

USDA news

USDA's Employee News Publication—For You & About You!

It's Now Available: Ethics Training— Online—On USDA Purchase Card Do's And Don'ts

*With A Light Touch
And A Dash Of Wit*

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

Answer: "The USDA Purchase Card."

Question: "In Fiscal Year 2004, what was used by approximately one in five USDA employees over one million times to transact almost half a billion dollars in official business for the Department?"

No, **Alex Trebek** probably won't use that question under the category of "Important Government Transactions—for \$300" during the next round of "Jeopardy." But the USDA purchase card is undeniably an important tool that USDA employees use for official business in support of mission delivery around the country and around the world.

That's why it's important that those purchase cards be used correctly and not be misused or abused. And that's the reason why USDA is now offering ethics training—online—for USDA employees who have been issued purchase cards, plus their supervisors.

Joe Daragan, purchase card Departmental program manager in the Office of Procurement and Property Management, explained that there are up to three govern-

ment 'credit cards'—a purchase card, a travel card, and a fleet card—that federal employees who qualify may use, to aid them in efficiently and effectively carrying out the mission of their respective departments.

"There have been relatively few abuses of those three government cards," he emphasized. "And while some of the stories of misuse and abuse have been, frankly, pretty awful, the vast, vast majority of those cards are used correctly and honestly—and their use saves the federal government a whole lot of money every year."

OPPM program manager **Joe Taylor** noted that Departmental Regulation No. 5013-6, dated Feb. 13, 2003 and titled "Use of the Purchase Card and Convenience Check," spells out that the Purchase Card Program at USDA "reduces administrative costs and allows agencies to procure supplies and services faster..."

But the Regulation also advises that, "The purchase card... [is] for official government business use only. Under no circumstances is the card... to be used for personal purchases or as identification for personal purchases. Failure to properly use and safeguard the card... will result in revocation of card... authority, and possible disciplinary action..." The regulation then highlights ethics requirements by advising that, "Office of Government Ethics Standards of Conduct for Executive Branch Employees apply to purchase card... use. All purchases/ continued on pg. 2..."



"Yeah, look at my desk and I'm literally up to my elbows in these stats on soybean plantings—but this number right here makes it all worthwhile," quips **Larry Whaley** (left), an agricultural statistician with the NASS State Statistical Office in Tennessee, based in Nashville. He and fellow NASS agricultural statistician **Todd Hayes** are crunching the numbers, plus doing an analysis focusing on Tennessee, as part of a nationwide NASS survey to, among other matters, gauge the intentions of farmers in 31 states to plant soybeans during this planting season. The survey follows USDA's confirmation last November of the detection of Asian soybean rust—for the first time—in the continental U.S. Note the story below.—
PHOTO BY JOEL MOORE

This Nationwide USDA Survey Came With A New Twist

And The Timing Was Just Right

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

Among the most sought after of USDA's many reports and publications is its "Prospective Plantings" report, which is issued annually in the spring. The most recent version, which was released promptly at 8:30 a.m. on March 31 to an eager audience, contained a new twist.

Here's the story behind the story of how USDA employees worked with that particular twist.

First, some background: In November 2004 scientists with the Animal and Plant Health Inspec-

tion Service confirmed the presence of Asian soybean rust on soybean leaf samples in Louisiana. According to **Matt Royer**, acting assistant deputy administrator for pest detection and management programs in APHIS, that disease produces two types of lesions: tan and reddish brown. Infection by that disease can spread rapidly to the middle and upper leaves of the soybean plant. Asian soybean rust is spread primarily by wind-borne spores—and last year's very active hurricane season was thought to have carried it to geographic areas where it had not existed before.

"In fact," noted **Coanne O'Hern**, the national survey coordinator for APHIS's Plant Protection and Quarantine Unit, continued on pg. 7...



Mike Johanns *Secretary of Agriculture*

Dear Fellow Employees,
The new food guidance system unveiled in April is the product of years of work by many employees. It is an accomplishment in which every employee should take pride. By emphasizing a personal approach to healthy eating and physical activity, **MyPyramid.gov** is a terrific tool to help Americans live longer, healthier lives, a key goal of President **George W. Bush's** HealthierUS initiative.

As you can see by the symbol on the opposite page, the food guidance system icon is still a pyramid. But the new pyramid is different in many ways. The vertical bands are in six colors, signaling the variety of the five food groups and oils. Moderation is symbolized by the narrowing of the color bands from bottom to top with more nutrient-dense foods at the bottom. Proportionality is demonstrated by the different widths of each band, giving an approximation of how much food we should get from each group. And finally, the figure ascending the steps reminds us of the importance of exercise.

The previous food guidance released by the federal government known as the Food Guide Pyramid was developed in 1992. It was more of a two-dimensional triangle with food groups arranged in a hierarchy. And although it is quite familiar, few Americans follow the recommendations. So with that in mind, it became clear that we needed to

do a much better job of communicating the nutrition message.

Using the interactive tools, **MyPyramid.gov** can help consumers understand how to put nutrition recommendations into actions. First it emphasizes gradual improvement. The slogan 'Steps to a Healthier You' tells us that each one of us can benefit by starting to make even very small steps toward healthier lifestyles.

The interactive MyPyramid Plan provides a quick estimate of the kinds of food each person should eat, based on gender and age and activity level.

The second tool, MyPyramid Tracker, includes detailed information on diet quality and physical activity status based on what you actually eat and your exact level of physical activity.

Over time, we will continue to make enhancements to **MyPyramid.gov** including the Spanish language version and soon a child-friendly version for children and teachers. As we begin to target additional audiences, partnerships will be a very important key part of our collaborative effort to help improve the nation's health. Everyone from government educators and health professionals, recreation and fitness interests, food industry and the media can help play a role in a healthier U.S.

Many of you have contributed to the development of the new system. I thank you and I encourage everyone to visit **MyPyramid.gov** to develop your own plan for a healthy lifestyle. ■

Do's And Don'ts...continued from pg. 1

transactions must be transacted for official Government business only."

Dave Shea, chief of OPPM's Procurement Policy Division, said that USDA employees make several thousand work-related official transactions with their purchase cards every business day.

He added that nearly 20,000 USDA employees currently have USDA purchase cards. "And an estimated 90 percent of those USDA employees," Shea noted, "are at field locations around the country and around the world."

"So this literally is a global matter for the Department."

To reinforce the proper use of USDA-issued purchase cards, OPPM, in partnership with USDA's Office of Ethics, recently instituted an online purchase card ethics training module for USDA purchase card holders and their supervisors.

"The training—which is titled 'Government Purchase Card Ethics Training'—is a quick tutorial on the ethical concerns and standards of conduct for using that card," said Taylor, who managed the development of the training. "The course, which can be completed in as little as 15 minutes, provides a good overview of the purchase card do's and don'ts."

Cindy Bezz, USDA's "AgLearn" project manager in the Office of the Chief Information Officer, explained that the training module is one of the online offerings available through USDA's new "Agriculture Learning Service," or

"AgLearn," which was formally launched in March 2004 for use by USDA employees.

"AgLearn," she said, "is specifically designed to provide one-stop services for delivering, scheduling, and managing 'learning events' online nationwide for USDA employees at headquarters and field offices." The March-April 2004 issue of the **USDA News** carried a story about AgLearn.

Bezz noted that the website for this particular purchase card ethics training module can be reached through **www.aglearn.usda.gov** "The AgLearn website requires a USDA 'e-authentication' ID to be able to log into it," she advised.

The Leave and Earnings Statement for Pay Period No. 26 included an initial announcement about this particular online training.

Ray Sheehan, director of the Office of Ethics, explained a goal of his office in this initiative. "We took what might typically be considered a very dry topic and helped to treat it with a light touch and a dash of wit—we hope!"

"This training module," he added, "takes serious issues regarding use of the purchase cards and places them in a USDA context. We think that makes the training easier to understand and more relevant to card holders and their supervisors."

Russ Ashworth, director of OPPM who is also USDA's senior procurement executive, noted that this purchase card ethics training course is being offered on a voluntary basis for USDA purchase card holders and their supervi-

sors. "Departmental policy does not currently mandate that purchase card holders take this training," he said. "So, at this point, we've left it up to agency-level managers to decide if they wish to make it mandatory at that level."

Pat Tippett, a senior ethics specialist in the Office of Ethics, said that USDA employees who are required to take annual ethics training may opt to choose this particular training module, whether or not they are directly involved in the use of the USDA purchase card.

"Similar ethics training—on the proper use of the USDA *travel card*—is also available through AgLearn," she added. ■



"I recommend that you plant trees along the banks of your pond and also keep your livestock away from it—in order to improve water quality as well as the health of your herd," suggests NRCS's **Robert Whitescarver** (left), to a landowner in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. Whitescarver's efforts at land conservation typify the agency's efforts, as it commemorated its 70th anniversary in April. Note **Sylvia Rainford's** story on page. 4—**PHOTO BY CEPHAS HOBBS**

Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

Secretary **Mike Johanns** traveled to Colombia in March to attend the 27th ministerial meeting of the Cairns Group of exporting nations, where he stressed the importance of trade to the U.S. agricultural economy. Here at home he consoled the families of Forest Service employees who lost loved ones in a helicopter crash in southeast Texas. He celebrated National School Breakfast Week and launched a one-stop Soybean Rust web site to help producers track the plant disease.

