



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

# MyUSDA

## A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

Volume 3, Issue 3

December 2012/January 2013

### 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



Over the course of 2012, all of you carried on USDA's record efforts to help folks across our nation, and I am proud of the work we carried out.

We supported agriculture in a tough time – providing excellent customer service, even in a time of budget uncertainty. This could not have been more important as our farmers and ranchers faced a record drought.

We promoted exports, with agricultural exports hitting a near-record level in 2012, and staying on track to set a new record this year. In fact on Monday, the Government of Japan—which represents our fourth largest agricultural export market—announced an agreement to expand access for U.S. beef, an action that will greatly benefit the agricultural economy.

We supported conservation efforts. We protected more communities, clearing more than 4 million additional acres of flammable brush from forests. We continued our work with more than half a million private landowners to conserve America's soil and water.

We built up communities. USDA provided an additional 10,000 loans and grants for rural businesses. We helped 150,000 more families achieve the dream of homeownership and carried out more than 1,500 new community facility projects. We expanded our efforts to improve rural infrastructure, with 10,000 new miles of electric line and more than 1,500 water improvement projects.

We ensured a safe food supply, and nutritious food for Americans. USDA took historic action this year to further inspect ground and raw beef products, and tighten standards for poultry. We continued our efforts to help one in four Americans put food on the table, while maintaining the integrity of food assistance programs. And we helped provide emergency food assistance for Hurricane Sandy victims – just one of more than 100 disasters for which we have provided this assistance since 2009.

I know we will have continued success in 2013 because of your hard work and commitment to USDA's Mission: "To provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management."

As we stay focused for 2013, please know that I deeply appreciate your efforts and your service.

Contact the staff of MyUSDA [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov), and please visit the [USDA Cultural Transformation Website](#).

# Alabama USDA Employees Mark Native American Heritage Month

**Article and Photos By Vickie A. Lane** Alabama USDA State Office employees gathered for a joint agency program to commemorate National Native American Heritage Month on November 27<sup>th</sup> in Montgomery, AL. Employees from the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Rural Development, Office of the General Counsel, the FSA Office of Civil Rights/PCIB, and the National Agricultural Statistics Service participated.

The program featured two USDA employees as speakers for the annual observance— Cassondra Searight, Executive Secretary, FSA State Office; and Craig Cornwell, Assistant Regional Attorney, The Office of the General Counsel.

Craig Cornwell made a brief presentation entitled “Culturally Transformed,” which focused on his personal heritage, lineage, and relationship to Pocahontas. Cornwell shared evidence revealing that he is a 13<sup>th</sup>-generation great-grandson of Pocahontas, also known as Rebecca, the Princess of the Indians.

Cornwell also talked about the cultural transformation progress he has seen take place in the Department over the tenure of his career. At the beginning of his career, he said, his chain of command was mostly Caucasian males. Now, his chain of command is very diverse in gender and race.

The second part of the program included a brief native dance by Cassondra Searight, who is also FSA’s American Indian/Alaska Native Employment Program Manager. Searight is a member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, the largest tribe east of the Mississippi river with over 55,000 enrolled members. Lumbee Indians are the descendants of three tribes— Tuscarora, Cheraw, and Croatan— that united for the sole purpose of survival.

In addition to heritage facts of the Lumbee Indians, Searight enlightened the audience about the meanings and significance of the colors, symbols, and patchwork of her regalia and the official Lumbee tribal logo. Her presentation included a video clip of a documentary film regarding the Lumbee dialect. Searight closed the presentation with an explanation and rendition of the traditional tribal thanks, which included audience participation. After the program, an old-fashioned potluck luncheon was enjoyed by all.



**ABOVE:** Cassondra Searight performs Native Dance during USDA’s commemoration of Native American Heritage Month for Alabama employees.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Ms. Searight and Craig Cornwell were featured speakers at the program.

**RIGHT:** Alabama employees from several USDA agencies participate in a traditional tribal thanks.



## USDA Virtual University Holds Flash Mentoring Event

**By Roderick Mance**

In response to employee feedback gained through the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, the Virtual University (VU) hosted its first Flash Mentoring event at the George Washington Carver Center Cafeteria in Beltsville, Maryland. Participants heard leadership’s expectations regarding mentoring at USDA, and they received sound guidance on achieving Cultural Transformation goals. Prospective protégés and mentors met to form relationships to assist with career progression and the achievement of organizational goals. Topics covered included Career Development, Cultivating a Team Oriented Atmosphere, Crucial Conversations, Customer Service, Project Management, and Work/Life Balance.

One of the mentors at the event, Duane Williams, Chief for the Agricultural Marketing Service’s Contracting Branch, called it “...an exciting event that gives us an opportunity to share with and learn from one another.”

Flash Mentoring involves multiple short-term group discussions focused on specific topics. Modeled after Speed Dating, Flash Mentoring allows protégés to receive information from one or more mentors in a time-controlled environment. It also gives executives and managers an opportunity to mentor future USDA leaders. Although Flash Mentoring makes mentoring faster, it does not reduce its quality and effectively supports USDA’s succession planning efforts.

The Virtual University would like to thank Salina Najera and Kimberly Morren of Food Safety and Inspection Service for all of their assistance in planning and hosting this event. For questions regarding the USDA Mentoring Departmental Regulation and organizing Flash Mentoring events, please contact Roderick Mance, via email, at [Roderick.Mance@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Roderick.Mance@dm.usda.gov).



## NIFA INTRODUCES NEW EMPLOYEES TO CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture brought 21 new employees onboard recently and oriented them with a workshop focusing on USDA’s Cultural Transformation.

NIFA’s New Employee Overview Organizers are pictured (from left to right) Suzanne Le Menestrel, Lindsey Jewell, Lisa Hampton, Ahlshia Shipley, Doris Perry, and Ila Blue.

*Photo by Stephanie Engle*



## USDA's NIFA Honors Veterans

**By Brent Elrod & Chance Wiley**

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) hosted its 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Veterans Day Observance, which featured firsthand experiences of service members

and family members affected by separation and combat, an Army chaplain assigned to the Pentagon, and the directors of two projects that support veterans.

Chaplain Colonel (COL) Thomas Waynick offered the invocation and highlighted how the work of the land-grant universities is helping the Chaplain Corps improve its ability to meet the needs of survivors experiencing complicated loss and grief.

NIFA Director Sonny Ramaswamy recognized NIFA's employees who are also veterans and discussed the agency's longstanding history of support for our military families and veterans. With funding from the Department of Defense, service components, and installations, NIFA partners with the Land-grant University System and the Cooperative Extension Service to improve the quality of military family life through research and extension.



NIFA Celebrates Veterans Day with a ceremony highlighting NIFA's military family and veterans programs. From left to right: Don Bower, COL Thomas Waynick, Sonny Ramaswamy, Donna Martin, Tammy Tysor, Effie Baldwin, Brent Elrod.

**Photo By Stephanie Engle**

Project directors from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and the University of Georgia Extension introduced their Army-funded projects. Donna Martin demonstrated how the Wounded Warrior Program at Texas A&M provides evidence-based educational tools that support the caregivers of injured service members. One such caregiver, Tammy Tysor, shared how the Wounded Warrior program has helped her as she juggles her job, raising two children, and assisting with her wounded husband's recovery and ongoing care. Her husband, Sergeant First Class (SFC) Antonio Tysor, sustained extensive injuries after a bomb exploded about five meters from him during his 2010 deployment to Afghanistan.

While SFC Tysor survived the blast and continues to heal, others have been less fortunate and paid the ultimate sacrifice. To better support the survivors of fallen soldiers, Don Bower and a team at the University of Georgia have been working with the Army Chaplain Corps and the Survivor Outreach Services program to ensure that the latest understanding of loss and grief and survivor support are incorporated into staff resources and training. For more information about NIFA's military family and veterans portfolio, contact Brent Elrod at [belrod@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:belrod@nifa.usda.gov).

## USDA Employees Create Caribbean American Employee Association



Several USDA employees of Caribbean heritage met recently to continue their discussion on the need to organize a USDA Caribbean American Employee Association. The existence of an USDA Caribbean Employees Association would highlight the rich diversity and culture of the Caribbean people and the career opportunities for Caribbean people both internal and external to USDA.

In recent years, the White House has issued an annual proclamation recognizing June as Caribbean-American Heritage Month. The Caribbean employees are planning to initiate an annual Caribbean Heritage Month Observance beginning June 2013.

## USDA Recognizes “Faces of Cultural Transformation”

In December, Secretary Tom Vilsack marked the fourth year of USDA's ongoing Cultural Transformation by recognizing several groups and individuals at the forefront of the Departmental initiative. The *Faces of Cultural Transformation* event was truly a representation of both USDA's diverse workforce and culturally enhanced workplace. The Secretary recognized two groups for Process Improvement:

- **Operations and Asset Management Division** - Rural Housing Service, Washington, DC, recognizing Edward Duval, Timothy James, Anita Kapoor
- **Business Services Transformation Team** - Office of the REE Under Secretary, Washington, DC, recognizing Caird E. Rexroad, Jr. and Jeffrey M. Van Houlén

He also recognized three individuals for awards:

- **Dr. Gregory Parham**—whose commitment to excellence and to the Cultural Transformation initiative assured a seamless and successful transition in leadership.
- **Curtis Wilburn/Office of Operations**—In recognition of the outstanding contributions to the Cultural Transformation initiative over the past four years made by staff of the Office of Operations.
- **Susan Carter**—In appreciation of the commitment of time, talent and support as the Mistress of Ceremonies at the Secretary's Cultural Transformation observance.



(Above Left) Secretary Vilsack delivers keynote remarks at the “Faces of Cultural Transformation” observance. (Above Right) Susan Siemietkowska of the Food and Nutrition Service describes the impact that Cultural Transformation has had on her Agency.

You can view the “Faces of Cultural Transformation” Observance at the link below. You can also see an excerpt of the new the MyUSDA TV series and an employee testimonial on how Cultural Transformation has impacted their daily lives.

- **Fourth Annual Cultural Transformation Celebration** <http://mfile3.akamai.com/88068/wmv/ocbmtcmedia.download.akamai.com/88068/dm/dm1204CAPFINAL.aspx>
- **MyUSDA TV Series on Telework** <http://mfile3.akamai.com/88068/wmv/ocbmtcmedia.download.akamai.com/88068/dm/tele.aspx>
- **USDA Employee Testimonials:** <http://mfile3.akamai.com/88068/wmv/ocbmtcmedia.download.akamai.com/88068/dm/test.aspx>

### UPCOMING USDA SPECIAL OBSERVANCES

- **Black History Month Observance, Thursday, February 21, 2013**
- **Women's History Month Observance, Thursday, March 21, 2013**

***Observances begin at 10:00 (EST) at the Jefferson Auditorium, Washington, DC***

## USDA Disability Employment Program News



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](mailto:Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov).

### USDA Renews Partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation to Support Employment of Individuals with Disabilities

USDA continues to develop innovative strategies and resources to increase hiring and retention of individuals with disabilities. In an effort to improve cost efficiencies and to expand the support of this initiative, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Acting

Assistant Secretary of Administration, Dr. Gregory Parham, signed an updated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) on December 6, 2012 during the U.S. Department of Education's National Employment Conference in Arlington, Virginia.



Dr. Gregory Parham (right), Acting Assistant Secretary for Administration, signs a national MOU with the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) with Steve Wooderson (left) Chief Executive Officer.

This MOU updates and expands our agreement from FY 2012 to strengthen USDA's partnership with a national organization that assists the Federal and State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs serving up to one million individuals with disabilities annually in training, assistive technology, and job placement support. Funding for the VR program is provided by the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration and states. Partnering with CSAVR will enhance USDA's efforts to increase our employment of individuals with disabilities and improve our cost efficiencies in tapping existing resources to provide reasonable accommodation and retention support to our current employees with disabilities.

The MOU establishes a range of low/no cost services and collaboration to USDA personnel at the national, regional, and state levels. The following list includes support throughout the life cycle of employment.

#### Recruitment

- Fill vacancies quickly using the **Schedule A Hiring Authority** and through direct marketing to applicants with disabilities at the national, regional, and state levels.
- Obtain support through the **Unpaid Work Experience Program**. VR may provide an individual at no charge to USDA in exchange for work experience for up to six months.

#### Hiring

- **Reasonable accommodation support** may be provided throughout the hiring and Onboarding experience.
- Tips for managers on interviewing individuals with disabilities.

#### Employment and Retention

- Free assessments to help identify needs and to develop a plan of action.
- Reasonable accommodation support with services and assistive technology.
- Support with job coaches and training.

#### Advancement

- Consultation for managers in developing Individual Development Plan for employees with disabilities.
- Consultation in identifying training and reasonable accommodation needs.

#### Retention

- Assistance as disabilities change or are acquired.

For more information about how to connect with Vocational Rehabilitation for any support, please contact USDA Disability Employment Program Manager, Alison Levy at: [Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Alison.Levy@dm.usda.gov).

## USDA Conservation Efforts Unearth 6,000 Year Old Prehistoric Site

### USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Employees in Minnesota Discover Site Showing Signs of Human Habitation Going Back 6,000 Years.

By Patrick McLoughlin

In order to fulfill requirements under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, NRCS-Minnesota implemented an archaeological backhoe trenching survey along the floodplain of the Red River in southern Norman County, Minnesota. The effort focused on the potential location of a borrow area for construction of a ring dike. As a result of the backhoe trenching, a new prehistoric site (21NR70) was recorded.

Two buried fire pits, or hearths, were discovered in a single trench close to the river. The shallower hearth (referred to as Feature 1) was recorded about 2 feet below the ground surface. A deeper hearth (referred to as Feature 2) was discovered at about 3 ft.-6 inches below the surface. Since both features contained burned bone and charcoal, radiocarbon samples were collected, and subsequently submitted for dating. No other features were discovered in any of the other trenches.

Results of the radiocarbon dating revealed that the hearth closest to the surface (Feature 1) is approximately 1,670 years old. The deeper hearth, (Feature 2, which is three and half feet below the surface) dates to almost 6,000 years old. Other features from archaeological sites recorded nearby have yielded dates between 3,500 and 4,000 years old.

The dates from new site 21NR70 confirm that people have occupied the Red River Valley almost continuously for at least 6,000 years. The hearth features, in addition to artifacts found at 21NR70 and other sites in the valley, suggest that the occupants of this region relied heavily on bison for subsistence.

Site 21NR70 was determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places based on the well-stratified, intact, and well preserved contents of the archaeological deposits. Once the site boundaries were clearly defined, the borrow area was moved to avoid damaging the site.



Pictured on the left are spear and arrow heads and displayed on the right are shards of ancient pottery and more arrow heads found at pre-historic site 21NR70.

## USDA FNCS Joins With Union Employees to Help Children During the Holidays

By Susan Siemietkowski



USDA's Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNCS) employees are a very generous and giving group! FNCS employees from the Alexandria, VA office participated in the Salvation Army's "Angel Tree" program this holiday season. As a result of this joint activity between the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU—the union of Federal employees) and FNCS, 80 needy children had presents to open on Christmas morning. Just a few of those presents are shown here. The joint effort is a strong showing of USDA's commitment to community outreach.

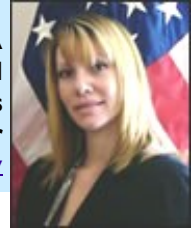
Way to go NTEU and FNCS!

## A Word About the Importance of Work/Life from Deputy Secretary Merrigan

By Megan Young

Recently, Hurricane Sandy prevented Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan from addressing USDA employees and guests at the Open House planned for National Work & Family Month. Despite this, she wanted to be sure to take the time to emphasize the importance of USDA's Work/Life & Wellness programs and what they mean for employees, supervisors and managers at the Department.

**Mika J. Cross, USDA  
Work/Life and  
Wellness  
Program Manager  
[worklife@dm.usda.gov](mailto:worklife@dm.usda.gov)**



As both a mother of two and caregiver to her father, she is passionate about ensuring employees are aware of how USDA's Work/Life & Wellness Program can work for them and she encourages USDA leadership at all levels to support and utilize the flexibilities and programs available- to help transform the workplace into one that is flexible, supportive and inclusive. From Telework and Flexible Work Schedules to the Nursing Mother's Program, Work/Life and Wellness Programs are an integral component of USDA's commitment to Cultural Transformation.



Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan

Dr. Merrigan is also proud to announce the accomplishments and awards the Work/Life & Wellness Program has achieved in just the last year. In 2012, USDA was awarded the Excellence in Telework Leadership Award, the Work/Life Seal of Distinction and named a 2012 Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace. Although much progress has been made, she encourages us to keep pushing forward and to welcome change in order to make USDA an outstanding agency for its employees and for the American public it serves.

Please take a moment and click on this link to view the clip in full: <http://mfile3.akamai.com/23747/wmv/ocbmtcmedia.download.akamai.com/23747/secy/MerriganWLWellnessCAP.asx>

You can also tune in to Dr. Merrigan's [Story Exchange](#) series which highlights interviews about Telework, among other innovative programs, ideas and initiatives by visiting: <http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov/oc/ctdiscuss.nsf/dx/storyexchange?Open&cat=Story%20Exchange>

If you're not yet a member, be sure to visit the [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community webpage on USDA Connect for updates and information on USDA's Work/Life and Wellness Programs, initiatives and policies.

## Moving on Up...To the New USDA Child Care Development Center!

The USDA Child Development Center moved from the Yates building to the General Administration building at 1800 F St NW in Washington, DC at the end of November. The new location has the same hours of operation: Monday-Friday, 6:30am-6:30pm and closed for all Federal Holidays.

If you'd like more information about the USDA Child Development Center in the Washington DC area, call them at 202.205.1133; email them at [child-care@dm.usda.gov](mailto:child-care@dm.usda.gov); or visit the Child Care Resources [Work/Life and Wellness](#) sub-community webpage at USDA Connect.-

USDA employees Esther Lin and Marian Romero (top left) along with photos (clockwise) of the reading area, snack lounge, and Imagination Station.





## USDA's "Supervisor Shining Stars": Two Stars Are Brighter Than One!

By Megan Young

Take a moment this month to learn about two of USDA's Supervisor Shining Stars and how their accomplishments and high standards can help other managers effectively demonstrate USDA's commitment to Cultural Transformation!

Lori Beutel fully understands the value of Telework and workplace flexibility, and knows how to use it effectively to the benefit of her employees and the organization. As a manager with the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Farm and Foreign Agriculture Service in Washington, DC, she has every single one of her 31 assigned employees on formal Telework Agreements, and she ensures that they are fully engaged in their work assignments at all times, regardless of location.

Additionally, whenever asked to help an employee deal with unforeseen work/life problems such as illness, family obligations, or travel problems, her thoughtful and caring responses and actions to help her employees cope have been exemplary.

When an employee was seriously ill for 4 months during the summer of 2011, requiring four hospitalizations and surgery, Lori made a huge difference in his life. She approved several accommodations which allowed him to remain a productive member of her staff despite this major illness. As a result of all her efforts, Lori has developed one of the most loyal, engaged, dedicated and productive staffs in all of the USDA, according to her very own employees!



Robert Turnure (right), Chief, Configuration Management & Standards Compliance Branch, Rural Development, Missouri with members of his staff.

Our other Supervisor Shining Star is Robert Turnure, a manager with USDA's Rural Development in Missouri. Robert is a dedicated leader with a contagious and motivating can-do spirit, who is innovative and unafraid to think outside the box.

Even prior to his Agency's Telework pilot, Robert ensured employees had mobile capabilities. After pilot approval, he encouraged each member of his team to participate as fully as possible in Telework.

Robert leads his team by example by participating in Telework himself. He ensures he is available remotely for questions and issues, checks in with employees and finding ways to test the technology—all while ensuring the continuity of operations. His experience with Telework has assured Robert that his employees are fully organized, prepared and ready to participate in Telework.



Lori F. Beutel, Director, FFAS, FSA, Information Technology Support Division, Budget and Acquisition Office Washington, DC.

**TELEWORK WEEK**

MARCH 4 - 8, 2013

**PLEDGE TODAY ▶**

Telework EXCHANGE

Last year, 7,516 USDA employees pledged to Telework during Telework Week 2012, resulting in more than \$1 million saved in commuting costs alone. We want to involve even more employees in 2013.

Telework Week 2013 will be March 4-8, 2013, so now is the time to begin talking to your leadership and co-workers about participating. Some branches will use the week as an opportunity to conduct a Continuity of Operations (COOP) Telework Drill for their workgroup. Visit the [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community page on USDA Connect for info.

You can **Pledge** today online! Stay tuned for more information in coming weeks! To learn more, visit [www.teleworkexchange.com/teleworkweek](http://www.teleworkexchange.com/teleworkweek).

Take the **Pledge** today!

Within the past few years, Robert has been responsible for standing up two additional temporary Help Desks. He took a page from the Telework book and built both Help Desks to be completely virtual, utilizing them for off-site nationwide support in emergency situations. Robert always keeps the Agency mission and the customer base in the forefront, while never forgetting his most valuable resource: the employees.

## U.S. Forest Service Telework Drill

By Megan Young

This year when USDA employees pledge to Telework during Telework Week 2013, March 4-8<sup>th</sup>, agencies can use it as an opportunity to go a step above and plan for an organized Telework Drill. The Forest Service's Washington Office recently held a simulated "Snowstorm in September" Telework Drill. We spoke with Linda Feldman from the Forest Service, Office of the Deputy Chief for Business Operations, to find out what they learned.

### ***How did Forest Service orchestrate this Drill?***

We simulated a snow storm severe enough to operate under Office of Personnel Management's inclement weather policy, which includes and strongly promotes use of Unscheduled Telework.

### ***Why did Forest Service plan the Drill?***

We wanted to test our Telework capacity in the context of emergency preparedness, allowing supervisors and employees to address Telework issues before there is a day when bad weather or another emergency event triggers the Office of Personnel Management policy on unscheduled leave and unscheduled Telework. This was a good introduction to teleworking for many who have never teleworked, and for some who have been reluctant to telework, or reluctant to allow otherwise eligible employees to telework.

### ***Who participated in the Drill?***

More than 72% of Washington Office employees teleworked on the day of the drill, representing 427 employees in all. They participated from all levels, including Deputy Chiefs, directors, supervisors, managers, and administrative staff.

### ***What were the pros and cons of the Drill?***

The primary challenge was our remote technology. Many of the problems were a result of VPN (connectivity) issues or limited knowledge of those who were not already frequent Teleworkers. We also experienced a lack of available laptops and government-provided cell phones. Still, several staff members were excited to learn how to use tools like Microsoft Office Communicator and Live Meeting to help them complete their work and stay connected with their co-workers and customers. Employees indicated they would like more training on those applications. Many said teleworking provided a quiet, comfortable work environment with fewer distractions, more productivity, and saving time for not commuting.

### ***What made the Drill successful?***

Several factors went into the success of our drill. We got strong backing from leadership and from the Union, to get the word out about the Drill. We allowed ample time to sign employees up to telework on that day, knowing they would need time to sign up for VPN for remote access for their computers. We teamed up with Human Resources, Chief Information Office, and Union and communicated often with leadership. Partnering with the Union was key to our success.

### ***Would you recommend Telework Drills to other managers and organizations across USDA and why?***

Yes. Planning a Telework Drill allows employees an opportunity to try out teleworking without making a long-term commitment before testing it out. It also ensured that our eligible employees had approved Telework Agreements on file, which is a requirement of all Teleworkers to be able to do so during times when Unscheduled Telework is authorized. Some of the feedback we received, reflected management issues that had not been addressed ahead of time, like making sure supervisors adequately discussed what work employees were to take home to work on and what equipment to take home. Many learned and benefitted from the drill and as a result the Forest Service is more prepared to Telework when unplanned things happen that disrupt normal office operations.



**TELEWORK WEEK**  
MARCH 4 – 8, 2013

Pledge to do more of this...

Join USDA's 2013 Telework Week movement by **Pledging** to participate in Telework Week 2013 and take back your commute time!

USDA encourages all organizations to take advantage of participating in Telework Week 2013 and take part in planning a Telework Drill. Don't be left unprepared! **Take the pledge today** to take part in Telework Week by visiting <http://www.teleworkexchange.com/teleworkweek/>

For more information about the USDA Telework Program, Check out our [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community at USDA Connect! Or send an email to: [Telework@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Telework@dm.usda.gov) Don't forget to pledge @ <https://www.teleworkexchange.com/>

## Official USDA Form for Public to File Program Discrimination Complaints

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR) is introducing a new way for USDA customers and participants in programs that receive financial assistance from USDA to file a civil rights complaint when they believe there has been discrimination.

OASCR, in partnership with the Office of the Chief Information Officer and Civil Rights staff from various USDA agencies, utilized the Lean Six Sigma approach to simplify the civil rights complaints filing process. The new electronic Program Discrimination Complaint form offers the following benefits:

- Speeds up the complaint filing process for participants and members of the public who believe they were subject to discrimination;
- Captures the required information to process a program discrimination complaint; and
- Reduces complaint processing time and makes it easier to quickly resolve issues.

The new USDA Program Discrimination Complaint forms can be found on-line in English (Form AD-3027) and Spanish (Form AD-3027S). Please note: filing a program discrimination complaint by letter is still an option. Letters and forms should be mailed to:

**USDA—Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights**  
**1400 Independence Avenue, SW**  
**Washington, DC 20250-9410**  
**Fax: (202) 690-7442**



**Joe Leonard, Jr.**  
**Assistant Secretary**  
**for Civil Rights**

OASCR recommends that the following standard statement be located on all USDA agencies' web pages: "You may use USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Forms AD-3027(English) or AD-3027S(Spanish), which can be found at: [http://www.ocio.usda.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2012/Complain\\_combined\\_6\\_8\\_12.pdf](http://www.ocio.usda.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2012/Complain_combined_6_8_12.pdf)

[http://www.ocio.usda.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2012/Spanish\\_Form\\_508\\_Compliant\\_6\\_8\\_12.pdf](http://www.ocio.usda.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2012/Spanish_Form_508_Compliant_6_8_12.pdf) or upon request from the local (agency) office. *USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.*"

## USDA: Providing a Rewarding and Satisfying Career Path

By Kathryn Quillen

Meet Sheila Trollinger. During her tenure with the Department, which started in 1988 as a receptionist, Sheila's experiences have provided her with a wide variety of opportunities for professional growth and advancement.

Sheila is currently a scheduler to Chief of Staff Krysta Harden and Deputy Chief of Staff Carole Jett, and office manager in the Office of the Secretary. She attributes her success to focusing on being a "team player" and cites the the people, diversity, and culture of the Department in making it a great place to work.



One of the main changes Sheila has seen in her time with the Department has been through USDA's Cultural Transformation initiative. Since the initiative was undertaken, Sheila says that USDA has demonstrated greater determination to recognize and cultivate talent within the ranks of its employees. Just as importantly, the Initiative has helped remind every employee—no matter what their position—that the "Peoples' Department" touches the lives of everyone across the nation. The initiative has focused on strengthening USDA's responsiveness, community involvement and customer service.

Sheila would recommend a career with USDA to others, and suggests that agencies strengthen their succession planning strategies that transfer knowledge from retiring to newly hired employees. This is just one more in a series of efforts underway to ensure that USDA is a modern service provider and a great place to work for nearly 100,000 employees.

## USDA Observes National Service Day Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King

**National Service Day honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Observance** The U.S. Department of Agriculture celebrated the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at the MLK National Service Day Observance on January 15, 2013. Hundreds of USDA employees gathered to commemorate Dr. King and recognize a number of employees who have demonstrated a personal and professional commitment to service during the past year. The National Drum Major Service Awards were presented to Mike Boyle of Rural Development from Tipton, Iowa; Bobby Goode, the Rural Development State Office Director in Tennessee; Jolene Lau, the Natural Resources Conservation Service Public Affairs Specialist from Hawaii, Mary Wagner, FS Associate Chief, from Sandy, Oregon; Tabettha Block of the US Forest Service in Hilo, Hawaii; Kim McMunn of the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in West Lafayette, Indiana; and Matthew L. Richardson of the ARS in Ft. Pierce, Florida. Additional honorees are pictured below.

USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Information Technology (IT) Specialist from Beltsville, MD Sandra Ball receives the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Service Day Drum Major Service Award at the USDA Jefferson Auditorium in Washington, D.C. on Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2013. (L to R, Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan, USDA Acting Assistant Secretary for Administration Dr. Gregory Parham, Sandra Ball, Agriculture Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) Ed Avalos, and Agriculture Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Dr. Joe Leonard). *USDA photo by Lance Cheung.*



USDA Forest Service Administrative Support Assistant from Hilo, HI Pam Holton receives the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Service Day Drum Major Service Award at the Jefferson Auditorium in Washington, D.C. on Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2013 (L to R USDA Director of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Max Finberg (at podium), USDA Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan, USDA Acting Assistant Secretary for Administration Dr. Gregory Parham, Pam Holton, Mary Skiles, and USDA Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Dr. Joe Leonard). *USDA photo by Lance Cheung.*



Theodore Shaw, Professor of Law, Columbia University of Law, was the keynote speaker at the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Service Day presentation of the Drum Major for Service Awards at the USDA Jefferson Auditorium in Washington, D.C. on Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2013. *USDA photo by Lance Cheung.*



## Fully Integrated: Working and Volunteering Together

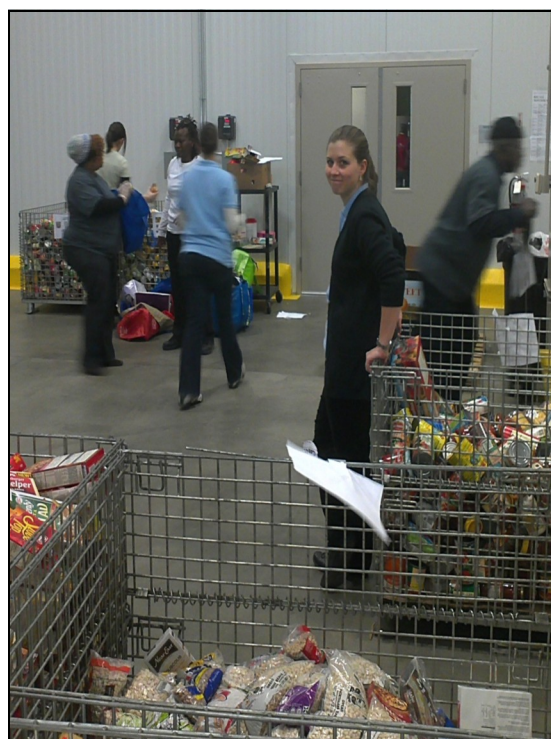
By Natalie Veeney Ford and Tina Hoellerer

The Diversity, Recruitment, and Worklife/Wellness Division (DRWD) of the Office of Human Resources Management participated in a positive, team building experience volunteering at the DC Warehouse of the Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB). A tenet of building and maintaining a high performance work group is functioning together as a team. Volunteering as a group strengthens team cohesion and provides a unique opportunity to make a positive and tangible contribution to the community – while having fun!

The mission of the CAFB is to feed those who suffer from hunger in the Washington metro area by acquiring food and distributing it through its network of partner agencies; and educating, empowering and enlightening the community about the issues of hunger and nutrition. DRWD participants joined CAFB volunteers of the day to sort and shelve over 14,000 pounds of donated food. With the help of one-day volunteers, the CAFB annually distributes 30 million pounds of food and services over 475,000 people in the region struggling with hunger. To give food, funds or volunteer with CAFB, go to <http://www.capitalareafoodbank.org/>



Above: DRWD colleagues, Ali Muhammad (left) and Roseal Fowlkes, shelve donated food in the DC Warehouse of the Capital Area Food Bank. Right: DRWD Intern, Megan Young, is still smiling after an afternoon of food sorting.



## NIFA Commits to Greater Cultural Transformation

By Kimberly Whittet

To help coordinate the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's wide array of Cultural Transformation activities, the Agency has formed a Cultural Transformation Leadership Team (CTLT). The goal is to ensure an inclusive workplace environment, facilitate modernization of technology and systems, encourage high standards of performance and customer service, lead a renewed commitment to creating diversity in the workplace, and ensure unparalleled commitment to improving USDA's record of civil rights.

Ultimately, the CTLT is focused to help create a workplace at NIFA where all employee and customers are treated with dignity and equality and everyone is given the same opportunity for success. For more info contact the CTLT Co-Chairs, Sylvia Montgomery ([smontgomery@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:smontgomery@nifa.usda.gov)) and Hiram Larew ([hlarew@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:hlarew@nifa.usda.gov)).

## USDA Welcomes Project Search Interns

By Michelle Jordan-Hedgeman

Project Search (PS) is a one year, high school-to-work transition project that currently involves five Federal Departments (Education, Interior, Health and Human Services , Labor, and now Agriculture) in partnership with the District of Columbia (DC) Public Schools, DC Department on Disability Services, and DC Rehabilitation Services Administration.

PS integrates education and work experience in a program for students with developmental disabilities who are in their last year of high school or who have recently graduated with their diploma. Interns receive real-life work experience to help them make successful transitions from school to adult life. The USDA Pilot Program of Project Search takes place entirely at the workplace and includes total workplace immersion to facilitate a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations. The goal is to prepare students for competitive employment in the community.

Information sessions are being planned to launch Project Search pilot programs at USDA headquarters and surrounding offices in the Metropolitan DC area and USDA offices near Denver, CO and Albuquerque, NM (in partnership with Dept. of Interior) for School Year 2013-2014 and at USDA regional offices nationwide (July 2013) for School Year 2014-2015.



The Diversity, Recruitment and Work/Life Division (DRWD) is in the process of coordinating a centralized USDA-wide effort to provide Project Search students a career exploration experience at Headquarter agencies only at this time at no cost through 08/31/13. For more information, please contact Recruitment Program Manager, Michelle Jordan-Hedgeman at [students@dm.usda.gov](mailto:students@dm.usda.gov).

Tomiko Banks, with USDA's Office of Human Resources Management (center) along with Project Search Student Interns Delonta Smith (left) and Gari Taylor (right).

## USDA Enters Agreement to Increase Veterans Employment

The USDA has entered into a partnership to increase the employment of Veterans at USDA. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) enables USDA to tap into a robust Veteran centric resource currently known as the VA for Vets Program <http://vaforvets.va.gov/aboutva/Pages/default.aspx>

The VA for Vets Program offers:

- The most thorough military skills translation and career matching services for Veterans seeking employment;
- A growing pool of over 25,000 veterans seeking employment;
- Professional development and deployment lifecycle support for current Veteran and Military Service Member employees; and
- Online training and personalized services for the supervisors, HR professionals, hiring managers and coworkers who work with Veteran employees each and every day.

The VA for Vets program will be offered to USDA at no-cost. The program will provide USDA with a robust pool of qualified Veterans that are seeking employment.



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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](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov) or visit USDA's [WorkLife 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](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov).**

### Submit Your Article to MyUSDA

**The deadline for February submissions is Thursday, February 14, 2013  
Guidance on Submissions to MyUSDA**

Submissions to MyUSDA should indicate progress that you, your agency, or your mission area have achieved toward implementing some aspect of 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 with an accompanying photo. Send photos as separate attachments and make sure they are high quality. **The ideal submission is a great picture with about 75-150 words to go along with it. Maximum length of articles is 250 words.**

Email submissions or further inquiries to [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov).