncheon. USDA held a pre-conference forum focusing on effective approaches to address recruitment, career development, and retention of Hispanic talent. The USDA team was an integral part of the overall program facilitating workshops and speaking to hundreds of attendees who stopped by the USDA booth. This important partnership with LULAC is one way we are addressing a core goal of the Secretary's Cultural Transformation initiative, which is to recruit, hire, retain, and promote a diverse workforce that reflects the American public. For more info, contact Jacqueline Padrón, Diversity and Inclusion Program Manager, at jacqueline.padron@dm.usda.gov.



USDA's Agricultural Outlook Focuses on Student Diversity

By Brenda Chapin

USDA's Agricultural Outlook Forum Student Diversity Program is designed to introduce students to contemporary agribusiness, future trends, scientific research, and agricultural policy in today's real world environment while increasing diversity within the Forum and throughout USDA.



Program sponsorship in 2013 was provided by CHS, Inc. and Farm Credit; USDA's Economic Research Service, Agricultural Research Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Office of the Chief Economist; and, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

Last February, the program was expanded from 24 to 30, including undergraduates, and for the first time, 10 students at the graduate level. The students came from Land-Grant Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and American Association of State Colleges of Agriculture and Renewable Resources institutions.

Miguel Aceves was among the 30 students selected in 2013. He wrote to USDA about his experience. "I recently got employed by the second biggest agriculture product distributing company in the US. The company is Helena Chemical, and I'm currently working as a Pest Control Advisor here in Yuma, Arizona. One of the biggest factors in determining my employment with this company was that they read an article on me attending the USDA Ag Forum this past February 2013. I wanted to let you know because thanks to you I have had many job opportunities this year, and I'm extremely grateful to you! Hope all is well and again, many, many thanks!"

To read some of the 2013 essays, go to: <http://www.usda.gov/oce/forum/diversity/winners.htm>. Thanks to the students themselves and their sponsors, this program has been a great success!

Project Grow Links Minnesota High School Students with USDA

By Julie MacSwain

Project Grow is a two-year pilot project between the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and the [Hmong American Partnership](#) in Minnesota. This unique partnership has introduced St. Paul high school students to careers in agriculture. Since 2011, NRCS has worked closely with the [Hmong American Partnership](#), a nonprofit that provides services to Minnesota's Hmong community. The Partnership was founded in 1990, based on the Hmong community's need for an organization that would help Hmong refugees adjust to life in America by drawing on the strengths of both Hmong and American cultures. Students who participate in the program go to the Hmong American Partnership Community Center in St. Paul once a week to hear guest lecturers who hold a variety of jobs within NRCS in Minnesota, and they work with mentors to learn about agriculture and agricultural careers. "Project Grow is a good project! It has helped St. Paul students understand the environment and conservation," said Thomas Herr, Hmong American Partnership. "Thank you NRCS for the time, effort and commitment." Questions regarding Project Grow should be directed to John Xiong, Cartographer, at 651-602-7863.



USDA Enters Partnership with Hmong National Development, Inc.

In June, Assistant Secretary for Administration Dr. Gregory L. Parham and President Bao Vang of the Hmong National Development, Inc. established the first partnership between USDA and the Hmong National Development, Inc. This partnership will strengthen USDA's White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and meets the intent of President Obama's EO 13515, Increasing Participation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Federal programs.

MyUSDA Security Corner

By Laura Fessenden

Does your office have a Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan?

Emergencies and disasters are characteristically unpredictable, so planning and preparing are essential for people and organizations. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) occupies over 9,000 + facilities and employs over 100,000 individuals across the country supporting critical missions on a daily basis. As one of the largest government agencies, it is of utmost importance that USDA be able to perform its essential functions through a variety of emergency or disaster incidents.

To meet expectations of the public and mandated responsibilities, USDA, in coordination with its agencies and staff offices, established and implemented a viable COOP plan. COOP planning ensures that USDA is able to continue to perform its most critical essential functions during an incident. Rapid implementation, with or without warning, is an inherent requirement of COOP plans. COOP planning focuses on four phases including: (I) Readiness and preparedness, (II) Activation, (III) Continuity Operations, and (IV) Reconstitution.

Along with good planning, it is also important to ensure that employees are capable of carrying out their duties successfully. To do this, USDA uses a test, training, and exercise program and associated activities to ensure that continuity personnel are aware of current procedures.

The Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Coordination's (OHSEC) Resilience and Preparedness Division (RPD) is responsible for USDA COOP planning and activities. Their responsibilities include:

- Developing and maintaining the USDA Headquarters COOP plan
- Provide guidance for development of agency and staff office COOP plans
- Coordinating continuity tests, training, and exercises.

Often times, there are multiple USDA Agencies occupying space within one facility location. It is important that collocated Agencies work cohesively in their individual COOP plans to ensure that all employees are aware and trained to follow complementary plans.

If you have any questions or would like more information about COOP plan or exercise development please visit the OHSEC RPD web site at <http://www.dm.usda.gov/ohsec/rpd/index.htm>, email the RPD at rpd@ocio.usda.gov or call 202-720-2667.

UPCOMING USDA SPECIAL OBSERVANCE

2013 Women's Equality Day, Thursday, August 22, 2013

The observance begins at 10:00 (EDT), Jefferson Auditorium, Washington, DC

Star Supervisors Continue to Shine at USDA!

As Director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) Division of Family & Consumer Sciences, Dr. Caroline Crocoll has a proven track record in promoting a healthy workforce. Dr. Crocoll dedicated a full time position to serve as the national program leader for "Health and Wellness."



This position was instrumental in developing USDA's first lactation room for nursing mothers. (See USDA's [story exchange](#) to learn more about this innovative effort.)

During monthly one-on-one meetings with staff, Dr. Crocoll makes work/life balance a key point in each discussion. Caroline's entire staff has telework agreements in place and are encouraged to utilize flexible work schedules to meet both individual needs as well as organizational and mission goals.

She publicly cites her belief that a positive work environment results in a healthy personal situation, and that clear boundaries between the two reaps benefits in terms of employee productivity and personal happiness. Shine on Dr. Crocoll!

**Mika J. Cross, USDA
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Wellness
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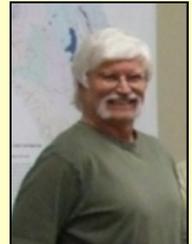


Another of USDA's Supervisor Shining Stars is Mr. John Blaine, a Resource Conservationist from the Natural Resources Conservation Office in Montana. John consistently supports and embraces work/life balance for his employees without hesitation.

Although John does not have kids of his own, he continues to display caring and understanding for the child-rearing issues that parents face. Whether it is unexpected illness that keeps them home from school, or the regularly scheduled medical appointments, John is unwavering in his understanding that employees will need to be away from work to care for their children or families.

His caring for employees extends beyond the workplace, and he occasionally attends non-work functions of employees. John is also a huge supporter of telework at NRCS in Montana. He is happy to offer this workplace opportunity to employees to assist them in finding balance between their work and personal responsibilities.

In fact, John's support and flexibility led to establishing one of the first areas in NRCS Montana to offer telework on a regular basis. Congratulations John, and keep on shining!



USDA Work/Life Program Wins Big in 2013!

By **Debra Arnold**

The Work/Life and Wellness Program at USDA, has done something extraordinary. For the first time, it has won a perfect trifecta, sweeping all three annual Work/Life awards given by the WorldatWork's, Alliance for Work/Life Progress (AWLP): The Work-Life Innovative Excellence Award; the Work-Life Seal of Distinction and the Work-Life Rising Star Recognition Award (to our own Mika J. Cross, Work/Life and Wellness Program Manager!)

The awards were presented to USDA at the 2013 AWLP Work-Life Forum in Baltimore earlier this year. Check out the buzz on USDA's award winning 'Turbo-Charge' Telework Program and more:

<http://www.worldatwork.org/waw/adimComment?id=70912&rssaccess=blog-work-life-rss>.

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

Employees “Step Up” On Their Bikes



May was recognized as “National Bike to Work Month” and many USDA employees “stepped up” for wellness, the environment, and commuter costs by taking to their bikes.

Dawn Pendell, CED, Farm Service Agency, Connecticut, is one of many USDA employees who participated in National Bike to Work Month.

Way to go, Dawn!

Married Lesbian and Gay Employees Now Eligible for Spousal Benefits

On July 8, 2013, shortly after the Supreme Court struck down the Defense of Marriage Act, Assistant Secretary for Administration Dr. Gregory Parham provided guidance to married lesbian and gay employees for updating their benefits to include their same-sex spouses. USDA follows guidance from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Dr. Parham noted, “This is an exciting time for USDA and for all our employees, and on behalf of the Secretary, I welcome these changes as a concrete sign of our ongoing Cultural Transformation initiative.”

