OCFO OCIO

connections

Happy 4th of July

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Facilitating Change: the Office of the Chief Financial Officer

by the Communications Team and Stewart Small

Jon Holladay arrived at USDA in 1992 during an inauspicious time for OCFO. The Department had received adverse opinions in 1991 and 1992 stemming from weaknesses in accounting and financial reporting at the Forest Service (FS). USDA's financial systems were found to lack sufficient audit trails and to be non-compliant with evolving financial standards. Holladay helped lead the effort to address that problem. He also has collaborated on and witnessed countless other efforts led by his OCFO colleagues to improve financial and administrative systems and processes.

Photo: Jon Holladay, DCFO

According to Holladay, the OCFO workforce is a key component of the staff office's success. He recounted some of the organization's history and a few key projects.

"OCFO and its predecessor, the Office of Finance and Management, are known for being responsible for the Department's financial management policy and strategic planning. OCFO's National Finance Center (NFC) was formed in 1973 to provide a centralized payroll and personnel system, and centralized voucher and invoice processing. By the early 1980s, NFC had established itself as a leader in developing and operating cost-effective administrative and financial systems."

Passage of the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990 brought an increased focus to financial management. The Act established a leadership structure, provided for long-range planning, required audited financial statements, and strengthened accountability reporting. It impacted the effectiveness of USDA's financial management system significantly.

In 1994, OCFO launched an initiative to replace the legacy accounting system. The initiative, completed in FY 2002, is the key factor that enabled the Department to obtain its first-ever unqualified audit opinion. OCFO also implemented several new accounting standards, reduced the number of outstanding material weaknesses, and launched a new Government-wide system to automate the reconciliation of Federal Employee Health Benefits records. By FY 2005, OCFO automated most of the Department's financial-statement preparation process, improving quality and reliability.

Making things easier, faster, better…

"Today, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer is a facilitator and enabler for USDA," Holladay notes. "We provide the systems for financial management, human resources management, and property management. In partnership with Departmental Administration, we provide components of the procurement systems. We provide reliable, cost-effective, employee-centric systems and services to more than 140 Federal organizations representing all 3 Government branches. OCFO is responsible for policy on financial activities such as grants administration and travel. We manage and coordinate the annual effort to review and assess the Department's internal control structure.

"OCFO's mission is about providing better service. There are no monuments. We look at everything we do objectively and look for ways that we can change things so that changes can be executed easier, faster, better, and cheaper."

Department-wide, some of OCFO's key ongoing projects include:

- Working collaboratively with the 14 grants-making agencies to standardize the grants-management process. This initiative, known as the Lean Six Sigma Grants Process, also will lead to a common desktop for USDA grants-management teams. It will allow the Department to share expertise across agencies and improve the reliability and timeliness of process execution;

- Collaborating with FS to leverage information technology investments made by OCIO and Rural Development to implement the Lean Six Sigma Transaction Processing initiative. It is designed to automate invoice processing to improve efficiency, shorten the time required for payment, and reduce reliance on paper records;

- Working to make Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) a standard process. EFT, the transfer of funds by means other than paper instruments, is designed to offer safety, convenience, and reliability to payment recipients and cost savings to the Federal Government. For OCFO, it will reduce data-entry costs, improve accuracy, and speed service. It also will enable resources to perform additional financial data mining which will help locate savings in procurement, travel, and cell-phone management; and

- Implementing webTA to increase productivity, ensure cost effectiveness, and standardize processes. This new system will streamline time-and-attendance procedures and move the Department from a paper-based process to a fully electronic one. It will reduce errors substantially by validating the accounting information at the time of entry instead of after transmission to NFC.

Holladay says that many of the aforementioned changes to move from manual to automated processes and/or systems will enable employees to devote additional time to analytic functions. "They will continue to be a value-added workforce who will find solutions for our customers inside and outside of the USDA."

