

**Friends of Agricultural Research-Beltsville, Inc.
PO Box 1061, Beltsville, MD 20704-1061**

**Dedicated to promoting the research and education programs of the
Henry A. Wallace Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, Beltsville, MD**

THE FAR-B NEWS

June 2007

Editor: Hank Becker

Annual Meeting Features Under Secretary

At the May 14 Annual Meeting of the Friends of Agricultural Research-Beltsville, Inc., FAR-B president Darwin Murrell President introduced the meetings speaker, Dr. Gale Buchanan, Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics, USDA, Dr. Buchanan spoke on the "The Excellence of the Beltsville Area."

He mentioned his admiration for the work of ARS scientists that he was familiar with from his many years of work at the state level. He also talked about his idea of combining the National Program Staffs of ARS and the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CRSEES) and how that reorganization would benefit his office in getting information on the research projects across the nation.



Under Secretary Dr. Gale Buchanan

Following his talk, Dr. Phyllis E. Johnson, Area Director, gave some brief comments on what is happening at BARC.

At noon, there was a reception for FAR-B members and guests and at 1:00 p.m. the Annual Board of Directors Report to the Membership was held. The next FAR-B meeting is June 12, 2007. This will be last meeting until September 11, 2007.

FAR-B To Sponsor Mum and Poinsettias Sale

Because of the huge success of our Plant Sale last Fall -- we made almost a \$1,000 -- FAR-B will be sponsoring not one but two Plant Sales in the late summer 2007.

Notices will go out in August for Behnkes mums and poinsettias with delivery dates in September for the mums and in early December for the poinsettias. Again, the plants will be delivered to the ARS National Visitor Center, Bldg. 302, BARC-East. Note that the poinsettia sale is being conducted early so as not to conflict with the Combined Federal Campaign season. Order forms will be sent and/or e-mailed to members in August and will be posted on the FAR-B website (see masthead; page 8).

Proceeds from the sales will again go toward travel grants for the BARC scientists. Do share this information with friends and family and help support our scientists at BARC!

Freddi Hammerschlag, *Fundraising
Chair*

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FAR-B Volunteers Needed At the National Visitor Center

The National Visitor Center (NVC) needs your help! Our biggest and most immediate need is in covering the Information Desk when Lorraine is absent. She is scheduled to be out 7/5, 7/6, 7/9, 8/23, 8/24, and 8/27.

Any part or all of those days would be greatly appreciated. For less of a commitment, and/or to get a taste of this duty, you may also volunteer for the Information desk any day from 1 to 2 p.m. Training is provided! Call (301) 504-9403.

We also need help with very large groups with multiple busses. Just let us know that you are interested, and we will contact you to see if you are available when one is scheduled.

Let me extend my and the NVC Staff's sincerest appreciation for Vern Pursel and Hank Becker for volunteering in the past! I am sure that the opportunities to serve at the NVC will continue, and become more diverse in the future!

Jennifer Woodward-Greene, *National Visitors Center*

AREA DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

As I look out the window of Building-003, the tents for Field Day have been erected and we are looking forward to a large crowd on Saturday, June 2. As you know, we took a hiatus last year from the annual Field Day due to budgetary concerns. We also now have an FY2007 budget and an indication of what the FY2008 has in store for us.

ARS is once again faced with proposed terminations of projects in FY2008, specifically for the Beltsville Area. These terminations add up to about \$10 million. These projects were Congressional add-

ons--some of which date back to FY2001. We are hopeful that the proposed terminations will not occur but the final resolution may not be known until after Labor Day.

In the last Area Director's message, we were in the throes of the Voluntary Early Retirement Authority and Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment (buyout) authority process. A total of 63 employees accepted early retirement. These actions enabled the Beltsville Area to save about \$5.5 million and have also impacted some of the reorganizations that are currently being implemented.

The reorganization will result in the formation of some new laboratories in the Animal and Natural Resources Institute, Plant Sciences Institute, and the Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center. There will be some personnel shifts for the U.S. National Arboretum but no reconfiguration of laboratories or units. We will post the entire reorganization scheme in the next Area Director's message.

There have been a few noteworthy transitions: two Research Leaders took the February buyout and have retired (Dr. Walter Rawls, Hydrology and Remote Sensing Laboratory, and Dr. YudRen Chen, Instrumentation and Sensing Laboratory).

Dr. Bill Kustas was selected as the new Research Leader of the Hydrology and Remote Sensing Laboratory and Dr. Moon Kim is currently serving as the Acting Research Leader of the Instrumentation and Remote sensing Laboratory.

Lastly, Dr. Harry Danforth, Technology Transfer Coordinator, accepted the position of Associate Area Director for the Midwest Area in Peoria, Illinois. A search for his replacement is currently underway.

We wish Walt and YudRen the best in retirement and appreciate their service to science, the Beltsville Area, and the Agency. We also wish Harry much success in his new role and we are sure he will find it both interesting and enjoyable.

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Many of you may already be subscribers, but one way to stay up-to-date with happenings within the Beltsville Area is to receive the monthly e-update. You can subscribe to this two page information source by sending an e-mail to BA.Office@ars.usda.gov. The current e-update as well as past issues can be found at www.ars.usda.gov/ba/e-Update.

Phyllis Johnson, *Area Director*

FAR-B Receives President's Gold Medal Volunteer Service Award

For the fourth year, FAR-B sponsored the Beltsville Elementary School (BES) science enrichment program for grades 1 to 6. This took a great effort by FAR-B members and by BARC, NAL and ARS Information Staff employee's. In recognition of the hours spent on this project, FAR-B received The President's Gold Medal Volunteer Service Award for 2007 presented by the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation. This is third year in a row that FAR-B has been recognized. This is the first year we have received the Gold Medal Award.

This year, from May 8 to 10, FAR-B members cooperating with the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center scientist demonstrated the returns from world-class agricultural science research to the BES students. Described as in-school, science enrichment field trips, these events have proved big hits with BES schools administrators, teachers, and especially enthusiastic youngsters, who are just awakening to the meaning of science in their lives.

FAR-B's enrichment programs at BES for 2005 and 2006 received Volunteer Service awards from the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation. Those successes trace to the thoughtful enterprise of BES Principal Steven Beegle, teacher-science coordinator Christi Davis

and fellow teachers, and the dedication of former or active scientists and managers of FAR-B and the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center.

This year, scientists presented their version of plant science enrichment adapted to the elementary school level. Every BES student took an hour in the school gymnasium -- rotating on signal at 15 minutes intervals among four plant science stations.

At the "plant basics" station, Freddi Hammerschlag and her team lead lively discussions touching on such topics as plant parts like stems and roots--how plants make their own food. They introduced the topic of plant chemistry, and talked about keeping plants healthy and making them better for you.

Over at the "uses of plants" station, science enrichment veteran Allan Stoner and team use their skills to get students thinking about how important plants are in their lives. Stoner has been to BES so many times that students look forward every year to the return of the kindly bear of a man they have come to know as "Uncle Al, the Kiddies' Pal." "Humans, domestic and wild animals, birds, and insects all depend on plants for an essential part of their diets," Uncle Al explains. He grabs their undivided attention when he tells students that plants are essential because they provide the oxygen they breathe.

At the "plants as food station," Dr. Zinc, decked out in white lab coat, also known as Jim Smith, and team coaxed students into becoming plant food detectives investigating how plants provide the food we eat every day. "Food from plants may contain more, or different, vitamins, minerals, and fiber than foods like meat and milk from animals," Smith tells the students. Most foods from plants are low in fat and calories, according to what the plant food detectives learned from their investigations.

At the "plants and the environment station," Jim Anderson and team

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demonstrated the soil erosion effects of rain by simulating rainstorms produced by students wielding rapidly firing squirt bottles. Students were asked to train their squirt bottles on trays of grass or bare soil. Students learned the devastating effects of erosion and sedimentation as soil-laden water rushes through streams and rivers toward its final destination in the ocean. The team explained the scientific process by which plants collect and store the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. "Plants help prevent pollution of ground water and the Chesapeake Bay," Anderson says.

BES students are making posters to show what they learned from the Plant Science Enrichment Program. Some 35 posters that have been selected by teachers were displayed at the FAR-B booth at the BARC Public Field Day, on June 2. After the BARC Field Day, the posters will be on display at the Citizens National Bank in the Chestnut Hills Shopping Center.

This now annual FAR-B sponsored program would not have been possible without the tremendous effort of Dianne Odland of the ARS Information Staff.

Jim Butcher, *Educational Outreach Chair*

Successful Combined Federal Campaign

This past year was one of our greatest successes. In the 2006 annual campaign, we raised \$9,545 in pledges from our Beltsville employees. This amount is essentially twice the pledges received in previous years. We sent an announcement to every scientist at BARC. We mailed out over 300 brochures. Our staff personnel also made generous contributions. It is apparent that CFC donors are pleased with the programs funded by FAR-B.

The second piece of good news is that the Local Federal Coordinating Committee for the CFC of the National Capital Area approved our organization to participate in

the 2007 campaign. This is no small accomplishment, since there are literally hundreds of organizations competing for funds.

From a management standpoint, FAR-B is a well run organization. Our overhead is about 3 percent. Some organizations are running overheads as high as 25 percent. Our personnel are all volunteers. We distribute our budget on a monthly basis. Our Officers and Board members are all elected. Our strongest assets are our programs. The outreach, research, and educational programs are outstanding. I attached a signed copy of the President's Volunteer Service Award in our 2007 application, based on our outreach programs.

Phil Kearney, *CFC Chair*

Fellowship Honors John Moseman

Shortly after John Moseman's death, Mrs. Moseman made a \$2,000 contribution to FAR-B. The Board of Directors decided to setup a fellowship honoring John's research in plant breeding. Additional contributions of \$1,200 came from outside donors. FAR-B's contribution of \$800 and \$2,000 from John Hartung at the Fruit Lab.

Dr. Kim Lewers, a plant breeder in the Fruit Lab agreed to lead this fellowship program. Kim circulated an announcement of the fellowship on the E-line at the University of Maryland and received numerous inquiries.

Andrea Luquette, Department of Cell Biology and Genetics, College of Life Sciences was selected for the fellowship. She is working with Kim on field studies to develop disease resistance in strawberries.

Phil Kearney, *CFC Chair*

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National Agricultural Research Alliance—Beltsville Alliance Formed

The National Agricultural Research Alliance—Beltsville (NARA—B) was officially launched as a Maryland tax-exempt nonstock corporation at the founders' Charter Meeting, held on March 17, 2007, at Behnke Nurseries in Beltsville.

The founders are: Officers: President: John Peter Thompson, chairman of Behnke Nurseries, Co.; Secretary: Renée M. Winsky, executive director of the Maryland Technology Development Corp.; and Treasurer: Wendi M. Williams, vice president of Old Line Bank.

Board Members include Wanda L. Plummer, director of business development, retention and expansion for the Prince George's County Economic Development Center; and FAR-B Special Advisor, Essex Finney, former BARC director. Other members are Markian Melnyk, Legal Advisor; and Jim Butcher, FAR-B Liaison.

The first emphasis is promoting the FY08 appropriations process. On April 13, the Alliance held a meeting at BARC for Congressional staff officers representing the Maryland delegation. The Beltsville Area Office presented a powerful justification for putting BARC funding on a stronger footing. NARA-B drew heavily on the FAR-B FY08 Congressional Outside Witness Statement for its part of the meeting.

Within coming weeks, NARA-B plans to hold a briefing on Capitol Hill for still more Congressional staffers. President Thompson is working with legislative staffer Jim Wood of Congressman Steny Hoyer's office to organize that meeting.

Other pending actions include: broadening the stakeholder and sponsor base; fleshing out a mission statement and strategic plan; improving and expanding communications; and recruiting staff

support to help implement the ambitious goals that the Alliance has set for itself.

Jim Butcher, *Legislative Liaison and Community Outreach Chair*

Report of the FAR-B Awards/Grants Program

For the second year, The Grants and Awards Program Committee, consisting of Past Presidents Bill Wergin, Phil Kearney, and Ralph Bram, has recommended and the entire FAR-B Board of Directors has approved grants of \$20,000 to BARC for scientific travel. These funds are proportionally allocated to the three institutes according to their approximate numbers of SYs and are administered by the institute chairs.

Some recent examples of scientific travel sponsored by the FAR-B Grants and Awards Program included: (1) Dr. Cathy Aime traveled to Uganda and Benin to establish contacts with scientists at the University of Benin, the University of Ibadan, and Makerere University and to lecture in areas of mycology and to present a Plenary Session paper to the First African Conference on Edible and Medicinal Mushrooms; (2) Dr. Bill Tureck traveled to Quebec City, Canada, to participate in the annual American Phytopathological Society meeting and present posters and a scientific paper on *Statistical methodologies for Early Detection Surveys in Forest and Ornamental Landscapes*; (3) Dr. Leslie Wanner attended the 11th International Conference on Plant Pathogenic Bacteria in Edinburgh, Scotland, and spoke on the topic of taxonomy and characteristics of gram-positive plant pathogenic *Streptomyces* species; (4) Dr. Joe Kirkbride traveled to Belgium, France, and Italy to visit four botanical institutions to study critical type specimens of the *Lotus* subgenus *Pedrosia*; and (5) Dr. Don Weber traveled to the Oak Lake Field Station near Brookings, South Dakota, as

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an instructor in a short course on the natural history and taxonomy of ground beetles that resulted in cooperative research with several scientific colleagues.

In addition, the following scientists from the Animal and Natural Resources Institute also received grants: Dr. John McMurty, Dr. Julie Long, Dr. Mark Jenkins, and Dr. Lou Gasbarre.

Thanks to FAR-B members for your continued support of this program-- particularly during these times of severe budgetary constraint. Each of the recipient scientists expressed sincere appreciation for the opportunity to expand their scientific interactions with colleagues from other institutions.

