

USDA *news*

USDA's Employee News Publication—For You & About You!

Ed Schafer Takes The Helm As Our 29th Secretary

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

Ed Schafer became the 29th Secretary of Agriculture in USDA's 146-year history on Jan. 28, 2008. He was sworn in by Vice President **Dick Cheney** following a 'unanimous consent agreement' in the U.S. Senate in lieu of a floor vote, with no Senators dissenting. Then on February 6, with President **George W. Bush** on stage with him, he participated in a ceremonial swearing-in held in the Jefferson Auditorium of the South Building at USDA Headquarters in Washington, DC.

On January 29, his second day as Secretary, Schafer spoke to USDA employees who had gathered in the Patio of USDA's Whitten Building in Washington, DC as part of a 'Welcome Reception.' In his remarks, the former two-term Republican Governor of North Dakota noted that, as he was going through the confirmation process to become USDA's Secretary, "Everywhere I went people said, 'You know, that's just the best-run agency. They have the best employees, the most mature staff, the most committed, the hardest-working. Those are the people that operate the United States Department of Agriculture. And they deliver the programs to the farmers and ranchers and landowners and the poor and the needy across

this country.' And I want to be a part of that."

"I want to join your team," he emphasized. "I want you to know that, as I look at my short term here at [USDA] and I get to develop a working relationship with you on this team, that I believe that this is going to be our finest hour."

Born and raised in Bismarck, ND, Schafer graduated from the University of North Dakota in 1969 with a bachelor's degree in business administration, and earned an MBA from the University of Denver in 1970. He then joined the Gold Seal Company in Bismarck. That company, which had been founded by his father, **Harold Schafer**, marketed such nationally-known consumer products as "Mr. Bubble" bubble bath, "Glass Wax" glass cleaner, and "Snowy Bleach."

Schafer held a series of management positions with the company before becoming its president in 1978. Under his leadership, Gold Seal's sales climbed to \$50 million through acquisitions and new product introductions, and its net worth tripled. The company was sold in 1986.

Schafer then went on to launch several new businesses, including a commercial real estate development company, a fish farm, and a classic car dealership.

Schafer served two terms as Governor of North Dakota from 1992-2000, where he focused on such issues as diversifying and expanding the state's economy, reducing the cost of govern-



Ed Schafer (right), takes the oath of office as the 29th Secretary of Agriculture, during a ceremonial swearing-in held in the Jefferson Auditorium of USDA's South Building in Washington, DC on February 6. As his wife **Nancy Schafer** (second from right) holds the Bible and President **George W. Bush** (left) looks on, Deputy Secretary **Chuck Conner** administers the oath. Note the story on this page.—**PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH**

ment, and advancing agriculture. After leaving that office in 2000, he co-founded Extend America, a venture capital-backed company, to provide wireless voice and high-speed data services to commercial and residential customers in five rural Midwestern states.

Schafer is the first USDA Secretary from North Dakota.

A complete copy of Schafer's remarks to USDA employees on January 29, and a more complete biography, are available at www.usda.gov. ■

USDA's Proposed Budget For FY 2009 Emphasizes Priorities, Fiscal Discipline

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

Noting that USDA's proposed budget provides critical resources needed to keep the agricultural community strong, but that tough choices had to be made to keep spending under control, Secretary **Ed Schafer** unveiled USDA's proposed budget for FY 2009 at a press conference on February 4 at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC.

"I point out that, even within the tight overall budget framework, there will be additional funds allocated to food safety, nutrition, and high priority bioenergy research," he said. "The budget also provides support to ensure our critical program delivery systems are maintained so that the infrastructure is in place that we can build upon to meet the demands of implementing a

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Ed Schafer *Secretary of Agriculture*

Dear Fellow Employees,
Call me "Ed."
I've been kind of struggling with the title of "Secretary of Agriculture." When I was governor of North Dakota a lot of people, of course, called me "Governor."

And when I became a former governor, some people weren't sure whether to call me "Past Governor" or "Ex-Governor" or "Former Governor." In fact, once I was introduced as "the former Ed Schafer."

But you know, I want to be called Ed—and let me tell you why.

I've known about USDA as governor. I've worked with this Department, and we had a lot of things going on. But as I was going through this confirmation process, everywhere I went people said, "You know, that's just the best-run agency. They have the best employees, the most mature staff, the most committed, the hardest-working. Those are the people who operate the United States Department of Agriculture. And they deliver the programs to the farmers and ranchers and landowners and the poor and the needy across this country." And I want to be a part of that.

You are the basis for that, you're the team, you're the people who make it happen. And I want to stand beside you as Ed, as your partner in this deal.

