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Monday Jan 25, 2010

[Puerto Rico's Business Owners, Banks Executives, Labor Unions, University Professors, Senate & House Leaders, Mayors, and USDA Rural Development and Farm Service Officials Leaders Shares Ideas on Creating and Maintaining Jobs in Puerto Rico](#)

José Otero-García, [USDA Rural Development](#) State Director, and Juan Ortiz, [Farm Service Direct](#) Sponsored a Presidential Roundtable Forum on job creation for Puerto Rico. The roundtable follo the Forum on Jobs and Economic Growth that President Obama hosted at the White House December 3, 2009.

Fifty-two persons joined together to work in creating jobs. The activity was covered by TV Chan 13 and Primera Hora Newspaper. The diversity of issues discussed was amazing and the group v composed of the best Professionals in their field.

The information provided from the discussion will be sent and provided to Agriculture Secret Vilsack and President Obama for consideration.



The Honorable Lucy Arce, Senator of Puerto Rico, José Otero-García USDA RD State Director for Puerto Rico and Jt Ortiz, Farm Service Director at a jobs forum last week.

Submitted by Miguel A. Ramírez, Rural Development Public Affairs Coordinator for Puerto Rico.

To learn more, go to the [Rural Development and FSA Job Roundtables Schedule](#), and the News Release, [“USDA to Host Roundtables on Jobs, Economic Growth”](#)

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📅 Friday Jan 22, 2010

[USDA Teams Up with the Smithsonian to Preserve the Past](#)

At an event at the [National Museum of American History](#) on Thursday, [Kevin Concannon, Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services](#), signed a gift of transfer donating a collection of historic food coupons, proof sheets, early artist designs, printers plates and sample Electronic Benefit Transfer cards showcasing nearly 40 years (1960 – 2009) of the Food Stamp Program (FSP).

These rare materials will become part of the museum’s National Numismatic Collection, which consists of more than 1.5 million objects. The NNC includes materials documenting the history of the early FSP that began with the 1935 Agricultural Adjustment Act and lasted until 1943, as well as other forms of emergency currency, such as clamshells used by Americans during the Great Depression. With the new acquisition, the museum will hold the single most comprehensive research collection pertaining to food coupons.

At the event, US Concannon said “these items represent an important conversion of history in our country,” as he talked about ending the era of food coupons for a more modern “efficient and normative” way to issue benefits. Since 2004, all benefits have been issued electronically, through Electronic Benefit Transfer cards, similar to a debit cards. The newer system provides users confidentiality, de-stigmatizing the program and greatly decreasing incidents of fraud.

The FSP began as a pilot program in the 1960s under President John F. Kennedy. Today’s program now called the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (SNAP), has the highest participation in the program’s history, serving nearly 38 million people, half of whom are children. SNAP is the largest of USDA Food and Nutrition Service’s 15 nutrition assistance programs that work in conce to form a national safety net against hunger.

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[Kansas USDA Holds ‘Rural Jobs Roundtable’ at 2010 Kansas Workforce Summit](#)

USDA [Rural Development](#) State Director Patty Clark and [Kansas FSA](#) State Executive Director Adrian Polansky hosted a roundtable on job creation and economic growth in association with the *2010 Kansas Workforce Summit* in Topeka. The “Rural Jobs Roundtable” was a special session at t summit and a follow-up to a national Jobs Forum held in December by President Obama.

A diverse group of over 150 business owners, educators, community leaders, economic developme and workforce professionals, state, county, and city governments were in attendance.

State Director Clark was the moderator of the panel which included Mr. Polansky; John Cyr, Director of Special Projects, North Central Regional Planning Commission; Mike Michaelis, Executive Director, Ellis County Coalition for Economic Development; Ed Martin, President/Chairman of the Board, Kaw Valley State Bank & Trust, Wamego; and Caleb Asher, Deputy Secretary, Workforce Development, Kansas Department of Commerce.

Comments from those in attendance included:

Participants and panelists stressed the importance of small business ownership transition in rural communities. Rural community bankers expressed concern that they are being disproportionately penalized through increased fees and regulations.

Audience participants also asked if USDA Rural Development could consider adjustments t the Business Loan Guarantee program that would mitigate the up-front costs for business plans and feasibility studies, especially for smaller loans. In particular, they noted that business start-ups associated with local and regional food systems currently have to finance the cost of a business plan and feasibility study for loans \$50,000-\$100,000 and those costs deter loan application.

The audience included representation from workforce development organizations and many rural manufacturing companies. Collectively they emphasized the importance of education and workforce training in trade skills such as construction, precision manufacturing, electrical, etc.

Panelists and participants also stressed the importance of partnerships, especially when

resources are limited. During the Summit, the Governor of Kansas announced receipt of a \$6,000,000 grant from DOE for Green Job Training. Partnerships with other federal agencies such as USDA Rural Development were discussed to extend and leverage the DOE/Kansas investment through business financing.

Participants were encouraged to fill out a seven question survey at the summit, or link to an electro survey provided by the Kansas Farm Service Agency at www.fsa.usda.gov.ks before January 28th.



(R-L) Adrian Polansky, Farm Service Agency Executive Director; Mike Michaelis, Executive Director, Ellis County Coalition for Economic Development; John Cyr, Director of Special Projects, North Central Regional Planning Commission; Ed Martin, President/Chairman of the Board, Kaw Valley State Bank & Trust, Wamego; Caleb Asher Deputy Secretary, Workforce Development, Kansas Department of Commerce; and moderating the 'Rural Jobs Roundtable', USDA Rural Development State Director Patty Clark.



Over 150 business owners, educators, community leaders, economic development and workforce professionals, state county, and city governments participated in the Kansas USDA 'Rural Jobs Roundtable'

Submitted by Harold Alford, Public Information Specialist on behalf of State Director Patty Clark

To learn more, go to the [Rural Development and FSA Job Roundtables Schedule](#), and the News Release, "[USDA to Host Roundtables on Jobs, Economic Growth](#)"

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[**Oregon Business Owners, Community Leaders and Residents Share Success Stories and Frustrations at USDA Jobs Forum in Albany**](#)

Panels of economic experts, elected officials, community leaders and state agencies presented information in conjunction with [Farm Service Agency](#) (FSA) and [Rural Development](#) (RD) for a jointly hosted USDA Forum on Jobs & Economic Growth on January 21. The forum was held in [Albany](#), a community with a 14 percent unemployment rate, well above the national rate.

Albany Mayor Sharon Konopa and City Manager Wes Hare highlighted the need for more living wage jobs in this once thriving timber town in the heart of the Willamette Valley. While the economy is depressed overall, Albany has used urban renewal funds to "Rethink, Reinvest and Revitalize" their community. Federal stimulus dollars have provided street improvements, an upgrade to the train depot, and expansion of the bus transit system. Other projects benefitting from ARRA (American Recovery & Reinvestment Act) will add new jobs to a local business expansion, and an innovative energy efficient wetlands wastewater treatment system that will lower sewer costs.

for area residents.

[Oregon State University](#) economist Mallory Rahe indicated that health and educational services are expanding, but the manufacturing sector will likely see few gains until the housing market shows some growth. Low oil prices are helping local businesses stay open, but layoffs and furloughs are common. Rural communities are faced with many challenges: distance, density and out-migration lack of broadband access, and fragmented production. And while rural America is often overlooked the local foods movement can bring rural residents and the country back together.

Lynn Voigt, State Director for FSA, noted that Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan, whom we heard by video at the start of the forum, was very active in promoting the USDA “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” initiative that helps create economic opportunities by connecting consumers with local producers.

RD State Director Vicki Walker took the opportunity to alert the audience to the ARRA Broadband workshop (www.broadbandusa.gov) in Portland on January 25 and 26, that will help prospective applicants understand the intricacies of the Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP) and the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). Ms. Walker also shared information about the Broadband Match program (<http://match.broadbandusa.gov>) that allows potential applicants to find community, business and individual partners for their broadband projects. “This kind of program emphasizes the Rural Development philosophy of leveraging dollars and opportunities to get the most bang for the buck,” said Walker.

The second half of the forum focused on green jobs/renewable energy, and how the agricultural industry contributes 10% to the total economic activity in Oregon. State agency representatives talked about the need for greater collaboration between USDA agencies, especially on market access with Oregon’s many specialty crops. A concern expressed throughout the forum was the need for more streamlined regulations and more technical assistance, especially with grant writing and training for start-up companies. University research was also needed for crop assistance. State Sen. Chris Edwards (D-Eugene), a sixth-generation Oregonian with roots in the agricultural and forest product industry would like to change federal forest policy, and appreciated Sen. Wyden’s approach for Eastern Oregon forests. He also wanted to reduce the barriers for marketing products to China, a country whose middle class currently holds the largest purchasing power in the world.

Forum participants echoed many of the same concerns, noting that America was in a liquidity crisis and that small business could benefit from more guaranteed loans. Collaboration and forming consortiums received a positive response, as did the desire to see more investment in revolving loan funds.

Several businesses commented on the successes they’ve had with Rural Development programs such as the Value Added Producer Grant.

Congressional offices were widely represented at the forum: Senators Wyden and Merkley, Representatives Wu, Schrader and DeFazio all had staffers attentively engaged in hearing the residents of Oregon provide constructive comments about what is working, and not working, in the communities. Several county commissioners and legislative leaders were also on hand to participate and listen.

Please join FSA and RD at the next Forum on Jobs & Economic Growth in Bend on January 28th, from 1 p.m. – 4 p.m. at Central Oregon Community College’s Hitchcock Auditorium. If you would like to make written comments, you may do so on this blog, or by posting to AskFSA@usda.gov and inserting “Oregon Jobs and Economic Growth Forum” in the subject line.



Participants at a Jobs Forum in Albany, Oregon watch a video presentation featuring Agriculture Deputy Secretary Merrigan



A large audience participates in the Albany jobs forum

Submitted through the Oregon USDA Rural Development State Office with thanks to State Director

Vicki Walker.

To learn more, go to the [Rural Development and FSA Job Roundtables Schedule](#), and the News Release, "[USDA to Host Roundtables on Jobs, Economic Growth](#)"

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