



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

MyUSDA

A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

Volume 2, Issue 6

April 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

As you know, the Department is commemorating our 150th anniversary this year, taking stock of past accomplishments while looking ahead to find ways to build a stronger USDA for the future.

Next month marks exactly 150 years since President Lincoln signed an Act to establish the Department of Agriculture. To mark this important milestone, I hope that all USDA employees in the DC metropolitan area are able to attend an event on May 15th. Special guests have been invited to join us for an event that honors each of you and your work each day to support the strength and prosperity of this nation. Full details will follow, but I hope you will save this date and join me in commemorating this historic date.

On another front, I want to keep you advised on budget issues as they unfold. In February the President released his 2013 fiscal year budget, which included a slight increase for USDA's discretionary budget that funds our organization and some of our programs. The President's budget, while more than our budget this year, would still be \$3 billion less than our budget for the 2010 fiscal year. Bottom line – under the President's budget things would be tight and we would have to continue on our path of belt tightening. Our efforts under the Blueprint for Stronger Service would continue and allow us to manage the change brought about by tight budgets.

The House of Representatives, prior to their spring recess, approved their budget resolution that begins to set their priorities for the 2013 fiscal year budget. Overall, the

House took three actions that impact USDA.

First, their budget resolution provided for government wide discretionary spending of \$1.028 trillion which is \$19 billion below the level previously agreed to with the Senate during the debt ceiling negotiations of last year.

Second, the budget resolution essentially holds defense spending constant, which means that non-defense discretionary spending will bear the brunt of the cuts. OMB estimates that non-defense spending would be cut by \$1 trillion over 10 years which would translate into an average cut of 5.4% in the 2013 fiscal year and a 19% cut in 2014 fiscal year levels.

Third, the House budget resolution seeks to avoid the automatic spending cuts required by the budget control act passed as a result of the debt ceiling negotiations. Again, the House held defense steady and shifted the burden of the cuts to non-defense spending. The budget resolution directs the Agriculture committee to reduce the deficit by \$8.2 billion in two years, \$19.7 over five years, and \$33.2 billion over ten years. The Agriculture committee has yet to decide how to reach these levels.

The bottom line is that the House budget resolution hits USDA and its programs in a very hard way. The Senate has yet to indicate the specifics of the budget for next year, although there are indications we will know more soon.



As I have said on many occasions the budget challenges we face are unprecedented. It is part of the reason why we must build an improved USDA through Cultural Transformation and our work to improve administrative services as part of the Blueprint for Stronger Service.

I am proud of our efforts to date in keeping down travel, supplies, and conference expenses. While the work to find administrative efficiencies and office consolidations required difficult decisions, they allow us to hopefully keep ahead of the process and allow us some freedom to decide how best to deal with cuts. I encourage all of us to aggressively proceed with the Blueprint for Stronger Service effort. It will make the department more efficient and over time more effective. I will continue to keep you advised as the budget discussions unfold.

Thank you for your continued service to USDA and the people we serve. 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

USDA Disability Employment Program: The Importance of 508 Compliance

Creating An Accessible Virtual and Physical Workplace

USDA's Cultural Transformation goals include a renewed commitment to create diversity in the workforce and to establish an inclusive, high-performance organization.

However, in hiring and retaining the top talent of individuals with disabilities, we're continuing to fall short.

Secretary Vilsack has established a goal that 3% of our workforce will be individuals with targeted or severe disabilities.

Our current representation is less than 1%. To attract, hire, and **retain** individuals with disabilities, and targeted disabilities, our virtual and physical workplace

must be inclusive and accessible to all employees.

Ms. Angela Williams leads the Department's compliance efforts as the USDA Section 508 Officer within the Office of the Chief Information Officer. Ms. Williams has over 14 years experience with Section 508 and disability initiatives through the development of accessibility related policies, procedures, and training.

In this month's "Diversity and Disability" column Ms. Williams is contributing an introduction to Section 508 and will provide additional tools, information, and tips to create a more accessible USDA as a co-contributor in future issues of "My USDA".



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!



**Angela Williams
USDA Section 508 Officer**

What is Section 508?

Section 508 is a law that requires Federal agencies to ensure that individuals with disabilities have the same access to and use of information and data as people who are not individuals with disabilities.

The law positively affects Federal employees with disabilities as well as members of the general public with disabilities who are interacting with the Federal government. (FAR 39.201 and 36 CFR 1194.1).

Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers to electronic and information technology (EIT), to make available new opportunities for people with disabilities, and to encour-

age development of technologies that will help achieve these goals. USDA fully embraces the scope and intent of Section 508 and is actively committed to ensuring that customers and employees with disabilities have equity in the use of electronic and information technology.

Accessibility allows USDA agencies and staff offices to attract and retain the best talent and to maintain a productive workforce. Compliance with Section 508 ensures USDA is inclusive of individuals with disabilities when procuring, developing, maintaining or using EIT.

Compliance with Section 508 contributes directly to the effective utilization of USDA's workforce and the accomplishment of USDA's mission. It specifically supports USDA's fifth strategic goal, to operate an efficient, effective, and discrimination-free organization.

Why is Section 508 Important?

- It eliminates barriers for people with disabilities;
- Supports Federal initiatives (i.e. cultural transformation, strengthening services, and telework);
- Benefits everyone;

- Achieves legal compliance;
- Promotes positive public image;
- Facilitates public access to Federal information; and
- *It's the law!*

Examples of Electronic and Information Technology (EIT) are:

- Websites
- Documents (MS Word, PowerPoint, Excel)
- Emails
- PDFs/Scanned PDFs
- Applications, Software and development
- Deliverables and Services (helpdesk, project plans, consulting)

If you have questions or need additional information about Section 508, email Angela Williams at Section508@ocio.usda.gov or visit <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/508/>

Cultural Transformation In Action: Mike L. Griffin, NRCS

I recently completed my first year of employment with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and it has been incredibly rewarding. Consequently, I wanted to share my experiences with colleagues within USDA.

First, my aim is to demonstrate that employees within the NRCS have enthusiastically embraced the varied goals of cultural transformation. Secondly, I want to encourage other employees throughout the USDA to continue the cultural transformation dialogue. Besides, sharing our individual experiences will permit the USDA to recruit and retain talented employees.

Additionally, it will serve as another indicator that the Department is becoming the quintessential “model” employer of choice for recent college graduates, individuals changing careers, and persons transitioning from military service and joining the civilian workforce. Thus, it is essential that we share our opinions regarding cultural transformation once provided the opportunity.

As previously mentioned, I joined the NRCS approximately a year ago as a human resources specialist. Since that time, I have had the opportunity to complete career-enhancing rotations in Kansas, Louisiana, and Texas. The purpose was to attain skills and talents necessary to succeed in my chosen career path. What’s

more, the rotational assignments provided a panoramic view of the NRCS community and a comprehensive awareness of its customers—farmers and ranchers.

My supervisor and I have worked closely to ensure that subsequent training provides essential competencies. In addition, I am in a formal mentoring program supported by the Agency. It has been wonderful to converse with a seasoned employee in an informal and trusting environment. My mentor has willingly shared his experiences, offered career guidance, and assisted in identifying short- and long-term career goals.

In addition, two subject matter experts (SME) in the human resources field have mentored me. They have willingly provided invaluable tools, such as study materials, technical guides, and practical experience in classifying positions and performing job analysis.

NRCS has provided a wealth of career-enhancing opportunities (e.g., formal / informal training, mentoring / coaching, and rotational assignments) to permit me to acquire critical skills. I often refer to the Agency as a hidden gem due to its size and the dedicated employees who strive to

deliver excellent service to our customers. Cultural transformation is well underway, and its value is confirmed daily.

Mike L. Griffin
NRCS
Fort Worth, Texas

Mike L. Griffin is a Human Resources Specialist with the National Employee Development Center (NEDC), the focal point for training for NRCS. He is a disabled veteran who served honorably in the US Navy. He has a Bachelor of Political Science and is currently pursuing a Master of Public Administration.



Disability and Veterans Employment Programs Add Diversity/Inclusion Specialist



Ms. Natalie Veene Ford is the new Diversity and Inclusion Specialist working with the Disability and Veterans Employment Programs.

Before coming to USDA, she was the Disability Program Manager for the Equal Opportunity and Diversity Office at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). In that role, she served as the agency expert responsible for the management of a global disability program. Her program areas included reasonable accommodation, facility access, information and communication technology accessibility/compliance, and the People with Disabilities Program.

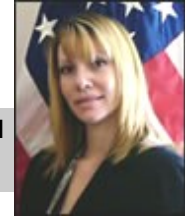
Her leadership positioned DIA to be recognized in 2011 by the Secretary of Defense for the Best Intelligence Component for outstanding achievement in the employment of persons with disabilities.

Ms. Veene Ford is an alumna of Spelman College with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Political Science/International Relations.

She is also an appointed member of the Queen Anne’s County Board of Education Ethics Committee and an active member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Incorporated, Iota Chi Zeta Chapter.

TELEWORK AT USDA

**Join Us As We “Talk Telework” on May 31st
Register for the May “Let’s Talk Telework” Webinar Today!**



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

Don't miss the May session of “Let’s Talk Telework!” that will focus on addressing some of your most frequently asked questions about the USDA Telework Program. Participants can send in their questions ahead of time to telework@dm.usda.gov or submit live Q&A throughout the session. Agency level Telework Program Coordinators also will be online to help answer specific questions or issues you may have.

Join us on Thursday, May 31, 2012, from 12:30-1:30 p.m. EDT for this engaging session. Participants can view either as an individual or as a group; however, we strongly encourage joining as a group since 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](#).

If you missed recent sessions of “Let’s Talk Telework!” you can access the archived files from the [Worklife and Wellness](#) community page on USDA Connect!

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

Weighing In On Work/Life Balance

During National Work and Family Month this past October, USDA's Work/Life and Wellness team launched a Department-wide survey of employees, taking inventory of the perceptions and impact of our current Work/Life programs and services. More than 3,400 employees took the time to respond. Below is a snapshot of some of the feedback we received.

- 87% feel that their manager/supervisor treats their work-life needs with sensitivity.
- 74% feel it is usually easy for me to manage the demands of both work and home life.
- 90% feel their manager/supervisor is supportive when home life issues interfere with work.
- 81% feel their manager/supervisor focuses on results, rather than the time I am at my desk.
- 80% feel their manager/supervisor allows me informal flexibility as long as I get the job done.
- 79% indicate they are totally committed to my job at USDA.