In terms of benefits, this means that all legally married same-sex spouses will now be eligible family members under a Self and Family enrollment. The children of same-sex marriages will be treated just as those of opposite-sex marriages and will be eligible family members according to the same eligibility guidelines.

For USDA’s LGBT employees who are already legally married, this means you have 60 days from June 26, 2013 (the date of the ruling) until August 26, 2013, to make immediate changes to your Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) enrollment. That 60-day window begins anew on the date that any employee gets legally married.

For purposes of benefits coverage, USDA will follow the same procedures that are currently followed when enrolling an opposite-sex spouse or children of an opposite-sex marriage. Benefits coverage is available to all legally married same-sex employees regardless of his or her current state of residency.

If you have questions about benefits, please read the OPM guidelines carefully, then contact your agency or mission area’s Human Resources Office to submit the necessary paperwork. If you have questions about USDA’s Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Special Emphasis Program, contact program manager Perry Stevens at perry.stevens@dm.usda.gov.

To any employee who wants to update your health benefits, please use Standard Form 2809:

http://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf2809.pdf

To update your life insurance benefits, please use SF 2817:

http://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf2817.pdf

For an overview from the Office of Personnel Management that includes updated information for legally wedded same-sex couples about benefits, go to:

<https://www.chcoc.gov/transmittals/TransmittalDetails.aspx?TransmittalID=5700>

Here is the link to the Office of Personnel Management’s Benefits Administration Letter, which was sent to all Federal agencies on Wednesday, July 3, 2013.

<http://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/publications-forms/benefits-administration-letters/2013/13-203.pdf>

Celebrating Caribbean American Heritage Month at USDA

By Ali Muhammad

USDA recently celebrated its inaugural National Caribbean American Heritage Month observance. Congresswoman Donna Christensen (right), who represents the Virgin Islands, delivered the keynote address. The event was highlighted with musical diversity from steel drummers, representing Trinidad and Tobago; a Reggae and Nyabinghi drum band, representing Jamaica; and a tassa drum group, representing Guyana. The morning celebration carried into the lunch hour with food delicacies of the Caribbean variety. The countries of St. Kitts & Nevis and Dominica displayed products manufactured in their countries for export. The USDA Foreign Agricultural Service also had an exhibit demonstrating how to do business in the Caribbean and later hosted a special meeting with Embassy officials.



USDA Outreach to Michigan Students

More than 700 children learned about USDA's Forest Service during the "Get Outside and Play at the Capitol" event in Lansing, Michigan, in June.

Diane Gardin with the Forest Service Northern Research Station (pictured here with a group of children who participated) worked with Lisa Perez of the Forest Service's Detroit Urban Connections to coordinate USDA's exhibit.



Farm to School Initiative A Success in Georgia

By Susan Siemietkowski

Thanks to USDA, the Arabia Mountain High School in Lithonia, Georgia, and all schools in DeKalb County, are able to include a variety of local fruits and vegetables in their school meals. In an effort to learn more about the Farm to School initiative and see it in action, staff from the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, based in Atlanta, recently toured Arabia Mountain's greenhouse and kitchen, before joining students for a healthy lunch. Such "Out and About" visits underscore FNCS' commitment to Cultural Transformation's "Customer Service and Community Outreach" pillar, which calls upon employees to better understand FNCS programs and the people they serve.



Produce grown in the school's greenhouse are served to students. The popular Farm to School Program promotes healthy options.

USDA Partners with EPA to Launch The U.S. Food Waste Challenge

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack spoke at the recent launch of the U.S. Food Waste Challenge. The challenge is a nationwide effort by USDA and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to reduce, recover and recycle U.S. food waste. Representatives from Gills Onions/Rio Farms, Unilever, Food Marketing Institute, National Restaurant Association, Grocery Manufacturers Association, Food Waste Reduction Alliance, Feeding America and Rock and Wrap It Up! were also present. At the launch event, USDA, EPA, and founding U.S. Food Waste Challenge participants announced their commitments and invited others to join in reducing, recovering, and recycling food waste across the U.S. food chain, from farm to final disposition.



USDA Photo by Bob Nichols

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 August submissions is Tuesday, August 6, 2013.

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.