

USDA *news*

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

Here's How We're "Unplugging"—At Our USDA Worksites—To Conserve Energy Plus, Sign The Pledge, And Then Change That Bulb

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

We USDA employees know that this Department has an expansive mission, consists of a variety of employees, covers a great amount of territory, occupies a number of office facilities—and, in the process, uses a lot of watts of electricity to get the job done.

So USDA recently unplugged. Literally.

It was all part of a challenge to see what USDA employees at headquarters locations in the Washington, DC metropolitan area could do to reduce electricity consumption, save energy, and bring down utility costs—specifically, during normal off-duty hours in the evenings and on weekends. Titled the “Headquarters Complex Energy Reduction Challenge”—or, in short-hand, “USDA Unplugged”—this effort asked each employee to turn off and unplug all non-critical office equipment both on Wednesday, October 17 and again for the weekend of October 19-21. The purpose was to gauge how much electricity might be saved as a result—and, in the process, demonstrate the role that this Department's employees might be able to play in energy conservation.

So, what brought all *this* on? And why now?

“We recently did a study here

at headquarters and found out that the energy use in our USDA office facilities has been on an upward trajectory for the past few years, both during the normal work day and during off-duty hours as well,” explained **Ed Murtagh**, the Acting Deputy Chief of the Washington Area Service Center in the Office of Operations. “And even more dramatic, there has been a rise in energy costs in much of the nation, due to really big increases in electricity rates.”

“So, as a result, for at least the last two years USDA had to take money from its Operations and Maintenance Fund to pay for headquarters energy usage instead. That, of course, meant there'd be less money available to address routine maintenance, minor repairs, and other work that we'd normally use to improve the quality of our USDA workplace.”

Accordingly, USDA executives and specialists brainstormed on this matter and came up with the “USDA Unplugged” challenge. “The idea,” noted **Ed Hogberg**, the Energy and Environmental Manager in OO, “was to request of headquarters employees that—before they left their office spaces at the end of the work day on the designated dates—they *turn off* such office equipment items as overhead lights, desk lamps, computer monitors,



“That exit sign over there uses energy efficient Light-Emitting Diodes to light it,” notes OO's **Ed Murtagh** (right), as he and OO's **Marian Romero** (center) staff an ‘energy awareness outreach/information table’ at a USDA headquarters facility. They were promoting some of the energy efficient devices that USDA employees can use to reduce their energy consumption, both at their office locations and in their residences. Note the story on this page.—**PHOTO BY SANDY MORGAN**

desktop computers, printers, scanners, copiers, window air conditioning units, and space heaters—and also that they actually *unplug* office items that continue to use some electricity even after they've been turned off.” Those include cell phone chargers, BlackBerry chargers, and computer speakers, plus any personal convenience items in the workplace such as radios, TVs, microwaves, and coffee makers.

“We publicized the event,” he added, “by use of e-mail messages to all headquarters employees, through posters in common areas around the headquarters office complex, by hanging vinyl banners, promoting the event, over the entrance of the Whitten Building and in cafeterias here at headquarters.” In addition, on October 17 Assistant Secretary for Administration **Boyd Rutherford**

left a voice mail message on the phones of all headquarters employees, encouraging them to participate in “USDA Unplugged.”

That's nice. But was all this just a ‘feel-good’ exercise, or did it actually accomplish anything?

“It certainly did,” replied Hogberg. He noted that USDA's energy managers, who specifically measure the usage of electricity, relied in part on the results of an ‘infrared imager’ that they had used in September to survey the headquarters buildings. They specifically wanted to identify wasted energy that occurs at the facility after-hours and on weekends, due to the window air conditioning units that are inadvertently left on in the office during those periods. That helped to provide them with some baseline data needed to measure improve-

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Chuck Conner *Acting Secretary of Agriculture*

Dear Fellow Employees, During this season of renewal and reflection, it is my hope that all of you remember how important your service is to your country and to American agriculture. Whether you are involved in our feeding programs, farm programs, research, food safety, conservation, or international trade, every one of you is integral to the successful delivery of public service and I am enormously proud of the work you do.

This great Department ticks because of your work and, of course, Congressional appropriations. But your jobs and those appropriations are determined by information, information collected once every five years by USDA in the Census of Agriculture.

2007 is a Census of Agriculture year. Answers to the questions posed to every farmer and rancher will give us the only complete count of the nation's farms and ranches and the people who operate them.

