



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

# My USDA

## A Progress Report for Employees On USDA's Cultural Transformation

December 2010  
Volume 1, Issue 2

### USDA's CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION ACTION ITEMS

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

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## A Message from USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack

This is the second in a series of updates for USDA employees to tell you about the actions we're taking—and the progress we're making—in creating a cultural transformation throughout the Department. We're doing more than just talking about change, we're actually creating it through new initiatives that offer you opportunities for professional growth and development while increasing the satisfaction you experience while working for USDA.

In the first issue of My USDA, we looked at your responses to the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FedView) and unveiled steps we will take to improve those responses in the future through the creation of the USDA Virtual University and by requiring increased Supervisor and SES accountability. Among other initiatives, we also

highlighted the Department's new Veterans Employment Program and the significant progress achieved in collaborative labor-management relations. In this second issue, we introduce you to a new and improved AgLearn and bring you up to speed on an initiative that is already seeing success as it forges new and productive partnerships with employee affinity organizations. We also take a close look at the recent Hiring Reform Process implemented throughout the Federal government and how it impacts you and the USDA workforce. Inside you will also find updates on the fruits of the new Presidential Labor-Management Initiative and news of the new telework regulation and how that will impact USDA employees.



If you haven't read the first issue of My USDA, I encourage you to do so. We'll continue to bring you important updates on the USDA action items developed to bring about cultural transformation throughout the Department. Thanks for your participation in this process, and I hope you will consider providing feedback via the Cultural Transformation website <[culturaltransformation.usda.gov](http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov)> about the initiatives we are implementing and how we can continue to improve USDA, every day in every way.

**Thomas J. Vilsack**  
Secretary

*Cultural Transformation (CT) is the process of creating a workplace where all employees and customers are treated with dignity and respect and provided the opportunity for success.*

### PRESIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM ON FEDERAL HIRING REFORM

In May, the President released an unprecedented memorandum in which he declared, "The Federal Government must recruit and hire highly qualified employees and public service should be a career of choice for the most talented Americans. Yet the complexity and inefficiency of today's Federal hiring process deters many highly qualified individuals from seeking and obtaining jobs in the Federal Government." To address these barriers, the President implemented the following six directives on November 1, 2010:

- Eliminate narrative KSA essays at the beginning of the application process;
- Accept resumes in any format, with optional cover letter;
- Use category rating;
- Ensure management engagement, involvement, and accountability throughout the hiring process;
- Improve the speed of the hiring process; and
- Notify applicants at 4 points within the hiring process.

In this issue of My USDA, we have the first of several reports on the impact of these hiring reforms throughout the Department. See the first of these articles on page 6.

## PRESIDENT OBAMA SIGNS HISTORIC CLAIMS RESOLUTION ACT OF 2010 Act Will Fund Agreements Reached in the Pigford II Lawsuit

*"President Obama and I made a firm commitment not only to treat all farmers fairly and equally, but to right the wrongs in USDA's past. I applaud those who took this historic step to ensure black farmers who faced discrimination by their government finally receive justice. And I commend those who led this fight in the U.S. Congress, and I am thankful for their unwavering determination."*

Secretary Vilsack



**Brandi Peters (left) is a Senior Counsel in the Civil Rights Division of the Office of the General Counsel (OGC)**  
**Inga Bumbarly-Langston (right) is the Associate General Counsel, Civil Rights Division, OGC.**

On December 8, 2010, President Obama signed the Claims Resolution Act of 2010 which included funding for the agreements reached in the Pigford II lawsuit, also known as the Black Farmer's settlement agreement. Secretary Vilsack says passage of the Act finally allows USDA to turn the page on past discrimination against black farmers.

"The Claims Settlement Act will allow those that have been waiting to get the relief they deserve and have long been promised. USDA has worked with Congress to include strong protections against waste, fraud, and abuse and ensure that only deserving applicants are reimbursed under this settlement," the Secretary said.

