



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

MyUSDA

A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

Volume 2, Issue 5

March 2012

USDA's Cultural Transformation Action Items

- LEADERSHIP
- RECRUITMENT & RETENTION
- TALENT MANAGEMENT
- EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT
- CUSTOMER FOCUS & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

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A Message from Secretary Tom Vilsack



America's farmers, ranchers, and growers are some of our nation's greatest assets. Not only do we rely on agriculture for our food, feed, fiber, and fuel, our agricultural producers preserve our environment, and help drive our national economy.

As I travel the country, I often ask folks when they last took a moment to thank or appreciate a farmer. The truth is that we owe a debt of gratitude to the hard working men and women who provide us – and much of the world – with a safe, reliable, affordable, and abundant food supply.

Earlier this month, USDA and others celebrated National Agriculture Day, a great time to consider the important contributions that American agriculture makes to our lives.

Agriculture is responsible for one out of every 12 jobs in America. Thanks to decades of investment, hard work, and innovation, American farmers and ranchers enjoyed some of their best incomes in three decades last year.

While many sectors of our economy are running trade deficits, American agriculture has enjoyed a

trade surplus for nearly 50 years. Last year saw a record agricultural trade surplus of \$42 billion and record agricultural exports that helped support more than 1.1 million jobs across the nation. We expect strong incomes and exports again this year.

What's more, America's farmers and ranchers are the most productive in the world, helping support the strength and prosperity of our nation as a whole. American families spend only 6 or 7 cents out of every dollar on food – less than almost any other nation and half as much as in Japan or Italy. That means we have more to spend on a nicer home, to save for retirement, or to fund our children's college education.

America's farmers have taken extraordinary steps to take care of our nation's natural resources. In the last 30 years alone, USDA has worked to help producers reduce soil erosion by more than 40% and agriculture has gone from being the leading cause of wetland loss to leading the entire nation in wetland restoration efforts. Our

farms act as carbon sinks, mitigating the impact of global warming. Land that remains in farming, pasture, or forest helps clean the water we drink and the air we breathe. Today, through the production of renewable energy like wind and biofuels, they are increasingly helping move our nation towards energy independence.

For generations, America's farmers and ranchers have helped our nation stay strong. Let's use National Agriculture Week to recognize the important work our farmers and ranchers do for this country and the world and say, simply, "thank you."

You can contact the staff of My USDA via email at MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov, and be sure to visit the [USDA Cultural Transformation Website](#).

Thomas J. Vilsack

More from Secretary Vilsack: The Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Compass is an electronic document and interactive map you can access online at www.USDA.gov/KYFcompass.

Farmers across the country have built nearly 4,500 high tunnels – a sort of low-cost greenhouse – to extend their growing seasons with support from USDA. We've provided grants to encourage and train a new generation of Americans getting their start in farming. We've also supported the growth of farmers markets. Today there are more than 7,100 of them around the country where farmers and ranchers are selling locally to improve their incomes – that is a more than 50% increase over the past 3 years. Today's ag industry is more diverse and more vibrant than ever, and USDA is working to meet its evolving needs. Learn more online by visiting the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Compass at www.USDA.gov/KYFcompass.

USDA Disability Employment Program

FOCUS ON ABILITY: Interviewing Applicants with Disabilities

Good interviews allow managers an opportunity to identify the individual with the best mix of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Here's some advice for gaining the maximum benefit when the person being interviewed happens to have a disability.

Preparing for the Interview

When scheduling interviews, inform all applicants that USDA provides reasonable accommodations on a case-by-case basis during the interviewing process and throughout employment. Be ready to contact your Reasonable Accommodation Specialist or Disability Employment Program Manager when reasonable accommodations are requested.

Inform applicants ahead of time if they will be required to take a test to demonstrate their ability to perform actual or simulated tasks. This will allow time for them to request a reasonable accommodation if necessary.

Conducting the Interview

Relax and make the applicant feel relaxed. Concentrate on the individual's skills, knowledge, experiences, and interests, not his or her disability.

