



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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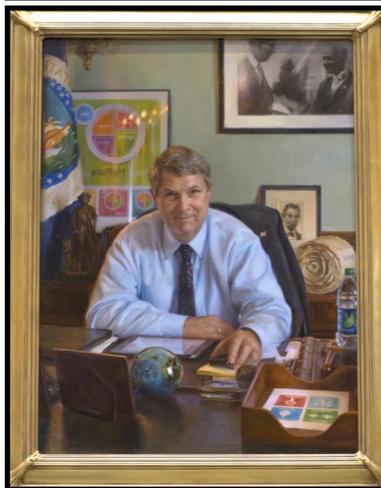
MyUSDA

A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

Volume 7, Issue 3

December 2016

Official Portrait of Secretary Vilsack Unveiled



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack held an Employee Town Hall on December 1, 2016, where he took questions and gave a very heartfelt thank you for the employee support he has experienced over the past eight years.

Secretary Vilsack is our Nation's 30th Secretary of Agriculture. As USDA's leader, he has worked hard to strengthen the American agricultural economy, build vibrant rural communities, and secure a stronger future for the American middle class.

Secretary Vilsack is the longest-serving member of President Obama's Cabinet. He was confirmed by the U.S. Senate by unanimous consent on January 20, 2009, and assumed office that same day.



Following the Employee Town Hall, Secretary Vilsack and his wife Christie unveiled his official portrait on the Whitten Patio.

The portrait was painted by Iowa artist Rose Frantzen.

(USDA photos by Tom Witham.)

USDA Ranked Most Improved in 2016 Best Places to Work in Government

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, center, received the award for the most improved large Federal agency in the 2016 Best Places to Work in Government rankings. He is joined by (L-R) USDA Assistant Secretary for Administration Dr. Gregory L. Parham; USDA Virtual University Provost Dr. Karlease Kelly; USDA Employee Engagement Manager James Brent; and USDA Chief Human Capital Officer Roberta Jeanquart. Max Stier (pictured far right), the President and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service, presented the award.



USDA has risen from 16th place to 9th place in just three years. For more information and an analysis of how we have come so far, see the next page!

USDA Most Improved in Best Places To Work

Department Climbs from 16th to 9th Since 2013

By Perry Stevens, Office of Human Resources Management

On December 15th, the Partnership for Public Service announced the 2016 Best Places to Work in Government rankings. These rankings reflect the level of employee satisfaction and commitment in Federal agencies. USDA has shown a steady improvement in the rankings over the last few years. In 2013, USDA ranked 16th out of 19 large agencies. We moved up to 13th in 2014, and last year our ranking was 11th. In 2016, USDA was in 9th place, showing the most improvement among all other large agencies. The rankings are based on data gathered from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey.

Dr. Karlease Kelly, Provost of USDA's Virtual University and one of those directed by Secretary Vilsack to increase employee engagement, explained why the results are important. "These results point to a number of ways we can measure the impact of our progress here at USDA, and they are due to a team effort that includes input and participation from leaders, managers, supervisors, and employees. Employees need to know that leaders are listening to you, and improvements are being made across the Department in terms of communication, teamwork, diversity and inclusion, work-life balance, employee training and development, and performance management. As we move forward into 2017, USDA will continue to ensure that you have the support you need to provide critical services to the American public we serve."

This link has profiles of each Federal Department and Agency. The USDA summary describes the changes and improvements that made USDA the most improved agency this year.

<http://bestplacestowork.org/BPTW/analysis/agency-profiles.php>

For more information about the 2016 Best Places to Work rankings, visit: <http://bestplacestowork.org/BPTW/index.php>

USDA Showed Improvements in 13 of the 14 Areas Examined in the 2016 Best Places to Work Rankings

Category	2015 Ranking	2016 Ranking
Executive Leadership	15	9
Empowerment	14	11
Fairness	14	7
Leaders	16	15
Supervisors	6	5
Employee Skills-Mission Match	10	7
Pay	13	9
Strategic Management	16	14
Teamwork	14	9
Innovation	13	14
Training and Development	11	5
Work-Life Balance	15	13
Support for Diversity	3	3
Performance-Based Rewards and Advancement	15	8

Secretary Addresses USDA Women in Agriculture

By Carrie E. Moore, Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Coordination

On December 2, 2016, more than 250 people gathered in the Whitten Patio for the USDA Women in Agriculture (WIA) Employee Group kickoff event. Deputy Under Secretary Alexis Taylor highlighted the integral role of women throughout the agricultural sector and the importance of men as active champions of women in the workforce. She introduced former Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden, who founded the WIA Initiative at USDA. She also introduced the newly elected WIA Executive Committee.



