

# USDA *news*

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

## Bringing Agriculture To A Website Or Device Near You

by Ron Hall

Office of Communications

**W**hen it comes to the use of 'New Media' at USDA, what a difference a year makes. The last 11 months have seen the Departmentwide development and implementation of a number of new media forms of communication—all in order to help USDA more effectively and efficiently convey its message to the public about the programs and services it has available.

What follows is a primer on what that's all about, and why.

**Amanda Eamich** is USDA's Director of New Media, located in the Office of Communications. She explained that 'New Media' refers to a variety of Web-enabled forms of communication with USDA's stakeholders—both internal and external. USDA is using text, video, and audio in new ways to provide a more open and transparent way of communicating and connecting with individuals. The goal is to provide information to individuals through the Internet in ways that they find quicker and more convenient, given their personal lifestyle.

"People are increasingly going online to learn and share information in both their personal and professional lives," she said. "USDA is working hard to discover and engage with communities online where they already are, instead of expecting them to come to a 'dot gov' Website."

Every day there seem to be new tools available for Web-based communication—and as a result, patterns of social interaction are changing. She said that even at USDA, smart phones and Web-based services are being integrated to the overarching communications approach to meet changing expectations.

Eamich noted that USDA is strategically adopting social media tools as part of the arsenal of communication tools and tactics used across the Department to more effectively reach the public. "As part of this integrated communication strategy," she said, "USDA is utilizing new media tools to deliver information to the public through a variety of channels. Although the Department's mission varies across agencies, there are many programs and initiatives that work together, such as our recent 'Rural Tour' and the 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food' initiatives."

Eamich pointed out that, with many social media services and Websites available, the Department is working towards a "One USDA" strategy to ensure consistent use across all agencies. "OC works closely with public affairs directors, Web managers and IT infrastructure and security representatives across the Department to identify new opportunities and coordinate social media activities," she said.

Eamich explained the stra-



"So far it looks like our rutabagas are pest-free—and maybe that's one of the benefits of a fall crop," concludes ARS Research Chemist **Isabel Lima** (right), as she and ARS Biological Science Lab Technician **Tracy Condon** check out the crop. The setting is ARS's Southern Regional Research Center in New Orleans, and the two are currently up to their elbows in one of the crops they're growing at the People's Garden. ARS Research Molecular Biologist **Doug Hinchliffe**, coordinator of that particular People's Garden, emphasized that it is located on Center property. This is one of a number of sites around the country—actually, around the world—in which USDA employees have started such gardens at field office sites, as part of the Department's People's Garden Initiative. Note the story on page 6.—**PHOTO BY JAFFOR ULLAH**

tegic approach as follows: "It is great to test new methods of communication, but we always start with the most important question: What is the goal or objective we are trying to accomplish, and how can new media help?"

Given the "newness" of social media tools and services, security and legal issues are involved. OC is working with the Office of the Chief Information Officer to develop social media usage policies to help employees understand appropriate use of new media tools as part of their official duties. "Regarding access, USDA's security team is a key player,"

she emphasized. "Unfortunately there are security risks associated with social networking sites, and network security is of the utmost importance."

"Social media," she said, "is used to amplify stories and information in new and creative ways, not replace traditional communication provided by USDA Radio and dedicated public affairs professionals." Interestingly, one of the fastest growing demographics for Facebook are users between 35 and 54.

"High-speed internet is not readily accessible in every corner

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# Tom Vilsack *Secretary of Agriculture*

Dear Fellow Employees,

In the midst of the holiday season and as the new year dawns, I want to let you know how much I appreciate all the hard work you have put in, and how pleased I am with what we achieved in this transitional year.

Since January, we have accomplished a great deal. Through implementation of the Recovery Act, USDA funded more than 50,000 projects to put Americans back to work, help pull us from the brink of economic disaster, and build a stronger America for the 21st century. We provided grants, loans, and other support to help create economic opportunities in America's rural communities so that they are self-sustaining, repopulating, and thriving economically. And we have begun the process of distributing billions of dollars in loans and grants to bring broadband for high speed internet service to rural communities across the country.

USDA supported farmers and ranchers across America with disaster assistance, support for struggling pork and dairy operations, technical advice, and marketing and regulatory programs. Through high-level trade meetings, we worked to expand agricultural exports in order to ensure the future prosperity of America's agricultural economy. And we worked to fully enforce the Packers and Stockyards Act to crack down on unfair or deceptive practices and ensure a fair marketplace for livestock and poultry.

We unveiled a new vision for management of our nation's forests with a focus on improving water resources and mitigating the effects of climate change. Our plan is creating jobs for folks working to conserve and restore private and public forests, and providing new opportunities for renewable energy generation.

USDA conducted and supported cutting-edge research into nutrition, food safety, agricultural management, and technologies to secure America's energy future from new domestic sources. We worked to expedite Farm Bill provisions to support the development of a renewable energy economy through research and funds for bio-refineries.

The Department fought hunger across the globe, working with the U.S. Department of State to outline a new strategy for global agricultural development that will focus on promoting availability, and improving accessibility and utilization. And at home we worked to ensure healthier lives and better nutrition for America's children. We made improvements to the food provided to women and their infant children, and we expanded programs and public-private partnerships to encourage nutritious eating and healthy lifestyles.

We have worked to transform USDA into a more productive and engaged organization. Many of you found ways to do more with less, and helped to implement reforms to avoid departmental spending of more than \$50 million since January. Others of you participated in civil rights training sessions as part of our efforts to move USDA into a new era as a model employer and premier service provider. I am particularly appreciative of all of you who looked for ways to break down silos and integrate activities in agencies across the Department. It is still my goal that USDA is able to act more consistently with one vision, one voice, towards our shared priorities.

It has been a productive year—but President **Barack Obama** and I still have a broad and ambitious agenda for USDA as an 'Every Way, Every Day' organization. It will require your continued dedication, passion, and hard work.

There is no doubt that this has been a difficult year for many Americans. Despite our efforts to create and save jobs through the Recovery Act, and our support for rural communities and small businesses, too many in this nation remain out of work. Not a day goes by when I don't count my blessings, and think about the wide range of opportunities we have here to improve the lives of the American people.

I hope that you'll join me in reflecting on these opportunities so that we can enter the new year rejuvenated, with a renewed energy and focus on making a difference in communities across the nation.

Happy Holidays and best wishes for the new year. ■

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of the United States," cautioned Eamich, "and our integrated communication strategy ensures that social media is complementary to—and not substitutes for—other traditional forms of public outreach, even if those more traditional methods are normally one-way messaging and not two-way communication."

Secretary **Tom Vilsack** endorsed the value of these new tools of communication in a memo he sent to all employees. In his September 1, 2009 memo titled "*USDA Launches Enhanced Rural Tour Web Site and New Media Efforts*," he said that "these new tools and

updated Web site are important avenues for connecting with people so that they can participate in our efforts. I hope that you will help promote these new tools."

Eamich said that campaigns like the Department's recent 'Rural Tour' "provided the perfect opportunity to launch new channels such as Flickr or enhance our presence on YouTube. The success of our integrated communications for the Rural Tour would not have been a success without the help of state employees writing blog posts and submitting photos and videos from events." She then added that "A first for USDA, the Rural Tour was 'live-Tweeted' to allow those

unable to attend forum events to follow along online."

Eamich pointed out that Twitter has been a great value to many USDA agencies in sharing information instantaneously to a broad network of individuals. Twitter, a microblogging site, posts short messages—140 characters or less—with links to blog posts, news articles, or even photos to subscribers.

As USDA's social media presence has expanded, the Department established a New Media page on the USDA Website to provide a directory to citizens of official accounts for each agency. On that site—[www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)

—are listed eight key forms of Social Media that are being used to enhance USDA's communication with the public. Included in the list are: Blogs, Facebook, Flickr, Podcasts, RSS Feeds, Twitter, Widgets, and YouTube.

Going beyond press releases and official statements, blogs, photo collections on Flickr, and video clips on YouTube shows the public exactly how USDA impacts the lives of Americans in every state.

Eamich explained that USDA's Blog—which is a shorthand term for "Weblog"—is a web journal that provides an alternative news source that goes beyond the

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# Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

## 60 Years:

The Rural Development mission area recently commemorated the 60th anniversary of two particular events: the creation of USDA's housing programs and the establishment of USDA's telecommunications loan program to provide telephone service to rural America.