In April, the Secretary and a coalition of agricultural groups urged Congress to approve the United States-Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement, and both Egypt and Taiwan reopened their markets to U.S. beef. Finally, after years of research, the Department rolled out the new food icon to advise consumers on a healthier lifestyle.

Forest Service: A helicopter carrying two Forest Service employees and a pilot under contract with the Forest Service crashed on March 10 near Center, Texas. **Charles Edgar**, fire management officer on the Sabine National Forest, **John Greeno**, Bald Mountain heliport manager with the Mi-Wok Ranger District on the Stanislaus National Forest in California, and **Jose' Victor Gonzalez**, a pilot with the Brainerd Co. in Minnesota all perished in the crash. Secretary Johanns expressed his condolences: "My warmest compassion goes out to the family and loved ones of Charles Edgar, John Greeno, and Jose' Victor Gonzalez, who were conducting important work in the Sabine National Forest to reduce hazardous fuels and protect communities from the threat of wildland fire. My heartfelt sympathy is also extended to the Forest Service and Brainerd Company coworkers experiencing

grief at this time from this tragedy."

National School Breakfast Week: March 7-11 was National School Breakfast Week, and also the 30th anniversary of USDA's School Breakfast Program. Begun as a fulltime-feeding program in 1975 by the Food and Nutrition Service, the School Breakfast Program promotes learning readiness and healthy eating behaviors to nearly 9 million children in 76,000 schools every school day. "Providing a nutritious breakfast sets the stage for learning before students enter the classroom," said Secretary Johanns.

Soybean Rust: USDA unveiled an interactive soybean rust Web site, as part of a national soybean rust plant disease surveillance and monitoring network, on March 15. The one-stop federal resource, www.usda.gov/soybeanrust, will show the extent and severity of soybean rust outbreaks in the U.S., the Caribbean basin, and Central America. It gives users up-to-date forecasts on where soybean rust is likely to appear in the U.S., reports where the disease exists by county, refers growers to county extension agents nationwide, lists the National Plant Diagnostic Network laboratories, and links to other web sites to give producers effective disease management options. "This web page will serve as a one-stop shop for anyone who depends on the soy industry to help understand these issues and make informed decisions," said Johanns.

CAFTA: Secretary Johanns has called on the agricultural community to support the United States-Central America-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). CAFTA countries include Costa Rica, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. While



MyPyramid.gov STEPS TO A HEALTHIER YOU

The new food guidance system, unveiled April 19, meshes healthy eating with exercise and provides interactive tools that will make it easier to do both. At www.MyPyramid.gov you can key in your age, gender, and physical activity level to get a personalized recommendation on daily caloric intake based on the "2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans." Look for the logo to show up soon on food packages. As Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion Executive Director **Eric Hentges** explains it, "Educational materials will show the new pyramid with the names of the food groups as well as the foods. But like the curved checkmark, that swoosh, and the tagline that says, 'Just do it,' you may not see shoes—but you know what they are talking about. That is the concept behind the simplified logo."

99 percent of exports from CAFTA countries enter the U.S. duty free under other agreements, U.S. exports are subject to tariffs. "Right now, import duties on U.S. beef range up to 30 percent and the WTO permits duties as high as 89 percent," Johanns told the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. Nevertheless, from 2001 to 2003 the U.S. exported about \$10.6 million worth of beef to those six countries. "Imagine how much we could sell if the price of American beef products there weren't inflated artificially," he said. "With 96 percent of the world's consumers living outside the United States, it is clear that continued trade opportunities for our farmers aren't a luxury—they're a necessity."

Earth Day 2005: On April 22 senior USDA officials representing the many agencies that help con-

serve erodible land, restore wetlands, create healthier forests, and expand safe drinking water systems participated in Earth Day activities in more than 25 states. The scope of USDA's reach is huge. But here are some key statistics: In the past 12 months 371,826 acres of wetlands have been restored, enhanced, or protected through USDA voluntary conservation programs. The National Resources Inventory (NRI) shows that between 2001 and 2003 the annual loss of wetlands declined to 30,000 acres, while the annual gain nearly doubled to 66,000 acres. Out of 34.8 million Conservation Reserve Program acres, 3.9 million acres help protect wetlands and related areas. And 5,475 communities received water and wastewater assistance between FY 2001-04.

—PATRICIA KLINTBERG

Employees *make these things happen*

Natural Resources and Environment

For 70 Years We've Been Doing Important Conservation Work

Robert Whitescarver remembers his early days with his agency very fondly. An avid outdoorsman, he knew he would be well suited for conservation work.

He was right. Whitescarver, a district conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service at the USDA Service Center in Verona, Va., has worked for the agency for over 25 years. He recently reminisced about his experiences with the agency, which—using the theme “A Partner In Conservation Since 1935”—is marking its 70th anniversary in April 2005.

On April 27, 1935, legislation was signed that created the Soil Conservation Service—now called NRCS—to control erosion which was devastating the country's agricultural land during the Depression.

Since that time the agency has added several programs, expanded availability and use of technological tools by employees, and included many new partners that are taking advantage of the agency's programs and services.

Whitescarver said he still remembers how he typically developed a conservation plan in the early 1980s to assist a landowner to better manage his/her resources on their land. Armed with an aerial photograph and a ‘soil erosion prediction’ slide rule, he examined the landowner's resources—cropland, pastureland, and/or woodland—and offered recommendations to the landowner to help correct natural resource problems. Then, using an ink cartridge pen, he carefully drew in—on that aerial photo—his recommended conservation practices for the landowner's property.

“Back then, since we didn't have the cost-share programs we have today, we had to rely on our salesmanship to sell conservation,” Whitescarver said. “We actually had agency training courses—mostly developed by what is now called our National Employee Development Center—on such topics as conservation sales training and the economics of conservation. That way, we were able to show landowners how a conservation practice could pay for itself.”

Jim Hunt, an NRCS district conservationist at the USDA Service Center in Green Bay, Wis., and a 30-year employee of the agency, said he also remembers using a slide rule to calculate soil loss. “Back then,” he recalled, “we thought that was ‘state of the art’ technology.”

NRCS field offices have come a long way since then. Presently, field office employees, when visiting an agricultural producer, can travel with a laptop computer that includes a Geographic Information System, which makes possible the electronic analysis of soils and land-use data. They can develop conservation plans with beautifully-colored maps with conservation practices outlined. While discussing conservation alternatives with landowners, they can easily change the landowner's plans to meet his/her needs.

Helen Flach, NRCS assistant state conservationist for programs in California, based in Davis, and a 27-year employee of the agency, noted that the various farm bills exerted a major impact on the agency's work. She advised that once Congress authorized the 1985 Farm Bill, landowners were required to treat their “highly erodible land” before they received commodity payments. “Landowners in my county greeted this warily,” Hunt observed. “But they complied.” “This farm

bill,” he added, “changed the agency's mission and the district conservationist's job.”

“From 1935 to the mid-1990s,” noted NRCS historian **Douglas Helms**, “SCS employees provided conservation technical assistance to landowners—while other USDA agencies provided financial assistance.”

The 1996 Farm Bill brought several added conservation programs for NRCS to administer—especially the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. “We have seen the merging of our conservation technical assistance with our new financial assistance,” Helms pointed out. Flach added that the 2002 Farm Bill then brought two new conservation programs to NRCS: the Grasslands Reserve Program and the Conservation Security Program—“a program,” she pointed out, “which added a new dimension: incentive payments to producers for the good conservation stewardship they have performed.”

Alvin Phelps, NRCS assistant state conservationist for field operations in southwest Virginia, based in Christiansburg, Va., and a 27-year employee of the agency, observed that when the agency was first created its ‘pioneer partners’ included conservation districts, other federal agencies, and state conservation and agriculture agencies. “Now,” he said, “our partners include universities, resource conservation and development councils, tribes, agribusinesses, limited resource farmers, and even urban dwellers.”

“Everyone's coming to the table looking for opportunities for conservation-based technical and financial assistance,” Phelps said. “So, by knowing all our programs, we help them find the best fit—whether it's 1935 or 2005.”

—SYLVIA RAINFORD

Rural Development

Here, At Rural Development, We're 'Living The Brand'

“When your potential customers don't know who you are, they don't come through the door.”

Allan Johnson said that with a smile, but he was shaking his head. Johnson is director of legislative and public affairs in the Rural Development mission area.

“We are Rural Development,” he said, “but all of the individuals in our focus groups thought our programs were for people living on gravel roads, not residents of small towns.”

That's why Johnson has been heading up a special outreach and marketing campaign on behalf of Rural Development.

Rural Development's image and communications complications dated back to 1994, when a sweeping USDA-wide reorganization had combined some of the most recognizable ‘brand names’ in America—historic USDA agencies such as the Rural Electrification Administration and the Farmers Home Administration—into a unified structure. Headquarters and field offices were consolidated, staffers were cross-trained, and flow charts were simplified.

But in the process, as its employees set up shop in consolidated, USDA-wide Service Centers, Rural Development lost hundreds of familiar ‘Main Street’ storefront offices across the country. As a result, “Rural Development liter-

ally dropped out of the phonebooks in many communities,” Johnson observed.

A national marketing survey, conducted for RD, confirmed that a majority of potential partners—rural business owners, small town leaders, and rural hospital, school, and co-op boards—weren't familiar with the new mission area, and, even when prompted, didn't have much of an idea what it did. Focus groups showed that, to most people, ‘USDA’ meant ‘farm programs.’ The much broader reach of Rural Development was rarely appreciated.

“We were invisible, and a lot of people didn't see us as a resource—because they didn't know about us,” advised **Kelly Utter**, the public infor-

Editor's Roundup *USDA's people in the news*



Michael Harrison is the assistant secretary for administration.

Before joining USDA, from October 2002 until his confirmation for this position by the U.S. Senate Harrison served as president and chief executive officer of Cunningham Services, a New York City-based provider of support services to law firms and corporations in 23 states. From 1991-2002 he worked in the New York City office of Dannon Foods, a Fortune 500 company, in such positions as vice president, general counsel, and corporate secretary. In addition, he served as an adjunct professor at the New York City Management Institute from 1994-99, teaching in such areas as lifestyle marketing law.

From 1985-91 Harrison practiced law in the private sector, based first in New York City, then

Newark, N.J., and finally in Philadelphia, concentrating on such areas as corporate law, employment law, and food regulatory law.

Lou Gallegos, the previous assistant secretary for administration, retired from that position following 27 years of federal service and now resides in Rio Rancho, N.M. ■



Terri Teuber is the director of communications at USDA.

Before joining USDA, since 2003 Teuber served as the communications director for [then] Gov. **Mike Johanns** (R-Neb.) and also for his successor, Gov. **Dave Heineman** (R-Neb.). She was the public information officer, based in Lincoln, Neb., for the Nebraska State Patrol from 1999-2003.

Teuber served as the main news anchor for KLNK TV from 1996-99 and as a reporter for KOLN TV from 1991-96, both in Lincoln, Neb.

From 1987-91 she worked at KDWA Radio in Hastings, Minn., beginning as an announcer and ultimately becoming its news director.

Alisa Harrison, the previous director of communications, held that position from March 2003 until her resignation in March 2005. ■



A popular TV show in the 1950s was called "Have Gun, Will Travel," depicting a gun-for-hire in

the Old West who tracked down bad guys. **Leroy Bull** may not think of himself as "Have *Stick*, Will Travel"—but he *does* have a stick, or a divining rod, and he *has* used it to locate buried time capsules. Five of them so far. And all in Japan.

Bull is a consumer safety inspector with the Food Safety and Inspection Service based at a meat processing plant in southeastern Pennsylvania. He is also the past president

of the American Society of Dowsers. It's an organization of individuals who employ 'divining rods,' also called 'dowsing sticks,' in attempts to locate such items as underground sources of water, potentially valuable mineral deposits, holes in underground pipes—and even buried time capsules.

"I was first contacted back in 2002 by a Japanese television production company which had seen my name on the website for the American Society of Dowsers," he explained. It seems that in 1977 a group of elementary school children in Hiroshima, Japan had—as part of a Japanese custom—buried a time capsule, filled with various items of school and individual memorabilia. Then, 25 years later, it was time to invite back the now-middle-aged former students, have a ceremony, dig up the time capsule, and review its contents—but nobody could remember the spot where it was buried.

Twice that particular group of students tried to find the time capsule by

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mation coordinator for RD in Wisconsin, based in Stevens Point. "We were spending a lot of time just explaining the mission."

An alphabet soup of acronyms didn't help. "You're definitely a pro if you understand when someone says that the RDM and the RDS are seeking approval from the SD regarding a RBEG, RBOG, HPG, and a CF," quipped **Carlotta Maneice**, the public information coordinator for RD in Texas, based in Temple. "But if you talk to the public that way, a lot of times you're out of the game before you start."

Beginning in February 2004 Johnson and his headquarters public affairs staff, working with public affairs coordinators at RD field locations, challenged the problem. "We started with articulating a clear mission statement: to increase economic opportunities and improve the quality of life in rural communities," he said.

Their communications strategy stressed that Rural Development isn't just about farms—it's about *rural communities*. "As we never tire of saying around here," added **Tim McNeilly**, assistant director of RD's Legislative and Public Affairs Office, "Rural Development is the only agency in government that can build an entire town from the ground up."

They also changed the mission area logo.

Chris Lozos, deputy director of the Visual Communications Center in the Office of Communications, said that "The tag line now reads 'Rural Development—Committed to the future of rural communities.' To reinforce that, we created a new logo depicting—in green and blue hues—a 'rural Main Street' setting with silhouettes of a water tower and three buildings, including one rural residence."

They also rewrote brochures and public service announcements—and even added a theme song to many of RD's telephone answering systems—to drive the message home.

"This marketing and outreach effort also applies to our own employees in RD," emphasized Johnson. "We want our employees to think of themselves in terms of the whole mission area, not an individual program or agency."

"We now call it 'living the brand,'" he said.

"Life is much simpler now," noted **Sue Stoneham**, a Rural Development manager based in McKinney, Texas. "We're achieving recognition in the community."

"The earlier perception," added **Lisa Shivener**, a Bastrop, Texas-based Rural Development assistant, "was that USDA had only to do with meat and food products. This new



"Just like the banner says—we're Rural Development, and we're committed to the future of rural communities," affirms **Godfrey Hinds** (right), a rural development manager for the RD field office in Ocilla, Ga., and the Hispanic Program manager for RD in

Georgia. He and **Ricky Sweet**, an RD area director based in Tifton, Ga., are participating in the recent Georgia Sunbelt Ag Expo in Moultrie, Ga., as part of RD's special outreach and marketing campaign for Rural Development.—PHOTO BY AL BURNS

'brand' clears up a lot of misperceptions about our mission area."

For Rural Development, an agency that was disappearing from the phonebooks a decade ago, the new emphasis is making a difference—and, more importantly, paying off for the public.

Jolinda LaClair, the Montpelier, Vt.-based Rural Development state director for Vermont and New Hampshire, summed it up best: "Accessibility for the customer is the bottom line."

—DICK KASTING

digging for it. Then they tried using a metal detector. But no luck. So, in conjunction with a TV production company in Japan, they tried a different approach—calling in a dowser.

"I've done over 2,000 dowsings," Bull said, "mostly looking for underground water, and I'd say that my success rate is about 94 percent."

"But I had never dowsed for a time capsule."

So, intrigued by the challenge, Bull took annual leave and traveled to Japan, and his expenses were paid by that TV production company.

Once he arrived at the elementary school in question, he was provided with a blueprint of the general geographic area around the school. "I laid the blueprint out on a card

table," he recounted, "and then I started a 'map dowsing.'" He had brought with him his favorite dowser, an 18-inch wooden 'Y-rod' dowsing stick. "The most important thing in dowsing is to concentrate," he said. "If your mind is wandering, then you're not going to be successful."

"I moved my dowser around the blueprint until it started to vibrate, and then point down, over one spot."

Bull and 25 former students went outside and headed for the site corresponding to the spot, on the blueprint, of the dowser's activities. "We discovered that the spot in question was now a gorgeous garden," he said.

So, any hesitation—on anybody's part—about digging up that scenic spot? "Not a bit—since school offi-

cials had already given written permission to dig virtually anywhere on the school grounds," Bull noted.

A backhoe soon arrived on the scene, started digging at that spot—and soon there was a metallic thud. A tad later, participants carefully hand-shoveled out a 12-cubic-foot iron box—the 25-year-old time capsule.

The time capsule was then moved inside the school gymnasium where—also according to Japanese custom—the individual who had been that school's principal in 1977 formally opened the box. Then the 35 former classmates in attendance—some accompanied by family members—gathered, laughing and crying, around a big tarp on which the contents of the time cap-

sule had been spread. Bull recounted that the items included sneakers, music boxes, report cards, 'Hello Kitty' memorabilia, and copies of essays, written by then-eleven-year-old students, on what it was like to be eleven in Japan in 1977.

The event was being videotaped for a subsequent TV show, and the students were asked to read their essays. "With the help of a translator," Bull said, "I noticed that the male participants tended to read essays that recounted the daily activities of an eleven-year-old, while the female participants tended to read essays describing their feelings." The videotapers then asked the participants to hold up their essays for the camera.

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PROFILE PLUS *More About: Annabelle Romero*



Fate may have had a hand in **Annabelle Romero's** appointment to head USDA's Office of Native American Programs (NAP). Born and raised in Belen, N.M., just 20 miles south of the Isleta Indian Pueblo, Romero was steeped in Native American culture as a child. "My Hispanic background and the Native American culture really do cross over in so many ways. And I grew up with Pueblo Indians. They were my neighbors and friends," she said.

NAP is part of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, which in turn, is part of the Office of Congressional Relations. Though scarce of staff and resources, Romero's office is supported by a 16-member interagency Native American working group.

Collectively they are the key contacts at USDA for the 562 federally recognized American Indian tribes. "Most Americans are unaware of the special status of American Indian and Alaska Native Nations and the trust responsibility between the federal government and Indian Tribes," she said. "Natives are not merely a race of people in America, they are members of nations whose continuing sovereign status is recognized in the U.S. Constitution, federal statutes, and numerous federal court decisions."

Romero began her tenure at USDA in April 2002 as a special assistant to [then] Assistant Secretary for Administration **Lou Gallegos**, whose portfolio included reaching out to all minority groups. There Romero planned a Navajo Nation consultation and site visit. "This had never been done by this Department with the Navajo Nation, the largest tribe in land base and second in population to the Cherokee Nation. We brought our officials to the Navajo Nation in Window Rock, Arizona, which is their state capitol, and held a two-day session with their leaders and government." In June 2003 Romero was appointed director of NAP.

Since then she has made personal contact with many tribes including the Yakama Indian Nation of Washington State, the Southwestern pueblos and tribes, the Choctaw Indians of Mississippi, and the Oneida Nation of New York. "You can't just write a letter and say, 'Here I am,' you have to go out and meet the tribes to establish trust relationships." Still, Romero said, "The thing that stands out is that there is still a lot of poverty in Indian country."

Revenues from gaming are beginning to change that, albeit slowly. For example, the Isleta Indian Pueblo, near Romero's hometown, has grown considerably as a result and now operates several business enterprises,

including the management of a championship 27-hole golf course with beautiful panoramic views. A Head Start & Child Care Center has been added recently and several housing developments are underway.

But such changes are far from uniform. Thus the push to make tribes aware of USDA farm loan, conservation, education, nutrition, community development, and housing programs. "USDA's Native American working group is involved in everything we are doing in Indian country. The agencies are the ones that do the work, and I rely on them," Romero said.

Together they have conducted follow-up meetings with the Navajo Nation, created a Native American Programs website: www.usda.gov/na and worked to educate the tribes about USDA's wide-ranging programs and recruitment opportunities, as well as funding for tribes and tribal colleges for educational purposes. In addition, USDA has awarded numerous grants and loans for everything from the purchase of school maintenance equipment to funds for conservation practices under its Environmental Quality and Incentives Program.

Another major event was the reception for "America's First Farmers," which was held in the Whitten Building at USDA headquarters on the National Mall in Washington, DC, in September 2004. This was the first of a weeklong series of celebrations in the city marking the opening of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian. This Departmental effort was attended by over 300 people from across the country including tribal leaders, tribal organizations, and Indian Nations. "I consider that a great turnout and a great success for USDA in Indian country," Romero said.

Last Book Read: "Memoirs of a Geisha," by **Arthur Golden**

Last Movie Seen: "Million Dollar Baby"

Hobbies: Dabbles in art, calligraphy, and photography.

Favorite Food: "Everything spicy."

Favorite Weekend Breakfast: Pancakes, "because my Mom used to make pancakes every Saturday."

Priorities In The Months Ahead: "Serving the Indian community is essential in this Department. We have so many programs it makes sense for them to come to us directly rather than through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which the tribes still look to for a broad spectrum of services. This year we have begun updating the Department's 'Guide to USDA Programs for American Indians and Alaska Natives,' which was last published in 1997. This will be an important tool to continue our work. There is still so much to do."

—**PATRICIA KLINTBERG**

"The guys tended to go 'Sure thing!'" laughed Bull, "while the women tended to go 'No way!'—since, I think, many of their essays contained the names of their schoolgirl crushes."

Because of his work with that time capsule, Bull was invited back four more times to Japan, most recently in February 2004, for the same purpose. He said that each time he used his dowsing, he was able to locate another school time capsule that had been 'lost underground.'

"I think that in Japan there may be a tendency to rely on people's memories, not records, to remember the whereabouts of the buried time capsules," he speculated. "The problem is that both teachers and principals typically rotate from school to school. So ultimately, 25-plus years later, nobody is there to remember things like the location of a buried time capsule."

Bull pointed out that, in each of his five 'time capsule ventures' Japanese TV crews filmed the

activities. "All five activities appeared on a popular Japanese TV show called 'Psychic Investigators,'" he noted. "In Japan, a 17 is the top number reflecting the size of the viewing audience. Those five shows never rated below a 16."

So, what's your response to people who have their doubts about dowsing?

"Dowsing is 'evidentally true'—that is," he said, "the proof is in the proverbial pudding." ■

—RON HALL

A New Twist...continued from pg. 1

"that was the first instance of soybean rust being detected in the continental U.S." But, she added, since its detection came at a time when most soybeans already had been harvested across the country, it was thought that the disease's impact on the 2004 soybean crop would be minimal.

Nonetheless, farmers would presumably be thinking about that disease as they began planning for the 2005 planting season. Or maybe not.

"So we thought we'd better find out," said **Steve Wiyatt**, director of the Statistics Division in the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Wiyatt pointed out that the "Prospective Plantings" report, which is prepared by specialists in NASS, is one of the federal government's principal economic indicators. "That report helps us all keep current on the agricultural situation in this country," he said. "So it seemed like a logical place to raise the issue."

Joe Prusacki, chief of the Crops Branch in NASS's Statistics Division, noted that, since Asian soybean rust had not been detected in the continental U.S. prior to last November, questions about it had never been included in the various surveys that NASS specialists conduct with farmers and ranchers, as part of their preparation for the 'Prospective Plantings' report."

"So," he added, "as we began our preparations for the March 2005 edition of that report, we decided to add questions addressing it."

"That was a new twist to our preparations."

NASS soybean commodities statistician **Jason Lamprecht** listed the four questions as follows:

① "Have you seen, read, or heard any information about Asian soybean rust?" If a farmer or rancher said "yes," he/she was then asked:

② "Was Asian soybean rust a decisionmaking factor in your soybean planting intentions for 2005?" If a farmer or rancher responded "yes," he/she was then asked two more questions:

③ "Did Asian soybean rust result in an increase, decrease, or no change in your soybean planting intentions?"

④ "By how many acres did your soybean intentions change due to the Asian soybean rust?"

"We were already planning a survey to measure planting intentions in general for 2005," Lamprecht explained. "So we added these four questions—specific to Asian soybean rust."

"The timing was just right to get this whole matter into the survey."

He said that NASS specialists at the agency's headquarters office in Washington, DC, completed the draft of their questionnaire, with this addition, in mid-January 2005. In early February they mailed the four-page survey to NASS's State Statistical Offices in the 31 major soybean-producing states. Then, in late February, those participating state offices mailed the survey itself—or, in some instances, a 'heads-up' letter or postcard, alerting the recipient to anticipate a survey-based phone call—to an estimated 68,000 randomly selected farmers and ranchers in the 31 major soybean-producing states.

"But we had to be careful about how we worded our 'heads-up notice,'" advised **Sammye Crawford**, deputy director of NASS's State Statistical Office in Louisiana, based in Baton Rouge, "so that our letter didn't inadvertently bias the survey in advance by providing information about Asian soybean rust in that letter."

Mark Harris, director of NASS's State Statistical Office in Nebraska, based in Lincoln, said that the surveys are most typically carried out over the telephone. The next most frequent method of surveying—in Nebraska, and in most of the participating states as well—was by mail, followed by face-to-face interviews, generally of operators of large farms.

Dean Groskurth, deputy director of that office, noted that he and Harris talked to a farmer at a conference in Kearney, Neb., who, the previous evening, had been contacted about the NASS survey by a telephone enumerator.

"The farmer told us that he filled out his survey right away," Groskurth related, "especially because he had heard Secretary **Mike Johanns** urge farmers to do so when the Secretary spoke to attendees at the Commodity Classic trade show in Austin, Texas in late February."

"The individual state offices gave the survey participants a final 'drop-dead' due date of March 16 to get the survey responses to them," Lamprecht explained. "Then those state offices had until March 23 to complete their tabulations and their state-focused analyses, and get that to us at headquarters. Then we had until March 30 to complete our nationwide analysis of the data."

More about the contents of the March 2005

"Prospective Plantings" report can be found at www.usda.gov/nass by clicking on "Publications." More about USDA's response to Asian soybean rust, including efforts by specialists in the Agricultural Research Service, APHIS, the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, the Economic Research Service, the National Agricultural Library, and the Risk Management Agency, can be found on www.usda.gov/soybeanrust

"We at NASS call ourselves the 'factfinders of agriculture,'" Lamprecht noted. "Because of the discovery of Asian soybean rust and the timing of our survey, we made sure we were the *fast* factfinders of agriculture for this report." ■

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"This table of results depicts what we're adding to the 'Prospective Plantings' report, based on what our farmers told us in our survey," notes **Brian Hellman** (standing), a senior commodity statistician with NASS's State Statistical Office in Nebraska, based in Lincoln. His audience includes (seated, L to R) **Dean Groskurth**, Nebraska state office deputy director; **Scott Keller**, NASS estimates group leader; and **Judy Jones**, NASS computer assistant. What was different about this particular nationwide NASS survey was that, for the first time, farmers and ranchers in the country's 31 major soybean-producing states were asked about their soybean planting intentions, in the aftermath of the recent discovery of Asian soybean rust—for the first time in the continental U.S. Note the story on page 1.—**PHOTO BY DAVID BIAR**



**HELP US FIND
Amadou Fall**

Missing: 2-13-2005 From: Yonkers, NY
D.O.B. 11-11-1989 Sex: Male
Hair: Black Eyes: Brown
Height: 5 ft. 10 in. Weight: 230 lbs.

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