- 78% indicate they would recommend employment at USDA to others.

Studies show that employees who feel empowered and are allowed autonomy in their jobs are more satisfied and engaged.

In fact, research demonstrates how lost productivity due to employee disengagement can cost more than \$300 billion in the U.S. annually.

A [Gallup study](#) by researcher James Harter and his colleagues found that business unit sales and profits at one point in time are predicted by employees' feelings about the organization at earlier points in time.

It is clear that people's emotions, perceptions and motivations at work are critical not only to employees' performance, but also to their health and well-being.

This is why USDA is committed to fostering a flexible and supportive workplace-focused on strategies for positioning USDA as a model Federal employer.

If you're interested in sharing your thoughts or ideas on how we can do a better job, send us an email to: worklife@dm.usda.gov or visit the [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community page on USDA Connect!



**Do you have a
Telework
Success Story?**

**Send it to
telework@dm.usda.gov**

A Telework Success Story from Rural Development

I work as a state review appraiser for USDA Rural Development. I am able to telework because the majority of my work is comprised of desk reviews that can be accomplished from any location. I had anticipated moving to my work location in Olympia Washington when I started at USDA Rural Development in November 2010; however, due to the pending remodel of the Olympia Offices, this has been delayed indefinitely.

Since my home in Nampa, Idaho is approximately 500 miles from the Olympia State Office in Washington, telecommuting part of the time was a great alternative.

Additionally, with the loss of staff nationwide due to early out retirement authorities, we are now considering regionalizing some of the appraiser work. I may soon be assisting with work in Idaho, in addition to my review work for Washington State.

The flexibility of telecommuting has been instrumental to provide flexibility in these changing times with USDA Rural Development!

Curtis Gaschler
State Review Appraiser
Rural Development
Olympia, WA



A Telework Success Story from NRCS

As an Assistant State Conservationist for Operations for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), I assist the State Conservationist in the development and improvement of statewide policies and procedures for activities within the state, including:

- 1) Operations and administrative management;
- 2) Technical assistance provided to land users through programs for which NRCS has responsibility; and
- 3) Preparation and maintenance of required records and reports.

I am also responsible for supervising five District Conservationists and one Management Analyst.

I telework when weather makes commuting difficult. I can work from my

home instead of driving to my duty station, which is forty-five minutes away with good traffic.

If I have other personal commitments or appointments, I can schedule a part-time day of work and still make the appointment.

This adds up to more hours on the job and less commuting and really allows me to get more work done during the day. I also use telework day to work from other offices where my staff is located, this helps me spend more time with them.

Maria M. Collazo
Assistant State Conservationist
NRCS
Somerset, NJ



**Work/Life
And
Wellness**
Thrive to Survive!

USDA's Work/Life and Wellness Program, along with help from agencies and mission areas across the Department, launched its new USDA Wellness Campaign 2012 this month to correspond with National Nutrition Month.

To commemorate this important initiative, the team is introducing its new official logo! What better representation is there than the 'Yin/Yang' symbol which encompasses a total balance of life? As you can see, the symbol demonstrates a balance of work and life for an overall healthy lifestyle.

In addition to the logo, we have added the tagline, "Thrive to Survive"! Credits for the design go to Lou Paulson, Rural Development, and the tagline to Lisa Smith, Office of the Inspector General. For Work/Life and Wellness Program information, contact worklife@dm.usda.gov, or visit our community page at [Work/Life and Wellness](#) USDA Connect!

APHIS Joins FSA and NRCS to Sponsor Immigrant and Minority Farmers Meeting

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is making Cultural Transformation a priority through several initiatives that will result in a more efficient operation, the creation of an Agency that is more inclusive and accepting of diversity, and an increased concentration on core mission activities.

To that end, APHIS was happy to be a co-sponsor of the 7th Annual Immigrant and Minority Farmers Conference in Minnesota. APHIS had an outreach exhibit at the event, which was hosted by the Association for the Advancement of Hmong Women in Minnesota, the Minnesota Food Association, the Farm Service Agency, and the Natural

Resources Conservation Service. Approximately 250 farmers from various ethnic communities attended, including Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Bhutan, Latino, Burmese, Somalian, Kenyan, and Ethiopian.

The conference provided APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) with an invaluable opportunity to meet with local farmers, representatives from Federal and state agencies, (including the MN Dept. of Agriculture), academic partners, and non-profit and industry partners. The goal of the conference was to promote the success and viability of small and beginning immigrant and minority farm operations.

By M. Essam Dabaan



APHIS Smuggling Interdiction and Trade Compliance Officer John Stevens (2nd from left) meets with attendees of the 7th Annual Immigrant and Minority Farmers Conference held recently in Minnesota.

Food and Nutrition Service Office Publishes Employee Potluck Cookbook

FNCS Administrator Audrey Rowe (right) joins Midwest Regional Office employees at one of their regular office potlucks.



The Midwest Regional Office of USDA's Food & Nutrition Service, based in Chicago, recently published a recipe book of dishes from its popular Potluck Lunch with Administrator Rowe that took place late last year.

Entitled "**Just Because,**" the publication highlights the importance of Cultural Transformation and celebrates food, friendship and camaraderie. The book includes entree, salad, side dish, bread, and dessert recipes.