Through the Census, producers reveal the value and importance of agriculture to the nation and their answers help influence decisions on the direction of future farm, food, energy, trade, and rural development policy.

That information in turn affects every agency and every mission area within USDA. The Census provides the factual data that underpins all of our programs and services. The more we know about the nation's farms and ranches—and the people who operate them—the better job we can do of targeting our programs to the people and places that need them most.

For example, USDA uses Census data to ensure that local service

centers are staffed at appropriate levels. Community planners use the information to target needed services to rural residents. Legislators use the information when shaping farm policies and programs. And, of course, farmers and ranchers can use Census data to help make decisions about the future of their own operations.

Still, producers tend to be reluctant about telling folks how much land they farm, how many bushels they produce, and any other detail that can reveal their financial situation. Such information is considered private, a sentiment we all share.

But we all need to help producers understand that their information, by law, will be kept confidential. The National Agricultural Statistics Service, which conducts the Census, uses the information only for statistical purposes and publishes data only in tabulated totals. The report cannot be used for purposes of taxation, investigation, or regulation. Indeed, even the Freedom of Information Act cannot be used to disclose an individual participant's information.

Because of its importance to all of USDA and all of U.S. agriculture, NASS is relying on all of us to help educate and inform farmers about the Census. Producers have until February 4 to return forms. And for the first time, forms can be answered online via a secure website: www.agcensus.usda.gov.

So as you count your blessings during this special time of year, please encourage your farm and ranch friends to have their farms and ranches counted in the 2007 Census of Agriculture. Their answers will shape the future of American agriculture for years to come. Again, I thank you for your continued service and wish you and your families a joyous holiday season. ■

"Unplugging" ...continued from pg. 1

ments. The energy managers then monitored the energy use for those 'challenge periods' and then compared that usage to similar time frames in both prior years and in recent days.

"They found," Hogberg affirmed, "that employees in the Whitten, South, and Yates Buildings, here at headquarters, did reduce the use of electricity by 9,000 kilowatt hours—in the off-duty hours of Wednesday, October 17—and by 24,000 kilowatt hours—over the weekend of October 19 to 21. We estimated those two particular cost savings to total almost \$3,000."

"To put that into perspective," added **P.V. Alexander**, OO's electrical engineer, "11,000 kilowatt hours is enough electricity to power an average U.S. home for a year. So we calculate that, during this challenge, USDA employees saved enough electricity to power approximately three homes for an entire year."

"And—to repeat—that was based on only one weeknight and one weekend."

Alexander added that, if those savings were annualized—in other words, if USDA employees continued that level of 'unplug/turn off' in their headquarters office spaces every time they finished their workday, for 52 weeks—the Department would realize savings as high

as \$330,000 per year, or enough electricity savings to power the equivalent of 220 homes a year.

In a related effort, on October 9 Rutherford sent an e-mail to all USDA employees at headquarters and field locations, inviting them to participate in a governmentwide campaign titled "Change a Light, Change the World." It was an effort to encourage federal employees to change the light bulbs in their residences with energy efficient bulbs, as "an easy step each one of us can take to conserve our energy resources while saving on energy bills."

In his e-mail he encouraged USDA employees to replace at least one conventional light fixture or light bulb with a more energy efficient product, to include compact fluorescent bulbs and Light-Emitting Diode (LED) bulbs.

"Recently," he had noted, "over 40 incandescent light bulbs, in and around the Secretary's reception area, were replaced with energy efficient bulbs, saving over 900KW hours per month, which is equivalent to the monthly electric consumption of a single family home."

To encourage participation, during five days in October USDA headquarters employees staffed an 'energy awareness outreach/information table' at which they encouraged

fellow employees to sign a pledge that they would, in fact, make such an energy-saving replacement in their residences.

And the results? "Over 500 employees stopped by during those five days—and over 100 of them signed our pledge sheets," noted OO Contract Services Supervisor **Marian Romero**.

Alright. Now, there are an estimated 10,000 USDA employees at headquarters sites in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. But we have about 90,000 USDA employees at field locations both across the country and around the world. So will USDA's field employees have the opportunity to initiate their own localized versions of "USDA Unplugged" or "Change a Light, Change the World"?