Describe the essential job functions and ask only job-related questions. Don't speculate about how you would perform a specific job if you had the applicant's disability. He or she have mastered alternate ways of living and working.

It is fair and appropriate to ask all applicants if they can do the job and how they would perform it.

Hold individuals with disabilities to the same standards and treat them with the same respect as all applicants.

Requiring a medical exam before making a job offer is prohibited under Federal law unless all applicants for that position are required to have an examination. If the applicant is not hired, the employer must demonstrate a job-related reason.

Interviewing Individuals with Specific Types of Disabilities

When Applicants Use a Wheelchair

Ensure that the meeting room is wheelchair accessible. Don't lean on the wheelchair. Stand or sit at eye level with the applicant if the conversation lasts more than a few minutes. Don't push the wheelchair unless you are asked to do so.

When Applicants Have an Intellectual or Cognitive Disability

Use simple, concrete language, but don't use baby talk. When giving instructions or directions, proceed slowly. Be patient, and repeat directions if necessary. Ask the applicant to summarize the information you have given to make sure it was understood. Give positive feedback whenever possible.

When Interviewing Applicants Who are Blind

Immediately identify yourself and others present; cue a handshake verbally or physically. Be descriptive in giving directions, e.g., the table is about five steps to your left. Verbalize chair location, or place the person's hand on the back of the chair, but do not place the person in the chair. Don't be embarrassed to use such phrases as, "Do you see what I mean?"

Don't shout. Keep doors either open or closed; a half-open door is a serious hazard. Ask the person if he or she needs a guide to the meeting room, chair, etc. Give a verbal cue that you're offering your arm. Let the applicant grasp your left arm, usually just above the elbow. Again, ask first, and do not be surprised if assistance is declined. Do not touch an applicant's cane. If the person has a guide dog, resist the urge to pet or interact with the animal. The guide dog is working while in harness and must remain focused on the needs of its owner.

When Interviewing Applicants Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

If the applicant requests an interpreter, contact your Disability Employment Program Manager or Reasonable Accommodations Specialist. Forward your request as soon as possible to schedule the service for your interview. There are different types of interpreting services available so it's vital to en-



If you have any questions or have best practices to share, please contact Alison Levy, USDA Disability Employment Program Manager: Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov. We look forward to hearing from you soon!

sure that when forwarding the interpreting request, you also provide the applicant's email address for follow up.

Try to allocate 15-30 additional minutes prior to the interview for the applicant to meet the assigned interpreters. There are variances in the types of sign language and with the terminology used for different occupations. Providing this lead time will increase the effectiveness of communication exchanged during the interview.

Keep in mind that the interpreter's job is to translate, not to get involved in any other way. When working with interpreters, always face and speak directly to the applicant, not the interpreter. Don't say to the interpreter, "Tell her..."

It is appropriate in Deaf culture to use a visual gesture such as a light wave to get the applicant's attention. If the applicant is speech/lip reading, speak clearly and a little slowly, keeping your mouth clear of obstructions.

Place yourself where there is ample lighting. If possible, do not sit directly in front of a window, or draw the blinds to avoid sunlight obstructing your face. Keep in mind that an accomplished speech/lip reader will be able to clearly understand only 30-35% of what you are saying.

Don't shout. If you don't understand what the applicant is telling you, don't pretend you did. Ask the candidate to repeat the sentence.

NRCS SPONSORS AMERICAN INDIAN LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was a full Circle of Support sponsor at the National American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) Leadership Summit, held recently on the Santa Ana Reservation near Albuquerque, NM.

Dr. Carol Crouch, Oklahoma District Conservation and National American Indian Program Manager for NRCS is the NRCS AISES liaison for all AISES annual events. Nathaniel Todea, NRCS hydraulic engineer from Utah, organized and participated in two sessions at both the college student and professional sessions.

The college session was titled "Reading the Stars (Laws) -- Traditional Ecological Knowledge for Leadership" and the professional session was titled "Intertwining Leadership Competencies and Traditional Ecological Knowledge". The college session included more than 100 undergraduate and graduate students across the US and Canada. Dr. Crouch and Richard Vigil, NRCS management analyst from Utah, contributed to both sessions facilitated by NRCS. The accompanying photo (bottom) shows

Richard Vigil speaking to the group. Norm Vigil, New Mexico Assistant State Conservationist for programs, provided perspectives from his heri-



engineering, and technology arenas. AISES' ultimate goal is to be a catalyst for the advancement of American Indians and Native Alaskans as they become self-reliant and self-determined members of society. For more information about AISES go to www.aises.org.

"The summit was great," said Todea, who added, "I remember sitting down with an electrical engineer, mining engineer, economics, and physics students and discussing efficiencies of systems, resources needed to develop systems and the need for more efficiencies; it was great seeing brainstorming and being part of the conversation."

tage at the professional session.

AISES is a national, nonprofit organization which nurtures community development by bridging science and technology with traditional values. Through its educational programs, AISES provides opportunities for American Indians and Alaskan Natives to pursue studies in the science,

According to Dr. Crouch, "It was a huge honor for NRCS to be selected to present at the leadership summit; not only one, but two sessions. It also provided an opportunity for our futures leaders to learn more about NRCS and sends a powerful message about the ongoing Cultural Transformation that NRCS is implementing to provide an inclusive work environment for all.

Food and Nutrition Service Southeast Region Goes Green!

As part of its efforts to promote Cultural Transformation and in celebration of St. Patrick's Day, the Southeast Regional Office (SERO) of USDA's Food & Nutrition Service, based in Atlanta, Georgia, held a potluck brunch on March 15, during which employees learned about and were encouraged to participate in local 'green' initiatives.

SERO's "Green Team" (pictured on the left) was recognized for their efforts to increase recycling and redirect supply purchases toward more energy efficient and post consumer products. Pictured from left to right are: Richard Hartley, Don Arnette, Kirk Farquharson, Sean Monahan, Lysander Bell, Olivia Parris and Steve Hortin. Team member Aaron Wiley was unable to attend.

In the picture on the right, SERO employees are presented with Clean Air Campaign Awards for cutting air pollution through increased telework and other environmentally friendly initiatives. Left to right are: Kirk Farquharson, Gayle Kinchens and Otis Spears.

Additional information on Cultural Transformation activities taking place throughout the mission area is available on [FNCS' CT intranet page](http://fnscs.ct.intranet): <http://fnscs/agencysr/ct>.



TELEWORK AT USDA

USDA Employees Saved Money and Reduced Pollutants During National Telework Week

More than 7,500 USDA employees across the Department and around the world pledged to participate in Telework Week 2012 saving those who would normally commute to work more than \$1,065,267.80 while teleworking during that one week alone, according to the pledge data submitted by the Telework Exchange.

Based on the 2012 pledge data, USDA Teleworkers also reduced 934,453.29 lbs of pollutants during Telework Week- a win for the environment. If all those who pledged to telework during Telework Week continued to participate with the same level of frequency for a year, they would collectively save \$53,263,390.00

By Mika J. Cross, USDA Work/Life and Wellness Program Manager



Looking to estimate your Teleworking cost savings? Check out the free calculator available from the [Telework Exchange](http://www.teleworkexchange.com) website at :

<http://www.teleworkexchange.com/calculators/calculator>

If you have a unique story to share about your 2012 Telework Week experience, please send us an email at telework@dm.usda.gov.



USDA's Commitment to Telework Week on YouTube

USDA's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration, Oscar Gonzales Jr., addressed the Department's commitment to its Telework Program on YouTube. The video stresses the aggressive

participation goals USDA set this year to increase the number of employees eligible to telework by encouraging managers and leaders to participate in National Telework Week.

You can check out the [new video on YouTube](#) by visiting the following link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GamfGhLjzGA>



A Telework Success Story from Rural Development



One of the primary benefits of teleworking for me is eliminating the 30-mile, one-way commute on often hazardous rural roads in the dark morning hours. And, since my home is more central than the Area Office to most of the 16 counties I serve, it often makes more sense to start work from home.

