



USDA's Office of Advocacy and Outreach...

Staying Connected

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AdvocacyandOutreach@osec.usda.gov

Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden visits 1890 Land-Grant University



Krysta Harden
Deputy Secretary

On Thursday, November 14, Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden visited the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) – a Historically Black Land-Grant University. During her visit, Deputy Secretary Harden conducted a roundtable discussion that included small and limited resource, and minority farmers; USDA officials representing FSA, NRCS, and RD as well as UMES students and faculty.

The discussion provided an opportunity for Deputy Secretary Harden to reaffirm USDA's commitment to support America's farmers, ranchers and growers who are driving the rural economy forward. The Deputy stressed the importance of new and beginning farmers and ranchers. Her visit allowed participants to hear first-hand commitment and passion for assisting new and beginning farmers and ranchers. During the discussion, local farmers shared challenges they face in accessing USDA programs and services; and they made recommendations regarding how to increase the number of new and beginning farmers.

Prior to the roundtable discussion, Deputy Secretary Harden conducted a student session that included USDA/1890 National Scholars, USDA Pathways Program Interns, and students majoring in agriculture, natural sciences, and related disciplines. During the student session, Harden shared her experience growing up on a family farm and talked about her career path. She also discussed farm policy. The students were very impressed and appreciative, as reflected in the many and wide-ranging questions they posed during the Q and A period.



Carolyn Parker
Director, Office of Advocacy and Outreach

Message From the Director

I would like to take this opportunity to wish each of you a "Happy and Prosperous New Year". This is our second year sharing the "Staying Connected" newsletter with stake - holders, staff and all who have an interest in farming, education, grant opportunities and sustainable economic and community development.

The theme of this edition is "Touching Lives in Every Way". To touch is to be connected in some shape or form. The articles in this edition will highlight how we are partnering to touch lives working through the seven mission areas: Farm and Foreign Agricultural Service (FFAS), Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services (FNS), Research, Education and Economics (REE), Natural Resources and Environment (NRE), Food Safety (FS), Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) and Rural Development (RD) to achieve our common mission of serving people.

It is our goal in 2014 to have a greater impact improving access to the many programs and services offered at USDA. Working to coordinate USDA programs and leverage resources with other Federal, State and local governments to ensure the needs of new and beginning, small and limited resource and veteran farmers and ranchers are met, working with institutions of higher education on research, program improvements and agricultural education opportunities; and assisting farm workers in becoming agricultural producers and landowners so that many lives in rural America succeed.

USDA ARS AND NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY – SCIENCE IMMERSION PROGRAM

As part of an ongoing partnership, the USDA ARS National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research (NCAUR), the USDA Hispanic-Serving Institutions National Program (HSINP) and Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) embarked on a unique relationship to encourage the next generation of scientists. In Fall 2011, NEIU brought a group of interested students for a one-day visit to NCAUR where they toured the 270,000 square foot research facility, held informal discussions with career scientists and caught a glimpse of NCAUR's accomplishments and major research programs.



Subsequently, in Spring 2012, nine highly motivated NEIU students visited NCAUR and took part in a week-long alternative spring break experience of Science Immersion.

Each student was paired with a scientist and a technician conducting a research project in the student's area of interest. Each day, the student reported to the lab team and worked with them at the bench in order to gain insight into a scientific career –from project conception through experiment design and implementation to data collection and analysis.

HBCU/1890-Tuskegee University
Presidential Management Fellowship (PMF)
Program

Venus Welch-White, a 2013 graduate of Tuskegee University's Integrative Biosciences PhD Program has been named a semifinalist in the 2014 Presidential Management Fellowship (PMF). Dr. Welch-White was selected as semifinalist from almost 7,000 applicants. Of nearly 1100 semifinalist, 9 represent (Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and 4 represent 1890 Land Grant Institutions. Tuskegee University is both an HBCU and an 1890 University.

Additionally, Venus is among the first applicants in a new PMF-STEM pilot track which seeks to close the skills gap in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines in the federal government. The PMF-STEM track accounts for 15% of the total number of semifinalists. Semifinalists must successfully undergo an in-person assessment early next year to be named PMF finalist. Venus completed her graduate research in Toxicology and Nutrition under the direction of Dr. Norma Dawkins, Food and Nutritional Sciences and Dr. Thomas Graham, Pathobiology.

Venus also was selected as a 2013 USDA Agriculture Outlook Forum student diversity program winner, and represented one of ten graduate students selected to attend this year's forum.



FNS Developing Future Leaders of Tomorrow!

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service hosted a record number of interns for the Fall 2013 session through the USDA/HACU National Internship Program. This program is designed to expose both undergraduate and graduate students to USDA, providing them with the opportunity to gain valuable professional experience that complements their education. Students are selected based on academic performance, leadership, and community service.



One of the USDA/HACU interns, Vita Schweighart, is assisting the FNS Public Affairs team, which is tasked with writing newsletter articles, disseminating news clips, designing email mastheads, visiting Ag-oriented high schools, talking with state health directors, working the USDA Food Day booth, and spreading the word about healthy eating at federal health fairs on behalf of every FNS program.

Of her experience Vita said, "My experience has been outstanding, and I highly recommend it to any graduate student interested in government service."

Another student Javier Muniz-Ayala said of his experience:

"Working at the Food and Nutrition Service has been an important milestone in my career. I could not feel more accomplished as I get to do my part to ensure that people suffering from hunger have access to nutritious food. Having the opportunity to work in the public sector makes me realize the importance of educating the community on significant issues such as public health and wellness to ensure a bright and healthy future for the generations to come."

Through these internship opportunities USDA is expanding the education and professional opportunities available for students, while creating a pipeline of future potential USDA employees.

Farm to School Produce

Jenny Bostick, a Mitchell county farmer with Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education, Inc., (SWGAP) successfully sold Romaine lettuce to schools in southwest Georgia. Ms. Bostick worked in conjunction with SWGAP's 2501 Program for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers and Farm to School programs to provide fresh locally-grown produce to two different school districts in the area.



After working as the Family Connections Partnership Regional Coordinator for many years, Jenny wanted to expand her small garden into a larger project. Jenny had been approved for a hoop house but did not know what to do next. So she began to attend outreach meetings and through networking, Jenny was eventually linked with SWGAP.

Once Jenny was introduced to SWGAP, she was invited to participate in a combined 2501/Farm to School program. During the program, farmers attend workshops from planting properly to record-keeping, then eventually to marketing and selling their crop to school systems. The program gives the school systems a chance to know the farmers that will eventually supply the schools, and it provides the farmer with the technical assistance they need to produce a quality product.

In November, Jenny's hard work paid off. She was able to see her lettuce loaded on a truck headed to be delivered to southwest Georgia schools and she made a promise to herself that the next time the entire truck would be filled with her produce.

Featured Funding Opportunities

USDA is soliciting applications for:

Rural Development Business and Cooperative Programs Agency: The Value Added Producer Grant (RDBCP-1023-VAPG)

Applications are due February 24, 2013. You must submit your application by this date or it will not be considered for funding that may be announced in a subsequent notice. Electronic applications can be submitted via <http://www.grants.gov>. Paper applications must be postmarked and mailed, shipped by this date.

Program Website: http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_VAPG.html

Program Manager Phone: 202-690-1376

Program Contact: CPGrants@wdc.usda.gov

Food Safety Certification Aids in Produce Sales



Curtis Harris, a farmer in Desha, a StrikeForce County, is one of the participants in the Wal-Mart Buy Local Project. He grows Southern Peas or Purple Hull Peas for the project. Mr. Harris attended the Southern Pea Production Workshop and the Food Safety Workshop sponsored by the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) and the Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation (ALFDC). He received a Food Safety Training Certificate as a result of attending the training.



Mr. Harris grew the recommended variety Top Pick and he had two plantings. His early planting was not irrigated or planted on dry land. Nevertheless, the crop did well. He plans to buy this land and then put an irrigation well on the field. He owns his second pea field and this field is irrigated.



Mr. Harris sold his peas to D&S Produce who processed the peas and sold them to Wal-Mart. D&S Produce was assisted with their GAP Audit by the 2501 Staff and Arkansas Land and Farm Development Corporation

(ALFDC). D&S Produce also received Food Safety Training Certificates as a result of attending the Food Safety Workshop at UAPB. After passing the audit he will be reimbursed for his audit expenses from a UAPB Food Safety Grant.

Did You Know...

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI's) represent 10.5% of non-profit colleges and universities in the country, yet serve 56% of all Hispanic students¹. Currently, there are over 350 HSI's with many more in the pipeline of becoming an HSI. The USDA's Hispanic-Serving Institutions National Program strategically places Regional Directors to partner with HSI's in their geographic vicinity. Stemming from their intimate knowledge of both the institutions and USDA, the six Regional Directors are able to provide multidirectional advisement, to both the HSI's and USDA.

Additionally, USDA agencies can build and develop partnerships in a reduced timeframe without any further investment to student recruitment/outreach or create programs targeting HSI's. Most importantly, USDA is better able to meet their mission of serving the Hispanic community which is currently underserved and underrepresented.

HSI's are defined by the Department of Education as an institution of higher education that has an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic students².

¹ http://www.hacu.net/hacu/HSI_Fact_Sheet.asp

² <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/ldueshsi/definition.html>

USDA PROGRAM SUCCESS STORIES

Wal-Mart Teams with Small Farmers in Alabama

The Wal-Mart initiative in Alabama promotes small farmers' supplying more than 200 Wal-Mart stores in the state. The Initiative began three years ago as a result of a discussion with Tuskegee University leadership, Dr. Walter Hill, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Wal-Mart organization. The Initiative is of mutual benefit to small farmers, whose markets have expanded significantly, and Wal-Mart, which can now offer "farm fresh" produce and has expanded its support of local economies.

During the second year of the Initiative, the Small Farmers Agricultural Cooperative was created. Members of the

Cooperative are business-minded farmers who meet regularly to discuss planting schedules, price points, packaging costs, packaging requirements, grading requirements, shipping procedures, operating hours and food safety requirements. They work collectively to achieve quality, quantity, consistency and sustainable produce.

Tuskegee University staff, faculty and USDA 1890 Program Liaison provide valuable support to the Cooperative. USDA supports the Cooperative by providing technical assistance and grants.

USDA NRCS "Working Effectively with American Indians/Alaskan Indians Executive Training: Indian Rights and Laws" for USDA Employees

The Office of Advocacy and Outreach and other Agencies benefitted from an Executive training to help USDA work more effectively with American Indians and Alaska Natives on November 13-14, 2013. The National Museum of the American Indian and USDA were training sites.

Working with Indian Country is a priority. Departmental Regulation on Tribal Consultation requires training for Executive staff to implement Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Tribal Governments.

USDA 1994 Program staff participated in the development and review of training modules. Among the trainers were a USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) cadre of knowledgeable and engaging American Indian and Alaska Native professionals. One trainer, Roylene Rides At the Door, a Blackfoot Nation member, is a USDA NRCS State Conservationist in Washington.

Indian Country includes the Nation's 566 federally-recognized Indian Tribes, Nations, Pueblos, Rancherias, communities and Native Villages.

This training is as important as that given to State Department employees being prepared to engage with a foreign nation. Training topics included best practices in engaging with tribal entities, cultural history, protocols and sensitivities, and tribal law.

Take home messages were:

Outreach employees need to understand the complexity of these Sovereign Nations.

These Nations are the federal government's least understood customers in our Nation and have a government-to-government relationship with the federal government through treaty rights.

The USDA 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Colleges and University Program works first hand with Indian Country's tribal colleges. For more information about the USDA 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Colleges and University Program, please contact Lawrence Shorty, Program Director, at Lawrence.Shorty@osec.usda.gov or 202-720-7265.



Roylene Ridges At the Door, Blackfoot Nation, USDA NRCS Workshop Trainer (Right) and Stephanie Koziski, OAO/1994 Program. (Left).

Employee Spotlight



Mr. George W. Richardson is the USDA 1890 Program Liaison to the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB). He is the longest serving USDA employee on the 1890 Program. Mr. Richardson began his career with USDA in 1963. He graduated from Blevins Training School (Arkansas) in 1950. Upon graduation, he enlisted in the United States Air Force, where he spent four years as an Aircraft and Engine Mechanic in the United States and Germany. After his tour of duty in 1954, he continued his education at Arkansas AM & N College (now UAPB), where he received a B.S. in Agricultural Education.

He began his career in 1958 as a Vocational Agriculture Program teacher, in Emerson, Arkansas. He is very proud of the fact that before he arrived, there had not been a single male student to graduate from the school and finish college, but in his first class, seven male students graduated and went on to graduate school from college.

When Mr. Richardson joined USDA in 1963 under the Kennedy Administration, he was a GS-7 Assistant County Supervisor for Farm Management. His most outstanding accomplishment with USDA was as a Community and Business Program Loan Specialist, he developed and obligated the first in the Nation, Guaranteed Water and Wastewater Loan in 1991. He began as an Agricultural Liaison in 1993.

Mr. Richardson has served under fifteen USDA Secretaries. He says Secretary Vilsak is special because "he is not afraid to explore uncharted waters. Instead of asking 'why?' he always asks 'why not?'" When asked what message he would give to other 1890 Program Liaisons, Mr. Richardson responded, "Focus on one goal at a time and do whatever is necessary to achieve it, with or without desired resources."

UPCOMING EVENTS

- National Women in Agriculture Association (NWIAA) White House Briefing, Washington, DC, February 21, 2014
- Growing Opportunities Career Fair, California State University, Bakersfield, CA, March 13, 2014
- AIHEC 2014 Spring Student Conference, [Lodging InformationBFCC website](#) Billings, MT, March 16-18
- National Extension and Research Admin. Officers Conference, [Information,Scholarship Application Form](#) Indianapolis, IN, April 28-30
- Native Health Research Conference, [Information/Form](#) Phoenix, AZ, June 1-5, 2014

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA SIGNS THE 2014 FARM BILL** -For more information visit <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=farmbill>
- **USDA/1890 Land-Grant College & High School Scholarship Application, [Deadline](#), February 28, 2014**
- **USDA/1890 Task Force Meeting, Southern University, Baton Rouge, LA, March 26-27, 2014**
- **Georgia NWIAA is currently seeking college women to join as Chairwomen. POC: Shi at 913-424-4493 or culllars84@yahoo.com**

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