



My USDA

A Progress Report for Employees On USDA's Cultural Transformation

November 2010
Volume I, Issue I

USDA's CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION ACTION ITEMS

- LEADERSHIP
- EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT
- TALENT MANAGEMENT
- RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION
- CUSTOMER FOCUS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

A Message from USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack

In June of this year, I told you about the ongoing process to transform the culture at USDA by creating a diverse, inclusive, and high-performing organization. Part of that process included a series of listening sessions where I heard your feedback directly, and, as a result, created five action teams to address the issues you identified.

I'm sure you're ready for a progress report.

This publication is the first in a series to keep you in the loop and informed about the actions we are taking to respond to your concerns and the areas you've identified as room for improve-

ment. It's important that you are aware of these new initiatives and how they impact you as employees. I want you to understand how to take advantage of these fresh opportunities to enhance your personal growth and professional development, optimize your satisfaction with the work you do each and every day, and how you can advance and succeed at USDA. We have made a lot of progress, but there is still work to do.

I personally value your input and feedback and consider it absolutely essential as we continue the journey to transform USDA into the model agency



that we all want it to be. In the coming months you'll hear more about these exciting initiatives and we welcome your continued feedback through new communication mechanisms such as the Cultural Transformation website. I hope you will be energized about these new opportunities designed to enhance your experience as a valued employee at USDA.

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary

Cultural Transformation (CT) is the process of creating a workplace where all employees and customers are treated with dignity and respect, and provided the opportunity for success.

A Message from USDA Assistant Secretary for Administration Pearlle Reed

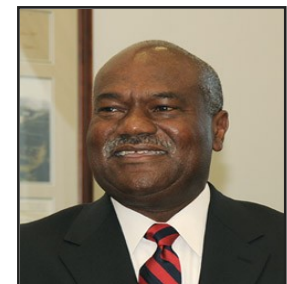
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In September 2009, Secretary Vilsack kicked off the USDA Cultural Transformational Initiative: Leading Change Every Day in Every Way. The Secretary charged Departmental Management with the responsibility for leading the initiative through the Cultural Transformation Task Force, consisting of a chair and SES members from each mission and staff office. They are divided into five teams focusing on Leadership, Employee Development, Talent Management, Recruitment and Retention, and Customer Focus

and Outreach. The work of the task force is being achieved in large part due to your participation in the Employee Viewpoint Survey and the Secretary's Listening Sessions.

I am thrilled to deliver this new publication to you, designed to highlight the progress we've made to date and to plot the anticipated progress we are working towards over the next six months. This progress is being guided by your input and feedback, so I thank you for your dedication to our common



commitment to transform the Department into a better, more diverse, and fully inclusive workplace.

Pearlle S. Reed
Assistant Secretary
for Administration

Responding to the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FedView)



FedView focuses on employee perceptions regarding critical areas of their work life, areas which drive employee satisfaction, commitment and, ultimately, retention in the workforce, so the Secretary has placed special emphasis on improving USDA's results....

Secretary Vilsack is personally committed to making a cultural transformation within USDA by creating a diverse, inclusive, and high-performance organization. His commitment to this effort is the result of a conversation with President Obama about the level of dissatisfaction among employees at USDA.

This level of dissatisfaction was revealed in the 2010 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FedView), formerly the Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS). In it, USDA ranked in the bottom third of the Federal Departments in terms of people's attitudes about their jobs.

FedView focuses on employee perceptions regarding critical areas of their work life, areas which drive employee satisfaction, commitment and, ultimately, retention in the workforce, so the Secretary has placed special emphasis on improving USDA's results on the annual survey.

A review of the top survey items for USDA suggests that employees have a very positive perception of the following:

- Quality of work performed,
- The concept of individual continuous quality improvement,
- Their immediate work unit,
- The kind of work they do, and
- Importance of their work.