You know, my philosophy comes back to **Teddy Roosevelt**. He learned how to get things done. And he talked a lot about how you do that. When Teddy Roosevelt was confronted with the completion of the Panama Canal—which is, on its face, an impossible task—he was asked how one could get something like that done. His response

was to emphasize that, if you put the right people in place and let them know what you want them to do, and then stand out of their way so they can get the job done, it will get done.

And that's the philosophy that I carry to you today. I'm looking forward to learning about each of you, and then delivering that common mission of this Department, getting the job done. But I stand out of the way and let you work.

To do that, we have to develop a team. And I'm excited about the team. I talk about teams a lot, and the reason I go by "Ed" is because I want to join your team.

I do want to get to know you, and I'm looking forward to working beside you because I view my role as the person who helps you do your job. There are often barriers out there to your performance—social and cultural and historical and financial barriers—to get things done. And you fight it every day. You're out there all the time, and you're pushing to get things done and completed and to find solutions to the problems that we face. And often there's something in the way. And my role is to get rid of those barriers.

So if you find something that's in the way that you can't move aside, that's what I want to know about because that's my job. My job is to get things out of your way so that you can get your jobs done.

I really look forward to working with you. It's an exciting time for agriculture, it's an exciting time for the United States, and I believe it's an exciting time for all of the thousands of employees with USDA.

I believe that this is going to be our finest hour.

And call me Ed. ■

USDA's Proposed Budget...continued from pg. 1
new farm bill."

Noting that a healthy economy creates jobs and boosts incomes, he advised that keeping American agriculture strong means that the country must continue to build on its recent successes in trade. "We have worked aggressively to open new markets for American farmers and ranchers, and those efforts are showing results," he said.

"Our budget includes the funding we need to continue these critical efforts."

USDA's FY 2009 proposed budget calls for nearly \$95 billion in spending. This is roughly the same amount as the Department's currently estimated spending for FY 2008.

Roughly 76 percent of those proposed expenditures—or \$72 billion in 2009—would be for mandatory programs that provide services required by law. They include many of the Department's nutrition assistance, commodity, export promotion, and conservation programs. USDA's discretionary programs account for the remaining 24 percent—or \$23 billion—in 2009. They include the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program; rural development loans and grants; research and education; soil and water conservation technical assistance; management of National Forests; domestic

marketing assistance; and programs that address pest and disease threats.

USDA's budget proposes a federal staffing level for FY 2009 of 91,065 full-time equivalent positions, or federal staff years. This is a decrease of 4,192 federal staff years from the currently estimated FY 2008 federal staff year level of 95,257.

Agencies that reflect proposed increases in federal staff years for FY 2009 include the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (an increase of 202 federal staff years, to total 7,429 federal staff years), the Food and Nutrition Service (35, to total 1,347), the Grain Inspection, Packers & Stockyards Administration (19, to total 695), the Agricultural Marketing Service (12, to total 3,087), and the Office of the General Counsel (10, to total 330).

Agencies with proposed decreases in federal staff years include the Forest Service (a decrease of 2,707 federal staff years, to total 30,473 federal staff years), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (1,446, to total 10,787), the Agricultural Research Service (211, to total 8,300), Rural Development (100, to total 6,100), and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (11, to total 1,395).

These federal staff year estimates are all subject to adjustments to reflect the final out-

come of budget negotiations, plus such unpredictable factors as natural disasters and other emergencies. In addition, USDA's proposed budget is based on the provisions of the 2002 farm bill, and does not include staff years associated with the Administration's farm bill proposals and other proposed legislation. Enactment of a new farm bill will affect some of the estimates in the proposed budget.

Highlights of USDA's FY 2009 budget proposal, thought to be of particular interest to USDA employees, include:

① \$264 million in USDA funding—an increase of \$81 million at the Department—as part of the governmentwide "Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative" which began in 2004. USDA's contribution is to continue to go to such activities as: strengthening USDA's Food Emergency Response Network and USDA's Regional Diagnostic Network to ensure the capacity to respond quickly to food emergencies and plant and animal diseases and related training; strengthening research to ensure food safety; continuing to develop the means to quickly identify pathogens; continuing to develop improved animal vaccines; better understanding the genes that provide disease resistance; and enhancing surveillance and monitoring activities to quickly de-

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Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

One Millionth CREP Acre:

USDA noted in January that it had recently enrolled the one millionth acre in its nationwide Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). It was part of 60 acres that **Steve and Margaret Lange** had enrolled in CREP last fall, working with **Mark Raschke**, a Farm Service Agency program technician with the USDA Service Center in Pipestone, MN. According to Raschke, in the process they were establishing riparian buffers and filter strips to protect Pipestone Creek, which winds through their property, by reducing sediment and erosion from the creek's current.

USDA made the announcement of the one millionth CREP acre in a ceremony held at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC on January 17. Also attending that ceremony was **Anna Bowers**. In 1997, working with **Colleen Cashell**, FSA County Executive Director for Washington County, MD, Bowers had signed the first CREP agreement with USDA. She had planted 16.7 acres of trees on her family farm, located on a bank of the Conococheague Creek in western Maryland. According to Cashell, that ultimately reduced the amount of both sediment and nutrients that entered the Chesapeake Bay.

A component of USDA's Conservation Reserve Program, CREP is a voluntary land retirement program through which USDA helps agricultural producers protect environmentally sensitive land, decrease erosion, restore wildlife habitat, and safeguard ground and surface water. This is accomplished through such actions, by the participants, as converting enrolled land to grass, trees, wetlands, wildlife cover, and other conservation uses.

U.S. Declared Brucellosis-Free:

On February 1 USDA announced that, for the first time in the 74-year history of this country's Cooperative State-Federal Brucellosis Eradication Program, all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands have simultaneously achieved "Class Free" status. Texas was the last and final state to be declared brucellosis-free.

According to **Debra Donch**, USDA's Brucellosis Program Manager in the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, "Class Free" status is based on a state finding no known brucellosis in cattle for the 12 months preceding designation as Class Free. "However, that status can change," she advised. "If brucellosis is found in more than one herd of cattle in a brucellosis-free state within a two-year period, that state is downgraded to 'Class A' status."

Donch noted that USDA's efforts now need to focus on eradicating brucellosis from the free-ranging elk and bison populations in the Greater Yellowstone Area, in order to protect America's cattle herd against future outbreaks of that disease.

Donch said that brucellosis is a bacterial disease that causes decreased milk production, weight loss, infertility, loss of young, and lameness in cattle, elk, and bison. The disease is contagious and can, though rarely, affect humans. There is no known treatment for brucellosis, and depopulation of infected and exposed animals is the only effective means of disease containment and eradication.

Food Safety For Super Bowl:

USDA traditionally publicizes food safety tips for such occasions as Fourth of July cookouts, Memorial Day BBQs, and Thanksgiving Day turkey cooking. Now add to that the



Secretary **Ed Schafer** (right) talks with employees in the Patio of USDA's Whitten Building in Washington, DC on January 29. He had just finished addressing employees at a 'Welcome Reception' held in the Patio, one day after having been sworn in as the 29th Secretary in USDA's 146-year history.—**PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH**

guidance it provided for Super Bowl Sunday, February 3. Food Safety and Inspection Service public affairs specialist **Donna Karlsons** noted that it's the second highest day of food consumption in the U.S. after Thanksgiving. "So FSIS publicized several tips to help Super Bowl partygoers and hosts avoid committing their own food safety 'personal fouls,'" she said. "For instance, any foods—hot or cold—that have been sitting out at room temperature for more than two hours can easily allow bacteria to multiply and cause illness."



Former Secretary Earl Butz Dies:

Earl Butz, who served from 1971-76 as

USDA's 18th Secretary and, earlier, from 1954-57 as USDA's [then] Assistant Secretary for Marketing and Foreign Agriculture, died February 2. He was 98.

"Throughout his life, Earl Butz championed the cause of the farmer and was an optimist about American agriculture and the power of the marketplace," said Secretary **Ed Schafer** in a

statement. "He was also a pioneer who foresaw the opportunities that global markets could offer to America's farmers long before they became a reality." Schafer added that, as Secretary, Butz insisted on giving farmers more freedom to manage their own businesses and more incentives to produce. "[Butz] oversaw changes to government support programs that have helped create today's robust agricultural economy," he noted. "And by approving the sale of more than \$1 billion of grain to the former Soviet Union in 1972, he raised farm incomes and set American farmers on the path to developing a stronger presence in export markets around the world."

Butz, who grew up on a family farm in Albion, IN and who attended Purdue University on a 4-H scholarship, ultimately served as a faculty member and administrator at Purdue, including serving as Dean of Purdue's Agriculture Department from 1957-67. Then, after leaving USDA in 1976, he returned to Purdue and worked as a lecturer and consultant.

In honor of Butz's service, flags at USDA facilities flew at half staff following his passing.

—**RON HALL**

Employees *make these things happen*

Departmental Administration

In This USDA Ethics Training Package, You May Get Glory—Or The Glue Factory

Federal employees who are required to complete annual Ethics Training can now go to USDA's Ethics Office website and take the training offered by that office.

But be cautioned: you might get gently mocked out in the process.

"As part of a governmentwide ethics training initiative for 2007, a training package that our office developed was chosen to be made available to virtually all federal employees, located both around the country and around the world," explained **Ray Sheehan**, Director of USDA's Office of Ethics and the Department's chief ethics advisor. "So any federal employee could use our ethics training package to fulfill their annual ethics training requirement—and the record shows that they have." In fact, he said, his tracking indicated that during 2007 virtually all federal departments and agencies used USDA's ethics training module found at www.usda-ethics.net/training/module_16a/index.htm

Sheehan acknowledged that any training that is mandatory is often viewed by participants as being "kind of a drag." So he and his staff brainstormed to come up with a course that was not only challenging but also fun. And while that may have been a professed goal for training packages that have been devised since the 'dawn of training,' employees who have completed this particular USDA ethics training package are apt to describe it with words like informal, chatty, breezy, a hoot, a riot, joshing, mocking, and even snarky.

