



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

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July 2015

### Feds Feed Families 2015 Campaign Is Underway

This year's Feds Feed Families (FFF) Campaign kicked off on July 15, 2015, and USDA employees are again being encouraged to donate generously. The annual FFF effort helps food banks and pantries stay stocked during summer months when they traditionally see a decrease in donations and an increase in need.

FFF is a national food drive led in coordination with the Office of Personnel Management, the Chief Human Capital Officers Council, and other federal agencies to raise food for Americans struggling with hunger across the country. Since 2009, through the amazing generosity of Federal employees, the food drive has collected nearly 39 million pounds of food for those in need. Last year alone, more than 14.8 million pounds were donated and provided to food banks and pantries.

Even as the economy grows stronger, there are still too many people struggling to put food on the table. Children are especially vulnerable to food insecurity. Federal employees have made a real difference in their lives by helping to make sure fewer kids in our communities will go to bed hungry tonight.

If you have any questions, please send them to the [fedsfeedfamilies@usda.gov](mailto:fedsfeedfamilies@usda.gov). Visit the website at [www.usda.gov/fedsfeedfamilies](http://www.usda.gov/fedsfeedfamilies).



USDA Assistant Secretary for Administration Dr. Gregory L. Parham (pictured above left) talks with employees attending the National 2015 FFF Kickoff Event.

Marian Romero (above right) of the Office of Operations discusses the campaign.

FFF 2015 National Program Manager Jennifer McDowell (pictured left) is on detail from the U.S. Forest Service to lead the national Feds Feed Families campaign.

**USDA photos by Tom Witham**

## Employee Viewpoint Survey Results Are In!

The Office of Personnel Management has issued the finalized response rate report for the 2015 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey.

Our final response rate USDA-wide is 66.2% which is 16.5% higher than the government-wide response rate.

Thank you for your support throughout the survey process and sharing your input on how we can continue to improve our workplace.

In the coming weeks, the survey results will be issued. So, look for information about the highlights of the survey results in a coming issue of MyUSDA.

## USDA Diversity & Inclusion: Special Emphasis Program Managers Training

By Tatjana Fernandez, Office of Human Resources Management

Over 300 USDA employees attended the annual *Diversity & Inclusion: Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPM) Training*, which was held on June 9 & 10, 2015.

The 2-day training took place at the Jefferson Auditorium in the South Building (DC) and was broadcast live to employees nationwide.

Topics included updates from the Office of Personnel Management's Recruitment, Engagement, Diversity & Inclusion Roadmap and from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, by Veronica Villalobos and Dexter Brooks, respectively.

Training on several other timely topic areas included: SEPM Roles and Responsibilities, differences between Recruitment and Outreach, Disability Employment, Pathways and Student Programs,

Recruitment Strategies, Alternate Dispute Resolution, Understanding Transgender Lives, Agency Head Assessment and MD-715, and Influencing Your Organization.

Training was developed and implemented at no cost by the Diversity, Recruitment, Work/Life and Wellness Division in the Office of the Human Resources Management.

Veronica Villalobos (left), Office of Personnel Management Director for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, is introduced by Dr. Zina Sutch (right), Recruitment, Work/Life and Wellness Division in the Office of the Human Resources Management.



## Do You Know USDA's Veteran Employee Org?

Which single employee group includes all of the Special Emphasis Program groups? If you answered "veterans," you're ahead of the game! But do you also know about the VEO, the USDA's Veteran Employee Organization?

The VEO is built on a promise to back the USDA commitment to veterans in agriculture: we provide support for current and prospective employees, and for veterans seeking USDA program services. The mission of the VEO naturally aligns with the USDA's Cultural Transformation (CT) Initiative. How is the VEO helping to make CT happen? One example is in recruitment and retention.

Tonya Johnson with FNS in Alexandria, VA, is one of several VEO members who actively participate in recruitment by attending veterans job fairs and hiring events. "Having a USDA veteran at these events makes a difference and shows that the USDA welcomes and values veterans."

Yet, while diversity begins with recruitment, an inclusive, high-performance organization also needs to retain talent.

Sheree Wolf and the APHIS Labor Management Partnership Committee in Ames, IA, are working to establish a sponsorship program for new veteran employees.

Sponsors would introduce new veteran employees to the work unit, help with questions unique to veterans transitioning from military to civilian service, and help them to connect with services in the community.

Membership in the VEO is open to all USDA employees: if you'd like to join, email [tonya.johnson@fns.usda.gov](mailto:tonya.johnson@fns.usda.gov).

The APHIS Labor Management Partnership Committee in Ames, IA. Left to right: Rick DeWald-Secretary/Treasurer, AFGE Local 2315; Rebecca Miller-APHIS Vice-President, AFGE Local 2315; Dr. Beverly Schmitt-Director, National Veterinary Services Laboratories; Dr. Byron Rippke-Director, Center for Veterinary Biologics; and, Sheree Wolf-President, AFGE Local 2315.



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](#).

## UPCOMING USDA SPECIAL OBSERVANCE

**Women's Equality Day**  
**Date: Wednesday, August 26, 2015**

*The observance begins at 10:00 a.m. (EDT) at the Jefferson Auditorium, Washington, DC. Employees receive one hour of diversity training for attending USDA Special Observances. You can view recordings of recent [USDA Special Observances by visiting here](#).*

## USDA Interns Benefit from HACE Luncheon

By Gregory Rosenthal, Agricultural Marketing Service

The Hispanic American Cultural Effort (HACE) hosted a recent luncheon to welcome interns from all over USDA. The event gave interns a chance to get to know each other and meet with HACE members, who welcomed and advised them. Participants learned about HACE and met the Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) Gabriella Bolanos-Ponce, HACE's Treasurer, who shared the benefits and requirements of membership.



They received information about—and encouragement to join—HACE's program, which provides valuable career counseling and coaching, networking events and fun activities. If you are interested in becoming a member of HACE, please send an email to: Gabriella.Bolanos-Ponce@ams.usda.gov.

A group of interns who attended the recent Hispanic American Cultural Effort (HACE) luncheon listen attentively to members of the Executive Board explain the benefits and activities available to HACE members.

## AMS Building Next Generation Workforce

By Gregory Rosenthal, Agricultural Marketing Service

Lorenzo A. Tribbett, Director of the AMS Fruit and Vegetable Program's Specialty Crops Inspection (SCI) Division, shared one of his passions with the Federal workforce at large when he was interviewed recently on Federal News Radio. He talked about SCI's hiring program that is building the division's next generation workforce. Over the last three years, SCI has set up partnerships with urban agricultural schools in New York City, Chicago and Philadelphia to recruit high school students as agricultural commodity graders.

"We are seeking out students at these fine urban agricultural high schools because they have already shown their enthusiasm and motivation for building careers in agriculture," said Tribbett during the interview. "We bring them on board, give them concrete opportunities to gain experience in the agricultural field, and provide them with the information and experience they need to chart out a successful career with AMS and USDA. This is a 'win-win' situation for all!"

Both Sonya Wilson (left) and high school hire Julio Macias (right) worked with the Fruit and Vegetable Program's Specialty Crops Inspection Division last year. Wilson now works in Washington, DC, as a Marketing Specialist.



## USDA Attends VFW-Sponsored Recruitment Event



Agricultural Marketing Service's Compliance Officer Pablo Orozco and Assistant Regional Director Rose Aguayo, both from the AMS Field Office in Fresno, CA, participated in a job fair in Madera, California, targeting veterans for recruitment.

During the event, Orozco and Aguayo connected with dozens of people seeking information on current opportunities available at AMS and USDA, and they provided information on the direct-hire process.

## USDA's Mentoring Program Is Growing—Sign Up Today!

By Rod Mance, Office of Human Resources Management

Mentoring is growing in popularity across the federal government. USDA has an outstanding Mentoring Program and has shared best practices with the Office of Personnel Management and other Federal agencies. In 2015, across the Department, there are more than 300 formal mentoring pairs. The program is a cost-efficient and personalized experience that helps the Department attract and retain top talent, enhance employee skills and abilities, and transfer institutional knowledge.

The formal program is designed to provide employees with opportunities to form new connections within the agency, broaden employee experience and career development opportunities, and assist in developing goals. A formal mentoring relationship is considered to be a one-on-one mentoring relationship that lasts longer than one quarter.

With the support of the Chief Human Capital Officer, USDA has a Mentoring Portal designed to provide the infrastructure to agencies to manage their mentoring program. There are more than 1,000 unique protégés registered in Portal. Of those 1000 protégés, 520 registered in FY 2015. As the program continues to grow it will be imperative to have Senior Executives, directors, and managers registered in the Portal to ensure we have enough mentors available for USDA's highly motivated protégés. In fact, as part of our Cultural Transformation efforts, we have a goal of having 100% of SES registered in the USDA Mentoring Portal.

The availability of these important groups is critical to transferring institutional knowledge and succession planning efforts at USDA. Mentoring is not limited to management. Anyone can be a mentor. The only requirements are that the mentor is a minimum of one grade level above the protégé and the mentor has secured their supervisor's approval. Anyone GS-15 or above does not require supervisor approval.

Visit the [USDA Mentoring Portal](#) today! Visit the [Contact Us](#) page for more information on your specific agency's mentoring program.



## USDA SHINES AT FAPAC 2015

By Fely Schaible, Asian Pacific American Employees Association

USDA was very well represented during the 30<sup>th</sup> Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC)

Conference and National Leadership Training held recently at the Washington DC/Rockville Hotel & Meeting Center. Three very deserving employees won the FAPAC Civilian Awards: Fahmida Chhipa, Secretary of Standards & Survey Development, Methodology Division, National Agricultural Statistics Service; Robin Gyorgyfalvy, Scenic Byways Leader and Landscape Architect from Region 6, Deschutes National Forest; and Liz Berger, Assistant Water Program Leader, Forest Service, Washington Office.

Pictured left to right: Fahmida Chhipa, Robin Gyorgyfalvy (receiving Outstanding Individual Leadership Awards for showing bold leadership and innovative ways to promote Equal Employment Opportunity, Affirmative Action and Diversity), Farook Sait (FAPAC 2015 Conference Chair), and Liz Berger, who received the Excellence in Individual Achievement Award for making the greatest contribution toward the AAPI representation at all levels.



## A Tale of Cultural Transformation at FAS

By Joseph Migyanka, Foreign Agricultural Service

As part of the ongoing efforts at the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) to further engage employees and bring different viewpoints together, Administrator Phil Karsting initiated five independent “Work-Out” sessions. A Work-Out is a tool to engage employees in solving organizational problems – fast.

Each group is made up of employees and managers from different levels and functions who come together for a day to address an issue within a defined topic. In small teams, people challenge prevailing assumptions about the way to get things done and come up with recommendations for improvements. The teams present their recommendations to senior leaders in a town hall-style meeting, where the leaders engage in a dialogue about the recommendations and make yes-or-no decisions on the spot. Approved recommendations are then assigned an owner, who is accountable for seeing them through to implementation.

Throughout coming weeks, FAS will conduct five Work-Outs on Decision Making and Accountability, Transparency, Administrative and Business Systems, Empowerment, and Teamwork and Collaboration. The Work-Outs are facilitated by the Partnership for Public Service.

## Engaging Leadership & The Bottom Line

By James Brent, Office of Human Resources Management

Have you ever wondered what makes someone an engaging leader and why it’s so important to the organization? In this day of doing more with less, decreasing budgets and increasing performance demands, how does employee engagement connect and contribute to the bottom line? Engaging leaders value the importance of:

- Establishing clear direction and creating a shared vision
- Empowering others more than themselves
- Respecting and treating colleagues at all levels as equals
- Strengthening connections and relationships
- Being available, staying humble and remaining grounded

Engaging leaders understand that high levels of employee engagement lead to better business results and stronger employee ties to the organization. This does not happen by accident and requires an unyielding commitment to continuous self evaluation, learning and development. Although the initial obligation is significant, the return on investment makes the effort worthwhile for you, the employees, and the organization.

The BOTTOM LINE is that without **strong leadership and engaged employees**, improving and sustaining a high level of organizational innovation, growth and performance is very difficult.

## Agencies at PP3 Find the Value in Working Together

By Gunner Hamlyn, Economic Research Service

For three USDA agencies co-located at Patriot’s Plaza III (PP3), cooperation and coordination are improving the work lives of all employees. Employees from the Farm Service Agency, the Food Safety and Inspection Service, and the Economic Research Service are co-located in the same building. All three agencies have been finding innovative ways to interact. Recently drawn together by emergency preparedness and facilities topics, they have discovered several opportunities to connect. From USDA-wide initiatives to PP3-specific recognition events, such as the June Pride Month Observance Program, posters can be found in the lobby providing official chances to intermingle. Unofficial chances are also perks of the location: a variety of food trucks each day, a farmer’s market on Wednesdays, and a new Toastmaster’s club with representation from each agency. Of course, beyond social activities, collaboration happens as well, with ERS having worked with FSIS and FSA on a variety of research projects. With over 1,000 USDA staff at PP3, interaction comes naturally despite a few elevator key cards keeping them apart.

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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### ***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 some aspect of 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).**