

USDA *news*

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

How We're Trying To Eliminate All That Unwanted Office Mail

by Ron Hall

Office of Communications

Here's a gripe: Each of us gets our own share of mail—including journals, catalogues, marketing pubs, and periodicals—through the U.S. Postal Service. It's addressed to us individually, it arrives at our USDA work sites, and it's often unsolicited—or, if it had once been requested awhile back, now it's no longer wanted. In addition, some of our USDA colleagues—who, actually, are no longer USDA colleagues at that site because of retirements or relocations—still get scads of similar mail at their former USDA addresses, even though they've long since left the premises.

So we all keep tossing our individual piles of unwanted mail into the trash, as we mutter our own versions of "Good Riddance!"

The problem, however, is that there's a cost for handling all that unsolicited and/or unwanted mail—and USDA is footing the bill.

That's why last November the Department initiated a "Reduce Unwanted Mail Campaign" to alleviate the problem and reduce the costs—both in dollars and in workpower—associated with it. What follows is how the campaign has been working thus far, both at USDA headquarters and field locations.

"Yeah, we all receive a whole lot of mail like that at our work sites," affirmed **Ed Murtagh**, the Sustainable Operations Manager for the Office of Operations. "And even when some of those materials are actually wanted, there can be a lot of waste and duplication."

He ticked off examples of such mail, including: mail for USDA employees who are long gone; multiple mailings for the same employee caused by small inconsistencies—such as slightly different name spellings, misspellings, or abbreviations—that, at least in the eye of the sender, warrant multiple mailings; and poorly targeted mailings—such as office supply catalogs and training programs, that are sent to employees who aren't involved in the purchase, program, or activity being highlighted.

Murtagh explained that last year, while he and several USDA colleagues were reviewing the impact of USDA headquarters facilities on the local environment, he conferred with USDA mail service personnel on that topic. "They alerted me to this continuing problem about unwanted mail," he recalled. "So we decided to try and find a solution."

"Our goal," he emphasized, "was to cut down on the amount of unwanted mail by helping em-



Even the horse in the center (background) seems to want to know what APHIS's **MARTHA CHAVEZ** (2nd from right) and **KERRY FORSYTH** (3rd from right) are explaining to the students near livestock corrals in Nogales, AZ. The teens are participants in the summer 2009 "Tohono Land Connections" program in Arizona, which is an outreach program for teens with an interest in plants, agriculture, and natural resources. The program is thought to be unique within USDA. Note **GREG ROSENTHAL'S** story on page 4.—**PHOTO BY PAUL BUSECK**

ployees to keep their names off of uninvited, unsolicited, and unwanted mailing lists—and also by helping employees to request that companies and publishers delete their names from those mailing lists, as appropriate."

Accordingly, as a first step in the "Reduce Unwanted Mail Campaign," OO's Mail and Reproduction Management Division disseminated a "Mailer's Memo" which described the campaign. "Our November 2008 'Mailer's Memo' was titled 'Special Edition—Going Green; Reduce Unwanted Mail,'" recounted **Betty Froehlich**, USDA's Mail Manager in OO. "And we actually colored

this single-sheet flyer green, to emphasize that we were serious about tackling this problem." She noted that OO's "Mailer's Memos" are sent to the mail collection offices, at headquarters, of USDA's program agencies and staff offices.

The flyer advised that, through a pilot project, USDA had set up special "Unwanted Mail Containers" at several sites around the USDA headquarters complex. It encouraged employees to place their unwanted mail, to include catalogs, brochures, journals, and periodicals, in those specially-marked white cardboard con-

continued on pg. 2...



Tom Vilsack *Secretary of Agriculture*

Dear Fellow Employees, Most people do not realize the impact our nation's forests have upon their daily lives. Forests provide countless recreational activities, alternative energy possibilities, local economic benefits, and wildlife habitats all across our country on both public and private lands.

Most people also don't realize that when you turn on your faucet, a forest may have helped the water get to your home. 87 percent of our country's fresh water supply originates from forest or agricultural watersheds. Our national forests alone are the source of fresh water for more than 900 cities and 3,200 public water systems serving more than 66 million people from coast to coast.

And yet, our nation's forestlands are threatened like they've never been before. Climate change, catastrophic fires, disease, and pests have led to declining forest health. We are losing our privately-owned working forestlands to development and fragmentation at an alarming pace. All of these changes have enormous potential impacts on drinking water, greenhouse gas emissions and the climate, local economies, wildlife, and recreation.

