

USDA *news*

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

Note Some Of Our More Creative Efforts At Outreach And Diversity During 2009

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

The year 2009 saw a number of initiatives—by USDA agencies in general and/or by USDA employees in particular—to strengthen diversity and outreach by the Department. What follows is a sample of some of those initiatives that are thought to be particularly unique, innovative, and/or creative, designed to strengthen diversity and outreach—either within USDA or outside of the Department to USDA's customers:

—The Food Safety and Inspection Service has had three of its food safety publications—its hand-washing card, its “Be Food Safe” brochure, and its card that identifies the proper temperatures for thoroughly cooking meat and poultry products—translated into eight different languages, including Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, Haitian Creole, and Spanish. “Our intent is to reach non-English speaking populations in the U.S. and reduce communication barriers,” said FSIS Public Affairs Specialist **Felicia Thompson**, the project manager for this initiative.

—Staffers with the Grain Inspection, Packers & Stockyards Administration wanted to further reach minority, underserved, underrepresented, and socially

disadvantaged communities concerning its annual solicitation for new members for its Grain Inspection Advisory Committee. “So,” explained GIPSA Management Analyst **Terri Henry**, who coordinated this effort, “we provided 600 community/faith-based organizations across the country and 300 minority-serving institutions with information about our November 10, 2009 Federal Register Notice, as well as our Nomination Form AD-755.”

—The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service coordinated its annual initiative titled “AgDiscovery”—which, last year, was titled “AgDiscovery 2009.”

It was held at seven land grant institutions—mainly 1890 Land Grant Institutions—across the country throughout last summer. “AgDiscovery is a two-week summer boarding program designed to help students aged 12-17 learn about careers in agriculture, including plant and animal science and wildlife management,” explained APHIS EEO Specialist **Terry Henson**, one of the program managers for this initiative. “We’ve been coordinating this effort, for USDA, since 2002,” added APHIS EEO Specialist **Beatrice Jacobs**.

—Since 2007 the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (formerly the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service) has worked with



While ARS Biological Science Lab Technicians **Katherine Darlington** (right) and **LaVonda Hollar** (2nd from right) describe types of illness-causing food bacteria that are viewable through the microscopes on the table (center), Sign Language Interpreter **Roberta Bregstone** (3rd from right) relays that information to an audience of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, at FSIS's Food Safety Camp in Beltsville, MD in April 2009. This activity is one of the initiatives, at USDA during 2009, thought to be particularly unique, innovative, and/or creative, designed to strengthen diversity and outreach—either within USDA or outside of the Department to USDA's customers. Note the story on this page.—

PHOTO BY BOB NICHOLS

the World Agricultural Outlook Board to coordinate and sponsor the USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum Student Diversity Program. “The program gives USDA agencies, corporations, and organizations the opportunity to sponsor junior and senior college students—who are studying agriculture—to attend USDA's annual Agricultural Outlook Forum in Arlington, Virginia,” said NIFA Program Specialist **Antonio McLaren**. “This year, USDA sponsored 22 students—the highest level of participation since the program's inception—to attend the 2010 Forum, which was held this past February.”

—FSIS developed a guide on the Agency's import permit policies for products containing small amounts of meat and poultry ingredients. “Then,” recounted **Keith Payne**, Supervisor of the Outreach and Partnership Staff in the agency's Office of Outreach, Employee Education, and Training, “from April through October of last year my office conducted a series of workshops in L.A. and Berkeley, California; Philadelphia; Elizabethtown, New Jersey; Washington, DC; Miami; and Seattle, in which we worked through industry associations that deal with the import of food products containing small

continued on pg. 2...



Tom Vilsack *Secretary of Agriculture*

Dear Fellow Employees,
This April USDA celebrates the 75th anniversary of the Natural Resources Conservation Service—the part of our Department dedicated to helping America’s farmers, ranchers, and private forest owners be good stewards of the nation’s natural resources.

This marks an important milestone not only for NRCS and USDA, but for the nation. Over the course of 75 years, NRCS has helped millions of working landowners practice smart conservation which has provided environmental benefits by filtering our water, cleaning our air, and strengthening our rural communities. And whether or not they realized it, Americans across the country recognized the important work NRCS does every day when they celebrated Earth Day.

President **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** created NRCS as the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) on April 27, 1935, when American agriculture was in dire straits. Westward expansion and poor land management decisions had resulted in severe degradation of the plains. Dust storms blew from Colorado to the Atlantic Coast.

It was clear we needed to take action to save our soil—and SCS was created to deliver an ongoing program of soil and water conservation on private lands.

Since then, NRCS has helped producers put over 425 million acres into conservation cropping systems and plant 20 million acres of trees. It has helped protect 160 million acres of wildlife habitat and worked to preserve and restore nine million acres of wetlands.

Today, thanks in part to these efforts, American farmers and ranchers are the most productive of any in the world. They provide a safe, diverse, and nutritious food supply for our nation and for citizens around the globe.

Today, we accept abundant agricultural production and a healthy environment as compatible national goals. And we are watching as the next generation of farmers and ranchers is increasingly taking responsibility for the health of our land.

That didn’t happen by accident. It is tied directly to the example and influence of NRCS employees who, with our district partners and local leaders, have made good on the country’s investment in an ongoing program of soil and water conservation on private lands.

It is also tied directly to the vision and leadership of **Hugh Hammond Bennett**, the agency’s first Chief, our current Chief **Dave White**, and all the dedicated leaders in between, who have fought to keep working lands conservation on our national agenda.

But, despite real progress over the past 75 years, private lands conservation in 2010 is as important as it has ever been. As we confront challenges like climate change and loss of open space, and as we explore opportunities for creating wealth in rural communities through renewable energy, water quality, and carbon credit trading, we will rely on working land conservation and NRCS like never before.

We must continue to look for ways to enhance our water resources and to pursue sustainable practices to feed a growing global population. We must confront the impacts of climate change. We must expand the range of environmental services provided from working lands.

Thanks to the enduring work of the Natural Resources Conservation Service and its predecessor, SCS, we are well-positioned to address these challenges and to continue helping people help the land.

So as we celebrate their 75th Anniversary, I’m extending my congratulations to all NRCS employees for their important work. All of USDA is proud of you for what you have accomplished, and excited for what’s in store for the years to come. ■

Creative Efforts...continued from pg. 1

amounts of meat and poultry products. One of our primary targeted audiences was the Asian American community because a significant amount of product is imported from countries in Asia.” “Over 300 importers participated in these workshops,” added FSIS Program Specialist **Sally Fernandez**.

—Starting in November 2008 and continuing through 2010, the Agricultural Marketing Service and FSIS have been working on-site with Tuskegee University in Alabama by providing technical assistance to bring that institution’s new meat, poultry, and vegetable processing facility up to operational status. “We’re working with the school to employ the skills of an architect, which is

the next step in this process,” noted **Orlando Phelps**, AMS’s Outreach Coordinator based in Lakewood, CO.

—The National Agricultural Statistics Service expanded its mailing list for the 2007 Census of Agriculture to include more minority, female, limited-resource, part-time, and small farm operators. “We did this with the assistance of the Rural Coalition and other community-based organizations and minority-serving institutions,” noted **Ellen Dougherty**, Head of NASS’s Marketing Unit. “Those groups helped us identify potential farm and ranch operators who might not have been counted in the past.” She added that, as a result, the 2007 Ag Census mailing list included 3.2 million names and addresses, compared to 2.8 million for the 2002 Census of Agriculture. The 2007 Ag Census

was formally released in February 2009.

—During 2009 APHIS provided \$131,000 to support 12 students, participating in the 1890 National Scholars Program, to attend nine 1890 Land Grant Institutions across the country. “In support of those scholars,” noted APHIS Special Programs Consultant **Ken Johnson**, “our various APHIS programs covered salaries and benefits, summer lodging, and travel costs associated with summer internships.” He noted that one of those interns is now a full-time APHIS Management Analyst in Riverdale, MD, and another of those interns is currently attending veterinary school and is to become an APHIS employee upon her graduation.

—The “Public Service Leadership Scholars Program” promotes public service and pro-

vides access to higher education for undergraduate and graduate students at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). Johnson said that during 2009 three Scholars summer-interned at APHIS offices—two in Riverdale, MD, and one in Fort Collins, CO.

—The Forest Service ‘adopted’ Cleveland High School in Rio Rancho, NM. “We’re working with the school’s population of 1,624 students, 38 percent of whom are Hispanic, on conservation education and on forestry competitions,” emphasized **Jacque Myers**, FS’s Associate Deputy Chief for Business Operations, based at the agency’s Albuquerque, NM Service Center. “While our agency has ‘adopted’ two other established schools—one in Falls Church, Virginia and one in Talladega, Alabama,”

continued on pg. 6...

Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

First Graduating Class:

USDA used Earth Day, April 22, to honor the first graduating class of 69 “Certified USDA Executive Master Gardener Program Volunteers.”

In a ceremony held in the Patio of the Whitten Building at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC, Deputy Secretary **Kathleen Merrigan** noted that “As USDA’s first Executive Master Gardeners, our volunteers will serve as ambassadors to advancing the mission of ‘The People’s Garden.’ Collectively, this first group of volunteers will perform 2,760 hours of service to ‘The People’s Garden’ at USDA headquarters or within their surrounding communities.”

Over 300 gardens have been designated as a “People’s Garden” around the world.

Secretary **Tom Vilsack** had formally launched the USDA “People’s Garden Initiative” on Feb. 12, 2009—the 200th birthday of President **Abraham Lincoln**, who founded USDA in 1862 and who had referred to it as “The People’s Department.”

Livia Marques, the Department’s Special Assistant for Horticultural Crops, is the Director of USDA’s “People’s Garden Initiative” (PGI). She noted that the PGI has promoted such activities as growing an assortment of fruits, vegetables, and other plants—in order to illustrate the many ways USDA works to promote healthy diets for children, fight childhood obesity, provide a sustainable, safe, and nutritious food supply, and protect the landscape where that food is produced.

USDA volunteers participated in the seven-week “Certified USDA Executive Master Gardener Program” course during March and April. Marques clarified that the sessions—which were held with the assistance of staffers from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture—took place during lunchtime at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC, at no cost to the participants.

“The volunteer program participants,” she noted, “were taught the basics of gardening, a generalized study of horticulture, and specifics about the landscape plans at USDA headquarters.” The training program included instruction by extension specialists from six universities from across the country. Topics in the program included botany, soil science, general plant health, integrated pest management, water use and conservation, wildlife management, and how to answer questions about gardens.

“All participants,” she emphasized, “were required to take 16 hours of training and receive a passing score of 75 percent or higher on the final exam.” To participate, USDA volunteers were required to commit to 40 hours, during calendar year 2010, through a combination of training, continuing education, and volunteer service hours.

Marques said that a second seven-week course is planned for sometime later this calendar year.

Honoring Tom Stefani:

During Secretary **Tom Vilsack’s** trip to Afghanistan this past January he paid tribute to **Steven Thomas Stefani IV (“Tom”)**. Stefani was a Forest Service Range Conservationist from the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest in northeast Nevada, who was serving on a voluntary assignment with a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan when he was killed on Oct. 4, 2007 near Ghazni, Afghanistan in an explosion that impacted his convoy.

In his remarks to honor Stefani, at a ceremony on January 12, 2010 at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, Vilsack laid a wreath at the base of a memorial for Stefani. He then noted that USDA has been deploying civilian agricultural experts to that country since 2003, and that Stefani “was a model of how Americans and federal employees can make a positive impact on the lives of those around them.”

Vilsack also noted that USDA is honoring Stefani’s life of service, particularly his work in Afghanistan, with the establishment of the “Tom Stefani Award for Reconstruction and Stabilization in Fragile States.” According to **Michael Ward**, an Agricultural Economist in the Fragile Market Economies Team in the Foreign Agricultural Service, USDA is to grant the award annually to one or more USDA employees as a way to recognize their efforts to



As indicated in the screen projection behind him, Secretary **Tom Vilsack** is talking about “The Cultural Transformation of USDA—Creating a Diverse, Inclusive, and High Performance Organization” to an audience of USDA employees participating in an ‘employee listening session’ at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC on March 31. Seated behind him are members of his Subcabinet. This was the first of six such employee listening sessions to be held around the country, designed to gather feedback from USDA employees on such topics as Leadership, Employee Development, Talent Management, Recruitment and Retention, and Customer Service and Community Outreach. **Vera Carey**, Special Assistant to Assistant Secretary for Administration **Pearlie Reed**, noted that USDA’s Cultural Transformation Task Force plans to issue a report on its findings, with recommendations, following the conclusion of the listening sessions.—**PHOTO BY BOB NICHOLS**

rebuild the agricultural sectors of post-conflict countries.



Former Secretary Clifford Hardin

Dies: Clifford Hardin,

who served from 1969-71 as USDA’s 17th Secretary, died April 4 in Lincoln, NE. He was 94.

Hardin grew up on a family farm near Knightstown, IN and earned B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in agricultural economics, all from Purdue University. He taught agricultural economics at the University of Wisconsin, served as dean of agriculture at Michigan State University, and was chancellor of the University of Nebraska until becoming Secretary in 1969.

During his tenure as Secretary he established the Food and Nutrition Service—which celebrated its 40th anniversary last August—and extended the Food Stamp Program. After leaving USDA in 1971 he became an executive at Ralston Purina, and later served on a number of boards. ■

—**RON HALL**

Employees *make these things happen*

NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

NRCS's Legacy Includes 75 Years Of Helping People Help The Land

2010 marks the 75th anniversary of the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the beginning of the federal commitment to conserving natural resources on private lands. Established by Congress in 1935 as the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), NRCS has expanded to become a conservation leader for natural resources, ensuring and restoring private lands and responding to future environmental challenges such as climate change.

The [then] Soil Conservation Service was created on April 27, 1935, by Public Law 46 that declared "soil erosion is a menace to the national welfare" and authorized broad powers to the new agency to attack the problem. The enactment testified to a continuing federal commitment to soil conservation and was the culmination of the efforts of **Hugh Hammond Bennett**, who became the agency's first Chief in 1935.

A North Carolina native, Bennett joined the [then] Bureau of Soils in USDA in 1903, shortly after graduating from the University of North Carolina. About four years earlier, the Bureau had begun making soil surveys to assist agricultural development. Usually mapped on a county basis, the maps and descriptions of the properties of the soil would help make farmers aware of the potentials and limitations of particular soils.

During 1935 and 1936, **M. L. Wilson**, [then] Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, developed the legal framework for a new unit of state government: the conservation district. "The districts were organized under state, not federal, law, and each district's directors, or supervisors, were elected by the people

living within the district's boundaries," noted **Pat Leavenworth**, NRCS's Wisconsin State Conservationist based in Madison.

Thus the district concept fulfilled many of Wilson's objectives and became the foundation for the "locally led conservation" concept that is fundamental to the way NRCS manages conservation activities. Local groups plan and set priorities in their districts and the district provides a means of spreading conservation activities nationwide. The federal government contributes to the conservation effort with financial aid as well as with trained personnel and technical guidance. The arrangement provided federal assistance to conservation and maintained local leadership.

"The nearly three thousand districts, their state associations, and the National Association of Conservation Districts became the grassroots support for federal conservation programs. They helped sustain SCS and conservation funding and included personnel to work alongside SCS employees—and thus sped the conservation work," observed NRCS Historian **Douglas Helms**. "NRCS field offices in many states might have a mixture of federal and district employees working alongside one another."

The enduring value of districts was so obvious that Bennett later said, "I consider the soil conservation districts movement one of the most important developments in the whole history of agriculture."

As part of legislation in 1994 that reorganized USDA, SCS's name was changed to the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Addressing the annual meeting of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) in Orlando on Feb. 2, 2010, NRCS

Chief **Dave White** took a look ahead. "The United Nations says world food output must grow by 70 percent over the next four decades to feed a projected extra 2.3 billion people by 2050," he advised. "Much of that increased output will come from ag operations here in the United States—the dedicated farmers and ranchers who NRCS, NACD, and the districts were created to serve. As we begin our next 75 years of service, figuring out how American producers can work together to feed all those people—and do it sustainably—is very much on our minds at NRCS."

"We don't have all the answers yet," White continued. "But based on what I've learned from Hugh Hammond Bennett and our conservation district staffs, I do know that working directly with customers, sound science, landscape-scale conservation, and local leadership will all be part of the solution." ■

—**FRED JACOBS**



SCS Chief **Hugh Hammond Bennett** (left), his wife **Betty Bennett** (2nd from left), and SCS Regional Conservator **A.E. McClymonds** view conservation work, on the farm of **Frank Milsna**, on Oct. 25, 1946. The work was part of the "Coon Creek Demonstration Project" in Vernon County, WI.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT/FARM AND FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

This Assignment Is A World Away From Maintaining Horse Trails

Donna and **David Mull** really like horseback riding, and, in turn, they like helping to maintain the horse trails they ride along, through the Chattahoochee National Forest in northern Georgia. In fact, one of their favorite activities is what they call a "Clip & Ride Day," in which they ride along a horse trail until they come across a fallen tree or brush

that needs to be removed. Then—with previously granted permission of the Forest Service, which administers this country's national forests—they use their saw and long clippers to remove that blockage from the trail.

But those days are behind them, for now.

That's because they're in a decidedly different environment. They're now both deployed to Afghanistan—and, in the process, they've become the first husband and wife team of active duty USDA employees to be deployed

together, at the same time, to that country.

Until late February 2010, Donna Mull served as a Human Resources Specialist with Rural Development's Georgia State Office in Athens, while David Mull served as a Rural Business Specialist in that same office. But in their current deployment, which began for both on March 1, 2010, they both are Agricultural Experts stationed at Bagram Airfield in northeast Afghanistan, working alongside

continued on pg. 5...

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



Karen Messmore is the Director of the Office of Human Resources Management.

From September 2004 until her selection for this position Messmore served as the Deputy Assistant Administrator in the Office of Management with the Food Safety and Inspection Service.

She was the Director of FSIS's Human Resources Division from 2001-04, after having been its Deputy Director from 1999-2001.

Messmore served as Chief of the Employment Policy Branch in FSIS from 1990-99. She began her career at USDA as an FSIS Personnel Staffing Specialist in 1981, after having worked in personnel positions at the U.S.

Treasury Department since 1976. She began her federal career as a Clerk-Stenographer with the U.S. Department of Commerce in Washington, DC in 1973.

Jill Crumacker, OHRM's previous Director, transferred to the Office of the General Counsel, in July 2009, as Senior Advisor. She subsequently left USDA. ■

continued on pg. 6...

...continued from pg. 4

an Agribusiness Development Team from the Kentucky National Guard.

So, what was the allure for this 'bigtime change of venue'?

"It's pretty basic—it's another opportunity to serve," replied David Mull. "What can give you a better sense of accomplishment than to share one's experiences with others in a positive way?" He noted that, growing up on a farm in Hayesville, NC, he learned a lot of what he described as "the old ways," using "old" equipment. "So I should be able to relate better to the situation of Afghan farmers."

"Ditto, David's answer about serving others," echoed Donna Mull. "My experience has been with animals from growing up on a farm in Watson, Arkansas, which I hope will also help Afghan farmers."

In fact, Secretary **Tom Vilsack** has once again encouraged USDA employees to consider volunteering for assignments similar to those of the Mulls. Most recently, in a memorandum dated Jan. 19, 2010 and titled "USDA Making a Difference in Afghanistan and Iraq," which was sent to USDA Subcabinet Officials and Agency Heads, Vilsack noted that "To date, we have had an outstanding response, and over 100 Department of Agriculture... employees from across [USDA] have served or currently are serving in this capacity."

"I ask," he continued, "that you share with your employees our continued request for volunteers, along with my sincere thanks to those who have already volunteered."

Dan Berman is the Foreign Agricultural Service's Team Leader of the Fragile Market Economies Team, which includes Afghanistan. FAS is the agency that manages and coordinates USDA employee participation in civilian-military units in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Berman noted that nearly all of the USDA employees who have served on details to Afghanistan have been serving on Provincial Reconstruction Teams or PRTs, District Support Teams or DSTs, Agribusiness Development

Teams or ADTs, Task Forces, or Regional Commands. Irrespective of their particular assignment, the USDA employees are designated as "agricultural experts." "The general purpose of these assignments," he said, "is to help establish security and support reconstruction projects and programs in provinces in Afghanistan. This enables the Afghan national government—plus various humanitarian aid organizations—to accomplish their reconstruction goals for that country."

"USDA's vast knowledge base brings unique internal capabilities to this critical mission," added **Bobby Richey**, Assistant Deputy Administrator for the Office of Foreign Service Operations in FAS. "That often includes helping to rebuild that country's physical infrastructure for increased agricultural production, training farmers in improved agricultural methods, rehabilitating the country's degraded natural resources, and helping farmers to participate in international agricultural markets."

Lula Lakeou, an FAS Program Assistant and a member of the Fragile Market Economies Team, noted that as of April 27, 2010, USDA has 56 employees—from headquarters and field locations—participating in agricultural reconstruction and development activities in Afghanistan. FAS Public Affairs Specialist **Matt Herrick** added that USDA employees have been serving in Afghanistan since September 2003. The May-June 2008 issue of the **USDA NEWS** carried a story about this program.

So, the Mulls are *not* unique, within USDA, in their willingness to volunteer for a detail to serve on a civilian-military unit in Afghanistan. But they *are* unique in being the first husband and wife team of active duty USDA employees to do so. Did that uniqueness provide an extra layer of complication to being able to successfully apply—and then being able to successfully participate—in this particular overseas assignment?

"After talking it over, we both applied for the program at about the same time, back in July 2009," Donna M. recalled. "We filled out all the paperwork and participated in all the interviews, and then both got notified, almost simultaneously, that we'd been accepted. But David saw his e-mail before I saw mine."

"And, when I first saw my e-mail, neither Donna nor I knew that she'd gotten her own e-mail notification too. So I immediately called up FAS headquarters and said 'I just got *my* notice that I'm going to Afghanistan—so I bet you're going to send Donna to Iraq?' But this nice lady in FAS headquarters—**Jamie Adams**—said they were sending us both to Afghanistan so we could be together."

