



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 6, Issue 7

April 2016

### USDA Moves Up In Forbes Ranking

**By Dr. Karlease Kelly, Provost, USDA Virtual University**

Forbes magazine has ranked USDA #142 in its list of the top 500 midsized places to work in the country. Last year we were ranked #216. USDA is the largest federal agency listed in the rankings. We know we have a great place to work, and it's good to know that others are recognizing that too. The Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey launches the week of April 25<sup>th</sup>. If you are one of the employees randomly selected to receive the survey, please take the time to complete it and help us drive our effort to improve.

### Internships Building a More Diverse Workforce

**By Edward Stoker (Mendieta), Agricultural Marketing Service**

Hispanic employees from across the Department gathered last month to discuss the importance of internships in building a USDA workforce that is increasingly capable of serving our diverse stakeholders. Jorge Muñiz Ortiz, a toxicologist with the U.S. Public Health Service assigned to the Food Safety and Inspection Service, organized the group of about 20 employees.

Approximately one third of the group are or were interns, but it was far from a group of rookies, collectively having 100 years of experience with USDA alone. They are successfully executing a dozen varied professional positions within six different USDA agencies. The bilingual group possesses knowledge, skills, and abilities which USDA can tap to implement and administer programs that reach and serve diverse communities within the U.S. and across Latin America.

In addition to thanking Jorge, we thank USDA leadership for recognizing the value and importance of a diverse internship program. On behalf of the many talented current and previous interns serving our diverse nation through the People's Department, gracias!



Pictured: Jorge Muñiz Ortiz, a toxicologist with the U.S. Public Health Service assigned to the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (front row, second from left), along with other Latino employees from across USDA, including Sonia Jimenez, Deputy Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service (back row, fourth from right).

# Teaching Cherokee Youth About Plants

By Julia Kirschman, U.S. Forest Service

The U.S. Forest Service Southern Research Station (SRS) and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) have partnered to develop learning modules for children attending EBCI's Snowbird Youth Center in Robbinsville, North Carolina, part of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cherokee.

The plant module is the first learning module developed. It's a fun and interactive series of activities for educators to use with children grades K-12 that focuses on 14 plants that are culturally significant to the tribe, such as white oak, flowering dogwood, ramps, sochan, and others. SRS and Bent Creek Experimental Forest staff developed the module with input from many experts, including the Snowbird Youth Center personnel.

Activities in the module include an audio game that teaches the Cherokee, scientific, and common names of the 14 plants. Supplementary materials provide information about traditional uses of each plant, as well as its ecological significance, ways to identify it, sustainability issues, and correct harvesting methods. The module also includes sets of small cards that children and youth can use outside to identify the plants, as well as information on creating a native plant garden. The tribe will also invite tribal elders and SRS scientists to help teach the modules to youth. After the modules have been used at the Snowbird Youth Center for six months, they will be re-evaluated and refined as needed.

Additional modules on climate change and water are also in the developmental stages. All the modules integrate traditional ecological knowledge from the tribe and scientific knowledge from SRS researchers. The goal of this partnership is to incorporate current science-based knowledge of the ecosystems where Cherokee youth live and to complement the traditional knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation. SRS also seeks to nurture interest in ecology, botany, climate change, and other natural resource issues.

It is mutually beneficial for EBCI and SRS to develop youth who will become wise stewards of the Earth, and the partnership is an excellent example of EBCI and SRS working together to educate youth. Ultimately, the young people who participate in the program will develop a heightened awareness of the natural world around them – including the challenges they face in protecting cultural and natural resources.

Plant cards and other materials developed for plant module for EBCI Snowbird Youth Center. *Photo by Julia Kirschman.*



Jerry Wolfe, Elder with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, provided knowledge about the Cherokee language in relation to culturally significant plants for the plant module recently developed for the Snowbird Youth Center.  
*Photo by Sarah Farmer, U.S. Forest Service*



## Upcoming Observance at USDA

### Asian American/Pacific Islander History Month

**Tuesday May 17, 2016**

**10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at the Jefferson Auditorium in Washington, DC**

**View recordings from many of USDA's Special Observances at**

<http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/observances.htm>.

