

NEWS

Historic Conservation Agreement Signed

There were big doings on Maryland's eastern shore in October. Vice President Gore and Agriculture Secretary Glickman joined Maryland Governor Glendening in announcing a landmark agreement to help protect the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. The agreement will serve as a model for other water quality efforts nationwide. Maryland and USDA will work together to expand the existing Conservation Reserve Program by allowing up to 100,000 acres of environmentally-sensitive land along Maryland streams and rivers to be set aside and maintained to protect water quality.

The new initiative, the State Enhancement Program (SEP) builds on the success of the CRP by allowing USDA to work with states, link resources and share costs to meet conservation and environmental objectives. Maryland is the first state to participate in a SEP. Illinois and Minnesota have submitted proposals for SEP agreements to the USDA.

"Although this effort begins in Maryland, we believe it is a model that can apply to other states as well," Vice President Al Gore said. "Clean water is not a regional issue. It is a national issue. This agreement means cleaner water, healthier fish, and a stronger environment for every family in Maryland. By protecting the lands adjacent to the tributaries of the Bay and by restoring wetlands, we can significantly reduce the amount of nutrients,

sediment, and pesticides that reach the waters of the Bay."

USDA and Maryland expect to contribute a total of \$200 million for the program. Both will provide 10 to 15-year contracts, cost-share and technical assistance to encourage landowners to devote environmentally sensitive cropland or marginal pasture land adjacent to streams, rivers, or other water bodies to long-term resource conserving vegetative covers.

"Problems associated with run-off from agricultural lands, as well as from urban areas, are real and must be

addressed," Secretary Glickman said. Working with farmers, ranchers and other landowners through these kinds of partnerships will go a long way to addressing water quality problems."

If fully implemented, the voluntary program would be the largest environmental project of its kind. The project would provide a filter of trees and grasses along nearly 5,000 miles of shore by the year 2002, enough to line every year-round stream and most seasonal streams in the parts of the Bay watershed now bordered by farmland.



Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman signs new CRP agreement. In attendance were Paul Sarbanes, MD Senator, top row, 2nd from left and bottom row: Parris Glendening, MD Governor; Vice President Al Gore, Secretary Glickman, and Barbara Mikulski, MD Senator.

Holiday Message From the Administrator

Once again we are in the holiday season — a time which means many things to many people. The rich aroma of a freshly cut Christmas tree. The array of lights that turn entire neighborhoods into winter fairylands. The giving and receiving of gifts and love between family and friends. For me these are some of the sentiments that make this season so special.

We also pause in our regular routine, step back from our whirlwind of daily activities, and reflect on the past year. We pause and give thanks for the blessings we have received; for Christmas is a time of joy, sharing and celebration; and New Year's Day is the day of hope and faith when we put behind us the cares that troubled us in the old year and look ahead to the promise of the new. This, I believe, is the essence of the holiday spirit.

I know you've had plenty to deal with this year, from continuing reorganization and consolidation of offices and workloads, closing of some offices, loss of many excellent workers from buyouts and retirements resulting in

more work with less people, farm credit difficulties with discrimination complaints, increasing Conservation Reserve Program enrollments, budget scares and realities. This year we added new items of concern like administrative convergence. Some days it seems like we're on a roller coaster.

But, through it all, the good and the not so good, you've continued to deliver the kind of expert service our farmers and ranchers have come to expect from us. I can't see into the future (wish I could!), but I can promise you we are all doing our best to keep the communication lines open between Washington and the field offices and staying on our toes to keep the Department and Congress informed of our programs, our services, our accomplishments.

And as we look to 1998, there will continue to be many challenges facing FSA which will test the endurance and skill of all of us — from the county offices all the way to Washington.

I want to thank you, each one of you, and tell you how much I appreciate everything you have done for the agency and for agriculture in the past year. This is clearly the best agency in government and as always it's the people who make it great. I wish you a very special and joyous holiday season.

The very best wishes to all of you and your families for a peaceful and joyous holiday season and for a happy and prosperous new year.



