

# USDA NEWS

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## You Don't Like That USDA Rule? Maybe You Can Waive It

Plus, A 30-Day Streamlined Process

by Ron Hall, Office of Communications

**S**o, you've got an idea that you're sure will help provide better service to your USDA customers. But there's this in-house rule that's keeping you from putting your idea into practice.

Well, you can grouse about that obstacle to your office colleagues. Or you can request a waiver of that in-house rule. And, these days, now you've got the clout of a Secretary's Memorandum to aid you in your request to get that in-house rule waived—and get your new idea up and running.

This new flexibility is courtesy of Secretary's Memorandum 2570-1, titled "Waivers of Internal Department of Agriculture Rules," which Secretary **Dan Glickman** signed on February 18, 2000.

In his Secretary's Memorandum Glickman noted that this new approach is in response to a written request by President **Bill Clinton** in April 1998 that federal departments expand their use of waivers of internal rules in order to facilitate governmental 'reinvention efforts' that are designed to further the efficient and effective delivery of governmental services to the public.

"I am committed to ensuring this ongoing effort reaches its full potential within the Department of Agriculture," Glickman affirmed in the memo, "through the establishment of a Department-wide standard waiver process that encourages innovation, is 'user-friendly,' and provides a quick route to cutting red tape and ensuring better, faster service to the public."

The five-page Secretary's Memorandum outlined a procedure to accomplish this goal. The procedure included designating a USDA Waiver Coordinator, as well as a waiver point of contact within each USDA program agency and staff office.

Office of Human Resources Management  
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*"Let me get closer. Now focus. Say 'cheese,' all you squash. Got it!" concludes Gary Crane, an agricultural commodity grader at AMS's market office in Hunts Point, N.Y., as he uses a digital camera to take a close-up snapshot of some recently-arrived zucchini squash. The purpose is to capture—on a digital color image—a measure of the quality of that load of produce. The image will then be loaded on the Internet, where it can be accessed by a would-be buyer and the seller of that produce, in order to help them negotiate a price, depending on a fair, objective—and visual—assessment of its quality. It's a new technique AMS has implemented to help provide additional inspection services. Note George Chartier's story below.—PHOTO BY BILL RAKER*

## Digital Images Help AMS Inspectors Make The Grade

by George Chartier, AMS Public Affairs Staff

**U**SDA's fresh produce inspectors working at terminal markets nationwide are increasingly using a small but effective technological tool to confirm the quality of daily shipments: a digital camera.

The Fresh Products Branch of the Agricultural Marketing Service began in 1997 to equip inspectors in market offices with digital cameras and enhanced computer technology that lets them take and transmit sharp, detailed color images of produce or containers.

With digital cameras, users need not wait for film to be developed, printed, and scanned. They save images to a flashcard—similar to a computer diskette—which can be downloaded into a computer. Once the images are in the digital format, they can be viewed, printed, or transmitted along the Internet to anyone in the world.

AMS adopted the technology principally to provide additional inspection services to the fresh fruit and vegetable industry, but it has turned out to be very useful for training inspectors and improving communication between headquarters and the field when trying to identify defects in fresh produce.

**Rita Bibbs-Booth**, section head for fresh products support services in AMS's Fruit and Vegetable Programs, said "This technology provides a quick, visual confirmation of product appearance and defects, damage from shifted loads, brands and container markings, and container conditions."

AMS has been steadily introducing digital imaging services at its federal terminal market field offices. Located in or near major cities, terminal markets are central distribution points for buyers and sellers to negotiate the price of produce shipped by truck and rail from farms and packing houses. Hundreds of tons and thousands of dollars worth of food pass through these markets on their way to restaurants, cafeterias, and dining tables.

Because nearly all the food is perishable,  
*continued on pg. 2...*

# Secretary Dan Glickman



Permanent Normal Trade Relations is one of the most important decisions facing the Congress and the nation this year. Passing it will allow the United States to

be a constructive partner for China, as it slowly but inevitably moves toward greater social, political, and economic freedom.

Should PNTR fail, China will still likely join the WTO. That train is leaving the station; it's just a matter of us deciding whether to hop along for the ride. If we don't pass PNTR, we leave ourselves on the outside looking in, inviting our competitors to take advantage of the terms we negotiated and capture the market share that should be ours.

The stakes on PNTR are enormous. It's about expanding American exports, but it's also about enhancing our national security and living up to our obligations as a world leader. Many times in our history, we've risked a lot more in the name of exercising global leadership. This does not involve sending troops to a dangerous part of the world. It doesn't even entail any economic risk. The economic benefits are all on *our* side.

Just over 50 years ago, Secretary of State **George Marshall** came up with his plan to help rebuild the European nations that had been devastated by World War II. It was bold, and it was controversial. But we did it because it was the right thing to do. And today, we recognize the Marshall Plan as the birth of the Western alliance that has been the foundation of global peace and

stability for the last half century.

Now, we can't perfectly equate the Marshall Plan with PNTR, or Europe in 1947 with China in the year 2000. But there are some parallels. Then, as now, the forces of isolation howled with opposition. And, ultimately, I believe that PNTR could be as important to shaping the geopolitics of the 21st century as the Marshall Plan was to fashioning the post-war world.

There is one major difference: the Marshall Plan was expensive. PNTR asks nothing from the American people. It doesn't require that we take any kind of economic hit. On the contrary, PNTR allows us to strengthen our economy *at the same time* that we achieve a major foreign policy objective. It's a win-win, and it's imperative that we not let the opportunity pass us by. ❖

*Digital Images...continued from pg. 1*

bargaining is brisk.

"Sellers seek the highest price the market will bear for their loads of food, while buyers look to bargain for the lowest price," explained **Bob Keeney**, deputy administrator for AMS's Fruit and Vegetable Programs. "To arbitrate, the Agency provides a valuable service: trained inspectors who can certify a fair, objective assessment of the quality of the product for sale."

AMS's inspectors typically begin their days around 5 a.m. and, by noon, they have graded dozens of lots of every kind of fruit and vegetable imaginable. Their knowledge of a vast variety of fresh produce—and what good produce should look like—is encyclopedic.

For a fee based on an hourly rate, AMS graders issue written certificates that buyers can show sellers when deciding on a purchase price.

Digital imaging is not intended to replace a written description on a government-issued grading certificate, but now there is instant visual evidence to back up the inspector. While instant film cameras have been used over the years, the arrival of computers and the Internet made it possible to transmit color images from the market to a supplier's office anywhere in the nation or the world in a matter of seconds. To help make a case during a negotiation, either a buyer or a seller can call for the AMS digital imaging service.

**Eugene Fabio**, president of J. Bonafede & Sons in Chelsea, Mass., gave an example of how effective the service can be:

"I remember getting a load of bananas and I asked for an inspection of the color and condition. Color with bananas is a big deal. They're supposed to be green," Fabio said, "but they arrived yellow." At Fabio's request, an AMS grader used a digital camera to record the over-ripe load. "The grader took eight to 10 good pictures, like any good photographer would. The inspector posted them on an Internet site, and within an hour I was on the phone with the grower from the Dominican Republic and the owner of the packing company, who was in Italy, and all three of us at the same time were looking at the images that were visually clear."

As a result, Fabio was able to persuade the owner to substantially reduce the asking price for the bananas.

AMS inspectors undergo thorough training in the use of the digital technology. **Kathy Staley**, the acting officer in charge of the AMS market office in Hunts Point, N.Y., said that the station's four cameras are rotated among employees.

Since the Office of Inspector General revealed its investigation into allegations of bribery and fraudulent grading at the Hunts Point terminal market in October 1999, AMS has instituted numerous reform measures to improve grading services at its market offices around the country. Among the reforms was the agency's decision to promote more widespread and regular use of its digital imaging service as additional proof of the quality of an inspected shipment.

"My office tries to show receivers and shippers the positive side of what this service can do for them," said **James Prady**, officer in charge of the AMS market office in Pittsburgh. "Digital imaging is good not just for showing defects, but also the good grades."

**Susan Taylor**, the officer in charge of the AMS market office in Boston, said that to increase the number of requests for digital imaging, inspectors need to watch for opportunities to suggest the service to customers, and especially when the images can improve on a written grade.