However, the benefits go far beyond the reduction of stress and automobile expenses and better logistics. For one, I can more easily participate in volunteering opportunities in my community. I can also use the time formerly spent driving on increasing my frequency and quality of physical exercise. Another nice benefit is now that I rely on a smaller home printer, I am "greener" and have increased my IT agility as I print less and file more electronically. I know I am more productive and focused on work and truly value the opportunity to telework.

Wanda Dziwura
Area Specialist – Water and Environmental Programs
USDA Rural Development
Caro, Michigan

Do you have a Telework Success Story?

Send it to telework@dm.usda.gov

Telework Success Story from the Natural Resources Conservation Service

For several years now, my agency has allowed me to Telework on the days that I attend class at Iowa State University, which is approximately 40-miles and an hour's drive from my Duty Station in Des Moines, Iowa.

By teleworking out of an NRCS office near ISU, I am able to attend morning and mid-day classes that are required for my PhD program.

Teleworking has allowed me to pursue my higher education goals and to

save two hours of annual leave commuting to and from the university each day of class (32-hr total/semester). I am now able to redirect those recovered hours back to work for NRCS.

It is a win-win situation for everyone!

Jennifer Anderson-Cruz
Biologist
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Des Moines, Iowa



A Telework Success Story from the Agricultural Research Service



I currently participate in Ad/Hoc Telework, and it is invaluable to me for a few reasons. I am a category I scientist who has colleges at my alternate telework site, which is also in my home town.

My assigned duty station is a one-hour drive from my home. I use the opportunity to telework from time to time to finish writing up peer reviewed research away from the office where I am not disturbed by phone calls and other office matters. I use this alternate site to interact with university colleagues stationed at my telework site.

In times of bad winter weather, this telework site offers me the chance to work and not have to face an extra long drive through bad weather.

Jonathan Whitworth
Research Plant Pathologist
Agricultural Research Service
Aberdeen, Idaho

Register for the March "Let's Talk Telework" Webinar Today!

The March edition of "Let's Talk Telework!" will showcase a panel of supervisors and managers from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, Food Safety and Inspection Service, and Rural Development who will share their perspectives and experiences implementing Telework for their employees and workgroups.

If you're a supervisor or manager new to Telework, this webinar is for you! Employees can also join the session to learn from these leaders how they have fostered flexibility, accountability, and realized a number of important benefits for their workgroups and the mission they lead.

Join us on Thursday, March 29, 2012 from 12:30-1:30 p.m. EST for this engaging session. Participants can either view as an individual or as a group; however, we strongly encourage joining as a group as there are only 300 phone lines available for the live event. Be sure to register in AgLearn for more information!

If you have any questions about the webinar content, please contact the Work/Life and Wellness Team at worklife@dm.usda.gov. Questions or technical difficulty with the registration process should be forwarded to your agency's [AgLearn point of contact](#).

Federal Interagency Rotations Come to USDA

By [Jake Faibisch](#)

Beginning April 2, the USDA will host three employees from the Departments of Interior, Labor, and Transportation through the President's Management Council Interagency Rotations Program on six-month assignments.

Two detailees will serve in APHIS and one in the Virtual University. Amanda Moore, the State Soil Scientist in Maryland for NRCS will serve on a detail in the Department of Interior as part of the program. This is the first time USDA will participate in the Interagency Rotations Program.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) launched the Interagency Rotations Program following the recommendations of national business leaders serving on the President's Management Council. The Council members believe that tomorrow's Federal leaders would benefit from broadening their professional experience

by serving in their Federal agencies.

The Federal Interagency Rotations Program targets high-potential GS 13-15 employees interested in executive career paths. The program exposes participants to high-level issues in other agencies to support developing Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs).

Recruitment for the next round of the Federal Interagency Rotations Program begins late spring 2012. The six-month details start on October 1, 2012.



2012 Inter-Agency Rotations Program participants and supervisors.

If you have questions or need additional information, contact Jake Faibisch at the USDA Virtual University at (202) 260-8352 or jacob.faibisch@dm.usda.gov.

