



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 4, Issue 2

January 2014

2013 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS)

Thanks to all the USDA employees who participated in the 2013 FEVS! The survey was administered from April 30-June 14, 2013 to a sample of permanent full and part-time USDA employees, totaling 22,332 employees. Our response from Headquarters/National Capital Region was 31% and from the Field 69%. USDA’s response rate was 59.0%, 11 percentage points above the Government-wide response rate.

[FEVS Results - Department of Agriculture 1st Level Subagency Comparison Report](#)



Message from Secretary Tom Vilsack to All USDA Employees

An initial look at USDA’s scores reveals that although we did not achieve improvement in every area, we did realize improvements in areas on the survey that correlate to USDA’s Cultural Transformation Initiative. For example, USDA’s survey results are above the government-wide average in areas of diversity and inclusion, performance management, work/life balance, and telework. The survey results reflected sentiments I see at USDA offices across the nation: USDA employees truly care about our mission, are treated with respect by their supervisors, and are constantly looking for better ways to get the job done. The USDA results can be viewed at <http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/vu/index.php>.

No doubt this is a tough and uncertain time across the Federal government, and this survey reiterates the need for a strong commitment to each of you as you work hard on behalf of the American people. In the coming years I believe that we can continue to make USDA the employer of choice for many talented folks, and I am committed to working toward an even stronger future for our Department.

One important effort being undertaken today is a new focus on employee training opportunities. Through the Virtual University, USDA is taking steps to expand training opportunities across our workforce to help employees grow in their careers and expand their skills. The Virtual University team has initiated the [Aspiring Leader Program](#) to assist employees in the GS levels 9 through 12 in identifying and strengthening foundational leadership skill; the [Leadership Essentials Certificate Program](#) for those who are currently in roles that require advanced leadership skills; and the [Mentoring Framework and Portal](#) to provide guidance to agencies on effectively developing formal mentoring programs.

In addition, we will soon schedule employee workshops to facilitate candid exchanges and to assist in understanding employee concerns and anticipate potential concerns down the road. Your feedback is critical to making sure that USDA is a modern employer and a great place to work. USDA’s leaders, managers, and supervisors will be looking closely at the results of this year’s employee survey, and we will continue to gather input directly from labor unions and employees. Thank you, again, for your participation – and thank you for all you do.

Secretary Tom Vilsack (in his Dec. 13, 2013, email to all USDA employees)

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

USDA Shining Stars

By: Debra S. Arnold

Shining stars can be a beacon of light. Meet two of USDA's brightest beacons.

Janae Lentz at APHIS in Ames, Iowa, demonstrates a commitment to fostering both a mentally and physical healthy workplace by consistently encouraging healthy lifestyles. Janae and other employees participate in the [Live Healthy Iowa challenge](#) which is a program that brings together coworkers in team-based wellness challenges designed to promote positive lifestyle changes.

Janae shares with teammates what works for her and occasionally brings in samples of healthy recipes to for them to try. She encourages her staff to walk and explore the newly approved walking paths available on the grounds. Janae is recognized and respected by her peers for her commitment to Work/Life balance of co-workers, family, and friends.

Congratulations and thanks for being a guiding light!



Jon-Michael "Max" Muise is "a supervisor who makes work/life balance a priority." As a supervisor at Rural Development in Vermont for 18+ years, he understands the importance of family and how an employee can be more productive when work and home life are in balance. Max puts in to practice what is required to achieve that balance by encouraging employees to put family first, stepping in to help employees when workloads get heavy, advocating for teleworking and maximizing the use of flexible work schedules.



Max is also a great proponent of Health and Wellness activities, and models it by using the onsite gym. After his workout, he returns to the office by saying, "I warmed it up for you!"

One employee states, "Our office, with our priority on family and work balance, also works as a family. Our office is a happy place to be, and as such is also a highly productive one. Max believes that when employees are encouraged to be happy outside the office, they make motivated and productive employees. This is certainly the case with our Brattleboro (VT) office!"

Congratulations, Max, and continue to "shine on!"

Telework Week 2014 Pledge Site Now Open

The 2014 Telework Week pledge site is now open for accepting individual and organizational pledges. To sign up or for more information visit: <http://www.mobileworkexchange.com/teleworkweek/>



Telework Week 2014 is the fourth annual global effort to encourage agencies and individuals to pledge to telework on March 3-7, 2014.

[Sign up now](#) to determine your impact and savings, and then plan to telework March 3-7, 2014.

Become a Better Telework Manager: Six Part Online Training

USDA's Work/Life and Wellness Program, which is part of USDA's Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), is hosting a six-part, online series in Telework Management. The series is already underway, but it's not too late to catch up!

Free to all employees, these sessions are held from 12:00-1:00, EDT. You can [register here](http://www.tmgov.org/tmgov):
<http://www.tmgov.org/tmgov>

- **Jan 9, 2014:** *The Ten Things I Hate About Telework: Overcoming Common Myths and Misperceptions*
- **Jan 23, 2014:** *Telework as a Reasonable Accommodation*
- **Feb 6, 2014:** *What's in it for me?: Supervisor Best Practices*
- **Feb 20, 2014:** *What's in it for me: Employee Best Practices*
- **Mar 6, 2014:** *The Tools and Technology of Telework*
- **Mar 20, 2014:** *The ROI of Telework*

For more information send an email to: telework@dm.usda.gov

USDA Earns Honor for Being Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace



Certificate of Excellence

Presented to

United States Department of Agriculture

In recognition of your continued efforts to provide an exceptionally supportive work environment for breastfeeding families.

This 6th day of December 2013

Sahira Long, MD, IBCLC
President
DC Breastfeeding Coalition

Dana Silver, MD, FABM
Past-President
Maryland Breastfeeding Coalition

Breastfeeding
Friendly Workplace

Last year the DC/MD/VA Breastfeeding Coalition awarded USDA with its highest honor: the Gold Award as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace.

This year, because of USDA's continued efforts to provide a supportive, flexible workplace where working mothers can participate in the Nursing Mothers Program when they return to work after the birth of a child, USDA was [honored once again](#).

As we continue to focus efforts on future initiatives in support of Nursing Mothers at USDA, consider joining our online Nursing Mothers Work Group community page on our [Work/Life and Wellness](#) page at USDA Connect!

New Community Forming for Fathers In the Workplace

Are you interested in helping fathers in the workplace find a better balance between parenting and having a successful career? So are we! Last month during National Caregiver's Month, USDA screened the Boston College Center for Work&Family's 'Fathers in the Workplace' webinar, as part of their research entitled "The New Dad."

An under-researched area within the work-life field, recent evidence suggests that working fathers may experience the same levels of work-family conflict as their female counterparts. Visit our "Fathers in the Workplace" [new online community page](#) to connect with others who are interested in forming a forum to address these important topics.

For more information contact: worklife@dm.usda.gov

Project Grow Field Trip to Aamodt's Apple Orchard

By Julie MacSwain Recently, twelve students from Project Grow gathered at Aamodt's Apple Orchard in Stillwater, Minnesota. Project Grow connects Hmong youth to natural resources, conservation and leadership through participation in afterschool activities. Project Grow is made possible through a partnership with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The students learned why soil is as critical to human life as water and air. Michael Whited, Senior Soil Scientist with the NRCS in St. Paul, used an apple as an analogy for planet earth (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mA78nPn41F4>) to show students how humans survive on a thin soil skin, or what he calls the "ecstatic skin of the earth."

The students learned about the importance of soil carbon and how it is reflected in soil color. For example, new soil material deposited by erosion is typically lighter in color while an older soil is darker. The students were shown an "inverted" soil profile with the darker C rich former surface A horizon soil buried by newer, lighter colored sediment. This led to conversations about soil health, soil erosion and conservation.



The students also learned more about the Apple farming operation and how this operation has played a role in the Stillwater community. Following the field trip the students enjoyed sampling some apples, cider and apple bratworst!

A special thank you to Tou Pha, Michael Whited and John Xiong for their role in planning the Project Grow field trip. For additional information regarding NRCS' role in Project Grow, please contact John Xiong at 651-602-7863.

Become a USDA Internal Coach!

USDA's Virtual University is Now Accepting Applications for the 2014 Graduate Internal Federal Coach (GIFC) Certification Program

By Marisol Rodriguez

The USDA's Virtual University (VU) is seeking candidates for the **2014 USDA/HHS Internal Coaching Boot Camp Program**. This unique opportunity is being offered to a limited number of USDA employees seeking an active role in transforming the USDA into one of the Federal government's best places to work, by becoming a USDA internal coach.

Coaching, as defined by the International Coach Federation (ICF), is a relationship guided by a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires employees to maximize their personal and professional potential. Enrich your own professional work-life by becoming a coach to a new employee. USDA is partnering with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) based on its successful model of creating a cadre of internal coaches.

Upon completion of this seven-month program, candidates will receive the Office of Personnel Management's Graduate Internal Federal Coach Certification, a newly established Federal government coaching certification.

For more information, visit the **USDA Virtual University homepage**. (<http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/vu/index.php>)

Three Reasons Why USDA Employees Have Chosen to “Connect”

By **Jamie Edmunds**

USDA employees do extraordinary work like risking their lives putting out fires, keeping our food safe on the processing line, and helping farmers stay in business through crop insurance programs after the worst drought in 80 years.

Most importantly, USDA employees are bringing the value of Rural America back to the forefront. Many employees are achieving these results with the help of [USDA Connect](#), a social networking application that empowers employees to be innovative and share ideas and successes. Here are three key reasons why employees are using Connect:



- To strengthen communication and collaboration;
- To reach out to employees across agency lines; and,
- To help improve the lives of others.

USDA Employees are building communities within Connect to collaborate, communicate and share creative ideas for getting the work done. In spite of extraordinarily tough budget times, USDA employees are finding creative solutions to con-

tinue to make the work of 90,000+ USDA employees relevant and vital to rebuilding Rural America. For example, check out USDA's [Blueprint for Stronger Service Community](#).

