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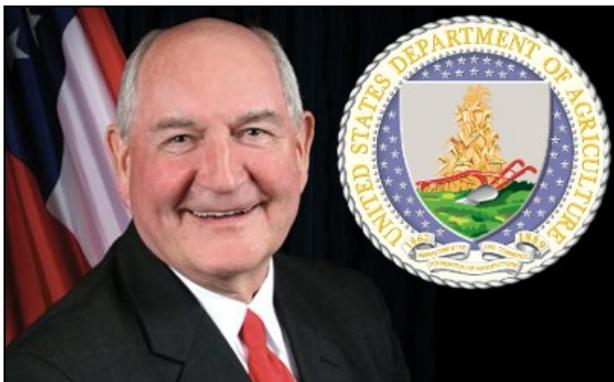
Keeping USDA
Employees Informed
About

Volume 1, Issue 3

April 2017

USDA Welcomes Secretary Sonny Perdue

- LEADERSHIP
- EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT & RETENTION
- DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES
- CUSTOMER FOCUS & COMMUNITY OUTREACH
- WORK/LIFE



The United States Department of Agriculture welcomed our 31st Secretary on April 25, 2017, when Secretary Sonny Perdue addressed employees from the Whitten Patio in Washington, D.C. The new Secretary thanked USDA employees for our service and said he looks forward to working with us to make USDA the best it can be for the American public. Secretary Perdue has outlined four guiding principles that track with USDA's key mission areas. First, he will maximize the ability of the men and

women of America's agriculture and agribusiness sector to create jobs, to produce and sell the foods and fiber that feed and clothe the world, and to reap the earned reward of their labor. Second, he will prioritize customer service every day for American taxpayers and consumers. Third, as Americans expect a safe and secure food supply, USDA will continue to serve in the critical role of ensuring the food we put on the table to feed our families meets the strict safety standards we've established. And fourth, the Secretary will always remember that America's agricultural bounty comes directly from the land. For more information about Secretary Sonny Perdue, please visit <https://www.usda.gov/content/secretary-agriculture-sonny-perdue>.

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Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Starts in May

By Ayana Bailey, Office of Human Resources Management

The 2017 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) launches during the first week of May. The survey measures features of the workplace that contribute to employee satisfaction. Over the last few years, a great deal of progress has been made to improve our workplace. This is demonstrated by the fact that USDA moved up into the top 10 Best Places to Work Rankings, at #9, and was recognized as the most improved large agency in 2016. Here are a few highlights of the actions that have been implemented to improve our workplace based on your input in previous FEVS.

- *Regular communications to keep everyone informed.*
- *Staff training and career development.*
- *Creating a culture of appreciation by regularly recognizing employee performance both formally and informally.*
- *Establishing a mentoring program to share important job knowledge.*
- *Increasing flexible work schedules and telework to ensure we can continue to fulfill our mission during times of disruption and to support employee work-life balance.*
- *Recruiting and supporting a diverse and inclusive workforce.*
- *Initiating Employee Advisory Committees to get regular input to drive continual improvements.*

If you receive the survey please complete it because your feedback is valued.

Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey—Key Facts

By Dr. Karlease Kelly, Provost, USDA Virtual University

If you have ever wondered what is meant by the terms “senior leaders,” “managers,” or “supervisors” in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), you’re not alone. It might surprise you to know that all of these terms relate to our own USDA, agency, and office leaders. Here are some definitions. Senior leaders are defined as the heads of our USDA departments/agencies and their immediate leadership team responsible for directing the policies and priorities of our department/agency. They are usually a member of the USDA Senior Executive Service (SES) or equivalent. Managers are defined as the people at USDA who are in management positions who ordinarily manage one or more supervisors (generally not SES). Supervisors are defined as your own first-line supervisor who is typically responsible for your performance appraisal and leave approval. If you receive the 2017 FEVS, it’s important to remember that the ratings you provide in the survey are about how we are doing at USDA. Your responses are completely confidential, and will be used to continue the positive success we have achieved at USDA.

USDA Testifies to Congress About Being a “Best Place to Work” in the Federal Government

By Ayana Bailey, Office of Human Resources Management

On Thursday, April 6th, USDA was invited to testify on Capitol Hill in front of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Government Operations for “The Best and Worst Places to Work in the Federal Government” hearing. USDA was invited to testify for being recognized by the Partnership for Public Service as the most improved large Federal Agency in 2016. The Department moved up into the top ten from #16 in 2013 to #9 in 2016, and the Committee was interested in our strategy for this accomplishment.



Roberta Jeanquart, USDA’s Chief Human Capital Officer and Director of the Office of Human Resources Management, testifies before the House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Government Operations on April 6, 2017.

Roberta Jeanquart, USDA’s Chief Human Capital Officer and Director of the Office of Human Resources Management, provided the testimony. She included the five strategies that have increased employee engagement: effective communication, employee development; performance management, support for diversity and inclusion, and work-life flexibilities. These practices have led to significant improvements across USDA.

Employee engagement also has many ambassadors, led by various Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Leads and Employee Advisory Committee Points of Contacts (POCs) who are leading the charge for engagement across the Department. These POCs are connected with the Employee Engagement Program Manager on a monthly basis to provide updates, reports, and share best practices. With all of these endeavors USDA is leading Employee Engagement in the Government! This is a huge accomplishment for such a large agency. As Ms. Jeanquart stated in her testimony, “we’ve made a business case that engaged employees are more productive employees. We know that we’ve made great progress, we know there’s more progress to be made and we look forward to this year’s survey.”

Committee Chairman Congressman Mark Meadows thanked USDA employees “for their service to the country...it’s very important that they hear this message loud and clear that they’re appreciated, not only by the American people but by members of both parties for their service to the country.” To see and hear Ms. Jeanquart’s testimony, visit these links:

Part I <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUqs8wbdj3U>

Part II <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vID8ZRn5wT0>

USDA FY2016 CFC Reaches \$1.35 Million

By Peggy Javery, Office of the Chief Financial Officer



Pictured L-R: Mike Young, Acting Deputy Secretary; Peggy Javery, CFC Manager; Iris Roseboro, Deputy CFC Manager; and Malcom Shorter, Acting Assistant Secretary for Administration (far right) present Joseph Burns, CFC Coordinator of Forest Service, the 100 Percent Mission Area Goal Award.

USDA's final contribution to the FY2016 Combined Federal Campaign for the National Capital Area (NCA) was \$1.35M. Through the leadership of the CFC Executive Team, Coordinators, and Key workers, employee giving reached a little over 90 percent of the \$1.5M goal.

The closing ceremony was held on Tuesday, February 21, 2017, to honor the USDA NCA with the Million Dollar Circle Award. Mission areas and agencies that reached 100 percent of their designated goals were also recognized. (GIPSA was the first agency after the CFC Kickoff to hit 100%.) A total of 13 agencies, and two Mission Areas were included in this category.

Additional recognition went to the agency with highest percent at 312% of their goal (National Appeals Division). Chairman, Honor, Merit, and E-Giving Agency Awards were presented.

The Most Innovative Event and Most Successful Agency Pledge Awards were highlighted during the ceremony.

USDA Expands Food Safety Hotline Hours for Consumers

By Chris Bernstein, Food Safety and Inspection Service

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) has expanded its Meat and Poultry Hotline by two hours daily to help consumers with safe food-handling questions.

The hotline is a toll-free telephone, chat and email service staffed by food safety experts who help prevent foodborne illness by answering consumer questions about the safe storage, handling and preparation of meat, poultry and egg products.

Meat and Poultry Hotline can now be accessed by calling 1-888-674-6854, or by visiting [Ask Karen](#) to chat or email, Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern Time. Consumers wanting information or to speak to a food safety expert are scheduled for interviews with FSIS experts.

In its 32 year history, USDA employees staffing the Hotline have answered more than 3 million consumer questions. The extended hours now allow FSIS to be even more responsive.

The Food Safety and Inspection Food Safety Hotline team responsible for expanding the Food Safety Hotline to help more consumers includes (from L-R) Clara Yuvienco, Nirav Shah, Archie Magoulas, Luis Delgadillo, Adam Ghering, Marianne Gravely, and Janell Goodwin; Seated are Janic Lopez-Munoz and Meredith Carothers".

Photo by Luis



Forest Service Offers Training for Women's History Month

By Montez Ashley, US Forest Service

"Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate." —President, John F. Kennedy

In collaboration with the Northern Research Station, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, Eastern Region, and Forest Products Laboratory, the 2017 Women's Day of Training Program featured a powerful workshop on negotiation skills for employees across several Forest Service units.

Regional Forester, Kathleen Atkinson provided opening remarks for the program. Darlene Floyd, Master Trainer with Horizons Management & Training Consulting, presented a two hour workshop on *"Making Your Words Count: Negotiating for Results."* Participants were able to develop a blueprint for engaging in the art of negotiation that they can use in both professional and personal ventures. Key points of the training included negotiation as a necessary part of life, techniques of negotiation, and tools and best practices for successful negotiations. Ms. Floyd used role plays and real life scenarios to drive home learning objectives. Most importantly, she removed the stigma often associated with the art of negotiation with her engaging presentation techniques. "The feedback received was overwhelmingly positive" stated Sheree Johnson, Director of Civil Rights for the Northeast Service Area. Many employees expressed sincere gratitude for the workshop.

Employees Celebrate All Cultures Week

By Montez Ashley, US Forest Service

The U.S. Forest Service Northeastern Civil Rights Team held its 4th annual All Cultures Week April 10-13. This year's theme, "Digging Deeper: Identifying Barriers to Authentic Workplace Inclusion," consisted of five presentations addressing various barriers to inclusive work environments. All of the sessions were [recorded](#) and are available for viewing. Participants received credit in AgLearn for their participation.

Presenters discussed building an inclusive work culture, navigating generational differences among employees, ways to communicate more effectively, understanding the value of culturally competent leadership and organizations in today's social climate, and awareness of crimes against those who are culturally different.

Mark Your Calendar for these Upcoming Special Observances at USDA

Asian Pacific American Islander Heritage Month

Thursday, May 25, 2017

LGBT Pride Month

Thursday, June 8, 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.

If you have an article for *MyUSDA*, you can email submissions to MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov. They may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline, a first-person account, or any work-related activity or event, particularly those focused on Leadership, Employee Engagement & Retention, Development and Training Opportunities, Customer Focus & Community Outreach, and Work/Life. Please keep submissions to fewer than 250 words. Photos and images are always welcome! If you have questions, please contact *MyUSDA* Editor Perry Stevens at MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov.

Winter Olympics Results Are In!

By Debra Arnold, Office of Human Resources Management

The USDA just concluded its 4th annual Winter Olympics with 673 Olympians crossing the finish line. Competition was fierce with employees from every agency and state competing in three levels of competition. A combined total of 1,839,884 minutes of physical activity were completed over the course of the eight weeks of competition. Congratulations to all our competitors!

Bronze Turtle



Sarah Costella
Farm Service Agency
Virginia

Silver Turtle



Kathy Archer
Rural Development/RBCS
Montana

Gold Turtle



Desirae Willms
Rural Development/RHS
Iowa

“This event gave me an extra push to get up, stay moving and strive to live a healthier lifestyle. Thank you for making this such a worthwhile experience and I hope that the program continues for years to come!”

Bronze Fox



Traci Jones
Animal and Plant
Health Inspection Service
Oklahoma

Silver Fox



Kathy Fox
Agricultural Research Svc.
Mississippi

Gold Fox



Samantha Ketteler
Rural Development/RHS
Nebraska

“The Winter Olympics was a wonderful experience for me. I started with the agency in July and had moved for the position, so this was a great way to motivate me to get active outside of work since I didn’t have my usual support group.”

Bronze Lion



Leslie Little
Forest Service
Colorado

Silver Lion



Mary McBreen
Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Gold Lion



Jennifer Youngblood
Forest Service
Wisconsin

“I want to encourage everyone to just get out there and move in any way that works. As I looked at other competitors each week, wow, I have some amazing colleagues in the federal family! Everyone who participated in the Olympics is a winner in my book!”

USDA Employees Bond Over DC Cherry Blossoms

By Nancy “Michelle” Chevalier, Rural Development

Part of Rural Development’s (RD’s) continuing efforts to engage employees, RD hosted its 2nd annual lunchtime Cherry Blossom Walk on the Tidal Basin, including a stop at the Jefferson Memorial, in Washington, D.C. Over 25 RD employees braved the wind and cold to participate in this year’s event.



Meanwhile, dozens of Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) employees volunteered during the National Cherry Blossom Festival, providing information to adults and children to create awareness about invasive species.

(Pictured Left) About two dozen USDA employees from Rural Development recently took advantage of an employee outing to view the cherry blossoms in Washington, DC.

(Pictured Below) Claudia Ferguson, Senior Regulatory Policy Specialist for APHIS, was one of the Agency’s volunteers at the Cherry Blossom Festival



USDA Homeland Security and Emergency Coordination Work Awarded Best in Government

USDA’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Coordination has been named the winner of the Association for Enterprise Engineering (AFEI) award in the Government category. The AFEI annually recognizes the strides made by government and business organizations towards achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness in a variety of performance categories. AFEI awarded this year’s award to USDA, Continuity of Operations Devolution Emergency Response Group (DERG) as part of the Continuity and Planning Division.

The award recognizes organizations that achieved greater efficiency and effectiveness in the application of technology to improve business and operational performance. AFEI specifically recognized USDA’s accomplishments applying technology and increasing efficiency in the operational performance of our DERG.

In its award citation, AFEI stated, *“The development, resourcing, and training of the USDA Devolution Emergency Response Group (DERG) is a success in integrating information systems, communication systems, network capabilities, broad based human expertise, and planning for shared resource availability nationwide...(It) provides a sustained Department leadership and decision-making capability for future emergency responses.”*

If you'd like to share your feedback about 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 monthly deadline for submissions is the end of the first week of each month.

Guidance on Submissions to MyUSDA

Submissions to *MyUSDA* are welcome. The ideal submission includes photos or graphics along with a brief description of the news story, achievement, experience, or 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 Workplace Leadership; Employee Engagement & Retention; Employee Development/Training Opportunities; Customer Focus & Community Outreach; and Work/Life.

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