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How We're Getting The Word Out On Keeping 'FMD' Away From Our Shores

What Would YOU Say, If Asked?

by Ron Hall, Office of Communications

We're all employees of the Department—so, in the eyes of the public, each of us is probably thought of as knowing virtually everything about virtually every aspect of our vast and varied USDA mission.

Well, that's a nice thought, but we employees know it's not realistic. Nonetheless, as a USDA employee, what would YOU say if someone asked "Say, what's this 'FMD' scare I keep reading about, and is there something I'm supposed to be doing about it?"

First, some background. Foot-and-mouth disease, or 'FMD,' is a viral disease that attacks animals with cloven hooves, such as cattle, sheep, and swine. According to **Mark Teachman**, a senior staff veterinarian in the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, it is characterized by fever and blister-like lesions followed by erosions on the tongue and lips, in the mouth, on the teats, and between the hooves. While many affected animals do recover, the disease results in a weakened state, loss of weight, and reduced production of milk and meat. "The disease is virtually never harmful to humans," he pointed out. "But it *is* highly contagious among those animals which are vulnerable to this virus."

"So countries always want to stop FMD right in its tracks when detected."

In fact, that's why foot-and-mouth disease has been the subject of a worldwide, concentrated focus of late. The most recent FMD outbreaks have been detected in the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, and Holland.

"Veterinarians and animal health technicians from APHIS and the Agricultural Research Service, as well as from state departments of agriculture, traveled on-site to the United Kingdom," advised APHIS senior staff

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*"That takes care of another successfully-assembled order of sampling kits," concludes **Robyn Johnson** (left), an FSIS sample handling specialist at FSIS's field laboratory in Athens, Ga. She is reviewing an inventory list with **Alethia Abrams**, program coordinator at Hope Haven, a center in Athens for adults with varying degrees of mental and physical disabilities. FSIS entered into a unique contract with Hope Haven, which now assembles those kits for FSIS inspectors around the country to use in testing meat and poultry products for Salmonella. Note **Jason Waggoner's** story on page 4.—**PHOTO BY DAFFNA VAUGHN***

OIG's Talks Give Us A 'Heads-Up' On Ways To Maintain Workforce Integrity

Those Phone Numbers Can Help

by Ron Hall, Office of Communications

Wow, that's some 'attention step!' When **Brian Haaser** talks to groups of new USDA employees, he'll often have an empty chair on stage with him. He'll point to the chair and say "That employee is missing from our group today. It's because the employee is in jail, convicted of criminal activity at the Department, such as embezzlement or accepting a bribe."

And that pretty much rivets the attention of the employee audience to the rests of his remarks.

Haaser, special agent-in-charge of the Program Investigations Division under Investigations in the Office of Inspector General, is one of several OIG special agents and audi-

tors who participate in orientation briefings for new USDA employees at headquarters and field offices around the country. OIG's emphasis in those orientations is to warn new USDA employees about such acts in the workplace as employee misconduct, conflict of interest, mismanagement or waste of USDA funds, and workplace violence, as well as such acts of criminal activity at their USDA office as bribery, smuggling, theft, fraud, embezzlement, and endangerment to public health or safety.

"We have two priorities in giving these presentations," Haaser explained. "The first is that we want employees to help us—and help each other—maintain the integrity of the USDA work force." He underscored that the message he wants to send is that USDA employees are to be fair and impartial in the workplace—and, as such, they are to be protected from false allegations, whether emanating from within the Department or from the public.

"Second," he noted, "we want employees to help us—and help each other—ensure the

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safety and security of our fellow employees by, for instance, giving them guidance on how to resist attempts at bribery or an assault against them in the workplace.”

Those OIG presentations are taking on an even greater importance in light of some statistical information which OIG specialists gleaned earlier this year. “This past January,” recounted OIG special agent **Iris Hall**, “we asked our liaison contacts in each agency to determine how many employees in each agency are in jobs in which they interact with the public.”

“Based on that search,” advised OIG special agent **Lee Huttenbach**, “we concluded that an estimated 55,000 USDA employees are in positions which involve interacting with the public—which may make them more vulnerable to threats and/or assaults.”

“So those stats confirmed for us the value in giving our presentations, to help protect our employees,” concluded OIG special agent **Beth Marik**.

As a comparison, according to Office of Human Resources Management computer specialist **Ed McLaughlin**, as of April 2 USDA’s work force consisted of 94,400 federal employees—full-time, part-time, and temporary.

Ernie Hayashi, director of the Farm and Foreign Agricultural Division under Audit in OIG, said that as part of the presentations OIG auditors describe their distinct role and how they can help employees. “We also alert employees to their rights under whistleblower protection procedures and Merit Systems Protection Board procedures,” he noted.

Dave Dixon, special agent-in-charge of OIG’s Western Region Office in San Francisco, said that he participated in several presentations, since June 2000, that were tailored to Food Safety and Inspection Service meat and poultry inspectors and other agency employees in California, as part of similar presentations to FSIS employees around the country.

According to FSIS program analyst **John Campbell**, who coordinates that agency’s ‘Workplace Violence Prevention and Response’ program, this was done in the aftermath of the killing of FSIS meat inspectors **Tom Quadros** and **Jeannie Hillery** and California state inspector **Bill Shaline** at a sausage factory in San Leandro, Calif., on June 21, 2000. The owner of that factory has

been accused of those killings and is currently awaiting trial in a California state court.

“What we specifically wanted to accomplish in those presentations was to advise our fellow employees that being threatened while on the job is unacceptable, and that someone in OIG is there to follow up,” Dixon advised. “Every week, out here in the Western Region, we get at least one phone call from a USDA employee that they’ve been threatened while trying to do their job.”

“So we’ll intercede in a variety of ways—but the key in our presentations is to let employees know that, if they contact us, we’re there to help.”

Karen Ellis, special agent-in-charge of OIG’s Northeast Region Office in New York City, said that during 2000 OIG gave several presentations to Agricultural Marketing Service agricultural commodity graders around the country, in the aftermath of the indictment and arrest of nine AMS graders on charges of bribery and fraudulent grading at private sector terminal markets in Hunts Point, N.Y., in October 1999. “We provided guidance to AMS employees on how to counter attempts at bribery,” she explained.

“For instance,” Ellis advised, “one tip we stressed—after we simply but firmly pointed out that the first piece of guidance is ‘Do Not Take A Bribe’—is to cooperate with OIG investigators, following your report to OIG of an attempted bribe.”

“This will help us try to prevent corrupt individuals from ‘shopping’ for another employee whose personal or financial situation may make him or her more vulnerable to bribery attempts.”

“Our presentations on this tied in with the reform measures that AMS instituted at terminal markets around the country, following the incidents at Hunts Point,” Ellis said.

According to OIG special agent **Conrad Raines**, OIG presenters at the sessions with employees distribute handouts and laminated cards with tips for dealing with bribery attempts as well as threats and/or assaults against USDA employees. The handouts include such items as the number for OIG’s toll-free hotline to report fraud, waste, and abuse (800-424-9121), its TTY number (202-690-1202), and its 24-hour number to report bribery, threats, or assaults (202-720-7257).

To emphasize the value of giving OIG specialists a ‘heads-up’ by using those numbers, **Lynn Odenbach**, assistant special agent-in-charge of OIG’s Midwest Region Of-

fice in Chicago, related a situation which took place in Ottawa, Ill., in early March. Rural Development staffers had planned a meeting with a local rural housing borrower. But that borrower had issued a threat against RD employees in that local USDA office, the day before the meeting was scheduled to take place.

“An employee contacted us in advance of that meeting, so we contacted the local sheriff, then the sheriff literally intersected the man on his way to the meeting and advised him that his ‘violent plans’ were ‘not appropriate,’ and the meeting subsequently took place without incident,” she advised.

“Actually,” Odenbach added, “one downside of that whole situation is that we wish we’d been contacted sooner, so that our intervention could have occurred earlier than merely literally at the last minute.”

“The quicker we’re notified about such matters,” Haaser underscored, “then the quicker we can act on behalf of our employees to maintain the integrity—and safety—of the USDA workforce.” ❖



*‘Big Bird’ the ostrich looks somewhat benign when this picture was snapped in Pretoria, South Africa—but seconds later it was hissing heavily, and then launched into ‘attack mode’ against CSREES’s **Patty Fulton** and RBS’s **John Dunn**. Just what was going on here, anyway? And just how tall was that bird: eight feet, or fifteen? Note the story on page 6.—**PHOTO BY PATTY FULTON***

So *That's* What That Change Was In My Employee Paycheck!

"We've always given 'em the bad news; why not give 'em some good news?" quipped USDA's Benefits Officer **Eleanor Ratcliff**.

She was referring to an unexpected increase that USDA employees and other federal employees found in their paychecks, as well as reflected in their Statements of Earnings and Leave, effective on Pay Period No. 1. The increase in pay was caused by a 'retirement contribution rollback' in the amount of money that federal employees are required to pay into their own retirement funds.

She noted that because of the 'rollback,' the withholding rates for all federal employees reverted back to the rates that were in effect before 1999. Specifically, the employee deduction for those enrolled in the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) is now back to 7 percent, while the employee deduction

Administrative



for those enrolled in the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) is now back to 0.8 percent. Employees under special retirement systems also had equivalent rollbacks.

"This is significant," Ratcliff pointed out, "because since 1999 the employee deduction for those respective retirement systems had been increasing by .25 percent in January 1999 and by .15 percent in January 2000, and was scheduled to increase by .10 percent in January 2001—for a total increase of .50 percent over that three-year period."

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veterinarian **Ty Vannieuwenhoven**. "For several weeks they've been conducting field investigations there and assisting in the depopulation of infected animals, and then cleaning and disinfecting farms afterwards—all to help contain the FMD outbreaks."

"But at the same time," he pointed out, "we've been initiating measures to keep foot-and-mouth disease from entering our borders." That's significant, because the U.S. has been free of that disease since 1929.

Specifically, here are some actions that USDA employees have initiated to ensure that this country remains free of FMD.

First, APHIS set up a toll-free phone number, 1-800-601-9327. According to **Joe Anelli**, chief of emergency programs in APHIS's Veterinary Services unit, its purpose is to respond to questions from the public, industry, and news reporters regarding USDA's response to the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Europe. The phone line is staffed by APHIS veterinarians and import/export specialists. "They are there to explain the restrictions impacting people and products arriving at U.S. ports of entry from disease-affected countries," he said.

APHIS senior staff veterinarian **Frank Kriewaldt** noted that most callers he has assisted really don't know how FMD is spread—so they want guidance on such matters as whether they should stay in hotels abroad. "We're logging," added Teachman, "up to 300 calls daily on that phone line."

Second, APHIS established a 'war room' at

its headquarters office in Riverdale, Md. According to Teachman, its purpose in this particular situation has been to coordinate public outreach activities and congressional requests, plus monitor the FMD outbreaks around the world—and, in turn, coordinate USDA's assistance on-site, as appropriate.

Third, APHIS provided 'media assistance' to its port directors and others at virtually all international airports in this country. "We provided them this 'media assistance,'" explained **Larry Hawkins**, APHIS regional public affairs specialist in Sacramento, "so they could demonstrate to local news reporters and the local public the process by which international passenger baggage is inspected and international passengers are questioned."

This included an overview on how APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine officers coordinate the entire agricultural clearance process, including ensuring soiled footwear is cleaned and disinfected as necessary, and enforcing the U.S. prohibition against the import of agriculturally prohibited products from FMD-infected countries. Those products would normally be detected in luggage by APHIS "Beagle Brigade" canine teams and APHIS baggage inspection officers, plus APHIS commercial air cargo inspectors.

Fourth, APHIS and the Office of Communications updated a previously existing 30-second television Public Service Announcement (PSA) to more specifically address potential problems that can be caused by foot-and-mouth-disease.

"The PSA is designed to reflect the current urgent message on FMD that we want to

"But, instead, because of the elimination of those higher retirement contributions, the employee deduction has now reverted back to pre-1999 levels."

The January 1999 issue of the **USDA News** carried a story on those increases.

"The reason for this change," explained **Marjorie Rawls**, an employee relations specialist in the Office of Human Resources Management, "was because last year Congress and the White House saw the federal budget running a surplus, so they agreed that the retirement plan deduction rates should fall back to the levels in effect in 1998, and that change was signed into law on October 23, 2000."

Rawls estimated that this change will save USDA employees and other federal employees \$200 to \$700 annually, depending on their grade.

"Who says," laughed Ratcliff, "you can't find good news in the print media?" ❖

convey to the public," affirmed **David Black**, acting director of OC's Video, Teleconference, and Radio Center. He noted that it includes a toll-free number—1-866-SAFEGUARD—designed to provide information for travelers on how they can help safeguard the U.S. from FMD. OC TV production specialist **Susan Gentilo** added that OC, APHIS, and the Office of Operations coordinated the delivery of the PSAs to 1,200 TV stations around the country, arriving on March 30.

Fifth, OC senior television producer Pat O'Leary and APHIS staff produced a 60-second public information video to be shown in inspection areas at international airports around the country. "The message," he explained, "advises passengers arriving from abroad to fill out their U.S. Customs forms correctly and to be up-front with USDA officials about where they've traveled—so as to help us ensure that FMD doesn't enter this country."

One final note: Didn't "foot-and-mouth disease" used to be called "hoof-and-mouth disease?"

"It seems both terms have been used across the country in the past, although there doesn't seem to be any sort of regional preference," observed APHIS public affairs specialist **Kim Smith**. "But I understand that 'foot-and-mouth disease' has always been the official term used here at USDA, dating back to the first use of the phrase in USDA publications in the late 1800s." ❖



Food Safety

A Better Plan for Making Kits

As a vital part of their testing operations, Food Safety and Inspection Service meat and poultry inspectors around the country use "sampling kits" to test for Salmonella, a harmful bacteria often found in meat and poultry products.

It used to be that FSIS employees at the agency's field laboratory in Athens, Ga., assembled all those sampling kits themselves when they had time. However, that was regarded by those employees as a headache that took valuable time away from important primary assignments. But now FSIS relies on employees at Hope Haven in Athens to assemble those kits—so FSIS's employees can spend more time on the mission of the agency.



FSIS's **Robyn Johnson** (center) and Hope Haven's **Alethia Abrams** (left) confer with Hope Haven's **Marion Baxter**, who is busy assembling sampling kits. Elsewhere in Hope Haven's work area...



...Hope Haven's **Regina Stevens** (left) and **Claudette Allen** assemble still more sampling kits, for ultimate use by FSIS inspectors around the country.—PHOTOS BY **DAFFNA VAUGHN, ROBYN JOHNSON**

Employees make these things...

HAPPEN!

Robyn Johnson, an FSIS sample handling specialist at the agency's lab in Athens, explained that Hope Haven is a center for adults with varying degrees of mental and physical disabilities. "The workers at Hope Haven, who are called 'clients,' can assemble anywhere between 500 and 1500 kits per week, depending on our order," she noted.

So when FSIS needs kits, Johnson calls Hope Haven and specifies the number and type of kits needed for a particular period of time, usually a week. FSIS lab personnel collect the items needed in the kits, such as specimen cups, sterile sponges for swabbing carcasses, sterile filter bags, and sterile rubber gloves, and get them ready for pickup by Hope Haven.

According to Johnson, the next step is that six to eight Hope Haven workers begin work on the kits immediately, monitored by two supervisors for quality control purposes. "The clients wear gloves and hair nets while they work in a sanitized area," she pointed out.

Hope Haven supervisor **Daffna Vaughn** trains the clients to assemble the sample kits. She noted that, since each client has strengths that can be nurtured and applied to the task at hand, she fits them to specific parts of the job. "Once I teach them how to assemble the kits, normally they don't have a chance to forget," she said. Vaughn has been involved with the contract between FSIS and Hope Haven since its inception in 1997.

Johnson described the process as "an assembly line type of operation in which the only variable is the size of the order; the tasks don't change."

"The men and women of Hope Haven work on one type of kit at a time, and can turn out between 25 and 50 kits per hour," she affirmed. There are four types of kits that FSIS normally requests of Hope Haven.

"Then twice a week a Hope Haven employee delivers the completed kits to our lab and picks up the materials needed for the next order," Johnson said. "We then distribute those kits to our FSIS meat and poultry

inspectors in meat and poultry slaughter plants nationwide."

Larry Dillard, the FSIS microbiologist-in-charge at the Athens lab, recalled that before his agency entered into a contract with Hope Haven to assemble the sampling kits, different FSIS lab personnel—including analysts, chemists, secretaries, and microbiologists—were being asked to do the assembling. And the kit assembling had to fit into the odd parts of the day, in between other tasks, and sometimes required employees working overtime on weekends to assemble the sample kits. "It was a dull drudgery for our employees," he acknowledged.

Then, during a local Combined Federal Campaign activity, Johnson toured Hope Haven's facility in Athens. "I was impressed with the work its clients were doing," she recalled. "Then it occurred to our FSIS group that maybe Hope Haven could help us with our sampling kits."

And in fact, she emphasized, the ultimate track record is that Hope Haven clients are able to assemble the kits faster than FSIS employees since they have more time to devote to that task. "This gives our lab employees more time to devote to other necessary jobs," she said.

"It's a mutually beneficial partnership," Johnson affirmed. "We're promoting diversity in our work force, for even though Hope Haven workers aren't literally working side by side with us, they contribute to our mission."

"Our partnership," added Dillard, "gives Hope Haven clients the chance to perform a service for the community which has inestimable value, plus find a sense of purpose that is so critical to any individual."
—**Jason Waggoner**



Natural Resources and Environment

The Latest In Soil Surveys

A soil survey in cyberspace?

That's what's happenin' now, as the Natural Resources Conservation Service has launched its first soil survey web site in hypertext markup language (HTML), which means that users can navigate through it with their web browser. In turn, that on-line soil survey can provide its customers with easy access to soil maps and helpful land management information, for a farm or backyard garden—all at the convenience of the user's home com-

puter keyboard.

The source of this NRCS soil survey website—which is the first one to link soil maps to soil information—is the agency's field office in Napa County, Calif. According to **Phill Blake**, the NRCS district conservationist in that field office who was part of the team which developed the website, soil surveys are valuable in that they provide the basic information needed to manage soil properly. "Soil surveys provide information needed to protect water quality, wetlands, and wildlife habitat," he advised. "Soil surveys are the basis for predicting the behavior of a soil under alternative uses, its potential erosion hazard, its potential for ground water contamination, and its suitability and potential productivity for cultivated crops, trees, and grasses."

Blake said that, in addition to agricultural producers, soil surveys are important to planners, engineers, zoning commissioners, tax commissioners, developers, and homeowners. "In a nutshell," he summarized, "soil surveys help landowners decide whether their soil is good for crops or good for condos."

The federal government has been conducting soil surveys since 1899. Blake noted that the NRCS Napa County Field Office soil survey was first published in 1978, and the last copy of it was handed out in 1994.

"It became a scarce information resource after that," he acknowledged. For the next several years NRCS staff spent many hours each month copying soil information and piecing together soil maps for the public.

"We had finally exhausted every avenue of delivering soil information to our farmers and ranchers and other soil survey users," Blake advised. "So when the opportunity came along to be the guinea pig for publishing soil surveys on the web, we jumped in headfirst."

Carmen Ortiz, the computer programmer with NRCS's Major Land Resource Area



"All those pages that went into previous hard copy versions of our soil survey, like the one here in my copy holder," notes NRCS computer programmer Carmen Ortiz (left), "are now captured on this little disc here in my hand." "So," quips NRCS water resources planning services geologist Vern Finney (right), "can I borrow it?"—PHOTO BY ANITA BROWN

Soil Survey Regional Office in Davis, said that she and NRCS soil scientist **Kit Paris** worked with the NRCS Napa County field office staff to make sure the end product website, www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/mlra/NapaSS/napass.html would not only be practical and useful, but also user-friendly. "The site features an extensive information base, including downloadable soil maps, soil quality interpretive maps, detailed descriptions of the more than 80 soil mapping units found in Napa County, and numerous tables of interpretive soil data," she said. "The site includes all the good information found in Napa County's original survey," Paris added.

"The value of doing this," Ortiz noted, "is that, with budget dollars scarce for publishing soil surveys in hard copy, we can put them on the web or on a compact disc—and make them universally accessible and timely as well—for a fraction of the cost."

"Since we created that Napa County on-line soil survey, we've also completed on-line soil surveys for the western portions of Mendocino and Stanislaus Counties," she affirmed. "We've got more in the works, because the demand for them is accelerating."

—*Jolene Lau*



Research, Education, and Economics

A New Way To 'Marry' Talent

"We're used to working with foreign agricultural officials and scientists—but the recent visit of Armenian legislators marked our initial venture into hosting parliamentarians, and even helping to directly influence policy decisions in another country."

Hiram Larew was commenting on an expanded direction of the International Programs Office, where he serves as director, in the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service. That office is normally in the business of providing technical and educational expertise on agricultural matters to developing countries by, in effect, 'marrying' the talent found at American land-grant colleges and universities with agricultural challenges globally.

But its mission expanded when six legislators from Armenia recently conferred with International Programs Office specialists, among others, to get a better sense of American agricultural systems.

"So not only have we been involved technically and educationally in Armenia," Larew observed, "but now we're working to respond

to the needs of policy-makers in a country, and that's an expanded role for us."

Larew pointed out that the International Programs Office is often "courted" whenever there is a need for technical and educational expertise "on the ground," overseas. "That expertise is often best found at land-grant universities and colleges," he underscored.

And, like extension agents in the U.S., land-grant specialists who collaborate with the International Programs Office to address international agricultural problems generally work at the local level in their country of destination. Those assignments abroad may last from a few weeks to several months.

The reason? "When you try to design something in Washington for application internationally, it can sometimes fail," observed **Tim Grosser**, a CSREES international programs specialist who oversees the Office's efforts in Armenia. And he should know something about designing and implementing a program on-site, since he has visited Armenia over 25 times in the last seven years.

Mike McGirr, a CSREES international programs specialist, noted that by bringing the land-grant system to the world, CSREES's International Programs Office has been able to foster substantial progress in the development of agricultural systems that were lagging for a myriad of reasons. "But, perhaps equally as important to people back in the U.S.," he observed, "the program has also helped to bring a global perspective back to U.S. universities, thereby better preparing tomorrow's graduates to succeed in an increasingly interdependent world."

In fact, that was the case with CSREES's first full-scale international project in Poland launched a decade ago. McGirr said that the Office provided technical and educational assistance as it helped Poland adjust its agricultural economy from a communist-based, state-run system to the uncharted territory of a free-market economy. Over 100 extension personnel from 31 land-grant universities participated. The Jan.-Feb. 1992 issue of the *USDA News* carried a story about that initiative.

"For me, that initiative in Poland was a real recognition of the capability of the U.S. cooperative extension system to foster positive change in a foreign environment," he said.

"And it appears that our efforts in Armenia have built upon that foundation," McGirr added, "by drawing the interest of politicians, in addition to our agricultural sector counterparts who normally take notice."

—*Afshin Mohamadi*



Rick Swenson was selected as the regional conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service's East Region, based in Beltsville, Md. He succeeded

Humberto Hernandez, who served in that position from October 1998 until July 2000, and who is now the regional conservationist for NRCS's South Central Region, based in Fort Worth, Texas.

From April 1994 until his recent selection, Swenson served as the NRCS state conservationist for New York, based in Syracuse. He was the agency's deputy state conservationist for Colorado, based in Lakewood, from 1992-94, after having been the deputy state conservationist for Massachusetts, based in Amherst, from 1990-92.

Swenson served as an NRCS area conservationist in Fresno, Calif., from 1987-89, after having served as an area conservationist in Las Cruces, N.M., from 1982-87. From 1980-82 he worked as an NRCS district conservationist in Phoenix, Ariz., after having worked from 1978-80 as a district conservationist in Clovis, N.M. He was a soil conservationist for the agency in Albuquerque, N.M., from 1976-78. He began his NRCS career as a soil conservationist trainee in Los Lunas, N.M., in 1976.

A native of Chandler, Ariz., Swenson holds a B.S. degree in agricultural science from Arizona State University and an M.A. degree in public administration from Syracuse University. ❖



Ed King was selected as the director of the Agricultural Research Service's five-state Mid South Area, headquartered in Stoneville, Miss. He succeeded **Tom Army**, who

served in that position from July 1995 until he retired in February 2001, following 32 years of service with ARS.

From January 1998 until he was selected for this position, effective in February 2001, King served as the associate director of the Mid South Area. He was the director of the agency's Kika de la Garza Subtropical Agricultural Research Center in Weslaco, Texas from 1988-98. Within that period, during the last three months of 1997 he led in conceiving and drafting ARS's new national research program on the Formosan subterranean termite. That research program is based in the Mid South Area's Southern Regional Research Center in New Orleans.

Editor's Roundup

USDA people in the news

King served as director of ARS's Southern Field Crop Insect Management Laboratory in Stoneville from 1981-88. He also worked as a research leader of the Biology, Ecology, and Biocontrol of Insects Research Unit at that lab, studying pest management and biological control, from 1976-88. He began his career with ARS at that lab in 1972 as a research entomologist studying biological control and insect rearing, with an emphasis on the sugarcane borer in sugarcane in south Louisiana and south Florida. From 1971-72 he was based in Marion, Ark., as a research biologist in pesticide research and development with the Niagara Chemical Division of FMC, an international chemical company. From 1969-71 he was a staff research associate on household and structural pests in the Louisiana State University Entomology Department.

A native of Dry Creek, La., where he grew up on a dairy farm, King holds a B.S. degree in biology and chemistry from McNeese State University in Lake Charles, La., as well as M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in entomology and botany, both from LSU. ❖



WARNING! EXERCISE MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH!

Well, maybe that's a bit of a stretch. But **Patty Fulton** and **John Dunn** had to be reconsidering—even if only briefly—their commitment to outdoor exercise, in light of their recent 'encounter with nature' in a park in South Africa.



Fulton, an international programs specialist with the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, and Dunn, director of the Cooperative Resources Management Division in the Rural Business-Cooperative Service, were on a 10-day assignment in Pretoria, South Africa on behalf of USDA

projects in support of cooperative development and agribusiness/extension development. One morning they went to a nature park on the outskirts of Pretoria for a workout. "I was preparing for an upcoming marathon and John likes to bike, so we decided to pace each other through the park," Fulton said.

Dunn explained that this particular nature park accommodated hiking, jogging, and biking—unlike other geographic areas which are nature preserves, and where such human activities aren't allowed. "This means that it wasn't unusual for us to notice that all of us humans, who were exercising in this setting, were sharing the park with a number of different birds and animals, both two-legged and four-legged varieties," he affirmed.

So they weren't all that surprised to come upon an ostrich during the path of their workout. Nevertheless, Fulton decided that she wanted to "capture the moment" on film, so they both stopped and she got her camera out of Dunn's backpack on his bike.

"As I was focusing my camera I heard the ostrich starting to hiss heavily at us," she recalled. Then the creature turned toward Dunn, ran at him, and appeared to move into 'attack mode.' Dunn, who was straddling his bike at the time, purposely rolled over, lay on the ground, used the bike as a shield, and began kicking the ostrich with his heel in its sternum, a technique he had mastered while teaching, as a black-belt in karate.

"So I'm both frozen and transfixed, watching this unfold in front of me," Fulton said. "And I'm thinking to myself, 'Here I am, on the opposite side of the world from home, and I'm about to witness a colleague get killed by Big Bird!'"

But she recovered her senses and concluded it was time to trade in her camera for some rocks. "I grabbed some rocks and started throwing 'em at the ostrich," she said. "And yes, I know, I was on *its* turf, not mine, and in a perfect world maybe I'd have thought of a kinder, gentler approach," she added. "But I figured that my options were limited at that particular moment."

The rock-throwing worked—sort of. The bird turned away from Dunn—and then began chasing Fulton.

"I started running down the hill, with the ostrich behind me," she said. "John was yelling, 'Down, Down!' and I thought, 'Hello?! I *am* going down—down this hill!'"

"And then I realized he meant that I should 'Get Down!'"

At about that time Fulton looked around and saw the ostrich was two feet behind her and gaining. So she turned her body slightly, did a quick 180-degree turn, and the bird ran by her, grazing her with its feathers. She then ran back up the hill to where Dunn was now on his feet and armed with more rocks—although, as Dunn later quipped, “At this point, Patty was now more in danger from getting hit by one of my errant throws.”

The ostrich approached closer, slowed down, stared at them, and then ran off in the opposite direction.

“Are you okay?” she said.

“Are you okay?” he said.

“That thing was eight feet tall!” she said.

“No, it was fifteen feet tall!” he said.

Then they both burst out laughing.

“But we still had to get out of that park,” Fulton emphasized. “And, as we made tracks for the exit, every time we even saw a sparrow,” she quipped, “we’d jump.”

As they exited the park they asked each other, “Do you think anybody back in USDA is gonna believe this?”

“Naah,” they concluded... ❖



“I’m a ‘Band Wally’ at heart and I love a parade, so the weather wasn’t bothering me at all!”

Kelly Harmon was using a phrase that describes those who join a

marching band in high school or college because they really want to be in the band, as opposed to those who join to avoid work in some other academic class. Her enthusiasm for marching bands and parades paid off—since she was part of this year’s presidential inauguration parade in Washington, DC on January 20.

Harmon, a computer specialist with the Agricultural Research Service in Beltsville, Md., plays the tenor saxophone for the Baltimore Ravens professional football team’s marching band. That band was selected to participate in the presidential inauguration parade.

The band opted to play a version of “America” for the inauguration parade. “No, not ‘I Like To Be In America’ from ‘West Side Story’,”

she clarified, “but rather ‘America’ as in ‘Oh Beautiful For Spacious Skies.’”

Harmon recounted that at 9 a.m. on a damp, frigid cold, rainy January 20 inauguration day, the 300 band members who participated met at the Ravens’ football stadium, did an hour warmup of their selection, boarded a bus and were driven to the Pentagon parking lot, were searched and patted down for security reasons, and then were driven to an enclosed area on Washington’s Mall, which served as the staging area for the parade.

“Once we’d been cleared for security, we weren’t allowed to have any pre-parade contact with the public,” she explained. “For awhile we were inside a nice heated tent on the Mall, where we indulged in hot chocolate and clam chowder.”

Then at 3:30 p.m. band members left the comfort of the tent and took their place in the parade formation. “They put the largest groups at the end of the parade,” Harmon noted. “We were second in size only to the marching band from Ohio State University—so that band was at the end, we were second to the end, and we were just behind a ‘Precision Lawn Chair Team’ from Denver, dressed in Hawaiian shirts and no doubt freezing.”

What almost became an issue, Harmon advised, was the effect of the weather on their instruments. “As a saxophone player, I blew my notes on a wooden reed, not a metal mouthpiece, so my lips didn’t get particularly cold,” she explained. “But, even though I wore gloves, my fingers did get cold because they had to be spread out to reach all 15 keys on my sax.”

And, she added, while the freezing rain was challenging enough, they worried about the possibility of sleet. “Sleet could have filled up the ‘bell,’ or the u-shaped part of my sax,” she explained. “That could have blocked the sound and/or caused the keypads to either not close properly or, if closed, freeze shut.”

“That could have led to a really ‘interesting’ rendition of ‘America,’” she quipped.

At about 6 p.m. Harmon and her bandmates arrived in front of the presidential reviewing stand. “Although by that time it was nearly pitch black outside,” she said, “big lights surrounding the reviewing stand made it like daylight as we marched by.”

And, as you marched by, playing your saxophone, did you sneak a peak over at the reviewing stand?

“Well,” she recounted, “there was a sign in front of the reviewing stand which read ‘Eyes Left.’ Now, some might have interpreted that as applying only to the drum majors—but we interpreted it as applying to *all* of us, so we all looked over there as we marched by.”

And how did you keep from tripping up, if you weren’t looking straight ahead?

“Oh, we spend a lot of time practicing ‘8 to 5,’ which means that you take 8 steps to march 5 yards,” she explained. “So that wasn’t a worry.”

One block beyond the reviewing stand the band members broke formation, walked up a hill, and boarded their waiting bus. “We were all soaked—but satisfied with our performance,” Harmon affirmed.

“But our focus right at that moment was getting those wet uniforms off. You may not realize,” she laughed, “that suffocating, wet wool can be very—shall I say—‘overbearing.’” ❖

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Letters

EDITOR’S NOTE: This “Letters” section is an opportunity for USDA employees to communicate with Secretary **Ann Veneman**, through questions or comments, on matters that would be appropriate and of general interest to USDA employees across the country. She invites employees to use this particular forum in the **USDA News** to communicate with her, by using the following mailing address: “Letters,” Sec. Ann Veneman, USDA, STOP #0190, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250.



"These sampling kits have our quality sterile sampling supplies inside," confirms **Terry Parker** (center), an FSIS laboratory support worker at FSIS's field laboratory in Athens, Ga. He and personnel from Hope Haven, a center in Athens for adults with varying degrees of mental and physical disabilities, are unloading the sampling kits, which were assembled by workers at Hope Haven under a unique contract. Those kits will then be shipped to FSIS inspectors around the country—who will use them to test meat and poultry products for Salmonella. Note **Jason Waggoner's** story on page 4.—PHOTO BY ROBYN JOHNSON



HELP US FIND

Tyrasha Dominique Brooks

Missing: 01-19-2001 From: Spring Lake, NC

D.O.B. 04-11-1988 Sex: Female

Hair: Brown Eyes: Brown

Height: 5 ft. 1 in. Weight: 110 lbs.

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