***Employees receive one hour of diversity training for each USDA Special Observance attended.***

# USDA Celebrates Women’s History Month

By Denise Freeman and Jacqueline Padrón, Office of Human Resources Management

USDA employees gathered to observe Women’s History Month on March 10, 2016, in the Jefferson Auditorium, Washington, DC. This year’s theme was **“Working to Form a More Perfect Union: Honoring Women in Public Service and Government.”** The capacity-filled auditorium was inspired as USDA honored past and current women in public service.

The program featured women making history. Dr. Catherine Woteki, Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics, provided opening remarks and an inspirational roadmap for women in the Science, Technology, Engineering, Agriculture, and Math (STEAM) fields. Marsha Wiggins, Deputy Director, Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), served as the master of ceremonies. Keynote speaker Beth Cobert, Acting Director of the Office of Personnel Management, shared her journey climbing the ladder of success in both the private and public sectors. Among her comments, Ms. Cobert talked about the importance of mentorship and networks. She mentioned how OHRM Director, Roberta Jeanquart’s journey to the SES rang true to her. “If it weren’t for the encouragement of mentors, I probably wouldn’t have been as successful,” Ms. Cobert said.

The Women’s History Month Observance was noted a success by the participants. To watch the observance video, and for instructions on how to self-record the observance’s Diversity and Inclusion Training in Aglearn, visit On Demand Web link: [www.dm.usda.gov/employ/observances.htm](http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/observances.htm).



Pictured left (from L-R): Jacqueline Padron, Dr. Catherine Woteki, Marsha Wiggins, Roberta Jeanquart, Mary Locke, Donna Carter, Denise Freeman, and Dr. Gregory Parham.

(Below):  
Beth F. Cobert, Acting Director, Office of Personnel Management, Keynote Speaker.



## “Wellness”—Not Just a Word of the Day

By Debra Arnold, Office of Human Resources Management

Yes, it's hot outside now, but it's time to find out how well you did in this year's USDA Winter Olympics! USDA is committed to finding creative, interactive opportunities for employees to 'get fit and stay fit.' The USDA Winter Olympics has proven to be one of the most engaging ways to offer such an opportunity across the globe. This year's event had 1,258 competitors with representation from all Agencies, states and territories as well as South Africa and Belgium. Our competitors logged a total of 2,584,833 minutes of activity during the course of the event. Congratulations to all our Olympic competitors!

You can find the full list of results posted on our [Work/Life and Wellness](#) USDA Connect site.

“Thank you. It was a great event. While I have been working out for years, it got me working with a personal trainer, adding weights to my routine, and overall helping me to up my game.”

-Beth Pendleton, Forest Service, Alaska

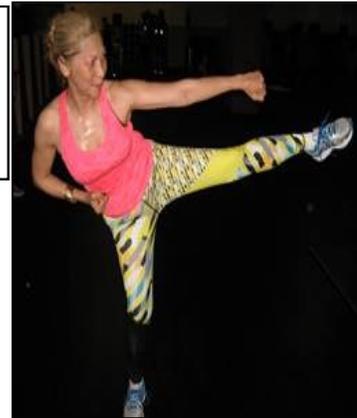
“I am glad I participated in the USDA Winter Olympics Challenge. I gained great personal satisfaction and became an even better employee at work. Having become a gold medalist for the APHIS program is icing on the cake. I will continue with my activities even when the challenge is over.”

Stephanie Dinh, APHIS, California

“I did want to thank you and your staff for coming up with the creation of the USDA Winter Olympics, for managing with the large number of participants' concerns and of course their data. As a new employee to the agency and new to the working world, it was fantastic opportunity to compete with employees across the number of agencies within the USDA umbrella, across the entire country, and exercise your mind and body during the winter months.”

Laurie Clark, NRCS, Colorado

APHIS employee Stephanie Dinh (right) of California is hard at work on one of her many workout routines. Stephanie is the 2016 Gold Lion Medalist.



NRCS-Colorado employee Julie Elliott (left) rides her bike to work.

Julie is the 2016 Gold Fox Medalist.



USDA's Winter Olympics is a family affair for FSA employee John Bird and his family (left) in Oklahoma.

John is the 2016 Bronze Fox Medalist.