It is time to reverse the trend of declining forest health and set forth a new direction for conservation, management, and restoration of these natural treasures.

On August 14, I visited Seattle, Washington to present a vision that will guide the policies and approach of the USDA and the Forest Service towards forest conservation and management during my tenure as Secretary. In my speech, I discussed the challenges that face our nation's forests and the opportunities for conservation and restoration that will be critical to maintaining the benefits that Americans gain from our forests each and every day.

The new direction I proposed for our forests will emphasize a collaborative and cross-boundary forest management approach with a

heavy focus on restoration. It will make our forests more resilient to climate change while protecting water resources, improving forest health, and creating new jobs.

This new approach will require the American people to become engaged in conserving and restoring both our National Forests as well as our privately-owned forestlands. We must reconnect Americans across the nation with their natural resources and the magnificent landscapes that sustain us.

The implementation of the Recovery Act has given the Forest Service a jump start in this new direction. With Recovery Act funding, hundreds of projects are underway creating local jobs and restoring our nation's private, state, and national forests through hazardous fuel reduction, forest health protection, and rehabilitation activities.

Although the Forest Service manages 193 million acres of land, the majority of our country's forests are not within the National Forest System. And so, our new vision for forest restoration seeks to increase the cooperation between public and private forest stakeholders.

This will mean bringing more voices into our forest planning processes. We also want to provide landowners with economic incentives to maintain and restore their forestland, which is why the Forest Service will play a leading role in the development of new markets for carbon storage and biomass energy.

A healthy and prosperous America relies on the health of our nation's forests—and the health of our nation's forests depends on the efforts of the Forest Service and Americans working together to help tackle complex forest health issues.

The path ahead is challenging but full of opportunity. We must encourage, catalyze, and expand the collaborative solutions that hold the most promise to protect our public and working lands. And we must dramatically accelerate the scale and pace of forest stewardship activities on both public and private lands. I am excited that the Forest Service will be leading these efforts. ■

Unwanted...continued from pg. 1

tainers, and pledged that "The Office of Operations staff will work to get in touch with the vendor to delete your name from their mailing list."

In addition, three USDA postcards were attached to each copy of the November "Mailer's Memo." "We advised in the flyer," Froehlich said, "that 'If you would like to delete your name from these unwanted mailing lists yourself, we are attaching some postcards that can be used to send to the companies'."

Michele Lambert, Director of the Mail and Reproduction Management Division, said USDA has estimated that it receives about 50 tons of junk mail each

year in the Department's Mail Center which services USDA's Headquarters Complex. Put another way, she noted, the Mail Center receives about 3,000-4,000 pieces of mail each work day, and about 25 percent of those pieces could be considered unwanted mail.

"So if we reduced that paper consumption by 50 tons per year, we'll preserve about 750 trees annually," she emphasized. "And we'll improve the efficiency of our Mail Center."

That sounds like a solid game plan. So how has it been working?

Barbara Brooks, the Office Manager in OO's Washington Area Service Center, replied that she has been serving as the

hands-on person for the Department to help get the unwanted mail cancelled. "Well, we haven't been getting an avalanche of unwanted mail—which we had originally expected," she acknowledged. "The unwanted items have been trickling in at a few pieces of mail a day."

She explained that, once she receives an item of unwanted postal mail, her standard procedure is to contact the customer service office—either by e-mail or by phone—of the source of that unwanted mail. She then requests the removal of the USDA employee name in question from that source's mail data base.

"Without exception so far," she noted, "they've been quite helpful and eager to comply."

Often they'll send Brooks a followup e-mail to confirm the action they've taken, although they sometimes acknowledge that it may take a few mail cycles before the name removal registers with the source's computers.

"One thing I'd like to do as a next step," Brooks said, "is to do some sample spot-checks, to follow up with our employees to confirm that the unwanted mail is, in fact, no longer being received."

"Of course," she added, "for those USDA employees who aren't here anymore, that's sort of academic."

On some occasions the Department's Mail Center receives a hefty bulk of mail, such as 500

continued on pg. 7...

Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

“Feds Feed Families”:

The colorful summer Hawaiian shirt was the garb of choice at Washington, DC’s Capital Area Food Bank on July 28. That’s because Deputy Secretary **Kathleen Merrigan**, plus several Administration officials who joined her at the Food Bank and who sported those shirts, were using the shirts to promote volunteer efforts by federal employees—on behalf of food banks—during this summer.

Max Finberg, Director of USDA’s Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, explained that “United We Serve” is the name of the overall effort to promote volunteer service by Americans across the country. “It’s also described as the ‘summer of service initiative,’ it’s taking place between June 22 and September 11, and it’s being promoted nationwide by President **Barack Obama** and First Lady **Michelle Obama**,” he noted. “But the specific volunteer efforts by federal employees in support of food banks is called ‘Feds Feed Families’—and that’s what we were focusing on, during our recent visit to the Capital Area Food Bank.”

Food and Nutrition Service Program Analyst **Amber Herman** pointed out that summer is often the hardest time for food banks to gather the resources they need to help their local communities. “Once the school year ends and school nutrition programs end as well, many kids lose an important source of food,” she advised. “Plus, volunteers can be on summer travel and change summer schedules, and this can interrupt regular donations to food banks. Those food banks are often important in the lives of many—and when they’re affected by erratic summer donations, that can compound the problem for a lot of needy people.”

That, affirmed **Cristina Chiappe**, Special Assistant to Assistant Secretary for Administration **Pearlie Reed** and USDA’s coordinator for “Feds Feed Families,” is what prompted the “Feds Feed Families” initiative.

She said that USDA employees at headquarters and field locations were sent an e-mail from Secretary **Tom Vilsack**, dated July 27, 2009 and titled “Secretary’s Letter to all USDA employees on ‘United We Serve’.” In it Vilsack noted that “One great opportunity that is happening now is the federal government’s food drive, ‘Feds Feed Families.’ Our colleagues at the Office of Personnel Management are asking all federal employees to do-

nate food to feed our hungry neighbors. Given that feeding hungry people is part of our mission, I hope that we will all be especially generous in donating food...” **J.K. Granberg-Michaelson**, an assistant to Finberg, said that employees were then encouraged to contribute nonperishable food items, especially nutritious foods and sources of protein, and deposit them in cardboard and wooden collection boxes set up in USDA offices around the Washington, DC metropolitan area. He added that similar food drive collection efforts were also encouraged at USDA office sites around the country.

And there was a unique inducement. Finberg noted that, during the July 28 event at the Capital Area Food Bank, Merrigan—garbed in a colorful summer Hawaiian shirt—encouraged employees to donate food at the collection boxes and to volunteer their assistance at their local food banks. “She then suggested,” he recounted, “that during the next ‘Casual Friday’—Friday, July 31—at USDA work sites, it would be ‘most appropriate’ for those employees who had donated at least five pounds of food to then feel free to wear a Hawaiian shirt of their own to work that day.”

And did that ‘fashion statement’ happen? “Well, I sure wore *my* Hawaiian shirt!” affirmed Finberg. “And I spotted friends with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Food and Nutrition Service sporting theirs as well!”

The Cost To Raise A Child:

On August 4 USDA released its annual report which details how much it costs to raise a child in America today. Titled “Expenditures on Children by Families, 2008” and released by USDA’s Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, it noted that for middle-income families with a child born in 2008, the costs of providing food, shelter, clothing, and other goods and services are estimated to total



Purposely sporting a colorful Hawaiian shirt, Deputy Secretary **KATHLEEN MERRIGAN** (left) is joined by OPM Director **JOHN BERRY** (2nd from left), Secretary of the Interior **KEN SALAZAR** (3rd from left, partially obscured), and Secretary of Transportation **RAY LAHOOD** (4th from left, wearing tie) at the Capital Area Food Bank in Washington, DC, as they sort some of the nonperishable food items collected by federal employees for the Food Bank.—**PHOTO BY KEN HAMMOND**

\$221,190 by the child’s 18th birthday.

“All expenses associated with raising children have continued to rise over time, particularly with regard to child care. However, that expense was a negligible component of the costs for raising a child in 1960 when USDA first produced this report,” advised CNPP Consumer Economist **Mark Lino**, who coauthored the report with CNPP Agricultural Economist **Andrea Carlson**.

He pointed out that housing costs are the single largest expenditure on a child, averaging \$69,660 or 32 percent of the total cost over 17 years. Food and child care/education—for those with that expense—were the next two largest expenses, each averaging 16 percent of the total expenditure. The estimates do not include the cost of childbearing or the cost of a college education. “For the year 2008,” Lino added, “annual child-rearing expenses for a middle-income, two-parent family ranged from \$11,610 to \$13,480, depending on the age of the child, with expenditures on teenagers being the highest.”

Carlson added that this report has been a resource for state agencies and courts in determining child support guidelines and foster care payments.

