



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

# MyUSDA

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

Volume 2, Issue 3

January 2012

### USDA's Cultural Transformation Action Items

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

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### A Message from Secretary Tom Vilsack



Effective communication is essential if we are to successfully implement USDA's mission. USDA employees work on a host of important issues – ranging from food, agriculture and natural resources to economic development, energy, science and education. Your work is directly improving the lives of millions of Americans. We have a great story to tell about these efforts to make a positive difference for every family in America. But not everyone knows it.

That's why I believe it is important to acknowledge the impressive accomplishments we have worked together to achieve during the past three years. USDA has done outstanding work, which we have documented in a series of fact sheets that I want to share with you. Here are just a few of the accomplishments noted in the [USDA Top Accomplishments fact sheet](#):

USDA currently provides critical nutrition assistance to 1 in 4 Americans during this time of record need.

We serve nearly 32 million children each day through USDA's school lunch and breakfast program.

USDA will prevent as many as 25,000 foodborne illnesses each year by implementing new and tougher standards to reduce the occurrence of the Salmonella and Campylobacter pathogens in poultry.

We provided 103,000 loans to family farmers, totaling \$14.6 billion in total credit, and over 50

percent of those loans went to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

USDA worked with more than 400,000 farmers and ranchers to implement conservation practices that clean the air we breathe, filter the water we drink and prevent soil erosion.

Worked to improve water and soil quality and enhance wildlife habitat on private lands larger than the state of California.

Provided grants and loans to assist over 50,000 rural small and mid-sized businesses in creating or saving 266,000 jobs.

Invested in over 6,250 community facilities projects, reaching nearly 29 million rural Americans, including 736 education facilities, 433 libraries, 581 health care facilities, and 2,800 public safety facilities.

Invested in new and improved broadband service for nearly seven million rural residents, and 364,000 rural businesses, saving or creating over 25,000 jobs.

Invested in 5,100 water and waste water community infrastructure projects to help safeguard the health of 18 million rural residents and create or save 135,000 jobs.

Helped approximately 25,000 rural small businesses, farmers, and ranchers, save energy and improve their bottom line by installing renewable energy systems and energy efficiency solutions that will save a projected 6.5 billion in kWh – enough energy to power 590,000 American homes for a year.

And these are just a handful of the positive results you are making into reality every day.

I urge you to read all the new accomplishments fact sheets so you can appreciate the tangible changes we are making together.

- [Food Safety](#)
- [Conservation](#)
- [Agriculture](#)
- [Energy](#)
- [Nutrition](#)
- [Rural Development](#)
- [Trade](#)

You can contact the staff of My USDA via email at [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov), and be sure to visit the [USDA Cultural Transformation Website](#).

**Thomas J. Vilsack**

## USDA Participates in VA's Veteran Career Fair & Expo

USDA took part in the Veterans Administration's first "VA for Vets," a Veteran Career Fair and Expo held January 18, 2012 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D. C. In support of the One-USDA recruitment initiatives, there were 21 USDA recruiters, hiring managers and staffing specialists (from AMS, APHIS, ARS, DM, FS & FNS) that volunteered to converse with veterans to inform them of the application process, discuss hiring flexibility options, and to review veterans work experience for specific or transferrable skills that can be matched for various student and career job opportunities at USDA.

USDA employee Pedro Nieto (center) of the Forest Service talks with veterans at the career fair and expo.



Jerry McGaughran of the US Forest Service (right) takes information from an applicant.



## Food Safety and Inspection Service Office of Outreach, Employee Education and Training "Pilot" Mentoring Program

By Salina A. Barton

In an effort to support the USDA Cultural Transformation initiative, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), Office of Outreach, Employee Education and Training (OOEET), Equal Employment Advisory Committee (EEOAC) launched a "pilot" mentoring program in Fiscal Year 2011.

Through the OOEET "Pilot" Mentoring Program, mentors participating in the program had the opportunity to provide guidance and support based on mentees' developmental needs and aspirations. Mentees had the opportunity to work with a mentor to identify and set professional development goals. As stated by a pilot participant "As a first time mentor, the OOEET "Pilot" Mentoring program inspired me to

*get to know my mentee's goals, to grow in our shared experiences to work toward her goals and to go and continue to give motivation to others to achieve their goals."*

The OOEET "Pilot" Mentoring Program kicked off in July 2011 and lasted on a formal basis for a period of one quarter, ending September 30, 2011. Each mentee/mentor pair was matched based on the information they provided in their profile forms. The program required participants to meet a minimum of two times per month either face-to-face or via teleconference, and to complete mid-point and final evaluations. The OOEET "Pilot" Mentoring Program helped to enhance the career and developmental goals for participants. The consensus of the participants indicated their interest

in being a part of a mentoring relationship – formal and informal, beyond the pilot phase. Most importantly, the mentoring relationships have inspired mentees to want to become mentors in the future.

