

SECRETARY TOM VILSACK ADDRESSES THE USDA LABOR-MANAGEMENT FORUM

Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack attended the USDA Labor Management Forum (LMF) during its regular quarterly meeting, January 23, 2012. The Secretary reminded the LMF members that the USDA is continuing to face difficult budget challenges in light of an approximate 12.5% cut in operating budgets over the last two years, and the likelihood of more cuts in the future.



The Secretary praised the USDA's efforts through the Blueprint for Stronger Service (Blueprint) to reduce costs through travel reductions, consolidating hundreds of cell phone plans, VERA/VSIP, and a host of other efficiencies that have been identified. The Secretary re-assured LMF members that the Blueprint would move forward in a thoughtful deliberative manner considering input from employees, management, and labor organizations.

The Secretary stated that because the USDA is reducing costs through the Administrative Solutions Project (ASP), one aspect of the Blueprint, the Department has a better fiscal standing than would be the case without the Blueprint. The Secretary stressed that unless we continue to be successful through the Blueprint, the USDA may be forced to take other cost saving measures that would jeopardize the USDA's ability to fulfill its mission and could negatively impact employees. The Secretary also acknowledged that these cost saving measures, though unsettling in some cases, will help reduce the likelihood of furloughs or reductions-in-force (RIF).

Secretary Vilsack concluded by repeating his desire for the USDA to become a model employer for the government and said that he will continue to work with all constituencies to make it a reality in spite of current and future budget challenges.

INTRODUCING MELISSA BAUMANN, LMF CO-CHAIRPERSON

Melissa Baumann is a Research Chemist at the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, WI, and serves as the Secretary-Treasurer for the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) national level bargaining unit in the Forest Service. Prior to assuming the role of LMF Co-Chairperson in November 2011, Melissa had 10 years of service on the Forest Service Partnership Council. As LMF Labor Chairperson, she hopes to assist both Labor and Management members of the forum in developing collaborative solutions to issues that are facing all of the USDA's Agencies.

INTRODUCING RONALD S. JAMES, LMF CO-CHAIRPERSON

Ronald S. James is currently the Employee and Labor Relations Officer (ELRO) for the USDA's Employee and Labor Relations Division. Prior to becoming a LMF Co-Chairperson, Ron was instrumental in the creation and operation of the USDA LMF. Ron brings over 30 years of labor relations expertise into the LMF Co-Chairperson's role, which includes tenures at several Unions, the Food Safety and Inspection Service, and as the Department's Labor Relations Officer, before becoming the ELRO. Like his predecessor, William P. Milton, Jr., Ron is an advocate for labor-management collaboration because it can contribute to higher employee morale, improved labor-management relations, and enhanced mission accomplishment. Ron said that he is grateful for the ground-breaking work done by the preceding and first LMF Co-Chairs, Debra Arnold (Labor) and Billy Milton (Management) for "giving the LMF a great start in working together to improve the USDA. They left big shoes to fill."

USDA LABOR- MANAGEMENT FORUM

BULLETIN

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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.



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USDA LABOR- MANAGEMENT FORUM

THE ROAD TO STRENGTHENING ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES ACROSS USDA

The Secretary of Agriculture, Thomas J. Vilsack, introduced the USDA's Blueprint for Stronger Service (Blueprint) on January 9, 2012. The Blueprint builds upon the three major components identified earlier by the Secretary in the Strengthening Service through Administrative Solutions initiative.

Since 2010, USDA's operating budgets have been cut by \$3billion – a nearly 12.5% reduction. Under the Blueprint, USDA's leadership, labor organizations, and employees were asked to take a closer look at how the USDA conducts business. The 3 key areas addressed were: 1) Budgetary Challenges, 2) Cultural Transformation, and 3) the Administrative Solutions Project.

Budgetary Challenges:

- Budget reductions
- Over 3150 employees have voluntarily left the USDA since March 2011 through VERA/VSIP.
- Other announced efficiencies

Cultural Transformation:

- Using employee feedback and engagement to make the USDA a model employer.

Administrative Solutions Project (ASP):

- An effort to modernize administrative services across USDA, obtain better results for USDA customers, develop greater efficiencies for American taxpayers, and create better avenues for employees to engage.

The purpose of the Blueprint is to build a modern and efficient organization that takes advantage of technological innovations and is better suited to address 21st century challenges. Though several cost saving initiatives such as VERA/VSIP opportunities and travel reductions have been implemented, tough choices still have to be made because of continuing reductions in the Department's budgets. The Blueprint will allow those tough choices to be made in a way that respects the USDA's mission and addresses the concerns of USDA employees. During the initial phase of ASP, labor and management worked together on Steering

and Cross-Cutting Committees and identified 379 recommendations.

Labor, management, and employees share a similar commitment to work together in achieving the goals of the Blueprint. The Secretary has praised the efforts of all parties in working collaboratively as the USDA moves forward with the Blueprint. The Secretary has also noted that other Departments have taken notice of the efforts the USDA has undertaken to manage change rather than be managed by it. More information on the Blueprint for Stronger Service can be found at:

http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=blueprint_for_stronger_service.html

The Labor-Management Forum Thanks Steering/ Cross-Cutting Committees for Their Service During the Initial Stages of the Blueprint

A primary function of the USDA Labor Management Forum (LMF) is to provide a venue for unions representing USDA employees to engage in pre-decisional involvement (PDI) as mandated by Executive Order 13522. One of the approaches to pre-decisional involvement (PDI) includes union representatives being selected to serve on management committees to provide union input on Agency decisions as those decisions are being formulated.

The LMF thanks the following individuals who volunteered their services to the Steering and Cross-Cutting Committees formed during the initial stages of the Blueprint. The Committees produced 379 recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of services in the USDA. These recommendations will be submitted to the Blueprint's next phase, Integrated Project Teams. The LMF acknowledges the following Labor participants for their time, efforts, and contributions:

STEERING COMMITTEES

Civil Rights: Debra S. Arnold, AFSCME 3870;
Sharon Cooney-Smith, AFGE Local 3354

Information Technology: Lou Paulson, AFSCME Local 3870;
Dan Singer, NTEU Chapter 226

Finance and Budget: Alysia Liddell, NTEU Local 3925;
Lisa Randolph, AFGE Local 3354

Human Resources: Ina Fells, AFSCME Local 3976;
Chris Feutrier, NFFE Local 1697

Homeland Security: Pamela Steed, NTEU Local 3925;
Tammy Daniels, AFSCME Local 3870,

Procurement: Plez West, NFFE Local 2047;
Luke Chesek, NTEU National Office

Property Management: Sean Britto, AFSCME Local 3020;
Cervantiz Myrville, NTEU Chapter 226

CROSS-CUTTING COMMITTEES

Communications and Stakeholder Engagement:

Patricia Carroll, AFGE 3354;
Leon LaVigne, NFFE Local 2165

Ways and Means: Angella Greaves, AFSCME 3976;
Mark W. Davis, NFFE Forest Service Council

Delegations of Authority: Pauletta Dunbar, AFGE 3354;
Debra S. Arnold, AFSCME 3870

Employee Locations: Connie Dupuis, NTEU Chapter 226;
Renee Crawford, NFFE Local 1753

Union:

Melissa Baumann - NFFE
Mark Davis - NFFE
Sharon Cooney-Smith - AFGE
Stan Painter - AFGE
Pamela Steed - AFSCME
Carl Goldman - AFSCME
Luke Chesek - NTEU
Patricia Maggi - NTEU
Doreen Lewis - NAPPQOSE
Sarah Rehberg - NAAE
Dave Mergen - AFSA
Susan Johnson - AFSA

Management:

Vera Cary - Departmental Management
Lisa Baldus - Research Education & Economics
Tami Trost - Office of the General Counsel
Joanne Munno - Marketing & Regulatory Programs
Steven Placek - National Appeals Division
Robin Bailey - Food, Nutrition & Consumer Services
Lenise Lago - Natural Resources & the Environment
Philip Short - Farm & Foreign Agricultural Service
Jacqueline Myers - Food Safety
Telora Dean - Rural Development
Richard Swenson - Natural Resources & the Environment
Ronald S. James - Employee & Labor Relations Officer