Technology is changing business processes at the same time that OCFO is losing employees to retirements. Holladay explains that management officials are preparing for these changes in a couple of ways. Besides designing new processes and training employees to perform new or additional analytic functions, there will be strategic recruitment for both entry-level and senior-level positions. OCFO also is continuing to use the aforementioned Lean-Six Sigma to manage and promote continual process improvement. "Lean Six Sigma is an important tool set as it standardizes the dictionary of improvement terminology and establishes a common tool set for process evaluation," Holladay says. "Possibly the most important lesson is that no process is ever perfect. We must diligently monitor the process and utilize the resulting data to determine whether additional changes are necessary and cost justified."

Holladay has served in all aspects of OCFO financial management and helped all 28 agencies standardize and stabilize financial practices. He says that OCFO is poised for more. Its efforts will be based on teamwork, following the mantra of keeping "an open mind, get input from others to expand how you see things, and then collaborate with others to innovate and improve what we do and how we do it. It is important that each team member continuously seeks ways to make processes more efficient and effective. I am continuously impressed by the efforts that OCFO's employees make to ensure we achieve our mission and provide quality service to our customers."

A Note from CFO/CIO Charles R. Christopherson, Jr.

Welcome to our first edition of the OCFO-OCIO Connections newsletter! I hope that this Newsletter will serve as a great way for each of the staffs to learn about one another and will serve as a means to bring us together. It is easy for each of us to get so wrapped up in our daily jobs that we become unaware of what is going on around us. Connections will be a way for you to keep up to date on all that is happening within both the Office of the Chief Financial Officer and the Office of the Chief Information Officer. I hope the Newsletter will also serve as an avenue that brings our geographically dispersed staff a little closer together. As we move forward, OCFO-OCIO Connections will become a multi-dimensional communications tool that will include both print and online versions of the Newsletter. Also, a Web site that will be a portal for more information on projects or articles you have read about in Connections will be available. Thank you again for taking a further look into the OCFO and the OCIO and I hope you enjoy this first edition of OCFO-OCIO Connections!

How OCFO and OCIO Connect to Support USDA Initiatives

USDA Secretary Visits the NITC Facility

by Jim Steven, Greg Zenitsky, and Bruce Pacot

On April 24, 2008, Secretary Ed Shafer, CFO/CIO Charles Christopherson, Jr., and Deputy CFO Jon Holladay visited the National Information Technology Center (NITC) Ward Parkway facility in Kansas City, Missouri. They met with USDA personnel from NITC, Cyber Security, Office of the Inspector General, and Forest Service. The Secretary addressed three USDA priorities:

1) Implementing the Farm Bill;

2) Promoting the progress of Agri-Fuel initiatives; and

3) Expanding IT connectivity to all users of USDA environments.

Photo: (left to right) Jon Holladay, Deputy CFO; Edward Reyelts Deputy ACIO, NITC; Ed Shafer, Secretary of USDA; Kent Armstrong, Acting Director, NITC; and Charles Christopherson, Jr., CFO/CIO.

The Secretary and the CFO/CIO responded to questions from the audience and discussed the direction of the Department. After the meeting, Secretary Shafer was available for pictures with the audience. Prior to leaving, the Secretary toured the enterprise data center to gain a better understanding of the mission critical environments that NITC hosts.

CSAM by Bryce Eckland and Evelyn Davis

In April 2006, USDA partnered with the Environmental Protection Agency to automate security assessments and corrective action planning using the Automated Security Self-Evaluation and Remediation Tracking (ASSERT) tool to report on Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) compliance and to track Plans of Action and Milestones (POA&Ms). The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) established the process of creating POA&Ms to assist in the management of weaknesses identified through FISMA and other sources. As deficiencies are identified through evaluation and self-assessment, plans are developed to correct the deficiencies. These corrective actions are documented and tracked through the development of POA&Ms. Progress on POA&Ms is reported to the OMB quarterly and annually.

ASSERT was an improvement over the prior POA&M reporting tool used; but, USDA grew beyond the capabilities of ASSERT and eventually, agencies were unable to generate FISMA reports as needed. ASSERT's inflexibility impacted the ability to provide detailed reports in a timely manner.

USDA selected Cyber Security Assessment and Management (CSAM) as the enterprise-wide FISMA reporting tool. CSAM is a comprehensive FISMA compliance tool developed for and by the Department of Justice (DOJ). It provides the ability to identify threats and vulnerabilities through the use of the embedded NIST SP 800-53 (Rev. 1) control requirements for Federal information technology (IT) systems. Using CSAM, IT security standards and procedures are tailored to meet the agency's needs and FISMA reporting requirements. CSAM also provides a complete POA&Ms tracking, management, and reporting tool and supports the implementation of a repeatable process that continually assesses control effectiveness. CSAM was designed and developed within the framework of the DOJ Enterprise Architecture as well as the Federal Enterprise Architecture due to the relationship with the President's eGov initiative. CSAM supports four President's Management Agenda initiatives:

- Strategic Management of Human Capital – managers and employees will develop and utilize new analytical skills;
- Competitive Sourcing – promotes innovation, efficiency, and effectiveness;
- Budget and Performance Integration – CSAM is a compliant Earned Value Management tool that calculates the statues of implementation plan and milestones in regards to budget, schedule, and performance; and
- Expanding Electronic Government – CSAM features allow for greater efficiency and reduced cost associated with Certification and Accreditation document development and maintenance, POA&Ms management, IT Inventory management, FISMA reporting and controls, and other OMB requirements.

CSAM is expected to replace the FISMA scorecard that takes approximately ¾ FTE (full-time equivalent). CSAM can generate security plans automatically which accounts for 95 percent of the security plan generation that represents a tremendous cost savings Department-wide. For each of the Department's systems, the estimated cost savings for security plans is $2,000 to $5,000.

USDA eAuth Service Recognized

The USDA eAuthentication Service was a top 20 finalist in the 2008 Industry and Advisory Council's Excellence.gov Awards. The theme, Improving Organizational Performance Using IT, recognized information technology solutions that improve the government's efficiency and organizational performance. Today, USDA's eAuthentication Service protects 270 USDA Web-based applications. In addition, USDA's eAuthentication Service is integrated with 10 federal-wide applications through the E-Authentication Federation. In a typical month, more than 95,000 USDA employees and approximately 190,000 customers have an active eAuthentication credential. This credential protects the application and the user by ensuring only qualified and approved users have access: first by authentication (verifying usernames and passwords) and then by authorization (matching the user to his or her application permissions). USDA eAuthentication Service customers use their credentials for nearly 2 million identity authentications and over 65 million Web site authorizations for access to protected content monthly.

FMMI Enhances Financial Systems
by Ann Adam

USDA continues to take steps to modernize its financial systems through the Financial Management Modernization Initiative (FMMI). FMMI makes way for the use of a state-of-the-art software package that will provide online, real-time transaction capability and access to both Department-level offices and all agencies. It will replace the Foundation Financial Information System and program financial systems, as applicable.

USDA launched FMMI after identifying the need to upgrade aging Departmental and agency financial and administrative payment and program general ledger systems. Department officials will use FMMI to address challenges and opportunities in the rapidly changing Federal financial management, and technology environment.

The launch began in September 2007 when USDA awarded the software integration services contract to Accenture to implement Systems, Applications, and Products in Data Processing (SAP) Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) 2005. SAP ERP 2005 is an advanced, Web-based, financial-management system that provides general accounting, funds management, and financial-reporting capabilities. FMMI will give USDA a modern, core financial-management system.

Implementing SAP ERP 2005

The FMMI Project Team members include Executive Sponsor Jon Holladay (Deputy CFO); Program Managers Mike Clanton and Kay Levy; and Project Leaders Tonya Allen-Shaw (Functional) and Jon Sandy (Technical). The team is implementing SAP ERP 2005 across USDA systematically. The agencies included in the first implementation phase are:

- Departmental Administration and Staff Offices;
- Agricultural Research Service;
- Economic Research Service;
- National Agricultural Statistics Service;
- Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service;
- Food Safety and Inspection Service;
- Office of the Inspector General; and
- Foreign Agricultural Service.