### Your USDA 2016 Winter Olympic Medalists

Gold Lion-Stephanie Dinh, APHIS, CA; Silver Lion-John Swan, RMA, MN; Bronze Lion-Brittany Waller, FSA, SC

Gold Fox-Julie Elliott, NRCS, CO; Silver Fox-Brooklyn Kelley, APHIS, OK; Bronze Fox-John Bird, FSA, OK

Gold Turtle-Danielle Simross, FSA, OH; Silver Turtle-Laurie Clark, NRCS, CO; Bronze Turtle-Patsy Bohl, FSA, KS

## USDA Running and Walking Club's MLK Shoe Drive

By Dawanna James-Holly, National Institute of Food and Agriculture and  
Michael Dukes, National Agricultural Statistics Service

The 2016 MLK Day Shoe Drive Kick-Off began this month with a running start. The USDA Running and Walking Club (RWC) is sponsoring a used athletic shoe drive from April through the end of May in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King and the [National Day of Service](#). The kick-off activities began with 17 points of contact around the country. This year's goal is to collect at least 600 pairs of adult running and soccer shoes in sizes 6-12. Donated used shoes will go to the [MORE Foundation Group](#), to provide training, plant fruit trees, and deliver tools to farmers in Africa. The worn-out/broken athletic shoes go to [The Nike Reuse Shoes Program](#), which recycles them and



transforms them into material used in athletic and playground surfaces and other products.

The donated shoes are used to help create jobs that promote free enterprise and help improve the quality of life for many. The impact of this effort helps to regenerate forests and farmlands in West Africa and Central America by providing essential equipment, tools and reforestation training to poor farming families and rural villages.



Shoe donations help African families learn more about composting, germination, sustainable agriculture, and other practices (above). Children planting a tree as part of the program (below). *Photos from the [MORE Foundation Group](#).*

Any additional questions, contact RWC MLK Shoe Drive Co-Leads. For HQ: Michael Dukes (NASS)

[Michael.Dukes@nass.usda.gov](mailto:Michael.Dukes@nass.usda.gov)

For Field Offices: Dawanna James-Holly (NIFA)

[dholly@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:dholly@nifa.usda.gov)

For more drop off locations visit our [USDA Connect Page](#).

To join the club, contact RWC Secretary Tatjana Fernandez (DM) [Tatjana.Fernandez@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Tatjana.Fernandez@dm.usda.gov). **Membership is free!** USDA employees founded the RWC to connect colleagues across all USDA agencies – The RWC is an USDA Welfare and Recreation Organization and the mission is to promote, practice, and enjoy the benefits of running and walking for health, recreation, and competition to all members of the USDA family.

## USFS Regional Partnership Delivers Women's Day of Training Program

By Diane Gardin, U.S. Forest Service

The U. S. Forest Service (USFS) Southern Research Station and the Eastern Region presented a Women's Day of Training Program on Tuesday, March 22, 2016. The training resulted from a partnership between USFS, the Northern Research Station, Northeastern Area State & Private Forestry, and Forest Products Laboratory.

The National Women's History Month theme for 2016 honors women who have shaped America's history and its future through public service and government leadership.

## APHIS Celebrates Women's History Month

By Dr. Debra Sime, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

USDA and Federally Employed Women (FEW) are committed to engage and sustain a partnership to coordinate and facilitate activities that are responsive to the needs of USDA's mission and its employees, including professional development and training opportunities. On March 18, 2016, USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) collaborated with the Minnesota Federal Executive Board, Customs and Border Protection



and the local chapter of FEW to recognize Women's History Month with presentations and training at the Mille Lacs Training Room, MRPBS Butler Square Building in Minneapolis, MN. The special observance keynote speaker, Ms. Sue Webster, presented on the 2016 Women's History Month theme "*Working to Form a More Perfect Union – Honoring Women in Public Service and Government*". The training day continued with presentations from Prudential - "*Women Rock! Their Finances*", GovLoop - "*What GovLoop Can Do for You*" and the Office of Personnel Management - "*USAJobs*."

Sue Webster, the immediate past president of Federally Employed Women, presenting on Women's History Month. ([www.FEW.org](http://www.FEW.org))

## Civil Rights History Examined in *Rosenwald*

By Lisa M. Mason, Office of Human Resources Management

USDA employees screened the film *Rosenwald* last month as part of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights' (OASCR) Film Festival and Forum. The film reveals the incredible story of how Jewish businessman and philanthropist Julius Rosenwald joined with educator Booker T. Washington and African American communities in the South to build schools, libraries, and teacher housing for African Americans during the early part of the 20th century. This historical partnership, along with the modern-day attempts to maintain or reconfigure the schools, is a dramatic story; at once little-known but important in the American mosaic of civil and human rights.

*Rosenwald's* greatest accomplishment was perhaps the establishment of challenge grants, which seeded the creation of more than 5,500 schools for poor, rural African American children in southern states at a time when few received any public education. From 1915 to 1932, rural southern African American students benefited from an initiative that truly speaks to the "American Dream." The story of the partnership between Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington is perhaps one of the most compelling of our time.

The Rosenwald Fund provided fellowships for gifted African Americans and a few white Southerners in order to give them one to three years to concentrate on their work and develop their abilities. Recipients include Ralph Ellison, E. Franklin Frazier, Zora Neal Hurston, Langston Hughes, John Hope Franklin, W.E.B. DuBois, and Marion Anderson.

Ashlee Davis, USDA White House Liaison, served as moderator. Other participants in the program included Jeff Knishkowsky, OASCR Special Counsel, and Dr. Gladys Gary Vaughn, Chief of OASCR's Training and Cultural Transformation Division. Aviva Kempner, *Rosenwald's* producer and director, conveyed the documentary's intent and interacted with the audience during the forum to discuss the screening.

*Rosenwald* director and producer Aviva Kempner (center) with OASCR's Charles Smith (left) and Dr. Gladys Vaughn (right).



## Forest Service and German Scientist Partner for Research

By Teresa Jackson, U.S. Forest Service

The U.S. Forest Service is hosting a visiting scientist from Germany researching the diversity of insects in dead wood and the roles these organisms play in wood decomposition and nutrient cycling.

The Insects, Diseases, and Invasive Plants research work unit of the USFS Southern Research Station (SRS) located in Athens, GA is working with Dr. Sebastian Seibold as part of the Forest Service's International Visitor Program (IVP). Dr. Seibold is currently travelling abroad on a fellowship through the German Academic Exchange Service.

Dr. Seibold shares an overlapping interest in environmental science and forest ecology with SRS Research Entomologist Michael Ulyshen, so they began collaborating through email in 2014. The two have now met and are able to work side by side.

Since arriving in mid-February, Seibold, Ulyshen and Research Entomologist Scott Horn have travelled to Mississippi to collect the final data from a study Ulyshen initiated four years ago. The study was designed to determine what impacts, if any, woody debris and termites have on the growth of loblolly pine seedlings in plantation forests.

Earlier this month, they travelled to the Savannah River Site in South Carolina to initiate a 10-year long-term decomposition study to determine how different groups of insects affect wood decomposition.

Seibold will be visiting the Southern Research Station until the end of April. His last month will be spent conducting additional field work, working on papers and preparing materials for a symposium he and Ulyshen are working on for the upcoming International Congress of Entomology. After his time in Athens, Seibold will move on to the University of Toronto to complete his fellowship.

Dr. Seibold says he is grateful to the Forest Service's IVP and the German Academic Exchange Service fellowship for paving the way for his first visit to the southeastern United States.



German scientist Dr. Sebastian Seibold stands in front of a plot installed in South Carolina as part of his global decomposition experiment. The plot is one of dozens around the world that Dr. Seibold has with international scientists. His next stop is the University of Toronto. Dr. Seibold is traveling around the world to collect the data.

## USDA-NRCS Outreach at Hmong College Career Day

By Julie MacSwain, Natural Resources Conservation Service

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees conducted outreach to students at a Hmong College Career Day in St. Paul, MN, earlier this month. On Friday, April 1, 2016, NRCS Biologist Tou Pha and Major Land Resource Area Region 10 Director Michael Whited, participated in the event held to introduce participants to a potential career in agriculture and conservation. The Twin cities has one of the largest populations of Hmong people in the country. Most Hmong families immigrated to the U.S. shortly after the Vietnam War.

Over 30 organizations, including NRCS, participated in this event. A total of 500 students (6-12<sup>th</sup> graders) attended. The majority of the students were of Asian Pacific Islander background.

An estimated 200 students stopped by the USDA-NRCS booth to learn about careers, Pathway's Program, and soil health. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> year that NRCS has participated in this important outreach event. For more information please reach out to Tou Pha at 651-602-7869.

## Presidential Management Council Interns on the Move

By Edwin Cierpial, USDA Virtual University, Office of Human Resources Management

Beginning April 5, USDA began hosting four employees from the Department of Education, Veterans Administration, Small Business Administration, and Office of Personnel Management through the President's Management Council Interagency Rotations Program.