The OOEET "Pilot" Mentoring Program committee will be delivering a briefing to FSIS Management Officials to share recommendations and lessons learned from the program. For questions regarding the



OOEET "Pilot" Mentoring Program, please contact Salina Barton, via email, at [Salina.Barton@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:Salina.Barton@fsis.usda.gov).



# Visits to Food Bank Promote Community Outreach

By Susan M. Siemietkowski and Jason Hatzenbuehler

A group of staff from the Alexandria, Virginia, headquarters office of USDA's Food & Nutrition Service (FNS) spent a recent afternoon helping out at the Capitol Area Food Bank (CAFB), located in nearby Washington, DC. The outing directly supports Cultural Transformation's "Customer Service/Community Outreach" pillar.



CAFB helps to feed the thousands of Washington Metropolitan area residents who currently do not have enough to eat or are at risk of facing hunger. In three hours, the FNS group sorted and packed approximately 14,000 pounds of donated items which were later picked up by families in need. Before starting the project, staff heard from a CAFB representative about the organization's history, mission and the population it serves. Without exception, FNS employees who participated were delighted to give back in this way and agreed that it was time well spent!

Staff from the Alexandria, Virginia headquarters office of USDA's Food & Nutrition Service sort donated food items before placing them into bins at the Capitol Area Food Bank (CAFB) in Washington, DC.

Employees from the Department's Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) also volunteered a day of community service to the CAFB.

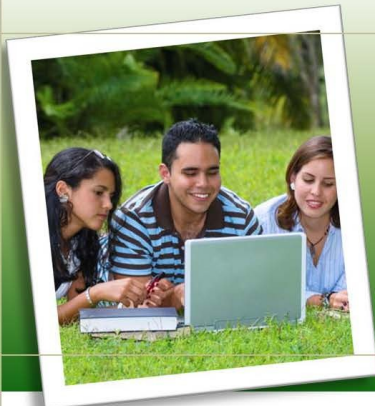


ABOVE: OHRM's Division of Recruitment and Diversity employees (from left) Michelle Jordan, Deb Arnold, Andre Teague, Jason Hatzenbuehler, Jonathan Kundrat, and Jacqueline Padron. BELOW: (from left, kneeling) Ali Muhammed, David Najafi, and Antoinette Scott.



## Webinars

February 6, 7 and 8, 2012  
From 3:00pm to 4:30pm (EST)



### Topics covered will be:

- An overview of the USDA Internship Programs
- Student employment opportunities available for the summer of 2012
- Basic qualifications
- How to apply

### Who should attend?

- Students currently enrolled in a college program (undergraduate or graduate).
  - ✓ Invitation is open to students in the following majors: Agriculture, Environment, Science, Mathematics, Statistics and Technology
  - ✓ Students must be U.S. residents or U.S. citizens
- Faculty and Career Services Staff

### Requirements to participate in the webinar:

- Have access to Internet
- Have access to a computer with speakers

### TO REGISTER:

- Register to be able to log-in to the webinar.
- Send an email to Wendy Carrasco, USDA Student Employment Program Manager, at [wendy.carrasco@dm.usda.gov](mailto:wendy.carrasco@dm.usda.gov)
- Be sure to indicate in the email message the date you would like to register for (Feb. 6, 7, or 8)
- On the subject type: "RSVP for USDA Internship Webinar"

### TO LOG IN:

- Check zone time before login into the webinar:
  - Ⓞ 4:00-5:30PM (AST)
  - Ⓞ 3:00-4:30PM (EST)
  - Ⓞ 2:00-3:30PM (CST)
  - Ⓞ 1:00-2:30PM (MST)
  - Ⓞ 12:00-1:30PM (PST)
- Click: <http://nifa-connect.nifa.usda.gov/hsgrantees/>
- Take photos while participating in the webinar with a brief description of what you learn through the webinar – photos will be posted at MYUSDA Newsletter.

## Student Intern Daman Wandke Finds Success in AMS Virtual Intern Program

By Dana Stewart

Daman Wandke is all about overcoming challenges... and so is the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). Daman, who has cerebral palsy, joined AMS in 2009 through the Microsoft internship for students with disabilities. His internship ended, but his passion to continue making AMS' PDF documents accessible to all website users did not. That's where the AMS Virtual Intern Program (VIP) came in.