Alabama Rural Development Observes Black History Month

By **Melissa R. Williams**

In February in observance of Black History Month, some employees of the Alabama Rural Development State Office traveled to historic Tuskegee, Alabama. The first stop was a visit to the famous Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site.

The site is home of the "Red Tail Angels" because of their planes' distinctive red tail sections and because they were known to never abandon bombers in their care. To obtain more details, see the movie "Red Tails" now playing in theatres.

The Rural Development staff also visited historic Tuskegee University. While at the Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site, visits were made to the George Washington Carver Museum and The Oaks, home of Booker T. Washington.

One employee stated that "for historical purposes, agriculture and Tuskegee were synonymous with technology and Silicone Valley".

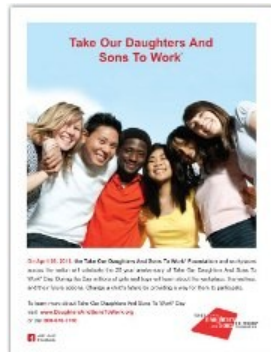


Save the Date! Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day April 26, 2012

Be sure to mark your calendars for the 2012 Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day where agencies across USDA will open their doors and provide learning opportunities for our children and community. Employees in the Washington, D.C. area will be updated soon on

event details scheduled in the Whitten Building Patio from 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m on April 26, 2012.

Volunteers interested in assisting with the planning of this event can send an email to: worklife@dm.usda.gov



RECRUITMENT: USDA Recruits Former Peace Corps Volunteers

In keeping with USDA's Cultural Transformation goals of committing to a diverse workforce that includes inclusive succession planning, the Department took an active role at the Winter 2012 Return Peace Corps Volunteer Career Conference, which was part of the recent Peace Corps Week of Festivities held in Washington, DC.

At no cost, the Department exhibited at a recruitment booth on February 29, 2012, that attracted more than 250 Return Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) from around the country who were job-seekers possessing global competency skills, various educational and academic backgrounds, foreign language proficiencies that have been used in an international arena, and amazingly high levels of initiative and resourcefulness. Representing USDA at this event was Richard Fierroz, Program Specialist (DM) and Matt Stellbauer former RPCV and International Agriculture Development Specialist (FAS).

USDA agencies and mission areas can utilize the hiring flexibility to employ former Peace Corps volunteers. Individuals who have satisfactorily served in the Peace Corps as a volunteer may be noncompetitively appointed to the Federal service within a one year period after completing his/her volunteer service. The one year period may be extended up to two more years for limited reasons, such as military service or study in an accredited educational institution.

The inaugural "Take an RPCV to Work Day" was held on March 1, 2012, which marked the exact day of the 51st anniversary of President John F. Kennedy signing the executive order that established the Peace Corps. Thirteen USDA per-

sonnel (including former RPCVs) representing six mission areas, agencies, or offices participated in the pilot program that was designed to allow RPCVs the chance to visit Federal agencies, corporations, non-profits, and organizations throughout the DC metro area. By shadowing USDA personnel for a half-day or whole-day experience in DC and in Riverdale, MD, RPCVs learned about USDA and mission critical occupations. In turn, USDA personnel benefited from learning about the cultures and traditions of the countries where the RPCV served during brown bag lunch sessions that were attended by various USDA employees that concluded with a Q&A session. The 10 RPCVs that visited USDA served in Honduras, Malawi, Nicaragua, and Senegal. At the present time the Peace Corps is gauging interest and evaluating the inaugural "Take an RPCV to Work Day" to see if there is an interest to place RPCVs located outside of the DC area with a matched employer to see if the pilot can be expanded in the future.

In support of One-USDA sponsored outreach events, the Recruitment Division is working on partnering

with Peace Corps representatives to host a webinar for the recent event participants to inform them about the various career and student employment programs and/or host an information session or workshop at the 2013 conference. To fortify our partnership, we are seeking to identify current USDA employees that were former RPCVs to assist with any future outreach. Please send your name, title, agency or mission area, duty station, RPCV country served and date served information to the attention of the USDA Recruitment Program Manager, Michelle Jordan at recruitment@dm.usda.gov.



