



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 6, Issue 6

March 2016

### USDA Agencies Work Together for Civil Rights

By Andy Pham, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Eleven USDA agencies and mission areas partnered in Washington, D.C. to bring Civil Rights training to 200 employees from across the Department. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Civil Rights Division hosted the FY 2016 Annual Civil Rights Training Conference in December 2015.

The purpose of the training, "Be FIT—Fair, Inclusive, Transparent," was to promote awareness regarding conflict resolution, embracing differences, and understanding fairness and inclusion.

NRCS Chief Jason Weller and USDA's Associate Chief for Conservation Leonard Jordan welcomed employees from NRCS; Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration; Food Safety and Inspection Service; Risk Management Agency; Agricultural Research Service; Agricultural Marketing Service; Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights; Office of Human Resources Management; Office of the Inspector General; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; and, Food and Nutrition Service to the training.

The FY 2016 Annual Civil Rights Training Conference featured several session topics, including "Increasing your FITness Education" and "Dealing with Conflict Due to Cultural Differences in the Workplace," which was the most popular training.

The evaluation survey results indicated that 94% of participants responded with favorable and positive feedback. Many gave the training conference a rating of "excellent", "outstanding", "superb", and even "incredible." Positive comments made by evaluators also included that the training conference was "very informative and educational" and that it should be "made mandatory for all NRCS employees and managers to attend."



Britt Stuart, Attorney-Advisor & Amar Nair, Attorney-Advisor from the Office of the General Counsel, USDA, presented the "Role of Agency Counsel in Civil Rights Cases," to participants in the 2016 Annual Civil Rights Training Conference.

*A reminder that the 2016 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) will begin during the last week of April. Approximately 39,000 out of 100,000 USDA employees will receive the survey at random. The Office of Personnel Management will roll out FEVS over several weeks, ending in early June. FEVS provides employees an opportunity to share their viewpoints about their organizations' strengths, their personal job satisfaction, areas of improvement, and many other important workplace issues. If you get a survey, please respond and help us continue our positive progress!*

# USDA Celebrates Black History Month

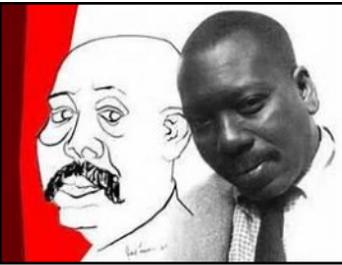
By Ali Muhammad, Office of Human Resources Management

On February 25, 2016, USDA celebrated its National Black History Month

Observance. The program was held in the Jefferson Auditorium of USDA's South Building in Washington DC.

The 2016 theme for Black History Month as set by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASLAH) is Hallowed Grounds: Sites of African American Memories. As a subset of this year's theme, USDA looked at the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the various parts of the country. Between the years 1916 and 1979, more than six million African Americans relocated from the rural south to the cities of the North, Midwest and West. Driven from their homes to escape dire economic conditions and harsh segregationist laws, they headed "North" to build a new place for themselves, creating a new Black urban culture that would exert enormous influence in the decades to come. The story of the Great African American Migration was narrated by Elsa Smithgall, the curator for the Phillips Collection, a Washington, D.C., museum of modern art, through the works of Jacob Lawrence's Migration Series.

Lawrence was a celebrated painter, story-teller, and interpreter of the African-American experience, and one of the most important artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, known for his modernist depictions as epic narratives of African American history.



**JACOB LAWRENCE  
(1917–2000)**

Ms. Smithgall's presentation was followed by a short narrative and vocal presentation of the Blues by Stacy Brooks and Memphis Gold, both celebrated blues vocalists and musicians. The connection of the blues to the migration cannot be overstated, as it was a part of the musical expression brought North with blacks as they left the South to settle in new parts of the country.

To learn more about *Jacob Lawrence and The Migration Series*, visit: [http://www.phillipscollection.org/migration\\_series/index.html](http://www.phillipscollection.org/migration_series/index.html); and to learn more about our featured artist Stacy Brooks, visit: <http://www.stacysblues.com/>

Gladys Gary Vaughn, PhD, shown right, Chief of Training and Cultural Transformation within the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, addresses participants at USDA's Black History Month Observance.



(Above) During World War I there was a great migration north by southern African Americans.