The lead attorneys representing the Department were invited to attend the presidential signing. Inga Bumbarly-Langston, the Associate General Counsel in the Civil Rights Division of the Office of the General Counsel (OGC), and Brandi Peters, a Senior Counsel in the Civil Rights Division of the OGC, were the attorneys at USDA who worked for the past two years to negotiate and draft the agreement. Their many months of hard work and dedication to an equitable outcome were an invaluable contribution to the success and passage of the Act.

To read more about the settlement and the Pigford II lawsuit, visit <http://www.blackfarmercase.com/>. To read more about the signing ceremony, visit the White House blog at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog>.

**"Today I have signed into law H.R. 4783, the "Claims Resolution Act of 2010." This Act, among other things, provides funding and statutory authorities for the settlement agreements reached in the Cobell lawsuit brought by Native Americans; the Pigford II lawsuit brought by African American farmers; and four separate water rights suits brought by Native American tribes. While I am pleased that this Act reflects important progress, much work remains to be done to address other claims of past discrimination made by women and Hispanic farmers against the Department of Agriculture as well as to address needs of tribal communities."**

President Barack Obama



*President Barack Obama joined by Members of Congress and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, and Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr., signs the Claims Resolution Act Bill of 2010 in the South Court Auditorium of the White House Dec. 8, 2010.*

*(Official White House Photo by Chuck Kennedy)*

## TWINS WHO STARTED THE SAME DAY BOTH TO RETIRE AFTER 37+ YEARS WITH USDA

December 2010 is a significant milestone for twins Delores Plum and Denise Hayes. They are retiring after more than 37 years each with USDA. They joined the Forest Service as high school students in 1973, going to school half a day, and then working for four hours a day each afternoon. They started as GS-1's and were promoted to GS-3's when they graduated.

The twins have carpooled together every day for their entire careers, never having lived more than 20 miles apart. After 13 years with the Forest

Service, Denise got a job in the Property Management Division of Departmental Management, where she has remained for the past 24 years, rising to the level of GS-15 Division Chief.

Delores has spent her entire career in the Forest Service working in the Business Operations, Acquisition field. She worked herself through a clerical career position, purchasing agent, and contract specialist until her position as Space Management Officer began in 1990 and continued until her retirement.



*Twins Delores Plum and Denise Hayes are retiring at the end of December after 37+ years with USDA.*

Denise, Delores and their lifelong friend Laurie Lewandowski, who has also worked for the Forest Service for 37+ years, all started with the FS within months of each other. They have all been friends since the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Delores' new career after retirement will include babysitting her granddaughter, Emmalina, and any more that might come along, and building out a new homestead somewhere in the Warrenton, VA area. She will also be busy going back and forth to North Carolina to visit her twin, Denise.

## USDA CREATES ROAD MAP FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

At the heart of Secretary Vilsack's case for the Cultural Transformation of USDA is the creation of a high performing organization that values diversity and inclusion. To that end, the Department has issued an official Diversity Road Map to serve as a springboard for establishing viable diversity recruitment programs within agencies. The Diversity Road Map defines USDA's strategic focus to cultivate a diverse and inclusive work environment.

OHRM's Diversity Road Map is organized around the following components:

**1. The Goal for Leadership Accountability and Commitment:** Ensure leadership accountability for hiring and retaining a diverse workforce in USDA mission areas, agencies and staff offices.

**2. The Goal for Outreach and Partnership:** Provide strategic diversity outreach and partnership initiatives to hire and develop a skilled and diverse workforce to meet the needs of USDA.

**3. The Goal for Recruitment and Hiring:** Provide strategic diversity recruitment and hiring initiatives to attract and develop a skilled and diverse workforce to meet the needs of USDA.

**4. Retention and Promotion:**

**The Goal for Retention:** Provide quality leadership training to managers and supervisors on retention strategies, wellness and work life balance.

**The Goal for Promotion:** Provide career opportunities and resources for career development through mentoring, coaching and Individual Development Plans.

**5. The Goal for Diversity Training and Awareness:** Articulate our diversity training

and awareness goals to the USDA workforce, act as ambassadors in our efforts, and recognize programs and individuals for exceptional contributions.