**Robin Chilton**, the officer in charge of the AMS market office in San Francisco, said her inspectors try to increase customer interest in digital imaging by practicing a long-respected sales technique: offering free samples. She tells her inspectors to "be visible with the camera. Arouse curiosity."

**Larry Lace**, chief of AMS's Fresh Products Branch, said the digital imaging service is now available in 12 of its 38 federal market offices nationwide.

"Our administrator, **Kathleen Merrigan**, has set an ambitious goal for us to place digital cameras in every one of our terminal market offices and getting our employees fully trained in their use by the end of calendar year 2000," Lace said.

Merrigan said she is enthusiastic about the potential of digital technology. "Any service we can provide that will bring fairness and transparency to the marketplace is worth investing in," she said. ❖

## USDA To Honor Its Own June 5

The Department's annual Honor Awards Ceremony for 2000 is scheduled to be held on Monday, June 5 at 1 p.m. at the Ronald Reagan International Trade Center in Washington, DC.

**Sandra Anglade**, USDA's Employee Recognition Program Manager with the Office of Human Resources Management and coordinator of the Ceremony, noted that this is the 54th Honor Awards Ceremony held by the Department. "USDA will honor individuals, teams, and groups of employees for their outstanding achievements, based on recommendations to Secretary **Dan Glickman** from USDA's Honor Awards Committee," she noted.

The Honor Awards Committee, chaired

## Administrative



for the second year in a row by Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics **Miley Gonzalez**, was composed of Gonzalez and three individuals selected from academia and the private, non-profit sector. Committee members met at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC on March 21 to evaluate the

nominations received for the Department's highest awards. 161 nominations were submitted to the Committee, including 64 individual nominations, 5 team nominations, and 92 group nominations.

Natural Resources Conservation Service program assistant **Janet Sweat** noted that Committee members then forwarded their selections—which consisted of 56 individual, 3 team, and 62 group nominations, for a total of 121 nominations—to Glickman for his consideration as USDA Honor Award recipients.

OHRM employee relations specialist **Cecilia Matthews** added that the Ceremony is to be transmitted live via satellite to employee locations around the country. All USDA employees are invited to attend. ❖

*Waive It...continued from pg. 1*

Deputy Director **Bob Whiting** is serving as the Departmentwide Waiver Coordinator. He noted the parameters under which Secretary's Memorandum 2570-1 is designed to operate.

"Internal rules' apply to internal Department regulations, processes, policies, and procedures that relate to providing our USDA programs and services to the public," he explained. "But this new waiver request process does *not* apply to laws, treaties, Executive Orders, negotiated labor agreements, civil rights protections, governmentwide regulations, or any other requirements and practices required by law."

"This waiver request process," he pointed out, "applies only to internal USDA rules not codified in the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations."

"And waiver requests that would have a detrimental effect on USDA's mission or its customers will be routinely disapproved."

He added that Deputy Secretary **Richard Rominger** is the USDA official with the ultimate decision-making authority to waive internal rules for the Department.

Whiting explained that USDA's waiver request process is set up so that it takes no more than 30 days from the time an employee initiates a waiver request to the time a decision on that request is made. "This streamlined process is in keeping with the whole idea of reinventing government," he observed.

In fact, this initiative is one of many that the Department has developed as part of the governmentwide effort called "National Partnership for Reinventing Government," formerly called "National Performance Review." **Gypsy Banks**, USDA's Hammer Award coordinator, said that as of May 8 USDA employ-

ees have been a part of 95 teams that have received "Hammer Awards for Reinvention" from Vice President **Al Gore** for contributions toward "putting customers first, cutting red tape, empowering employees, and getting back to basics in government."

Whiting noted that the mode of communication for initiating and acting on waiver requests is to be electronic mail.

"We're currently constructing a particular section on USDA's web site where we'll post those waiver requests which have been approved," he said. "We want to promote maximum visibility of these waiver actions throughout the Department."

He added that approved waivers will become effective on the date of their posting to the USDA web site.

Whiting said that, if an employee has an idea that he/she feels will improve USDA's mission and support to its customers, but the employee has also identified an internal USDA rule which precludes the adoption of that idea, then the procedure for using this new system to waive an internal USDA rule works as follows:

First, the employee making the waiver request fills out the e-mail version of the appropriate form, titled "Request for Waiver of Internal USDA Regulation, Policy, Procedure, or Process." That form asks the employee to provide the title of the internal rule in question, the particular provision of the rule if appropriate, and the USDA agency, office, or division that enforces the rule. The employee is then asked to describe the "Benefits of Adopting This Suggestion."

The employee then e-mails the waiver request form to the appropriate agency-level waiver point of contact. If the waiver request

involves more than one agency, then USDA's Waiver Coordinator needs to be notified.

"The waiver point of contact will consult informally with the Office of the General Counsel," Whiting said, "to ensure that the waiver request meets the appropriate criteria, such as that the internal rule in question is not codified in the CFR, or any of the other exceptions."

If the waiver request passes that test, the waiver point of contact then sends the request by e-mail to the agency or office division that enforces the rule.

"If that office concurs in the waiver request, then the agency point of contact will forward the concurrence to me—and the approved waiver request will be posted on the USDA web site," Whiting said. "But if there isn't concurrence, then there is an established procedure which will ultimately involve a final decision by Deputy Secretary Rominger."

He added that when an internal USDA rule is waived through this process, a notice to that effect will be published in the Federal Register, as appropriate, to notify the public of the change. "It's the responsibility of the office which had been enforcing that rule to ensure that the Federal Register publishing takes place, if required," he advised.

"The point of this new initiative on requesting waivers to in-house rules," Whiting underscored, "is to help eliminate impediments to our efforts to serve our USDA customers."

He said that the initiative is to be in place and officially launched by this summer, and employees will receive a formal announcement advising them when it has begun. ❖



## Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services

### 'Unexpected Guests' On Osaka TV

"Nakodo" is a Japanese word which means "go-between." And thanks to the efforts of Foreign Agricultural Service employees acting as a "nakodo," some U.S. agricultural products got an unexpected boost on a popular TV show airing in Osaka, Japan.

Ritsuko Nomura, FAS office coordinator of the agency's Agricultural Trade Office in Osaka, explained that "Wide ABC..." is the name of a weekday afternoon TV show whose purpose is to entertain Osaka home-makers with 'slices of life' from their city.

Officials from the TV show contacted the FAS office in Osaka with a proposal. "The show was willing to provide some visibility to U.S. agricultural products," recounted Dan Berman, currently director of FAS's Agricultural Export Services Division who was then FAS's Agricultural Trade Officer in Osaka. "However, the catch was that the TV show would have the final say as to what was going to be mentioned on the air about those agricultural products."



"This package of U.S. dried fruits on this videotape," notes FAS's Ritsuko Nomura, "is similar to those U.S. agricultural products we recently spotlighted on OsakaTV."—PHOTO BY EIKO TSUMURA

Under the leadership of Terrence Barber, the Tokyo-based executive director of FAS's Agricultural Trade Office in Japan, FAS maintains close relations with over 50 U.S. agricultural "cooperators," or trade associations, which are based in Japan and which promote their agricultural products in Asia, the U.S.'s largest export market.

"But, look, we knew that if we merely gave the TV officials our contact list of names and addresses of the agricultural cooperators, and then merely counted on both sides to hopefully get in touch with each other, we wouldn't be taking fullest advantage of this opportunity which fell in our lap," Berman noted.

## Employees make these things...

# HAPPEN!

Accordingly, Nomura took the initiative of following up with each of the 20 most appropriate agricultural cooperators as a "nakodo" to help those who were interested to contact the TV station. She then helped to get firm commitments of TV air times for several of the agricultural commodities.

Berman noted that part of the FAS strategy was that, once his office knew which FAS cooperators were ready to supply the agricultural items to be mentioned on TV, the Agricultural Trade Office recommended to TV officials only those products that Japanese consumers could see, remember, and buy the next day at the store.

"Some of the FAS cooperators advised Ritsuko that they didn't want to participate because they couldn't control what would be aired about their agricultural product," Berman said.

"But others basically said 'Any publicity is better than none.'"

The result? Nomura said that, as an example of FAS's efforts, on two different episodes of "Wide ABC..." last year, there were 'unexpected guests': carrots and grapefruit from the United States.

On one show, she recalled, a TV reporter proclaimed a sample of California carrots "delicious cooked or raw and very healthy" and are "very convenient to use" since they come packaged pre-peeled and bite-sized. He then poured Italian dressing on a bowl full and 'gobbled them with gusto.'

On another show, an announcer, bundled up in a blue ski jacket, extolled the health benefits of Florida grapefruit as snowflakes fell on her.

"As part of FAS's mission to expand U.S. agricultural exports," Berman affirmed, "we were happy to facilitate this visibility of U.S. agricultural products before Japanese consumers on a popular TV show."

—JILL LEE



## Natural Resources and Environment

### Cultural Heritage In Florida

"The Perdido Bay Indian Tribe doesn't have any federal reservation land—so maybe there's a way we can help them promote their cultural heritage."

That was John Harper's thinking back in 1995 when he first became interested in this general subject. Harper is a soil conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and coordinator of the Three Rivers Resource Conservation and Development Council near Pensacola, Fla.

"There are over 200 tribal members of the Perdido Bay Indian Tribe of the Southeastern Lower Muscogee Creek Indians who live in Escambia County, Florida," he recounted.

Back in 1993 officials of the Perdido Bay Tribe had set up a Cultural Resource and Education Center in a storefront in Pensacola. Its purpose was to help explain the culture of the Perdido Bay Tribe to the residents of northwestern Florida and to visitors from around the country. "But it was in need of funds to continue operating," Harper advised.

Accordingly, in 1995 Harper helped to initiate a partnership between the Three Rivers RC&D Council and Perdido Bay Indian Tribal Chief Bobby "Bearheart" Johns.

The Council initially provided a \$5,000 grant to help the Center continue its operations. Harper explained that the financial assistance helped tribal representatives to continue to provide a variety of educational programs including high school seminars, college presentations, and various Native American ceremonial



"What's the latest entry on the Center's home page?" NRCS's John Harper (left) asks Perdido Bay Indian Tribal Chief Bobby "Bearheart" Johns, as they get ready to access the web site of the Perdido Bay Tribe Cultural Resource and Education Center—while both are surrounded by artifacts at the Center.—PHOTO BY DOROTHY STALEY

performances in the local area.

"We were able to get involved financially," he noted, "because one of the functions of the Resource Conservation and Development programs is to assist locally sponsored resource conservation projects that benefit the environment and/or the economy of local areas."

"This project seemed like a good way to accomplish that mission, plus add to the cultural heritage of our local community."

"The story of the Perdido Bay Tribe of the Lower Muscogee Creek Indians has not been widely told," added Bearheart. "But it is our purpose to share our story and our rich culture with everyone who comes through our doors."

To date, the assistance of the Three Rivers RC&D Council has totaled \$35,000 in grants. Harper noted that its assistance has helped the Center to continue adequately telling the Creek Indian history through such initiatives as developing a partnership with the Pensacola Historical Society. "For instance, last fall we provided funds to them," he noted, "to renovate a classroom at the Historical Society."

"That classroom is now being used by local schools and community groups in a monthly hands-on discussion with sixth graders about the history of the Creek Indians in northwestern Florida."

Bearheart added that this October, as part of the annual three-day 'cultural roundup' put on by a local Pensacola church, Perdido Bay Tribal members will recreate an entire Creek village. "Through this 'living history,'" he said, "we hope to show an estimated 150,000 visitors how we would bake bread and carve flutes in traditional palmetto huts and grow corn and beans in traditional garden plots." He noted that the Three Rivers RC&D Council's financial assistance will be supporting that re-creation.

"As I learn more about the work and traditions of the Perdido Bay Tribe from the storytelling, carvings, and music of Chief Bearheart," Harper said, "I remind myself that the American Indians were this country's first farmers and conservationists."

—DOROTHY STALEY



## Research, Education, and Economics

### From Anyplace On The Planet

After undergoing a 17-month-long renovation, the National Agricultural Library's public service areas officially reopened on April 12 with a dedication ceremony.

According to Joe Swab, acting NAL public

affairs officer, this wasn't just another case of a federal building getting a makeover. He said that NAL's renovation should offer newer, expanded, and easier opportunities for agricultural research for both USDA employees and any other interested persons—whether located in the Washington, DC metropolitan area or at a site anyplace else on the planet.

Swab coordinated many aspects of the NAL renovation. "We've turned ourselves into not only a resource for books and other printed documents, but also a resource for a vast quantity of electronic materials," he affirmed.

"Although NAL has been developing electronically for the last three decades, as of now any agricultural researcher, located anywhere in this country or any other country for that matter, can access us electronically. The renovation, along with staff reorganizations, streamlines the Library's public services and improves public access."

The physical changes in the newly renovated public areas include an abundance of new computer stations for customers, customer work areas with improved lighting and sound control, and an efficient new information and help desk staffed by NAL librarians and information specialists. "The modifications help that staff serve our on-line and remote users far better than ever before," he said.

The National Agricultural Library is a 15-story building located on the grounds of USDA's Beltsville Agricultural Research Center in Beltsville, Md., and is part of the Agricultural Research Service. It is one of only four national libraries, the other three being the Library of Congress and the National Library of Education, both in Washington, DC, and the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, Md.

According to NAL Director Pamela Andre, the Library began its renovation in 1998 for several reasons. "A severe shortage of storage space for the collection, a need for more customer-friendly user areas, a need to upgrade the building infrastructure, and a desire to meet the new millennium with the most modern facilities we can develop led NAL to undertake the renovation," she said.

Alvetta Pindell, head of NAL's Information and Research Services Branch, noted that NAL has a collection of over 3.3 million items. "They include books, research reports, audio-visual materials, electronic information items, and artifacts," she noted. "The materials date back to the 16th century and include items from some of the most esteemed names in agriculture and science—and a nearly comprehensive collection of the writings of USDA researchers."



"Hey, I think she's stuck under there!" laughs NAL computer specialist **Diana Claburn** (2nd from left), as she and fellow NAL computer specialists **Sue Phelps** (2nd from right) and **Darcel Cuthrell** (right) work with contractor **Elizabeth Rivera** (far left) to wire new computer work stations in NAL's renovated service area.—PHOTO BY JOE SWAB

A part of NAL's 'new millennium of service' that has major implications for global access is NAL's increased emphasis on "AgNIC."

**Melanie Gardner**, an NAL librarian and coordinator of AgNIC, said that the NAL-coordinated Agriculture Network Information Center, or AgNIC, is an Internet-based system for gathering, storing, and disseminating quality agricultural information. "The key," she explained, "is that AgNIC relies on an alliance of collaborating institutions around the world to manage all this electronically-stored information."

For instance, each of AgNIC's current 25 partners—which are generally public, land-grant colleges and universities—offers expert informational coverage of a "narrow slice" of agriculture, such as tree fruits, maple syrup, forestry, or animal welfare.

"This is valuable," said **Jim Horsfield**, chief of the Research Support and Training Branch in the Economic Research Service and a member of the 'AgNIC alliance,' "because USDA and the land-grant institutions together produce the most significant agricultural research and information in the world—and AgNIC serves as a portal to disseminate that information." AgNIC is available on the Internet at [www.agnic.org](http://www.agnic.org)

Another important aspect of NAL's electronic services is the AGRICOLA database, which includes bibliographic records for scientific literature in all forms, including books, journal articles, microforms, and electronic journals. It is available at [www.nal.usda.gov/ag98](http://www.nal.usda.gov/ag98)

"NAL is relied on by policy makers, scientists, and extension workers the world over to provide crucial agricultural information," Andre noted. "And we're now offering a new millennium of service."

—RON HALL



**E**ric Olsen was named Chief of staff to Secretary **Dan Glickman**. He succeeded **Greg Frazier**, who held that position from March 1995 until March 2000, when he was named

the U.S. Trade Representative's special trade negotiator for agriculture and food policy.

From May 1994 until his appointment in March 2000, Olsen served at USDA first as special assistant to the secretary and subsequently as counsel to the secretary on domestic policy. In those positions he worked on such issues as appropriations, food safety, agricultural concentration, agricultural research, agricultural biotechnology, organic standards, ethanol, and marketing and regulatory issues.

From 1993-94 Olsen served as legislative counsel to U.S. Rep. **David Minge** (D-Minn.), where he concentrated on issues before the House Agriculture Committee and the "Great Flood of '93" in the Midwest. He worked as a staff attorney for Farmers' Legal Action Group, based in St. Paul, Minn., after having worked as an attorney for the St. Cloud Area Legal Services in St. Cloud, Minn.

Before earning his law degree in 1989 Olsen was a research assistant to the Minnesota House of Representatives Research Department, in St. Paul. He worked as the govern-

## Editor's Roundup

USDA people in the news

ment relations representative of The Pillsbury Company, based in Minneapolis, from 1984-85.

A native of Marshall, Minn., Olsen holds a B.A. degree in liberal arts and a J.D. degree, both from the University of Minnesota. ❖



**G**eorge Arredondo was named as associate administrator for operations and management in the Farm Service Agency. He succeeded **Jim Kearney**, who held that position

from January 1999 until November 1999, when he was appointed administrator of the Rural Housing Service.

From August 1998 until his appointment in March 2000, Arredondo served as FSA's state executive director for Arizona, based in Phoenix. He worked as an FSA farm loan officer in Phoenix from 1997-98, after having served as the agency's county executive director for

Cochise County, Ariz., based in Willcox, Ariz., from 1994-97.

Arredondo worked as an agricultural program specialist and a project leader in FSA's Cotton, Grain, and Rice Division at the agency's headquarters office in Washington, DC in 1994. From 1993-94 he served as an assistant team leader for FSA's Business Process Analysis Team, after having served as a functional expert with FSA's Information Strategic Planning Team from 1992-93. He worked as an automation coordinator for the agency from 1989-90 in Phoenix, and as an agricultural program specialist from 1987-89 and also from 1990-92, in Washington, DC. He began his career with USDA as a program assistant in Casa Grande, Ariz., in 1985.

A native of Coolidge, Ariz., where he grew up on a farm producing cotton, grains, and alfalfa. Arredondo studied agricultural business at Central Arizona College and business administration at the University of Phoenix. ❖



**J**anice McDougle was selected as the deputy chief for state and private forestry in the Forest Service. She succeeded **Phil Janik**, who served in that position from June 1998

until March 1999, and who is now FS's chief operating officer.

From November 1997 until her selection McDougle served as associate deputy chief for state and private forestry for the agency. She was FS's associate deputy chief for the national forest system from 1994-97. From 1993-94 she served as a member of the Forest Service Reinvention Team. She was assistant director for planning and budget, as well as appeals and litigation coordinator, for FS's Wildlife and Fisheries Staff from 1989-93.

Before joining the Forest Service in 1989 McDougle served at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 19 years, where she began her career as a biologist in 1970 with its Division of River Basin Studies in Upper Darby, Pa. From 1973-74 she worked as a biologist with the Fish and Wildlife Service's Division of Ecological Services in Concord, N.H. She subsequently served as a biologist with FWS's Endangered Species Program in Washington, DC from 1975-84. She then worked as a program analyst in FWS's Budget Office from 1985-86. From 1987-89 she served as a biologist with the agency's Division of Wildlife Refuges.

A native of Birmingham, Ala., McDougle holds a B.S. degree in zoology from Alabama A&M University. ❖



**David Horner**, an agricultural commodity grader at AMS's market office in Pittsburgh, gently turns a fresh tomato, prior to taking its picture using a digital camera. But it's not part of some photo contest; instead, he is producing a digital color image of that tomato as a representation of the box of tomatoes in front of him. He'll then load that image on the Internet, where potential buyers—and its seller—can view an accurate image of that tomato's quality, before they settle on a price for that load of produce. Note **George Chartier's** story on page 1.—**PHOTO BY JIM PRADY**



**B**rad Powell was selected as the regional forester for the Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Region, based in Vallejo, Calif. He succeeded Lynn Sprague, who served in that position from 1994 until December 1998, when he retired following over 38 years with the Forest Service.

From December 1998 until his recent selection Powell served as the acting regional forester for FS's Pacific Southwest Region, after having been selected as the deputy regional forester for resources at that location earlier in 1998. From 1995-98 he was the forest supervisor on the Tongass National Forest, based in Ketchikan, Alaska. He served as the forest supervisor on the Daniel Boone Na-

tional Forest, based in Winchester, Ky., from 1993-95, after having been its deputy forest supervisor from 1991-93.

From 1987-91 Powell was the manager of the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, located on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest in Washington. He worked as a district ranger, based in Pecos, N.M., on the Santa Fe National Forest from 1984-87. From 1977-84 he worked in recreation, lands, minerals, and timber staff positions on ranger districts in New Mexico and Alaska, after having begun his full-time career with the Forest Service in fire and timber management in Young, Ariz., on the Tonto National Forest in 1972.

A native of Columbia, Mo., Powell holds a B.S. degree in forest science from the University of Missouri. ❖

## Letters

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I work in a Rural Development field office in Florida. While the economy may be strong in urban and suburban areas of the country, in rural America the unemployment rates are much higher than the national average, many rural families are paying more than 30 percent of their monthly household income for housing, and infrastructure is inadequate or in poor repair so that it won't meet new government guidelines—let alone attract new industry to rural communities. In short, rural areas are not enjoying the prosperity that most of the developed areas are.

However, the government continues to cut program funding that directly impacts these rural communities. I realize there have been some minor increases, but most of the time a sub-program is created within the service area that takes the additional funds provided. Or, alternatively, USDA cuts administrative funds, thereby reducing the resources available to do the job.

I recently looked at a Rural Development report that identified the number of RD program dollars spent in each State, compared to the number of RD employees within that State. It noted that Florida administered more RD program dollars per employee than any state in the nation. Yet our funds for rural development here are being cut.

So my question: If rural America is the only sector of this nation that is not enjoying economic prosperity, why do we not put funds in this area—where we already have the resources in place to make things better?

Jim Dean  
Marianna, Fla.

Dear Jim,

Thank you for your e-mail message. Under Secretary for Rural Development **Jill Long Thompson** and I share your concern that rural areas are not benefitting from the economic expansion other parts of the country have enjoyed of late. While some rural areas have shown improvement, a significant number of rural counties still reflect poverty rates in excess of 20 percent and unemployment rates between 10 and 14 percent.

As you correctly stated, these are the problems that our Rural Development programs are designed to address. You expressed a concern that, while some RD programs have seen minor increases in funding, overall funding has been reduced. In fact, funding for RD programs has increased from \$7.4 billion in 1993 to \$11.2 billion for FY 2000. During that same period RD staff employment has decreased from 9,547 to about 7,000 staff years. Despite this decrease, customer service has improved due to management innovations such as the establishment of a Centralized Servicing Center for single family housing loans. Also, more loans are being made on a guaranteed rather than a direct basis, which means private lenders are bearing more responsibility for servicing.

The report you referenced did identify some possible inequities in the distribution of employees. Under Secretary Thompson has established a working group of State Directors and senior headquarters personnel to examine options to distribute staffing more equitably.

Many of the economic problems in rural America are longstanding and systemic, and it will take some time before all rural Americans have the same economic opportunities as others in our society. However, we are making progress in responding to the needs of rural areas and I appreciate your work and that of your fellow RD employees toward this goal.

Dan Glickman  
Secretary

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"Does it matter if I'm left-handed or right-handed?" quips NRCS's **John Harper** (left), as he is about to get a lesson on how to play a Perdido Bay Indian wooden flute from Perdido Bay Indian Tribal Chief **Bobby "Bearheart" Johns**. They are standing in front of the Perdido Bay Tribe Cultural Resource and Education Center in Pensacola, Fla. The two have been working together to help preserve the cultural heritage of the Perdido Bay Indian Tribe by strengthening the operations of that Center. Note **Dorothy Staley's** story on page 4.—**PHOTO BY DOROTHY STALEY**



**HELP US FIND**

**Loukthayoth Yoshi Phiangdale**

Missing: 02-06-96      From: Raymond, WI  
 D.O.B. 12-09-84      Sex: Male  
 Hair: Black            Eyes: Brown  
 Height: 4 ft. 5 in.      Weight: 65 lbs.

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- ◆ **June 5**  
*USDA Honor Awards Ceremony*  
 Washington, DC  
 (202) 690-0266 or (202) 720-8372 (TTY)
- ◆ **June 14-17**  
*2000 National Ag in the Classroom  
Conference*  
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