Since 2001, the VIP has been using technology and innovative management to create a flexible, inclusive virtual workplace that allows AMS to retain highly talented students. So, Daman headed back to school at Western Washington University in Bellingham, WA, but he also (virtually!) stayed in DC so he could continue his work. His efforts were so successful that, last year, his accessibility research was awarded second place at the Emerging Researchers National Conference in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Daman applies the same passion to everything he takes on. At WWU, he founded and was president of Students for Disability Awareness, a grassroots group that he nurtured into a permanent campus Disability Outreach Center.

As he nears graduation from WWU this spring with a degree in management information systems, Daman is expanding his disability advocacy efforts to the state and national levels. He recently was named to the Washington State Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment. And, he is mapping out his next moves. "My goal is to help student organizations across the country create and promote disability awareness programs at their institutions.

By harnessing the power of the disabled community, we can create a national program that will break down stereotypes about employees with disabilities through education." Knowing Daman, we expect nothing but success in this and every other challenge he decides to overcome.

### Recruiting Interns with Disabilities

Secretary Vilsack has directed that 3% of our estimated 7,100 USDA student interns this season be students with targeted disabilities.

Between April and August, agencies will report hiring numbers through the USDA Metrics and Milestones report to the Assistant Secretary of Administration and Secretary Vilsack for review. Early recruitment yields the best results for USDA and we're bringing the best resources to you.

USDA is hosting the Federal-wide 2012 launching of the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) on Tuesday, February 7, 2012, in the Jefferson Auditorium of the South Building from 10:00am – 11:30am. Office of Personnel Management Director, John Berry is the key-

note speaker, with Department of Labor's Deputy Secretary Kathy Martinez of the Office of Disability Employment Policy.

The session will be recorded and posted as a webinar for all of USDA to access remotely. In the meantime, ensure that you're recruiting the cream of the latest crop of students with disabilities by registering for access to the WRP database:

[www.wrp.gov](http://www.wrp.gov) today! To participate in person, please RSVP to [WRPmarketing@dol.gov](mailto:WRPmarketing@dol.gov) by January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2012.

Sign language interpreting and captioning will be provided. Please include additional requests for reasonable accommodations with the RSVP.

### Vocational Rehabilitation Core Services and Support Include

- Pre-Employment
- HR/Staffing
- Reasonable Accommodations
- Staff Training
- Consultation

#### National Vocational Rehabilitation Contact

**Kathy West-Evans**  
 Director of Business Relations CSAVR  
 The NET: National Employment Team  
 (206) 999-9455

[kwest-evans@rehabnetwork.org](mailto:kwest-evans@rehabnetwork.org)  
 Website: [www.rehabnetwork.org](http://www.rehabnetwork.org)

#### National USDA Contact

**Alison S. Levy**  
 Disability Employment Program Manager  
[Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov)

#### State Rehabilitation Agencies:

<http://askjan.org/cgi-win/TypeQuery.exe?902>.

*Learn more about the VR Program from USDA's Disability Employment Program Manager Alison Levy on page five.*

*And please share your experiences working with local VR agencies so we can publish your success stories in future issues of MyUSDA!*



## USDA Disability Employment Program



**If you have any questions or have best practices to share, please contact Alison Levy, USDA Disability Employment Program Manager: [Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov). We look forward to hearing from you soon!**

Assistant Secretary of Administration, Pearlle S. Reed recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Council of Administrators of

Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), as the first Federal agency to do so at the national level. The agreement establishes a partnership that connects USDA agencies with CSAVR's National Employment Team (The NET); a network of more than 25,000 Vocational Rehabilitation specialists and their 10,000 community partners who will increase our USDA employment of individuals with disabilities. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is an awesome resource. Funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education, and state funds, they annually serve over one million

individuals with disabilities who are seeking employment. USDA agencies now have the option to connect with The NET at the national, regional, or local level through one single point of contact. There are a variety of available service options to enhance our recruitment, accommodation, employment, advancement and retention of employees with disabilities: all at no charge to USDA.

Assistant Secretary for Administration, Pearlle S. Reed shakes hands with Chief Executive Officer, Stephen A. Wooderson, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), while representatives from USDA and Vocational Rehabilitation observe the commemorative MOU signing.



## Southwest Conference on Disability Provides Recruitment Opportunity for FS

**By Nicole Ebberhart**

The US Forest Service Albuquerque Service Center – Human Resources Management (ASC-HRM) turned a commitment to Cultural Transformation into a successful opportunity for recruitment at the Southwest Conference on Disability.

Based on this effort, the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation presented the ASC-HRM with the Excellence in Disability Employment Award.

The ASC-HRM began participating in the Southwest Conference on Disability in 2010. This week-long conference, held in October, is hosted by the University of New Mexico (UNM) Division of Disability and Health Policy.

The Conference primarily offers seminars and workshops focused on providing persons with disabilities access to information that affects their lives.