The keynote speaker was Secretary Tom Vilsack, under whose tenure there has been a 10 percent increase in the number of senior and professional leadership roles filled by women at USDA. Secretary Vilsack spoke about the influential women in his life, from his family to the many strong women leaders at USDA. He talked about the role of women in agriculture; 70 percent of the world's farmers are women, but they are often not adequately represented in industry and government even here in the United States. He said it's not enough for women to have a seat at the table; they must actively participate in leadership and policy development.



WIA Employee Group Chair, Kim Graham, discussed WIA's goals for the coming year. WIA strives to elevate women's roles in agriculture through identifying and supporting professional development, mentoring, networking, and leadership opportunities by presenting U.S. and international speakers on agriculture and leadership. For more information about the WIA Employee Group, email WIAEmployeeGroup@dm.usda.gov. You can also visit the Women in Ag Blog at <http://blogs.usda.gov/category/women-in-ag/>.

FNCS Volunteers Bring Holiday Cheer to Denver Children

By Susan M. Siemietkowski, Food & Nutrition Service

Employees from the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNCS) Mountain Plains Regional Office (MPRO) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) reached out to their coworkers to fulfill a holiday wish list for 27 children who receive services through the Denver-based organization Shiloh House.

Shiloh House provides residential and educational services for children ages 5-17 throughout the Denver metro area and operates four Colorado Department of Education accredited schools that serve the day treatment and residential program at-risk youth.

Gift requests from the students included toys, clothing and gift cards to local merchants, which staff generously purchased. SNAP staff hand delivered the gifts to children at the program. The MPRO gifts specifically went to children participating in the full-time residential treatment programs due to severe abuse and/or neglect. These children were removed from their homes, and due to the behavioral issues stemming from their traumatic experiences, are not eligible for foster care placement or adoption.

Thanks MPRO for your thoughtfulness and generosity! The kids are going to love those gifts!



FNCS Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program employees Abi Wenhold (left) and Gina Brand (right) were among the USDA volunteers bringing holiday gifts to at-risk youth.

Veterans Helping Veterans at USDA

By Perry Stevens, Office of Human Resources Management

Audrey Healy is a military veteran with nine years of active duty service who began working at the Foreign Agriculture Service in 2012. She describes loving her job. “For more than three years, I had many unique experiences, made a lot of great friends, and learned a great deal about being an administrative assistant. I even got to do a detail to the Foreign Agriculture Service Office of the Administrator and worked for Mr. Phil Karsting for four months.” She also joined the Veterans Employee Organization (VEO) where she met other employees like Roseal Fowlkes, USDA’s Veterans Recruitment Program Manager, and VEO President Craig Wilbert.



Veteran employee Audrey Healy with her new boss, Dr. Ariel Szogi, the Research Leader for the USDA-ARS-Coastal Plains Soil, Water, and Plant Research Center in Florence, SC.

In 2015, Audrey’s sister in South Carolina became ill, and Audrey made the difficult decision to leave her job so she could take care of her. She searched for a new position there, and she kept in close touch with Roseal and Craig.

“We kept her on our radar as a veteran seeking employment in South Carolina, and when a position opened up, we were able to refer her to the Agricultural Research Service in Florence, SC,” Roseal said. “Audrey is an excellent employee, and I am happy the Veterans Employment Program was able to help.”

Audrey is very satisfied with the outcome. “I think Roseal and Craig cannot be given enough thanks for their efforts in helping me with my job search down here. Their actions were paramount in my acquisition of this position. I look forward to learning a new job, taking on new challenges, and making new friends in Florence. It is going to be a pleasure to serve on the new team!”

USDA Annual Winter Olympics Starting Soon!

By Debra Arnold, USDA Work/Life and Wellness Program Manager

USDA is committed to providing opportunities for employees to get fit and stay fit, leading to reduced absenteeism and increased productivity across the Department. The annual USDA Winter Olympics provides all employees the opportunity to participate in a fun, interactive event that will keep them moving during those sedentary winter months. Whether you are a novice or an expert at physical fitness, you can join the Olympics!



Registration to participate is now open! To participate, you must register by going to the USDA Connect Winter Olympics Community at <https://connections.usda.gov/communities/community/2017olympics>. The competition runs from January 14th thru March 10th. At the end of competition, gold, silver and bronze medals will be awarded to Olympic winners in three categories Lion (expert), Fox (intermediate) or Turtle (novice). No worries if you are a Turtle one week and a Lion on others! Winners will be determined at the end of competition based on the final tabulation of total minutes. If you have any issues getting started on Connect or have questions about the process, please send emails to wellness@dm.usda.gov.

Do you have an article to submit to MyUSDA?

You can email MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov with your submissions. They may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline, a first-person account, or any work-related activity or event demonstrating the Secretary’s Cultural Transformation Action Items: Leadership, Recruitment & Retention, Talent Management, Employee Development, Customer Focus & Community Outreach.

USDA Celebrates Native American Heritage

By Dawn Pindell, Farm Service Agency

On October 20th, Farm Service Agency (FSA) employees from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island gathered at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum in Mashantucket, Connecticut to mark Native American History Month. Lori Carver, the FSA Executive Officer in Massachusetts, created this opportunity to learn about Native American traditions and connections. About 60 people (pictured below) participated in this Native American learning experience, a short awards program, a local foods luncheon, and tour of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum.

Bryan Hurlburt, Connecticut's State Executive Director, said "This event is important to help build networks and address the racial, ethnic, and cultural barriers we sometimes encounter in the workforce. It ties in nicely with our AgLearn course on Working Effectively with Tribal Governments."

Rhode Island State Executive Director George Goulart Jr., added, "It was nice for Rhode Island staff to be a part of this special event. Having a tri state meeting such as this one was beneficial to our staff."

A quick elevator ride to the museum tower gave our group of CT, MA, and RI employees the opportunity to look out over the 2,500 acre mostly treed land, with an abundant display of the golds, reds, and yellows of autumn. It was a pleasing way to complete a good day of learning and inspired the attendees to take the lessons they learned to heart.



By Josie Atcity, U.S. Forest Service

USDA employees from several agencies in New Mexico celebrated Native American Heritage Month with a luncheon hosted by Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employee Theresa Nelson, a member of the Navajo Nation from Shiprock, New Mexico. Theresa invited employees from the Farm Services Agency, Rural Development, the U.S. Forest Service and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service for a free Indian taco luncheon that she funded and prepared. Theresa has worked for the past five years as a Management Information Technician with NRCS, Albuquerque, NM. Theresa says she hopes the luncheon would assist in building and maintaining networking connections among peers within the USDA.

By Danielle Logan, Rural Development

USDA Rural Development employees in Virginia welcomed Chief Robert Gray of the Pamunkey Tribe to lead an informal discussion at the state's Richmond office. Chief Gray, (pictured right) a 36-year federal employee himself, spoke to both the process of becoming federally recognized and the tribe's history. Chief Gray said the Pamunkey Tribe has a wealth of history. Although most historically known for their famous ancestor, Mataoka (Pocahontas), the tribe's history dates back tens of thousands of years before her. He stressed the tribe's willingness and excitement to work with federal agencies including USDA.



Culture of Recognition

Being recognized for good work is a key driver of engagement, and the best and most effective recognition costs nothing more than intentionality.

Making use of the awards program described here is important, but it's even more critical to make frequent, informal recognition part of the culture for your staff.

Simply saying a genuine, "Thank you for ____" or "Job well done on ____" goes a very long way toward letting people know they and their efforts are valued.