Both of their deployments are scheduled to last for 12 months.

"Yeah, we may be unique being USDA's first husband and wife team of active duty employees to deploy to Afghanistan," affirmed David M. "But USDA has said it needs us both here. So this is where we want to be." ■

—**RON HALL**



RD's Donna (left) and David Mull take a brief break from their week-long training at the Indiana National Guard's Muscatatuck Urban Training Center in southern Indiana last December. That's where this husband and wife team received immersion training involving integrated civilian-military operations in Afghanistan, to prepare them for their respective assignments with a civilian-military unit in that country.—PHOTO BY BRAD STAGGS



Leslie Weldon is the Regional Forester of the Forest Service's Northern Region, headquartered in Missoula, MT.

From June 2007 until her selection for this position Weldon served as Director of External Affairs in the Office of the Chief of the Forest Service in Washington,

DC. She was the Forest Supervisor on the Deschutes National Forest in Bend, OR from 2000-07. From 1998-2000 she served as Executive Policy Assistant to [then] FS Chief **Mike Dombeck** in Washington, DC.

Weldon worked as a Forest Service Liaison to the U.S. Army Environmental Center at the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland from 1996-98, where she developed an interagency partnership for technical assistance in natural and cultural resource management on U.S.

military installations, both stateside and overseas. From 1992-96 she worked as a District Ranger at the Stevensville Ranger District on the Bitterroot National Forest in Montana. She began her full-time career with the agency as a Fisheries Biologist for three districts on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest in Washington in 1983, where she worked restoring habitat for salmon and steelhead.

continued on pg. 7...

Creative Efforts...continued from pg. 2

clarified FS Program Analyst **Jacqueline Emanuel**, "what's unique about our interaction with Cleveland High School is that we were involved in it 'pre-construction.' So we were able to help it, in those early stages, to enhance and expand the school's already-existing 'environmental ethic'—and thereby helped to further educate the school's diverse student population on the value of environmental design and stewardship."

—In 2004 the Natural Resources Conservation Service developed—and then offered for the first time—a training course titled "Working Effectively With Alaska Natives."

Crystal Leonetti, the Native Liaison for NRCS in Alaska, based at the agency's Anchorage office, developed the course and serves as one of three agency instructors for it.

"The course," she explained, "is designed to help Agency staff better understand Tribal laws and culture—including often unsaid cultural norms and customs—in an effort to better serve Alaska Native landowners." She pointed out that this course was created from an earlier training course titled "Working Effectively With American Indians" which NRCS developed a number of years earlier. The most recent course, she advised, is required training for NRCS employees in Alaska. NRCS then offered that course for the second time in November 2009. "With that particular presentation," noted **Doug Carter**, the Farm Service Agency's County Executive Director for Southern County in Palmer, AK, "NRCS offered the course, for the first time, to employees with other USDA agencies in Alaska—specifically, our FSA and Rural Development employees. Part of that purpose was to strengthen the outreach between USDA agencies in our state."

—During May 2009 FSIS launched its "USDAFoodSafety" channel on YouTube. "This channel provides food safety videos in American Sign Language, English, and Spanish," noted FSIS Public Affairs Specialist **Brigitte Keefe**. In turn, FSIS produced

several "SignFSIS" video-casts, in American Sign Language, with text captioning, about basic food safety messages.

—In April 2009 FSIS launched the first in a series of food safety podcasts in Spanish. According to **Maria Miranda**, an FSIS web manager, the agency generally posts two podcasts per month in Spanish on a variety of consumer food safety topics, such as how to understand the 'use-by' dates on food products and how best to remove odors from refrigerators and freezers. "During FY 2009 and through March 2010," added FSIS Technical Information Specialist **Kathy Bernard**, "our Agency has uploaded 42 such podcasts on the FSIS Website, via a free subscription through iTunes, and through a Real Simple Syndication, or RSS, feed."

—The Food and Nutrition Service has granted 33 states the option to waive face-to-face interviews for applicants to the FNS-administered Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), including those with disabilities, elderly persons, and the working poor, in order to encourage their participation in SNAP. "Not having to travel to interviews significantly eases the application process for SNAP applicants, which is even more critical as the program responds, as designed, to the economic downturn," advised **Jessica Shahin**, FNS's Associate Administrator for SNAP.

—During 2009 a number of NRCS Plant Materials Centers across the country worked with Tribes to develop information on plants that are culturally significant for them. "We've placed on our NRCS website the documents we've produced from that research," noted **John Englert**, NRCS's National Program Leader for Plant Materials. Examples include "Spirit Germplasm Sweetgrass," authored by NRCS Conservation Agronomist **Susan Winslow** at the agency's Plant Materials Center in Bridger, MT, and "Ethnobotany, Culture, and Use of Great Camas," authored by NRCS Conservation Agronomist **Dale Darris** at its Plant Materials Center in Corvallis, OR.

—For the last several years Agricultural

Research Service scientists have been developing a database of food composition information for Native American populations. "As of April 2010," noted ARS Nutritionist **Pamela Pehrsson**, who coordinates this effort, "our agency's scientists have analyzed and/or otherwise generated data on at least 180 traditional foods from such Tribes as the Navajo, Hopi, and Apache Tribes in the Southwestern U.S., various Alaskan Tribes, and the Shoshone Bannocks in the Rocky Mountains." She added that American Indians and Alaska Natives have diverse diets which depend upon their unique cultures and indigenous plants and animals. "This database," she said, "provides crucial food composition information to Tribes, health professionals and researchers in those Tribal communities, and others to support dietary assessment and nutrition education strategies."

—During April 2009 FSIS held a Food Safety Camp—which, FSIS Public Affairs Specialist **Donna Karlsons** pointed out, was an interactive and science-based educational event held in Beltsville, MD—for 40 deaf

continued on pg. 7...



"This piece of food processing equipment should help Tuskegee more easily package sweet potatoes—and thereby more successfully market that product," affirms AMS Outreach Coordinator **Orlando Phelps** (left), as he and **Winston Felton** (right), an FSIS Front Line Supervisor based in Montgomery, AL, confer with Tuskegee University officials **Walter Hill** (2nd from left) and **Olga Bolden-Tiller** on bringing Tuskegee's new meat, poultry, and vegetable processing facility up to operational status.—PHOTO BY ROGER HAGERTY

Tom Tidwell, the previous Regional Forester of FS's Northern Region, is now Chief of the Forest Service. ■



Mariusz Swietlik is the Director of the Agricultural Research Service's North Atlantic Area, based in Wyndmoor, PA. From November 2007 until his selection for this position Swietlik

served as Acting Director of ARS's North Atlantic Area. He was its Associate Area Director from 2006-08.

Swietlik served as Director and Research Leader of ARS's Appalachian Fruit Research Station in Kearneysville, WV from 1998-2006. From 1996-98 he was Assistant Director of the Texas A&M University-Kingsville's Citrus Center, as well as Assistant Director of Texas A&M University's Agricultural Research & Extension Center, after having worked as a Professor of Plant Physiology at Texas A&M

University-Kingsville from 1984-96. He was a Senior Fulbright Scholar studying plant water use, photosynthesis, and mineral nutrition of fruit crops at ARS's Appalachian Fruit Research Station in Kearneysville from 1982-84, after having begun those studies at ARS's Beltsville (MD) Agricultural Research Center from 1980-82.

Wilda Martinez, the previous Director of ARS's North Atlantic Area, retired from that position following 53 years of federal service, all of it with ARS. ■

Creative Efforts...continued from pg. 6

and hard-of-hearing school students from Washington, DC.

—During 2009 AMS employees: presented recruitment information at a Disabled Veterans Career Fair in Baltimore in September; forwarded 60 vacancy announcements, for possible placement, through a nationwide network of Veterans Administration Employment Specialists; provided recruitment information at two "Hire the Heroes" Recruitment Fairs—one held in Washington, DC in May and one held in Little Rock in September—for recently discharged Disabled Veterans; and gave an Agency recruitment presentation to approximately 40 Disabled Veterans in Washington, DC in February and then networked with the participants—which, according to **Todd Birkenruth**, the Disability Program Manager for AMS, resulted in the selection of a Disabled Veteran.

—USDA's Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and FNS have worked together on some targeted outreach to the Latino community on nutrition assistance programs. "An Economic Research Service-funded study," noted Center Director **Max Finberg**, "indicated that churches and religious organizations are the primary source of information, for the Hispanic population, about USDA's nutrition assistance programs. So at the Center, we're expanding outreach to Latino church networks." In June 2009 he hosted a meeting in Washington, DC with Latino leaders and pastors from across the U.S.

—During 2009 FSIS participated in several recruitment activities designed to hire persons with disabilities. Activities included FSIS employees participating in: a job fair at Washington, DC's Gallaudet University in September; a State of Minnesota Disability Job Fair in October; seven job fairs in the Washington, DC area for disabled veterans/'wounded warriors'; and the "Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities" (WRP). According to FSIS Public

Affairs Specialist **Sharon Randle**, FSIS hired five students through WRP as summer interns during 2009—and one was since hired as a full-time Program Support Assistant.

—During June 2009 AMS participated in the National Association of Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) in Rapid City, SD. "During that session I discussed the potential for adding extended shelf-life egg products in one-pound cartons for distribution on Indian Reservations," recounted **Dennis Pearson**, Chief of AMS's Commodity Procurement Branch for Poultry Programs. "While this wasn't the first time that AMS had attended this annual conference, it *was* the first time that AMS had performed a 'product demonstration' for a new product to add to FDPIR's program."

—The "Washington Internships for Native Students" (WINS) offers students from sovereign American Indian and Alaska Native nations the opportunity to build leadership skills while living, studying, and interning in Washington, DC through American University. APHIS Native American Program-Delivery Manager **Janet Wintermute** noted that in 2009 APHIS continued its participation in WINS by sponsoring six interns with funding of \$63,000. "The six students then interned with us during last summer," added APHIS EEO Specialist **Gwen Smith**.

—On Oct. 17-20, 2009 NIFA hosted the "First Americans Land-Grant Consortium" ("FALCON") in Washington, DC. **Tim Grosser**, NIFA's National Program Leader for Tribal Capacity Building Grants Program who co-coordinated this initiative, explained that FALCON is a non-profit association that supports administrators, faculty, and students at 1994 Land-Grant Institutions, also known as Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). "An estimated 120 attendees participated at the 2009 FALCON," noted fellow National Program Leader **Saleia Afele-Faamuli**. The focus of the 2009 FALCON, she pointed out, was on Tribal Wellness programs.

—During 2009 APHIS began contact with

two military transition offices: the Army Career Alumni Program (ACAP) at Fort Meade, MD, and the Transition Assistance Management Program (TAMP) at the U.S. Marine Corps Base at Quantico, VA. "Those are both exit points for separating service members," explained **Christopher Filmore**, APHIS's Veterans Emphasis Program Manager. "We're now able to post job announcements through TAMP's website and through personal contacts with ACAP."

—During September 2009 FSIS provided food safety education to about 6,000 Spanish speakers in the Washington, DC metropolitan area by participating at a "Celebra la Vida con Salud" Health Festival and radio show. "Celebra'," explained FSIS Food Safety Specialist **Maribel Alonso**, "is a national education and awareness campaign that reaches the underserved U.S. Spanish population." ■

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 107,800 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

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, audiotope, 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.



*"The most effective way to work with our Alaska Native customers is to listen, communicate, and establish a strong rapport," affirms **Crystal Leonetti** (standing, right), the Native Liaison for NRCS in Alaska, based in Anchorage. Accompanied by fellow instructor and NRCS District Conservationist **Jerry Gilmore** (seated, center) who is assisting with the presentation's visuals, Leonetti is teaching a course titled "Working Effectively With Alaska Natives." Her audience, at this training in November 2009, included 38 USDA employees based in Alaska. The course, which is required training for NRCS employees in Alaska, is designed to help USDA staffers better understand Tribal laws and culture, in an effort to better serve Alaska Native landowners. This activity is one of the initiatives, at USDA during 2009, thought to be particularly unique, innovative, and/or creative, designed to strengthen diversity and outreach—either within USDA or outside of the Department to USDA's customers. Note the story on page 1.—PHOTO BY MOLLY VOELLER*



**Help us find
CHAD AUSTIN KILLEN**

Missing: **05-21-2009** From: **Brighton, MI**
 D.O.B.: **5-6-1992** Sex: **Male**
 Hair: **Brown** Eyes: **Hazel**
 Height: **5 ft. 11 in.** Weight: **140 lbs**
If you have information, please call
1-800-843-5678

**NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING
AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN**

USDA-Sponsored Calendar Highlights

- **May 3-9**
Public Service Recognition Week
USDA headquarters and field offices
(202) 720-3088 or 1-800-877-8339 (TTY)
- **May 5-7**
CYFAR (Children, Youth, & Families at Risk) 2010 Conference
San Francisco, CA
(202) 690-1568 or 1-800-877-8339 (TTY)
www.nifa.usda.gov/nea/family/cyfar/announcement.html
- **Month of May**
Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
USDA headquarters and field offices
(202) 205-0175 or 1-800-877-8339 (TTY)
- **Month of June**
National Gay and Lesbian Pride Month
USDA headquarters and field offices
(202) 720-9664 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