Donna Johnson, RPCV (front row – white visitors badge) with Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Coordination (OHSEC) Staff – left to right, Deborah Duckett, Directors Office (yellow top); Justin Sotherden, Physical Security Division; Dan Sharp, Radiation Safety Division; Risa Salsburg, Resilience and Preparedness Division; and James Terry, Radiation Safety Division.

Photo by Justin Sotherden

NRCS Uses AgLearn to Implement Plain Writing Act

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Public Affairs Division is tracking its progress toward implementing the Plain Writing Act. One of the primary tools NRCS is using is the NRCS Plain Writing Webinar, which has been assigned in AgLearn to all NRCS employees. In two days we had more than 2,200 NRCS employees view the webinar and as of March 26 we have had more than 6,000 employees view it. [Please click this link to see the Webinar.](#) It's only about 20 minutes long, and I think you'll enjoy it.

We worked closely with the NRCS National Employee Development Center and tailored the Webinar specifically to NRCS staff to show why plain writing is important to what we do as conservationists. We also took the opportunity to incorporate USDA Cultural Transformation, USDA's 150th Anniversary, Abraham Lincoln's legacy, and the overall importance of conservation to sustainable agricultural production—we even tried to add some humor. Our approach was to make it something our employees could easily relate to the work they do every day.

The graphic (right) is a visual of NRCS' Agency-wide progress implementing plain language. This graphic is on our intranet site so all NRCS employees can watch our progress together.

Our goal is 100 percent compliance, and we'll update the graphic as our compliance rate increases.

By Terry Bish



Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Turns Knowledge Management Inside Out for the Fruit and Vegetable Industry

By Christopher Purdy

Knowledge Management (KM) is a tool organizations use to share expertise within their companies to better achieve their goals and objectives. The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is turning the concept of KM inside out. Our new AMS Fruit and Vegetable Webinar Series captures our staff's hundreds of years of produce marketing experience and shares it with our customers to help improve their knowledge of the many programs available to give them a competitive edge in the produce business.

The staff of AMS' Fruit and Vegetable Program is sharing their wealth of experience and expertise in everything related to the marketing of fruits and vegetables and delivering it to our customers' desktops in convenient, online seminars. We're even putting names with faces by introducing our customers to the individuals on our staff who support their businesses every day.

In February, John Koller, Chief of the Dispute Resolution Branch of the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA) Division, took the stage. More than 500 customers logged in to hear John's discussion of PACA, a Federal law that sets the "rules of the road" for the produce industry, and practical tips to help them benefit from the law's provisions. Participants followed up

with John in a lively interactive question and answer session. Here is some of the positive feedback our customers shared with us after the webinar ...

- "It really broke down the (PACA) complaint process in a very understandable way."
- "It put the practical knowledge I had from experience into the regulatory framework."
- "The information presented gave a solid starting point if a complaint is filed or we need to file or just get answers."
- "There are too many grey areas in the produce industry. It's great to know there is a resource who can provide third party information."
- "Gave a good overview of the PACA program and the rights of sellers under PACA as well as procedures to follow in the event of a dispute."

John also shared good feedback, "I really appreciated the opportunity to reach so many of our customers at one time and answer their unique questions right away." We look forward to continuing sharing our knowledge with our stakeholders – everyone involved in the fresh and proc-

essed produce marketing chain -- through upcoming webinars. Feel free to join AMS' inside-out KM movement! Visit our [web page](#) for complete information on the webinars, including content, dates, times, bios on speakers, and free online registration. If you see something you missed, just visit our [webinar archive](#) to watch it online.



Feds Get Fit in New Program

By Pamela Stanziani, Agriculture Marketing Service

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) employees have put words into action as they started a new workplace fitness campaign. Inspired by USDA's [My Plate](#) and First Lady Michelle Obama's [Let's Move](#) initiative, staff from the AMS Fruit and Vegetable Program began their own bi-weekly walking and nutrition program - Fruitful Fit Feds.

Committed to living a healthier lifestyle, a group of employees get together each week to help each other meet their exercise and nutrition goals. To get their exercise fix, the employees walk a pre-determined route through the sprawling USDA Headquarters Building, or, weather permitting, a fixed route around the Mall, both in Washington, D.C. They also exchange nutritional information, introducing others to valuable resources like the [Super](#)

[Tracker](#) that helps members eat healthier.

The Fruitful Fit Feds campaign began with a kick-off celebration that included a welcome from Acting AMS Administrator Robert Keeney, followed by exercise warm-up tips from USDA's Employees Service and Recreation Association Director of Fitness Abbey Bloomenstock. After returning from an inaugural walk, the group munched on healthy foods while listening to AMS Nutritionist Janet Tenney talk about nutrition facts and healthy eating tips.

AMS' Fruitful Fit Feds continue to meet twice a week to walk during lunch breaks, led by volunteers



AMS Lends a Hand at the Sixth Annual Minority Landowner Conference

For the past six years, Minority Landowner Magazine has sponsored an annual Minority Landowner Conference (MLC) to improve the productivity and profitability of minority farmers. This year's conference, held in February in Raleigh, North Carolina, was especially exciting as MLC rolled out a unique, interactive self-help opportunity for small and disadvantaged farmers – and the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) was part of it!

The showcase of this year's conference was the Farm Turnaround Team. The Team is comprised of resource professionals from Federal and State agencies, private enterprises, and the nonprofit sector who are experts in financial management, technical assistance, marketing, and succession planning. Farmers can meet with the Team, free of charge, for improvement ideas and solutions to challenges they

face. An eager crowd of 250 farmers and resource professionals from across the Southeast gathered to take part in the conference and avail themselves of this unique resource. AMS' Bobby Wellons and Kimberly Duncan were on hand to address a variety of marketing questions including how to market with limited financial resources, understanding pricing, advertising and promotion, and creating niche markets. Several farmers asked if some of the Team members could visit their farms to help with ideas and solutions. Bobby Wellons was happy to

oblige and will be hitting the road in upcoming months to deliver his expertise right to the farm gate!

AMS was proud to showcase our programs and services for small and disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. Some attendees knew about several AMS grants related to farmers markets and our farmers market programs. We want them to know about the full range of our programs and services. The conference was the beginning. We are continuing to work with the farmers we met at the MLC, and with all farmers and ranchers, to make sure they know all that AMS can do to help them succeed.



AMS' Bobby Wellons and Kimberly Duncan share information at the Minority Landowner Magazine's 6th Anniversary Conference.

Food and Nutrition Service Improving Work Space to Improve Employee Worklife

Renovations have been underway at Food & Nutrition Service headquarters/Park Office Center (POC) in Alexandria, Virginia, for several months. It is hoped that POC's new and improved office space will foster greater collaboration between colleagues and make individual work areas more comfortable. Both goals promote higher performing organizations and underscore the mission area's commitment to Cultural Transformation.

The process began last summer when Management briefed the Union (the union for Federal Employees, NTEU) regarding the 2012 construction renovation project. A Memorandum of Understanding was then negotiated which outlined an itemized list of work scheduled to be performed along with specific timelines and parameters.



Renovations have made it necessary for some employees to relocate to different floors temporarily. Work on the 6th floor is just about done and the 2nd floor is under construction presently. As a result, LFMD and Contracts are now in temporary swing space on the 11th floor. In addition, several members of Financial Management team are currently in temporary swing space on the 12th floor until renovations on the 7th floor are completed. Work is scheduled to begin on the 8th and 9th floors shortly.

UPCOMING SPECIAL OBSERVANCES

- Asian Pacific Islander American Heritage Observance, Thursday, May 24, 2012, at the Jefferson Auditorium
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Pride Observance, Thursday, June 7, 2102, at the Jefferson Auditorium

Observances are scheduled to begin at 10:00 a. m. (EST)

IF YOU'RE IN DC, PLEASE ADD THESE TO YOUR CALENDAR

Secretary Meets with USDA Labor Management Forum

President Barack Obama has named Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathlenne Merrigan as a member of the National Council on Federal Labor-Managements. For more information on the appointment and what it means for USDA and the American public, [please click here!](#)

Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack addressed the USDA Labor Management Forum (LMF) during its regular quarterly meeting, January 23, 2012. The Secretary reminded the LMF members that the USDA is continuing to face difficult budget challenges in light of a 12.4% cut in operating budgets over the last two years and likely more cuts for the future.