"In looking back over the last 60 years," said Under Secretary for Rural Development **Dallas Tonsager**, "I can see how providing basic services like housing assistance and telephone services to residents of rural communities... has played a fundamental part in shaping not only rural America, but the whole fabric of the economy of the United States."

**Gary Allan**, Chief of the Universal Services Branch in the Rural Utilities Service's Telecommunications Program, noted that USDA's telecommunications loan program was established in 1949—under the [then] Rural Electrification Administration—to provide telephone service to rural America. "At the time," he pointed out, "only one in three farms had access to telephone service. But the Telephone Loan Program, now part of RUS, revolutionized the lives of millions of rural families and businesses and fueled economic growth by providing connectivity, emergency services, and access to business activities."

**Chris Alsop**, Deputy Administrator for Community Programs in the Rural Housing Service, pointed out that, also in 1949, passage of the Housing Act marked a turning point in the nation's history by establishing USDA's [then] Farmers Home Administration. "Since that time," he said, "to date three million rural Americans have benefited by receiving housing direct loans/grants and guaranteed loans—totaling \$124.6 billion—from USDA."

## ADR Workshop:

As part of a memorandum, titled "A New Civil Rights Era for USDA" and dated April 21, 2009, which was sent to all USDA employees, Secretary **Tom Vilsack** noted a planned focus on "Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) services in USDA" with a goal of "strengthening the ADR function." That goal was advanced recently when the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights sponsored an Alternative Dispute Resolution Workshop at USDA.

Titled "How to Conduct Crucial Conversations to Resolve Conflict—Making It

Safe," the workshop was held on December 8 in the Whitten Building at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC, with call-in service provided to USDA employees at field locations.

"Our intent was to empower participants at any grade level with the skills on how to have a crucial conversation to manage workplace conflict," explained **Carl Butler**, Director of the Early Resolution and Conciliation Division within the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. "In addition," added **Raul Dinzy**, an Early Resolution Specialist in that Division, "our workshop discussed the importance and usefulness of ADR as an effective, fair, and fast alternative process for assisting USDA employees in resolving workplace conflicts, including allegations of discrimination, and achieving long-term solutions to such problems."

Early Resolution Specialist **Anita Pitchford** noted that specialists who put on the workshop had set up 500 teleconference lines, to accommodate participants at USDA field locations. "We ended up having over 350 participants from those sites, with over 100 attendees here at headquarters."

"USDA sponsors various workshops and training sessions, on a number of topics, throughout the year and across the country," Early Resolution Coordinator **Keela Harris** acknowledged. "But we think that this was unique because this topic, unlike a lot of otherwise helpful and useful training sessions, really impacts on an employee's worklife on a daily basis. That, in turn, can affect that employee's performance, for good or ill, as the employee works to support USDA's mission."

Division Program Support Specialist **Tanya Rucks** said that her Division plans to sponsor monthly workshops on ADR-related issues throughout 2010.

## New Office:

On December 9 Secretary **Tom Vilsack** announced the opening of USDA's Office of



Garbed in hooded sweatshirts that sport the NRCS logo, NRCS employees engage in warm-up exercises, prior to a planned walk through the National Mall in Washington, DC. Making sure that he's keeping up with his employees—while also trying not to get mud on his khaki slacks—is NRCS Chief **Dave White** (wearing shades). The activity was part of a "FedsGet-Fit" event held on October 27, 2009.—PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH

Advocacy and Outreach. A new office, it was established by the 2008 Farm Bill to improve access to USDA programs and enhance the viability and profitability of small farms and ranches, beginning farmers and ranchers, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

"This Office will help ensure that access is provided to all USDA customers in an equal and fair manner and enable USDA employees to be increasingly responsive to the American people they serve," Vilsack said.

Located within Departmental Management, the Office's five program areas are: Small and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers; Farm Worker Coordination; Socially Disadvantaged Farmers; Higher Education Institutions Program; and Community Engagement and Accountability. As noted in a story in the Sept.-Oct. 2009 issue of the **USDA NEWS**, \$1.7 million has been appropriated by Congress for this Office for FY 2010.

**Terry D'Addio**, who most recently served as Team Leader and National Program Manager for the Resource Conservation and Development Program with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, has been appointed Interim Director of the new Office. ■

—RON HALL

# Employees *make these things happen*

## MARKETING AND REGULATORY PROGRAMS

### Who You Gonna Call?! Sodium Busters!

The Agricultural Marketing Service and the Food and Nutrition Service recently joined forces to become 'sodium busters.' Here's what that's all about.

The "Dietary Guidelines for Americans" is a publication co-produced by USDA and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services which provides information about choosing a nutritious diet, maintaining a healthy weight, achieving adequate exercise, and keeping foods safe to avoid foodborne illness. Following publication of the most recent edition of the *Dietary Guidelines*, dated 2005, in early 2006 specialists from AMS and FNS began to work together to reduce the sodium level in the processed commodities that AMS purchases for USDA's nutrition assistance programs—including one of its largest, the National School Lunch Program, which is administered by FNS.

According to AMS Nutritionist **Janet Tenney**, the *Dietary Guidelines* currently recommend no more than 2,300 mg of sodium per day, and no more than 1,500 mg per day for at-risk populations. "But in their next revision, anticipated by the fall of 2010, the Dietary Guidelines may recommend even lower levels of sodium per day, because of the increasing number of Americans at risk from sodium in their diets," she noted.

In fact, **Laura Walter**, Supervisor of FNS's Schools and Institutions Section, pointed out that for the 2008-2009 school year, sodium levels in tomato and cooked dried bean products were reduced to a level considered by the Food and Drug Administration to be 'low sodium.' "For the current school year—that is, for the 2009-2010 school year—all canned vegetables used in the School Lunch Program for public schools were lowered to this level as well," she advised.

AMS Agricultural Marketing Specialist

**Chandramohan Chawan** added that meat products are also affected, with lower sodium levels in chicken fajita strips and turkey ham already being offered. According to **Darin Doerscher**, an AMS Livestock and Meat Marketing Specialist based in Grand Mound, IA, several beef and pork products are undergoing formulation review by AMS employees.

"While these recently reduced sodium levels in meat aren't low by Food Safety and Inspection Service and FDA standards," Tenney observed, "these reductions make it easier to meet current 'Dietary Guidelines' recommendations of no more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day." She said the reductions also help school food service directors across the country achieve a goal of a weekly average of no more than 800 mg of sodium in a public school lunch per day.

Tenney noted that the new sodium levels were developed by specification writers and nutritionists in AMS, at the request of FNS. "But there were a few hurdles that we had to overcome to make this happen," she advised. "For instance, in many meat and poultry products, sodium salts are more than a flavor enhancement or preservative. Sodium phosphates help hold meat products—like deli ham—together for slicing. So simply removing the salt isn't always an option."

Additionally, the products have to taste good to the students—the target audience of the foods in question. "Taste testing the reformulated products is essential before they're placed into the system," noted FNS Nutritionist **Sheldon Gordon**. "AMS and FNS staffers conduct taste tests and set up pilot programs in public schools to make sure students would want to eat these new products."

**David Bowden**, Chief of AMS's Poultry Programs, Standards, Promotion, and Technology Branch, pointed out that turkey taco filling underwent taste testing—but it was done by students—all with the goal of devel-

oping 'kid-approved' lower sodium versions.

Bowden recounted that **Yonna**, his 7-year-old daughter, participated in such a taste testing. "She'd admit that she's a finicky eater," he advised. "But she seemed to be pleased with the taste of the reformulated turkey taco filling that she taste-tested."

Chawan noted that AMS has been working with food processors in the private sector to find cost-effective and tasty sodium alternatives for AMS's products. "None of the sodium alternatives are as inexpensive as salt," he acknowledged. "But, if used judiciously, they can make a healthy and acceptable product."

"Salt—as well as fat and sugar—are all cheap and tasty," Tenney said. "And there aren't any simple solutions to our goal of reducing the sodium level in the processed commodities used in the School Lunch Program."

"But that's not keeping us from trying to provide choices that make it easier to plan a healthful meal for our kids in school." ■

—**HAKIM FOBIA**



"I think we have enough samples of sliced peaches for about 15 taste testers," affirms AMS Livestock and Meat Nutritionist **Clara Lau** (right), as she and AMS Agricultural Marketing Specialist **Myron Betts** set up a testing for a recent taste panel.—**PHOTO BY ALICE WELCH**

## NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

### Seasonal Tree From Forest Service Once Again Graces U.S. Capitol

For the first time Arizona has provided this year's Capitol Christmas Tree—which is now lit and ready for viewing on the west

lawn of the U.S. Capitol, facing toward the Washington Monument in Washington, DC.

This year's tree, which came from the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests in north-eastern Arizona, is a Blue spruce that is 70 years old. "That's almost as long as Arizona

has been a state," noted **Rick Davalos**, a Forest Service District Ranger with the Alpine Ranger District on the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs who is the FS coordinator of the 2009 Capitol Christmas Tree Project.

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



**Harris Sherman** is the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment.

Before joining USDA, from 2007 until he was confirmed by the U.S. Senate for this position Sherman served as the Executive Director of Colorado's Department of Natural Resources under Colorado Governor **Bill Ritter**. During that time he also served as Director of Compact

Negotiations for the Colorado Interbasin Commission, Chair of the Colorado Oil and Gas Commission, and Co-Chair of the Governor's Forest Health Advisory Council. Previously, in an earlier point in his career, he also served as Director of Colorado's Department of Natural Resources under [then] Colorado Governor **Richard Lamm**.

Between his two stints in Colorado's Department of Natural Resources, for approximately 20 years Sherman was the Managing

Partner of the Denver Office of Arnold & Porter, an international law firm, where he specialized in natural resources, water, energy, public lands, and American Indian law.

**Mark Rey**, the previous Under Secretary for NRE, is now teaching natural resources policy at Michigan State University and is also a lobbyist with the Livingston Group, a government relations firm based in Washington, DC, where he is concentrating on natural resources and environmental issues. ■

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He added that the tree that was selected was originally 85 feet tall and was, therefore, one of the tallest trees ever selected to serve as the Capitol Christmas Tree. "We cut the tree to 65 feet for logistical reasons and to accommodate its display on the Capitol grounds," he advised. "That's because the Capitol landscape crew doesn't have a basket crane taller than that. But that's still as high as a six-story-tall building." He noted that, following the trimming, the tree was set up with five feet in the ground, in a concrete base, and guy wires were also used on the tree to secure it.

The Capitol Christmas Tree is provided each year by one of the nation's 155 national forests. This is the 38th Capitol Christmas Tree that has been provided to Congress by the Forest Service from a National Forest, according to **Beverly Carroll**, a Forest Service Program Analyst and National Coordinator for the Capitol Christmas Tree. "They are provided with the support of local communities and state agencies for use as the Capitol Tree," she said. This particular tree was initially discovered on the Alpine Ranger District by FS silviculturist **Monica Boehning**.

**Judy Palmer**, FS's Fire Management Officer for the Springerville Ranger District, coordinated the November 7 harvesting of the tree—which was accomplished by logging industry specialists. "Given the enormous size of the tree, and given the fact that we were cutting the tree to preserve it for a particular activity," she said, "we used private sector personnel."

**Jim Payne**, the Media Officer for FS's Southwest Region and the Public Affairs Officer for the 2009 Capitol Christmas Tree Project, said the tree then traveled over 4,600 miles during its three-

week trek to Washington, DC. During its journey the tree visited 28 cities and towns in Arizona, plus several additional stops further along the way.

**Chad Scussel**, an FS Law Enforcement Officer on the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs, worked with local law enforcement officials to ensure that the 'tree caravan' moved through the various cities and towns in a safe and timely fashion. He also secured the various locations along the route where the tree was stored overnight.

**Albert Pena**, an FS Equipment Operator, explained that the tree rested on its side, and it was covered as it traveled on a long-load flatbed trailer. "We fit it with a custom cradle that supported its branches," he said. "So that not only prevented damage to the tree but also helped to maintain the tree's perfect shape." FS Equipment Operator **Craig Sheperd** added that they also fit the base of the tree with a rubber bladder that they filled with fresh water every night. "The tree absorbed about 15 to 30 gallons of water each day throughout the whole trip," he affirmed. Additionally this year, because of Arizona's dry climate, FS personnel set up a more elaborate system to keep the tree cool and moist.

Palmer pointed out that this year the tree was sprayed with an anti-transpirant, a chemical which seals the tree's needles in order to retain moisture.

The Capitol Christmas Tree arrived in Washington, DC on November 30. FS Soil Scientist **Jennifer Hill** noted that this year's tree is decorated with over 6,000 hand-made outdoor ornaments, mostly from school children. "And those ornaments had to be able to withstand three weeks of harsh winter weather," she pointed out.

FS Conservation Education Specialist **Brenda Jensen** added that all the 10,000 lights on the tree are 'Light-Emitting Diode' or LED lights, which save electricity.

Carroll said that the Capitol Christmas Tree—also called the "People's Tree"—is not to be confused with the National Christmas Tree, which grows on the Ellipse behind the White House.

The 2009 Capitol Christmas Tree was formally lit on December 8. The tree will be lit each evening until January 1, 2010. ■

—**RON HALL**



The setting is a barn in Eager, AZ, where Forest Service's **Rick Davalos** (center) is taking a short break, along with FS Program Manager **Joshua Sorenson** (left) and Sponsor **Carsten Moeller** (right), after they just installed a GPS tracking system on the flatbed trailer they're standing on. That's the trailer that is about to transport the 2009 Capitol Christmas Tree to its destination on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, DC.—**PHOTO BY JULIA PATRICK**



**E**dward Avalos is the Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs.

Before joining USDA, from 1995 until he was confirmed by the U.S. Senate for this position Avalos served as Director of Marketing and De-

velopment with the New Mexico Department of Agriculture, based in Las Cruces. He began his career with that Department in 1980 as a Marketing Specialist. During his tenure there he established the New Mexico Specialty Crops Program in 1995.

From 1975-80 Avalos worked as a Marketing Specialist for the Texas Department of

Agriculture, based in Amarillo.

**Bruce Knight**, the previous Under Secretary for MRP, is now Founder of, and Principal at, Strategic Conservation Solutions, a Washington, DC-based consulting firm that focuses on conservation and environmental policy. ■

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## PROFILE PLUS More About: Livia Marques



**N**ow that we're into the onset of winter, harvests are generally completed and gardeners across the country are putting up their hoes and trowels and can finally catch their breath.

"Yeah, except that isn't happening to me," laughed **Livia Marques**. She's got a lot to

catch her breath about—since she's been serving as Director of USDA's "People's Garden Initiative," Departmentwide, since its official launch earlier this year. For the last 11 months the PGI has promoted such activities as growing an assortment of fruits, vegetables, and other plants—in order to illustrate the many ways USDA works to provide healthy diets for children, fight childhood obesity, provide a sustainable, safe, and nutritious food supply, and protect and preserve the landscape where that food is produced.

Marques's formal title at the Department is "Special Assistant for Horticultural Crops," and that's reflective of her background, both educationally and career-wise. Born in New York City, she grew up in Hialeah, FL and earned a B.S. degree in horticultural science from North Carolina State University in 1990. She then managed a landscape nursery in Raleigh, NC for two years before beginning her USDA career as a Soil Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Duplin County, NC in 1992. Then, during the rest of that decade and into the new millennium, she worked in such positions as an NRCS District Conservationist in Milford, NH and Brattleboro, VT, an NRCS Plant Resource Specialist in Annapolis, MD, an NRCS State Conservationist in Reno, NV, and ultimately a Science Delivery Coordinator at the Forest Service's Southern Research Station in Asheville, NC from 2006 until she took her current position at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC.

Marques explained that she had been asked to come to USDA HQ on a detail to help out with the expansion of an already existing garden, located at USDA's Whitten Building in Washington, DC. It was being formally turned into USDA's "People's Garden" on February 12, 2009—the 200th birthday of President **Abraham Lincoln**, who founded USDA in 1862 and who had referred to it as "The People's Department." She arrived in time for the groundbreaking—"or 'the jackhammering,' as I like to call it"—she quipped, referring to the fact that Secretary **Tom Vilsack** had begun the formal ceremony by driving a jackhammer into a plot of asphalt.

At the groundbreaking Vilsack encouraged USDA field office personnel around the world—literally—to develop People's Gardens, both on their own office property and within their local community. He followed that up with two particular e-mails to all USDA employees—dated July 17, 2009 and Aug. 27, 2009, respectively. They both represented his "People's Garden Message To All USDA Employees." He wrote that "I'd like to encourage every person who works for USDA, all one hundred and three thousand of us, to look

for opportunities in our home communities and home areas, at USDA offices or churches, or at schools, or in community garden facilities to participate in the People's Garden movement."

As part of Marques's approach to help USDA agencies promote this initiative, she looked for opportunities to link those agencies with community-based volunteers. "My roots are in NRCS—which has a well-established program for using volunteers from local communities," she recounted. "So I just assumed that all USDA agencies had similar programs." When she found out that wasn't the case, she helped to draft what turned out to be Secretary's Memorandum 1059-001, dated July 8, 2009 and titled "Volunteer Program for the People's Garden Initiative." "That document created USDA's first-ever volunteer program that was offered to all USDA employees Departmentwide and that also enabled all agencies to develop community-based volunteer programs," she said.

In addition to ensuring that she had a PGI coordinator in each USDA agency, another tactic Marques employed was to create a Partnership Forum. "I wanted to reach out to groups who had an interest—and also experience—in an initiative like this," she explained. "I wanted to 'leverage our resources'—excuse that jargon—and I definitely didn't want us to try to reinvent anything here at the Department." Accordingly, she contacted such groups as the Henry A. Wallace Center for Sustainable Food Systems and the National Gardening Association, and currently is working with over 35 such national organizations. That Forum came up with the PGI logo and provided thousands of seed packets to help start gardens at USDA field offices and at community locations nationwide.

So, what's the progress of People's Gardens at USDA field sites? "Well," Marques replied, "there are two creative examples in Gastonia, North Carolina alone. AMS's Federal Seed Lab didn't have land available outside that facility, so staffers developed an indoor lettuce garden in the lobby of the building. That's thought to be USDA's first indoor field office garden. Staffers at AMS's National Science Lab recently built a bee garden on the grounds next to their testing facility in Gastonia, to highlight the importance of improving the pollinator population. And FAS staffers at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, South Korea helped set up a People's Garden in an unused greenhouse that's part of our ambassador's residence there. Local schoolkids are taking care of that garden—which represents the first People's Garden located outside the U.S. So, yeah, it's been a busy first year."

**Last Book Read:** "'Bajo La Luna Negra'—which roughly translates as 'Under The Black Moon'—by **Ernesto Santana**."

**Last Movie Seen:** "'Where The Wild Things Are' with my son **Levon**—especially since I've read the book to him so many times."

**Something I Don't Want People To Know About Me:** "I once killed a houseplant. Horrors!"

**Priorities In The Months Ahead:** "Oh, lots more People's Gardens! Specifically, I'm hoping to triple the number during 2010." ■

—**RON HALL**



**Phil Short** is the Deputy Administrator for Management in the Farm Service Agency.

Before joining USDA, from 2000 until his selection for this position Short served full-time as President and Chief Executive Officer of his own consulting company, Visions & Strategies, LLC, which is based in Spotsylvania, VA and which

focused on strategic corporate planning, business development, federal market penetration, and development of financial systems and internal controls.

Short served as Director of the Personal and Family Readiness Division at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps in Quantico, VA from 1999-2000. From 1995-99 he served as an elected member of the Louisiana State Senate where he worked on agricultural issues with Louisiana state USDA officials as Vice Chair-

man of the State Senate Agriculture Committee and as a member of the State Senate Education Committee, both from 1996-99. He was an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1970-94, including service as an aviator flying various combat aircraft.

**John Williams**, FSA's previous Deputy Administrator for Management, retired from that position following 39 years of federal service, all of it with USDA. ■

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official newsroom. "At USDA, we're writing blogs, often feature stories, to describe various initiatives related to the mission or activities of the Department as well as stories about how people interact with the Department," Eamich said.

For instance, a recent blog, titled "Students Have Lively Discussion on Climate Change Across the Atlantic," described how Forest Service employees hosted a videoconference in which students in Washington, DC, and Copenhagen, Denmark were able to share their perspectives on issues related to climate change.

Eamich said that the USDA blog "is a fantastic opportunity for the public to discover all that USDA does each and every day—from forests, land conservation, housing loans, and food safety. Citizens are able to submit comments or ask questions on the blog providing valuable feedback to fine-tune our communications approach."

Upping the ante on citizen engagement, Deputy Secretary **Kathleen Merrigan** recently hosted the Department's first live Facebook chat to kick off the 'Know Your Farmer,

Know Your Food' initiative. The live chat enabled participants to watch and listen to her as they submitted questions through a chat window, in real time. Eamich noted that USDA's Facebook Fan page has been a great tool to share information about USDA programs, inform the public about upcoming events, and allow citizens to start discussions on USDA-related activities.

Although Facebook is currently not accessible to all employees, through a direct click on their office computers, for network security reasons, all information posted on the USDA Fan page is also available on the USDA Blog, YouTube, Flickr, and a new USDA Live Webpage that streams video featured in live chats.

Podcasts also help the Department ensure access to content on-demand, when convenient for individuals. Podcasts are digital media files that are distributed over the Internet using syndication feeds such as the iTunes library for playback on computers or portable media players such as an MP3 player. For example, USDA Radio News stories and features, prepared by the radio news reporters in OC, are available, as well as food safety tips for consumers and guidance to the food industry, prepared by the Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Newsfeeds, blog entries, and podcasts can be subscribed to through many RSS feeds from various agencies. RSS stands for 'Really Simple Syndication' and summarizes the latest news and information from a website in an abbreviated form that can be easily read by any of a number of newsreaders or Web-based programs.

USDA has its own official YouTube channel, where the Department posts various news and feature videos highlighting such items as USDA travel, Recovery Act stories, and Department programs and initiatives.

"Unfortunately, much of the work carried out by USDA employees worldwide goes unnoticed," said **David Black**, Director of the

Broadcast Media and Technology Center in OC. "YouTube brings the Department's work to life for citizens worldwide through powerful imagery and storytelling."

In the same way, USDA's Flickr account brings to life USDA programs, events, and activities. **Alice Welch**, Chief of the Photography Branch in OC, said the collection features nearly 750 photos from Rural Tour stops, nutrition and education events, garden events, and more.

"It is inspiring to see such a positive response to our new media efforts—from citizens to the White House," said Eamich. "These tools and technologies provide an outstanding opportunity to make agriculture both fun and relevant—in addition to showing people how USDA interacts with their lives every day." ■

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"We're growing three varieties of lettuce here—and they all look pretty scrumptious to me," affirms AMS Plant Pathologist **Sandra Walker** (right), as she shows a visitor to AMS's Federal Seed Lab in Gastonia, NC what's growing at what is thought to be USDA's first indoor field office People's Garden. Note the story on page 6.—**PHOTO BY YUJIA WU**



The initial ingredient in any good People's Garden is Elbow Grease—and that's what NRCS District Conservationist **Roy Fowler** (left) and FSA Program Technician **Bennett DeMoss** are providing, as they place weed mat around grapevines. The two are among the many staffers at the USDA Service Center in Power County, ID who developed their People's Garden, which was funded by the owners of their Service Center building in American Falls, ID. FSA County Executive Director **Norman Wright**, coordinator of that particular People's Garden, noted that the Garden site used to be a weed patch situated just off the parking lot at their Service Center building. But now their Garden includes apple trees, peach trees, and a vineyard of 12 grapevines—with the first grape harvest anticipated for Fall 2010. This People's Garden is one of many that Departmental employees have developed at their USDA field office locations around the world—literally. Note the story on page 6.—**PHOTO BY NORMAN WRIGHT**



Help us find

### Tashfeen Shah

Missing: **8-1-2007** From: **Baldwin, NY**

D.O.B.: **4-10-2007** Sex: **Male**

Hair: **Brown** Eyes: **Brown**

Height: **2'0"** Weight: **13 lbs.**

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