ADMINISTRATOR

A Word of Thanks...

As I depart from the hallowed halls of the South Building's Farm Service Agency, I would like to thank the FSA State, county and national office employees for their contributions to the agency newsletter, formerly known as the "ASCS News and Views", now called the "FSA News."

For more than 10 years it has been my pleasure to serve the entire FSA family by presenting a variety of stories to you. The tremendous success that has been achieved is directly attributable to those of you who made a significant contribution. I have never witnessed a greater degree of dedication and cooperation to do any job that had to be done.

To all of you who have played a part in making the newsletter such a success and making my job such a pleasure, I thank you. Together we have helped a lot of people. As the newsletter ventures into the 21st century through the use of the World Wide Web, I hope you will continue to send in articles, human interest stories, and anecdotes so that the newsletter will continue to flourish. Remember, only you can make it happen!

I wish you success and happiness as I bid you a fond farewell.



Jeanette B. Young
Editor

(P.S. Jeanette Young retired from FSA on December 3 after 33 years of service.)

FSA News

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USDA Customer Service Fair— A Successful Outreach Effort

By Maribeth Blank, TN STO

In an ongoing effort to provide outreach to rural communities in Tennessee, the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rural Development, Tennessee State University's Small Farmer Assistance Program and Cooperative Extension Service, University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture are working together to promote the programs that can best benefit small and minority farmers.

In line with this effort, these organizations held a successful USDA Customer Service Fair in Jackson, Tennessee in September to provide information concerning programs and services available to small farmers in the state. Representatives from these agencies, along with local banks, agricultural suppliers and co-ops were on hand to answer questions concerning their products and services.

Over 100 farmers attended, along with another 75 persons in farm-related occupations. According to David

McDole, State Executive Director, the breakout sessions were well attended, providing information on conservation and farm commodity assistance and forestry programs for small farmers, and pollution control.

"These events improve communications between agencies, increase our knowledge of other agency's responsibilities, and demonstrate how to work together to improve the delivery of programs and services to farmers," said J. R. Kelly, a Branch Chief. "I hope that every effort will be made to make this an annual event in each of the three divisions (east, middle, west) of the State."

"The comments received from the farming community, and other agencies and lenders participating, indicate they also felt it was a successful, worthwhile endeavor to bring together various segments of government, (state and Federal) with programs to assist farmers and rural residents," Frank M. Rodgers, Director, Farm Loan Programs said.



Tennessee small and limited resource farmers participating in the USDA Customer Service Fair.

FSA Employee Completes Leadership Program



FSA employee Michael Sullivan, prepares to cross the Bridge Over the River Kwai while visiting Thailand.

Michael Sullivan, FSA Ag Credit Manager in Coushatta, LA, recently completed the Louisiana Agricultural Leadership Development Program sponsored by the LSU Agricultural Center. The two-year educational program is designed to strengthen leadership potential and promote the future of farming in the state.

Participation in this program includes attending seminars on leadership, emerging technology and its impact on U.S. agriculture, relationships between population trends, world and U.S. agriculture, futures market, and farm policy issues. Mike traveled to Washington, DC to meet with farm policymakers and key agricultural legislators, as well as to the Chicago Board of Trade and the Chicago Mercantile.

The program concluded with a two-week trip to Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia. There, the participants visited local farms, research institutes, agricultural universities, agricultural lending institutions, and marketing facilities, as well as took part in several cultural events of local interest.

Positioning FSA For The 21st Century Through Strategic Planning

In order to assist in positioning the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for the 21st century, Keith Kelly, Administrator, has added Eddie A. Moore, Professor of Agricultural and Extension Education, Michigan State University to his management team. Moore serves as Chief of Strategic Planning, Economic and Policy Analysis. Since his arrival, he has worked closely with a representative group of FSA employees from all levels in developing a custom-driven Field Delivery System.