Overall, USDA employees have a positive view of their immediate supervisors. Combined with the fact that they believe their supervisors are engaging them in feedback on performance,

this would give an indication that there is "fertile" ground for improving employee engagement. The idea that our employees "know how their work relates to the agency's goals and priorities" is also a clear indication of some level of engagement.

A review of the bottom survey items for USDA suggests that employees have a negative perception of the following:

- Worklife programs and Telework,
- Managers dealing with "poor" performers,
- Fairness and equity in career advancements and top performance recognition (merit principles), and
- Recognition for creativity and innovation.

Agencies across the government saw decreases in employees' satisfaction with telework. In response, USDA is aggressively promoting telework through a new Departmental policy expanding telework and placing the responsibility on managers to demonstrate why a particular position is not suitable for telework.

Worklife Programs in general also scored low among USDA employees. As a result, the Department is increasing its communications about the benefits of worklife programs. The Office of Human Resources Management has established the position of Worklife Program Manager to lead and promote the program and ensure that Mission Areas are maximizing their benefits.

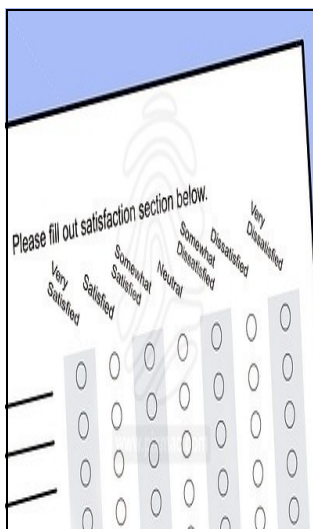
Historically, Federal employees

have had a negative view of how their agencies apply merit principles in decisions about promotions and performance recognition. Employee perceptions at USDA reflect this as well, contributing to employee disengagement. In response, USDA has developed the Improving Employee Satisfaction Action Plan to monitor progress in implementing initiatives to improve employee response in these areas. The Action Plan holds mission areas accountable for implementing and supporting the plan. Employees can review it on the USDA website.

Secretary Vilsack tasked the Assistant Secretary for Administration, Pearlie Reed, and his team to develop a Transformation Taskforce, which sponsored a series of six employee listening sessions and a session with Union representatives across the United States to hear employee feedback.

The feedback affirmed the lower scores on the FedView in the areas of: (1) Leadership not dealing w/poor performers; (2) inequities in merit principles; (3) supporting innovation and creativity; and (4) ill-equipped supervisors. Additionally, the feedback indicated a need for improved employee development across the board. On the positive side, the results show significant improvement in the areas of performance management and communication.

Results from previous years' FHCS and the results from this year's FedView show that maintaining the status quo will simply lead to USDA falling further behind in critical areas such as employee satisfaction and motivation. Training and develop-



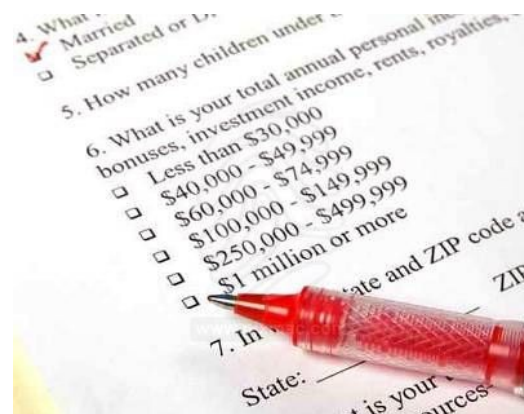
Responding to the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FedView), con't.

ment for employees and supervisors are needed to bring about positive changes. USDA is committed to building a high performance culture to enable the Department's workforce and leadership to address the challenges of the 21st century.

The USDA VU is being proposed to establish a global training entity for the Department. You can read more about the opportunities for training and development that the Virtual University will provide on page four of this issue. The creation of the USDA VU is a direct response to employee feedback on the following survey items:

- The ability of leaders to generate motivation and commitment among employees
- Employee satisfaction with leadership
- Employee satisfaction with their supervisors
- Employee satisfaction with career development and leadership opportunities
- Level of employee engagement

Increases in these areas will have a positive impact on USDA's ability to recruit and retain high performing employees and to deliver its mission effectively. Survey responses indicate the Department is experiencing progress is engaging employees. As the Cultural Transformation Initiative continues to be implemented, USDA should experience steady improvement in future FedView results. While USDA did not realize any substantial improvements in bottom ten responses over last year's results, the implementation of its Employee Satisfaction Action Plan and the introduction of the Cultural Transformation Initiative and the Virtual University will have a visible impact on the results in 2011.



LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY: Improving SES & Supervisor Accountability Through Performance Appraisal

Throughout employee Listening Sessions, we heard your concerns that USDA leadership was not being held fully accountable for performance of their human resources responsibilities. As a response, the Department developed and implemented a new Senior Executive Service (SES) performance appraisal system in December 2009 designed to hold SES employees more accountable for how they lead and manage people.

The new appraisal system rates SES leaders on a variety of areas that deal with accountability for effectively managing their employees. Sections rate SES employees on how well they do the following :

- Ensure subordinate performance plans are linked to organizational performance goals and objectives
- Confirm that employees receive a

progress review and a rating of record during the appraisal period;

- Make certain employees are appraised realistically against clear, measurable standards of performance and within established time frames;
- Certify that subordinate managers and supervisors adhere to the Agency performance management policy with regard to performance appraisal and employee recognition; and
- Utilize data from employee feedback as an indicator of general satisfaction or needed improvement with regard to the planning, developing, monitoring, rating, and rewarding of performance.

The new appraisal system also holds SES employees accountable for the proper implementation of civil rights laws, and for holding subordinate supervisors accountable for achieving civil rights goals and objectives. In addition, all USDA supervisors with responsibility for hiring will have new standardized performance measures incorporated into their performance plans that pertain to recruiting and hiring highly qualified employees and supporting their successful transition into Federal service. All supervisors will also have new measures pertaining to employee retention, succession planning, and performance management.

Through the performance appraisal of senior leadership and supervisors, USDA expects to see improvement in these areas of employee concern. The Department will closely monitor progress via future FedView surveys. USDA is committed to improving the satisfaction level of its workforce regarding USDA SES employee accountability.

USDA CREATES VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

The Virtual University will collaborate with AgLearn, Agency Training Officers, and other federal and academic institutions to share training resources, including classroom training, e-courses, webinars, and other tools across USDA.

Q&A with USDA VU Provost Dr. Karlease Kelly

So what is USDA's Virtual University?

It's a service designed to help employees, supervisors, and student interns have an opportunity for meaningful employee development and career enhancement. It is a global training entity that connects employees with the resources they will need to advance and acquire greater job satisfaction.

How did the Virtual University come about?

The idea came straight from the Secretary's Cultural Transformation Listening Sessions. It was clear that employees wanted access to more training and development opportunities. They were asking for skills development, mentoring, Individual Development Plans, leadership training...all very common themes. So standing up the Virtual University links back directly to what our employees want and need to further their careers.

How is USDA's Virtual University different from AgLearn?

AgLearn is a key partner with the USDA VU. One of the things the USDA VU will do is connect employees with AgLearn courses they need. AgLearn is huge, but it's under-utilized because it's hard for some to figure out what all it has to offer. The USDA VU will point users to key courses and help them create their own employee development plan.

The USDA VU is also developing policy for training and employee development to ensure that employee needs are met. We'll be offering some face-to-face classroom training as well as webinars in conjunction with the Department's Wellness and Work/Life Program- in hopes to further expand the use of such workplace arrangements as Telework and flexible work schedule options that help employees balance their work and life priorities. When we have such training, we'll make them available for downloading through AgLearn—and,

just as importantly, we'll make sure to let employees know it's there.

Will USDA's Virtual University serve as an information clearinghouse for employee training and development?

Yes, and in that role we'll be collaborating with Agency Training Officers and eliminating barriers that have existed until now. For instance, a training officer at one agency may have developed a product that everyone needs, but access to it is limited to that agency. The USDA VU will work to make sure these things can be used Department-wide. In the future, the USDA VU will have a web site with more details about training programs and employee developmental opportunities open to all USDA employees.

Dr. Karlease Kelly has been named the first Provost of USDA's new Virtual University. Dr. Zina Sutch has been selected to be the new Training Officer. Together, they are working with USDA agencies and mission areas to develop courses and provide opportunities for employees to improve and enhance their professional development.

"The idea (for the Virtual University) came straight from the Secretary's Cultural Transformation Listening Sessions"



**Dr. Karlease Kelly , Provost
USDA's Virtual University**

Before becoming Provost of USDA's Virtual University, Dr. Kelly served as the Assistant Administrator for the Office of Outreach, Employee Education and Training with the Food Safety and Inspection Service.

She has over 15 years of government service with a focus on training, education, and evaluation and served as the FSIS Chief Training Officer prior to her current position. Under her leadership, FSIS became an Authorized Provider of continuing education units and received the Exemplar Award from the International Association of Continuing Education and Training (IACET).

Dr. Kelly is a native of Oklahoma and possesses a Ph.D. in industrial and organizational psychology, and a Master of Science in educational psychology.



Employees are responsible for working with their supervisor to create and maintain an IDP and for taking responsibility for identifying opportunities for self development and improvement on a continual basis.



Making Individual Development Plans (IDPs) Work for You

A key element to employee development is the establishment of dynamic Individual Development Plans (IDP) for employees.

IDPs are an important part of succession planning in that they help employees develop skills that will be needed both now and in the future. This approach is supported by senior USDA leaders. As part of long-term career planning, employees, supervisors and training managers can use IDPs to outline training, and more importantly, create activities that will lead to a more engaged, effective, and skilled workforce.

Through the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration, OHRM has established a web site that provides guidance and tools for the creation and use of IDPs. That site is at www.IDP.usda.gov. The process of creating IDPs, is a shared responsibility between Supervisors and Employees. Employees are responsible for working with their supervisor to create and maintain an IDP and for taking responsibility for identifying opportunities for self development and improvement on a continual basis.

A Departmental Regulation establishing USDA's policy for

IDPs is in final clearance. The Regulation specifies that Supervisors are responsible for ensuring employees have an IDP and that the IDP remains current; providing feedback to employees about job strengths and areas for improvement; and supporting employee training and development, providing training opportunities and funding if related to the Department's mission and ensuring funds are available. The development of the IDP regulation was based on the Secretary's listening sessions and the identified need to develop employee skills and value to USDA.

MORE PROGRESS IN EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

An executive coaching program and a new Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program are also in the works.

Courses on networking, acculturation, and addressing cultural and communication barriers have been implemented, and a variety of other courses are being piloted that will help employees improve and thrive in the USDA work environment.

Stay tuned for more details about these initiatives in upcoming progress updates.

USDA LAUNCHES CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION WEBSITE

You've asked for it and now it's here: the Department has launched the Cultural Transformation website found at culturaltransformation.usda.gov.

The site is a place where you can find updates on important initiatives and accomplishments, key messages from Secretary Vilsack, and learn about activities in the field.

You'll also be able to provide instantaneous input around the five key areas driving transformation, which are Leadership, Talent Management, Employee Development, Recruitment and Retention, and Customer Focus and Community Outreach. The site is a platform for creating dialogue among employees and to enable the workforce to share ideas, discuss hot topics and gain insight into how USDA is creating a new legacy through the Cultural Transformation initiative.

You will need to use your eAuthentication (eAuth) account to log in to the website. Be sure to bookmark the site and visit it often!

Expanding the Secretary's Honor Awards

One key finding of the 2008 Federal Human Capital Survey was that many respondents felt they are not being duly recognized for their performance. One of the ways USDA has responded is by enhancing the 2010 Secretary's Honor Awards Program to include more award categories for recognizing employee achievements. The Department also is providing greater ease of employee participation by improving the overall nomination process and clarifying award requirements and processes.

The Secretary's Honor Awards recognize the highest level of employee achievement, which is why they are the most prestigious awards presented by USDA. The 2010 program, themed "Every Day in Every Way," focused on the positive and lasting impact USDA employees are having on the country.

Secretary Vilsack honored employees who are successfully revitalizing rural communities, providing America's children with safe and nutritious meals, conserving and restoring the country's natural resources, and promoting agricultural production while increasing food security.

In all, 28 groups and eight individuals were recognized, totaling 500 award winners in eight award categories. Now, there is increased interest in the 2011 Secretary's Honors Awards, and the addition of a new award category recognizing accomplishments in diversity and recruitment will provide more deserved employee recognition. In a culture where employees are positively motivated and engaged, these awards reinforce behaviors that improve individual and team performance and result in the overall improvement of the workforce.



Secretary Tom Vilsack speaks at the 62nd Secretary's Annual Honor Awards at Jefferson Auditorium on August 3, 2010.

Recognizing Employee Achievement

We all know that exceptional talent and outstanding achievement deserve to be rewarded. USDA's award and incentive programs are designed to boost employee morale and retain agency talent by recognizing employees for their performance and acknowledging their important contributions to the agency's mission. Simply put, it is a good return on investment.

Recognition comes in various forms, from sharing a sincere "Thank You!" for a specific job well done to granting a monetary or non-monetary award. Employees can be recognized both individually and as a member of a group or team.

Monetary awards can be awarded based on a performance appraisal of "Fully Successful" or higher or can be based on a significant example or contribution to the efficiency, economy, or other improvement of Government operations. Employees can also earn an additional step increase in basic pay for an "Outstanding" performance rating. Other monetary awards include spot awards, and suggestion awards.

Nonmonetary awards are also granted to recognize individual and group achievements, as outlined above. One popular and easy way to dole out nonmonetary recognition is through a time off award, which grants time off from duty without charge to leave or loss of pay.

Additionally, agencies have the flexibility to develop their own unique award programs, both monetary and nonmonetary to recognize employee contributions.

All managers and supervisors are encouraged and expected to fully utilize our recognition programs on a regular and recurring basis, not only at the close of the performance appraisal cycle. Recognition improves morale and creates a better work environment. A rewarding environment is the best way for employees to thrive and do their best. For more information on the USDA employee recognition program, please visit our website at http://www.dm.usda.gov/hrsd/awards_facts.htm. And if you have suggestions we welcome your input at any time!

Ensuring Accountability for Liability Findings Against the USDA

USDA takes complaints of discrimination very seriously. As a testament to this, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration has established an Equal Opportunity Accountability Unit. This is the direct result of Secretary Vilsack's commitment to a zero tolerance for discrimination policy in response to the information personnel shared at the listening sessions.

The EO Accountability Unit, which is part of the Office of Human Resources Management reviews all settlement agreements and decisions finding liability against the Department,

whether they are individual, employee, or program complaints of discrimination. Employees can rest assured that USDA leaders are committed to fostering a workplace free from all forms of unlawful discrimination- where employees can feel safe performing the important duties they are charged with each and every day.

Under this initiative, agencies are now required to forward copies of all settlement agreements or decisions in which there is a finding of liability against the USDA. This includes copies of all Reports of Investigation or Fact Finding Reports drafted as a

result of personnel misconduct investigations, which touch on or concern allegations of discriminatory conduct.

The EO Accountability Unit is analyzing every action—or inaction—leading to the determination of agency liability.

Agency personnel at all levels including employees, supervisors, managers, and executives whose actions or inactions are determined to have resulted in the finding of liability against the agency are being held responsible and accountable for their actions or inactions.

To date, disciplinary and adverse actions have been initiated, including training, in all cases where we have concluded the action or inactions of personnel contributed to the liability against the Department.



Improving Recruitment & Retention Through the Veterans Employment Program

"In the past year, USDA has seen a 1.2% increase in the number of veterans hired and a 0.8% increase in the number of disabled veterans hired"

On November 9, 2009 the President signed an executive order to enhance employment opportunities for veterans in the Federal workforce. In response, the USDA Veterans' Employment Manager, David Dissinger, wrote an operational plan focusing on four goals: establishing a structure dedicated to employing veterans; providing employment counseling and skills training to transitioning service members; implementing a marketing campaign to inform veterans about opportunities at USDA; and building a mechanism to provide timely employment information and resources to veterans.

Because USDA's percentage of veteran new hires is below 10%, the Department is in-

creasing its total new hires of veterans by 5-6 percentage points and increasing the number of disabled veterans by 2 - 3 percentage points. Dissinger says the Department is beginning to see the numbers go up. "In the past year, USDA has seen a 1.2 percent increase in the number of veterans hired and a 0.8 percent increase in the number of disabled veterans hired. That's an improvement, and with the new Veteran's Employment Program underway, we're committed to moving those figures much higher."

Dissinger says future plans include taking advantage of Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs training programs targeting recruitment

efforts to fill high-demand and high-turnover jobs with veterans, increasing use of non-competitive hiring authorities for veterans and disabled veterans, and developing an effective marketing strategy showing USDA to be the employer of choice for veterans, transitioning service members and their families.



USDA Answers President's Call to Work Collaboratively With Federal Employee Labor Organizations

Presidential Initiative on Collaborative Labor-Management Relations

One way to deliver the highest quality service to the American people is by getting ideas for improvements from the people who know the work best, federal employees. That's why the President, through Executive Order 13522, directed departments and agencies to create labor-management forums to collaborate outside the bargaining process with federal employee unions. USDA's Headquarter Forum includes senior managers and representatives



of the national USDA employee unions. The HQ forum ensures that labor-management forums in agencies are established and are conducted in ways that allow employees to participate in making USDA function better. At the national level, unions are

providing input by participating on workgroups looking into the onboarding process to improve employees' transitions, enterprise social networking tools for greater collaboration, and a website to update employees on the Cultural Transformation Initiative. Labor-

Management collaboration was also conducted on improving employee awards and recognition, transportation expenses for new appointees and pre-employment interviews, telework, referral bonuses, hiring veterans, and mentoring.

The HQ forum has developed metrics to measure the work forums to improve employee morale, mission accomplishment, and labor relations. Forums will only be able to achieve these improvements through the constructive engagement of unions and all USDA employees and management.

USDA TOPS ALL FEDERAL AGENCIES IN THE "FEDS FEED FAMILIES" CAMPAIGN

This summer, USDA came out way ahead in the "Feds Feed Families" Campaign. The Department led the 2010 government-wide campaign by collecting more than 432,000 pounds of non-perishable goods, dwarfing Veterans Affairs at 225,000 and the Department of Homeland Security at 219,000 pounds.

USDA Assistant Secretary for Administration Pearlie Reed says he is proud of the Department's commitment to the program. "At USDA, our employees donated about 200,000 pounds more than the second most generous federal department. That is a tremendous effort and a testament to the compassion of our employees."

Food banks across the country are facing severe shortages of non-perishable items, just as summer leaves more children without school nutrition programs. Federal employees nationwide stepped up to meet this challenge by gathering nearly 1.7 million pounds of food for families in need this summer.

USDA employees across the country, through the Federal Executive Board structure, established individual agency campaigns and competed among themselves to increase contributions this summer.

With a greater awareness of the program in the Field, USDA anticipates an even greater level of employee involvement next year. This annual campaign has brought a greater awareness to USDA employees of the needs of some American families during these tough economic times. It's hoped that the goodwill exhibited by our employees will spill over into the Combined Federal Campaign.

*USDA collected more than
432,000 pounds of non-
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dwarfing the VA's 225,000
pounds.*