Please contact Megan Bensette (Megan.Bensette@fns.usda.gov) for additional information.



Ag Marketing Service Employees Collaborate on Electronic Cookbook

By Nicole Nelson Miller

George Bernard Shaw once said,

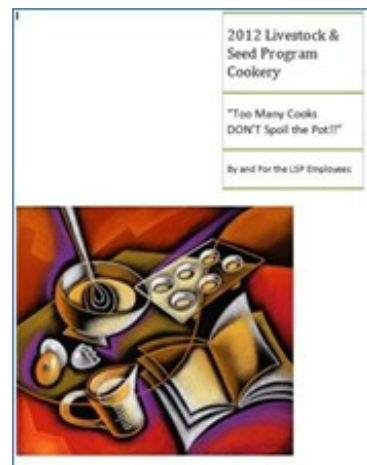
"There is no love sincerer than the love of food." The Agricultural Marketing Service's Livestock and Seed (LS) Program may have proven that point.

Last fall, the LS Program asked employees to share their favorite recipes, and they delivered! In February 2012, we published the *2012 Livestock & Seed Program Cookery*, a cookbook of recipes contributed by program employees both at headquarters and stationed in the field.

The Cookery, which was made available to employees electronically, contains nearly 50 pages of dishes ranging from breakfasts to desserts—a bit of something for everyone.

This was a fun activity that everyone could be a part of, no matter their job or duty station.

Everyone who contributed a recipe became part of the bigger end product. That's cultural transformation at its best!



Cultural Transformation In Action

Editor's Note: Dr. Atanu Biswas is a Research Chemist with the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in Peoria, Illinois. He recently completed two 60-day details at USDA Headquarters in Washington, D. C. where he participated in the Executive Potential Program. Atanu is a native of India, which he describes as having a diverse geography, religion, culture, food habits, clothing/attire, and language. He says India's diversity has posed tremendous integration challenges, yet it is this very diversity that provides its people with enormous pride and joy. Here, he shares some of his experiences while working in DC, along with three posters he was inspired to create as a result of what he learned. To download your own high resolution copies of Atanu's posters, please visit: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/78329316@N08/?saved=1>



By Atanu Biswas

My first detail involved USDA policies and practices on the topic of diversity, which, coincidentally, is also consistent with the Secretary's initiatives related to cultural transformation. I was fortunate to work with my mentor, Dr. Mickey McGuire, the Acting Area Director of ARS Northern Plains Area, and Dr. Donald L. McLellan, Director of Outreach, Diversity and Equal Opportunity (ODEO) of ARS to arrange this detail.

Under Dr. McLellan's tutelage, I learned skills that enable me to identify internal and external politics that impact the work of the organization, some of which no doubt, may go unrecognized by members of any organization. While in Washington, my goal was to take full advantage of the Agency's cultural diversity, as well as the diversity present throughout the city to improve my knowledge and understanding of the power of inclusion and apply it to make contributions to the USDA cultural transformation process.



United States
Department of Agriculture

My second detail was with Dr. Catherine Woteki, Undersecretary for the Research Education and Economics Mission Area and Chief Scientist for USDA, and her associate, Dr. Jill Auburn, Acting Chief Scientist. During this time, I attended several high profile meetings where I witnessed how the policies and procedures related to cultural transformations were implemented. During my detail, I was inspired to put together three posters dealing with diversity, outreach and cultural transformation.

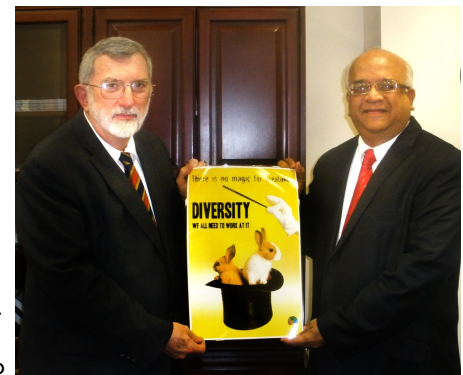
After spending the first 25 years of my life in India and now some 31 years in the United States, I find that diversity is a reality—and a good one at that—in professional life everywhere. Diversity awareness brings flexibility and adaptability to one's character, adds intellectual power to the organization, and depth to its competitiveness.

Indeed, the United States continues to be lauded as the greatest nation in the world because of its ability and vision in leverag-



ing diversity for continuous improvement and cultural richness. I can only agree. My experiences in USDA bear witness to recent advances of cultural diversity.

We all can be proud of living up to this noble philanthropic value.



Agricultural Research Service (ARS)
Research Chemist Dr. Atanu Biswas
(right) with Dr. Caird E. Rexroad, Jr.,
Associate Administrator, ARS.

Employees Influencing Change Through the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

By Mary Jo Thompson

The 2012 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FedView) is coming soon! In keeping with USDA's Cultural Transformation goals and initiatives we are proud to announce that USDA will again participate in the Government-wide 2012 FedView.

On May 2, 2012, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) will administer the 2012 FedView to approximately 80,000 permanent full- and part-time USDA employees. FedView will remain open through June 11, 2012.

There are 84 basic questions, 14 demographic questions, and three USDA-specific questions on the survey, which will take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete.

Responding to the survey is a good way to let USDA leaders know what is not working. It's also important to complete the survey to let us know what is working well.

We have used previous voluntary and confidential feedback from the 2010 and 2011 FedView to initiate and foster change throughout USDA. Your survey responses were the powerful tools from which we built our Cultural Transformation action plans for change.

Your voices are influencing these changes, and with your continued support, we will bring our USDA transformation to the next level.

If you have questions regarding the 2012 FedView, you may contact Mary Jo Thompson at maryjo.thompson@dm.usda.gov or Ed Cierpial at (202) 260-8362 Edwin.cierpial@dm.usda.gov.

You may also contact your agency points of contact as follows:

- **Dana Schrock (FS)**
dschrock@fs.fed.us
- **Leslie Violette (NRCS)**
leslie.violette@wdc.usda.gov
- **Cecilia Matthews (FSIS)**
cecilia.matthews@fsis.usda.gov
- **Geoffrey Gay (FNS)**
Geoffrey.gay@usda.gov
- **Nancy Varichak (MRP)**
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rmflores@fs.fed.us

HACE
(Hispanic American Cultural Effort)

invites you to join us in Celebration for

Cinco de Mayo

Free
Dance
Lessons



Participate in
our
Food Contest
as a
Competitor
or Taster

May 2, 2012

Whitten Building Patio

11:00am—1:00pm

For More Info or to Participate, Contact Cynthia Cuellar
(202) 720-8773 or cynthia.cuellar@osec.usda.gov



By Laura Fessenden

The Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Coordination (OHSEC) Emergency Program Division (EPD) manages the USDA Operations Center (USDA Ops Center) and serves as the focal point for emergency management and coordination of natural or man-made disasters within the scope of the USDA mission. This group of dedicated men and women assist in the development and coordination of policies, capabilities, and procedures for reporting and response to emergencies impacting the USDA mission or personnel. The USDA Ops Center works around the clock to assess and analyze emergency incidents or events, making internal and external notifications as required. The USDA Ops Center can be reached at 202-720-5711 or opscenter@dm.usda.gov.

A critical part of the USDA Ops Center success is interacting with Agency Emergency Coordinators. Each USDA Agency has designated staff identified to work as liaisons with the USDA Ops Center to report incidents that impact agency staff, facilities and programs. By doing so, USDA Ops Center is able to keep abreast of real time information of all incidents in order to assist the agencies and to keep the Secretary of Agriculture accurately informed of high level events that are affecting employees, structures and agriculture.

Should an incident or emergency arise, it is recommended that an employee reach out to their direct supervisor within their Agency who will provide information, based upon the incident, to the Agency Emergency Coordinator. The Agency Emergency Coordinator will ensure that the emergency or incident is addressed, and also reported to the USDA Ops Cen-

ter. An employee can find out who their Agency Emergency Coordinator is by speaking with their direct supervisor or senior level management within their agency.

Other Helpful Information

Additionally, there are other avenues to receive or report information regarding an emergency or incident:

USDA Employee Information Line

The Employee Information Line provides information on the status of USDA facilities in the National Capital Region (NCR), and severe weather and/or employee working hours/ reporting times. This line is updated daily. Please call 1-800-932-1902 for current information. For TTY services, call 1-800-877-8339

USDA "Be Prepared" website

The USDA "Be Prepared" webpage <http://www.dm.usda.gov/beprepared/> provides employees information on USDA's operational status as well as related links to helpful information such as Headquarters Emergency Telephone Numbers, National Terrorism Advisory System Information, Tropical Storm and Hurricane Information and a link to the USDA Employee Emergency Response Guide and the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Memorandum on Washington, D.C. Area Dismissal or Closure Procedures.

Office of Inspector General (OIG) Hotline

OIG Investigations is the law enforcement arm of the Department, with Department-wide investigative jurisdiction. OIG Special Agents conduct investigations of significant criminal activities involving USDA programs, operations, and personnel, and are authorized to make arrests, execute warrants, and carry firearms.

Did You Know USDA Operates a 24-Hour, Seven-Day-a-Week Operations Center?

If you witness or have knowledge of any of the following: criminal activity (such as bribery, smuggling, theft, fraud, endangerment of public health or safety); mismanagement / waste of funds; workplace violence; employee misconduct; or conflict of interest, you can file a report on the OIG hotline.



Employees may contact the 24/7 hotline to report a crime, fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement, etc. Employees may remain anonymous and can report an incident electronically, via phone, fax or mail. For more information or to submit a report electronically, go to <http://www.usda.gov/oig/hotline.htm>

OPM Status Website

For information regarding USDA facility opening status, emergency or incident statuses both inside and outside of the NCR, employees can go to the Office of Personnel Management's website at http://www.opm.gov/Operating_Status_Schedules/.

Important Reminder

As a reminder, all USDA personnel are urged to report suspicious activity to their local law enforcement agency or dial 911.

For additional information or questions regarding the USDA Security Corner, please contact the USDA Physical Security Division at physicalsecurity@dm.usda.gov.

Get [Connect](#)-ed and Foster Cultural Transformation: Join the Conversation!

Recently, while exploring [USDA Connect](#), I followed a recommended link to the [Cultural Transformation Ideaspace \(CTI\)](#). There I was surprised to learn about another side of the Cultural Transformation (CT) initiative. I thought CT was mainly concerned with diversity as it related to various groups and hiring practices. I was surprised to learn that part of CT is also to encourage just what I think Connect is doing,—creating a means to transform the thought culture in our organization and how we do business across the Department. On the site is a quote from Secretary Vilsack:

“The cultural transformation of USDA requires that we change our business practices, as well as establish equitable opportunity for all employees to be personally successful and fully engaged in the success of USDA.”

I read posts on CTI that give me hope about dissolving the (real or perceived) chain-of-command limits imposed on ideas coming from the field.

I am a 'lifer' in my current position, so most things related to advancement, hiring, etc. do not affect me. However, I do have a lot to offer USDA outside of my local office. How do I let 'them' know that without stepping on toes, going outside the 'chain of command' or other such 'cultural limits' related to bureaucracy? How can I contribute without travel, both for budget and personal reasons? I have found a way to do that on Connect.

I have 'met' many people from various agencies and levels of USDA, and provided my input on various topics. Others have noticed my contributions on Connect, and I hope my efforts have made positive impacts.

Another 'cultural limit' that I would like to see transformed is the of lack of control or information at the field level for widespread changes that drastically affect our work environment. Software development is one area where this could make a tremendous impact. Connect is a place where programmers could ask field office personnel what we need out of new software, such as what has worked so far and what needs to be improved. Programmers could poll the users about options or conduct joint application development (JAD) sessions with the people who use their programs. This would be a major improvement, allowing employees to relay our concerns or ideas directly to the people that affect our day-to-day processes.

The Blueprint for Stronger Service has its own community on Connect, [USDA Strengthening Service through Administrative Solutions](#).

This is a real-life example of how employees at all levels can interact, comment, and have dialogue about ways to improve, save money, and demonstrate our abilities.

By Tanya McIlravy



I believe that Connect is a place where:

- Ideas can flow freely despite titles and geography,
- People can be 'discovered' and put their talents to work for others outside their physical/admin boundaries,
- Concerns and suggestions are met with thanks rather than angst.

Won't you join me? Together, we can transform the Department, just by getting [Connect](#)-ed!

USDA to Observe 2012 Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month



Join us on Thursday, May 24, 2012, at the Jefferson Auditorium, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., as USDA celebrates Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month.

The guest speaker will be the Honorable Chris Lu, White House Cabinet Secretary, who serves as the liaison between the White House and members of the President's Cabinet.

Secretary Lu has worked for President Obama since 2005, when Mr. Obama came to Washington, D.C. as a Senator from Illinois.

Mr. Lu spent the previous eight years as a counsel for the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee before signing on as then-Senator Obama's legislative director.

According to the Washington Post, during the 2008 Presidential campaign, Mr. Lu's top priority was monitoring Obama's Senate votes.

After the election, he was named Executive Director of the Presidential Transition Team before the President selected him to become the White House Cabinet Secretary.

Dr. Regina L. Tan Selected as the First USDA Employee to Participate in the AAGEN's Senior Executive Service (SES) Development Program

By Fred Cheng

USDA congratulates Dr. Regina L. Tan for being selected to the Senior Executive Service (SES) Development Program, sponsored by the Asian American Government Executives Network (AAGEN).

The road to joining the elite Senior Executive Service is not a finely paved road, but a road with twists, turns, and bumps. Dr. Tan has more than ten years of public health experience in preventive medicine and epidemiology. She joined the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) from the MITRE Corporation, where her management of a team of engineers was essential to developing innovative data architecture research and development across the Federal government.

As the Director of the Applied Epidemiology Division, she manages the Consumer Complaint Monitoring System team and hurricane response components.

Dr. Tan's success did not happen overnight, but only after many unnoticed years of dedicated hard work and challenging assignments. AAGEN launched

the SES Development Program to prepare selected candidates, such as Dr. Tan, for the highest levels in federal service. In addition, the program is a response to President Obama's Executive Orders 13515 and 13583, establishing a coordinated government-wide initiative to promote diversity and inclusion in the Federal workforce.

On March 21, 2012, AAGEN honored Dr. Tan and 19 other candidates at the White House Eisenhower Executive Office Building. They were the first class to be inducted into the AAGEN-sponsored Senior Executive Service (SES) Development Program. The program is supported by the White House Initiative on Asian American Pacific Islanders (WHIAAPI), the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

OPM Director John Berry stated, "This is an important step, not only for the aspiring Senior Executives but also for the future of the SES, as we continue to build a culture

that values and cultivates talent from all backgrounds."

All USDA employees are encouraged to apply for the next AAGEN sponsored SES Development Program this fall. Dr. Tan said her motivation for applying to the SES program encompasses the USDA Mission, "We provide leadership..."



Dr. Regina Tan gives her acceptance speech at White House Eisenhower Executive Office Building after being selected to the SES Development Program, sponsored by the Asian American Government Executives Network (AAGEN).

Federal Inter-Agency Holocaust Remembrance Program

USDA employees in the Washington, DC area are cordially invited to attend the 2012 Federal Inter-Agency Holocaust Remembrance Program on Wednesday, May 9, 2012. The event will be held at the Lincoln Theater (1215 U Street, NW, Washington, DC) from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. (EDT).

This year's theme is "Speak Up—Speak Out." Guest speakers will include Stefania Kenigswain Sitbon, Holocaust Survivor, (*The Zookeeper's Wife—Motion Picture 2012*); Henry Abraham, a U.S. Soldier who gathered evidence for the Nuremberg trial prosecutions; and, Ernst Floeter, a German witness.

There will also be a special performance by the United States Marine Corps Band.

USDA's 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

Under Secretary Harris Sherman Addresses 2012 Earth Day Celebration on the National Mall

More than a billion people in 192 countries celebrated the 42nd anniversary of Earth Day. In Washington, D.C., on the National Mall, the Earth Day celebration included the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service exhibit. This year's theme was "healthy soils," and USDA provided demonstrations to the public. Both children and adults were thrilled with our 3-D photos of landscapes and the earth's natural elements, and they enjoyed the interactive demonstration of till vs. no-till farming.

Harris Sherman, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment joined in the celebration and spoke to the crowd on the Mall and to those watching the event live on the Internet. He talked about the importance of conserving our natural resources. The Under Secretary toured the NRCS exhibit: "Soils, the Foundation of Life" and talked with visitors about the critical importance of healthy soil. He also enjoyed the 3-D photos and soil demonstrations at the exhibit.



Under Secretary Harris Sherman with Smoky Bear (Left). Children examine a model of Earth on the National Mall (Center). Mr. Sherman joins Soil Scientist Maxine Levin at the USDA NRCS exhibit booth (Right)

Story and Photos by Terry Bish, NRCS

Forest Service Sees Great Success in Sustainable Construction

The U.S. Forest Service is at the forefront of an effort to implement Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). The Southern Region currently has nearly a dozen LEED buildings in use, under construction, or in the design stage.

The Henry Koen Federal Building, located in Russellville, Arkansas, has housed the Supervisor's Office for the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests since its completion in 1939. The Koen Building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1989.

A 5,500 square foot, LEED-Gold addition was completed in 2009 as the first phase of a larger project finished in 2011 to restore and renovate the Koen Building. The entire pro-



The Henry Koen Federal Building in Russellville, Arkansas

ject focused on reducing the energy and water consumption of the Supervisor's Office, restoring the historic interior, and improving the life safety systems. In total, the Southern Region currently has 4 LEED-Gold Buildings, 1 LEED-

**By David R. Culp,
Regional Architect
US Forest Service**

Silver, and 1 LEED-Certified. Three more LEED buildings are under construction, and two more are in the design stage for the Region. All of our projects share common features and design elements that we refine with each project, improving our results while reducing costs. Instead of being a separate process that is applied to a design, sustainability is present from the beginning, along with ongoing reviews of the life cycle cost of our choices.

RECRUITMENT: USDA Leads Feds in DC Summer Youth Employment Program Submissions and Placements

More than a hundred students from Washington, D.C.'s Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) have been selected for internships at USDA offices in the DC Metro area. Seven USDA offices located in DC, MD and VA will host 110 students from the SYEP, which is supported by DC Mayor Vincent Gray. This locally funded six-week initiative is administered by the District of Columbia Department of Employment Services (DOES) and will allow USDA to provide meaningful internship experiences to DC Youth ages 18-21, exposing them to the many ways in which USDA touches lives every day in every way.

On April 5th, 2012, DOES hosted a Career Exploration Fair to provide potential employers an opportunity to screen, recruit, and interact with youth participants in person while providing additional information about their agency/organization. USDA's Diversity and Recruitment staff, along with ambassadors from throughout the Department, shared a listing of job descriptions with about 5,000 students who attended the event at the National Building Museum in DC.

The SYEP has been well received since USDA hosted 10 students in 2010 and 65 students in 2011. In March, a record number of host supervisors from across the Department submitted approximately 80 student job descriptions, with ARS, DM, FNS, FSA, FSIS, and RD leading the way with the most submissions and placements.

According to DOES representatives, USDA is slated to place the most students out of all Federal agencies (IRS was second), and it ranks in the top 10% of approximately 470 employers that made a commitment to place 12,000 District youth ages 14-21 in summer positions. The students will be paid \$7.25 an hour and work up to 25 hours a week, which will result in an estimated \$119,000 in cost savings to the Federal government.

The Recruitment Division is planning a Departmental Management orientation briefing in June for all host employers/site supervisors, program administrators, and designated payroll coordinators to acquaint them with the guidelines and regulations set forth by the DC Department of Employer Services. Further details about the orientation will be announced soon.

**By Michelle Jordan-Hedgeman
USDA Recruitment
Program Manager**

**FOLLOW-UP to the
"USDA Recruits Former
Peace Corps Volunteers"
Article from the March
2012 Issue of MyUSDA**

Thanks to the 21 USDA nationwide employees who responded to our inquiry to partner with them for future Peace Corps recruitment or outreach events. It's amazing to know that they were former Return Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCV) who served in 17 different countries for an average of two to three years dating back to the 1960's!

If you're a RPCV who would like to participate, please send your name, title, agency or mission area, duty station, RPCV country served and date served information to Michelle Jordan-Hedgeman at recruitment@dm.usda.gov.

Mentoring Lunch and Learn Session

The Office of Operations (OO) Pilot Mentoring Program held its first Lunch & Learn Session. During the session, the eight sets of protégés and mentors who are in the OO Mentoring Program pilot got together to learn about mentoring and, more importantly, to learn about one another.

Tony Myers, the Mentor Program Team Leader, has had many mentors over the years, both formal and situational mentors. He has had such a positive experience that he is passionate about expanding this program within OO. Tony notes that experienced staff who mentor can give back to OO by providing guidance and advice to OO employees who are not as experienced.

The OO management team has been promoting this Cultural Transformation initiative as an opportunity to invest in our future. All the pilot participants are

excited about this opportunity, and look forward to seeing this program expand to all the employees who wish to participate.

Mentoring is a way to foster knowledge management by passing knowledge from an experienced employee to one who is new to the team. This helps reduce the loss of institutional knowledge which

By Karlease Kelly

frequently occurs when our most experienced workers retire.

The OO program follows the Departmental Regulation on Mentoring that was recently issued by the Virtual University, with the goal in mind to create a mentoring culture across USDA.



Tony Myers (right) and Anthony Thompson, FSIS Mentoring Program Trainer (left), demonstrate mentoring interaction using a role play exercise



“...our efforts to find efficiencies and strengthen USDA must continue. I want us to lead the Federal government in an effort to focus on our core competencies and do them better than anyone in the world. As we lead, I believe your extraordinary work to serve the American people through innovation, creativity, and collaboration will help us build an even better USDA.”

**Tom Vilsack,
Secretary**

Ask the Secretary Events

By Jamie J. Wadzink

On March 21, 2012, USDA employees were invited to engage in a dialogue with Secretary Vilsack and ask questions about the USDA Blueprint for Stronger Service. Through the “Blueprint,” the Department is striving to address budgetary challenges and build a modern and efficient organization. One component of “Blueprint” is the Administrative Solutions Project (ASP). As part of the ASP, USDA is identifying improvements in how USDA employees deliver and receive administrative operations. During the Ask the Secretary events, employees learned more about the vision for ASP, including the Pillars of Administrative Operations.

Pillars of Administrative Operations Snapshot:

Pillar I – Includes organizations (Forest Service; Food Safety and Inspection Service; and Marketing and Regulatory Programs) that deliver the majority of their administrative transactions through a single administrative service center. These include the FS Albuquerque Service Center and the FSIS and MRP operations in Minneapolis. The intention is to leave these operations as-is and to leverage their expertise for certain Department-wide improvements.

Pillar II – Includes administrative activities where expertise in a given functional area by one agency, i.e., Center of Excellence (COE) could be leveraged by other agencies within USDA. For Example: ARS work in Design/Construction and FS expertise in Travel Management could be leveraged by other agencies in the Department. Final decisions on these COEs have not been made and they could be incorporated into the locations of the National Service Centers and the Shared Service Centers.

Pillar III – Includes administrative operations for those agencies and offices that do not currently have single administrative service delivery organizations identified as National Service Centers. However, they do have national and regional offices supporting program delivery. These Shared Ser-

vice Centers (SSCs) are a new, transformational vision for administrative service delivery for these agencies/offices through regional administrative operations centers that would support the day-to-day operations of multiple agencies

The Three Pillars, and their structures and functions, are envisioned to maximize flexibility and scalability of resources. The overall intention of the Three Pillars of USDA Administrative Operations is to ensure that USDA will be more flexible in addressing budgetary challenges and will be stronger through cross-functional collaboration and communication, enhanced technology, and increased virtual working environments across USDA agencies.

One of the principles being discussed as part of the Three Pillars of USDA Administrative Operations is virtual alignment. As part of this principle, few (if any) employees would need to physically relocate to a new duty station. Instead, USDA will strive to implement virtual organizations allowing employees to stay where they are if their positions are affected by the implementation of the Pillars.

For now, the Department is still in the preliminary discussion stages with USDA Leadership on the next steps. The Secretary has directed that the process to refine and implement the Pillars vision be thoughtful and deliberative and provide ample opportunities for employees and our union partners to engage in the conversation. You will be hearing more about the Blueprint, the ASP, and the Pillars in the coming weeks and months, so please continue to engage through your agency leadership



Secretary Tom Vilsack (left) and Administrative Solutions Project Lead Chris Nelson explain the Three Pillars of USDA Administrative Operations.

and our Communications Community.

ASP Communications Community: Get Connected Today!

For more information surrounding the Administrative Solutions Project, we encourage you to join our USDA Connect Community called “[Strengthening Service through Administrative Solutions](#)”. “Ask the Secretary” Videos and materials are posted on USDA Connect in addition to background information and weekly Leadership Talking Points. Please continue to ask questions and provide feedback at our mailbox AdministrativeSolutions@osec.usda.gov.

Special Thanks!

Thank you to all the 700+ USDA employees who attended the events, wrote into the employee mailbox, and shared ideas/concerns, and solutions regarding the Administrative Solutions Project going on within USDA. We received over 100+ ideas/comments and recommendations, and the Secretary thanks you for your continued dedication to improving USDA’s administrative operations.

Thanks also to the labor unions of the USDA Labor-Management Forum who suggested to the Secretary that the events be held.

MyUSDA Volume 2, Issue 6

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 Connections](#).

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If you have ideas for future articles, contact us at MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov.

Submit Your Article to MyUSDA

The deadline for May submissions is Tuesday, May 15, 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