



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 3, Issue 7

August/September 2013

### USDA Employees Are Making Their Voices Heard

Hats-off to the USDA Agencies for encouraging employee participation and a huge thank you to all employees for participating and providing your opinions on the 2013 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). Your responses are valuable and will continue to assist USDA leadership in improving your work environment.

The FEVS closed on June 14, 2013. After being opened for approximately 6 weeks, USDA's response rate was **59.4%**, which exceeded the Government wide response rate by 8.6%. USDA Mission Area and Agency response rates were excellent, with a number of Agencies exceeding 60%.

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has projected that reports will be sent to USDA beginning in September/October 2013. Reporting will be staggered so that OPM can review and validate the data contained in the reports prior to releasing them to the Department.

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. As reports are received, USDA and Mission Areas will begin the task of reviewing and analyzing the data. The analysis will assist in identifying those areas that employees feel are working well and those areas needing improvement. Using this information, USDA Agencies will modify current FEVS Action Plans and design ways in which to improve employee perceptions and the work environment based on survey results. If you have any questions about the FEVS results in your agency please contact:

- |                             |                            |
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If you do not have a contact listed for your organization, please contact Mary Jo Thompson at [maryjo.thompson@dm.usda.gov](mailto:maryjo.thompson@dm.usda.gov) or Dr. Edwin Cierpial at [Edwin.cierpial@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Edwin.cierpial@dm.usda.gov).

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

## USDA Successfully Shortens Time-to-Hire Window

**By John Decato** To quote the famous songwriter and vocalist Bob Dylan: the “Times They Are A-Changin.” For the USDA, the “Times” are in reference to Time-To-Hire (T2H). Specifically, our collective effort to achieve the goal of hiring someone into the USDA workforce, at or below the Executive Branch goal of 80 days, is changing in a dramatic way. For those that do not work directly in the Hiring Reform arena, every Executive Branch Department has been tasked with the formal goal of 80 days as the benchmark for hiring new employees. As a general rule, the 80-day clock starts once the decision to fill a position is made and stops when the new employee enters onto duty.

Historically, USDA has been unable to break through the 80-day threshold since we began tracking T2H. Our average T2H numbers have generally hovered around the 100 day mark. For FY-2011, our final T2H number was 103 days. Beginning in FY-2012, we embarked on a concerted effort to re-think our recruiting practices and began to look at how other Departments in the Executive Branch were achieving the results that had eluded us to this point. T2H became a topic of discussion at just about every level of the organization to include the Secretary. The effort that was put forth in FY-2012 has paid off in a big way. The best practices that were researched, published and put into action resulted in a final T2H average of 89 days for FY-2012. More importantly, in FY-2013 the momentum resulting from this collaborative effort has resulted in numbers that just 18 months earlier seemed insurmountable. Through the first three quarters of FY-2013, we stand at a year-to-date average of 69.9 T2H for USDA. For the past two consecutive quarters we have, for the first time in our history, reported to OPM average T2H numbers below the 80-day benchmark. For the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of FY-2013, our quarterly T2H number was 61 days. When you compare that number to our starting benchmark average of 134 days in FY-2010, it is a 54.5% overall reduction in T2H. This is a noteworthy achievement. As of this writing, there is a strong possibility that we will close out the fiscal year below the 80-day goal.

Although there is still much work to be done in many of the individual agencies, congratulations for a job well done are in order for the effort and results thus far attained in FY-2013 by those who work in the hiring area and for those who directly support the hiring reform effort. For all of you – Thank You.

## Community Outreach in Michigan

**By Kenneth Arbogast** Dan Bailey, a Forest Service employee on the Huron-Manistee National Forests in Michigan, wears many hats, and recently Dan wore his Forest Service hat when he went to participate in an annual Pow Wow hosted by his tribe, the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians (LRBOI). Dan is a forestry technician on the Manistee Ranger District and the Region 9 Special Emphasis Program Manager for Native Americans/Alaskan Natives. He is also a member of the LRBOI and the chief judge of the tribe’s court.

