

**LABOR-MANAGEMENT  
FORUM CO-CHAIR  
DEBRA S. ARNOLD**

“The employees of USDA are currently faced with an uncertain future and the possibility of a major ‘facelift’ in how we operate. At no time, in my 25 year history with USDA, have we been faced with the challenges we are faced with today. Pre-Decisional Involvement (PDI) has never been more important. The Department and Mission Areas are providing employees at all levels greater opportunities through PDI to share in the changes of tomorrow. We finally have a voice that is really heard!

It is my hope that the culture of USDA will continue to change through PDI securing a more inclusive workforce where everyone counts.”



**Debra S. Arnold**  
Co-Chair,  
Labor-  
Management  
Forum

President,  
AFSCME Local  
3870

Rural  
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**William P. Milton, Jr.**  
Co-Chair,  
Labor-Management  
Forum

Chief Human Capital  
Officer,  
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“As you will see in this issue of the *Bulletin*, USDA management and its labor partners have been busy working together through the USDA Labor-Management Forum on a number of significant matters for the USDA and its workforce.

Using the collaborative approach called Pre-Decisional Involvement (PDI), labor and management in USDA worked together on wide range of issues. We also collaborated in various ways to make cultural transformation, including telework, a reality for USDA employees.

Because labor-management collaboration is more likely to result in higher employee morale, improved labor-management relations, and enhanced mission accomplishment, USDA management is fully committed to working with employees and their unions to make USDA work better.”

**LABOR-MANAGEMENT  
FORUM CO-CHAIR  
WILLIAM P. MILTON, JR.**

**USDA  
LABOR-  
MANAGEMENT  
FORUM**

**BULLETIN**

July 2011

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The responsibility of the USDA Labor-Management Forum is to oversee Presidential Executive Order 13522 that directs Federal agencies to actively partner with employee labor organizations and to engage the national unions in pre-decisional involvement (PDI) on Department-wide issues.



**USDA IS AN EQUAL  
OPPORTUNITY PROVIDER  
AND EMPLOYER**

# USDA LABOR-MANAGEMENT FORUM

In June, the USDA Labor Management Forum marked one year since the signing of its Charter. The first year allowed us to get to know one another, learn how to interact pre-decisionally, and determine what topics are appropriate for labor and management interaction at the top level of USDA.

Recent months have seen topics of significant interest to all USDA employees brought before the forum for discussion and Union pre-decisional involvement. While budget issues have loomed large, an equally important change for employees in the Department involves the Cultural Transformation of the USDA. Topics related to both have come before the Forum to allow unions representing employees in USDA to provide input to decisions and receive information prior to implementation of new policies.

## PDI & GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

As the passage of the 2011 budget reached its most tense moments in March and April, Departmental leadership held daily conference calls with Union Forum members to update them on the situation and the plans that were being made for a potential shutdown. As a result, union leaders were able to make appropriate arrangements for a possible shutdown, despite very limited information being made publicly available.

## VERA/VSIP

Fortunately, the government shutdown was averted, but the cuts included in FY11 Agency budget and the projected cuts for FY12 have resulted in the need to

take actions to reduce expenses. As the USDA went forward with a request to OPM to receive Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) for all of USDA and Voluntary Separation Incentive Payments (VSIP) for specific Agencies, the LM Forum members were kept informed of the status and provided feedback on the communications that were sent to all USDA employees about the early out and buyout opportunities.

## CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

Cultural Transformation of USDA continues to be a significant topic before the Forum. Agencies report weekly on metrics related to Cultural Transformation, and the Forum will be reviewing these reports at their next meeting. Metrics under Cultural Transformation include workforce diversity, increased hiring of individuals with disabilities and veterans, improvement of labor-management relations, process improvements, employee development, and hiring reform. The Forum received reports from Agencies regarding their efforts to improve Labor-Management relations in their Agencies and will be reviewing them to determine how the USDA LM Forum can assist subordinate Agency Forums improve employee morale, mission delivery, and labor-management climate.

## TELEWORK

As part of Cultural Transformation, and in compliance with the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010, the Forum was briefed on the Department's telework initiatives. The Department has been working on eliminating barriers to teleworking and beginning to monitor participation in telework to help ensure consistency across all Agencies. The USDA has increased its eligible teleworkers from a

reported 16,000 in 2010 to 58,000 in 2011, and is well on its way to meeting an aggressive goal of 40% participation by the end of 2012. Employees are encouraged to telework, with denial occurring only if (1) the employee is in a security position; (2) the job requires contact with the public, and/or (3) disciplinary action was taken in the last 3 months. Telework can be a benefit that saves costs, reduces energy usage, and helps retain employees. The Forum encourages all employees and managers to embrace telework for employees.

*By Melissa Baumann and Adrian Lindsey,  
L-M Forum Communications Committee*

## Union:

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Mark Davis - NFFE  
Sharon Cooney-Smith - AFGE  
Stan Painter - AFGE  
Ina Fells - AFSCME  
Debra Arnold - AFSCME  
Luke Chesek - NTEU  
Patricia Maggi - NTEU  
Sharon Church - NAPPQOSE  
Sarah Rehberg - NAAE  
Henry Schmick - AFSA  
Susan Johnson - AFSA

## Management:

Robin Heard - Deputy Asst. Secy. for Administration  
William P. Milton, Jr. - Chief Human Capital Officer  
Carol Shelton - Research Education & Economics  
Ralph Linden - Office of the General Counsel  
Lenise Lago - Natural Resources & the Environment  
Joanne Munno - Marketing & Regulatory Programs  
Steven Placek - National Appeals Division  
Robin Bailey - Food, Nutrition and Consumer Svcs.  
Eloris Speight - Natural Resources & the Environment  
Philip Short - Farm & Foreign Agricultural Service  
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