Today, 60,000 employees are in USDA Connect collaborating within Agency Communities and building new Cross-Agency Communities of interest in both administrative and program areas. For example, check out USDA's [Worklife and Wellness Community](#). Each and every USDA employee can log into Connect and easily navigate to communities that interest them. So, if you are self-directed and want to challenge yourself while learning how to do your job more efficiently, then USDA Connect is the place for you and, maybe, your entire Agency.

Watch for new Connect features coming January 18, 2014.

NRCS Connecting Works!

Connect is “home” for 11,000 NRCS employees. In 2013, NRCS leadership decided to “own engagement” within their agency and adopted USDA Connect as their main repository for internal employee communications. Over the next three years, the considerable return on investment has improved operational efficiency, reduced operational costs, improved agility through innovation, and, most importantly, increased employee engagement and morale. For more info: Reach out to [George Couch](#), USDA Connect Advocate (NRCS).

Want to Learn more about how you or your Agency could Connect? Contact [Steve Coon](#) for more information.



COMMON CENTS CORNER



Business Operations Update From USDA's Administrative Business Initiative Council (ABIC) – Four Priority Areas:

[Workers Compensation](#); [Strategic Sourcing](#);
[Marketplace for Shared Services](#); and, [USDA's Smartspace](#)

By coming together across Agency and Departmental Lines, leadership decided on four key areas to work on in 2013 and 2014. Collectively, these partnerships have not only resulted in improved processes and increased savings, but also a renewed focus around USDA's overall mission. Two Agencies stepped up in 2013 to lead in the areas of improving customer service and streamlining operations. *Check out:* Forest Service – “Customer Help Desk” and Agricultural Research Service – “Support Services Contract” on [USDA Connect](#).

Continue to watch and influence these four priority areas on [USDA Connect—Blueprint for Stronger Service Community](#)

Blueprint for Stronger Service RESULTS:

- No USDA employees furloughed in FY 2013
- Overall Blueprint Savings in the past 3+ years—\$1.2 Billion

USDA Honored at 7th Annual Human Capital Training Conference

By Michelle Jordan-Hedgeman and Vladimir Jean-Charles

Departmental Management's Recruitment Program received one of the top honors at the 7th Annual Human Capital Management Government (HCMG) Training Conference in the category "Most Innovative Recruitment Program." The HCMG Training Conference, held in December, brought together key stakeholders from throughout the Federal government and Defense Human Resources Communities to discuss best practices for managing human capital, improving efficiency and advancing innovation.

The award acknowledged the Department's efforts in attracting top talent, implementing an effective recruitment strategy, and demonstrating improvements in the hiring process. The conference also featured panelists from the Office of Human Resources Management lending their expertise on the subject matter areas of "Communicating Clear and Compelling Career Paths to Retain the Best and the Brightest"; "Revitalizing Succession Planning Today to Avoid a Difficult Situation Tomorrow" and "Employee Health and Wellness On A Dime".

The HCMG received 72 nominees with nine of the submissions coming from USDA for consideration in these categories: Most Innovative; Best Workforce Development; Best Implementation of an Enterprise Technology System; and, Best Leadership Development Program.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was among the top three finishers in the Best Leadership Development Program. The purpose of the program is to develop a cadre of leaders to implement NRCS' mission of "Helping People Help the Land." This is the second consecutive year that the NRCS Emerging Leadership Development Program (ELDP) has been recognized as finalist. The award recognizes ELDP's focus on training and preparing future leaders, developing cutting-edge human capital strategies, communicating effectively, managing performance and leading in a joint environment.

During the two-year period, 70 NRCS employees graduated from the ELDP. Participants completed 12 organizational improvement projects designed to give them a broader perspective of the work of the agency. Since the inception of the program, 51% of the participants have been promoted to leadership positions.

Veterans Unite: Join the USDA Veteran Employees Organization (VEO)

The Veterans Employee Organization (VEO) is open to all USDA veterans and supporters of veterans who are interested in working together on behalf of positive workplace issues. For more information or to sign up for our list-serve, send an email to worklife@dm.usda.gov or VACFeedback@dm.usda.gov.



Let the Olympics Inspire You to Greater Fitness!

USDA Winter Olympics started January 1st and runs through February 28th! It's your opportunity to increase your activity—whether you're just getting started or are an experienced athlete. If you would like to participate, register under one of these three categories; Turtle (novice), Fox (intermediate) or Lion (expert). Decide which category you believe you belong based on the following:

- Turtle - 30-44 minutes of exercise or 6000-7999 steps per week
- Fox - 45-59 minutes of exercise or 8000-9999 steps per week
- Lion - 60+ minutes of exercise or 10,000+ steps per week

Visit [Work/Life and Wellness](#) Community of Practice on USDA Connect to pledge your participation, post weekly results, track your progress and keep an eye on the competition! Results will be shared weekly and posted on our community webpage. Upon completion of the USDA Winter Olympics, three winners will be announced (Bronze, Silver and Gold) in each of the three categories (Turtle, Fox and Lion) for a total of nine winners. The participants with the highest combination of minutes and steps in each category will be determined the winners. Results are self documented and based on the honor system.

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 February submissions is Thursday, February 6, 2014.

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.