**6. The Goal of Employee Development and Recognition:** Provide training opportunities for developing employees and their mentors.

The USDA Diversity Road Map ensures equality of opportunity and inclusion through national policy development, diversity programs, workforce analysis, and education and training to best serve our employees, customers and key stakeholders.

*If you would like a copy of the Diversity Road Map, please email Monshi Ramdass, USDA Diversity Program Manager, at [Monshi.Ramdass@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Monshi.Ramdass@dm.usda.gov).*



*Graduates and instructors from USDA's first Special Emphasis Program Managers training class in September 2010. Formal SEPM training is essential for promoting diversity and inclusion at USDA.*

## **Go Beyond the Training You Know: Have You Used AgLearn Lately?**



If you have, then congratulations and thank you! In fact, more and more USDA employees are using [AgLearn](#) for all their training and development needs. In Fiscal Year 2010, over 500,000 courses were completed online, helping the Department achieve approximately \$32 million in cost avoidance and savings. Since its inception in 2004, AgLearn has not only helped us reduce the cost and streamline the delivery of online and in-person training across the Agency, it has also opened new doors for the Agency's 100,000 employees in terms of professional growth and personal enrichment.

But these are just some of the benefits that AgLearn has brought to USDA and the constituents we serve.

Next time you use AgLearn for mandatory training, take a moment to explore its other capabilities. You might be surprised to learn that AgLearn offers so much more in the form of training and learning development opportunities that not only serve the Agency's mission, but unlock the potential of every employee to better serve our constituents, while enriching your career and life skills. Additionally you have the ability to search, access, and enroll in any of the offered coursework, including online and instructor led. All your training records and activities are managed in AgLearn.

Here are just six ways in which AgLearn can benefit you, the mission, and those we serve:

**Go Beyond the Training you Know** – Are you ready to grow your potential? AgLearn's award-winning immersion training programs go beyond traditional learning formats to provide innovative skills-based training that help you expand your leadership potential, enhance your business skills, increase your technical competencies, and improve your financial fitness and personal well being.

**Learn More, Faster** – With over 6,000 online courses and 15,000 books, AgLearn can help you fast-track your performance, earn college credits, gain world-renowned certifications such as Six Sigma and CISSP®, and support your professional IDP goals.

**In the Office, at Home, or on the Go** – Take courses in the office, at home, or download podcasts and chapters of leading professional reference books.

**No Limits** – Whether you want to take one course or 20 courses, there are no limits to the amount of training you complete.

**Training that Better Serves Our Constituent Needs** – Not only is AgLearn a great tool for helping you unlock

your potential, it also helps USDA optimize our investment in you! AgLearn helps enable our mission and improve the quality of services we deliver to our constituents. For example, take a *Rosetta Stone* course and serve your constituents in their language of choice, or brush up your customer service skills with our "Effective Telephone Techniques" training.

### **Quickly Find the Right Course for You**

– AgLearn's interface lets you quickly browse subject areas. Once you find the topic that interests you, expand the grouping by clicking the + sign to get a quick glimpse of the courses available. Quick tips and FAQs also help you find the training that's right for you!

Whatever your training needs, AgLearn offers an expansive collection of courses, delivered through your medium of choice – from instructor led and webinars to podcasts, Chapters to Go and on-demand videos.

AgLearn is also constantly evolving to stay in tune with the needs of USDA employees, stakeholders and in support of the Department's overall mission. We're even exploring the use of video teleconferencing and Virtual Worlds to help unlock the world of training in new and exciting ways.

Visit [www.aglearn.usda.gov](http://www.aglearn.usda.gov) to experience what AgLearn has to offer, or contact Team AgLearn at [AgLearn.Info@usda.gov](mailto:AgLearn.Info@usda.gov).