This annual USDA report, which is available at www.cnpp.usda.gov, is now in its 49th year. ■

—**RON HALL**

Employees *make these things happen*

FOOD SAFETY

Now We Can 'Chat' With "Ask Karen" About Our Food Safety Concerns

"Yakety Yak, Don't Talk Back" is a song recorded by the **Coasters** in 1958 when **Ezra Taft Benson** was Secretary of Agriculture. Fifty-some years later, USDA employees can now "talk back"—in a live chat that's also electronic—as they answer the public's questions about food safety.

It's all part of a new development on the "Ask Karen" feature which is part of USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline. **Diane Van**, the Hotline Manager with the Food Safety and Inspection Service, explained that "Ask Karen" has been serving as a 'virtual representative' automated response system available 24/7 at the agency's website—www.fsis.usda.gov, or more directly at www.AskKaren.gov.

"Since 'Ask Karen' was launched in April 2004," Van pointed out, "the way it has functioned is that 'Karen' has displayed an answer—based on the words typed by users of this feature—to about 1,400 questions concerning the safe storage, preparation, and handling of meat, poultry, and egg products, as well as about the prevention of foodborne illness and disease." The Sept.-Oct. 2005 issue of the **USDA NEWS** carried a story which featured "Ask Karen."

"But now, in a new development," Van emphasized, "customers with Internet access can type in questions by visiting the 'Ask Karen' website and clicking on the gray 'Live Chat' tab on the answer screen. A technical information specialist at the Hotline will return the answers—in real time—through

typed conversation." FSIS launched this new feature "live" on July 16.

How does the real-time chat work? **Maribel Alonso**, an FSIS Bilingual Technical Information Specialist on the Hotline, explained that the "Ask Karen" chat is a one-on-one conversation where the user types a food safety question onto the computer screen, and a Hotline specialist replies instantly. "The back-and-forth typed conversation scrolls on the screen," she noted. "Users can see what they type as well as the replies from the specialist."

Contrasting the 'virtual representative Karen' with the new, 'live chat Karen,' FSIS Hotline Technical Information Specialist **Archie Magoulas** observed that "'Chat' brings the self-service database 'Karen' to life. But I want to emphasize that consumers can always talk to a food safety expert by telephoning the long-standing toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline phone number—1-888-MPHotline or 1-888-674-6854."

Hotline Technical Information Specialist **Sandy King** clarified that the "Ask Karen" chat feature is active only during Hotline office hours—10 am to 4 pm, Monday through Friday. "But the 'virtual Ask Karen,' with its automated response system, is still available to users anytime, anywhere," she underscored.

Tina Hanes, an "Ask Karen" Application Administrator and Hotline Technical Information Specialist, recounted that some of the questions asked during recent 'chats' ran the gamut from the serious—"What are the symptoms from ingesting E.coli 0157:H7?"

(diarrhea or bloody diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, and malaise)—to the fatuous—"How many feathers are on a turkey?" (about 3,500).

Public Health Service Commissioned Officers Lieutenant **Israel Otero** and Lieutenant Commander **Iris Valentin-Bon**, both Bilingual Technical Information Specialists on the Hotline, noted that plans are to have a Spanish version of "Ask Karen" available by early 2010.

"The 'chat feature' is increasing USDA's 'talk back' with our customers," Van emphasized. "So we're pretty pleased with 'Karen's' popularity." ■

—**CiCi Williamson**



"The notebook confirms what I'm 'chatting' to our customer," affirms FSIS's **TINA HANES** (seated), as she and FSIS's **ARCHIE MAGOULAS** check with the FSIS Meat and Poultry Hotline's reference notebook while responding—in real time through the Hotline's new "Ask Karen" 'chat' feature—to a customer's inquiry about food safety.—
PHOTO BY CiCi Williamson

MARKETING AND REGULATORY PROGRAMS

This Unique APHIS Outreach Program Combines Teens, Ag, Science, Culture

If you're worried that today's typical high schooler may not even entertain a career in agriculture, then you haven't met the 11 teens who attended this year's "Safeguarding Natural Heritage: Tohono Land Connections" program in Arizona.

That's an outreach program for teenagers with an interest in animals and plants, agriculture, and natural resources. And this year's participants left the two-week program—sponsored by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Tohono O'odham

Community College, and the University of Arizona—charged up by hands-on experiences and field trips related to plant and animal science, agriculture, natural resources, and the environment. Among many other things, the Tohono Land Connections, or "TLC," students learned how veterinarians dip cattle for disease-carrying ticks and how—and why—APHIS grows and sterilizes literally millions of pink bollworms every year.

