

USDA *news*

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

USDA's Budget For FY 2010 Is Signed Into Law

by Ron Hall

Office of Communications

It was preceded by one governmentwide short-term funding bill or "continuing resolution." But USDA's budget for FY 2010—the "Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2010"—was ultimately signed into law on October 21, three weeks into the new fiscal year that began on October 1, 2009, and the earliest this appropriations bill has been signed since FY 2000.

On the same day of the signing Secretary **Tom Vilsack** sent a letter, titled "Fiscal Year 2010 Appropriations," to all USDA employees. In his letter he focused on several items in the signed bill and then noted that "Now that Congress has done its part, it is our turn. We have the opportunity and responsibility to make sure that our programs serve all of the people who need them. We need to make every dollar count by managing our resources in the most efficient and effective manner possible."

He added that "We must now demonstrate to Congress and the public that we can act quickly and effectively to implement our programs in a transparent, equitable manner. Each of you has a vital role to play in achieving these objectives and it is only through your knowledge, skills,

and efforts that we will achieve our goals."

"I recognize," Vilsack concluded, "that it is through your commitment and dedication that USDA customers are provided the highest level of service. Every day that you come to work is an opportunity for you to make a difference in addressing the critical needs of America. I am honored to lead the team and to support you in meeting our goals."

What follows are some highlights of the Department's budget for FY 2010 that are thought to be of particular interest to USDA employees.

Scott Steele, Director of the Office of Budget and Program Analysis, said that the bill which was passed provided \$118.1 billion in funding for the agriculture portion of the budget. However, this figure currently does not include an appropriation for the Forest Service that, for budget purposes, is part of the "Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations" which, at press time, had not yet been signed into law.

The \$118.1 billion funding was the end product of congressional conference committee efforts and negotiations with executive branch officials.

The original budget proposal for USDA estimated a staffing requirement for FY 2010 of 104,751 total staff years, includ-



"Let's make sure this video gets up on USDA's website," suggests **Anita Pitchford** (left), a Conflict Management Specialist in USDA's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center, as she and her colleagues—Conflict Management Specialist **Lawrence Albert** (center) and Program Support Specialist **Tanya Rucks**—watch a video depicting a conflict resolution scenario. The setting was the "Conflict Resolution Day" commemoration held on Oct. 15, 2009 on the Patio at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC. "The purpose of this particular day," explained **Sheila Walcott**, Acting Director of the Center, "is to provide an opportunity for those involved in resolving conflict—whether here at USDA or somewhere else around the world—to highlight the collaborative and creative methods and strategies available to resolve conflict and strengthen relationships." —PHOTO BY BOB NICHOLS

ing non-federal county employees. That would have represented a personnel decrease of 789 staff years from the FY 2009 staff year ceiling which was estimated on May 7, 2009 to be at 105,540.

As detailed in a story in the May-June 2009 issue of the **USDA NEWS**, at least 7 USDA agencies or staff offices had reflected some proposed limited increases in staff years for FY 2010, and at least 3 had reflected proposed decreases from FY 2009 staff year levels.

However, based on the fund-

ing figure passed into law, Steele indicated that the staff years for many USDA agencies would basically remain at FY 2009 actual levels, with increases in key areas such as food safety and nutrition.

In addition to the budgetary items which Vilsack highlighted in his October 21 letter, Steele noted that USDA's final appropriations for FY 2010 include these items thought to be of particular interest to USDA employees:

① \$13 million is provided for stabilization and reconstruction

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Tom Vilsack *Secretary of Agriculture*

Dear Fellow Employees,
As you may have heard, I have spent some of the past six months traveling around the country on President **Barack Obama's** Rural Tour. Since May I have held 22 listening sessions attended by thousands of Americans in communities from Hamlet, North Carolina to Bethel, Alaska and from Las Cruces, New Mexico to Wattsburg, Pennsylvania.

These events would not have been possible if it had not been for the hard work of so many USDA employees. The support that you all offered to the planning, preparation, and execution of these events, both here in Washington, DC and out in the field, meant we were able to engage in a robust dialogue about the challenges facing rural America and what USDA can do to help.

At each forum I had the opportunity to hear ideas for how we can help revitalize rural America, and shared the Obama administration's commitment to strengthening rural communities to help them create wealth so they are self-sustaining, repopulating, and thriving economically.

All over the country, I met folks with ideas and questions about the future of agriculture in this nation. I visited communities that are looking forward to Recovery Act investments in broadband technology that will create jobs and stimulate economic growth. And I listened to farmers who are excited about the new income opportunities from our efforts to combat global climate change like the creation of a carbon offset market and the production of clean, renewable energy.

Despite the incredible diversity of the communities I visited, at each event I saw the common thread that runs through rural America: the strength, optimism, and sense of community that have sustained these towns for so long and that make them worth fighting for today.

The Rural Tour brought me up close with the incredible contribu-

tions that our Department is already making across the nation. Whether it is investments in infrastructure; support for American agriculture through loans, insurance, marketing, and regulatory efforts; conservation work to improve water and air quality; or research that helps American farmers continue to provide food for the nation; the work of each and every USDA employee is responsible for the health of these communities. We must be as effective as possible as we continue this good work.

I believe that there are better opportunities today to strengthen communities across rural America than at any other time in decades, and I am counting on you to play a critical role in supporting new engines of economic development for rural America.

Rural America is home to about 50 million citizens and accounts for 75 percent of our nation's land. Revitalizing these communities is one of President Obama's and my top priorities for the Department, and the opportunities we have today come around maybe once in a generation.

At many of my Rural Tour stops I met young people: FFAers, 4Hers, and others, who weren't sure if the future they imagined for themselves would be possible in their hometowns. I know that if we do our jobs right and seize the opportunity to lead this rural revitalization, those young people will be convinced that the small communities where they grew up can still be the best place in the country to live, work, and raise a family.

Thanks so much for all your hard work in achieving this goal.

P.S. If you are interested in learning more about what I saw and learned on President Obama's Rural Tour I would encourage you to visit our Rural Tour website—www.RuralTour.gov. ■

USDA's Budget...continued from pg. 1

activities in Iraq and Afghanistan to assist in the stabilization and reconstruction of agricultural production in those countries.

② An increase of \$44 million is provided for Departmental information technology activities to improve the Department's information security, including conducting network security assessments, procuring security tools, and establishing USDA's Agriculture Security Operations Center.

③ Congress directs USDA to submit to Congress a description of how the Department "will coordinate and oversee the interdependent planning and implementation" of the Farm Service Agency's Information Technology modernization ini-

tiative "with all other related Department IT modernization initiatives."

④ \$1.7 million is provided to create a new Office of Advocacy & Outreach within Departmental Management. These funds will be used to increase access to programs of the Department and increase the viability and profitability of small farms, beginning farmers and ranchers, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

⑤ \$1 million is provided for Tribal Relations, to support tribal consultation and government-to-government relations—all between USDA and Indian Tribes.

⑥ \$1.8 million is included for the Economic Research Service for research on economics of environmental services mar-

kets and policies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

⑦ \$4 million is provided to award grants, through the Research, Education, and Economics mission area, to develop and field-test new food products designed to improve the nutritional delivery and functional form of humanitarian food assistance provided through the McGovern-Dole and the Food for Peace Title II PL 480 programs.

⑧ \$6.967 million is provided to the Agricultural Marketing Service for the National Organic Program, including an increase of \$0.3 million to enhance accreditation oversight capabilities.

⑨ Congress directs USDA to work with other appropriate federal departments to submit a report "regarding tourism oppor-

tunities in Rural America. This report should identify existing federal programs that provide assistance to rural small businesses for purposes of market development and business opportunities in the area of tourism and to make recommendations for the improvement of such programs."

⑩ The law prohibits funding from being used for employees' first-class travel unless allowed by current regulations.

⑪ Funding is limited to \$1.8 million for activities related to all advisory committees, panels, commissions, and task forces of the Department except for panels used to comply with negotiated rule makings and panels used to evaluate competitively awarded grants. ■

Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

USDA's ARRA Website:

On June 26 USDA formally launched its "USDA Recovery Act Website," including features that allow people to learn about, share, and discuss funding—in states and communities throughout the country—from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, known as ARRA. As Secretary **Tom Vilsack** noted, "...this new website not only enables people to get detailed information on projects, but also share their own stories about how the Recovery Act is impacting their lives."

So, four months after its debut, how has the website been working?

"We've had an average of 250,000 hits per month on that website since it was launched," noted **Amanda Eamich**, USDA's Director of New Media, who is in the Office of Communications.

She explained that the website—

www.usda.gov/recovery—includes blogs where people can learn about individual Recovery Act projects in each state and U.S. territory, Recovery Act feature videos, and the ability to share personal stories. USDA's website also includes a section in which individuals can report, to the Office of Inspector General, allegations of waste, fraud, and abuse in the use of ARRA funds.

"Our Recovery Act website offers various ways for the public to interact with, and learn from, the Department," Eamich underscored. "We have a fantastic relationship with USDA employees nationwide, who report on Recovery Act projects for state blogs, and also submit photos and videos—all of which greatly enhance our ability to share valuable information with communities interested in seeing Recovery Act projects at work."

Wayne Moore, OC's Chief Information Officer, noted that the website includes an innovative geospatial mapping tool, developed by Forest Service employees, that shows—on a map of the U.S.—exactly where and how USDA is spending every dollar of its portion of Recovery Act funding. "It's exciting that both the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Department of Commerce have joined our Recovery Act fund geospatial mapping project," he pointed out. "Additional information adds even more value to the Recovery website."

ARRA provided USDA with nearly \$28 bil-



*It's not quite sunset on Sept. 10, 2009—and on the Patio of USDA's Whitten Building in Washington, DC, **Max Finberg**, Director of USDA's Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (right), **Farook Sait**, Special Counsel in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (center), and **Amina Makhdoom**, Chair of the Montgomery County (MD) Committee on Hate and Violence (left), are reviewing details for USDA's first-held "Iftar Dinner" which is about to begin at that location. The event's theme was "A Common Calling...Feeding Hungry People," and during the event USDA's Muslim employees and other participants commemorated Ramadan, which ran from Aug. 21 to Sept. 19 this year. Finberg noted that during Ramadan, Muslims fast each day from sunrise to sunset, then break their fast each evening with a dinner—the Iftar. "But we also remember those who 'fast involuntarily,'" Finberg advised. "It's part of our anti-hunger mission, here at USDA, to remember them, to think of them, and to help them: those who 'cannot break the fast'." —PHOTO BY BOB NICHOLS*

lion in funding. The Department is using this funding to: ensure that farmers and ranchers continue to contribute to local economies, take steps to build and preserve critical infrastructure in communities across America, and implement new resource conservation measures.

NIFA:

USDA has a new entity—the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. NIFA was created under the 2008 Farm Bill and was formed in the main from the existing Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service—which itself had been created in 1994.

NIFA's Director is **Roger Beachy**, a Plant Scientist from the Danforth Plant Science Center in St. Louis. **Colien Hefferan**, who served as the last Administrator of the [then] CSREES, currently serves as Advisor to the Director.

Secretary **Tom Vilsack** launched the new

agency with a speech on October 8. In his remarks he said that NIFA is to be "a research 'start-up' company—we will be rebuilding our competitive grants program from the ground up to generate real results for the American people."

"The opportunity to truly transform a field of science happens at best once a generation," he underscored. "Right now, I am convinced, is USDA's opportunity to work with the Congress, the other science agencies, and with our partners in industry, academia, and the nonprofit sector, to bring about transformative change."

The Institute will work through USDA and with university and other partners to focus science in five areas: global food security and world hunger, nutrition and childhood obesity, food safety, sustainable energy, and America's environment and natural resources. ■

—RON HALL

Employees *make these things happen*

RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS

These Feathers Are For More Than Mere Pillow Stuffin'

Chicken feathers are normally just an unwanted byproduct of poultry processing. But now they may have a more valuable future as an ingredient in biodegradable flower pots—and chalk that up to the work of **Walter Schmidt**.

He's a chemist with the Agricultural Research Service's Environmental Management and Byproduct Utilization Laboratory in Beltsville, MD—and he's been developing practical uses for discarded chicken feathers since 1993. "Each year in the U.S., about four billion pounds of chicken feathers are left over after processing chickens," he pointed out.

So, working with **Masud Huda**, a Research Associate with the Horticultural Research Institute in Washington, DC, Schmidt formulated planting pots that degrade over variable periods of time, ranging from one to five years.

"The pots look and feel like any other plastic planters that you see at your local nursery," Schmidt explained. "But they're made to disintegrate naturally, without harm to the environment. In fact, since the pots are manufactured without any petroleum components, they'll slowly release beneficial nitrogen to the soil."

"As part of our process," he continued,

"we first shred the chicken feathers, then we powder that shredded material, then we convert the now-powdered material into pellets—and then, using the same commercial equipment presently used to make flower pots, we transform the pellets into biodegradable pots." Two gallon-sized flower pots can be made from the feathers of one chicken, and 7,000 of the pots can be made on one machine per day.

As a precursor to these 'feather-based flower pots,' Schmidt and then-ARS Research Associate **Justin Barone** found, in 2002, that feather-derived plastic could be molded just like any other plastic, and has properties very similar to such plastics as polyethylene and polypropylene. "This makes the feather-derived plastic a unique material for packaging—or for any other application where you want high strength and biodegradability," Schmidt emphasized. In 2006 ARS patented the process using keratin—which is the tough, durable fibrous biomaterial that makes up feathers—to make thin 'polymer films'—which are plastic-like sheets—and also to make mixtures with petroleum-based products.

Schmidt and Huda are now working to develop fully biodegradable flower pots. "Several commercial pot manufacturers are involved in this phase to determine optimum production-scale molding specifications for

the containers," Schmidt noted. The "green" horticultural end products, he added, will not only help solve the environmental problem by creating biodegradable plastics, but will also provide a cost-effective commercial use for chicken feathers.

And, in case you were wondering, goose down is used to stuff very comfortable and expensive pillows. But since chicken feathers don't offer the same qualities—they're shorter, with more prickly quills, and aren't as fluffy as goose down feathers—they're generally used in inexpensive pillows.

Now you know. ■

—**SHARON DURHAM**



"I'm looking forward to planting some tomatoes in this flower pot," quips ARS's **Walter Schmidt** (center), as he and Horticultural Research Institute staffers **Masud Huda** (background, left) and **Marc Tefteau** (right) produce yet another biodegradable flower pot from chicken feathers. —**PHOTO BY STEPHEN AUSMUS**

NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

No More "Play Ball!" "Yikes!" Crash! Near This Populated USDA Facility

All across America during the now-completed 2009 baseball season, ball players of all ages did their best to hit home runs. That was also the case at the many adult-league baseball games played at Bluegrass Park in Elkins, WV.

But here's the complication: situated right over the field's left-field fence is the Elkins Equipment Depot, which belongs to the Monongahela National Forest, headquartered in Elkins, and which is run by the Forest Service.

"The Depot includes two buildings backing up to the ballfield—a large garage and an equipment storage facility—with literally doz-

ens of windows vulnerable to home runs—so, over the years, we've had a lot of broken windows in our facilities," recounted **Debra Holler**, the Administrative Officer on the Monongahela NF. "In addition, hard-hit balls would be whistling past the heads of our employees working at the Depot, and their vehicles parked on-site sometimes got damaged. There's an extra tall chain link fence along the boundary between the field and the Depot, but it didn't provide enough protection. In fact, it got so bad that we declared the Depot area a 'hard hat only' location during baseball season."

"So we needed to find a solution that saved our windows—and our employees—and that was satisfactory to the citizens of our hometown here in Elkins."

Installing a big net behind the leftfield fence, in front of the Forest Service buildings, seemed to be the apparent solution. "But the objection to that by the local officials responsible for the ballfield was the cost of such a project and the limited funds available in the community," Holler explained.

"I was the main representative for my agency at the meetings with field officials, baseball team officials, and town representatives," she recalled. "I was the shortest person there, I don't play baseball, and I was the only female. But I like a challenge—so I wanted to make sure we found a compromise. Besides, this is a baseball town, and we didn't want to be seen as a bad neighbor—even though we needed to physically protect

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



Kevin Concannon is the Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services.

Before joining USDA, from 2003 until he retired from the position in August 2008 Concannon served as the Director of the Iowa Department of Human Services, based in Des Moines. From 1995-2003 he served as Maine's Department of Human Services Commissioner, based in Augusta. He was Director of Oregon's Department of Human Services from 1987-95, based in Salem, after having served as the Commissioner of the Maine Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, based in Augusta, from 1980-87. In

those positions he advanced changes in mental health reform, helped transform state welfare systems, led major initiatives in prescription drug access, worked on improvements in child support and child care programs, and furthered long-term care system reform for the elderly.

Concannon served as President of the American Public Welfare Association from 1993-94 and President of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors from 1987-88.

Nancy Johner, USDA's previous Under Secretary for FNCS, is now the State Director, based in Lincoln, NE, for former USDA Secretary and current U.S. Senator **Mike Johanns** (R-NE). ■



Rayne Pegg is the Administrator of the Agricultural Marketing Service.

Before joining USDA, from May 2008 until her appointment to this position Pegg served as the Deputy Secretary of Legislation and Policy for the California Department of Food and Agriculture. She was the Director of International Trade and Plant Health with the California Farm Bureau Federation's National Affairs and Research Division from 2004-08, where she analyzed California agriculture's foreign market opportunities and competition and participated in the World Trade Organization negotiations and the US-Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations. In addition

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our property and our employees."

Holler recalled that, during discussions with City and ball league officials, FS staffers took to lugging around a five-gallon drywall bucket that was full of baseballs collected from the Depot—to illustrate the need for a net. "That was a pretty heavy visual aid—both literally and figuratively," she quipped. "But it helped us to explain our concerns."

Holler noted that another selling point which Forest Service staffers used during the discussions was the 'potential liability' issue. "In other words," she clarified, "if one of our employees got hurt by a flying baseball, the City might be liable. So, preventing that possibility tended to appeal to the City's self-interest."

However, notwithstanding the persuasive arguments which FS staffers made during the discussions, the proverbial bottom line was that, like most municipal recreational facilities in small towns, there was no money in the ballfield budget to address the need for a net. "So, in the end," Holler recounted, "the Forest Service paid for the work because of concerns for employee and equipment safety—even though the danger came from another party."

On Feb. 23, 2007 the parties involved—the Forest Service, Elkins City officials, and league officials—signed a memorandum of understanding confirming that those three parties would work cooperatively on the 'netting matter' and related issues.

But then it took a couple of years to ac-

quire the needed components, which included a net, cables, and poles. "And, to do it right, it's a lot more complicated than just sticking poles in the ground and then attaching a net," advised **Mary Smakula**, FS Facilities Engineer on the Monongahela NF. She designed the project with input from colleagues on the National Forest. "For instance," she pointed out, "Engineer **Jacob D'Angelo** provided a 'baseball velocity analysis'—which indicated the type and strength of net needed; Engineer **Randall Biller** provided a 'baseball flight analysis'—which indicated where the net was most needed; and the Forest engineering survey crew provided mapping of the site for pole placement and to determine where underground services were located."

"We used a heavy-duty driving range net, because some of the damage was occurring from golf balls being hit by people sneaking into the baseball field," noted Smakula. She added that the supporting poles are 50 feet tall with 7 feet of that in the ground. The net itself is about 41 feet above ground. "It turned out," she recalled, "that the installation required the relocation of electrical service from an overhead drop—which would have intersected the net—to an underground service. So we took care of that too."

Smakula noted that the project cost \$5,000. "Although our employees did most of the planning and design," she said, "the electrical relocation and the net/pole installation were performed by area contractors. So the project did add more than \$5,000 to the local

economy in labor."

The netting was in place for the Spring 2009 baseball season. Holler said that, during the course of this past season, some balls have bounced back onto the field from the net, and others have hit the net and fallen to the bottom—where they've been collected.

"Well, a few baseballs still do make it into the Depot yard," Holler acknowledged. "But things are definitely a lot better than they were before—and it's good that we took the initiative on this to get it corrected." ■

—**RON HALL**



There's no way that FS's Mary Smakula could reach the top—41 feet up—of the netting that separates left-field, in Elkins, WV's Bluegrass Park, from a Forest Service facility directly behind it. But that's fine with her—since she helped to get that netting in place, in order to protect the facility and its FS employees from hard-hit home runs.

—**PHOTO BY KATE GOODRICH-ARLING**

tion, during 2008 she served on USDA's Agricultural Trade Advisory Committee on Fruits and Vegetables.

From 2001-04 Pegg served as Director of Governmental Relations for the Agricultural Council of California, based in Sacramento, where she focused on issues impacting agricultural cooperatives in California. She

worked on communications and business development with a telecommunications firm in Portland, OR from 1999-2001, after having worked as an account executive with a graphic design firm in Portland from 1998-99.

Jim Link, the previous Administrator of AMS, returned to the cattle business in north-central Texas, where he is concentrating on stocker/feeder cattle. ■



Dudley Butler is the Administrator of the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration.

Before joining USDA, Butler served since 1980 as an attorney in private practice, based in the Jackson, MS area and Laramie, WY, where

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PROFILE PLUS More About: Brenda Chapin



As of Nov. 1, 2009 there are only 110 days left until the Feb. 18, 2010 kickoff of USDA's next annual Agricultural Outlook Forum.

Brenda Chapin has been fixating on that date since last May, when the planning formally began for the 2010 version of the "Forum." That's because it'll be the fifth Forum she has coordinated for the Department.

For Chapin, the Information Officer for the World Agricultural Outlook Board within the Office of the Chief Economist, her coordination of USDA's Agricultural Outlook Forum is a logical next step in her career. That's because the Forum's purpose is to bring together individuals and groups who are interested in current issues and trends, economic and otherwise, in domestic and global agriculture—and Chapin has been in the information dissemination business, in various forms, for all her adult life. She was born and raised on a grain and cattle farm in Central City, NE. She earned a B.A. degree in English, political science, and French from Creighton University in Omaha in 1970 and then later earned an M.A. degree in professional writing from George Mason University in Fairfax, VA.

Right out of college Chapin became a free-lance writer in Omaha for magazines and newspapers, focusing on people profiles and travel writing. A few years later she and her husband relocated to Norfolk, VA where she continued her free-lancing until they moved to Alexandria, VA in 1974. She maintained her free-lance writing for the next several years but gradually shifted into writing about Information Technology issues, then ultimately to marketing writing for the field of computer science. During that time she also authored a book titled *"Guide to the Recommended Country Inns of the Mid-Atlantic and Chesapeake Region."* It was first published in 1985, with its seventh and most recent update published in 1996. "I wrote the first edition under my married name," she recounted. "My dad read it, told me how much he liked it, but then said he'd sure like it even more if I'd used my full family name instead." Accordingly, the later editions were penned under the name **Brenda Boelts Chapin**. "It's all part of the things we do for our parents," she laughed.

In 2003 Chapin became a contract writer for the Farm Service Agency; a year later it hired her as a Public Affairs Specialist in its headquarters office in Washington, DC. She moved to WAOB in 2005, with the main assignment to be the coordinator of USDA's Agricultural Outlook Forum.

Chapin explained that the work on Forums—which are generally always held in February—normally finally ends the following May with payment of the last bills and mailing of the final thank-you notes. "Then we take a quick breath, chill out for about five

minutes," she quipped, "and then start planning for the next Forum for the following February." The first step is to form a Steering Committee, composed of representatives of 14 program agencies in USDA plus OCE. "That group serves as the sounding board," she noted. Her role is to coordinate it behind the scenes and take notes. Then in June the Forum's Planning Committee begins operation, with a composition similar to the Steering Committee. "Its role is to develop the theme, program, and speakers for the Forum," she said. By September the planning shifts to logistics, plus invitations to the myriad of guest speakers and panelists. "We don't pay our speakers," she emphasized. "And yet the quality of our speakers is always top-notch." By mid-autumn the Forum's Information Committee, which Chapin chairs, begins its work to promote the event. "And then, a few weeks before the Forum commences, I start bugging our in-house USDA meteorologists about the weather conditions around the country on our 'opening day'—so I'll know if any speakers are gonna be subject to weather delays, or whatever. And yeah," she quipped, "that's when I really get busy chewing my nails off, about every reported snowflake."

Chapin noted that USDA has hosted its annual Agricultural Outlook Forum since 1923, and OCE has overseen it since the late 1980s. "It's USDA's largest annual meeting," she pointed out. The changes she has helped to bring to the Forum during her tenure as coordinator have included the dissemination of speeches online, instead of through paper copies, and the increased use of technology such as big screens at the Forum site "to enhance the viewing experience," she explained.

Any anecdotes about her time as Forum coordinator? "There may be some, but I'm blocking 'em out!" she laughed. But Chapin then recalled the situation, in February 2008, in which a gospel youth singing group had booked a conference room next to one of the Forum's breakout areas. "So, while our attendees were busy talking about drought situations across the country, they were being serenaded next door with some unanticipated heavy-duty 'musical accompaniment'."

Last Book Read: *"Oracle Bones: A Journey through Time in China"* by Peter Hessler.

Last Movie Seen: "I just watched *'Gosford Park'* on DVD—again!"

Recent Hobbies: "Hiking around our cabin in the Shenandoah Mountains."

Something I Don't Want People To Know About Me: "I am absolutely atonal—I cannot carry a tune. But I still participated in the chorus in high school, until the chorus director asked me point-blank what I was doing there. So we worked out a deal: he let me stay—as long as I only mouthed the words to the songs..."

Priorities In The Months Ahead: "Always the Forum—but, at the same time, I'm going to help my dad, who is a World War II veteran, transition to an Assisted Living Veterans Facility in Grand Island, Nebraska." ■

—RON HALL

he concentrated on areas of the law involving agricultural issues. He worked as a certified mediator and arbitrator, based in Mississippi, since the mid-1990s. He was involved in cattle, timber, and farming operations, and in the 1980s and '90s he owned cattle in Wyoming and traded cattle in Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, and Utah.

Butler began his professional career in 1976, serving as a legislative assistant for [then] Mississippi Governor **Cliff Finch**. From 1978-80 he served as Attorney and Special Assistant to the Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Corrections, based in Jackson, where he was responsible for legal work involving the Department. During that same period he also worked as a liaison to the Mississippi State Legislature, where he was responsible for such duties as the re-vamping of the Department's agriculture division and the reorganization of its management structure.

Terry Van Doren, the previous Administrator of GIPSA, is now the Legislative Director for former USDA Secretary and current U.S. Senator **Mike Johanns** (R-NE). ■



Bill Murphy is the Administrator of the Risk Management Agency.

From October 2005 until his selection for this position Murphy served as RMA's Deputy Administrator for Insurance Services. He was the Director of RMA's Regional Office in Davis, CA from 1990-2005, where he over-



The FFA jacket belonging to RD Loan Specialist **Aaron Morris** is in the closet of his parents' home in Chicago, so he couldn't bring it with him to USDA's TV studio in Washington, DC. But, even without that missing jacket—which dates back to 1998—he's still filming a personal shout-out of support to the Future Farmers of America. Note more information about that USDA employee initiative on the back cover. —PHOTO BY **DAVE KOSLING**

saw crop insurance operations in California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and Hawaii.

Murphy served as Director of the agency's Western Regional Compliance Office, based in Davis, from 1988-90. He began his federal career with USDA's [then] Federal Crop Insurance Corporation as a Crop Insurance Underwriter in its [then] Harrisburg, PA Field Actuarial Office in 1981.

Eldon Gould, the previous Administrator of RMA, returned to his family farm in Maple Park, IL, where he is raising hogs and growing corn, soybeans, and wheat. ■



Chris Smith is USDA's Chief Information Officer.

From January 2008 until he was selected for this position Smith served as the Department's Deputy Chief Information Officer. He was the CIO for Rural Development during 2007. From 2004-06 he was the Information Technology Director to the Chief Financial Officer at the General Services Administration, after having served from 2002-04 as the Senior Advisor to the CFO at GSA.

Smith was a Budget and Management Analyst with the Internal Revenue Service from 2001-02. During that time he also served on active duty as a Reserve U.S. Air Force Communications Officer based in Pakistan and then the Philippines. He worked as a Management Analyst with the Foreign Agricultural Service from 1999-2000, after having begun his federal career as a Budget Advisor with the Food and Nutrition Service in 1998.

Chuck Christopherson, USDA's previous CIO (who was also USDA's previous Chief Financial Officer), is now a Washington, DC-based Senior Vice President with SAP Labs, a computer software application company, where he is responsible for selected software applications in support of federal, state, and local government offices plus non-profit and education companies, both within the U.S. and on behalf of other countries around the globe. ■



Christine Zakarka is the Deputy Administrator for Policy and Program Development in the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

From November 2000 until her selection for this position Zakarka served as Chief of the Planning, Evaluation, and Monitoring Staff

within Policy and Program Development for APHIS. During that time she served on two managerial details for APHIS, including Acting Assistant Human Resources Director during 2008 and Acting Director of the agency's National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, Iowa during 2006. She was the Manager of APHIS's Information Technology Planning Division from 1995-2000. During that time she also served as Acting Director of the agency's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Program during 1998.

Zakarka worked as an Employee Development Specialist in APHIS from 1991-95. From 1984-91 she was a Volunteer Placement Specialist with the U.S. Peace Corps at its headquarters office in Washington, DC, after having served from 1980-84 as a Volunteer Math Teacher with the Peace Corps in Lobatse, Botswana.

Mike Gregoire, the previous Deputy Administrator for Policy and Program Development in APHIS, is now APHIS's Deputy Administrator for Biotechnology Regulatory Services. ■

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"Just read the message right off the teleprompter," advises OC Camera Operator **Dave Kosling** (left), as NASS Director of International Programs **Larry Siverson** gets ready to recite. Siverson is taping a personal shout-out of support to the Future Farmers of America (FFA). In his younger years Siverson was an FFA member in Newman Grove, NE—as reflected on the back of his FFA jacket that he brought to the video session, held in the TV studio of OC's Broadcast Media and Technology Center at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC. **Orrin Evans**, OC's Director of Special Projects, noted that 15 USDA employees—who were FFA members from chapters in 12 different states—recorded such messages of support. Those statements accompanied a similar congratulatory message from Secretary **Tom Vilsack**, all of which were shown at the FFA annual convention in Indianapolis on October 23.—**PHOTO BY AMY MCGEEHAN**



Help us find

Courtnei Gorman

Missing: **8-31-2008** From: **Addison, IL**

D.O.B.: **9-25-1992** Sex: **Female**

Hair: **Black**

Eyes: **Brown**

Height: **5 ft. 1 in.**

Weight: **127 lbs.**

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