

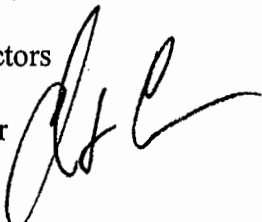


DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

MEMORANDUM

OCT 03 2007

TO: Subcabinet Officials
Agency Heads
Staff Office Directors

FROM: Charles F. Conner
Acting Secretary 

SUBJECT: AbilityOne Program Awareness and Celebration

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and the appropriate time to celebrate the AbilityOne Program, formerly known as the "JWOD" Program. President Bush, in his New Freedom Initiative for people with disabilities, has pledged the Administration's commitment to provide for increased opportunities for people with disabilities to enter into our Nation's workforce.

The AbilityOne 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 AbilityOne 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 AbilityOne 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 AbilityOne Program. I ask all USDA employees to continue their support by identifying more contracting opportunities for AbilityOne Program non-profit agencies.

Through AbilityOne 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 continues to make an important contribution to President Bush's Goal of fulfilling America's promise to people with disabilities.