



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

MEMORANDUM

TO: Under and Assistant Secretaries
Agency Heads
Staff Office Directors

FROM: Thomas J. Vilsack *Tom Vilsack* 10/24/09
Secretary

SUBJECT: AbilityOne Program Awareness and Celebration

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month and an appropriate time to recognize and celebrate the AbilityOne Program. The theme of this year's celebration is "AbilityOne Works for You."

The AbilityOne Program is the largest single source of employment for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities in the United States. Through AbilityOne Program employment, individuals with disabilities make a significant contribution to the Federal Government's critical missions. Government acquisition personnel and purchase card users buy supplies and services furnished by AbilityOne affiliated non-profit agencies who employ people with disabilities. Because of the AbilityOne Program and the support of federal agencies, over 42,000 individuals at more than 600 community-based nonprofit agencies across the country have meaningful employment.

We can be proud of USDA's long tradition of providing employment and training opportunities for people who have severe disabilities. Through our support of the AbilityOne Program, individuals who are blind or have other severe disabilities provide USDA with a variety of supplies and services including grounds maintenance, packaged food commodities, uniforms, mailroom and custodial services.

In a speech made at the White House in July 2009, President Obama stated in part, "...I believe we're getting there...because more than one in five Americans live with a disability -- and chances are, the rest of us love somebody with one -- we remember our obligation to ensuring their every chance to pursue the American Dream. We celebrate the courage and commitment of those who brought us to this point. And we recommit ourselves to building a world free of unnecessary barriers and full of that deeper understanding."

Your efforts to develop awareness and to educate our workforce about this important program will help ensure that USDA continues to make an important contribution to fulfilling America's promise to people with disabilities.