The FMMI Project Team will work with these agencies to achieve an implementation date of October 1, 2009. Aiming toward this target date, the team conducted workshops with subject matter experts from across the Department in April and May. The workshops were part of the initial plan-and-analyze phase. They introduced USDA-specific requirements and processes. The information gleaned from the workshops and individual agency follow-up sessions will be carried forward to the design phase which starts in July 2008. During this phase, USDA will determine how to meet Department-wide and agency-specific requirements for FMMI.

Preventing Self-Inflicted Spam!

Recently a blank email was sent out by mistake to a large group of recipients. In an effort to notify the sender, several recipients used "Reply to All" to inform the sender that the message was blank. When that occurred, all of the replies went to each recipient who had received the original email message which resulted in each recipient's mailbox becoming full and the overall email system slowed down.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

➢ If you get an email and you don't recognize the sender or the email is not expected, __DELETE the email__. If you think that the message may be a virus, report it to your supervisor.

➢ __DO NOT EVER "Reply to All"__ on a suspicious email, especially if you don't know who else was included in the distribution. If you think you received an email by mistake and recognize the sender, respond only to the person who sent the message to you by selecting the "Reply" button.

Please use good judgment when responding to unusual email messages received.

Janell Duke, Chief
ITS Operations Security Branch/IOD

Did You Know?

Upon request, the Controller Operations Division, Customer Liaison and Training Branch (CLTB) conducts training sessions for USDA agencies in New Orleans, Washington, D.C., or an agency site on a fee-for-service basis. Continuing Professional Education (CPE) credits are awarded upon successful completion of the course. Training sessions available are:

➢ Foundation Financial Information System (FFIS) ;

➢ Corporate Property Automated Information System (CPAIS) Real Property Management; and

➢ BRIO. This commercial off-the-shelf, report-writing software is used by financial managers to extract data from FFIS which is stored in the Financial Data Warehouse (FDW). BRIO allows users to query the FDW for data from specific FFIS tables. The query results may be limited or sorted and displayed in either spreadsheet or chart format.

In addition to the training listed above, CLTB also is available to coordinate training, such as Standard General Ledger (SGL), Federal Agencies' Centralized Trial-Balance System (FACTS) I and II, Appropriations Law, etc.

For more information, call (504) 426-5471, or email: customer.training@usda.gov

Volunteers Support FEB by Myra Garner and Bruce Pacot

The following National Information Technology Center (NITC) employees have volunteered and been given approval for the yearly commitment to support the Federal Executive Board (FEB) Committees and Councils:

- ☆ American Indian Federal Employees Council — Crystal Wallace
- ☆ Black Federal Employees Council — George Lovelace
- ☆ Hispanic Federal Employees Council — Greg Martinez (Transferred)
- ☆ Small and Minority Business Subcommittee — Jennifer Adams
- ☆ Veterans Affairs Subcommittee — Bruce Pacot
- ☆ Women's Federal Employees Council — Judy Gabriel

Throughout the year, these representatives attend meetings, promote diversity awareness events, hold "Lunch and Learn" sessions, support the FEB Unity Day Celebration, and communicate committee and council information to the employees at NITC. They also provide coordination and support of community volunteerism for a variety of special volunteer programs.

An example of a volunteer effort is the Annual Heart of America STAND DOWN, "Giving a Hand-Up to Homeless Veterans" in the Kansas City Metro Area. Each year, there are two events (summer and fall) supported by the FEB Veterans Affairs Subcommittee, NITC personnel, other government personnel, and local volunteers. The summer event was held on June 6 and 7, 2008.

On any given night, there are 1,800 homeless veterans in the Greater Kansas City Metro Area. The objective of a STAND DOWN is to provide them with access to some of the short and long-term resources needed to rebuild their lives. Services available at the semiannual event include Health and Medical Services; Mental Health and Substance Abuse Counseling/Referral; Social Services and Referrals (Internal Revenue Service, Social Security, Department of Housing and Urban Department, etc.); Educational, Vocational and Employment Services; Identification Cards; Veterans Benefits; Hair Cuts; Clothing and Toiletry Distribution; Chaplain/Spiritual Services; and other donated support services.

Best practices research has shown that the most effective way to break the cycle of homelessness is with a coordinated community effort. Since 1993, the Heart of America STAND DOWN Foundation has been actively working to combat homelessness with the help of the local community by providing a variety of services and warm meals during these special events. The STAND DOWN is 100 percent volunteer-run and volunteerism is critical to the success of each STAND DOWN event.

At the last STAND DOWN, the NITC coordinated an effort for clothing donations for this special event. The building personnel at the NITC location in Kansas City, Missouri, donated more than 40 containers of clothing for this event. This was very helpful in assisting the homeless and less fortunate veterans. It was greatly appreciated by the STAND DOWN committee and especially the veterans that received the wonderful donations.

2008 Financial Management Training by Susan Showalter

"Financial Management is On the Move to Improve" was the theme of this year's Financial Management Training (FMT) held June 10 – 12, 2008, at the Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C. The training was comprised of 16 plenary and 12 breakout sessions to maximize the 2½-day educational event. The breakout sessions provided participants with an opportunity to focus on areas closely related to their line of business by selecting up to 8 of the 12 topics presented.

The USDA FMT was initiated more than 15 years ago as a means to achieve mass financial manager education and promote working partnerships with agency personnel. In recent years, participation has steadily increased. This year, there were more than 400 participants.

The Office of the Associate Chief Financial Officer - Financial Operations (ACFO-FO) served as host and is dedicated to ensuring a highly trained, skilled, and informed workforce. John Brewer, Associate Chief Financial Officer, Financial Operations, led the training. Sessions provided an excellent opportunity to keep pace with upcoming financial improvements and included such topics as Financial Management Modernization Initiative (FMMI), Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) of 2006 - Phase II, GovTrip, Internal Controls, and Corporate Property Automated Information System - Personal Property (CPAIS-PP).

ACFO-FO works closely with the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) to facilitate efficient and effective business practices and technology. OCIO manages the technological tools used by OCFO each day to meet the Department's financial goals. In support of this, OCIO representatives facilitated sessions at this year's FMT entitled *Cost Management Information System*, *Project Management*, and *Earned Value Management*.

This year's training included, for the first time, presentations by selected USDA agency chief financial officers who shared their agency's mission activities and successes with the attendees. Continuing Professional Education credits were earned by participants based on the session attended.

The training session proved to be a successful and productive educational experience for USDA participants.

NITC Day of Caring 2008 – "I Volunteer"

by Ruth Bennett, Sandra Burbank, and Bruce Pacot

Annually, the NITC has more than 30 volunteers to support a community effort that is selected by the NITC Day of Caring Coordinators. The Day of Caring 2008 Coordinators are Ruth Bennett and Sandra Burbank.

Photo: Ruth Bennett (left) and Sandra Burbank.

This year, the Day of Caring was held on Saturday, June 7, 2008. We worked with the architectural and landscaping company, DLR Group, at the Mastin House. The Mastin House is a group home in Kansas for mentally and physically challenged individuals. This was our fourth year at this location and everyone has really enjoyed participating and working with the same people. We landscaped, constructed six banner and flag pole permanent holders, performed general cleanup, and, for fun, erected two rain gutter boat racing troughs. Ruth says, "This has always left a warm feeling inside knowing that I have helped people who are unable to do the job themselves and other NITC personnel can also give testimony to these feelings."

☆ 2008 LENGTH OF SERVICE RECIPIENTS ☆

40 Years - Howard Baker

35 Years - Thomas Durham, Nancy Woolworth

30 Years - Cleola Baker, Judy Chamberlain, Joyce Cheng, Beverly Darr, Carolyn Ewell, Mary Goebel, Teresa Hurley, Denice Lotson, Yvonne McDonough, Gary McGuire, Charles Pugh

25 Years - Jennifer Adams, James Cole, James Cross, Raymond Doakes, Kate Hickman, Philip Gehrt, Daniel Hostetter, Michael McSherry, Rachel Mecham, K. Lynn Pearcy, Gail Phillips, Gregory Schmitz, Geri Smiley

20 Years - John Donovan, Sandra Facinoli, Paul Hagar, Mark Heisey, Michael Johnson, Gary Klesner, Brian Toy, Brent Vernon, Alesia Webster

10 Years - James Donohue, Shari Erickson, Bernadette McGhee, James Noel, Senta Owens

5 Years - William Arentsen, Robert Thompson, Ginger Weaver

☆ RECENT HIRES ☆

Dennis Crow, Enterprise Architecture Division, ITM/OCIO
Mary Eckart, Management & Program Analyst, FMB/ITS/OCIO
Lee Farquharson, Capital Planning Division, ITM/OCIO
William Goodwin, Workforce Development Branch Chief, ITS/OCIO
Naomi Gumbs, Capital Planning Division, ITM/OCIO
Roy Lafferty, Project Manager, ITS/OCIO
Barbara Lawton, Enterprise Architecture Division, ITM/OCIO
Rhonda Lucas, Budget Analyst, FMB/ITS/OCIO
Jorge Rivera, Director of the Working Capital Fund Division, NFC/OCFO
Loyce Smith, Management Analyst, OCIO

☆ RECENT PROMOTIONS ☆

Jeff Claunch, IT Specialist, OCIO
Chris Clements, IT Specialist, OCIO
Chris North, AASD Director, OCIO
Bradley Sackett, IT Specialist, OCIO
Greg Zenitsky, IT Specialist, OCIO

☆ RECENT REASSIGNMENTS ☆

Raymond Doakes, IT Specialist, OCIO
Hugh Woolard, IT Specialist, OCIO

Thoughts on the Parkersburg, IA, Tornado

Last Friday, on my non-workday, I went to Parkersburg, Iowa, where an EF5 tornado struck, to cook and serve breakfast to the displaced families, volunteers and workers. I can't imagine what these people were feeling but I came away with many thoughts and impressions. Most of the families that came in were pretty much still in shock – children with blank stares, parents just happy to be alive... Everyone said *please* and *thank you* as we filled the plates with food and after they would get done eating, they would come up and say, "Thank you so much for coming and helping out." Here these people lost everything and they are thanking me. That is small town Iowa for you. The fire rescue and National Guardsmen all did the same thing. They were doing 100 times what I was and they were thanking me. It made me wonder if I said *thank you* enough.

At one point, I was cleaning up tables and I looked up and an elderly lady was sitting at a table all alone crying. I went over to her and put my arm around her and asked if she was okay. She said to me, "Sometimes you just have to cry." I asked if she had lost her house and she said, "My house is completely gone but the worst thing is, I can't find any of my stuff. It is all just gone." I felt so bad for her and as she talked about it, she stopped crying. But it got me thinking, we all have so much stuff. What would I do if it was all gone, scattered across miles of countryside? I wondered how she would ever get back all of the memories that were now scattered everywhere.

I drove through the area where the devastation had taken place. The area was filled with piles of debris where buildings once stood. I drove through this area many times before the tornado, as it is on a major highway, but that day it was impossible to know where anything had previously stood. I thought to myself that the night before I was worried about when I was going to get my lawn mowed... at least I have a lawn. I was out picking up sticks on the yard and thought... at least I'm not picking up the pieces of my house.

Cindy Richtsmeier,
Technical Support Division-Iowa/ITS