Lawrence, Jacob, *The Migration Series, Panels #1 and #23. Casein tempera on hardboard 12 x 18 in.; 30.48 x 45.72 cm. Acquired 1942. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.*



## **Upcoming Observance at USDA Asian American/Pacific Islander History Month Thursday, May 5, 2016**

**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.**

## FSIS Gets Results Through Employee Engagement

By Cecilia Matthews, Food Safety and Inspection Service

Here at FSIS, engaged employees begin their day with a sense of purpose and finish with a sense of achievement. They consistently bring high levels of determination, tenacity, energy, and resilience to everything they do to support the FSIS/USDA mission. Increasing and encouraging employee engagement is a key for continued success.

Hearing from our most valuable assets, our employees, has brought about engagement throughout the Agency and it shows. FSIS distributed paper-based surveys to field employees without computer access that yielded a response rate of 55%, which more than doubled last year's 24%. FSIS also achieved an increase in the web-based survey responses to 77% vs. last year's 73%. FSIS' employee engagement efforts are paying off and our increased response rates this year reflect that.

Managers are using the 360° assessment tool to utilize feedback from employees. They are providing career development through the mentoring program and job shadowing opportunities that include on-the-job learning in other program areas. These steps are getting results: The Department's cultural transformation goal was a completion of 10%. The Department exceeded that goal with a 21.15% completion rate. FSIS surpassed even that goal with a 29% completion rate. Another key to increasing engagement is for management to provide positive feedback by recognizing employee achievements using newsletters, phone calls, and emails. All employees are encouraged to use their communication skills to support positive engagement habits. Establishing positive and consistent habits at work help create higher personal engagement.



## USDA Coaching Portal Helps Employees Achieve Success

By Marisol Rodriguez, USDA Virtual University, Office of Human Resources Management

Are you a high achiever? Is your communication style focused, concise and impactful? Are you clear about your career path? Are you ready to increase your level of success and well-being? The USDA has launched the [USDA Coaching Portal](https://www.eservices.usda.gov/apps/Coaching/Home.aspx) (<https://www.eservices.usda.gov/apps/Coaching/Home.aspx>), a powerful leadership development tool to help you increase your levels of achievement, well-being and overall success.

Visit the Coaching Portal and watch a 15-minute video to discover the personal and professional benefits of working with a coach.

Coaching is a process to increase awareness, gain clarity and focus on what is most important to you. Coaching has been proven to boost top performers' effectiveness in their job; increase their self-confidence and effectiveness in their life, and support the development of their leadership skills. Coaching services are available, at no cost, to all USDA employees who meet at least one of the following requirements:

- A completed IDP with clearly outlined "Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and Time-bound" (SMART) goals
- Enrolled/completed a USDA Leadership Development Program
- Completed a USDA 360 Degree assessment and identified 2-3 competencies to develop
- Onboarding Supervisor, Manager, or SES
- Transitioning from Manager to Leader

To request coaching services, fill a "Coaching Request Form" (from the homepage, open the **Forms Tab**, from the dropdown click **Client**, then **open** "Coaching Request" fill it completely, hit **submit**) and **Make 2016 Your Best Professional Year Ever!**

# Forest Service Employees Take Part in Day of Service

**By Denise Ottaviano, U.S. Forest Service**

Forest Service employees participated in a Martin Luther King, Jr., Day of Service project at the Roadrunner Food Bank (RRFB) on January 21 in Albuquerque, NM. Forty-four employees volunteered in the warehouse sorting and inspecting produce and packaging cereal. The amount of cereal packaged was enough to feed 9,456 people!



The produce was packaged for distribution within 5 days or less. The produce that was not fit for human consumption was donated to a local pig farm. Through a partnership with the local pig farm, the farmer donates meat to the RRFB. The employees' efforts helped the RRFB distribute food to shelters, group homes, food pantries, soup kitchens, low-income senior housing sites, and regional food banks throughout New Mexico. RRFB is the largest food bank in New Mexico and helps feed 70,000 hungry people in the state each week.

Employees from the U.S. Forest Service are shown packaging cereal at the Roadrunner Food Bank in Albuquerque, NM.