A task force met in Washington, DC in August to develop the 21st century Field Delivery System. A sub-committee of the task force met during September in the Nation's capitol to refine the work of the task force, followed by conference calls with the sub-committee and the entire task force. The Administrator will use the task force report, a headquarters staff document entitled, "Final Report of the Organization Review Task Force," the State Executive Director's Planning Task Force report, and conversations with a variety of groups to position the agency for the 21st century.

At FSA headquarters, deputy administrators, division directors, and other FSA management personnel have briefed the strategic planning staff on functions, accomplishments, challenges, and opportunities. Recently, deputy administrators have been asked to empower their employees in reexamining the possibilities for streamlining and reorganizing their unit operations. The deputy administrators were asked to consider a number of questions including the following:

1. The National Performance Review (NPR) supervisory ratios were set at a target of 1:15; what changes would the unit propose to meet the NPR target?
2. What should be the vision and values of the unit as related to

the FSA mission in the context of an ever changing global society?

3. What cultural changes were needed in the unit in order to improve the efficiency of the unit's programs and administrative operations?
4. Are there similar unit functions being handled by other FSA units which could be streamlined, coordinated, or organized in ways to increase the agency's efficiency?
5. Considering the loss of past and projected quality employees, what are the opportunities for the unit to improve on program and administrative efficiencies?
6. Are unit personnel performing tasks which are not needed, or tasks which could be performed more efficiently and effectively utilizing different approaches?
7. What are the unit plans (short and long-term) for diversifying the workforce including diversifying the management team?
8. Considering a number of changes (legislative, organizational, new priorities, etc.), are there employees in the unit who might be interested in transferring to other FSA units?

The Blair House Papers on National Performance Review supports the notion of empowering people. The 1997 National Performance Review priorities are: (a) delivering great service; (b) fostering partnership and community solutions; and (c) reinventing to get the job done with less. In order to effectively position the agency for the 21st century, move to a higher level of excellence, and empower FSA employees, Administrator Kelly is seeking the support of all agency officials in this important initiative.

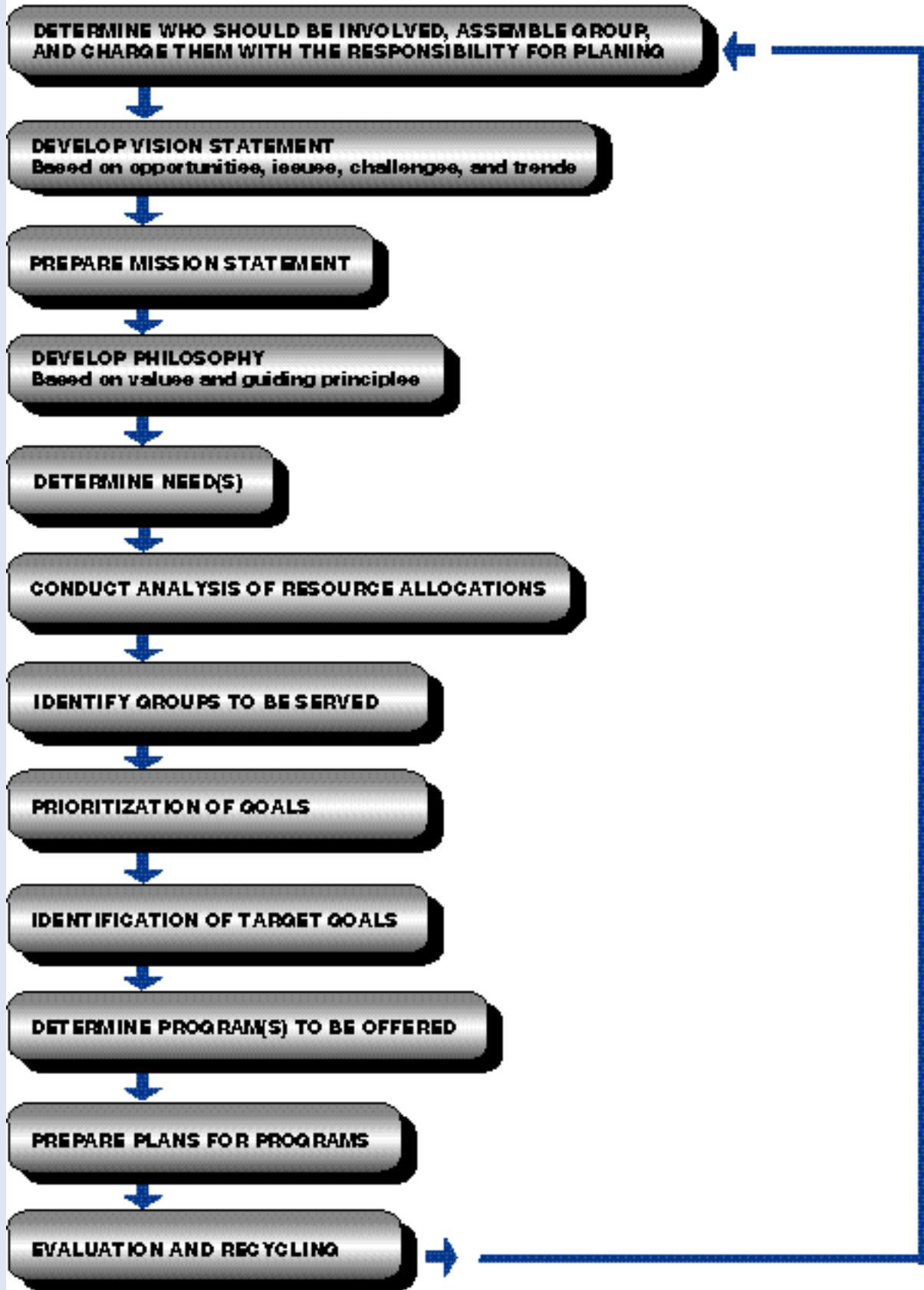
Kelly and Moore are confident that the agency has a cadre of officials who have the capacity to assist in leading people, leading change, achieving significant results, managing resources, and building partnerships. Some FSA officials have already discussed with Kelly and Moore tentative plans for making their units more efficient and effective. Keith Kelly and Eddie Moore have been impressed with their creative thinking in the interest of American farmers and ranchers.

During the 1997 National Forum held in Virginia in October for State Committees and State Executive Directors, Kelly's remarks focused on "National Policy Development and Grassroots Involvement." Moore made a presentation entitled, "Positioning FSA for the 21st Century." They both sought the assistance of State Committees and State Executive Directors in positioning the agency for the next century.

Kelly and Moore encouraged the participants to give strategic planning a higher priority in their states and to consider the model shown in the planning process. They challenged the forum participants to think broadly about assembling inclusive groups (Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rural Development Services, the private sector, and other entities) to assist in state and local strategic planning efforts. They also discussed the importance of developing a vision in the context of global challenges, opportunities, issues, and trends. Moreover, they encouraged forum participants to reexamine their mission, philosophy, and target their goals.

Clearly, Administrator Kelly is genuinely concerned about helping American farmers and ranchers to succeed. Their successes are linked to the agency's ability to position itself for the 21st century through strategic planning.

Kelly/Moore Planning Model



Innovative Outreach In California

By Erica Haspiel-Szlosek

“Reaching out to new Farm Service Agency customers is one of the most important things we do,” says California’s State Executive Director John G. Smythe. “There are a lot of new farmers in California who have never worked with us, and we want them to know they can count on FSA for help when they need it.”

The State Office just added a new “Outreach Coordinator,” whose job is to coordinate and expand outreach activities for all FSA programs. Monica Kristofors, who started work in September, is trilingual in French, Spanish and English. In addition, one of the newly advertised farm credit positions will be filled by a person fluent in Hmong, a large number of whom have settled in California. The following are just a few of the outreach activities taking place in California.

A pilot project was just completed in Monterey County to improve delivery of services to farmers who apply for direct operating loans. The Outreach Coordinator analyzed complaints received from current and previous applicants, CRAT issues, and processing problems. She recommended several changes to the SED, DDs and office specialists. All will be monitoring the changes to see if they help solve some of the customer service problems.

In Monterey County the FSA staff runs a well-coordinated and innovative outreach effort aimed at Latino farmers. In 1995 flooding devastated area berry farms and brought new customers to the County Office seeking help. In response, a local working group was formed to share information about Federal programs. The multi-agency committee included FSA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rural Development, County Extension Service and a newly created farmer

coalition of Latino growers. The group has worked for more than two years to share information about assistance that can be provided to minority growers in the area.

The University of California helps out with marketing and business courses in Spanish to help growers become more competitive with their crops. And currently, the University of California Cooperative Extension Service is helping FSA develop a bookkeeping course for Latino farmers. The course will focus on helping small growers maintain an accounting system, how to monitor crop yields and market prices, and how and where to obtain technical assistance.

“Our customers were changing,” said Monterey County’s Executive Director Vivian Soffa. “And it was up to us to find new ways to reach out to them. Working with other agencies and with the Latino growers to find solutions has worked for us.”

The growers agree, says Jim Gordon, organizer for California Latino Agriculture. “Your Monterey County office is a model for the United States in how to work with a minority population.”

Fresno County Executive Director Janice Schoonhoven noted that a similar effort is beginning with the Hmong farmers in California’s Central Valley. “There are thousands of Southeast Asian farmers in Fresno and Mercer counties, and we have a lot of work to do to integrate them into our programs.” According to Schoonhoven, a task force is underway involving Federal agencies, the University system, and Hmong community leaders. A public meeting was held this spring with the Hmong farmers to introduce local FSA, NRCS, and RD employees and explain program requirements.

“We’re not resting on our laurels,” said Smythe. “We’re continuing to find new ways to bring the FSA story to the farmers of California.”



Jose Montenegro from the Rural Development Center (left), hosted Monique Kristofors (FSA) and Xiathao Moua on a farm tour.

FSA Year 2000 Project

By Del Fern, KCMO

Are You Ready! As the year 2000 approaches, so does an epic collision between the world of high tech and the forces of time; a looming computer problem called the Year 2000 Crisis. Thousands of computer programs are becoming obsolete with regard to most date-oriented software.

Since the development of the first computers, programmers have used two-digit numbers to identify the year, "96" instead of "1996." Computers all over the world will continue to assume that the first two digits of the new year are "19," and they will read the new date as January 1, 1900. At the stroke of midnight on Friday, December 31, 1999, the date will become "000101." Beginning January 1, 2000 (October 1, 1999 for Government organizations) century digits become essential. Applications and hardware that rely on the current year for calculations or sequencing will fail or produce inconsistent results if century digits are not considered.

A moment after midnight, December 31, 1999, the world's computers are programmed to start making mistakes unless the Year 2000 problem is corrected. Telephone conversations begun just a few minutes earlier will be dead. Employees will be locked out of security areas. Elevators will stop

running. ATM's, automobiles, electronic mail systems, traffic lights, PCs, and weapon systems will not work properly, if at all.

This is not science fiction. All systems from mainframe to personal computers and local area networks, and processes that depend on computerization, are susceptible to the impact of Year 2000 consequences. Chaos on a worldwide scale is possible.

Between now and the Year 2000, the cost of solving this problem is expected to approach \$600 billion. The U.S. government alone, with its thousands of programs scattered over hundreds of agencies, is slated to spend about \$30 billion to reprogram its computers. Individual corporations will be spending tens of millions of dollars each over the next two years. FSA's Year 2000 price tag alone is \$20 million.

George Aldaya, Deputy Administrator for Management, as the FSA Year 2000 Executive Sponsor, leads FSA's preparation efforts, which are managed and tracked at the Kansas City Management Office. The work scope includes all FSA computer hardware, vendor and custom-made software, administrative support equipment (FAX's, copying machines, programmable calculators), facility support

mechanisms (security systems, automated heating/cooling control, fire prevention/suppression systems), scientific instrumentation, and telephone systems.

As of October 19, 1997, FSA has completed 18% of our estimated 518,000 hour effort. Our scheduled completion for most date conversion work is September 30, 1998. The coming year is going to be a busy, frantic one.

FSA is already a major problem solver in the Year 2000 battle. Private industry, municipal governments, and other Federal agencies are adopting parts of our unique approach. Your bank may even be using our facilities certification methodology to certify its facility and office systems for Year 2000.

Financial concerns, such as those of your bank, will push and keep the Year 2000 issue in the forefront more and more in coming months. Financial liability will drive corporate leaders and bank boards to carefully handle their stewardship. Disclosure to stockholders of projected expenses and expended dollars for the Year 2000 will likely become required of corporations as this problem gains more exposure. As stewards of the public trust, FSA is a leader in planning for Year 2000 and reporting the Agency's progress to USDA and Governmental oversight authorities.

FSA Honored at FFA Convention

Keith Kelly, Administrator (left), accepts an award from Jack Pitzer, National FFA Organization, for FSA's outstanding support as an exhibitor for five years in the FFA National Agricultural Career Show. The exhibition provides an opportunity for student attendees to explore individual interests related to career choices in agriculture. Nearly 40,000 FFA members attended the convention in Kansas City.



A Step Up

Federal employment has been seen by some as providing limitless opportunities for advancement. "My aunt started at a GS-2 and worked her way up to GS-15!," we hear. However, all too often, some of the government's hardest-working and most competent employees are left in the dust, with no clear idea of how to move up in the ranks.

The USDA Graduate School's pilot Aspiring Leader Program (ALP) allows GS 5-7 Federal employees to develop and/or enhance skills necessary for professional growth. This is achieved through "shadowing" assignments, classes, and 30-day developmental details.

Participants must be nominated by their supervisors, and demonstrate initiative, leadership potential, and communications/technical skills. Supervisory support is crucial, says Program Director David White, because of the 6-month time commitment involved. Employees apply for the program, the applications are paneled, and the best-qualified selected. The current class is comprised of 114 Federal employees from across the United States and Europe. Of these, 9 represent FSA. Over 90% are women.

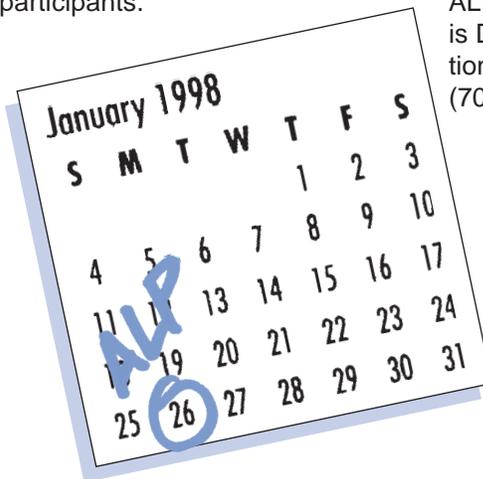
FSA Secretary Dorothy Gayle is working her detail as a purchasing agent in Management Services. Because many at this grade level aspire to advance from the administrative/clerical field, one ALP stipulation is that participants not be requested to perform this type of work. Gayle's host supervisor, Greg Hardy, has been

supportive from day one. "He asked the contract officers to teach me everything they know. They were very forthcoming, and I took good notes!"

Gayle apparently did more than that — Hardy has asked if she might be interested in extending her detail. Said Hardy, "I'm pleased with her contributions to our staff, and I hate to give her up. I would love to make her a permanent employee. The ALP is "win-win"—beneficial to both the Agency and participants."

Another selectee, Dawn Kral, is working as a writer on the Public Affairs Staff. A Program Assistant recognized for her writing and fact-finding ability, Kral has been writing news releases, newsletter articles, and training video scripts, as well as conducting research. "I've always wanted writing and communications to be a major part of my Federal career," says Kral.

The deadline to enroll in the next ALP, which begins January 26, 1998, is December 19. For more information, contact David White at (703) 807-0322.



Dorothy Gayle (left) and Dawn Kral, ALP participants.