The detailees will serve six-month assignments, with two at the Virtual University, one in APHIS and another one in RD. USDA had four participants completing this phase of the program: Donna Lalli and Subhash Gupta from APHIS, Manada Yousefi from FNS, and Tom Hendershot from FSA. This is the first time USDA will have more than one or two individuals participating in development opportunities within the Interagency Rotations Program.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) launched the Interagency Rotations Program following the recommendations of national business leaders serving on the President's Management Council. The Council members believe that tomorrow's federal leaders would benefit from broadening their professional experience by serving in other Federal agencies. The PMC Interagency Rotations Program targets high-potential GS 13-15 employees interested in executive career paths. The program exposes participants to high-level issues in other agencies to support developing Executive Core Qualifications. (ECQs).

Recruitment for the Federal Interagency Rotations Program begins late spring 2016. The six-month details start on October 5, 2016. If you have questions or need additional information; contact Dr. Karlease Kelly at the USDA Virtual University at (202) 720-0185 or [karlease.kelly@dm.usda.gov](mailto:karlease.kelly@dm.usda.gov).



### OPEDA Accepting Scholarship Applications Through June 30

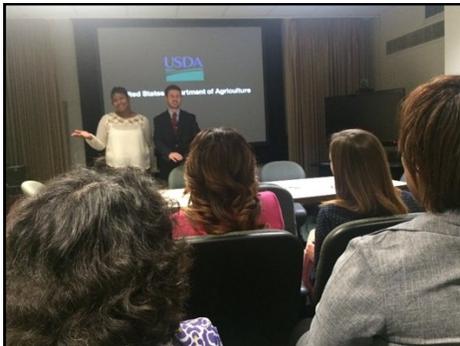
Organization of Professional Employees of the USDA (OPEDA) members in good standing and their family members (broadly defined) attending college are eligible to apply for scholarships for the 2016-2017 school year. This year, OPEDA will be awarding two scholarships of \$1,500 each. The two scholarships awarded are in honor of John W. Peterson and Steven "Tom" Stefani for their exemplary service to OPEDA, the USDA, and our country. We encourage you to visit OPEDA's website for more information about membership and scholarship opportunities. [http://opeda.org/Scholarship\\_OPEDA.html](http://opeda.org/Scholarship_OPEDA.html).

## USDA Employees Screen Security Talks Films

By Gregory S. Linden, Employee Advisory Council Leader

*"Lights, Camera, Action!"*

The Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Coordination (OHSEC) has produced a series of six *Security Talks* films aimed at increasing employee awareness of the organization. OHSEC's Employee Advisory Council (EAC) proudly hosted their premiere on March 1, 2016. Participants were welcomed by the smell of freshly popped popcorn. The OHSEC *Security Talks* videos support USDA's Cultural Transformation Initiative by promoting Customer Focus & Community Outreach, as well as Employee Development. The videos feature employees from all six of OHSEC's divisions and highlight unique initiatives taken on by OHSEC which support the USDA mission in national security.



*Security Talks* are an educational resource which provide viewers with insight on OHSEC's roles and responsibilities, and assists newly-hired OHSEC employees in understanding the organization and the programs it supports. The OHSEC EAC is dedicated to continuously improving the workplace environment, and ensuring employee's voices are heard at all levels.

Tyra Taylor (EAC Representative) left, and Greg Linden (EAC Leader) right, welcomed OHSEC employees to the Office of Communications Viewing Room and introduced the *Security Talks* Premiere.

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](mailto: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](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov)**

### Submit Your Article to MyUSDA

**The monthly deadline for submissions is the end of the first week of each month.**

### **Guidance on Submissions to MyUSDA**

Submissions to *MyUSDA* should indicate progress that you, your agency, or your mission area have achieved toward implementing the Secretary's Cultural Transformation (CT) Initiative. The ideal submission includes photos or graphics along with a brief description of the event. The ideal word count for articles is 150-200. All submissions are subject to editing and Departmental review.

Submissions may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline, a first-person account, or any work-related activity, event, or observance demonstrating the Secretary's Cultural Transformation Action Items: Leadership; Recruitment & Retention; Talent Management; Employee Development; and, Customer Focus & Community Outreach.

**Email submissions or further inquiries to [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov).**