*Photos by John Baros*

# FSA Learns the Importance of Diversity in Farming

**By Savannah Halleaux, Farm Service Agency**

Dr. Eddie Moore is a Michigan Farm Service Agency State Office Committee Member and a professor at Michigan State University, but his beginnings were far humbler. Dr. Moore grew up in a modest family with six brothers on a grain and livestock farm in North Carolina. All of the family resources were used to further the farm for the family well-being. "The dinner table conversation was around survival. My parents taught me how to survive," he said.

Moore points to his high school agriculture teacher as the influence that led him to college. It was through his agriculture teacher that Moore learned that he could achieve a better life through education. He encourages USDA employees to be leaders who make a positive difference in the lives of diverse farm families.

Moore started his career as an agriculture teacher during the racial integration era. Neighboring districts shut down their schools in protest of integration. Moore's district immediately integrated and produced Virginia's first African American Future Farmer of America State Officer.

"Working for diversity in farming and supporting rural communities is like supporting school integration," Dr. Moore says. "If I don't love my people, no one else will. That's why it is so important to keep fighting for the farms and the farm families."

He credits strong leadership from Presidents and Supreme Court Justices down through loan officers and program technicians in the field for the steady increase in producer diversity since 1999. "Life is rough. Strong leadership is tough work."



**Dr. Eddie Moore**

## Employees Give Back on National Day of Service—FNS

By Susan M. Siemietkowski, Food and Nutrition Service

As a way to honor the legacy of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and reinforce the importance of

Cultural Transformation’s Customer Service and Community Outreach pillar, 15 employees from the Western Regional Office (WRO) of USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service, based in San Francisco, participated in several volunteer events last month. Activities included packaging food at food banks and serving free meals at local community organizations.

At the SF-Marin Food Bank in San Francisco and Alameda County Community Food Bank in Oakland, WRO staff sorted and packaged rice and fresh produce into household-sized portions. Both food banks, using volunteer assistance to repackaging bulk foods for distribution, provide food to Bay Area food pantries and meal programs. At the Curry Senior Center and Glide Memorial Church, both of which are located in San Francisco, WRO volunteers served meals to low-income seniors.



The benefits of volunteering not only impact the recipients, but help build teamwork. In addition, it was very rewarding for WRO employees to interact with the beneficiaries of USDA programs and see firsthand how their work impacts individuals and the community.



(Above) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) employees outside the SF-Marin Food Bank in San Francisco.  
 (Right) FNS employee Ronna Bach serving breakfast.  
 (Far right) Rice being packed by FNS staff.

## Employees Give Back on National Day of Service—FSA

By Chris Beyerhelm, Farm Service Agency

Farm Service Agency (FSA) Administrator Val Dolcini joined employees for the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Day of Service observance to remember Dr. King’s legacy and his teachings. FSA employees were encouraged to volunteer four hours of time to a non-profit organization of their choice to help build and strengthen their community.



At the FSA Kentucky State Office, employees volunteered their time to support the Lexington Rescue Mission. They helped seal and stamp about 7,000 envelopes for the faith-based organization that strives to end homelessness by providing basic needs, such as food, clothing, financial services, health clinics, job for life, and spiritual care.

FSA Kentucky State Office employees volunteering at the Lexington Rescue Mission From Left side: Gidget Cropper, Felicia Harper, Marcinda Kester, Guy Perry and Javier Garza. Right Side: Winnie Breeding, Aaron Lowe, and Debbie Beehn.

Another volunteer, Patty Taylor, the Farm Programs Chief in the FSA Tennessee State Office, gave her time to assist at the Wilson County Community Center. This community center’s focus is to provide quality food and household resources to those in need. Her “volunteer experience” not only helped others but also rewarded her with a feeling of pride, satisfaction, and accomplishment. Patty’s words so eloquently sum up the rewards of volunteering, “I was hoping to help transform lives when actually the experience transformed my life.”

## Mentoring Is Making a Difference at Rural Development

### Eric Peters, Rural Development

Experienced USDA Rural Development employees in Richmond, Virginia, shared stories with their newer colleagues on February 17, 2016, to kick-off this year's RD-Virginia Mentoring Program. Mentors reflected on a variety of experiences: an elderly woman who received indoor plumbing for the first time in her life; radio communications installed in a mountainous Virginia school district's bus fleet that kept drivers and children more safe; and, town residents who before working with the agency couldn't wear white clothes because their water was so discoloring.

The seasoned USDA Rural Development employees who made these stories possible hold knowledge vital to the agency and, most importantly, vital to Virginia residents. Therefore, in 2015, when 40 people in RD-Virginia offices entered new positions, either as new employees or as promoted employees, the Agency faced a decision about how to transfer valuable institutional knowledge. In order to achieve our agency's goals, said Janice Stroud-Bickes, Assistant to the State Director in Virginia, "We need to provide employees with opportunities for connections." She said the mentoring program will do exactly that.

The program will be seven months and includes as mentees five new supervisors and 16 new Pathways employees, each of whom has a mentor from somewhere in Virginia or Washington, D.C. They will graduate in September, and between now and then, mentors and mentees will create Individual Development Plans (IDP), and meet monthly. Mentees will complete selected readings and attend five professional development sessions. "This program is creating a mentoring culture in the state," said Audrey Love, USDA Rural Development Mentoring Program Manager. "The mentees benefit, but so do the mentors because they might see fresh ways to look at things or gain a better sense of self-worth."

"This is for the future of the agency and for the culture of the agency," Stroud-Bickes said. "This is a chance to get it right."



**(Upper Left)** RD Virginia State Director Dr. Basil Gooden and keynote speaker, Nakeina Douglas-Glenn, Ph.D., Director of the Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute at Virginia Commonwealth University. **(Above)** Single Family Housing Specialist Jeanie Barbrow plans for selected readings with her mentee, Chelsea Daly, Single Family Housing Technician. **(Left)** Janice Stroud-Bickes, Assistant to the State Director, and mentee Justin Jones, Single Family Housing Technician, discuss a development plan for Justin at the Mentoring Program orientation.

***"Mentoring is important because it provides employees with opportunities to form new connections, broaden employee experience, assist in developing goals, and cultivate new opportunities. The USDA Mentoring Program has four key objectives. They are: 1) Transfer Institutional Knowledge, 2) Enhance Employee Skills, 3) Increase Employee Retention, and 4) Attract Top Talent. Through these objectives, USDA can strengthen its foundation and ensure a pipeline of talented, skilled, motivated employees exists for succession planning. For more information on the USDA Mentoring Program visit the [Contact Us page](#) on the [USDA Mentoring Portal](#)."***

***—Roderick Mance, USDA Mentoring Program Manager***

## Creating a Welcoming Workplace Is Everyone's Responsibility

By Meghan Walter, Natural Resources Conservation Service

On February 18, Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Jason Weller participated in

Welcoming Workplace training focusing on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) program. Chief Weller supported the training to foster a safe and welcoming workplace for all customers and employees by providing education on the topics of sexual orientation and gender identity. *Sexual orientation* is our attraction to others; *gender* is our internal sense of being male, female, or somewhere in between. Everyone has both a sexual orientation and gender identity.

Within USDA, we talk about sexual orientation and gender identity because it's just good customer service. Delivering excellent and innovative customer service means creating a workplace in which employees and customers of all backgrounds and cultures feel included and accepted, not simply tolerated.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are also workplace issues because, historically, there were federal policies that allowed for the investigation and dismissal of federal employees because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. This was known as the Lavender Scare, a period from the 1950s to the 1960s during which LGBT federal employees were routinely fired. Today, the federal government prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity for employees as well as contractors and subcontractors.

Here are a few steps you can take to build a welcoming workplace:

- If someone tells a homophobic or transphobic joke in your presence, don't ignore it; say something. Hurtful speech can be cleverly disguised, and often innocently proffered, but it usually enforces a particularly negative aspect of a stereotype.
- Be supportive of LGBT employees, and let them know you accept who they are. Sometimes even subtle cultural cues like displaying a visible book on a shelf, attending an LGBT Pride month event, and using inclusive language are supportive.
- Educate yourself about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender lives and histories. Read about the Lavender Scare and the Stonewall Riots; research the impact of LGBT pioneers like Bayard Rustin, Janet Mock, George Takei, Tammy Baldwin, Anise Parker, Alan Turing, and Kylar Broadus.

For more information about the Welcoming Workplace training, contact Meghan Walter at [Meghan.Walter@or.usda.gov](mailto:Meghan.Walter@or.usda.gov).



Chief Jason Weller and NRCS National LGBT Special Emphasis Program Manager Meghan Walter show their support for our LGBT communities at USDA-NRCS.

## Veteran Retention a Priority at USDA

By James Brent, USDA Virtual University, Office of Human Resources Management

USDA recognizes veterans as a source

of top talent and essential to organization performance and mission delivery. While we have taken a number of positive steps aimed at attracting veterans, we know more can be done to improve retention rates of our veterans. To support this effort, new measures were added to the USDA Cultural Transformation Milestones and Metrics Action Plan, and Assistant Secretary for Administration Dr. Gregory L. Parham recently asked the Office of Human Resources Management to lead a Department-wide effort aiming at reducing veteran attrition based upon inquiries from Secretary Vilsack.

One of the actions associated with this effort, conducting listening sessions, began in February and will continue over the next couple months. The eventual outcome will be the development of a Veteran Retention Plan with strategic initiatives and goals. USDA veterans have demonstrated their commitment to public service, and now it's time for us to prove our commitment to our veterans!

## Women in Leadership Program Thrives at USDA

By Todd H. Repass Jr., Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Coordination

The USDA Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Coordination's Women in Leadership Program (WIL) focuses on improving equality in the workplace. The program helps women by: having a better understanding of women in government and related initiatives; growing leadership skills by identifying or hosting learning opportunities; providing inspiration and motivation for career success; and, building a network with other women through networking events and participation with other women's groups to include members of USDA's Federal Women's Program.

Since its inception in 2015, the program has distributed monthly newsletters and held regular events. Speakers at the events have included Sharon Wong of the Office of Personnel Management and Jacqueline Padron, USDA's Diversity and Recruitment Programs Senior Team Lead, who spoke about the Department's commitment to diversity and inclusion. WIL members have viewed the PBS documentary, "The Women's List," and have conducted a Flash Mentoring Event on the Whitten Patio with nearly 70 employees and mentors. For more information, please contact Carrie Moore, Program Lead, at [carrie.moore@dm.usda.gov](mailto:carrie.moore@dm.usda.gov).



Mentors from the Women in Leadership's Flash Mentoring Event:  
**Bottom Row:** Diem-Linh Jones (OBPA), Telora Dean (FNS), Lisa Wilusz (OPPM), Bobbi Jeanquart (OHRM), and Dr. Karlease Kelly (OHRM)  
**Middle Row -** Dr. Zina Sutch (OES)  
**Top Row:** Ann Acheson (FS), Lynn Moaney (OCFO), Robin Heard (DM), Peggy Javery (OCFO), and Kim Cash (FAS)

## AMS Holds Employee Town Hall in the Bronx

By Edward Stoker, Agricultural Marketing Service

On February 11, 2016, Agricultural Marketing Service Associate Administrator Erin Morris and Deputy Associate Administrator

Karen Comfort visited with employees at the Specialty Crop Inspection (SCI) Division and Market News Division who work at the Hunts Point Terminal Market in the Bronx, New York. SCI has traditionally experienced difficulty filling agricultural commodity grader (ACG) positions in the Bronx, which is not an easy duty station. One staff member drives nearly 140 miles one way just to get to work! Despite the challenges, SCI staff love their job because they make a difference in the lives of their customers. To creatively address the difficulty filling ACG positions, the SCI Division established a program in 2014 to encourage area high school students to consider internships and, ultimately, a career with AMS. The program has been expanded to other terminal market locations. The Hunts Point office hired SCI's first veteran under the USDA direct hire program and recently kicked off a new pilot Veteran Affinity Group Program to help SCI employees support newly hired veterans.

Market News Division staff has had a different experience, not having the same level of turnover as SCI. Many of their employees have worked on the market for several years, starting out as graders and then transitioning to Market News. They also love what they do each and every day. They too have built long-standing, positive working relationships with the businesses on the Market to ensure that sales volume, prices, and the quality and condition of specialty crops sold at the market are accurately reported. When asked what they liked about AMS, the Bronx staff responded "The people!"



Agricultural Marketing Service Associate Administrator Erin Morris (fourth from the right) and Deputy Associate Administrator Karen Comfort (sixth from right) with Specialty Crop Inspection employees in the Bronx, NY.

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](#).



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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 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](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov).**