Dan thought that wearing his Forest Service uniform and carrying the agency’s flag in the Grand Entry Opening Ceremony might encourage other tribal members to consider the Forest Service as a possible career. Dan also manned a booth at the Pow Wow to share career information about the Forest Service.

After getting permission from his supervisor and the District Ranger, Dan approached the LRBOI tribal council with his idea. More than 5,000 people attended the Pow Wow representing 19 different tribes, eight states, Canada and South America. There were 164 dancers, 9 drum teams and 80 different singers in the drum teams. Dan described the response from other participants in the Pow Wow as very positive. “They all thought it was a perfect fit, seeing that Tribal culture is based on Nature as is the Forest Service.” Representatives of four other tribes asked for contact information so that Dan can represent the Forest Service in future Pow Wows they will host.

Dan Bailey, a forestry technician on the Huron-Manistee NFs, wears his uniform and carries the Forest Service flag at the Little River Band of Ottawa Indian’s Pow Wow in Manistee, Mich.

*Photo courtesy of Kaytlyn D. Bailey.*



## USDA Helps Students Gain Work Experience

**By Michelle Jordan-Hedgeman** The Metropolitan Washington DC Offices of USDA hosted students from the D.C. Mayor Vincent C. Gray's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) from July 1 – August 9. The SYEP is a locally funded initiative that provides District youth ages 14-21 with enriching and constructive summer work experiences through subsidized placements in the government and private sectors.

Departmental Management coordinated a centralized USDA-wide effort to provide a record number 93 DC youth ages 16-21 career exploration opportunities to work throughout USDA this summer. USDA hosted 10 students in 2010, 65 in 2011 and 76 in 2012 and introduced them to the dynamics of working in a professional and positive work environment for a period of six weeks. This was a great opportunity to get exceptional student workers at no cost during the current budget constraints (cost savings were approximately \$100,000 to the Department).

A special note of thanks to approximately 67 hosts supervisors and 34 administrative & payroll liaisons for their respective roles to assure that the students were exposed to various career fields with the Mission Areas, Agencies and Staff Offices.

In preparation for Summer 2014, Departmental Management will seek support from Mission Areas, Agencies and Staff Offices to explore SYEPs Nationwide. To offer assistance and/or to share details (i.e. city & state, website or point of contact information) for SYEPs outside of the Metropolitan Washington DC area, please contact DM Recruitment Program Manager, [Michelle Jordan-Hedgeman via recruitment@dm.usda.gov](mailto:recruitment@dm.usda.gov).

## USDA Employees Donate to Youth Professionalism Clothing Drive

Metro DC area USDA employees answered the call by dropping off donations for the second annual Suiting Youth Empowering Professionalism Clothing Drive in support of the DC 2013 Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). The donated items included men's and women's new or slightly worn yet dry-cleaned spring and summer work attire, shoes, accessory and accent items.

The soliciting of clothing aided the DC youth by helping them make the most effective presentations and positive first impressions during job interviews and support them while working in our various work settings. Donations are still being accepted (in person) for the SYEP Clothes Closet located at 4058 Minnesota Ave., NE; Washington, DC 20019 (Orange Line - Minnesota Avenue Metro Station) during core business hours weekdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (excluding holidays)



Left to right – Roseal Fowlkes (DRWD), Freeman Thennie (SYEP Manager), Wendy Carrasco (DRWD), April Kim (DRWD Volunteer Intern), Robert Terrell (OO), Barbara Evans (OO), Marian Romero (OO), Michelle Jordan-Hedgeman (DRWD), Ashley Williams (SYEP Clothes Drive POC) and Jennifer Kim (DRWD Volunteer Intern).

A special note of thanks to the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), Diversity, Recruitment, and Work/Life Division (DRWD), and the Office of Operations (OO) for the coordination of this successful event. A more streamlined campaign will occur with detailed notices, volunteer captains and recognizable collection boxes in support of a centralized USDA effort throughout all Metro DC USDA offices for the Summer 2014 collection period.

Roseal Fowlkes, left, takes all of the USDA donated items collected in his truck to the SYEP Clothes Closet.



## USDA Stars Shine Bright!

By Debra Arnold

Star supervisors shine bright at USDA! Robin Rose, Recreation Program Manager at Gifford Pinchot National Forest in Washington state is a staunch supporter and champion of workplace flexibilities and employee wellness.

As one employee states, "She has been very supportive of Telework, a flexible work schedule, and overall creating a family friendly workplace. This has helped me in everything from breastfeeding in the early days to dealing with daycare and doctor's appointments as time moves along".

During a recent wellness challenge, Robin led her team with enthusiasm and positive peer pressure. She even developed the weekly "Ms. Couch Potato No More" award (complete with matching Ms. Potato Head toy statue) to pass along to the highest scoring person each week. Her spunk and excitement was contagious and supported active engagement with the wellness challenge.



Robin's commitment to work/life balance has truly helped bridge the gap between parenthood and work. She has led her team to energize both realms without neglecting either. Her constant support has led to a happy and more productive workforce. You go girl!

Meet Dexter Thomas, another bright star at USDA. Mr. Thomas firmly believes that it is the end work product that counts and not where the work is performed. Whether his employees are in the traditional office, alternative work site, or working from home, Mr. Thomas supports his employees and provides them with the direction, tools and support to get the job done. He has no reservations approving regular Telework agreements for his employees, or additional Telework days as the need arises.

Mr. Thomas supports employee work/life balance and uses Telework as a strategic tool to get the job done while helping employees balance their home life and work life. On multiple occasions, Mr. Thomas' support was found invaluable by employees who teleworked for medical reasons, added time with family members during child birth, or on those occasions when added Telework days were beneficial for work/life balance.

By supporting a quality work/life balance for the employees, Mr. Thomas has gained their respect and appreciation, which is evident in their work ethic and the quality of work they display. Kudos to you Dexter!!!



## USDA Celebrates World Breast-Feeding Week

USDA once again proudly supported World Breastfeeding Week during the first week of August. This year's theme was "Breastfeeding Support: Close To Mothers." USDA recognizes that support for Nursing Mothers is a key priority in the USDA workplace.

To support new and expectant mothers who wish to continue lactation, after they return to the workplace, USDA established an online community for Nursing Mothers on the [Work/Life and Wellness community website](#) and developed a Nursing Mothers Support Handbook to provide clear guidance for both nursing mothers and managers.

Employees can visit the online community to find resources, share experiences, and post testimonials. You can also find relevant USDA resources and bulletin boards to promote breastfeeding at the WIC Works Resource System under [Education and Training Materials Database](#).

Stay connected with the USDA Nursing Mothers community by visiting the [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community page on USDA Connect or by sending an email to [worklife@dm.usda.gov](mailto:worklife@dm.usda.gov).

## Telework Mythbusters! Free Webinar Now Available

If you missed the latest Telework webinar - "Busting Federal Government Telework Myths: A Management Perspective", you still have a chance. Supervisors from USDA, NIH and the US Air Force shared their best practices and resource for success. The archived webinar and frequently asked questions is available at [The Center For Organizational Excellence Web Site](#).

Scroll to the section entitled, "Human Capital Strategy and Management Workforce Planning." You will find links to the recorded webinar, the slides, and the complete responses by the panelists to the questions. The questions asked during the webinar have been sent to our panelists to answer and will be available at this same location soon. For more information send emails to [telework@dm.usda.gov](mailto:telework@dm.usda.gov) or visit the [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community of USDA Connect!

### Coming Up: National Work and Family Month 10 Year Anniversary



Stay connected with the [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community of USDA Connect for exciting updates on a month-long series of free webinars and events as USDA celebrates National Work and Family Month in October!

Details to follow in the next edition of MyUSDA.

Interested in learning more? Send an email to: [worklife@dm.usda.gov](mailto:worklife@dm.usda.gov).

And don't forget, you can contact MyUSDA by emailing [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov), and be sure to visit the [USDA Cultural Transformation Website](#).

## South Dakota Statewide Native Homeowner Coalition on the Horizon

By Christine Sorensen

South Dakota USDA Rural Development, Governor's Office of Economic Development, South Dakota Housing Development Authority (SDHDA), and the Great Plains Native Asset Building Coalition convened a vital meeting of stakeholders to gain input on the creation of a statewide coalition to support and promote homeownership in South Dakota Native communities.

Six of the nine Indian reservations in South Dakota, including representatives of six Indian housing authorities participated in the session, as well as Nathan Sanderson of the Governor's Office of Economic Development. In addition to USDA Rural Development, federal stakeholders included the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Veterans Affairs, and Indian Health Services.

"This meeting was a historic first step towards collectively working towards increased homeownership opportunities in Indian country," stated USDA Rural Development State Director, Elsie Meeks. "A coalition could support the partners on the ground, housing authorities, state, federal and tribal governments; all working towards not only homeownership but wealth building within Tribal communities." With the full support of key stakeholders across the state, a homeownership coalition is on the horizon. Priorities to engage tribal leaders, develop statewide goals, conduct policy advocacy and peer networking and provide a clearing house for resources and services; the coalition will move the dream of homeownership on Native lands to reality.

USDA recently included South Dakota as a StrikeForce state and the [StrikeForce economic development goals](#) for the state include increased and focused support and outreach on Tribal lands by USDA Rural Development, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency.



## ONE USDA—Human Resource Enterprise Solution Project

By **Indu Garg**

The vision of One USDA is to develop USDA-wide, modern, cost effective, standardized, and interoperable Human Resource (HR) solutions providing common core functionality to support the Strategic Management of Human Resources. One USDA's goal is to improve mission delivery through the deployment of an integrated workforce system which facilitates strategic and advisory HR service delivery and streamlined HR transaction execution. It is aligned with OPM's HR Line of Business (HRLOB) initiative, which provides guidance to Federal agencies to standardize HR business functions and processes, as well as the systems that support them. One USDA is a collaborative effort across USDA mission areas that will reduce duplication and decrease the amount of time HR currently needs to input employee data.

Previously, each of USDA's 29 agencies and staff offices have used separate HR systems to perform more than 90% of the same functions. In most cases, the same data must be entered numerous times. One USDA, promotes one-time data entry saving HR professionals time and allow them to focus more on strategic human capital priorities such as helping managers develop recruitment tools to hire the right people for the right jobs and to process personnel actions in advance in order to improve the onboarding process. It will also provide managers with uniform and consistent HR policies across USDA, improved data integrity, and the capability to utilize a staffing report based on budgeted, approved positions.

The major impact will be in HR, where managers will enjoy greater consistency of data and the process will work faster and smoother. One USDA aims to leverage consistent HR standards that streamline business functions across the Department. This will enable communication, data sharing and function use; across all agencies. It will eliminate the use of decentralized and inconsistent resources to create new, repeatable solutions throughout agencies in response to a single set of Federal requirements. It will harness a way to support duplicative agency functions throughout the USDA Mission Areas.

Stay tuned for more information on One USDA in subsequent My USDA Newsletters!

## How To Love Your Government Career



Bernetta Reese, USDA's Web and Digital Communications Manager, loves her government career, and her passion was recognized recently at the [Next Generation of Government Training Summit](#).

Bernetta was one of five speakers selected out of more than 100 submissions. She told the crowd we all share a common goal: to be happy in our career. Her five-minute talk, "[How To Love Your Government Career](#)," is available on YouTube.

So what tips has Bernetta, who was a web manager at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security before coming to USDA, learned during her successful ten-year transition from intern to manager? She shared her knowledge with GovLoop,

1. [Be flexible](#) and open to new opportunities to enhance your career.
2. [Create a work/life balance](#).
3. [Be strategic](#) and write out your career plan.

Bernetta says her worklife is improved by smiling. "It's important to find a reason to smile when you're at work. If you don't have a reason to smile, you won't enjoy being there."

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 deadline for October submissions is Monday, October 7, 2013.

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