The Secretary praised the USDA's efforts through the Blueprint for Stronger Service (Blueprint) to reduce cost through travel reductions, consolidating hundreds of cell phone plans, office closures, VERA/VSIP, and efforts to find efficiencies. The Secretary reassured LMF members that the

Blueprint would move forward in a thoughtful deliberative manner considering input of employees, management, and labor organizations.

The Secretary said that because the USDA is reducing costs through the Administrative Solutions Project (ASP), one aspect of the Blueprint, the Department has a better fiscal standing than would be the case without the Blueprint. He stressed that unless we continue to be successful through the Blueprint, the USDA may be forced to take other cost saving measures that would jeopardize the USDA's ability to fulfill its mission and could

**By Ronald S. James
USDA Labor
Relations Officer**

negatively impact employees. The Secretary also acknowledged that the recently announced office closures, though unsettling, will help to reduce the likelihood of furloughs or reductions in force (RIF).

Secretary Vilsack concluded by repeating his goal for the USDA to become a model employer for the government and that he will continue to work with all constituencies to make it a reality in spite of current and future budget challenges.

Efforts Promote Better Understanding of Programs and Recipients

A transformed USDA is a highly motivated and engaged workforce that is empowered to succeed and trained to meet future challenges.

In an effort to help employees better understand its programs and the people that the Food and Nutrition Service serves, the Southwest Regional Office of USDA's FNS (based in Dallas, Texas), recently invited Dr. Katie Wilson, Executive Director of the National Food Service Management Institute at the University of Mississippi, to address its staff.

Dr. Wilson gave an excellent presentation which focused on the training and services available to assist child nutrition and child care professionals in the operation of successful feeding programs.

Specific topics covered by Dr. Wilson included nutrition standards training, Chefs Move to Schools, and the Child and Adult Food Care Program. This type of activity directly supports Cul-



tural Transformation's Customer Service/Community Outreach pillar.

Similar events are being planned for the coming months throughout the mission area.

Dr. Katie Wilson meets with staff from the Food and Nutrition Service's Southwest Regional Office in Dallas, Texas.

MyUSDA Volume 2, Issue 5

If you'd like to share your feedback about Cultural Transformation, telework, diversity, or any other aspect of work/life at USDA, send an email to: MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov or visit USDA's [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community website if you have access to [USDA](#)

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MyUSDA Staff

Karen A. Messmore—Editorial Director

William P. Milton, Jr.—Deputy Editorial Director

Perry Stevens—Editor-in-Chief

Mika Cross—Lead Editor

**Melanie Clemons, Robinn DeCecco, Bryan Knowles, Lynne Short,
Michelle Jordan—Editors**

Key Contributors:

Monshi Ramdass, Karlease Kelly, Zina Sutch, Anita Adkins, Alison Levy, Jacob Faibisch, Bonnie Fauber, Patty Moore, Bobby Gravitz, Ronald S. James, Susan Siemietkowski, Larry Yerich, Robin Heard, Kate Lewis, Stuart Bender, Mike Edwards, MaryJo Thompson, Christopher Purdy, Dana Stewart, Deborah Duckett

Submit Your Article to MyUSDA

The deadline for April submissions is Thursday, April 19, 2012.

Guidance on Submissions to MyUSDA

Submissions to MyUSDA should indicate progress that you, your agency, or your mission area have achieved toward implementing the Secretary's Cultural Transformation (CT) Initiative. Submissions may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline (with accompanying photos strongly preferred), a first-person account (describing a personal work-related experience relating to CT progress), or a "brief" (just a few sentences describing a successful Cultural Transformation event, group, initiative, or activity...or some other relevant worklife issue.)

The ideal submission is a great picture with about 75-150 words to go along with it.

Email submissions or further inquiries to MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov