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Creative Things We've Done—At Our USDA Worksites—To Conserve Natural Resources

by Ron Hall
Office of Communications

To citizens in many parts of this planet, the word "sustainability" means ""Where is my next meal going to come from?" or even "How am I going to survive?"

In the U.S. we're a lot more fortunate; to us, the word "sustainability" may mean "How can we conserve this country's natural resources?" or "How can we minimize the ecological footprint that we humans are leaving on Mother Earth?"

"That may sound ponderous and heavy-duty—and also pretty intimidating," acknowledged **Ruth McWilliams**, the National Sustainable Development Coordinator for the Forest Service. "But at USDA we're breaking this down into small, manageable steps."

"Specifically, we're focusing on our individual USDA workplaces—both at headquarters and field locations around the country. We're looking at what each office site can do—and has already done—to conserve natural resources while maintaining other social and economic benefits."

What follows are some examples of specific initiatives USDA employees have implemented recently in their individual work places around the country to conserve natural resources.

First, as background, over the years USDA officials have developed and implemented a variety of policies—as spelled out in numerous Secretary's Memorandums, Departmental Regulations, Memos of Understanding, reports, and studies—to promote the sustainability of natural resources at the Department.

But after that, the next step needs to be that employees translate those various documents into concrete action at USDA office sites around the country. Or alternatively, the approach may be to experiment with an innovation at a selected USDA office location—and then, depending on the degree of its success—implement that experiment USDA-wide.

The examples that follow reflect those approaches.

For instance, FS employees on the Bighorn National Forest in Sheridan, Wyo., have installed a device called the "VendingMiser" on the soft drink machines in their office buildings. **Bruce Kjerstad**, an FS civil engineering technician on the Bighorn NF, who installed the devices, said it's a motion sensor and a controller that attaches to the back and top of a vending machine.

"After 15 minutes of inactivity," he explained, "the 'VendingMiser' shuts down power to the vending machine. But if someone walks by the vending machine and thereby 'alerts' the motion sensor, the device sends power to reactivate the machine. The device also makes sure that, even if there is no office foot traffic for extended periods of time—such as during the weekend—the soft drink machine turns on every one to three hours so the sodas stay cool."

*"Are you sure you've got the jars of peanut butter I'm giving up?" quips **Margarita Maisterrena** (right), Director of Public Affairs for FNS's Mid-Atlantic Region in Robbinsville, N.J., as she checks with Mid-Atlantic Region program specialist **Dave Bintz** (inside van). They are preparing yet another load of donated food items for dissemination to needy individuals in the Philadelphia area. This food drive initiative is considered unique because the volunteer efforts—coordinated by USDA employees—concentrated on employees at surrounding federal agencies for the food donations. Note **John Cheng's** story on page 4.—**PHOTO BY KIM JABAT***

Lexie Carroll, an FS civil engineer on the Bighorn NF who purchased VendingMisers for FS offices in the agency's Rocky Mountain Region, said that last fall she purchased 30 Misers at $140 each. "We sent the Misers directly to the offices that agreed to install them," she said. "We calculate the Misers will pay for themselves in just over nine months, at current energy rates, with an energy savings of about 63 percent."

As a second example, in many USDA offices, when the office printer wears out, it is being replaced with a printer—with 'duplex capability'—that is, it's capable of printing on both sides of the page. "I know many offices already have duplex printers," acknowledged **Anna Jones-Crabtree**, the forest engineer on the Bighorn NF and the Sustainable Operations Coordinator for FS's Rocky Mountain Region."But the key is that, when several employees have their individual work station computers plugged into that single printer, the individual computers need to be set up with the command that activates two-sided printing. Often they are *not.* That's what we've been adjusting when possible."

Glenda Wilson, Director of Engineering for the Rocky Mountain Region in Lakewood, Colo., added that they try to ensure that a stack of white paper, with one side already used, is located near their office printers. "That way," she explained, "if someone needs to

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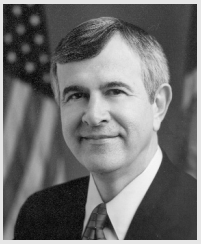

Mike Johanns *Secretary of Agriculture*

Dear Fellow Employees,

I can remember when gasoline prices were well below $1.00/gallon when I was growing up on my Dad's dairy farm. In the days of cheap gas there was little incentive to look at alternatives to foreign oil imports.

Those days are long gone in both respects. Petroleum-based fuel prices are at levels never seen before and interest in reducing our dependence on foreign oil has never been greater.

USDA has long been involved in encouraging the development of renewable fuels. That role is well documented in the fourth Farm Bill theme paper, entitled "Energy and Agriculture." We have renewable energy and energy efficiency programs under way in several agencies: the Agricultural Research Service, Rural Development, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Farm Service Agency, the Forest Service, the Office of Energy Policy and New Uses, and the Commodity Credit Corporation.

Our efforts have helped increase ethanol production 120 percent since 2001 to a total of 4 billion gallons in 2005. During the same period we supported development of 132 ethanol and biodiesel plants, 130 wind plants, 22 solar, 4 geothermal, 2 hydrogen, and 11 hybrid projects.

We also helped finance 92 anaerobic digesters, which turn manure into energy. These are being adopted by commercial livestock operations not only to produce energy but also to meet new state and Federal regulations for controlling animal waste.

We have encouraged producers to adopt no-till practices on about 62 million acres of cropland. Assuming an average savings of 3.5 gallons per acre in diesel fuel, this amounts to a savings of 217 million gallons of diesel fuel per year with a cost savings to farmers of about $600 million per year.

Advancing ReNEWable Energy

That is progress. Because of your dedication, USDA is meeting our goal of taking a comprehensive approach to produce new sources of energy, mitigate energy costs for producers, and create new wealth in rural communities.

But there is still much to be done. It is more important than ever for us to support the development of renewable energy and carve out a greater role in energy production for our farmers and ranchers.

That's why Secretary of Energy **Samuel Bodman** and I are co-hosting a renewable energy conference Oct. 10-12 in St. Louis, Mo. It builds on the President's Advanced Energy Initiative, specifically biomass, wind and solar research and commercialization of new energy sources. The meeting will be an opportunity to create partnerships and strategies necessary to take advantage of the substantial new investments that are occurring in this field.

Developing new renewable resources will help America to achieve energy independence. That alone is a worthy focus. For those of us who serve America's farmers and ranchers, the incentive to advance renewable energy is even greater because it holds so much promise for rural America. I applaud your work to date and wholeheartedly encourage your continued commitment to renewable energy development as we fulfill our vision of a vibrant future for rural America. ■

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make a copy of some item—and that particular item *doesn't* need to be copied on unused paper—there's an option easily available to avoid using unused paper for copying purposes unless it's necessary."

She noted that the name of that stacked paper is 'GOOS'—or "good on one side."

Third, as an example of the Department's effort to procure, for USDA office use, "biobased products"—that is, products made from renewable resources that come from farms or forests—from April 2005 through April 2006 the Agricultural Research Service's Grazinglands Research Laboratory in El Reno, Okla., purchased biobased products which included 275 gallons of biobased hydraulic tractor fluid, two cases of biobased two-cycle engine oil, and a case of biobased cartridge grease. **Mike Downing**, the Procurement and Realty Officer for ARS's Southern Plains Area in College Station, Texas, said the lab purchased those biobased items for farming operations, grounds-keeping, and facilities maintenance at the lab.

He added that ARS's Kika de la Garza Subtropical Agricultural Research Center in Weslaco, Texas purchased two boxes of biobased hand sanitizer, five boxes of environmentally friendly toilet bowl cleaner, and four boxes of environmentally friendly foam cups.

Fourth, USDA is experimenting with the concept of a "Low-Impact Development" technique know as "the green roof." According to **Ed Murtagh**, Acting Deputy Chief of the Washington Area Service Center in the Office of Operations, the principle behind "the green roof" is to retain rainwater which would typically run off roofs of buildings into rain gutters, into the street, and ultimately often into local bodies of water.

In areas with hard surfaces like roads and rooftops, instead of rainwater slowly entering streams as cool, clean groundwater, it rushes into waterways all at once as hot, polluted runoff—where it can cause flooding and environmental damage.

"Especially in urban areas," he explained, "as rainwater falls through the air, it picks up nitrogen and other airborne pollutants from auto emissions. If it falls on hard surfaces like tiled roofs or concrete streets—instead of onto a natural area containing trees—it not only retains those chemicals, but also picks up additional pollutants from the streets, and can carry them toward the rainwater's destination—like, in our case, the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay."

However, Murtagh said, a "green roof" typically consists of plantbeds growing in containers of soil that are placed on the roof itself. When it rains the plantbeds absorb much of the rainwater. The plants serve as a filter for the chemicals the rainwater was carrying. In addition, by capturing and retaining rainwater, the plantbeds cool off the roof—thereby saving on the amount of air conditioning needed to cool that office building.

The significance of this is that since April 2005 the Office of Operations has been experimenting with a 120-square-foot plot of "green roof" on top of a utility building that is part of USDA's Whitten Building in Washington DC. That "green roof plot" consists of hardy, low-maintenance plants growing in a special soil mix specifically designed for "green roofs."

"So far," Murtagh said, "our observation is that our 'green roof' *has* successfully captured rainwater, *has* filtered that water, and *has* cooled off that portion of the roof."

He said future plans call for expanding the OO "headquarters green roof project" to other buildings in the headquarters complex.

Fifth, in order to cut down on water consumption in USDA offices, waterless urinals have been installed in some field office sites.

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Notes *from USDA Headquarters*

*Secretary **Mike Johanns** traveled to Mongolia, Geneva, Kazakhstan, and Iraq during July and early August. In Mongolia, he led a Presidential delegation to help celebrate that country's 800th birthday. In Geneva, the Doha Development round was suspended without an agreement. The U.S. remains committed to the round and will continue to press other countries to match our ambitious offer. In Kazakhstan, the Secretary led a trade and investment mission of U.S. agribusinesses to help build partnerships with the country's agriculture sector.*

*Japan reopened its market to imports of U.S. beef and the fourth Farm Bill theme paper—Energy and Agriculture—was released in Iowa. It considers all the potential sources of energy under agriculture's umbrella, from farm fields to pasture and forest lands. It is available at **www.usda.gov/farmbill***

*Also in August, USDA mourned the loss of three Forest Service employees and a contract pilot. "Our Forest Service employees—**Michael Lewis, Lillian Patten, Monica Zajanc**, and the contract pilot, **Quinn Stone**—lost their lives in service to their country as a result of this crash. Our dedicated employees at USDA are our most valued resource," Secretary Johanns said. Flags at USDA offices across the country were flown at half-mast.*

Iraq And Agriculture:

During a whirlwind trip to Iraq, Secretary Johanns met with top Iraqi officials, U.S. troops from Iowa and Nebraska, and Iraqi producers.

"I am truly inspired by the hope and optimism that I witnessed in Iraq. The Iraqi leaders are determined to achieve self-sufficiency in their nation and improve their agricultural productivity," said Johanns. Agriculture is the second largest contributor to the economy behind oil, and it has the greatest potential to provide employment in Iraq.

He and Deputy Prime Minister **Salam Zukam Ali Al-Zawba'i** signed an agreement to strengthen and broaden Iraq's agricultural extension system through partnerships between U.S. and Iraqi universities. "Many people outside of agriculture don't realize the value of the Extension Service, but in Iraq, agriculture has been so long neglected that there is very truly a hunger for information and a practical application of scientific guidance," Johanns said. He added that USDA is sending four agricultural advisors to assist the government of Iraq.

This initiative builds on other U.S. efforts to assist Iraq in rebuilding a once robust agricultural sector over the past three years such as private sector development, livestock and crop improvement, market development, and water management. Overall, the U.S. Government has provided broad assistance, including projects such as: the rehabilitation of irrigation infrastructure reaching nearly one-half million rural Iraq residents, making available 31 tons of cleaned and treated wheat seed, and the reconstruction of nearly 70 veterinary clinics serving more than 100,000 Iraqi animal breeders.

*Secretary **Mike Johanns** (left) and Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister **Salam Zukam Ali Al-Zawba'i** sign a joint statement of intent to strengthen and broaden Iraq's agricultural extension system and universities through partnerships between U.S. and Iraqi universities.—**Photo by Ken Root***

Japan: Seven months after halting imports of U.S. beef, Japan announced it would resume imports of beef from U.S. cattle aged 20 months or younger. While applauding the move Secretary Johanns said, "In 2003, the United States exported $1.4 billion worth of beef and beef products to Japan. I look forward to the day when we resume that level of trade. To that end, I have asked the Japanese Government to meet with us this fall to discuss the next steps toward strengthening our beef trading relationship and graduating to standards based on science."

Crop Insurance Expanded:

Two crop insurance pilot programs designed to provide insurance coverage for pasture, rangeland, and forage were launched by the Risk Management Agency in August. The Rainfall Index insurance program will be tested in 220 counties in six states and uses rainfall indices as a means to measure expected production losses. The Vegetation Index insurance program will be tested in 110 counties in six states and uses satellite imagery to determine the productivity of the acreage as a means to measure expected production losses. Together, these pilot programs will be available to provide coverage on about 160 million of the 640 million acres of grazing and forage land in the U.S.

Renewable Energy:

Secretary Johanns announced the selection of 12 projects in Iowa, Kansas, and Oregon that will receive over $9 million in loan guarantees and grants to fund renewable energy and energy efficiency projects. Eligible farmers, ranchers, and rural small businesses will use the funds to develop renewable energy systems and make energy improvements such as installing an anaerobic digester, a wind turbine, and a biodiesel facility in Iowa as well as energy efficient grain dryers; energy saving improvements to existing businesses in Kansas; and a biomass high pressure boiler and back pressure turbine generator system to increase steam production for the lumber drying process in Oregon. These funds are part of USDA's comprehensive energy strategy and our commitment to advance the development of renewable energy.

—Patricia Klintberg

Employees *make these things happen*

Food, Nutrition, And Consumer Services

FNS Gets Fellow Feds Involved In A Unique Food Drive Effort

Many of us think of the needy and hungry during the winter holiday season—and are, therefore, generous contributors in the fight against hunger. But the holiday season soon passes and it gets colder—and the cupboards of food banks and other community feeding sites often get bare during those harsh, bleak winter months.

But in 1999 that 'bare-cupboard' condition prompted some USDA employees to help out. Seven years later, they're still at it: aiding their community by helping to feed it.

"Back in 1999 we decided that a food drive would allow us, as federal employees, to provide *direct support* to our neighbors in need," said **Tim Walsh**, food drive coordinator for the Food and Nutrition Service's Mid-Atlantic Region, in Robbinsville, N.J.

Participating in food drives certainly isn't new at USDA; employees have been engaged in such efforts, at headquarters and field offices around country, literally for decades. "But what might be different here," said Walsh, "is that we went beyond our local 'USDA family' for assistance. Instead, we made a concentrated effort to reach out to employees at our fellow federal agencies and get *their* participation in this effort, to support our local community."

In fact, the FNS employees initiating this effort contacted Philadelphia's Federal Executive Board (FEB) to enlist its help in reaching out to the federal agencies located in the Philadelphia area. "Since that first contact with Philly's FEB in 1999," Walsh added, "we've averaged 40 federal agencies which participate in our annual food drive."

Wait a minute. Walsh and his colleagues are based in Robbinsville, N.J.—and Philadelphia is, of course, located in the Keystone State. What gives?

"Robbinsville is only about 35 miles from Philly," explained **Joe Yehl**, an FNS team leader in the Mid-Atlantic Region's Food Stamp Program. "More importantly, Philly is the closest city to us with a large federal presence—which we wanted to tap into."

Walsh explained that, at the peak of winter, FNS employees collect boxed and canned food items from the participating federal agencies throughout the greater Philadelphia metropolitan area. "We all help out with details that range from making phone calls, scheduling pickups, and hauling the food," he said. "We drive around to the pick-up points which we've set up in the buildings of the participating federal agencies. We drop off empty boxes—and then, later, we pick up filled ones."

FNS employees then deliver the collected food items to "Philabundance," the Philadelphia area's largest food bank. In turn, food bank staffers sort and then directly distribute the donations to more than 600 charity feeding programs serving nine counties in SE Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey.

Walsh said that, during the most recent winter food drive effort which went from February to March, FNS's Mid-Atlantic Region employees delivered over 13,000 pounds of food to "Philabundance." Since 1999 the figure stands at close to 90,000 pounds of food. "That translates to over 70,000 meals," he affirmed.

Word of FNS's success, at this unique food drive effort in the Mid-Atlantic Region, spread to the rest of the agency—and staffers at FNS's Mountain Plains Region in Denver ultimately decided to give it a go.

According to **Bart Bushman**, an FNS program specialist in that regional office who coordinated FNS's effort in Denver, in April and May of this year the Mountain Plains Region conducted its own version of a federally-based food drive. They presented the idea of a food drive to the Denver federal community, and it was quickly accepted.

"We initially expected six federal buildings to participate, but ended up with fourteen," he recounted. Mountain Plains Region staffers coordinated the pickup of food donations by the groups which used them—such as the Food Bank of the Rockies and COMPA Food Bank Ministries.

Bushman said that employees in that region generated 8,700 pounds of food for distribution throughout the Denver area.

"Over the last seven years, some of the names and faces of our federal participants in this effort have come and gone—but that hasn't changed our commitment to this effort," Walsh affirmed.

"Besides," he quipped, "picking up boxes chock full of food keeps me from having to go to meetings."

—John Cheng

Rural Development

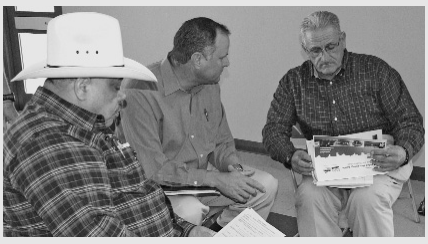
RD Is Focusing On The Long Term In Louisiana, Post-Katrina And Rita

It's summertime, 2006—which means that we're right in the middle of this year's hurricane season. But the effects of last year's Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita still loom large on those Gulf Coast areas they devastated on Aug. 29, 2005, and late September 2005, respectively.

That's why employees with the Rural Development mission area, who have been assisting in post-Katrina recovery, have taken a long-term approach to their assistance.

"It's because the assistance that Rural Development is providing is generally designed to be long-term in its effect," advised **Sean Le Blanc**, Area Director of RD's Amite, La. Area Office.

Le Blanc oversaw USDA's long-term recovery efforts in Louisiana, including the 20 RD employees from 18 states plus from RD headquarters in Washington, DC, who were onsite in Louisiana earlier this year. Employees from several other USDA agencies have also worked onsite in the aftermath of Katrina and Rita. In fact, the Sept.-Oct. 2005 issue of the **USDA NEWS** carried a story which focused on how employees helped employees, as well as others, immediately following Katrina, while the March-April 2006 **USDA NEWS** included a story about USDA employees serving as volunteers onsite, six months after Katrina struck.



*"Our 'Disaster Recovery Guide' shows what RD Community Facilities Programs are available," explains **Gerard Labat** (center), an RD community programs specialist, as he coordinates with community officials during an outreach meeting in Rayne, La.—**Photo by Holly Martien***

"But our RD focus," Le Blanc empha-

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

Gale Buchanan is the Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics.

Before joining USDA, from March 1995 until his confirmation for this position by the U.S. Senate Buchanan served as Dean and Director of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at the University of Georgia. He was Interim Director of the Georgia Agricultural Experiment Stations from 1994-95. Previously he had served as their Associate Director as well as the Resident Director of the Coastal Plain Experiment Station—all affiliated with the U. of Georgia—from 1986-94.

From 1980-85 Buchanan was Dean and Director of the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station at Auburn University. He began his full-time academic career in 1965 in Auburn's Department of Agronomy and Soils, with primary teaching and research responsibilities in weed science.

Joseph Jen, the previous Under Secretary for REE, returned to California Polytechnic State University—where he had served as Dean of its College of Agriculture before joining USDA in 2001—and is now a senior advisor to its president for special agricultural and federal initiatives. ■

Tom Christensen is the Deputy Chief for Programs in the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

From June 2004 until his selection for this position Christensen served as the Director of the Financial Assistance Programs Division for NRCS. He was Director of NRCS's Conservation Operations Division from 2003-2004, after having served as Director of the agency's Animal Husbandry and Clean Water Programs Division from 1998-2003. From 1996-98 he was NRCS's acting Chief Information Officer.

Christensen served as NRCS's State Conservationist for Illinois, based in Champaign, from 1994-96, after having been the agency's Assistant State Conservationist for Idaho, based in Boise, from 1990-94. He worked as an NRCS area conservationist in Utica, N.Y., from 1987-89, after having been a district conservationist in Plattsburgh, N.Y., from 1984-87. He began his career with the agency in 1981 as a soil conservationist in Monroe, N.C.

Jose Acevedo, NRCS's previous Deputy Chief for Programs, retired from that position following 32 years of service with NRCS. ■

David Goldman is the Assistant Administrator of the Office of Public Health Science in the Food Safety and Inspection Service.

From July 2003 until his selection for this position Goldman served as Director of FSIS's Human Health Sciences Division, after having been its Deputy Director since February 2002. He is a family practice and preventive medicine/public health physician, and a member of the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public

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sized, "has been on 'Long Term Community Recovery' efforts for that region."

RD rural development specialist **Suzette Agans** explained that local parish Long Term Community Recovery teams were immediately established in the 17 parishes most affected by Katrina and Rita.

"Each of those Long Term Community Recovery teams was multi-disciplinary, consisting of planners, engineers, architects, and members of the National Guard, plus local and State officials," she noted.

A Rural Development employee was assigned to each team. **Paul Johnson**, an RD special projects representative in Olympia, Wash., said RD was the only USDA agency to have representation on these local parish teams. "We brought, to the team, RD's knowledge of the principles of economic and community development, plus the technical and financial knowledge that RD has," he affirmed.

Each parish-level Long Term Community Recovery team first determined the "Recovery Needs" for that parish, then formulated "Recovery Priority Issues," established "Recovery Goals," developed "Recovery Projects, Programs, and Policies," and built an "Implementation Strategy" that outlined funding resources and processes so that the recovery projects could be accomplished. "In this particular disaster situation," advised **Jack Shaw**, RD's Washington, DC-based Desk Officer for Louisiana, "it became evident that clear, defined recovery projects, programs, and policies would aid the parishes in identifying federal, state, and local funding sources available for long-term recovery projects. That could include funds from a variety of USDA programs and activities."

RD employees involved in this effort onsite relied on a "Disaster Recovery Guide" that was developed by specialists in RD's Louisiana State Office in Alexandria, La. "This eight-page handbook provided a matrix of RD programs available for disaster recovery efforts," Le Blanc explained. "The people we were servicing told us they found this handbook to be easy to follow, and was a useful 'one-stop resource guide'."

He added that employees from other federal agencies working onsite used RD's "Disaster Recovery Guide" as a model for creating their own handbooks.

So, what can RD employees say were *their* specific accomplishments, by being part of the post-Katrina and Rita Long Term Community Recovery teams?

Karen Nardini, RD's Acting State Director in Louisiana, said that the Long Term Community Recovery teams made significant progress in the strategic planning phase of Louisiana's recovery from the hurricanes of 2005. "RD employees from across the nation helped Louisiana's communities identify and prioritize rebuilding goals and identify projects to accomplish these goals," she said.

"This, of course, is an ongoing, long-term endeavor," added **Jane Ferguson**, the special projects coordinator in RD's State Office in Athens, Ga. "Our RD employees participating in the parish teams realized that we generally weren't going to see any immediate results from our efforts."

"But our RD employees brought, to this massive undertaking, the ability to respond to a community issue, understand community development principles, offer effective communication skills and teamwork abilities, and implement alliances among private, public, and nonprofit entities and various governmental agencies."

"So, in the absence of some magic manual titled 'How To Recover From Katrina and Rita'—since no manual existed about how to respond to a disaster of this scale—that's what we've been bringing to the table, for the long haul."

—Bob Schoenfeldt

Health Service, assigned to FSIS since February 2002.

From 1998-2002 Goldman worked for the Virginia Department of Health in Fredericksburg, Va., and then in Richmond, first as a district health director and then briefly as the deputy state epidemiologist. He served as an officer in the U.S. Army Medical Corps, from 1988-1998, working in both family practice and preventive medicine.

Karen Hulebak, the previous Assistant Administrator of FSIS's Office of Public Health Science, is now the chief scientist in that office, and also serves as Chair of the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene and a Vice Chair of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. ■

At last count, USDA has over 112,900 full-time, part-time, and temporary employees located across the country and around the world. During their off-duty hours a sizeable number of employees perform a myriad of volunteer activities in their local communities.

But it may be safe to say that only one USDA employee has had a baseball field named after him because of his long record of volunteerism.

Paul Franklin is a National Agricultural Statistics Service systems analyst at the agency's field office in Des Moines, Iowa. But for the last 30 years he has also umpired Little League Baseball games for the Urbandale, Iowa Little League. For those 30 years he has always umpired for free, advising that he'd prefer to see the fees—that he might otherwise earn—get churned back into strengthening Urbandale's Little League program.

In addition, for most of those 30 years he has been the ump behind home plate. "But now the knees are getting a little sore," he quipped. "So I recently started to ump less behind home plate and more on the bases."

According to **Tracie Hoffmann**, a NASS administrative technician based in Des Moines, Franklin didn't think it was unusual—on a particular Saturday afternoon earlier this baseball season—when he showed up to umpire a Little League game and saw a large crowd at the Little League Ball Field for 11 to 12 year-old players. After all, that was the day when 23 past presidents of the Urbandale Little League were to be honored at a ceremony before the game.

"So I'm standing over by the bleachers and I'm dressed in my umpire's uniform," Franklin recounted. "I had arrived early so I could watch the ceremony for the 23 past presidents of our local Little League—especially since I know most of them personally."

"But then, following those two activities, the master of cere-

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PROFILE PLUS *More About: Ray Motha*

The weather has always played a big role in **Ray Motha's** life.

As a kid growing up on a Massachusetts farm, his mother would serve meals timed to coincide with the morning, noon, and evening TV weather forecasts which Ray's father hoped would help him make better decisions when it came to the family's dairy, corn, hay, and vegetable production.

By the time he was in sixth grade, young Ray was operating his own little weather station—collecting rainwater in a gauge and monitoring a barometer—then reporting the results as a local observer for a Boston TV station.

Today, Motha is USDA's Chief Meteorologist and the primary advisor to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Chief Economist on climate and weather activities. Along the way, Motha attended the University of Massachusetts, and spent a year in a research program at the Johannes Gutenburg Institute in Mainz, Germany. He received his M.S. in Atmospheric Science from the University of Chicago in 1971 and his Ph.D. in Agricultural Meteorology from the University of Nebraska in 1978. Two years later he joined USDA as an agricultural weather analyst.

"Farmers and ranchers know all too well that the weather is one of the major factors affecting agricultural production. While there's not a whole lot we can do about the weather, early and accurate assessments of crop conditions based on growing season weather and early alerts of potential extreme conditions can help producers to be better prepared for whatever nature throws at us," he said.

Since weather is one of the key factors affecting prospects for crop production and commodity prices, it made sense for USDA to be actively involved in the weather forecasting business, Motha said.

In 1977, the World Agricultural Outlook Board—which serves as USDA's focal point for economic intelligence and the commodity outlook for U.S. and world agriculture—and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration got together to form the Joint Agricultural Weather Facility (JAWF). Located in the South Building at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC, JAWF meteorologists from USDA and the National Weather Service sit side by side, daily monitoring global weather patterns via satellites and 8,000 ground stations.

Motha's staff of six meteorologists is responsible for assessing the likely impact weather is having for USDA's commodity forecasts and producing the international "Weekly Weather and Crop Bulletin." Regular briefings by WAOB experts are an important information source for the Secretary, the Chief Economist, and top Department officials.

Motha has also been a member of the U.S. National Drought Policy Commission, advising the Secretary, who chaired the Commission, and assisting in developing national drought policy.

And later this year, Motha will step down after having served two terms as President of the World Meteorological Organization's Commission for Agricultural Meteorology (CAgM) in Geneva—an extraordinary achievement for someone who started his career with a dime store weather kit on a New England dairy farm.

Motha has brought focus to the commission's successful reorganization, and helped create the World AgroMeterological Information System (WAMIS)—Motha's proudest CAgM accomplishment. Through a centralized server, WAMIS allows free access to agricultural weather advisories for 25 nations.

"It has helped the global community," he said, "and in particular underdeveloped nations, whose economies are supported through agriculture, to better predict and assess disasters including drought, flood, and pestilence."

Monitoring the global weather picture each day is essential since it is a significant variable in crop prospects and ultimately the global trade outlook.

"Because of transportation and trade, the global marketplace has shrunk, and brought us all closer together," he said. "It should come as no surprise that a drought in the south of France can affect the price of a box of cereal in the U.S. six months from now because of the dynamics of supply and demand, market access, and international trade."

Favorite Books: Anything by **Tom Clancy.**
Last Movie Seen: *"Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest."*
Hobbies: Coaching soccer and gardening.
Favorite Food: Chilean sea bass.
Priorities In The Months Ahead: "Getting my two daughters ready for college."

—Harry Phillips

monies called out *my* name and asked me to join him at the microphone at home plate. And then I was soon joined by my wife, my two daughters, and my son, and their families." They were all wearing red T-shirts that read "Paul's Team" in black letters.

The master of ceremonies spoke to the crowd about Franklin's contributions as a volunteer umpire over the past 30 years. And then he announced that this particular field was officially being named after Franklin.

With that, the speaker unveiled a silver metal plaque, in the shape of home plate, that was nailed to the backstop. The plaque read "Paul Franklin Field."

Did Franklin offer any remarks following the dedication of the field in his name? "Hey, I was too choked up," he admitted. "I couldn't have said anything even if I had wanted to."

However, one-half hour later, following that dedication, Franklin was behind the plate—at that field—ready to yell "Play Ball!" As an added bonus, for this particular game his adult son and son-in-law also served as umpires out behind the bases.

"So, for this first game played on Paul Franklin Field," he affirmed, "we were able to have a Franklin umping behind the plate, a Franklin umping one base, and a Franklin kin umping the other base."

"For some reason, I like the sound of that," he laughed. ■

—Ron Hall

Creative Things...continued from pg. 2

For instance, **Bill Dauer**, FS's forest engineer on the White Mountain National Forest in Laconia, N.H., said that a new combined national forest headquarters and ranger station office "is at the 90 percent design level"—and is to include three waterless urinals, nine composting toilets, and water-reducing fixtures in the bathroom sinks.

"The significance of this," he pointed out, "is this is not just some remote, rural campground facility that'll have these waterless urinals and the other features; it's our forest headquarters office. And an estimated 100 permanent Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service employees will be working there." Construction on the facility, to be located in Campton, N.H., is scheduled to begin in FY 2007.

Sixth, when slate roofs need replacement or repair at ARS's Beltsville (Md.) Agricultural Research Center (BARC), they're now being done using "recycled content roofing tiles." "Those tiles look like slate, they're less expensive than slate, and they meet historical preservation standards," noted **Ron Korcak**, Associate Director for BARC. He added that this became policy after a tornado struck in that area in 2001, requiring the replacement of roofs on four BARC buildings.

ARS Engineering Project Manager **Sandy Morgan** added that ARS's BARC facility has installed carpeting, in some its offices, which has a soy-based padding—a biobased product.

Seventh, many USDA offices around the country require the use of government vehicles to carry out their mission on a daily basis. "We have about 4,000 vehicles to service the Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Region and Northern Region, covering a total of nine states," said Missoula, Mont.-based **Willie Boyer**, FS's fleet manager for those two regions. "75 percent are SUVs or trucks. But we're trying to save their use for when we really have to travel over rugged terrain."

Accordingly, during FY 2006 Boyer purchased 358 vehicles for use in those two regions, and 86 of those purchases were alternative fuel vehicles, such as ethanol-based vehicles and hybrid electric vehicles. "This added to the 83 alternative fuel vehicles which we already use," he said.

That's why for the last two years the Bighorn NF has had access to a hybrid electric vehicle. "We call her 'Rhonda the Honda'," quipped **George Williams**, the NF's fleet manager. "We use her for those official trips where we simply don't need the use of a truck or an SUV to get the job done."

Eighth, in 2005 USDA conducted a three-month pilot program using biobased cafeteria-ware in the Whitten Building cafeteria. **Mike Green**, the Program Manager for USDA's Biobased Procurement Program who is in the Office of Procurement and Property Management, said the pilot included totally replacing the currently-used polystyrene and plastic food service items with biobased products such as bowls and plates made from sugarcane fibers; biodegradable trays; cold-use cups, cup lids, and straws made from corn; bio-coated hot cups; and heat-stable utensils made from modified cellulose and limestone. "We also gave guidance to the cafeteria patrons," added **Marian Romero**, the building concessions supervisor in OO. "We showed them how to dispose of their food and cafeteria-ware discards in special recycling bins in the cafeteria so those items wouldn't get contaminated with non-compostable items."

The reason for that, explained ARS research microbiologist **Pat Millner**, is that, as part of the pilot, ARS compost site operator **Randy Townsend** picked up the collected biobased cutlery on a daily basis, transported it to ARS's BARC Composting Facility, mixed it with appropriate leftover and discarded food from the cafeteria which he had also picked up, and made compost out of it. "I mixed that material with grass clippings, leaves, straw, and water, and composted the mix for six weeks. Next, I cured that 'enriched' mix for several months and then screened the mix to make it more useable," Townsend said.

Then in July USDA's groundskeepers delivered nearly eight cubic yards of the compost back to the Whitten Building, where it was spread around the produce growing in the USDA Vegetable Garden located on the side of that building. OO quality assurance specialist **Ron Chunik** noted that after harvesting the produce as it matures, it will be donated to a local soup kitchen.

*FS's **Bruce Kjerstad** (left) checks the "VendingMiser" he installed on his office's soft drink machine, while FS's **Lexie Carroll** (center) and **Anna Jones-Crabtree** confirm that the temperature of the sodas inside is still just fine.—**Photo by Steve Quintana***

"This pilot may be repeated at selected USDA field sites around the country," Green said. "We may also be able to apply the lessons learned from this pilot to Forest Service firefighting field sites, where firefighters could conceivably discard biobased, biodegradable food utensils as they pick up camp."

Finally, presumably most if not all USDA offices around the country are recycling soda cans and bottles, newspapers, and other paper. Those offices presumably have boxes and bins conveniently located nearby that are officially designated, within the office complex, for depositing those recyclable items.

"When I do my rounds around the Whitten Building to pick up trash from employee wastebaskets," observed **Greg Champion**, a custodial staffer who services that building, "on occasion I'll see that some employees are still throwing their bottles, cans, newspapers, and white papers in their wastebaskets, instead of in those 'recycle containers'—usually just down at the end of the hall."

"So sometimes I'll lift those items out of that employee's wastebasket. And then I'll drop them off myself in the nearest recycle bin, when I'm pulling my trash barrel around the building."

"These creative actions," affirmed McWilliams, "show that USDA employees are concerned about our collective consumption and its impact on the environment." ■

*ARS's **Randy Townsend** (left), OO's **Marian Romero** (center), and OO's **Ron Chunik** are gathered around a sign anchored near the tomato plants in USDA's vegetable garden, located next to the Whitten Building at USDA headquarters in Washington, DC. The sign reads: "Compost for this vegetable garden was made from food waste collected from cafeterias at the USDA Washington DC complex and processed at the USDA Beltsville Agricultural Research Center. Produce will be donated to local charities." That succinctly captures one purpose of a recent pilot project in which the three were involved. And it is one of several creative initiatives, being implemented at USDA headquarters and field offices across the country, in which Departmental employees are conserving natural resources—at their USDA workplace. Note the story on page 1.—**Photo by Alice Welch***

Help Us Find

Jeremiah Demetri Simmons

Missing: **11-20-2005** From: **Richmond, CA**
D.O.B. **2-6-2002** Sex: **Male**
Hair: **Black** Eyes: **Brown**
Height: **3 ft. 0 in.** Weight: **50 lbs.**

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■ **Month of September**
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