Keep in mind everyone is different, and find out whether your individual staff members are comfortable with public recognition – some may thrive on it, and others may hate it.

Learn what works for each, and look for every opportunity to commend good work.

HR Fact Sheet: Employee Recognition GS and Other Non-Executives

Basic Principles

- ◆ It is USDA's policy to recognize performance that exceeds expectations, especially that which contributes to the core values, mission and goals of the Department
- ◆ Awards and formal recognition must be commensurate with the purpose and intent of the award granted, provide for special acknowledgement of the accomplishments, and be given as close to the time of the achievements as possible

Approvals

- ◆ Discrete awards of \$5,500 or less may be approved at the Agency level
- ◆ Any combination of awards over \$5,500, paid to an individual within a fiscal year, must be approved by OHRM before they can be paid out (OHRM may forward these to the Secretary for approval at their discretion)
- ◆ Discrete awards over \$5,500 must be approved by the Secretary
- ◆ Awards over \$10,000 must be approved by the Office of Personnel Management
- ◆ Awards over \$25,000 must be approved by the President

Monetary Award Types

- ◆ Performance (Based solely on an employee's rating of record assigned at the end of the appraisal period)
- ◆ Extra Effort (Recognizes specific accomplishments that are in the public interest and have exceeded normal job requirements)

Modes of Monetary Awards

- ◆ Cash
- ◆ Time Off
- ◆ Combination of cash and time off
- ◆ Quality Step Increase (an option for a rating of record of "Outstanding", permanently increases the employee's pay)

Non-monetary Awards

- ◆ Abraham Lincoln Honor Awards (previously known as the Secretary's Honor Awards; chosen by the Secretary)
- ◆ Honorary Awards (formal items with specific limits on spending amounts)
- ◆ Informal (items of nominal value, such as pens, mugs, etc.)
- ◆ Length of Service (certificates and pins)
- ◆ Certificates of Merit and Appreciation

Consult with your Human Resources Office for eligibility and justification requirements

Guide Dogs for the Blind at RMA Civil Rights Training

By Jo Lynne Seufer, Risk Management Agency

Employees at USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) in Spokane, Washington, participated in an in-house Civil Rights training that included a specific focus on the Americans with Disabilities Act. One of the things employees learned was how guide dogs for the blind are trained. Mikelyn Ward, director of the Spokane Puppies of Promise group, arranged for two of their member volunteers, Pat and Jerry Gardner, to teach employees about the process.

Potential guide dogs are weaned at eight to nine weeks of age, and they are trained by volunteers until they are 14-16 months old. If they are successful, they go to doggy college training facilities for two months and are then eventually paired with an assigned blind person. Dogs that do not graduate are generally used for other service dog programs. Guide dogs for the blind usually retire after six or seven years.



For more information about guide dogs for the blind, go to <http://www.guidedogs.com/>. You can "Like" [Spokane Puppies of Promise Facebook](#) if you'd like!

Jammer (left) and Kahuna (right) are guide dogs in training at Spokane Puppies of Promise, in Spokane, Washington.

Chemist Helps Students Connect Agriculture with Chemistry

By Ken Melton, Agricultural Marketing Service



Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) employee Jonathan Senn-Carter (pictured lecturing), the Monitoring Program Division Chemist at the Agency's Science & Technology Program, visited Charles Herbert Flowers High School in Springdale, MD, last fall to give a presentation entitled, "Chemistry: From High School to USDA."

Over the course of two days, Jonathan spoke with more than 215 students about the possible career paths and occupational fields associated with high school and college chemistry courses. He shared the mission of USDA and increased awareness of the Pesticide Data Program and the value for consumers and the agricultural industry. Most of the sophomore and junior level students attending were in their first semester of introductory chemistry and learned about the connections between agricultural practices and the necessity of pesticides in order to further their interest in the agricultural industry.

Upcoming Special Observance at USDA

**Black History Month
Thursday, February 15, 2017**

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.

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](#).



Catch Up On Recent Issues of MyUSDA!

To see previous issues of MyUSDA, please visit:

<http://www.dm.usda.gov/newsroom.htm>



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If you have ideas for future articles, contact us at 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.