Due to budgetary considerations, the FAR-B Innovative Idea Award program was suspended during the past year but will be resumed when adequate funding becomes available.

Ralph Bram, *Grants and Awards Chair*

Financial Report

FAR-B's financial condition remains sound in 2007 even with income lagging behind expenditures by several thousand dollars. This deficit was the result of the Board of Directors' decision to dip into reserve funds to provide \$20,000 to BARC scientists for travel grants again this fiscal year.

On the income side of the 2007 budget, we received a 69 percent increase in pledges to the Combined Federal Campaign last fall.

Vernon Pursel, *Treasurer*

IN MEMORIAM

Joel Bitman

Long time member of FAR-B, Joel Bitman, a physiological chemist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture who became a prolific artist after he retired, died of kidney failure on March 6 at Brooke Grove Rehabilitation and Nursing Center in Sandy Spring. He was 80.

Dr. Bitman, who began working at the Agricultural Research Center in 1951, conducted research into DDT and other pesticides, estrogens, cholesterol, cow's milk, polyunsaturated fats, breast milk and mastitis, or inflammation of the breast. He reported his research in more than 400 publications.

In the late 1960s, alarm spread that DDT, which had been developed to combat mosquitoes spreading malaria, typhus and other insect-borne human diseases, was harming the wild bird population.

Dr. Bitman and his colleagues at the USDA initially concluded from feeding experiments on Japanese quails that the pesticide contributed to the thinning of eggshells. His 1969 article on the subject in *Nature* magazine helped fuel the debate over DDT and eggshell thinning. His findings, which were met by criticism, resulted in subsequent experiments in which Dr. Bitman showed that when the quails were fed DDT along with normal amounts of calcium, the shells did not thin.

Later, Dr. Bitman testified before Congress as an expert witness on eggshell thinning and at the proceedings that resulted in banning the pesticide.

Additionally, Dr. Bitman, who was an adjunct professor at Georgetown University Medical School in the 1980s and 1990s, contributed to the understanding of human milk's composition and fat content and how to optimally preserve its beneficial components. His work help clarify the impact that disease and premature birth

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have on human lactation and milk composition.

In 1984, he explained a USDA study that found that mothers of premature babies produce a special milk that helps develop their preemies' brains and nervous systems better than milk from women with full-term infants.

"Mr. Bitman said the studies indicated it was important for the premature infant to receive its own mother's milk, rather than milk collected from other nursing mothers," the *New York Times* reported. He also stressed the importance of properly handling and storing the milk to preserve its special qualities.

As chief of the hormone physiology and biochemistry laboratories in Beltsville, Dr. Bitman supervised research projects in Israel, Poland, Yugoslavia, Pakistan and India. He spent 45 years at the USDA-- where he was known for his good humor, no-nonsense approach to problem-solving and mentoring of younger scientists-- before retiring in 1995.

Dr. Bitman, a native of Newark, graduated from high school and joined the Navy during World War II. Afterward, he received a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Cornell University and continued his education at the University of Minnesota, obtaining a master's degree in 1948 and a PhD in 1950--both in physiological chemistry with a specialty in steroids.

In the 1950s, Dr. Bitman also began his formal art education, studying oils with Jozef Pielage and oils and acrylics with Jack Perlmutter. More recently, he studied water media painting with Yolanda Frederikse, Susan Murphy and Michael Harrington.

After leaving the USDA, Dr. Bitman's passion turned to painting. He produced about 900 works, featuring many iconic scenes, including the Smithsonian Castle, the Library of Congress, the Old Executive Office Building, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Renwick Gallery, the Pension Building, Washington National

Cathedral, cherry blossoms, the Enid A. Haupt Garden, Georgetown, the C&O Canal, Great Falls and the Annapolis Harbor.

Survivors include his wife of 57 years, Doreen Bitman of Silver Spring; three daughters, Judy Pearson of Silver Spring, Laura B. Rinne of Fayetteville, Ark., and Roberta Abel of Basking Ridge, New Jersey; a sister; and seven grandchildren.

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2007 FAR-B Board of Director

Left to Right: Allan Stoner, Vern Pursel, Phil Kearney, Freddi Hammerschlag, Darwin Murrell, Nancy Thrush, Jim Anderson, Hank Becker, Jim Smith, Dave Chitwood, and Jim Butcher. (Missing are William Wergin, Ralph Bram, Diane Odland, Essex Finney, Morton Beroza, and Frank Longen).

To contact the FAR-B Board

email – farbboard@comcast.net
phone – (301) 854-9758
<http://www.ars.usda.gov/ba/far-b>

Beltsville Area

Area Director: Phyllis Johnson
Associate AD: Ron Korcak
Nat'l Visitor Center: Jennifer Woodward-Greene

FIRST CLASS

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