"To get the most accurate 'meter-measurement' out of a 'USDA Unplugged' effort," replied **Charles Johnson**, USDA's Facilities Energy and Water Program Manager located in the Office of Procurement and Property Management, "those USDA field facilities need to have so-called 'advanced meters' that provide access to peak and off-peak use measurements by the hour. But we definitely want to encourage these initiatives at our field offices, no matter what kind of meters those *continued on pg. 7...*

Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

After months of delay the U.S. Senate passed a farm bill on December 14. Calling the bill “fundamentally flawed,” Acting Secretary **Chuck Conner** promised to work with the U.S. House and Senate on ways to make a good farm bill that benefits rural communities and America’s farmers. The House passed its bill last July. Conference on the two measures is expected to begin early next year.

During the past two months, the Secretary announced a revision of the food packages provided to WIC participants—the first revision in 30 years—and he applauded the National Cattlemen’s Foundation cooperative agreement with USDA to promote the merits of a National Animal Identification System.

On the international front, the Secretary praised passage of a Free Trade Agreement with Peru, which opens their market to U.S. farm products. And he praised the Philippines for reopening their market to U.S. beef and beef products of all ages. Beef trade with the Philippines reached \$6.3 million when partial market access opening was achieved. Under the new agreement trade could double in 2008.

USDA Revises WIC Food Packages: Under the interim final rule issued December 6, participants in USDA’s Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) will begin to receive fruits, vegetables, and whole grains as recommended by the Dietary Guidelines. “The addition of these foods better reflects the needs of over 8 million low-income mothers and children in the WIC program. The new food packages are designed to improve the nutri-

tion and health of our nation’s low-income pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and young children with nutrition education, and more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains to greatly improve dietary quality,” said Secretary Conner.

NAIS Progress:

USDA has agreed to partner with the National Cattlemen’s Foundation in cooperation with the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) to facilitate the registration of additional cattle premises as part of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS). “This cooperative agreement will help USDA reach out to the large and varied American cattle industry to promote the merits of a national animal identification system,” said **Bruce Knight**, Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs. The long-term goal of NAIS is to retrieve sufficient trace forward and trace back data within a 48-hour window, which will allow animal health officials to trace a disease back to its source. This procedure offers the best protection to other premises and cattle from the adverse economic impact of a disease outbreak. As of December 17, USDA had registered 429,600 premises nationwide.

New Trade Office In China:

The Foreign Agricultural Service opened its fourth trade office in China in mid-December. Located in Chengdu, the capital of southwest China’s Sichuan



Former Kansas Senator **Bob Dole** (center), who is known for his quick wit, shows that he hasn’t lost his touch—as Acting Secretary **Chuck Conner** (right) and Father **Doug Greenaway** just found out. The setting was the Patio of USDA’s Whitten Building in Washington, DC, on December 6, and the occasion was the announcement of the publishing of an interim final rule revising food packages, provided by USDA’s Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), for the first time in nearly three decades. According to **Pat Daniels**, Director of the WIC Program in the Food and Nutrition Service, those food packages will now include fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Dole was one of the original co-sponsors of the legislation that created WIC.—**PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH**

province, the new office is the 102nd overseas office staffed by USDA in 82 countries. “Rising per capita incomes and steady economic growth are creating new demand for U.S. foods and beverages in this region. This office will help U.S. exporters position themselves to take advantage of these trends,” said **Ellen Terpstra**, Deputy Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services. China imported roughly \$8.2 billion worth of U.S. agricultural products in fiscal year 2007, a record figure. Bulk and intermediate products like soybeans, cotton, hides, meat, and poultry accounted for a large portion of that total. While U.S. bulk commodities have traditionally fared well in this market—China imports more U.S. soybeans and cotton than any other country—U.S. consumer-ready foods like nuts, dairy products, and wine made the biggest gains in 2007 with a 44 percent increase over fiscal year 2006.

Biobased Products: USDA has clarified the preference

process for biobased products in the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR), which is expected to make it simpler for procurement officials and manufacturers to participate in the program. The BioPreferred program, managed by USDA, requires federal buyers and their contractors to give preference to qualified biobased products. The program was enacted as part of the 2002 farm bill. Biobased products are made from agricultural, forestry, or marine materials. With the update to the FAR, agencies across the federal government, and their contractors, will be required to give procurement preference to biobased products that meet qualifications for preferred procurement. According to USDA research, more than 10,000 biobased products are commercially available for purchase. USDA rulemaking will seek to speed the qualification of as many of these products as possible.

—**PATRICIA KLINTBERG**

Employees *make these things happen*

Natural Resources And Environment

Seasonal Tree From Forest Service Again Graces U.S. Capitol

For the fifth time Vermont has provided this year's Capitol Christmas Tree—which is now lit and ready for viewing on the west lawn of the U.S. Capitol, facing toward the Washington Monument in Washington, DC.

This year's tree, which came from the Green Mountain National Forest based in Rutland, VT, is a 44-year-old, 4,000-lb., dark green balsam fir. "It was originally 55 feet tall when it was found in the forest," explained **Kristi Ponozzo**, the Forest Service's public affairs officer for the Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forests. "Now it's set in the ground with 50 feet exposed." She explained that the lower five feet of the tree go into the ground, and cement is then used to reinforce the tree and keep it erect. Guy wires are also used on the tree to secure it.

The Capitol Christmas Tree is provided each year by one of the nation's 155 national forests. Vermont earlier provided the Capitol Christmas Tree in 1967, 1980, 1982, and 1994. The Green Mountain NF is commemorating its 75th anniversary during 2007.

This is the 36th Capitol Christmas Tree that has been provided to Congress by the Forest Service from a National Forest, according to **Beverly Carroll**, a Forest Service program analyst and national coordinator for the Capitol Christmas Tree. "They are provided with the support of state agencies and officials and local communities for use as the Capitol Tree," she said.

This particular tree was initially discovered by now-retired Vermont state employee and county forester **Jim White**. Natural Resources Conservation Service soil conservationist **Jenny Kimberly** said that this particular tree was nurtured by White, FS forestry

technician **Frank Thompson**, and herself. "As it grew," Kimberly explained, "we'd clear away other trees from our tree's base so that it could get more sunlight and grow better. We also made sure that it was injected with an anti-bug solution."

"November 16 was the day we harvested the tree," she added. Ultimately they wrapped it in strips of burlap which Kimberly sewed together as a cover. "We employed 'Vermont ingenuity,'" she quipped, "to secure the cover by using a piece of fence wire as a needle and parachute cord as the thread. Then our tree headed out on its journey."

Meg Mitchell, Forest Supervisor of the Green Mountain NF, noted that the Capitol Christmas Tree Committee, composed of federal, state, and local entities both in the public and private sector in Vermont, is offsetting the carbon emissions associated with transporting the tree to Washington, DC. "The Committee purchased offsets—with a \$300 donation—through the National Forest Foundation's new Carbon Capitol Fund," she explained. "This offset the 3,000 gallons of fuel needed to transport the 55-foot balsam fir, plus the many companion trees accompanying the main tree on its trek."

Mitchell added that the offset program allows consumers to offset their carbon emissions by directly investing in carbon sequestration projects on National Forests. "By planting trees through the offset program," Mitchell said, "the Carbon Capital Fund is able to sequester large amounts of carbon, while simultaneously improving water quality, increasing wildlife habitat, and improving the ecological condition of our National Forests and Grasslands."

Forest Service scientists estimate that the nation's forests 'sequester,' or store, carbon

at a rate that is equivalent to 10-15 percent of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions.

The Capitol Christmas Tree arrived in Washington, DC on November 26. **Cathy Rider**, FS's purchasing agent on the Green Mountain NF, added that most of the tree's journey and related activities were funded through sponsors and donations.

Melissa Reichert, FS's forest planner for the Green Mountain NF, said that this year's tree is decorated with over 3,000 ornaments, mostly by school children and artists from throughout Vermont. Mitchell added that, for the second year in a row, the lights on the tree are 'Light-Emitting Diode' or LED lights, which save electricity.

Carroll said that the Capitol Christmas Tree—also called the "People's Tree"—is not to be confused with the National Christmas Tree, which grows on the Ellipse behind the White House.

The 2007 Capitol Christmas Tree was formally lit on December 5. It will be lit each evening through January 1, 2008.

—**RON HALL**



Scott Wixsom, a Forest Service biological technician on the Green Mountain National

Forest in Vermont, takes a break from using his chain saw to clear underbrush away from the balsam tree behind him—so that tree can be safely harvested on November 16 and transported to Washington DC to serve as the 2007 Capitol Christmas Tree.—**PHOTO BY CHRIS ALEXOPOULOS**

Farm And Foreign Agricultural Services

Lots Of Ground To Cover, And Not Much Time To Do It? Use A Chopper

M*A*S*H has come to USDA. Well, sort of.

For two summers in a row Farm Service Agency specialists in Kansas have relied on helicopters to aid them in conducting compliance inspections of lands enrolled in USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

According to **Mike Robinson**, the Kansas FSA District Director based in Manhattan, KS, the helicopters being employed are updated

models of a chopper series that was used primarily during the Korean War for medical evacuation purposes, and are like the helicopters seen on the M*A*S*H television series.

But why use helicopters in the first place?

"Choppers are more time-effective and cost-effective than performing CRP compliance inspections visually on the ground," affirmed **Norma McConkey**, FSA County Executive Director in Jefferson County, KS, who co-coordinated the 'CRP-helicopter' project in 2006 in

Kansas. "They are especially valuable," added **Beverly Preston**, FSA's Program Manager for CRP, based in Washington, DC, "when there is—literally—a lot of ground to cover and not much time to do it in."

Dwaine Schettler, an FSA program specialist in the agency's Washington State Office in Spokane, echoed those sentiments. He noted that in July and August 2006 FSA specialists in Washington State had 1.1 million acres of CRP lands to inspect in a very short

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



Chris Connelly is USDA's Director of Communications.

Before joining USDA, from January 2001

until his appointment to this position Connelly served as Chief of Staff and Communications Director for the late U.S. Congresswoman **Jo Ann Davis** (R-VA).

From 1998-2001 Connelly served as Press Secretary,

Deputy Press Secretary, and policy analyst for various Members of Congress. He also served as a speechwriter on national issues while on the Hill. He began his time on the Hill as a member of [then] Majority Whip **Tom DeLay's** whip staff.

Terri Teuber Moore, the previous Director of Communications for the Department, is now a Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy Director of Communications for Policy and Planning. ■

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time frame. "So the way we did it," he explained, "was to use helicopters for our CRP field inspections, allowing us to identify those fields that met CRP eligibility requirements and those fields that didn't. Then, for the fields that failed our aerial review, we visited them on the ground—so that we could make an accurate assessment of them to determine their eligibility for continued enrollment in CRP."

So, how many FSA employees went up in the chopper?

Schettler said that his state used two different types of employees. "At first, our plan was to use the local FSA county executive director on board, with the chopper pilot," he recounted. "But that, of course, meant that we'd have to pull that CED away from his/her daily duties as a CED."

So, after doing that once, FSA used a temporary employee, who had previous experience at CRP field inspections, to conduct the aerial inspections in Washington State. Schettler said, "He ended up logging 158 hours in the helicopter, visited 12 of the 13 counties we inspected, logged 9,800 air miles, endured cockpit temperatures that exceeded 100 degrees—but made the whole process a complete success."

He added that using one employee allowed FSA's Washington State Office to maintain consistency across the entire project, and it kept the learning curve to a minimum after the team—an FSA employee and a chopper pilot—had developed a working relationship.

Schettler pointed out that, as part of their statement of work, they required the helicopter company to provide an aircraft that was capable of using a digital Geographic Information System (GIS) map. "So the chopper pilot was able to load information about the CRP field boundaries right into the onboard computer," he said. "This allowed the pilot to establish a flight pattern to most effectively cover all the required fields." Then the FSA employee in the air also employed a handheld GPS (Global Positioning System) unit to track the flight and verify coverage. "That

provided us," he said, "with documentation that we then used to make our determinations about continued CRP eligibility."

According to **Lois Loop**, a program specialist for FSA's Oregon State Office in Tualatin, OR, FSA specialists in Oregon were the first to employ choppers for CRP compliance inspections, in June 2006, spearheaded by **Charlie Newhouse**, FSA's District Director for Eastern Oregon. "It was essentially a one-time-thing for us," she acknowledged. "But, when we did it last year, we had 400,000 CRP acres to check, in a short period of time. So we used a chopper, with FSA county office employees in the air doing the inspection."

"I can confirm," she added, "that it *did* prove to us that you can see anything you want to from the air—including a landing strip and a building structure on some CRP acres that weren't supposed to be there!" Loop noted that their specialists put rolls of toilet paper on the ground as test markers. "We *were* able to see those markers, so that confirmed that we would be able to see patches of weeds—that aren't supposed to be on CRP acreage. We figured that if we could see the TP, we could see the weeds."

Kim Kee, FSA's County Executive Director in Brown County, KS, said that, when she was airborne, she was able to see noxious weeds as well as trees, brush, and erosion. "We were able to complete approximately 60 CRP acreage reviews in less than a day," she emphasized. "The same number of CRP contracts would have taken me at least 10 full days in the field."

Rick Abel, FSA's County Executive Director in Atchison County, KS, recounted that he and his chopper pilot traversed from one CRP acreage to another at approximately 300 feet above the ground, and zipped along at about 75 miles per hour. "When we approached an area of CRP acreage," he said, "our pilot brought the bird to within about 100 feet above ground, and then slowed down so we could get a good look at the acreage."

Abel said he agreed with Schettler's observation that having one FSA employee being



*It's one leg in and one leg still out for FSA's **Rick Abel**, as he gets ready to embark on a compliance inspection, by helicopter, of acreage in Kansas that is enrolled in USDA's Conservation Reserve Program.—PHOTO BY TRISH HALSTEAD*

airborne with the chopper pilot is more time-effective than orienting several FSA specialists in how to effectively observe CRP acreage from the air. "That's why I ended up being the only person doing it for us in Kansas this year," he affirmed.

And the cost-savings? "We had two counties with over 100,000 acres enrolled in CRP," Schettler replied. "With three days of flight, and two days compiling data, we were able in a week's time to identify those fields which would require a followup visit. In most counties, less than 20 percent of the fields required followup visits. This is where the cost and time savings were found, looking at the number of employees required to spot-check 20 percent of the fields versus making a visit to *all* fields."

Robinson estimated that \$16,479 was saved in 2006 by the six county offices in Kansas which conducted some of their CRP compliance inspections using the helicopter instead of the traditional method.

"We estimated that it costs about \$30 per each CRP contract by using a helicopter to inspect the CRP acreage," he declared. "But when I used the chopper this summer I was able to cover the acres for 100 CRP contracts in one day. Contrast that with the 'pre-chopper CRP inspections' in the spring of 2006, when I used an all-terrain-vehicle to do my CRP inspections—and I could still only cover the acres in about 10 CRP contracts per day."

"So you do the math. See the savings?"

—RON HALL



Brian Wansink is the Executive Director of USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy

and Promotion.

Before joining USDA, from July 2005 until his appointment to this position Wansink served as a professor of consumer behavior and marketing and as the Director of the Cornell Food and

Brand Lab in the Department of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY. That Lab focuses on the psychology behind what people eat and how often they eat it.

Wansink has also held academic appointments at Dartmouth College (1990-94); Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, Holland (1994-95); the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania (1995-97); the University of Illinois at Urbana-Cham-

paign (1997-2005); INSEAD, the international business school, at Fountainbleau, France (2004-05); and the U.S. Army Research Labs at Natick, MA. (2005).

During those appointments he generally taught and conducted research on consumer behavior as it relates to nutrition and food choices. His publications that are thought to be particularly germane to CNPP and USDA include *"Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More than We*

Think" (2006), *"Marketing Nutrition"* (2005), *"Asking Questions"* (2004), and *"Consumer Panels"* (2002).

Eric Hentges, CNPP's previous Executive Director, is now the Executive Director of the International Life Sciences Institute, North America, a Washington, DC-based non-profit, worldwide foundation that seeks to improve the well-being of the general public through the advancement of science. ■

PROFILE PLUS *More About: Scott Steele*



Scott Steele is USDA's Budget Officer and Director of the Office of Budget and Program Analysis. He hails from Latrobe, PA, home of **Arnold Palmer, Mister Rogers**, Rolling Rock beer, the Banana Split, and the Pittsburgh Steelers' training camp. A town of about 12,000 people, it is believed to be the birthplace of professional football and gets its name from **Benjamin Latrobe**, son of the architect who designed the U.S. Capitol.

With that colorful backdrop how did Steele, who holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in business administration, economics, and agricultural economics all from The Pennsylvania State University, wind up as the go-to-guy on all USDA budget matters, large and small? In an understatement he said, "Being an economist, I've always been interested in how money gets spent or better yet not spent, ask my wife."

He began his nearly 38-year career with USDA in the Economic Research Service working on international trade issues. That portfolio expanded over time to include commodity programs and world food security issues. For several years he headed the U.S. Delegation to the Committee on World Food Security under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. As his duties expanded changes occurred within the Department, consolidating the budget function with what was then the Office of Agricultural Economics. For a time, Steele became a special assistant on international trade and budget issues and then moved to OBPA when it became a separate office. In 1986, he was appointed OBPA's Deputy Director for Program Analysis. He also has worked on every farm bill from the 1977 Act onward.

Today, as Director, the buck stops in his office and exits only after analysis shows where it can be spent to reap the biggest payoff to the taxpayer. "What we do is carry out an analytically based decision-making process with USDA policy officials to determine how best to allocate our resources among competing uses to achieve desired outcomes. It involves priority setting, strategic planning, and performance measurement. Budgeting is classic economics at work, not just an accounting exercise," said Steele.

It also involves marketing. To secure the funding the Department requires to carry out its operations, the budget must be justified to the Office of Management and Budget, Congressional Committees, and the general public. The amount needed, why it is needed, and what achievements will result from the use of taxpayers' money must be clearly explained. In addition, OBPA coordinates the review, analysis, and clearance of practically every regulatory and leg-

islative action that may affect the Department.

The USDA budget is a study in the complexity of OBPA's mission. In size, USDA ranks with the largest of the Fortune 500 companies. Its annual budget in terms of outlays was approximately \$90 billion in 2007. Of that amount, 75 percent is mandatory spending and the remaining 25 percent is discretionary spending. Steele said that it is the discretionary budget, approximately \$22 billion, that pays for "the bread and butter functions" of the Department such as the salaries and expenses of all 106,000 USDA employees, loans and grants, research, rural development, as well as the cost of fighting forest fires. It also pays for some conservation and international programs and for nutrition assistance, such as WIC, which is USDA's largest discretionary program. On the mandatory—or must-spend side of the ledger, which has been set by other laws like the farm bill—the remaining \$68 billion in outlays is divvied up roughly as follows: 66 percent for nutrition programs like food stamps, school lunch, and breakfast programs; 25 percent to farm and conservation programs; 5 percent to crop insurance; and 4 percent to other programs.

And when USDA operates under a continuing resolution rather than under new appropriations? "When a pay increase comes along without the money to pay for it, we normally have to absorb these added costs. Some agencies may have a cushion in reserve to absorb the increase or they may have to cut back on training and travel. As a last resort, agencies may have to consider furloughs," Steele said.

Last Book Read: *"A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail"* by **Bill Bryson**.

Last Movie Seen: *"The Bourne Ultimatum."*

Hobbies: "No one thing, just try to keep busy. My daughter calls me Mr. Fixit."

Favorite Weekend Breakfast: Ham and eggs, sometimes pancakes.

Priorities In The Months Ahead: "We are taking one day at a time, and are focusing on getting the 2009 budget ready to send to Congress in February. We are also working on the Performance Improvement Initiative—PII—which is part of the President's Management Agenda that will become a permanent mechanism to track government-wide program performance. The President has just issued an Executive Order to do this. Right now the Department is looking good since we have achieved the score of 'green' from OMB for our work on the PII initiative. We are in the top echelon of the Federal departments in terms of our performance under this initiative and we would like to keep that way."

—PATRICIA KLINTBERG

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offices have."

The results of "USDA Unplugged" and related efforts build upon activities that USDA employees at headquarters and field locations have already initiated to reduce the use of electricity at their office sites. Several such initiatives were spotlighted in the July-August 2006 issue of the **USDA NEWS** in a story titled "Creative Things We've Done—At Our USDA Worksites—To Conserve Natural Resources."

For instance, as noted in that earlier story, Forest Service employees on the Bighorn National Forest in Sheridan, Wyo., had installed a device called the "VendingMiser" on the soft drink machines in their office buildings. **Bruce Kjerstad**, an FS civil engineering technician on the Bighorn NF, who had installed the devices, had said it's a motion sensor and a controller that attaches to the back and top of a vending machine.

"After 15 minutes of inactivity," he had explained, "the VendingMiser shuts down power to the vending machine. But if someone walks by the vending machine and thereby 'alerts' the motion sensor, the device sends power to reactivate the machine. The device also makes sure that, even if there is no office foot traffic for extended periods of time—such as during the weekend—the soft drink machine turns on every one to three hours so the sodas stay cool." During autumn 2005, personnel with FS's Rocky Mountain Region had purchased 30 Misers at \$140 each for use throughout the Region. They had estimated that the Misers would pay for themselves in just over nine months, at the energy rates at the time, with an energy savings of about 63 percent.

Fast forward to February 2007 in which Departmental Administration staff in Washington, DC ordered VendingMisers for use in a pilot test of several refrigerated beverage machines installed in the Headquarters Complex.

The results? "They're installed in the Whitten, South, and Yates buildings here at headquarters," Hogberg replied. "Calculating the estimated savings at \$200 per machine per year, and the initial capital investment of \$3,400, within six months the annual savings of \$6,400 offset the cost of installation."

Second, the Forest Service has pioneered the use of solar powered trash compacters at some of its facilities. According to **Hank Kashdan**, FS's Deputy Chief for Business Operations, these devices use sunlight to automatically compact trash at the point of disposal, thereby increasing capacity by four to five times that of ordinary trash receptacles.

"The 'BigBelly' trash compacter uses solar power and has a large trash storage capacity," he explained. "They keep litter in and animals out; they promote clean air because they save three out of four collection trips, and that reduces annual vehicle emissions while saving time and fuel; and they promote clean energy by demonstrating renewable energy technology." **Jacqueline Myers**, FS's Associate Deputy Chief for Business Operations, added that the agency has installed 'BigBellies' at several national forests around the country.

Third, within the past few years USDA employees at headquarters and field locations have, on their own initiative, developed "Green Teams." "Their purpose," explained **Anna Jones-Crabtree**, the Sustainable Operations Coordinator for FS's Rocky Mountain and Northern Regions, "is to pragmatically implement various measures that would reduce a local USDA office's 'environmental footprint,' if you will. Green Teams are very 'place-based'." In addition, the Green Teams are encouraged to publicize their success stories, such as the use of VendingMisers, in order to encourage their use, as appropriate, at additional USDA office locations.

"Small yet pragmatic actions at a local USDA office might not seem like a lot," she acknowledged. "But collectively, when added up Departmentwide, they can be pretty significant."

Fourth, in June 2007 the Department established a USDA Sustainable Operations Council, chaired by Rutherford, to coordinate and promote the Department's sustainable operations for its facilities, fleets, and daily activities at headquarters and field locations. **Sharon Holcombe**, Chief of OPPM's Energy and Environment Division, said that the Council is being supported by four working groups of employees to promote USDA efforts in the areas of green purchasing, environmental management systems, facilities, and transportation. Additional information about these activities is at www.greening.usda.gov

"Look," Murtagh emphasized, "USDA is the second largest landholder in the federal government. We occupy about 89 million square feet of office and lab space. We operate over 23,000 buildings around the country. We manage about 193 million acres of land. We procure over \$4 billion a year in goods and services. We operate a fleet of over 46,000 motor vehicles and other light and heavy motorized equipment. Now, if this large Department can operate in a more sustainable manner resource-wise, that'll help reduce our reliance on petroleum-based



*There's no telling what **Bob Jones** (left), NRCS's Alaska State Conservationist based in Palmer, Alaska, is thinking as he leans over to kiss **Bacon** the pig. However, he might be muttering to himself, "I didn't think my staff could even find a pig living in Alaska in November." But they did, so he did—did kiss that pig, as he had promised to do if his statewide NRCS staff of 74 employees were to raise at least \$5,000 for the 2007 Combined Federal Campaign. USDA headquarters and many field offices are participating in the 2007 CFC during this time frame. According to NRCS soil conservationist **Jim Hazlett**, who coordinated the agency's 2007 CFC efforts in Alaska, NRCS staffers in that state ultimately raised \$11,138. So, on November 15, while Bacon's owner **Al Hummel** did the holding honors, it was time for Jones to pucker up.—PHOTO BY CASSANDRA STALZER*

products, plus mean big benefits to the environment."

"So that means we really need to keep engaging USDA employees in their office spaces, to make this all work." ■

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"It's time to hit the aerial highway," quips **Rick Abel** (right), Farm Service Agency County Executive Director in Atchison County, KS, as he and helicopter pilot **Chris Grauer** get ready to get airborne. Abel is about to conduct an aerial compliance inspection of fields in his state that are enrolled in USDA's Conservation Reserve Program. In his right hand he is holding a Global Positioning System unit to track both the flight and the CRP acreage. In his left hand he is holding a clipboard with a flight map full of data about the various acres enrolled in the CRP. So, why is he employing a chopper instead of staying on terra firma and conducting the inspection on the ground? Note the story on page 4.
—**PHOTO BY TRISH HALSTEAD**



HELP US FIND **Brian Dalton**

Missing: **10-12-2007** From: **Pittsburg, PA**

D.O.B. **2-2-1992** Sex: **Male**

Hair: **Black** Eyes: **Brown**

Height: **5 ft. 5 in.** Weight: **135 lbs.**

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