Its title is "Ethics Sweepstakes," and it's

configured as a horse race. According to **Mike Edwards**, Deputy Director of the Office of Ethics, the person taking the training—also known as the "player" or the "jockey"—rides a "gallant steed" called "Ethical Conduct" and competes, in a "2-horse grudge race" of 20 spaces, against its arch rival, a horse called "Appearances." The trainee can select a particular level of difficulty—"Easy," "Moderate," or "Hard"—and, in turn, based on that choice, may immediately be characterized as "You wimp!"; "An honorable, though not courageous, beginning," or "'Awright! Who's Bad?'"

The trainee then progresses "around the track" through such stages as "The Race Is On!", "First Turn," "Back Stretch," "Far Turn," "Home Stretch," and "Finishing Kick." Accompanied by appropriate sound effects that include a bugle blast known as 'Call to Post', horse whinnies, galloping hoofs, audience applause, and guffaws, the trainee's horse gallops forward—or backward—in comparison to the competition horse, based on the level of difficulty which the trainee chose combined with the number of successful answers to a series of 'ethics in the workplace' questions. **Ellen Pearson**, an ethics specialist in the Office of Ethics, noted that the course takes about an hour to complete—"unless you're *realllly* good," she quipped.

So, why offer to the trainee the rather unprecedented option of selecting easy, moderate, or hard questions? "That goes back to my 'Religious Studies' teacher in the seventh grade in Springfield, Massachusetts," Sheehan explained. "He offered us the opportunity

for bonus points—for pride—if we opted to try answering harder questions than we otherwise had to. The goal was to beat the classmates in the next row. And that taught me the value of creating competition and providing incentives to select harder options—especially if, at the same time, one is given the possibility of even the slightest reward."

He added that he created much of the text for the training while riding Amtrak trains to and from Springfield to visit family members. Thus the origin of such quips in that text—depending on the degree of success of the "jockey trainee"—as "You showed up for the bugle," "I guess somebody has to do the easy questions, right?" "At the Far Turn, you are well-behind. We can see the glue factory from here," "You get credit for one module in a cloud of dust," "You were half-right, which means WRONG!", and "You're stuck where you are for the entire world to see." Then, at the end—assuming successful completion of the course—there is "You're done with ethics training for the year, baby!"

"Training that is required can be a real exercise in mass drudgery," Sheehan acknowledged. "But we feel we've taken a decidedly important subject—ethics in the workplace—and developed real-world, practical scenarios that test one's knowledge of the do's and don'ts of ethics. Plus, in the process, we added some lightheartedness to the mix."

"So, to very loosely paraphrase **Julie Andrews** in *'The Sound of Music'*, you *could* say that we added a spoonful of slightly sarcastic sugar to make the medicine go down—or whatever."

—**RON HALL**

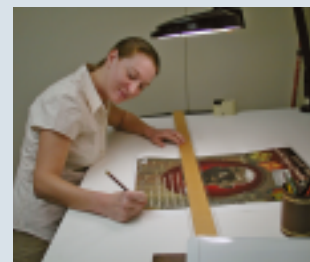
Natural Resources And Environment

NRCS Employs A 'Home-Grown Approach' To Create Its Commemoration Posters

"We were having great speakers—but not very great attendance—and it was costing us too much money to purchase our posters. So that's why we developed a whole new game plan."

Joseph Hairston, the Director of Civil Rights with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, was commenting on what he described as the "resources used" versus "pay-back gained" balance that he must measure when overseeing his agency's various Special Emphasis Program commemorations.

According to **Elaine Ho**, Director of USDA's Office of Diversity, USDA's headquarters and field offices have a track record of being conscientious about holding various programs and activities in support of the various Special Emphasis Program commemorations that take place throughout the calendar year. She noted that they include Black History Month in February, Women's History Month in March, Asian Pacific American Heritage Month in May, National Gay and Lesbian Pride Month in June, Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15 to October 15, National Disability Employment Awareness



"...and, now, I'll just add my signature at the bottom, and tape this poster up on my office wall," quips NRCS's

Jennifer Abbey. She submitted the winning design in her agency's recent poster contest in support of Black History Month during February. Now her entry represents NRCS's official poster that is currently being used at NRCS offices around the country in support of that commemoration.—**PHOTO BY CLELL FORD**

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Editor's Roundup *USDA's people in the news*



Karen Ellis is the Assistant Inspector General for Investigations with the Office of Inspector General. From September 2005 until her selection for this position Ellis

served as the Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Investigations with OIG. She was the special assistant to [then] Assistant Inspector General for Investigations **Mark Woods** from 2004-05.

Ellis served as the Special Agent-in-Charge of OIG's Program Investigations Division in Washington, DC from 2002-04,

after having served as the Special Agent-in-Charge of OIG's Regional Office based in New York City from 1999-02. She was the Assistant Special Agent-in-Charge of OIG's Regional Office based in Beltsville, MD, from 1997-98. From 1989-97 she worked as a Special Agent in several OIG offices including Washington, DC

(1994-97), San Francisco (1990-94), and New York City (1989-90), where she began her fulltime career with OIG.

Woods, OIG's previous Assistant Inspector General for Investigations, retired from that position following 24 years of federal service. ■

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Month in October, and American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage Month in November.

Hairston echoed that sentiment as applied to NRCS's own agency-level Special Emphasis Program commemorations, both at its headquarters and field locations. "But we wanted to increase attendance at those events, plus get more people involved, plus save some money in the process," he advised. Accordingly, during a brainstorming session his Civil Rights Division came up with what might be called 'home-grown posters.'

Hairston explained that, to help visually recognize the various Special Emphasis Program commemorations that it honors throughout the year, NRCS uses posters that it then distributes to its headquarters and field sites. "We had been contracting with various artists in the private sector to develop meaningful and educational posters for the different Special Emphasis Program commemorations," he said. "They came up with great artwork—but it also was costing us a lot, over the course of a year's worth of commemoration posters." He said that, in addition to the artist's fee, each individual poster cost about \$10. His office would then purchase about 500 posters, for distribution throughout the agency. "So that was about \$5,000 per poster, for each Special Emphasis Program commemoration, plus the costs for mailing them—and that just got to be too much," Hairston affirmed.

That's when they turned to the 'home-grown approach.'

"We decided to invite our NRCS colleagues to develop the posters," Hairston explained. "We'd have a 'poster contest' for each of the Special Emphasis Program commemorations, and we'd offer a \$300 spot award to each winner. That poster would serve as NRCS's official poster for that particular commemoration. Then we'd post an Adobe Acrobat version of that poster on our agency's website, so our various offices around the country could then access it, and print it out in whatever size best

suited their needs."

He added that the rules for each contest were pretty consistent. Submissions must: be from NRCS employees; state the particular theme for the event for that year, and note the year itself; show diversity; include the NRCS logo; contain NRCS's non-discrimination statement that "NRCS is an Equal Opportunity Employer;" be in an electronic form, not paper; and be submitted by e-mail. Submissions would be judged by a poster selection committee, composed of NRCS employees and overseen by the appropriate Special Emphasis Program manager for the agency.

The various employee-based poster contests began in 2001. So, how have the contests gone thus far? "Well, I'm the fund-holder, and I say that they've gone just fine," Hairston quipped.

Here are some specifics: **Sharyn Alvarez**, NRCS's Federal Women's Program Manager, said that the theme for the March 2007 Women's History Month commemoration was "Generations of Women Moving History Forward." "38 contestants participated," she noted. Its contest winner was **Di Hodge**, a soil conservation technician based at the USDA Service Center in Carrollton, GA.

Angela Biggs, NRCS's National Asian American/Pacific Islander Emphasis Program Manager based at the USDA Service Center in Harlan, Iowa, said that the theme for the May 2007 Asian Pacific American Heritage Month commemoration was "Pursuing Excellence through Leadership, Diversity, and Unity." "10 NRCS employees submitted posters," she said. Its contest winner was **John Gledhill**, [then] an NRCS equal opportunity specialist who has since left the agency.

Gilbert Guerrero, NRCS's Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager, said that the theme for the Sept. 15-Oct. 15 2007 Hispanic Heritage Month commemoration was "Hispanic Americans: Making a Positive Impact on American Society." "We had 21 poster submissions," he recounted, "and **Kara Nelson** won that contest." She is a soil conservationist with the

USDA Service Center in Balsam Lake, WI.

Cliff Denshire, NRCS's National Disability/Veterans Emphasis Program Manager, said that the theme for the October 2007 National Disability Employment Awareness Month commemoration was "Workers with Disabilities: Talent for a Winning Team." "12 agency employees participated in our poster contest," he said. **Daniel Meyer**, a soil conservationist with the USDA Service Center in Stockton, CA, submitted the winning poster.

Gerald Rouse, NRCS's American Indian/Alaska Native Emphasis Program Manager based in Spokane, WA, said that the theme for the November 2007 American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage Month commemoration was "We Are All One Family Dedicated To Protecting Mother Earth." "We get our particular poster differently," he explained. "I work with NRCS's American Indian/Alaska Native Employee Association, and it works with a different NRCS region each year to solicit submissions from American Indian artists. Then the Association makes a selection, and that's the poster that is distributed to our NRCS offices throughout the country."

Bennie Clark, NRCS's Black Emphasis Program Manager based at the agency's state office in Indianapolis, coordinated the most recent agency-level poster contest in support of Black History Month for February 2008. Its theme is "Carter G. Woodson and the Origins of Multiculturalism." "We received 10 submissions for our latest poster contest," he noted. **Jennifer Abbey**, an NRCS soil conservationist with USDA's Service Center in Sebring, FL, submitted the winning poster.

The aforementioned posters can be viewed by clicking on www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/civilrights/sep.html.

"I've known all along that our NRCS employees have a lot of talent," Hairston said. "But this poster contest reflects that that talent includes 'poster artistry' as well."

—**RON HALL**



Corbin Newman is the Regional Forester for the Forest Service's Southwestern

Region, based in Albuquerque.

From October 2005 until his selection for this position Newman served as FS's National Director of Forest Management, based at the agency's headquarters office in Washington, DC. From 2002-05 he was the Director of FS's National Fire Plan. He served as the agency's national budget coordinator for the National Forest System from 1999-2002.

Newman served as the Forest Supervisor on the Huron-Manistee

National Forest, based in Cadillac, MI, from 1997-99. From 1995-97 he was the strategy team leader for FS's Eastern Region, based in Milwaukee, after having been the appeals and litigation coordinator for that region from 1992-95. He was a district ranger on the Allegheny NF, in Bradford, PA, from 1989-92. He worked as the Public Affairs Officer on the Black Hills NF, based in Custer, SD, from 1987-88, after having been the Assistant Timber Sales Officer on that NF from 1986-87. He began his full-time career with the agency as a supervisory forestry technician in Fort Collins, CO, in 1979. Then in 1980, while at that location, he became a certified silviculturist—a person who cares for forestland.

Harv Forsgren, the previous Regional Forester for FS's Southwestern Region, is now the Regional Forester for the agency's Intermountain Region, based in Ogden, Utah.



As we all know firsthand, we public servants with USDA are often serving the public even when we're not on the clock. Here's how **Larry Poss** 'contributed to that cause' during a two-day situation recently.

Poss, a marketing specialist in the Audit, Review, and Compliance Branch with the Agricultural

Marketing Service in St. Joseph, MO, was on a business trip when he ended up being bumped from a flight at the airport in Raleigh, NC. So, as he was standing at the gate, waiting to make alternate reservations, he noticed a teen sitting off to the side who appeared to be visibly upset.

"Well, I went up to her, and I simply asked her if she had been bumped from her flight like I had," he recounted. "She explained that she hadn't been bumped but had somehow been left behind because of a mix-up in communications." That was in spite of the arrangements that the 15-year-old's mother had tried to orchestrate in advance to make sure nothing went awry. It turned out that the teen's trip—she

PROFILE PLUS *More About: Brad Rippey*



If you're a steady listener of USDA's daily Radio News Line—and if not, well then, gee, you *should* be—when you dial 202-720-6776 or go to <http://audioarchives.oc.usda.gov>, chances are you might hear **Brad Rippey** being interviewed about the weather. Specifically, he might be talking about its possible effect on the immediate future

activities of America's farmers, ranchers, agribusiness personnel, commodity market specialists, and USDA employees, among others. And if you listen to the annual interview with a USDA agricultural meteorologist on December 24, first you'll hear the Office of Communications radio news reporter solemnly advise that "**Santa Claus** always listens to *this* radio station." Then you'll hear Rippey or one of his fellow ag meteorologists give their prediction of what weather patterns Santa is likely to run into, across the U.S., as he and his reindeer do their rounds on Christmas Eve.

"Yeah, we always get a kick out of doing that particular interview," Rippey said. "And my three young kids like listening to it too." Tracking Santa's coast-to-coast trek, climatologically, is all part of his territory, since Rippey, an agricultural meteorologist in the Office of the Chief Economist, is the lead spokesperson for USDA on domestic weather issues.

Rippey's dad was a career employee of the Forest Service. So Rippey moved around a lot during his younger years. Born in Elkins, WV, he lived in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Virginia before earning a B.S. degree in meteorology at Penn State.

Was he always interested in the weather? "It sounds corny, but I always knew it was what I wanted to do," he replied. "I remember that at age six I'd study the weather page of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, following where the weather fronts were moving. Then in 1972, when Hurricane Agnes wreaked havoc as it swept up the East Coast, I vividly remember that my folks had us spend the night in the basement of our house in Philadelphia when that storm passed through. I'm sure I was scared—but that also taught me even further about how important the weather is."

His first job out of college was with the U.S. Department of Commerce, where he concentrated on satellite meteorology. He then

spent nearly eight years with the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center, where he became the editor for domestic weather issues for the "Weekly Weather and Crop Bulletin," a joint publication of USDA and the National Weather Service.

"That particular publication dates back to 1872," he pointed out. "And it hasn't had a name change since 1924." Rippey has continued as its editor for domestic weather issues following his move to USDA in 1998. In the mid-1990s, once the publication ceased having paid subscriptions for its paper copies, that 16-to-40-page publication has been made available for free on the Internet. "It's an important pub," he added, "that provides weekly updates on how the weather is affecting agriculture." That explains, he said, why it generally gets over 5,000 hits per issue.

In addition, working with other "mets" or meteorologists from USDA and from the National Weather Service located in his USDA office, he prepares and releases, by 9 a.m. daily, the one-page "U.S. Agricultural Weather Highlights" report. "It's primarily a snapshot of current weather developments and their immediate impact on agriculture," he said. "That publication is less heavily visited—about 250 hits per day—but it has a dedicated group of users."

And the name of his particular office within the Office of the Chief Economist? "It's called the Joint Agricultural Weather Facility—we try to put the 'ag flavor' into everything we do," Rippey quipped.

Last Book Read: "*Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America*" by **John Barry**.

Last Movie Seen: "*Shrek the Third*"—with my kids."

Hobbies: Running, genealogy, traveling.

Favorite Weekend Breakfast: "I enjoy scrambled eggs when I get a chance—but lots of times it's just cold cereal."

Something I Don't Want People To Know About Me: "All through school, including high school, I was petrified about doing 'public speaking.' Now, thankfully, it's sort of second nature to me."

Priorities In The Months Ahead: "For the last decade our office has worked with the Commerce Department and the National Drought Mitigation Center to produce a weekly map called the 'U.S. Drought Monitor.' We want to continue to improve it and its website portal at www.drought.gov. Our goal is to turn it into the one-stop shopping source for drought information in the U.S."

—**RON HALL**

was returning to Kansas City, MO from New York City via Raleigh—was her first major trip by herself. “And,” Poss said, “she seemed pretty shook up.”

“I think we’ve all been in that situation, especially in our younger years, when we’ve felt a little lost, alone, and sort of helpless—so I thought I could try to guide her in the right direction, but without being intrusive.”

Accordingly, he helped the teen contact the appropriate airline personnel. “I made sure they offered her the same options that I had received,” he noted. Poss and the teen both were booked on the next direct flight to Kansas City. However, that flight didn’t leave until the next morning. “So I made sure that provisions were made for her at a nearby hotel—at the airline’s expense,” he advised. He also made sure she found the correct shuttle to that hotel.

During this time there had been a flurry of phone calls between the teen and her mother, during which the teen told her mom that “[Poss] was cool, he didn’t try to do everything for me, he just made sure they were doing the same things for me as they did for him.” As the mother later recounted, “I don’t know if you have ever parented a 15 year old, but if so, you know that is very high praise! He gave her a sense of comfort and security that simply would not have been there if Larry Poss had not been there.”

Nonetheless, as the mother later acknowledged, she was initially “very suspicious” of this man who was helping her daughter. So Poss talked with her on the phone and, as she subsequently described it, “Credit to Mr. Poss

for sensing a parent’s anxiety. He spoke with me by telephone, and attempted to calm my nerves, while not adding to my fears.”

The mother also asked Poss if he could give his business card to his daughter—which he did. Her acknowledged purpose for that was two-fold: to be able to ultimately contact him to thank him, and to be able to check him out further if need be. But, as she said later, “I felt much better knowing he worked for the USDA; one, because I know the background checks that government employees must endure and, two, having grown up in the Midwest, I know there are certain character traits that are inherent in the people of the agricultural world. . . knowing he was a USDA employee helped me get through the next 12 hours.”

Poss’s assistance to the teen wasn’t over quite yet. He called her hotel room in the evening to let her know the hotel was serving complimentary sandwiches. In the morning, he called her room to be certain she was awake and ready to catch the shuttle back to the airport. And, as the mother later recounted, “Once they were on the return shuttle to the [airline] terminal, [my daughter] was ready to exit the shuttle at the first stop. Thankfully Mr. Poss was still keeping a watchful eye. She was three stops too early. There’s no telling where she would have ended up had she gotten off at that first stop.”

The teen ultimately made it back to her residence in Oak Grove, MO, and the grateful mother sent a lengthy note, describing the whole incident, to **James Riva**, Chief of AMS’s Audit, Review, and Compliance Branch and Poss’s supervisor. She emphasized in her note

that “Mr. Poss is no doubt too humble to share all that he did. Suffice to say, he was key to [my daughter’s] safe return.”

“I make this business trip a lot—but normally I fly through the airport in Fayetteville, North Carolina,” Poss noted. “So maybe it was fate that had me fly through Raleigh this time—and put me in that particular spot at that particular moment, so I could be of help to that teenager.”

—**HAKIM FOBIA**

The **USDA NEWS** is published by the Office of Communications, the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This employee news publication, which is prepared by, for and about this Department’s employees, is distributed to USDA’s 95,800 federal employees—full-time, part-time and temporary—by order of the Secretary of Agriculture. Mailing address is Rm. 412-A Whitten Bldg.; OC, USDA; 1400 Independence Ave., SW; Washington, D.C. 20250-1300.

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Since the **USDA NEWS** is made available on USDA’s website, all materials contained in this employee news publication are made available to the public. To view this employee news publication online, click on:

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USDA’s Proposed Budget...continued from pg. 2

text pest and disease threats and to improve response capabilities.

In addition, USDA’s proposed budget includes \$13 million to proceed with the design and planning for a new Agricultural Research Service Consolidated Poultry Research Facility in Athens, GA, which would be the Department’s premier center for conducting critical research on exotic and emerging avian diseases that could have devastating effects on animal and human health.

② \$60 million in avian influenza efforts, in which USDA continues to work closely with states in domestic surveillance efforts and improves the nation’s preparedness and response capabilities to help stem the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1) overseas. USDA is a partner in the governmentwide effort to prepare the country for a potential pandemic, and in the worldwide effort to stop the spread of the virus overseas.

③ record funding of nearly \$1.1 billion for

the Food Safety and Inspection Service. This is designed to ensure that the demand for inspection is met, to continue improving the safety of the nation’s food supply. This funding also continues the Department’s efforts to increase the speed with which it can detect and respond to outbreaks of foodborne illness.

④ an increase of \$2 million, to total \$22 million, for the Office of Civil Rights, which includes an increase of \$0.5 million to conduct mandatory compliance reviews of USDA agency programs, plus an increase of \$0.2 million to reduce the average number of days needed to process EEO complaints.

⑤ \$12.5 million in the Office of the Secretary to continue supporting the Department’s efforts, coordinated by the Foreign Agricultural Service, to assist in agricultural reconstruction activities in Afghanistan and Iraq. USDA continues to provide technical advisors assigned to Government Ministries in Iraq and to Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) that are operating in the rural prov-

inces of Afghanistan and Iraq. USDA employees are advisors who serve temporary assignments on those PRTs. The Sept.-Oct. 2006 issue of the **USDA NEWS** carried a story about some of those activities.

⑥ An increase of approximately \$20 million, to total approximately \$59 million, for renewable energy research and development activities to enhance bioenergy feedstocks and improve conversion technologies for cellulosic ethanol.

⑦ \$3.4 million to consolidate, under USDA’s Office of Ethics, all ethics activities at the Department. This is designed to ensure that ethics oversight and the delivery of ethics services to USDA’s agencies are carried out in a consistent manner with clear accountability.

For more details on USDA’s proposed staffing levels, as well as additional details on other aspects of USDA’s proposed budget for FY 2009, click on www.usda.gov/budget.

USDA’s proposed budget for FY 2009 was transmitted to Congress on February 4. ■



"I think we need another wall in order to hang these latest winning posters," quips **Cliff Denshire** (right), NRCS's National Disability/Veterans Emphasis Program Manager, as he and NRCS Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager **Gilbert Guerrero** (left) and NRCS Federal Women's Program Manager **Sharyn Alvarez** analyze the posters on the table and on the wall display behind them. Those posters represent some of the winning entries from agency-level 'home-grown' contests. In those contests, NRCS employees competed to develop the official agency-level posters that were, in turn, used in commemorating NRCS's participation in the various Special Emphasis Program commemorations which USDA headquarters and field offices honor throughout the year. The winning entries were posted on the agency's website so that the various NRCS offices around the country could access them and print them out in whatever size best suited their needs. And the winning 'NRCS artists' received \$300 spot awards for their contributions. Note the story on page 4.—**PHOTO BY JOSEPH HAIRSTON**



**HELP US FIND
Cori Baker**

Missing: **11-9-2007** From: **Tulsa, OK**
 D.O.B. **5-13-1994** Sex: **Female**
 Hair: **Brown** Eyes: **Blue**
 Height: **5 ft. 5 in.** Weight: **105 lbs.**
If you have information, please call
1-800-843-5678

NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN

**USDA-Sponsored
Calendar Highlights**

■ **March 4-6**

Washington International Renewable Energy Conference 2008 (WIREC)
 Washington, DC
 (202) 720-4581 or 1-800-877-8339 (TDD)
www.wirec2008.gov

■ **Month of March**

Women's History Month
 USDA headquarters and field offices
 (202) 720-7314 or (202) 720-6382 (TDD)

■ **Month of March**

National Nutrition Month
 USDA headquarters and field offices
 (703) 305-2298 or 1-800-877-8339 (TDD)

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