The 2009 program, which ran from May 26 to June 5, marks the TLC's third successful year. "This novel program engages teens by melding western science with the cultural heritage of the Tohono O'odham people,

who have inhabited the Sonoran Desert of southeastern Arizona for generations," noted **Jose Ceballos**, National Coordinator for APHIS's Postentry Quarantine Program, who developed the idea while with APHIS's Native American Working Group in 2006.

"We were trying to come up with new ways to reach out to the Tribes with our APHIS programs and services," Ceballos explained. "We wanted to learn how we might be able to serve their community. So our first idea was to create a youth outreach program focusing on invasive insect species and federally designated noxious weeds."

continued on pg. 5...

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



Krysta Harden is the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations. Before joining USDA, from March 2004 until she was confirmed by the U.S. Senate for this position Harden served as the Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Conservation Districts, based in Washington, DC. From 1993-2004 she was the Senior Vice President of Gordley Associates, a Washington, DC consulting firm, where she focused on conservation, environmental, and energy issues

while working with a variety of commodity organizations.

Harden worked on Capitol Hill from 1981-92. This included serving as a professional staff member for the House Agriculture Committee, where she concentrated on peanuts and tobacco, and as Chief of Staff and Press Secretary for [then] U.S. Rep. **Charles Hatcher** (D-GA).

Linda Strachan, the previous Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, is now the Director for Federal Government Affairs at the Washington, DC Office of Dupont Company. ■



Jonathan Coppess is the Administrator of the Farm Service Agency.

From May 2009 until his appointment to this position Coppess served as FSA's Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs. From 2006-09 he was a Legislative Assistant for U.S. Senator **Ben Nelson** (D-NE), where he focused on agriculture, energy, and the environment and worked on the 2008 Farm Bill.

continued on pg. 6...

So Ceballos's ideas ultimately reached **Olivia Vanegas-Funcheon**, President of the Tohono O'odham Community College in Sells, AZ, who saw this as an opportunity to motivate teens to stay in school, turn them on to science, and then encourage them to study agriculture and related fields in college. "But before the program began," Ceballos recounted, "leaders of the Tohono O'odham Nation requested that the planned program's scope be expanded to include a wide variety of plant, animal, agricultural, and environmental topics from the native perspective."

Ceballos helped to run the TLC during its pilot in 2007 and again in 2008. He then passed the torch in 2009 to **Janet Wintermute**, APHIS's Native American Program-Delivery Manager. For the first time, this year's TLC curriculum included presentations from every major APHIS program. "To my knowledge," she emphasized, "this particular outreach program is unique within USDA because—although any high schooler can apply—it's designed to stimulate Native American students to go to college and major in agriculture, natural resources, and related subjects. It's also designed to benefit tribally controlled land grant colleges."

Christina Jewett, an APHIS National Program Manager for Native American Program Delivery and Tribal Liaison, based in Tucson, AZ, pointed out that this year's program gave the TLC students a taste of APHIS's vast range of work. She added that one of the program's highlights was the tour of the U.S. port of entry from Mexico at Nogales, AZ. "The TLC students watched about 1,000 head of cattle from Mexico run—literally—through a narrow, fence-lined chute to the U.S. gate of entry, where U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials counted them on their way to

holding pens on the U.S. side," she recalled. **Kerry Forsyth** and **Rita Kester**, APHIS veterinarians based in Douglas, AZ, and in Nogales, respectively, then explained to the students how the agency safeguards American livestock by screening imported animals for foreign animal diseases and pests.

Tess Williams, an APHIS Trade Specialist based in Phoenix, coordinated a tour of the truck and cargo inspection dock run by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency, or "CBP," at Nogales. She and fellow APHIS colleagues based in Nogales explained how CBP enforces APHIS's import regulations and conducts import commodity inspections. The students moved on to APHIS's Plant Inspection Station in Nogales. "They simulated," she said, "an import inspection of cumin and coriander seed, looking for onionweed—a federally designated noxious weed that's a serious invasive species." Also at Nogales, **Martha Chavez**, an Agricultural Specialist for Animal Health based in APHIS's Mexico City office, discussed how the agency facilitates safe global trade by negotiating animal and plant health protocols that prevent the international spread of animal and plant pests and diseases. The TLC students also visited Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, where **Laurie Gage**, an APHIS Veterinary Medical Officer and Large Cat Specialist based in Napa, CA, described common zoo veterinary problems and procedures and explained how the agency enforces the Animal Welfare Act. "The students learned how vets give a tiger a root canal," she said, "and APHIS's role in rescuing captive dolphins that were swept out to sea by Hurricane Katrina in 2005."

Bill Sparklin, an APHIS Wildlife Biologist based in Phoenix, taught the students how the agency tracks wild animals as part of its efforts to resolve human-wildlife conflicts that

threaten agriculture, natural resources, or public safety. "They also got to test their own tracking skills," he noted, "by playing hide and seek, searching for fellow students who had donned radio collars."

But, Wintermute underscored, APHIS wasn't the only star of the show. "The Tohono O'odham Community College and the University of Arizona also provided the students with such activities as living on the Tohono O'odham Nation's reservation—where the students learned about the Tribe's deep cultural connection to the land," she said. "And they attended classes and labs on campus in such fields as entomology and meat safety." APHIS worked with the community college and the university to develop the core curric-

continued on pg. 7...



"Now you and I are going to test some grain tissue to see if we can determine the presence of genetically engineered material," explains **CARL ETSITTY**, an APHIS Regional Biotechnologist based in Fort Collins, CO, to recent participants in the "Tohono Land Connections" educational program in Arizona.—
PHOTO BY PAUL BUSECK

Coppess practiced law in Chicago from 2001-05, primarily as a commercial litigator. During the late 1990s he worked at Archer Daniels Midland as a Grain Merchandiser. He grew up on his family's corn and soybean farm in west-central Ohio, where his father and brother continue the seven-generation farming operation.

Doug Caruso, the previous Administrator of FSA, returned to his home in Madison, WI. ■



Mike Michener is the Administrator of the Foreign Agricultural Service.

Before joining USDA, from July 2007 until his appointment to this position Michener served as the Senior Democracy and Governance Advisor and Lead Planning Officer for the U.S. State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization. From 2005-

07 he served as the lead Iraq Policy Officer for the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. He worked as an Asylum Officer for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, based in San Francisco, from 2003-05.

From 1998-2003 Michener was a Democracy Specialist with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID),

continued on pg. 7...

PROFILE PLUS More About: Bill O'Donnell



All USDA employees should have received an e-mail message, dated July 21, 2009 and titled "Recruitment for Provincial Reconstruction Teams," encouraging Departmental employees to serve on temporary details as agricultural advisors in Afghanistan or Iraq. **Bill O'Donnell** saw that announcement and, yep, he was interested.

Well, actually, he was 're-interested.' More actually, he had already served on a detail to Afghanistan during 2004-05. And even more actually, he is unique among all those USDA employees who have served on those details, nearly all of which involve being a part of a Provincial Reconstruction Team, or PRT. That's according to **Bud Eaton**, the Afghanistan PRT Coordinator in the Foreign Agricultural Service—the agency that manages and coordinates USDA participation in PRTs in those two countries. Eaton noted that O'Donnell was the first employee who is from the USDA agency that has contributed the most employees to this program—the Natural Resources Conservation Service—who has completed a PRT detail, who is currently back stateside, and who is still a USDA employee and not a retiree. FAS International Agricultural Development Specialist **Autumn Tarter** added that as of August 24, 2009 USDA had 12 employees—from headquarters and field locations—participating in Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and 29 employees in PRTs in Iraq. Furthermore, FAS International Programs Specialist **Katya Caballero** said that USDA employees have been serving on PRTs in Afghanistan since September 2003, and on PRTs in Iraq since June 2006. The May-June 2008 issue of the **USDA NEWS** carried a story about this program.

O'Donnell is the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs for NRCS in West Virginia, based in Morgantown. He was born and raised in Bakersfield, CA, and holds a B.S. degree in range management from the University of Nevada-Reno. He began his full-time career with NRCS as a Range Conservationist in Reno in 1983, served as a District Conservationist in Oregon, Utah, and then Nevada from 1986-2001, and held other managerial positions for the agency in Iowa and West Virginia from 2001-07, when he took his current assignment.

He first became interested in USDA's PRT Program while attending a conference in Des Moines in 2002. NRCS's **Manuel Ayala**, who has since retired, spoke at the conference where he promoted the program. "Manuel was on his way over to Afghanistan," O'Donnell recounted, "and he became the first person from my agency to serve on a PRT in that country. I've always been fascinated by that part of the world, so I kept in touch with Manuel, and when the opportunity arose, I applied for the program."

That's when O'Donnell ran into an obstacle. "My wife was supportive," he emphasized. "But my three kids were all wondering why Dad wanted to leave home for six months." In addition, his parents and four siblings expressed great reservations. "They knew I'd receive 'Danger Pay' as part of this assignment—but weren't too happy with the fact that I'd be in a situation that would warrant 'Danger Pay' in the first place." But, he said, he saw this as a calling.

And what was the application process like? "Actually, the paperwork portion was easier than applying for a typical government job," O'Donnell replied. It included providing KSAs—"Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities"—to a series of required qualifications. In addition, he was interviewed by a panel of FAS employees. Was the interview conducted via long distance? "Oh, generally not," he underscored. "There's no doubt that they want to meet the candidate in person, size him or her up, determine whether the candidate's motivation is to really serve on a PRT or merely to escape their current job, and determine the candidate's skills, degree of self-motivation and ability to work independently, work under stress, work with interpreters and with members of the military, and work a schedule that is definitely not 9 to 5. In short, they want to assess if the candidate has the psyche to make it in this program."

O'Donnell was ultimately selected, and in August 2004 he began serving in Mazar-e-Sharif in north-central Afghanistan. During his tenure he served as the agricultural advisor for the five provinces that his PRT dealt with. Projects he worked on included: pest control against a sap-sucking bug that was destroying the local wheat crop; starting to rebuild a local soil testing lab; and developing trial plots of improved crop varieties—during which he worked with staff at NRCS's Plant Materials Center in Lockeford, CA to obtain different varieties of crops for field trials. "The great thing about USDA," he observed, "is that you have a great network back in the states. You're never alone overseas."

O'Donnell returned to NRCS from his assignment in Afghanistan and arrived in Morgantown in April 2005. "My screen saver on my office computer is full of photos of my tour in that country," he affirmed. "So every time I log in, all those memories come back."

Last Book Read: "*On the Border with Crook*" by **John Bourke**. "It focuses on U.S. Army General **George Crook**, it was first published in 1891, and it's a gift from my dad."

Last Movie Seen: "*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*." "I had a date with my daughter **Kelsey** and my youngest son **Conner**."

Something I Don't Want People To Know About Me: "On my PRT, once I got past the 'deer in the headlights' feeling, at times the weird became the normal for me."

Priorities In The Months Ahead: "When I went to Afghanistan I felt a pull to go. I've since applied to go back—because I feel that there's some valuable work I want to finish in that country."

—**RON HALL**

where he specialized in the Balkans as he served in Washington, DC, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. He worked in university administration for the University of Maryland's European Division, initially in London from 1992-94 and then in Heidelberg from 1994-98.

Mike Yost, the previous Administrator of FAS, returned to his family farm in Murdock, MN. ■



Larry Chandler is the Area Director of the Agricultural Research Service's Midwest Area, based in Peoria, IL.

From 2004 until his selection for this position Chandler served as the Associate Area Director of ARS's Northern Plains Area, based in Ft. Collins, CO. He was the Director of ARS's Red River Valley Agricultural Research Center, based in Fargo, ND, from 1999-2004.

Chandler served as the Research Leader and Supervisory Research Entomologist at ARS's Northern Grain Insects Research Lab in Brookings, SD from 1994-99. He worked as a Research Entomologist for ARS at its Insect Biology and Population Management Research Lab in Tifton, GA from 1989-94, after being a Research Entomologist for ARS at its Subtropical Cotton Insects Research Lab in Weslaco, TX from 1987-89. He began his full-time career with ARS as a Research Entomologist at its Plant Health & Stress Physiology Research Lab in Weslaco in 1982.

Steven Shafer, the previous Area Director of ARS's Midwest Area, is now Deputy Administrator for Natural Resources & Sustain-

able Agricultural Systems for ARS, based in Beltsville, MD. ■

Unwanted...continued from pg. 2

catalogues, with an individual USDA employee name on each catalogue. In those instances, Froehlich has been the person to contact the source of the mailing. She then provides guidance to that source on how to get those employee names removed from the source's database, plus how to get those unsolicited shipments to USDA stopped.

But what if some USDA employees actually *want* those catalogues—even if they *were* unsolicited? "In these 'bulk' situations," Froehlich replied, "our mail staff does an initial check, and we've generally found that a sizable number of the employee names have been 'outdated or erroneous'."

"In addition," she pointed out, "in many instances those bulk mailings will only include an employee name but not an office address, since the source assumes that *we* will add those addresses, and then make the deliveries—of each and every one of those catalogues."

"Look," she emphasized, "we want to focus our time and resources on delivering the official mail that employees want and need—instead of this unsolicited and unwanted mail."

Froehlich added that, in one such recent situation, the catalogue company she had contacted then asked if it could pick up the unsolicited catalogues itself and then deliver them to other sources. "Are you kidding, of course!" Froehlich advised her contact. "That keeps us from having to handle these items yet again."

In February 2009 the campaign moved beyond the pilot stage and became more so-

lidified. "We concluded that it's both cost-effective and time-effective to continue this particular effort—and to expand it as well, if we can," Murtagh explained.

Might the removal of an employee's name from unwanted mailing lists be formally incorporated into the 'outprocessing checklist' of employees who are retiring or otherwise leaving USDA?

"I think that's worth looking into," Murtagh said.

So, is the plan to expand this campaign to USDA field offices?

"Personnel from a number of USDA agencies, who have participated in the campaign at the headquarters level, have contacted me about the feasibility of initiating similar campaigns at their field offices, as appropriate," Murtagh replied. "And I've been helping them develop a template that would replicate this campaign at our field offices."

"So stand by: you might be seeing evidence of the 'Reduce Unwanted Mail Campaign'—hopefully at USDA field offices, from coast to coast." ■

Employees...continued from pg. 5

ulum for the program, and the three partners have continued to tweak it over the years.

APHIS covers the two-week program's costs for room, board, and lab supplies through a cooperative agreement with the community college, which in turn pays the university for a number of its program-related expenses. Both schools provide professors, labs, and staff time to support the TLC activities. Students only pay for transportation to and from the program. Students who apply to participate are required to submit a brief essay explaining "How my interest in agriculture and natural resources can help myself, my community, and the country."

"All the partners benefit when the teens realize that agricultural and related careers can be exciting and deeply rewarding," Wintermute observed, "and the TLC program is making sure the students know that there are plenty of these jobs at USDA."

Has the program made a difference—and might it be worthy of duplication, as appropriate, by other USDA agencies? "At least seven students—from this year's class of eleven—told me that they wanted to become involved with agricultural issues when they returned home," Chavez noted.

Now that's making a difference in a teen's life. ■

—**GREG ROSENTHAL**

The **USDA NEWS** is published by the Office of Communications, the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This employee news publication, which is prepared by, for, and about this Department's employees, is distributed to USDA's 118,300 full-time, part-time, and temporary federal employees and non-federal county employees, by order of the Secretary of Agriculture. Mailing address is Rm. 412-A Whitten Bldg.; OC, USDA; 1400 Independence Ave., SW; Washington, D.C. 20250-1300.

Ron Hall Editor
Charles Hobbs **USDA NEWS** Internet Coordinator
Kirk Spencer Printing Foreman
Gallin Murray Bindery Foreman

Since the **USDA NEWS** is made available on USDA's website, all materials contained in this employee news publication are made available to the public. To view this employee news publication online, click on:

http://www.usda.gov/agnews_pubs.xml

USDA prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs). Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Ave SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (800) 877-8339 (TTY) or (866) 377-8642 (federal relay voice users). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



No, that's not a recycling container in this pic. Instead, its purpose is best described by the sketch, on the container, of a mailbox and the words below that sketch which read "Unwanted Mail Box—Place unwanted mail in container for deletion from mailing lists; 'Reduce Unwanted Mail Campaign'." And that's why OO's **BARBARA BROOKS** (left) and **BETTY FROEHLICH** are conferring about the publications which Brooks is holding—since they are the latest items which USDA employees have deposited in the box, so that those employees can then have their names removed from the mailing lists of those unwanted pubs. Note the story on page 1.—**PHOTO BY RENEE ALLEN**



Help us find

Domingo Sanchez Gonzalez

Missing: **8-30-2008** From: **Louisburg, NC**

D.O.B.: **12-25-1996** Sex: **Male**

Hair: **Black**

Eyes: **Black**

Height: **4 ft. 4 in.**

Weight: **130 lbs.**

If you have information, please call

1-800-843-5678

NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN

USDA-Sponsored Calendar Highlights

■ **Month of September**

National Preparedness Month

USDA headquarters and field offices

(202) 720-5711 or 1-800-877-8339 (TTY)

■ **September 15-October 15**

Hispanic Heritage Month

USDA headquarters and field offices

(202) 720-6350 or 1-800-877-8339 (TTY)

■ **Month of October**

National Disability Employment

Awareness Month

USDA headquarters and field offices

(202) 720-6350 or 1-800-877-8339 (TTY)

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, \$300



U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250