## **THE USDA CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION WEBSITE**

*Be sure to check out the Department's Cultural Transformation website at [culturaltransformation.usda.gov](http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov).*

*The site is a place where you can find updates on important initiatives and accomplishments, key messages from Secretary Vilsack, and learn about activities in the field.*

*You'll also be able to provide instantaneous input around the five key areas driving transformation, which are Leadership, Talent Management, Employee Development, Recruitment and Retention, and Customer Focus and Community Outreach. The site is a platform for creating dialogue among employees and to enable the workforce to share ideas, discuss hot topics and gain insight into how USDA is creating a new legacy through the Cultural Transformation initiative.*

## USDA IMPLEMENTS INNOVATIVE EMPLOYEE "ONBOARDING" PROGRAM



Onboarding is a term you may be hearing a lot of soon. It refers to the process for welcoming and bringing new employees into an organization and assimilating them (as quickly as possible) into the culture of the workplace. The onboarding process is important because it is a new employee's first real introduction to our workforce.

USDA is an enormous place, and it can be overwhelming for someone new, so effectively welcoming fresh faces into the daily life of the Department is essential. Those first few days can be stressful and confusing; a warm welcome and helpful information can make all the difference to a new employee. As part of Secretary Vilsack's business process improvements, USDA has created a standardized Onboarding Program to assist our new entrants in becoming productive and engaged members of the USDA team.

USDA's innovative Onboarding Program for all new employees is currently being successfully piloted at headquarters for the Staff Offices and Departmental

Management. Some USDA agencies have already implemented their own onboarding programs. It will be implemented USDA-wide soon.

OHRM Deputy Director William P. Milton, Jr. says the establishment of the USDA-wide Onboarding Program brings much needed attention to the process. "It's important that employees' initial experience be welcoming. An improved, clear, and comprehensive onboarding experience results in energized, dedicated, and high-performing employees in the performance of public service."

A working group led by OHRM, with the participation of representatives from the Mission Areas and the unions, developed several useful tools to assist new employees and their supervisors. The working group has developed innovative tools to assist both new employees and supervisors in making the Onboarding Program a success.

One exciting new feature is the creation of a new web Onboarding Portal which will feature a video message to new employees from the Secretary and will

be a treasure trove of useful information about USDA, its agencies, Federal service and employee benefits. The Portal will also serve as a central "go-to" point for new entrants to obtain necessary forms and specific information before their arrival at USDA.

Another important new feature of the Onboarding Program is the creation of new guides and an easy-to-scan one page supervisor checklist. These easy-to-read guides assist supervisors by fully explaining their role in the onboarding process and the role of "sponsors" (co-workers assisting the new employee as a "buddy"). A new guide also has been prepared for sponsors, to ensure their success in the process. An employee's experience during the first days and weeks on the job make a lasting impression. USDA's new Onboarding Program will provide new employees throughout USDA with a warm welcome and the information, tools and support they need to become productive team members.

## TOURING THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Secretary Vilsack opened up the Office of the Secretary to USDA employees at the end of November and mid-December. As part of the Cultural Transformation, the Secretary invited employees to sign up for a tour of what has been commonly called "The Cage." The tours are in keeping with "Small Acts of Inclusion" and transforming what could be perceived as an inhibiting label into a place that is welcoming.

The guided tours included many interesting facts about the Secretary's Suite and some of the interesting artifacts therein. The tours gave the Secretary an opportunity to thank employees, especially during the holiday season, for their commitment to the mission of the Department and for support of the Cultural Transformation.



**Christie Vilsack, wife of the Secretary, welcomes a group of USDA employees touring the Office of the Secretary December 10, 2010**

## **FEDERAL HIRING REFORMS: BRINGING IT HOME FOR USDA EMPLOYEES**

### **New Reforms**

- ◆ ***REDUCE APPLICATION BURDEN***
- ◆ ***SHORTEN HIRING PROCESS***
- ◆ ***CREATE A WIDER POOL OF QUALIFIED CANDIDATES***

As of November 1, 2010, new hiring reforms have been implemented throughout the Federal government. So what does that mean for present and future USDA employees?

The first thing the reforms accomplish is making the application process for federal jobs a whole lot easier. Until now, applicants for new positions and promotions had to complete lengthy essays describing their Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs). Now, with a resume and cover letter you can easily apply for federal jobs.

Another federal hiring reform replaces the old "Rule of Three" with the ability to refer the best qualified candidates for a position to the hiring official—not just the top three. This allows the hiring official to consider every candidate who is best qualified for the job instead of only the three highest-rated applicants. The result is a wider pool of eligible applicants who can now be considered to fill open positions.

Additionally, an important change brought about by the federal hiring reform is a shortened application process and the inclusion of a mechanism to keep applicants informed about

the status of their applications.

The new hiring reform process will give the Federal government momentum to attract the most talented and high quality candidates by reducing burdensome application procedures and the time it takes to make a final selection. More high quality candidates will apply for federal jobs because they will know to expect communication and feedback about the status of their application, as opposed to filing an application and then waiting months without hearing anything about the job.

The new hiring reforms are in place, but the Department is continuing to make improvements. Feedback from employees and managers will be collected to gauge satisfaction with the reforms. Anita Adkins, the Director of the Human Resources Policy Division within the Department's Office of Human Resources Management, says the process will be streamlined and improved based on how well these changes are being received by the end users (applicants and hiring managers.)

"This will be an ongoing process. Let's say our average time to hire is 131 days. We will re-

duce that time moving toward a goal of 80, so it will be on a continuum that will provide additional opportunities to be more efficient and effective so that USDA attracts not only the best and brightest performers and the diverse workforce we want, but we also engage them and retain them. We want to become a model Department for both hiring and retention."

USDA has had several accomplishments related to the new hiring reforms. They include:

Reducing the number of days in the end-to-end hiring process by eliminating obsolete policy;

Issuing Departmental Regulation to implement Category Rating;

Issuing advisory memoranda to eliminate the use of KSA essays in the initial stage of the application process, providing instructions on vacancy announcements, and more formally establishing policy to notify applicants at four key points in the hiring process;

Launching a Hiring Reform website;

Collaborating with OPM "Mobile Assistance Team" to provide a hiring reform workshops and training;

Meeting with the National Labor Forum to brief National Union leaders on Hiring Reform; and

Establishing performance standards to increase hiring manager accountability.

**"Our goal has been to improve the hiring process so that USDA agencies and offices can recruit and hire highly qualified employees who will deliver the quality services and results the American people expect and deserve and to establish a diverse workforce that looks like America. Our ability to achieve our missions effectively and efficiently depends on a diverse, talented, and high performing workforce."**

**—Secretary Vilsack**

## WHAT THE TELEWORK ENHANCEMENT ACT MEANS FOR USDA:

**“Work is WHAT you do, not WHERE you are...”**

A great majority of USDA employees who work and commute in the metropolitan DC area have seen the slogan from the General Services Administration (GSA) promoting Telework options on METRO trains throughout the National Capital Region. Well thanks to the new Telework Enhancement Act, also known as HR 1722, many more of them will be practicing that way of working, rather than reading the signs during their daily commute.

The new Telework Enhancement Act promotes increasing work-at-home opportunities for federal employees. And following the aftermath of last year's crippling snow storms in Washington, it is a much needed business practice that is being pushed for by President Obama. As part of his efforts to increase workplace flexibilities for the federal workforce, Telework is just one of the programs that positively affect an organization's bottom line.

But there is still a perception that

*“This disconnect between the needs of our families and the demands of our workplace also reflects a broader problem, that, today, we as a society still see workplace flexibility policies as a special perk for women, rather than a critical part of a workplace that can help all of us.”*

workplace flexibility only affects women, or that employees who need time to care for an elderly parent or attend a school function for their child aren't engaged or fully committed to the job. However, studies show that's not the case. A report released by the White House Council of Economic Advisers in March found that flexible work arrangements result in lower turnover and absenteeism as well as higher productivity from a healthier workforce. As USDA works to transform the culture of its workforce and the minds of its leadership who affect employment decisions for its employees, Telework is just one program that will help lead the way.

So what exactly will HR 1722 really do for USDA employees, who are located in duty stations across the country and around the world?

- ◆ It will expand the eligibility for USDA employees to Telework, especially for those who are in occupations that do not require daily on-site work or interfacing with customers;
- ◆ It will allow for expanded flexibility in professional development opportunities for USDA employees, especially when considering applying for positions, details, or rotations that are well outside of their local commuting areas (Teleworking full-time can be an option in some instances, in fact USDA has hired a number of “virtual” employees in 2010 alone);
- ◆ It will provide enhanced Telework training focusing on developing performance plans that demonstrate results, enhance productivity and optimize time management skills;
- ◆ It will empower employees to perform their jobs based on the success and results they accomplish, not based on the

number of hours they log or meetings they attend in the traditional office;



- ◆ It will offer USDA a strategy for recruiting and retaining top talent and increasing the diversity of its candidate pool- even if it means hiring them from a different zip code altogether;
- ◆ It will cut the costs of commuting for employees and can help increase the air quality by reducing pollutants and dangerous vehicular emissions;
- ◆ It will help reduce realty and facility renovation costs for USDA by increasing “hotelling” or shared office space for regular Teleworkers- allowing for funding of other important programs and initiatives for the workforce;
- ◆ It will- in addition to embracing telecommuting, flexible and compressed work weeks, job sharing and part-time employment- help employees provide better service to the American people, even in times of emergency, unplanned closures or early dismissals, by enabling them to take care of themselves and their families- all while performing the essential elements of the job.

What other changes can you expect? USDA will align its Telework Program strategy with OPM's objectives to **Improve Continuity of Operations, Promote Management Effectiveness** and **Enhance Work-Life Balance**. The Department has already named Mr. William P. Milton, Deputy Director for the Office of Human Resources Management as USDA's Telework Managing Officer (TMO) as required by the new law. Plans to conduct regular monitoring and to implement new assessment tools of the USDA Telework Program are also in the works. Stay tuned for more information from us about USDA's Telework Program and how it will support the new Telework Enhancement Act!.

**For more information about HR 1722 and other news about Teleworking, you can visit:**

<http://www.teleworkexchange.com/news.asp>

**For a full summary of the bill visit:**

<http://www.fedsmith.com/article/2628/official-summary-telework-enhancement-act-2010.html>

## **ESTABLISHING STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS WITH EMPLOYEE AFFINITY GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS**

As part of the Secretary's proactive move to correct USDA's past civil rights track record, the Department is taking concrete steps to strengthen the relationship with employee affinity organizations and associations.

The Secretary believes that proactive partnerships with the various groups will increase recruiting and retention efforts throughout USDA.

To accomplish this, a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with a cross-section of national employee organizations are currently being implemented, with the goal of improving workforce diversity within the Department.



National Image Inc. Chair/CEO Sylvia Chavez-Metoyer and Asst. Secretary for Administration Pearlie Reed sign the MOU while being observed by Gabriel Tapia, Vice Chair of National Image Inc., and Robin Heard Deputy Asst. Secretary for Administration.

The purpose of the MOU initiative is to establish a commitment with a diverse coalition of

National Employee Organizations such as Federally Employed Women (FEW), the Fed-

eral Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC), the Conference of Asian Pacific American Leadership (CAPAL), Asian American Government Executive Network (AAGEN), Federal Managers Association (FMA), League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE), Student Veterans of America (SVA), and National Image, Inc.

These partnerships will provide the framework for identifying mutual issues and concerns as well as help to develop and implement solutions for ensuring equality of opportunity, access to employment, career enhancement opportunities, and improved workplace quality of life for USDA's workforce.

## **USDA RECOGNIZED AS MOST GENEROUS IN THE "FEDS FEED FAMILIES" CAMPAIGN**



**USDA collected more pounds of non-perishable goods during last summer's "Feds Feed Families" campaign than any other federal agency or Department.**

Front Row (from left) Max Finberg, Director of the Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partners and manager of the USDA Feds Feed Families Campaign; Carmen Jones, Special Asst. to the Assistant Secretary.

Back Row (from left) OPM Director John Berry; Lynn Brantley, President of the Capital Area Food Bank; OHRM Deputy Director William P. Milton, Jr.; Stacy Porto, Special Asst., Office of the Secretary; Secretary Vilsack; Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration Robin Heard; Livia Marques of the People's Garden.



To date, Assistant Secretary for Administration (ASA) Pearlie S. Reed has signed MOUs with FEW, FAPAC, CAPAL, AAGEN, FMA, SAIGE, and National Image Inc. These kinds of formalized relationships have been titled as a best practice within the Federal government. In coming months, ASA Reed anticipates signing MOUs with the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and Student Veterans of America (SVA).

The impact of this effort will establish opportunities for USDA employees to attend National Conference events in order to enhance networking opportunities and attend professional development courses as approved by their Individual Development Plans. In addition, this initiative will increase awareness of USDA as an employer of choice, its programs and service delivery, and to enhance recruitment, hiring, career development and retention of a diverse workforce at all levels.

## LABOR-MANAGEMENT FORUMS WORKING COLLABORATIVELY TO IMPROVE WORKLIFE

Executive Order 13522 requires departments and agencies to establish labor-management forums through which unions and management will work collaboratively outside the bargaining process on ways to improve the delivery of government services to the American people.

The Executive Order instituted an approach to labor relations called pre-decisional involvement (PDI). PDI requires management to take its ideas to unions before a decision has been made to adopt them so that employee ideas can be incorporated into the decision-making process.

At the national level, the USDA Labor-Management Forum is made up of representatives of seven national unions and senior USDA managers from across the Department.

The responsibility of this national level forum is to engage the national unions in PDI and to oversee the implementation of Executive Order 13522 throughout the Department.

Regarding PDI, the USDA has included union-appointed employees on workgroups looking at developing a Department-wide onboarding program, enterprise networking tools, and the Cultural Transformation website.

To date, the Department and its national unions have worked collaboratively on the following Departmental Regulations:

- ◆ Telework
- ◆ Individual Development Plans (IDPs)

- ◆ Labor Relations
- ◆ Payment of Travel and Transportation Expenses for New Appointees and Pre-Employment Interviews
- ◆ Advances in Pay
- ◆ Employee Awards and Recognition
- ◆ Administrative Leave
- ◆ Employees Assigned to Reconstruction and Stabilization Activities
- ◆ Mentoring
- ◆ Referral Bonus Awards



- ◆ Employment of Veterans
- ◆ Text Messaging While Driving
- ◆ Drug-Free Workplace, and
- ◆ Onboarding Requirements.

Additionally, they have engaged in discussions on the need to improve the Department's 2010 Employee Viewpoint Survey scores.

As part of its oversight responsibilities, the USDA Labor-Management Forum established the following three major categories of forum work that will be measured to evaluate the effectiveness of labor-management collaboration:

1. Employee Satisfaction and Engagement
2. Mission & Service Delivery; and
3. Labor-Management Relationship.

All labor-management forums in the USDA will be responsible for setting goals, developing plans, and working to improve their agency's performance in each area.

Periodically, all forums in agencies in the Department will report their progress against the established standards to the USDA Labor-Management Forum.

The USDA Labor-Management Forum will then provide progress reports to Secretary Vilsack and the President's National Council on Federal Labor-Management Relations.

USDA is also one of only seven Departments in the Federal government that has an agency/union partnership participating in the (b)(1) Bargaining Pilot Program under the Executive Order.

The USDA (b)(1) bargaining project is between the Office of General Counsel and the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 1106. They will negotiate a replacement of the current paper based research and case han-

dling processes with an electronic system that has capabilities for online research of internal documents and electronic case management.

If you are interested in knowing what labor-management forums are doing in your agency or if you want to contribute your ideas to help your agency work better, please contact either your agency's labor relations officer or the appropriate union president.

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