

Strengthening Partnerships across the Food and Healthcare System to Improve Food and Nutrition Security

Leadership Remarks



Lisa Ramirez, EdD

Director

USDA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement

Dr. Lisa R. Ramirez recently served as the Chief Innovation Officer for Lubbock ISD. She relocated to Lubbock from Washington, DC where she served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Programs in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education. In this role, she oversaw a broad range of management, policy, and program functions.

Dr. Ramirez also served as the Director of the Office of Migrant Education and the Director for the Office of School Support and Rural Programs in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE). Dr. Ramirez joined the U.S. Department of Education in 2006, when she was appointed Group Leader for the discretionary grants team, which plans and coordinates the High School Equivalency Program (HEP), College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), and the then active Migrant Education Even Start (MEES) program. After only one and a half years in her new role, she was promoted to Director of the Office of Migrant Education, where she led the planning and coordination of all aspects of the various programs, including grant and contract administration, policy, evaluation, and special initiatives. In 2015, she added the Office of School Support and Rural Programs to her portfolio. Even with dwindling resources including a reduction in staff, Dr. Ramirez has continued to inspire the staff in such a way that they have developed their own leadership skills and have become motivated to produce consistently higher and more effective results, both inside the office and with the field of grantees.

The daughter of migrant workers and a former migrant worker herself, Dr. Ramirez left the fields to serve in the United States Army Reserves. She financed portions of her college education through the GI Bill and began her career as an educator in 1992, first as a middle and high school teacher in English and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in Texas, then serving as Assistant Principal and Principal. In 2004, Dr. Ramirez took on the challenge of opening the Lubbock Independent School District's first charter campus, the Ramirez Charter School. Dr. Lisa R. Ramirez brings a unique combination of personal and professional experiences to help improve the academic success of students across the country. A dynamic, change agent at heart, Dr. Ramirez has had a powerful impact on the various staffs and offices where she has worked. Correspondingly, Dr. Ramirez was recognized within the Department for her unique positive spirit, notable intelligence and outstanding leadership.

Born in Chicago, but a Texan at heart, Dr. Ramirez received her B.A., M.Ed., and Ed.D. degrees from Texas Tech University, in Lubbock, Texas. A life-long learner, she is an alumna of the Executive Leadership program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and the National Hispana Leadership Institute. She is also a Pahara-Aspen Institute Fellow. Dr. Ramirez enjoys running, hiking, writing and the study of film/world cinema. Dr. Ramirez currently lives with her husband, two children and two family dogs in Alexandria, Virginia.

Partnerships Panel



Mallory M. Koenings, Ph.D., RDN, (she/her/hers)

National Program Leader

USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Mallory Koenings, PhD, RDN is a National Program Leader in the Division of Nutrition, Institute of Food Safety and Nutrition at the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, USDA (NIFA). Previously at NIFA, she provided national program leadership to the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and the Web-based Nutrition Education, Evaluation, and Reporting System (WebNEERS) as the National EFNEP Coordinator, to advance the science of nutrition education and deliver enhanced low-income national nutrition education programs and services to consumers throughout the United States, District of Columbia, and the Territories. She also provided programmatic support for the AFRI Childhood Obesity Prevention Challenge Area Program and the AFRI Function and Efficacy of Nutrients Foundational Program. In a Special Assignment to the Office of the Director she provided support and leadership to the Science Program and Analysis Officer.

Prior to joining NIFA, Dr. Koenings specialized in designing and implementing databases for reliable public health data collection and analysis, adapting health education to meet the needs of specific populations via web-delivered interventions and mobile applications, especially young adults and preschool children. She has authored publications in journals, such as the American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine, Advances in Nutrition, and the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition. Her expertise spans healthy lifestyle behaviors, nutrition, physical activity, stress, alcohol, and sleep, paying special attention to environmental influences on nutrition and health.

Dr. Koenings has received several awards and honors, which include being named an ASN Translational Research Award Competition Finalist, the NIFA, USDA Director's Team Award, and the USDA's Abraham Lincoln Honor Award. She served as Chair of the Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior Higher Education Division 2016-2019.

Dr. Koenings received a Bachelor of Science degree in Biochemistry, a Bachelor of Science degree in Nutritional Sciences, and a certificate in Environmental Studies from the University of Maryland, College Park. She earned her doctoral degree in Nutritional Sciences with an emphasis in the built environment and health behaviors from the University of Wisconsin – Madison. She completed her dietetic internship at West Virginia University, and post-doctoral fellowships at West Virginia University and Rutgers University. Dr. Koenings also received a Certificate in Public Leadership from Brookings Executive Education.



Erica Christensen Raml (she/her)

Director of Technical Assistance & Innovation

Nutrition Incentive Hub – Fair Food Network

As Director of Technical Assistance & Innovation at the Nutrition Incentive Hub, Erica leads the development and delivery of training and technical assistance services for nutrition incentive practitioners across the country. Over the past decade, Erica Christensen Raml has worked with communities across the country to increase food access and support local economies.

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Erica has helped implement eight nutrition incentive programs in Washington, D.C., Little Rock, Arkansas, and New York City. She has been responsible for program outreach, data tracking, design, and implementation for programs operating at farmers' markets, health clinics, hospitals, and farm share sites. Most recently, she developed values-aligned partnerships and managed operations at a New York City-based food hub. For her work, she was named one of the top 40 under 40 by the Hunter College New York City Food Policy Center. Prior to that she coordinated training and technical assistance programs at the Wallace Center, which supported the growth of value chains and food hubs across the country.

A biracial Chinese-American, Erica holds a master's degree in global environmental politics from American University and a bachelor's degree in political science and international studies from the University of Memphis. She enjoys morning runs, spending time outdoors with her husband, and trying every bowl of ramen she can get her hands on.



Erin Smith, LMSW

Program Director, Double Up Food Bucks Mississippi
Jackson Medical Mall Foundation

Erin W. Smith is the proud wife to Brett and mother of Bryce, Hampton, and Ashlynn. She is the Founder and President of Therizo Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit public charity with the purpose to develop fresh fruit and vegetable incentive redemption systems supported by grocers, farmers, farmers markets and other vendors to increase access, affordability, and availability of produce to low-income and elderly households.

Since 2015, Erin has been working to fight against food insecurity matters across the state of Mississippi. She managed a statewide USDA Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Grant Project 2015 to July 2019. This FINI grant project included both a nutritional incentive program and a produce prescription program. This fresh fruit and vegetable incentive and food prescription program was groundbreaking and was the first of its kind in Mississippi. Once the grant project ended, through partnership with USDA, Fair Food Network and the Jackson Medical Mall Foundation (JMMF), Erin developed and created the Double Up Food Bucks Mississippi program now being implemented through JMMF as a USDA Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) Large Scale Grantee. Under Erin's leadership, most recently, the Mississippi Double Up program was awarded a \$5 million-dollar large scale nutrition incentive grant through the USDA's COVID Relief and Response (GusCRR) funding.

Erin is a proud farmer and part-owner to Particular Poultry, Inc., an eight house broiler poultry farm operation. In addition to serving the Mississippi School Boards Association and the Lincoln County United Way as a board member, she has served as a trustee for the Brookhaven Public School District since 2012. Philanthropic endeavors are essential to Erin's life philosophy of giving back. She enjoys coaching basketball to youth, and is a member of Heuck's Retreat Baptist Church, Blessings in a Backpack, the Eagle Club, and life memberships include: Junior Auxiliary of Brookhaven, Kappa Delta, Beta Sigma Chapter, University of Southern Mississippi Alumni Association, and Copiah-Lincoln Community College Alumni Association.

A graduate of the 2019 Leadership Mississippi class hosted by Mississippi Economic Council, she has also been recognized twice by the Mississippi Business Journal as a Top 50 Under 40 Business Leader in 2018 and a member of the Top 50 Leading Businesswomen Class of 2017. In 2016, she was named in the Daily Leader's

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first ever Top 20 Under 40 recognition program. In 2010, she received the Outstanding Service Award by the University of Southern Mississippi. She received the Staff Member of the Year and the High-Performance Award for Copiah-Lincoln Community College in 2013 while receiving eight regional and international advisor awards from Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society from 2008-2016. **Through all of her experiences, she has established a deep understanding of what it takes to create all types of partnerships on a local, state, and national level. She most enjoys working with Mississippians to create positive outcomes for their lives!**



Sam Hoeffler (she/they)

Program Manager
Reinvestment Partners

Sam is part of the food team at Reinvestment Partners. She manages our produce prescription programs, guides program evaluation, and contributes to policy and advocacy work. Before joining the organization, Sam was the program evaluator and food systems lead for a SNAP-Education program. She brings a critical perspective to food work.

Federal Presenters



Bill Ashton

Director, Strategic Initiatives Division
Military Veterans Agricultural Liaison (MVAL)
USDA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement

William B. Ashton was born in NYC, attended schools in Brooklyn and Queens. Upon graduation from St. Francis Prep in 1976, he joined the U.S. Navy. During his 23-year career he advanced from Seaman Recruit to Lieutenant Commander and retiring in 1999.

He had a very diverse career, qualifying in “Submarines” in 1978 onboard USS L. MENDEL RIVERS (SSN 686). Reassigned as the Nuclear MM Detailer in 1980. Served on the personal staff of the Chief of Naval Operations and attaining the grade of YN1 (SS). In 1984, received orders to Naval Research Laboratory Field Site Detachment and in 1986 commissioned an Ensign under the Limited Duty Officer Program (Administration).

First tour as an officer was onboard USS MCKEE (AS 41) as Personnel and Administrative Officer. Transferred to Submarine Squadron FOUR, Charleston, SC in 1989. In 1991 reassigned as the Administrative Secretary to the Chief of Naval Personnel. In 1993, reassigned as Administrative Assistant/Aide to the Deputy for Naval Training, Washington, DC. Receiving orders in 1994, he was transferred to Submarine Squadron SIX, Norfolk, VA. In 1996, he was transferred as Officer in Charge of Personnel Support Detachment, Submarine Base, Pearl Harbor, HI. After a consolidation of all PSDs on the island, he became the OIC, PSD Hawaii. In 1997 was reassigned as OIC, PSD, Anacostia and in 1998 was reassigned for his final tour as Military Assistant to the Director, Defense Reform Initiative.

Upon retirement, he accepted a job as the Director of Operations for Winner International, manufacture and distributor of the steering wheel locking device “THE CLUB”. He also became the Vice President for Operations of Winner Advertising after 16 of 17 personnel left the company. Rebuilding the company within three months, he was then asked to take over as Chief Executive Officer/Director of Winner Institute of Arts

and Science where the school attained candidacy for accreditation and Title IV funding under his leadership.

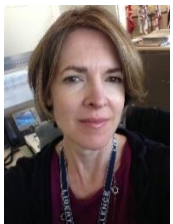
In 2002, he accepted a job as Assistant Officer in Charge of Personnel Support Activity Detachment, Washington, DC. In August 2004, he accepted a job at Commander Navy Installations Command as the PASS/Shore Corrections/TPU Program Branch Head. He took military pay timeliness from 54% to 98% during his tour. During this timeframe he became the Program Manager for Navy Family Accountability and Assessment System (NFAAS) and Navy Mobilization Processing Sites in addition to his other duties. In 2013, the PASS Program transferred Naval Personnel Command in Millington, TN and he accepted realignment as a Program Analyst for Environmental at CNIC.

During 2004, he was selected to serve on the Secretary of the Navy's Retiree Council for a period of three years. This Council reviews retiree's policies and makes recommendations to the Secretary. From April 2015 to January 2018, he served as the Security Director for the Commander, Naval Sea Systems Command Headquarters to lead the Security efforts of the command. As the Director for Security, he is responsible for four divisions to include (Operations, Inspections, Information & Industrial and the Technology Protection & International Security).

He is currently serving as the Military Veteran Agricultural Liaison for the United States Department of Agriculture. William B. Ashton was named the first permanent Military Veterans Agricultural Liaison for the United States Department of Agriculture in January 2018. In his role as liaison, Ashton will guide USDA efforts to support veterans learn and succeed through agriculture, agribusiness, in rural communities, and beyond. He was recently transferred to be the Strategic Initiatives Division Director, which includes Youth Programs, Faith Based Initiatives, Military Veterans Agricultural Liaison and Special Initiatives.

He has been appointed by the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia to be the Fleet Reserve Association's representative to the Joint Leadership Council. The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations provides a vehicle for veteran's service organizations to collaborate with the Department of Veterans Services on meeting the needs of Virginia's veterans.

He is married to the former Debbie Lucas of Hagerstown, Maryland and has twin boys, Christopher and Brandon.



Gina O'Brian

Policy Analyst – Mountain Plains Regional Office
USDA Food and Nutrition Service

Gina O'Brian, RDN, has worked with FNS programs at the Mountain Plains Regional Office for 26 years. Her experience spans WIC, Child Nutrition Programs, Food Distribution Programs, FDPPIR, and SNAP Ed. Gina works with nutrition staff across programs to clarify nutrition-related policy, share nutrition curriculums, consider cultural applications, and provide nutrition technical assistance to ensure meals meet dietary guidelines as well as truly nourish. Gina mentors dietetic interns and helps lead the Region's Cross-Program Nutrition Advisory Committee, providing guidance and inspiration to State Nutrition Action Coalitions.

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Traci Pole, MBA, MS

Assistant Regional Administrator

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) - Region VIII
US Department of Health and Human Services

Traci Pole, MBA, MS, has worked for the Department of Health And Human Services (HHS) for 17 years. Her experience spans Public Health Prevention, Health Promotion, Emergency Preparedness and Child/Adolescent and Young Adult Health. Traci joined the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) as the Assistant Regional Administrator in 2019 and supports the Denver Regional Office to address substance use and mental health related topics across 6 states and 33 federally recognized tribes.



Anne Utech, PhD, RDN, LD

National Director, Nutrition and Food Services
Veterans Health Administration

On January 22, 2019, Dr. Utech was appointed for the Title 38 Senior Executive Service (SES) Equivalent position of National Director, Nutrition and Food Services (NFS), Veterans Health Administration – Central Office (VHA-CO), Washington, DC (virtual Houston, TX). In her appointment, Dr. Utech serves as the Nutrition Field Advisory Committee executive manager and oversee all NFS policies and programs, strategic planning, national external & internal partnerships, and serve as the VA’s primary subject matter expert for nutrition & food services.

From April 1, 2019 to March 25, 2020, Dr. Utech served as Acting Chief Officer for Specialty Care Services, Veterans Health Administration – Central Office (VHA-CO), Washington, DC. In this capacity, she led 26 medical specialties, national program directors, and programs in an interim capacity. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

Her professional interests are environmental sustainability in procurement/waste streams, promoting and conducting nutrition research, expanding strategic partnerships for greater impacts, and data analytics to improve Veteran outcomes. Recent awards include being the 2015 Commencement Speaker and Hallmark Alumni Awardee at Texas Woman’s University. Recent peer-reviewed publications have been on the topics of nutrition support, nutrition education and diabetes.



Christine Going, EdD, MPA, RD, FACHE

Officer, Assistant Under Secretary for Health, Clinical Services
Department of Veterans Affairs - Central Office

Christine Going, EdD, MPA, RD, FACHE is the Co-Chairperson for the Veterans Health Administration’s Ensuring Veterans Food Security Workgroup. She is a Registered Dietitian and an American College of Healthcare Executives fellow. Dr. Going has worked for the Department of Veterans Affairs for 30 years. She started at the Northport VAMC, in Long Island, New York, as an Administrative Dietitian and has worked in many positions with increasing responsibility ranging in fields from a Health System Specialist for Neurology, Orthopedics, and Nuclear Medicine, to the Quality Manager, to the Health System Specialist to the VISN Chief Medical Officer. Dr. Going most recently served as the Chief of

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Nutrition and Food Services at the Northport VAMC prior to her current role as the Executive Officer to the Assistant Under Secretary for Health for Clinical Services.

Dr. Going received her Bachelor of Science degree from Syracuse University in nutrition science and clinical nutrition and completed her field placement at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester, New York. She earned a Master of Public Administration in healthcare administration from Long Island University and her Doctorate in organizational change and leadership at the University of Southern California.



Megan Bowman, MS, RD, LDN, VA

Megan Bowman, Megan Bowman, RD, LDN, VA

Assistant Chief of Nutrition and Food Services and Clinical Nutrition Manager
VA Salt Lake City Health Care System

Megan Bowman is a Registered Dietitian at the VA Salt Lake City Health Care System (VASLCHCS) and Health and Aging Policy Fellow. She received her Bachelor of Science in Food and Nutrition from Montana State University in 2005 and her Master of Science in Human Nutrition from Arizona State University in 2007. Upon graduation, Megan began her career with the Phoenix VA Health Care System. After working for five years as a food service management and training dietitian, she returned to her home state of Utah and joined the Nutrition and Food Services department at VASLCHCS. After a year and a half of working as a clinical, primary care dietitian, Megan was promoted to her current position as the Assistant Chief of Nutrition and Food Services. In addition to her work implementing programs and supporting nutrition operations, she sits on local and national committees geared at ensuring Veteran food security and quality management. Megan has also held an adjunct faculty position at Salt Lake Community College teaching Nutrition Science, for the last eight years.



Torey Powell (He/Him/His)

National Outreach Coordinator

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service

Torey Ian Powell currently serves as a National Outreach Coordinator for the Agricultural Marketing Service. Prior to this Torey served as USDA's first National Coordinator for Agricultural Youth Programs for the USDA - Office of the Secretary. In this role, he led a Department-wide effort to support an inclusive, prosperous, intergenerational agricultural workforce. Prior to this, he served as Director (Acting) of the USDA Center for Faith and Opportunity and Deputy Forest Supervisor (Acting) for the Monongahela National Forest in Elkins, West Virginia. Torey started his career with the federal government on the Chugach National Forest in Anchorage, Alaska as a Presidential Management Fellow in the position of Partnership and Outreach Coordinator, focusing on the development of community partnerships including the Chugach Children's Forest and the 2015 U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree.

Torey is a disabled veteran of the United States Army, including a 2010 deployment to Kandahar, Afghanistan. His distinguished service concluded in 2016 with multiple commendations. Torey received his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Marketing and Communications from Concordia University Texas in Austin (2010), Texas and Master of Social Work (MSW) Degree with a specialization in policy from the University of Houston Graduate

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College of Social Work (2014) and Executive Master of Public Service and Administration degree at Texas A&M's Bush School of Government and Public Service in 2020.

Meeting Coordinator



Alex Córdoba, MPA (He/Him/His)

Program Lead

USDA Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships

Community Development Specialist

Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement

Alex is the Program Lead for the USDA Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, leading secretarial and departmental initiatives with a focus on public private partnerships, capacity building, and nutrition security. He also serves on the management team of the Local and Regional Food Systems Working Group, as well as the internal advisory committee of the USDA Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP).

Alex joined USDA in 2016 as a Presidential Management Fellow with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. He also served as a Strategic Engagement Specialist and Promise Zone Desk Officer with USDA Rural Development. He holds a BA in Sociology, and in Religious Studies, with a minor in American Ethnic Studies, from Willamette University in Salem, OR. He obtained a Master's in Public Administration from the Cornell Institute for Public Affairs with a concentration in public and nonprofit management in 2015.