




United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

October 27, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Under and Assistant Secretaries
Heads of Agencies and Staff Offices

FROM: Mike Johanns
Secretary 

SUBJECT: Celebrate the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Program During National
Disability Employment Awareness Month!

As we near the end of October, I want to remind you that this month is National Disability Employment Awareness Month—the perfect time to celebrate the Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program. The theme of this year's JWOD Program celebration is "JWOD Works for America." President Bush, in his New Freedom Initiative for people with disabilities, has pledged the Administration's commitment to increasing the ability of people with disabilities to integrate into our Nation's workforce.

The JWOD Program provides employment in local communities nationwide for a population that continues to experience an exceptionally high unemployment rate. In sharp contrast to the national unemployment rate of 5 percent, nearly 70 percent of people with disabilities are not employed. The JWOD Program, created by Congress to help alleviate this employment inequity, has become the largest single source of employment of Americans who are blind or have other severe disabilities.

Under the JWOD Program, Government purchase card users and acquisition personnel buy supplies and services furnished by nonprofit agencies employing people who are blind or have other severe disabilities. I am especially proud of our efforts here at USDA to provide employment and training opportunities for people with severe disabilities through our support of the JWOD Program. I ask all USDA employees to continue this support by identifying more contracting opportunities for the JWOD Program nonprofit agencies.

The major challenges to productive employment of qualified people with disabilities are attitudinal barriers and false assumptions about what people can and cannot do. What people with disabilities CAN do is be productive. Through JWOD Program employment, individuals with disabilities make a significant contribution to the Federal Government's critical missions.

Your efforts to develop awareness and to educate our workforce about this important program will help ensure that USDA makes an important contribution to President Bush's goal of fulfilling America's promise to people with disabilities.