The ASC-HRM and Kirtland Air

Force Base recognized an opportunity for recruitment at this annual event. In 2010, the two partnered with UNM to add a career fair to the Conference. The career fair demonstrated to be beneficial to both the community and the participating agencies. In 2010, the ASC-HRM identified 30 vacant positions, accepted 230 applications, and ultimately filled 20 positions.

In 2011, the ASC-HRM identified 86 vacancies and accepted 104 applications. Selections for these positions are currently in progress.

Based on the ASC-HRM's successful recruitment efforts, federal representation at the Conference has increased this past year. The US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Army Corps of Engineers joined the Conference. Additionally, the Veterans Administration and the New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation provided support

to applicants and federal agencies in both 2010 and 2011 by providing Schedule A letters.

These letters document eligibility for persons with disabilities to be considered and appointed non-competitively by Federal agencies, helping to streamline the recruitment process.

In addition to the career fair, the Conference began offering free pre-conference workshops.

The Forest Service and several state agencies provided participants with valuable information on an array of topics. Plans to provide free year-round workshops and webinars are currently under development for 2012.

The partners also plan to increase recruitment nationwide and extend the recruitment period. By focusing on abilities,

diversity, and inclusion, the ASC-HRM is creating a diverse, high-performing organization. The recruitment effort will continue to grow and to have a positive impact on both the community and the agency.



Forest Service ASC-HRM recruiters at the 2011 Southwest Conference on Disability: (left to right) Sonya Montoya, Jessica Torres, Cindy Dominguez-Trujillo, interpreter.

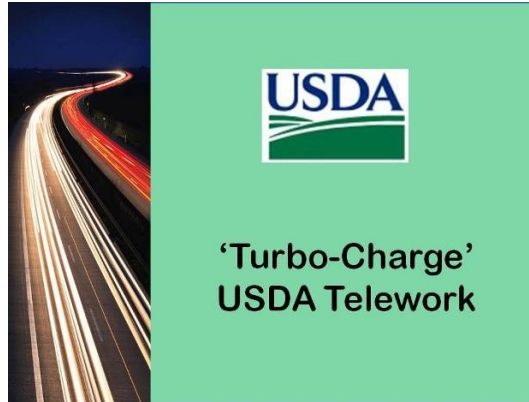
## TELEWORK AT USDA

To learn more about the USDA Telework Program or to share your stories, visit the Work/Life and Wellness Community page on USDA Connect or send an email to [telework@dm.usda.gov](mailto:telework@dm.usda.gov).

With a new year comes new opportunity for USDA to renew its commitment to enhancing Telework and other key Work/Life flexibilities for its eligible employees. This month, USDA is kicking its efforts up-a-notch, so to speak, and launching a new marketing campaign entitled, "Turbo-Charging Telework."

Several components comprise this initiative for USDA to Turbo-Charge Telework, including a new series of free, monthly webinars entitled, "Let's Talk Telework!" as well as an open invitation to all employees to participate in an online Telework Survey. In addition, USDA has pledged to support national Telework Week this March as an executive Champion

By **Mika J. Cross, USDA Work/Life and Wellness Program Manager**



We are looking to hear from you about ways you think USDA can Turbo-Charge Telework - feel free to contact us with your ideas by sending an email to: [telework@dm.usda.gov](mailto:telework@dm.usda.gov) or connecting with us at the Work/Life and Wellness community page on

USDA Connect!

We look forward to having you join these and other upcoming opportunities to increase Telework at USDA... stay tuned for more information in upcoming editions of MyUSDA.

for the event. Last year, more than 500 employees participated in the week-long event to support, pledge, and participate in Teleworking, and this year USDA hopes to increase the level of participation significantly.

### Let's Talk Telework! Free Webinar, Thursday, January 26<sup>th</sup>

USDA's Work/Life and Wellness Programs, WCTS, and AgLearn is proud to host the first in a series of free online workshops each month that are available to all employees, supervisors, and managers on a first-come/first served basis, entitled "**Let's Talk Telework!**" The workshops are offered on the last Thursday of each and every month, beginning January 26<sup>th</sup>; 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. EST. Series topics will feature important issues relative to USDA's Telework Program and will allow for interactive question and answer sessions throughout the presentation.

You can help shape the topics of discussion by submitting your suggestions to: [Telework@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Telework@dm.usda.gov) or [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov).

Choose below from the two registration options:

#### Option #1:

Review the webinar as part of a group (as an audio conference set-up) on a reserved phone line: Web Address: <https://aglearn.usda.gov/plateau/user/deeplink.do?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=27212>

#### Option #2:

Review the webinar by myself or become a group leader and dial in to a teleconference line to hear the audio. Web Address: <https://aglearn.usda.gov/plateau/user/deeplink.do?linkId=REGISTRATION&scheduleID=27153>

Once you select the desired link, you will be prompted to log into AgLearn which will take you directly to the registration confirmation page. Be sure to select **Confirm** to save your registration and then log out. Within 30 minutes, you'll receive an email confirmation from the AgLearn System that contains an attachment that provides all the access information needed to enter the meeting room on the day of the webinar. Be sure to save this attachment. If you have any questions about the webinar, the registration process, or access to the webinar, please contact [worklife@dm.usda.gov](mailto:worklife@dm.usda.gov).

## Join the Telework Week Movement Pledge to Telework March 5-9, 2012

Beginning Monday, March 5, 2012, USDA will champion participating in the second annual Telework Week.



Led by the Telework Exchange and supported by USDA, Telework Week is a week-long effort

to encourage Agencies and employees across the Department to pledge to telework. We invite you to [pledge](#) to telework the week of March 5-9, 2012 – it's free to participate.

Telework is a win-win-win opportunity for USDA and the environment. Telework supports:

- Meeting the Federal telework law requirements - *Telework Enhancement Act of 2010*
- Real estate savings - *Presidential Memorandum on Disposing of Unneeded Federal Real Estate*
- Sustainability - *Executive Order 13514*
- Business continuity
- Improved productivity
- Personnel recruitment and retention
- Work/life balance and commuter savings
- Reduction of traffic, greenhouse gas emissions, and wear and tear on public transportation

Pledge your support by visiting [www.teleworkexchange.com/teleworkweek](http://www.teleworkexchange.com/teleworkweek).

During Telework Week 2011, nearly 40,000 pledges saved \$2,730,229 in commuting costs, gained back 148,692 hours into their day, and removed 1,818 tons of pollutants from the air, while refraining from driving 3,764,001 miles.

For additional information and to pledge, please visit [www.teleworkexchange.com/teleworkweek](http://www.teleworkexchange.com/teleworkweek).

You can learn more about USDA's Telework Program and other Work/Life and Wellness Programs by visiting the [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community page on USDA Connect, or by sending an email to [worklife@dm.usda.gov](mailto:worklife@dm.usda.gov).

### Take the Telework Survey!

Please think about participating in a free, 8-10 minute web-based Telework survey to document your perceptions and attitudes about teleworking at USDA. No personally identifying information is collected as part of the survey, and individual responses will be treated confidentially.

The survey will be open until the end of January, and aggregate results will be shared in a future edition of the *MyUSDA* newsletter. Please consider taking the time to complete the Telework Survey below:

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/WEB22E4XKXYLPW/>

### UPCOMING SPECIAL OBSERVANCES

- **Black History Month Observance**  
Thursday, February 16, 2012, at the Jefferson Auditorium
- **Women's History Month Observance**  
Thursday, March 8, 2012, at the Jefferson Auditorium

Observances are scheduled to begin at 10:00 a. m. (EST)

**IF YOU'RE IN DC, ADD THESE TO YOUR CALENDAR**



# USDA Reaches Out to Underserved Asian American Community

**By Brunilda Velez**

In collaboration with OHRM's Diversity and Recruitment Division, the USDA Service Center in Menomonie, Wisconsin worked with local partners to outreach to underserved/underrepresented Asian communities to meet the intent of the White House initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

One of the activities was a conference hosted by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). The event was called "Marketing Beyond the Farmers Market." The purpose was to educate Hmong producers about different marketing avenues for their produce. Participants included **University of Wisconsin-Extension** who discussed

the importance of pest and herbicide management. Other topics provided included: Safe Farm Produce Handling, Farm Service Agency programs and loans, and other farm related assistance from non-profit organizations.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) participated in a resource panel and provided information about programs and assistance available to the local community. NRCS provided Hmong translated flyers, brochures, and other information about program and upcoming sign-ups and initiatives. NRCS focused on practices that are most applicable to this group. The targeted practices were: seasonal high tunnels, organic transition plans, grazing and its components, nutrient and pest management. NRCS also emphasized the importance of using Web Soil Survey as a resource to help them choose farmland.

The second event was the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Hmong New Year Celebration hosted by the University of Wisconsin Stout Hmong Student Organization. During

this event, Hmong students and members of the communities dressed in traditional clothing and enjoyed traditional foods, dance and music. The New Year's Celebration "Nyob Zoo Xyoo Tshiab" gives thanks to ancestors and spirits, and welcomes in a new beginning.

Employees from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rural Development and Farm Service Agency were able to educate the local community about USDA employment, student programs, and assistance available through several USDA programs. Such as first time home ownership, home repair grants, conservation programs, and beginner farmer loans.



Ka Ying Vang, the NRCS Asian-Pacific Islander Special Emphasis Program Manager, talks about Seasonal High Tunnels during the conference.



The USDA display included the Farm Service Agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Rural Development.



Children in traditional Hmong clothing.



Nyob Zoo Xyoo Tshiab, the Hmong New Year celebration, is linked to personal renewal and giving thanks for the blessings received during the past year.





ABOVE: Pang Vang, third from right, President of the Hmong Student Organization, along with other participating students. BELOW: Dancers present a traditional New Year celebration performance.



(from left), Brunilda Velez – NRCS District Conservationist, Tammy Pellett – NRCS Soil Conservationist Technician, Mary Hensley- RD Area Specialists, Marylan Duque - RD Area Technician, Maryann Bravo – RD Area Specialist and Laurie Tietz RD Area Technician. Not Pictured: Susan Larson – RD Area Director, Landis Wagner – RD Area Specialist.



On January 9<sup>th</sup>, Secretary Vilsack made a public speech and shared an email with employees about the efforts to improve USDA and the service we provide to the American people during this era of tight budgets. As a reminder, the all employee email shared a link where we can learn more details about plans. If you haven't already done so, please visit the Blueprint for Stronger Service website – accessible from the main page at [USDA.gov](http://www.usda.gov), and take time to hear the [VIDEO](#) recorded by the Secretary.

Blueprint for Stronger Service web site:

[http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=blueprint_for_stronger_service.html)

[contentidonly=true&contentid=blueprint\\_for\\_stronger\\_service.html](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=blueprint_for_stronger_service.html)

## AMS Encourages Underrepresented Farmers to Serve on Boards and Committees

By Corriece P. Gwynn

The Fall 2011 issue of *Minority Landowner* magazine features a cover story on the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and its efforts to encourage underrepresented farm groups to serve on the boards and committees that administer Federal marketing orders and research and promotion programs. The quarterly magazine reaches a cross section of underrepresented farm groups nationwide and will celebrate its sixth anniversary this year.

Entitled "A Call to Serve," the six-page article highlights opportunities that diverse persons have to contribute to the governance of 49 boards and committees supervised by AMS. The article also encourages underrepresented farm groups to view board and committee service as an opportunity to enhance leadership skills and to help bring about change in their respective agricultural community.



"The article is important because it allows us to share information with our readers about teamwork and diversity efforts at AMS, in addition to conveying information about serving on boards and committees," said publisher Victor L. Harris.

As a registered forester and former Assistant State Forester for Administration with the North Carolina Forest Service, Harris is passionate about the magazine and the clientele that he serves. The magazine will introduce the "North Carolina Farm Turnaround Team" at its Sixth Anniversary Conference to be held February 23-25, 2012, in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Harris is also assisting with the Minority and Limited Resource Farmers' Conference to be held March 2-3, 2012, at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri.

## AMS Livestock and Seed Program Harnesses Technology to Hold First All-Employee Meeting

Imagine that you want to connect with 500 employees working in more than 75 locations across the country to improve your organization. How would you do it in today's tight budget environment? Technology!

The AMS Livestock and Seed Program recently used a creative mix of technology to hold its first-ever All-Employee Meeting. Nearly all of the program's employees "met" via webinar using the USDA Creative Media Center's *ReadyTalk* application. Those who couldn't make it, including front-line graders who were on their shifts, were able to access the recorded session in its entirety at their convenience on AMS' intranet site.

Deputy Administrator Craig Morris led in-depth discussions on program, agency, and cultural transformation activities and goals. Participants then took part in a dynamic question and answer session -- some questions

were submitted before the meeting, anonymously if preferred, via the online *SurveyMonkey* tool and some were asked live via the *ReadyTalk* chat mechanism.

Questions addressed everything from the budget and organizational restructuring to increasing employee diversity and telework. Participants loved the interactive, open conversation so much they asked for more! So, early in 2012, the Program will hold another all-employee virtual meeting. In fact, the technology was so effective, the program used it to provide "live" headquarters and field supervisory training on Harassment in the Workplace and Reasonable Accommodation, and plans to hold additional training on more topics in the future.

Congrats to the AMS Livestock and Seed Program for their creative approach to connecting, communicating, and transforming.





## MyUSDA Security Corner

By Laura Fessenden

The following advice is provided by the USDA Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Coordination (OHSEC) to all USDA personnel to promote a more secure work environment at all USDA facilities:

1. Secure and lock all areas that are not open to the general public. Post signs in these areas stating "USDA Employees Only Beyond this Point". Additionally, make sure the last person to leave the office at night ensures all doors and windows are secured.
2. Question strangers in the work area that do not belong or do not have a valid visitor badge. Ask whom they are visiting to validate they are an authorized visitor. Ask if your facility has a formal visitor process. Do not sign any visitors into a USDA facility unless you validate they are conducting government business.
3. Keep all valuables (purse, wallet, keys, etc.) with you at all times or locked in a drawer or closet. Secure government equipment when not in use.
4. Mark any personal items brought to work (i.e. radio) with your name.
5. Discuss with your supervisor or co-workers methods to stay connected during the duty day while conducting field work or mission responsibilities away from the office.
6. Report any broken or damaged doors, windows, or door/window locks in your facility to the supervisor of facility maintenance as soon as possible as these items, if not properly working, may provide gaps to the overall security posture of the facility.
7. Report non-working or dim perimeter lights (parking garage/lot, walkways, etc.) or interior corridor/elevator/stairwell lights in your facility to the supervisor of facility maintenance as soon as possible.
8. Don't advertise your plans to be out of the office. This may include personal vacation or government travel. Disclosing this information can open a crime of opportunity for individuals who learn about your absence for an extended period of time. In the age of social media it is not recommended to disclose your location.
9. Familiarize yourself with your facility's Occupant Emergency Plan (OEP) and understand proper procedures in various emergency situations.

Following these tips may improve the overall security posture of your facility and provide a more secure workplace for all USDA employees.

As a reminder, OHSEC urges all USDA personnel to report any observed suspicious activity (which may include unattended briefcases/bags, individuals taking photos of federal facilities, etc.) to their local law enforcement agency or dial 911.

For additional information and examples of suspicious activity, please visit <http://www.nationalterroralert.com/suspicious-activity>.

## USDA Employees Embrace "National Day of Service"

By Susan Siemietkowski

Employees from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, and each of the agency's seven regional offices, spent several hours away from their desks on January 18, 2012, and worked at different food banks around the country. It was part of USDA's "National Day of Service" and as a way to honor the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Employees' desire to engage was overwhelming. In addition to helping people in need, team-building was fostered and stronger bonds formed among many who participated. FNS Administrator Audrey Rowe and members of her staff spent the afternoon at **Food For Others** in Fairfax, Virginia. Upon arriving and after receiving a brief orientation, employees sorted and packed food items that will be donated to local families who are food insecure.

"It's so great to be able to give back in this way" said Rowe. "Today's experience was especially fulfilling since **Food For Others** focuses on fighting hunger - - which is what FNCS is all about." she added.

Other USDA employees who volunteered were (from right): Lennetta Elias, Office of the Chief

Financial Officer, Louise Fox, Departmental Management, and Kim Chapman, Office of the Chief Financial Officer. They helped prepare the evening meal at the D.C. Central Kitchen during USDA's National Service Day on January 12, 2012. The D.C. Central Kitchen turns leftover food into millions of meals for thousands

of at-risk individuals while offering nationally recognized culinary job training to once homeless and hungry adults. USDA Photo by Tom Witham.





# Round of Applause for USDA's Hispanic Roundtable

By Jacqueline Padron

Recently, USDA hosted the first in a series of roundtable discussions between USDA and Hispanic community leaders. Pearlie S. Reed, Assistant Secretary for Administration, representing Secretary Vilsack, invited Hispanic associations and organizations—including USDA Hispanic employee organizations—to join USDA senior officials to discuss best practices, ideas, and strategies to increase employment of Hispanics at USDA. Oscar Gonzales, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration, was charged with leading the Roundtable.



Edward Avalos, Under Secretary, USDA Marketing & Regulatory Programs greets Hispanic Roundtable participants.

William P. Milton, Jr., Chief Human Capital Officer, OHRM, expressed USDA's commitment to having a workforce that mirrors the people we serve. "We are currently ranked as the fifth most diverse executive department in

the Federal government," Milton said. "But we're working harder to be a model service provider."

Participants included members of the National Council of Hispanic Emphasis Program Managers and the Hispanic Council on Federal Employment. Attendees learned about USDA's Diversity Road Map, which defines the department's strategic focus to cultivate a diverse and inclusive work environment that ensures equal opportunity and inclusion through national policy and development, diversity programs, workforce analysis, and education and training to

best serve our customers and key stakeholders.

They also learned about USDA's Virtual University and Student Portal. Invited guest speaker Veronica Villalobos, Director of Diversity and Inclusion at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), gave an overview of the Government-Wide

Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and an update on the Hispanic Council on Federal Employment.

In the afternoon, the group strengthened partnerships and had conversations about best practices, ideas, and strategies

to increase employment of Hispanics at USDA. The group contributed good insight into the challenges that Latinos face looking for Federal jobs and how to build a stronger foundation for the future of Latino employees at USDA. We are reviewing the group's recommendations and will incorporate as many as possible in our FY 2012 plans.

"If someone had told me when I was younger that I would end up working at USDA, I would have never believed them. My parents were farmers, and the reason that I ended up where I am today is because I was given an opportunity." This was a recurrent theme from USDA employees at the meeting. It's about recognizing talent and providing opportunities.

By strengthening our partnerships and continuing these positive conversations with Hispanic leaders, we will be able to diversify our workforce and ensure that we meet the needs of the communities we serve.

[Click here](#) to view more photos from the USDA Hispanic Roundtable.

If you'd like more information about the Hispanic Roundtable or USDA's Hispanic Program, please contact Jacqueline Padron, Diversity and Inclusion Specialist, at [jacqueline.padron@dm.usda.gov](mailto:jacqueline.padron@dm.usda.gov).



Judith Canales, Administrator, USDA Rural Development, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, speaking with Ana Rosario, President, National Conference of Puerto Rican Women and Al Gallegos, President, National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives.



USDA's Hispanic American Cultural Effort (HACE) installed a new slate of officers at its January 18, 2012 meeting. They are (from left) Marielsie Avila (Newly Appointed President); Febe Ortiz (Previously Appointed President); Karime Echevarria (Newly Appointed Vice-President); and Cynthia Cuellar (Newly Appointed Secretary).

## Letter to the Editor

### Watch Those Acronyms!

I write because I see a disturbing trend in government agencies. Since I have worked in the Geological Survey, the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and now the Forest Service, I am particularly sensitive to it. That is, the use of unfamiliar acronyms; thrown around undefined as if everyone knows what they mean. In the November-December edition of MyUSDA there is an article with the title "NIFA Recognizes Its Veterans." Not having any idea what NIFA was, I queried my office mates, some of whom have been working with the Forest Service for well over 30 years. NONE of them were aware of an agency or organization within the Department of Agriculture, or anywhere else; with the acronym "NIFA." Having attended many multi-agency meetings, I have frequently been the victim of acronym abuse. People at these meetings just **assume** that everyone is familiar with their "inspeak," and this is usually **not** the case.

In a publication which is sent out to the entire parent agency, any of these acronyms should be defined the first time they are used, or the meaning will be lost. I should not have had to go to the Department of Agriculture web site to search on "NIFA" to find out that it is the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. If I told you that my sub-organization was the CNO, would you know that it meant Centralized National Operations? The Geological Survey's style manual, Suggestions to Authors of the Reports of the United States Geological Survey states on page 229 that one should "Verify that abbreviations or acronyms are defined when first used . . ." However, on page 147 they say that "Acronyms are troublesome for most readers and should be avoided." I agree with that assessment.

**Roger D. Congdon, Forest Service  
Albuquerque, NM**

**The Government-Wide Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and Guidance is up on the Office of Personnel Management Diversity and Inclusion website.**

**You can view it here:  
<http://www.opm.gov/diversityandinclusion/index.aspx>**

*Editor's Response—This is a very good point, and you're right about our needing to spell out all acronyms. The NIFA example you provided slipped right by me, but I'll do better in the future!. Thanks for the letter!—PStevens*

## USDA Volunteers Commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. , By Marking National Service Day



J. Plunky Branch of the Afro-Funk Jazz Group, "Plunky and Oneness" performs a saxophone solo of The Negro National Anthem at the National Service Day and Martin Luther King Celebration in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s contributions to the Civil Rights Movement at the United States Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C., on Thursday, January 12, 2012. *USDA Photo by Bob Nichols.*

From left: Katie Yockam, Rural Development; Leslie Harvey, Departmental Management; Dr. Alma Hobbs, Associate Assistant Secretary for Administration; Pearlie Reed, Assistant Secretary for Administration; and William P. Milton, Jr., Chief Human Capital Officer, Office of Human Resource Management, help prepare the evening meal at the D.C. Central Kitchen during USDA's National Service Day on January 12, 2012. NSD honors Dr. Martin Luther King's contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. The D.C. Central Kitchen turns leftover food into millions of meals for thousands of at-risk individuals while offering nationally recognized culinary job training to once homeless and hungry adults. *USDA Photo by Tom Witham*

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](#)

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If you have ideas for future articles, contact us at [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov).

### MyUSDA Publication Schedule

- The February issue of MyUSDA will be published on Friday, February 24, 2012.
- The deadline for February submissions is Tuesday, February 21, 2012.

### 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. Submissions may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline (with accompanying photos strongly preferred), a first-person ac-

count (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.)

The ideal submission is a great picture with about 75-150 words to go along with it.

Email submissions or further inquiries to [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov)