



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

USDA's Cultural Transformation Action Items

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

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MyUSDA

A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

Volume 4, Issue 5

April 2014

Secretary Vilsack Hosts Townhall Meeting

By Denise Ottaviano

Secretary Vilsack recently hosted a town hall meeting with USDA employees in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Employees in the Albuquerque area from the Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service, and Rural Development attended the event. The Secretary thanked employees for their hard work and expressed how proud he is of the USDA workforce. Information was shared about the 2014 Farm Bill, 2015 Budget Proposal, and funding for wildland fire suppression. The Secretary addressed employees' concerns and stressed the importance of improving employee morale and working more efficiently. He also discussed the importance of having mentoring and leadership programs and exploring better ways to attract diverse, underrepresented individuals to USDA and the farming industry. The Secretary encouraged employees to continue to take pride in the services they provide.



Employees Influencing Change At USDA

By Karlease Kelly

The Office of Personnel Management will launch the 2014 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) survey by email during the week of May 5th to a randomly selected group of approximately 30% of USDA's permanent full and part-time employees who were employed as of October 31, 2013. The results from the survey provide valuable insights into the perceptions of how the USDA workforce views their work environment, leadership, performance management and hiring practices, to name a few areas of importance. If you receive the survey, please respond and share your input on what is working and what needs to be improved in the workplace. Your input is very important.

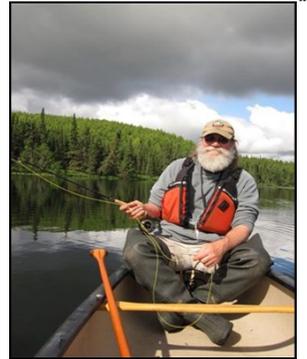
FEVS contacts include Millie West-Wiggins (OASCR), Joe Migyanka (FAS), Thevee Gray (FSA), Francine Smith (RMA), Ken Sharp (FNS), Jean Daniel (FNS), Cecilia Matthews (FSIS), Karen Comfort (AMS), Darcy Long (APHIS), Idelisse Rodriguez (GIPSA), Steven Placek (NAD), Rhonda Flores (Forest Service), Febe Ortiz (NRCS), Liz Parker (ARS), Betty Lou Gilliland (NIFA), Kimberly Whittet (NIFA), Leslie McBroom (RD), Hunter Colby (OCE), Maria Schmit (OGC), and Carol Cobb (OIG). If you do not have a contact listed for your organization please contact Mary Jo Thompson at maryjo.thompson@dm.usda.gov or Dr. Edwin Cierpial at edwin.cierpial@dm.usda.gov.

USDA “Shining Star” Supervisors

By Debra S. Arnold

Meet John Eaves with the Forest Service in Alaska. John is the guy that when you walk into his office, he smiles and greets you with a warm welcome. He asks you about your family, your life, your weekend, *and then your work*. He wants to know that his employees are feeling healthy, happy, and balanced.

When one employee struggled with the decision to start a family and the balance between work and family, John was very supportive and encouraged her to move at her own pace. He regularly chatted with the new mother and gladly offered up the option for her to combine Telework and leave to allow more time with the new baby, but also giving her the opportunity to stay on top of her workload. John’s continued reassurance allowed the employee to focus on her health, new baby and still get the job done!



The employee commented, “this is a work/life balance that I never knew was possible and I owe it the USDA Forest Service for supporting the telework policy and for John’s trust in me.” What a bright light you are, John! Congratulations!



Janice Waddell with Rural Development in California is another light that leads the way for others! Janice’s employees find her to be very supportive and understanding when it comes to work/life balance.

When Telework was first offered Janice encouraged employees to pursue the opportunity. This flexibility reduced the stress of commuting allowing for more quality family time which is priceless!

Employees consider wellness and fitness a big part of their lives. Janice continues to support the onsite Fitness Center, which she considers an asset and a necessity. The availability of the Fitness Center has made it easier for the employees to stay healthy and fit. By supporting the Fitness Center, USDA has shown its support for health and welfare. Employees feel very fortunate to have someone that really cares about helping them to maintain a healthy worklife balance. They are given the flexibility needed to get the job done and work cohesively as a ‘Team’ to make it happen. They attribute their ability to work well as healthy and happy employees to the support of their Supervisor, Janice. Congratulations, Janice, you are a star!

May is National Bike Month!

National Bike Month includes an ever-expanding diversity of events in communities nationwide — but the biggest day of the month is Bike to Work Day on May 16th. More than half of the U.S. population lives within five miles of their workplace, making bicycling a feasible and fun way to get to work. Between 2000 to 2011, the number of bicycle commuters in the U.S. grew by more than 47 percent.

Help keep USDA employees healthy, reduce the carbon footprint and save commuting dollars. Consider joining a team for Bike to Work Day or gather your own group for the event. Learn more by visiting <http://www.biketoworkmetrodc.org/>.



Recently, USDA’s Economic Research Service was awarded Bronze Level recognition as a bicycle-friendly business. The Bicycle Friendly Business Award is based on a review of bike to work amenities and policies of a business for: Engineering (showers, lockers, safe bike storage); Education (safe biking classes, bike-to-work mentors); Encouragement (incentives, management support); and, Evaluation (tools to assess and improve active commuting among employees.) ERS is the third Federal Agency in the Capital Region to be awarded this level of recognition. The ERS efforts support Executive Order 13154 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote healthier Federal employees.

Stay tuned for information about free activities and events in recognition of June as National Employee Wellness Month!

USDA Hosts Asian American Leadership Development Program

By Dr. Vivian Chen

As Secretary Vilsack recently stated, “We’re going to continue with Cultural Transformation. It’s not only the right thing to do; it’s the smart thing to do.” As evidence of that, twenty high-ranking federal employees throughout government graduated from the Asian American Government Executive Network (AAGEN) affinity group’s Senior Executive Service Development Program at a ceremony held at the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) on April 7. Brian Ronholm, Acting Undersecretary for Food Safety and co-chair of USDA’s White House Initiative on Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders, welcomed over 100 distinguished guests attending the event. Katherine Archuleta, Director of the Office of Personnel Management, gave the keynote address. Other distinguished speakers included Daphne Kwok, chair of the President’s Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Veronica Villalobos, OPM Director of Diversity and Inclusion, and Christine Harley of the [White House Initiative on Asian American and Pacific Islanders](#).



The year-long program is designed to boost their chances of obtaining SES positions. The participants enhanced their leadership and managerial skills through in-class training, mentorship and experiential learning activities. Three of the graduates, including Dr. Luis Tupas from USDA, have already succeeded in obtaining SES positions.

AAGEN also launched the third cohort of the SES Development Program. Two USDA colleagues, Dr. Ashok Alva and Dr. LinShu Liu, are among the 22 new participants, representing 21 federal agencies and the private sector. For more information, visit www.aagen.org.

Passion for Conservation and Accommodations for the Deaf Attracts Farmer to the Forest Service

By Carmen D. Young

Deaf since age 2, young Joanel Lopez would venture off while visiting family in Haiti, exploring mountains and enjoying the peace that comes with connecting to nature. Interested in conservation, he graduated from Binghamton with an environmental studies degree, specializing in ecosystems. Joanel recently became a Forest Technician with the Forest Service. “My duty is to designate harvest timber. I [determine] and record tree measurements, assess quality, and determine defect.”

Last year he participated in BC3—Bridging Cultures Conservation Corps—launched by Montana Conservation Corps, a partner in Region 1 of the Forest Service and 21st Century Conservation Service Corps member organization. BC3 provides college students and recent college grads hands-on, focused field experiences, cultural understanding, and related training to foster interest and successfully pursue natural and cultural resource careers with the Forest Service and other federal agencies. As the first deaf recruit in the program, Joanel was impressed by the Forest Service and BC3. During the season, staff focused efforts to get qualified interpreters out in the field with Joanel’s crew. The Forest Service was contacted for information about providing reasonable accommodation.

“[The BC3 orientation] entails deaf education,” he says. “Crew leaders and members made their efforts to learn ASL [American Sign Language] and communicate with me. In addition, the program is great for people from diverse backgrounds and cultures to face dealing with different perspectives. It’s also good for the Forest Service to understand what it can do best to serve diverse people while it’s caring for the land.” Now as a Forest Service federal employee Joanel has options like Video Relay Interpreting (VRI) and Video Relay Service for video conferencing. In the field, he texts to “clock in” and can use text through satellite when there’s no cell service. He also teaches ASL to his co-workers.



RMA Works Together to Improve FEVS Results

By DeNira Dedeaux

The Risk Management Agency (RMA) recently conducted feedback sessions to gather information to improve RMA's Best Places to Work ranking in the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). Employees offered management 630 ideas about solutions for improvement. In Kansas City, the Cultural Transformation Task Force is sorting those ideas by categorizing the comments as either Work Life Balance, HR and Succession Planning, Training, or Process Improvement. Teams are assigned to research the benefits and limitations of each idea. Once the survey has been placed in categories, the Cultural Transformation Task Force will engage with Management to determine the best strategies for implementing ideas.

RMA is Committed to Cultural Transformation!

- RMA Cut Hiring Time from 159 days to under 80 days
- Work Life and Wellness EAP series launched September 2013
- Mentoring Program launched February 2014
- Onboarding Program launched March 2014
- Employee Recognition Program in the works to be launched in 2014

RMA employees and managers are actively engaged with one another to improve the overall work environment, transforming RMA into a Premier Agency!

Successful Cultural Transformation Includes:

1. Improving USDA's past and future record on Civil Rights, including expanded outreach efforts to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers;
2. Implementing systems of accountability that encourage all employees to achieve high standards of performance and customer service;
3. Committing to create diversity in the workforce and succession planning;
4. Striving to make USDA a premier organization and model employer;
5. Being open, responsive, collaborative, transparent, and highly effective in implementing our many missions; and,
6. Respecting the diversity of our workforce and constituencies so that our workforce will be engaged and motivated, empowered to succeed, and trained to meet future challenges.



For more information visit: <http://www.dm.usda.gov/ct.htm>.

UPCOMING USDA SPECIAL OBSERVANCES

- **Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month**
Thursday, May 22, 2014
- **Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) Pride Month**
Thursday, June 5, 2014

Observances begin at 10:00 (EDT) at the Jefferson Auditorium, Washington, DC
Employees receive one hour of diversity training for attending USDA Special Observances.

Learn How to Apply to the Senior Executive Service

The USDA Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SES CDP) is a competitive, Office of Personnel Management (OPM) approved training program designed to develop a diverse group of candidates exhibiting outstanding executive potential for leadership roles. This program is also an effective succession management tool to identify and prepare aspiring executive leaders. The USDA Virtual University (VU) is holding training for GS-14 and 15s interested in applying for an SES CDP or for SES positions. This is a great opportunity to learn from an OPM Qualifications Review Board (QRB) member, representatives from USDA's Executive Resources Division, and the VU team about preparing your application for an SES position or an SES CDP.

- **TRAINING DATE:** May 20, 2014,
- **TRAINING TIME:** 1:00 pm-3:30 pm
- **TRAINING PLACE:** Jefferson Auditorium, 1400 Independence Ave, Washington D.C
- **TARGET AUDIENCE:** GS-14s and 15s interested in applying for executive positions

Attendees will learn about:

- SES overview and qualifications.
- OPM QRB certification process.
- Do's and Don'ts when writing ECQs.
- Executive Core Competencies – how to write them.
- Using the OPM Challenge, Context, Action and Results (C-C-A-R) model when writing your ECQs.

Registration is first-come first-served. The number of webinar attendees is limited and must be reserved for those not local to the Washington, DC metro area. Registration closes on May 16, 2014, 5:00 pm EST. Contact Wanda Bryant, SES CDP Manager at wanda.bryant@dm.usda.gov to register or if you have questions regarding this event.

USDA General Counsel Engaging and Encouraging Employees

By Maria Schmit

USDA General Counsel Ramona Romero and Deputy General Counsel Inga Bumbary-Langston have been on a listening tour, visiting with Office of General Counsel (OGC) employees in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Atlanta, Georgia, and Washington, DC. During the sessions, the General Counsel leadership answered questions and listened to employees' comments and suggestions on how to increase information sharing and identify additional resources.



Pictured (left) the Harrisburg, PA OGC Office: Back row from left is Troy Mouer and Aaron Fredrickson. Front row from left is Julie Quirk, Ginny Henning, General Counsel Ramona Romero, PA State Conservationist Denise Coleman, and PA State Executive Director Billy Wehry. (PA State Director Tom Williams not pictured).

Pictured (right) Atlanta OGC Regional Office: From left to right— 1st row: Deborah Lloyd, Dorian Henriquez-Simons, General Counsel Ramona Romero, Avel Rivera, Maria Roman, Deputy General Counsel Ileana Brugueras, Steve Youngpeter, Andrea Foster. 2nd row: Wanda Crumbley, Renee Tyler, Judy Abraham, Mark Simpson, Jay McWhirter, Steve Bott, Matt Tilden, Mark Stevens, and Jaru Ruley.



Unique Team In Place at the National Centers for Animal Health

By **Todd Edeker**

Did you know the National Centers for Animal Health (NCAH) Calibration Laboratory is staffed entirely by U.S. military veterans? NCAH embraces USDA's efforts to help U.S. military veterans identify job opportunities. We have successfully used USDA and other federal programs to fill critical calibration positions with motivated and qualified veterans, continuing a historic 378-year tradition of taking care of our own.



USDA employee Ryan Brennan (National Centers for Animal Health Calibration Laboratory), is currently deployed to Kuwait on active duty.

Our military veteran assistance programs go back to 1636, when the pilgrims of Plymouth Colony passed a law for the colony to support disabled soldiers. The Continental Congress of 1776 provided pensions for soldiers who were disabled. Congress authorized [establishment of the Veterans Administration](#) in 1930.

The needs of today's military veterans have changed since the days of the pilgrims. The wounds they now carry are often complex and hard to understand. To all of the veterans working with us today, from those who served in Vietnam to those who

served through the Cold

War, we salute you. Today's veterans have skills the USDA needs. The Department offers veterans opportunities to serve and protect our country again, by utilizing their skills to contribute to the USDA mission to protect and promote U.S. agriculture. The NCAH Calibration Staff are proud to continue our service to our country by providing metrology services to USDA staff who endeavor to protect animal health.



NCAH employees (L-R): Ed Burley, Gary Garland, John Olson, Todd Edeker, and Susan Dykshoorn.

Learn More About Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

The Privacy Act, enacted in 1974, provides safeguards against the invasion of personal privacy by establishing procedural and substantive rights that control Personally Identifiable Information (PII) collected, maintained, used and disseminated by agencies in the executive branch of the Federal Government. As such, it is important that all USDA employees, contractors, stakeholder and affiliates are able to recognize PII and are equipped with the knowledge to protect it.

The Office of the Chief Information Office, Privacy Office in collaboration with several agency Privacy Officers developed a training [course](#) available to all employees that explains the responsibilities for safeguarding PII, examining the authorized and unauthorized use and disclosure of PII, as well as the penalties for not complying with guidance, policies, regulations and laws governing PII. The course also details recent changes in authority impacting PII. To learn more about PII, click on the link above that will take you to the course.



Join the USDA

Veteran Employees Organization (VEO)

The Veterans Employee Organization (VEO) is open to all USDA veterans and supporters of veterans. For more information or to sign up for our list-serv, send an email to worklife@dm.usda.gov or VACFeedback@dm.usda.gov.

You can contact MyUSDA by emailing MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov, and be sure to visit the [USDA Cultural Transformation Website](#).

If you'd like to share your feedback about Cultural Transformation, telework, diversity, or any other aspect of work/life at USDA, send an email to: MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov or visit USDA's [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community website if you have access to [USDA Connections](#).



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If you have ideas for future articles, contact us at MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov.

Submit Your Article to MyUSDA

The deadline for May submissions is Monday, May 12, 2014.

Guidance on Submissions to MyUSDA

Submissions to MyUSDA should indicate progress that you, your agency, or your mission area have achieved toward implementing some aspect of the Secretary's Cultural Transformation (CT) Initiative. Submissions may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline (with accompanying photos strongly preferred), a first-person account (describing a personal work-related experience relating to CT progress), or a "brief" (just a few sentences describing a successful Cultural Transformation event, group, initiative, or activity...or some other relevant worklife issue with an accompanying photo. Send photos as separate attachments and make sure they are high quality. **The ideal submission is a great picture with about 75-150 words to go along with it. Maximum length of articles is 250 words.**

Email submissions or further inquiries to MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov.