

NEWS

Daikon and Gailon – New on FSA's Plate

by Paul Fischer, CED/Outreach Coordinator, Middlesex, Mass. County Office; and Jim Meisenheimer, Regional Public Affairs Specialist

Southeast Asian immigrants are emerging as a vital and thriving stronghold in American agriculture. Smaller, niche-type farming that is common in their communities is becoming an important trend in this country as consumer demand for exotic, locally grown food rises.

These new faces come from countries rich in agricultural heritage, and they were expert farmers in their native lands. But they often find their farming methods outdated in their new industrial homeland. In many cases, these first and second generation entrants lack necessary tools to farm – access to capital, training, and land. Moreover, cultural and language barriers limit their ability to connect with local farmers and other community members.

FSA employees around the country are helping make the transition easier with training, technical assistance, financing, and help in finding suitable acreage. And, just as importantly, they're helping them find effective ways to market their crops.

Part of the challenge was letting people know about our programs and gaining the trust of new entrants who are often wary of government intervention. Around the country, FSA is hiring people who speak SE Asian languages to help with outreach and program delivery. FSAers are working with their local communities and other agencies to learn about the SE Asians' needs and developing programs tailored to address them.



The Lowell, Mass. Farmers Market. Popular products include Chinese cucumbers, Thai basil, lemongrass, and daikon. photo by Paul Fischer

The following examples illustrate the enthusiasm and flexibility of FSA employees as they help aspiring farmers realize their dreams.

Lowell, Massachusetts

Lowell, Mass., with 28,000 Cambodians, has the second largest Cambodian community in the U.S. Prior to immigrating to the U.S., the majority of these immigrants were farmers skilled in growing on small plots of land. But

in the U.S., they often find it difficult to reconnect with their rural roots.

The Middlesex County FSA Office staff stepped in to help these farmers put their skills to use. In 1998, they collaborated with Tufts University, the Mass. Department of Food and Agriculture, University of Mass. Extension, and community leaders to develop the New Entry Sustainable Farming

*See FSA's PLATE,
continued on page 4*

ADMINISTRATOR'S COLUMN

Helping Beginning Farmers and Ranchers

Did you know that the average age of farmers is 54? It makes one think about what could happen if there's no one coming along behind that 54-year-old to fill that role.

The need to assist and encourage beginning farmers and ranchers has been of particular concern to Congress and this Administration for some time. According to the most recent census of agriculture taken in 1997, there was an increase of 34.1 percent in the number of farmers in the 65 and over age group between 1978 and 1997. During the same time period, the number of farmers less than 25 years of age declined by 68.7 percent, and the number of farmers between 25 and 34 declined by 55 percent.

Statistics such as these make it clear that America's farm population is aging and that younger people are not replacing retiring farmers in adequate numbers. This situation, if allowed to continue, threatens to erode the competitive advantage that the U.S. has in agriculture, the one major industry that has consistently earned its way in the world market by returning a balance of trade surplus to the U.S.

Concerns about the lack of new entrants into farming led Congress to establish special programs for beginning farmers and ranchers (including the Downpayment Farm Ownership Program) and to target loan funds to them under provisions of the Agricultural Credit Improvement Act of 1992. The 1992 Act called for the creation of a Federal-State Beginning Farmer Partnership, which required USDA to enter into memoranda of understanding (MOU) with interested states that have beginning farmer and rancher programs, for the purpose of providing joint financing. To date, FSA has entered into MOUs with 16 states and has provided \$87 million in downpayment farm ownership funds to help more than 2,000 beginning farmers get started in agricultural careers. Overall, USDA has made more than 38,000 loans totaling \$2.9 billion to beginning farmers and ranchers since fiscal year 1994, when FSA's beginning farmer and rancher programs became operational.

I'm glad to report that FSA is also working with the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Beginning Farmers and Ranchers to help new producers. Members of the committee are from USDA agencies, including FSA and the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; state beginning farmer programs; private nonprofit organizations with active beginning farmer programs; commercial lending institutions; and agricultural education institutions. It also includes several farmers.

At their first meeting in September 1999, the 16-member committee developed six priority recommendations, which, if implemented, could positively impact the target group. Among the ideas, the committee suggested that in fiscal year 2000 more funding is needed for FSA loans, and that

adequate, trained staff is vital in FSA offices where heavy demand for loans is expected. Secretary Glickman responded in writing that additional funding was approved to meet the demand for credit in fiscal year 2000, and that FSA was authorized to hire 100 additional employees to process loans, with plans to hire more in future years. The committee members met again in April to discuss the Secretary's response to their initial recommendations and to discuss other proposals drafted at the first meeting.

Mark Falcone, Deputy Director of FSA's Loan Making Division in Farm Loan Programs, oversees the committee. He says, "The committee consists of a diverse group of people with a wide range of experience. They've covered a lot of ground in a short period of time and are very dedicated to helping beginning farmers and ranchers."

Farm Loan Programs Deputy Administrator Carolyn Cooksie attended the April meeting. She briefed the committee on specific issues within FSA's loan programs and addressed some of her concerns.

I expect our programs will continue to improve and our service capability will increase as this committee and other concerned groups and policymakers construct a positive framework for change. FSA is doing its part to make sure there's someone coming along to fill the shoes of America's agricultural producers.



FSA NEWS

is published monthly in the interest of all FSA employees.

Editor: Jillene Johnson
Editorial Board: Janet Baker,
Star Bryant, Greg Hawkins,
Dann Stuart.

Reporters: FSA employees.

Readers are encouraged to contribute stories, photos, and suggestions. Send materials to the Editorial Board at:

FSA Public Affairs Staff
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Stop 0506
Washington, DC 20250-0506

Agile, Mobile, and Versatile: The Life of One CED

by Michael Kaufman, Regional Public Affairs Specialist

All FSA CEDs know how much work is involved in managing a county office. Imagine running two! In different states!

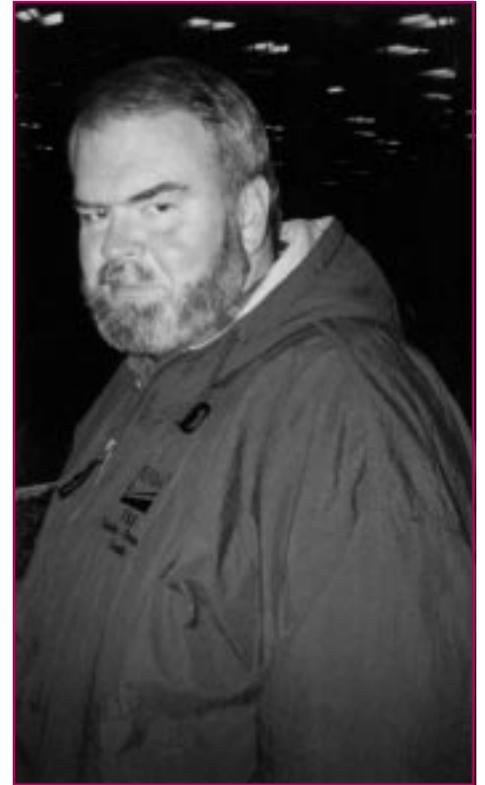
That's just what John Feters does. For over three years, Feters has successfully managed the Scioto County, Ohio Office and the Greenup County, Ky. Office. This double duty came about when Kentucky SED Hampton Henton and Ohio SED Steven Maurer decided to try shared management for the two offices. Feters was up for the challenge, and also up for answering to two equal supervisors.

Being in two places sounds impossible and is nearly as difficult to achieve. FSA programs vary between the two counties even though the offices are only 18 miles apart. For instance, the counties have different rates for the Pasture Recovery Program and for disaster programs. The burley tobacco leasing rules are also different.

Feters deals with the unique circumstances of both counties while equitably delivering our programs. He jokes, "Having one foot on a banana peel and the other on a bar of soap is tricky, but learning how to juggle at the same time is the tough part." It's just this kind of humorous approach that helps Feters and his staffs get through burdensome workloads.

Feters tries as much as possible to divide his time equally between the offices, which face each other across the Ohio River. He gets a lot of help from his two adaptable FSA teams.

People like John Feters and his staffs help hardworking farmers on both banks of the Ohio River make it through tough agricultural times and succeed. Kentucky SED Hampton Henton points out that Feters is typical of the spirit and dedication of FSA employees. "Although conditions differ significantly between the areas, Feters does his best to be fair and reasonable," Henton says.



John Feters in Ripley, Ohio at the opening day of a tobacco auction last November.
photo by Michael Kaufman

A Little Less of Some of Us

by Juliet McBride, Health and Wellness Coordinator, Human Resources Division

Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services (FFAS) has lost what amounts to 2 people. But we won't miss them because they were unwanted baggage. Forty-five employees in the National Office lost a whopping 357 pounds by participating in Weight Watchers®.

The program got its start when HRD asked FFAS headquarters-based employees for input on health and wellness topics of interest to them. A significant number said weight loss topped their list of concerns. So in January, HRD made rooms available for two weekly Weight Watchers®

meetings. The employees paid the fees themselves and attended the 12-week sessions during their lunch breaks.

The Weight Watchers® leader, Allison Palmer, was an enthusiastic coach and worked tirelessly to motivate the members toward their goals. Participants learned to substitute ineffective eating habits with lasting healthier choices. Weight Watchers® member Jim Goff says, "I'm back to my weight of 15 years ago and feeling great." Participant Amy Jones says, "It's so convenient to have a program like this at work. It has helped move me toward

a healthier lifestyle." The response from the participants was so positive that the group meetings will continue for another 12 weeks!

Good health and nutrition can enhance employee performance and productivity. HRD encourages all FFAS employees around the country to take advantage of health and wellness opportunities whenever possible.



FSA's PLATE

continued from first page

Project. The project links members of the SE Asian community with funding and farmland identified by the project members. FSA provides funds through its beginning farmer program, and the project partners provide education, training, and technical assistance.

The program joins beginning Cambodian farmers with established producers who rent out small plots of land and provide training on growing crops, pest and financial management, etc. In return, the producers can rent out unused land and learn how to increase their farms' viability through crop diversification. More experienced project participants lease larger plots and farm full time. FSA farm operating loans help the Cambodians finance irrigation systems, greenhouses, and other necessities throughout this process. The ultimate objective is to encourage participants to independently own and operate their own farms.

The Cambodian farmers also needed help marketing their crops. FSA connects the growers with the Lowell Farmers Market, the city's primary source of locally grown vegetables. In the project's first year, the market expanded from 2 to 8 growers. These farmers are filling the need for ethnic vegetables like daikon, gailon, and Chinese water spinach, while also selling more traditional crops like tomatoes and corn. The potential for this market to expand to 15-25 growers in 2-3 years is excellent. With help from FSA and its partners, several growers are also marketing their products to local grocery stores and restaurants.

This project was featured in several newspapers, including *The Wall Street Journal*. Under Secretary Schumacher is also impressed and has visited the Middlesex office and the farmers market several times. He says, "These



Sem Chey Farms in Lowell grows hydroponic Chinese water spinach. A pound of this crunchy, flat-leaf spinach commands up to \$4 in the trendy Boston restaurant community. *photo by Paul Fischer*

farmers are starting small, but I see tremendous potential here in meeting a demand for fresh produce, not just in the Asian community, but in general."

Minneapolis/ St. Paul, Minnesota

With its population of 75,000 Hmong, the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minn. metro area is home to one of the country's largest Hmong communities. More than 10,000 people from this SE Asian minority group have moved to the Twin Cities within the past year alone.

This influx hasn't gone unnoticed by the Minnesota FSA State Office staff. They are collaborating with the Minnesota Food Association to help Hmong residents who want to farm. Before this initiative, few Hmong farmers had participated in FSA programs because of language barriers and a lack of records needed for enrollment and qualification.

The Minnesota FSA State Office staff is breaking down those barriers. Much of this is thanks to FSA employee Kham Yang, a Hmong outreach worker. Yang and other FSA employees have helped the Hmong farmers get involved with FSA programs and find 5-10 acre parcels of land to grow produce for farmers markets. She also helps the Hmong farmers fill out reports on acreage, disaster losses, etc.

Thanks partly to FSA, Hmong farmers now make up over 50 percent of the 165 exhibitors at the St. Paul Farmers Market, one of the oldest farmers markets in the country. The Hmong offer an array of ethnic meat, salad dressings, and produce such as bitter melon and Japanese eggplant. The market is so impressive with its focus on small growers that Under Secretary Schumacher and Jacques Diouf, head of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, visited it last fall. "What was really interesting was the

new vegetables showing up here because of the ethnic presence in Minnesota,” said Diouf. “I was highly impressed with the diversity of produce.”

The successful outreach efforts in the Twin Cities are exemplified by a recent event in St. Paul. In January for the first time in this area, FSA displayed an outreach exhibit at the 22nd annual Hmong New Year celebration. An estimated 40,000 Hmong from as far away as California and New Jersey attended this event.

Amid the rows of vendors selling native quilts, colorful crafts, and folk medicine sat the lone USDA display. Yang, her husband, and her daughter set up and ran the “Reaching Out to Family Farmers” exhibit. They were pleased to see many people pausing at the exhibit table covered with Farm Loan Program pamphlets and pictures of gardens planted last summer by Hmong farmers. “Before this event, a lot of these people hadn’t heard of FSA or its programs,” said Yang. Even though the wording of the exhibit is in English, the message seemed to get through. “It’s a nice display and it gets people’s attention,” said Yang. Yang attends events like this as much as she can to meet with farmers and explain how they can use FSA programs to further their agricultural talents.



Hmong girl in traditional clothing pauses at the FSA exhibit table.

photo by Jim Meisenheimer



United States
Department of
Agriculture

United States
Chaw Ua Hmoob
Saub Xyuas Nee Ua
Liaj Ua Teb

Farm Service Agency
(Chaw Pab Kev Ua Liaj Ua Teb)

Yim Hli Ntuj Xyoo 1999

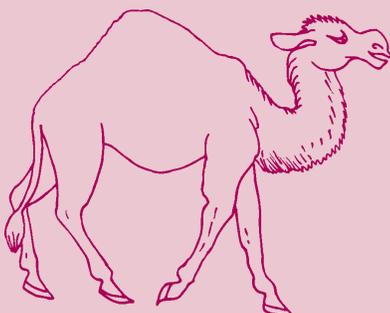
Ntawv Qhia

Nyiaj Txais Ua Liaj Ua Teb

Farm Loans

<p>Qhov Chaw Pab Kev Ua Liaj Ua Teb (Farm Service Agency (FSA)), yog ib lub chaw ua haujlwm tawm ntaam U.S. Chaw Ua Haujlwm Saib Xyuas Kev Ua Liaj Ua Teb (Department of Agriculture), tsim tawm thiab yog tus lav txais nyiaj pab (makes and guarantees loans) rau cov tsev neeg ua liaj ua teb</p>	<p>ntaub ntawv (apply) lav them cov nyiaj rov qab los ntaam FSA los. Cov ntaub ntawv qhia kuj muaj nyob rau pem cov hoobkas loj (headquarters) thiab cov chaw ua haujlwm nyob rau cov xeev, txhua cov kev pab (programs) yog raug saib xyuas seb ua haujlwm li cas tawm ntaam cov zej zog cov</p>	<p>ib nraib neeg ua liaj ua teb kuj txais tau nyiaj los ntaam qhov nyiaj txais muaj tus kam lav (loan guarantees). Nyob rau hauv qhov nyiaj txais muaj tus kam lav, ib lub zej zog tsev txais nyiaj ua liaj ua teb (agricultural lender) yog tus txais qhov nyiaj thiab ua ntaub ntawv, ces FSA mam lav (guaran-</p>
--	---	--

At the urging of the Minnesota State Office, FSA has translated several program fact sheets into Hmong.



PASS THE ANTACID

The largest item on any menu in the world is roasted camel, prepared for Bedouin wedding feasts. Cooked eggs are stuffed into fish, the fish stuffed into cooked chickens, the chickens stuffed into a roasted sheep’s carcass, and the sheep stuffed into a whole camel.

Source: *The Guinness Book of Records, 1996 Edition*

Mediation Is Justice For All

by Chester Bailey, USDA Agricultural Mediation Program Manager, State Operations

In the February issue of FSA NEWS, we told you about the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) program. ADR is any method of dispute resolution other than formal adjudication. One of the most common ADR techniques is mediation.

Mediation involves all parties in a dispute meeting together to try to work out their differences with the assistance of an impartial, trained mediator. Mediation provides a constructive, positive atmosphere for participants, and often resolves problems in the workplace in the early stages, before a grievance or EEO complaint is filed.

Mediation is also used in other conflicts involving FSA, such as when a producer feels adversely affected by an FSA decision. Mediation helps farmers, their creditors, and other persons directly affected by USDA actions resolve disputes. This offshoot of the program is called the USDA Certified State Mediation Program.

This program got its start in 1987 under authority of the Agricultural Credit Act. It began as a state's go-between for farmers with delinquent loans, and aimed to help borrowers and creditors resolve their disputes before they reached bankruptcy or litigation. Since then, the program has expanded to cover more areas, such as conservation compliance, pesticides, and wetland determinations. Most recently the Secretary further extended the program to cover rural housing loans, rural business loans, and crop insurance issues.

The State Mediation Program can be introduced at the state level, but most have been initiated at the national level. State governors or designated state agency heads must notify FSA of

their interest in the program, and if a state meets all the conditions, the FSA Administrator certifies its program. FSA then may provide the state matching Federal funds up to \$500,000 or 70 percent (whichever is less) of the program's operating and administrative costs.

Since 1988, USDA has obligated more than \$23 million for the State Mediation Program. Last fiscal year, the participating 22 states requested over \$3 million in matching grant funds.

Twenty-five states are participating in the State Mediation Program in fiscal year 2000: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The state programs are operated primarily by state universities or state departments of agriculture.

Mediation supports our Administration's goal of achieving savings through alternative means of dispute resolution. Mediation, at \$400 to \$650 per case, offers significant savings over national level administrative hearings, which cost between \$3,000 to \$4,000 per case. It can take years for a case to make its way through the courts, whereas the mediation process generally takes just a few meetings to complete. During fiscal year 2000, it is anticipated that USDA will have participated in mediation in over 3,000 cases involving farm credit and farm program issues.

The mediation program is quite effective in resolving FSA program disputes at the local level, thereby empowering FSA employees. During fiscal year

1999, the overall mediation agreement rate was over 70 percent. Since the parties control the results of mediation, there is generally much greater satisfaction with the outcome than with an appeal or litigation. The mediation process is goal-oriented and focuses on specific measurable action. Our customers view mediation as "putting them first" and cutting red tape.

The participants in mediation are relieved to discover that confidentiality is assured, and mediation documents cannot be used for any other legal action. A mediator has no decision-making authority, but encourages participants to reach mutually agreeable solutions. Mediation is voluntary by all parties. Parties who are not satisfied with the outcome can still seek redress in a court through the administrative appeals process.

Mediation usually occurs after a USDA official advises a customer that mediation services are available before taking formal adverse action. Generally, a participant will be offered the right to mediate any issue that is appealable. An example of such an issue is the documentation necessary to determine program eligibility. Some decisions cannot be mediated, such as the requirement that a producer provide a cash flow statement.

The State Mediation Program is receiving quite a bit of recognition, including a National Association for Rural Mental Health article citing the program's mental health benefits. The Center for Theology and Land lists the program in its Rapid Response Brochure, a resource for farmers. The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) passed a resolution supporting the expansion

of agricultural mediation. NASDA further urged the expansion of mediation to include other Federal agencies that play a role in land and resource management, including the Department of the Interior and the Army Corps of Engineers.

The program was also cited for its effectiveness in Vice President Gore's Report of the National Performance Review, "Creating a Government that Works Better and Costs Less." This report singles out the program as an example of activities which agencies should use more frequently.

For more information on the mediation program, see the Agricultural Mediation Program fact sheet or visit the ADR Intranet website at: <http://dc.ffasintranet.usda.gov/hrd/adr.html>

Loan Officer Recognized for Distinguished Outreach Work

by Kaylyn Talbot, District Director, Western Idaho

The Idaho State Office recently awarded Monta Green, Farm Loan Officer in the Elmore County Idaho Office, its 1999 Outstanding Outreach Award for Green's work with Native American youth. The award recognizes individuals who excel in their outreach efforts. In the January issue of FSA NEWS, we told you about FSA's work with the Duck Valley Indian Reservation, 90 miles south of the Elmore County Office. The rural youth loan program is popular among the kids on this 289,819-acre Shoshone-Paiute reservation.

Much of this is thanks to Green, who increased loan activity from 16 loans to 32 loans for kids to raise beef cattle. Because of her diligence and patience, the kids have learned financial responsibility and how to care for their livestock. Green has been central to changing the lives of these kids who now have aspirations to be ranchers or seek higher education.

Green turned what many might consider just a job into a passion. She has worked tirelessly to establish solid relationships with the youths and reservation youth loan advisors. Not only

has she administered the loans, she has also held workshops to provide guidance on recordkeeping. Green also plans to hold a marketing seminar in the near future.

"I enjoy working with the kids," says Green. "They realize they can have goals and reach them. I believe we have accomplished an acceptance that goes beyond just a working relationship." For her work, Green received a laser engraved plaque shaped like Idaho, plus time-off and monetary awards.



Monta Green.



Lunch break during a roundup and branding at the reservation. Green is serving up pieces of fry bread topped with butter and honey.

Goat Sucker: The Final Chapter (Or Is it?....)

Once again terror sweeps over the beautiful South American landscape. Recently, more than 200 farm animals have been savagely killed; they were found with vampire-like incisions in their throats and their blood sucked out. Fearless detectives swept the area with night vision equipment as blood-curdling animal screams sent frightened residents huddling together in the dark.

The legend of the goat sucker began several years ago when farmers in several Latin American countries and Puerto Rico found over 1,000 goats, cattle, and sheep mysteriously slaughtered in the same gruesome way. You might remember our FSA NEWS coverage from '95 and '96 on this dreaded alien creature – the three-foot-tall beast with grayish or dinosaur-like skin. Some citizens claimed they saw bright red eyes the size of hen's eggs, long fangs, and multicolored spikes down the creature's head and back.

From Santiago comes, maybe – finally – the truth. According to a "government official," roving dogs, not a mythi-

cal bloodthirsty monster known locally as "chupacabras," were found responsible for the deaths of livestock in northern Chile. Hopefully, this explanation will finally calm the fears of the frazzled public.

After all, the government says we're safe...but why don't I feel reassured?



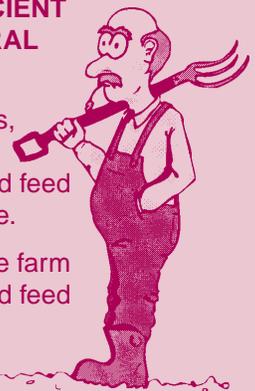
A 1995 composite drawing of the goat sucker based on a number of "eyewitness" accounts.

Answers to April's Puzzle

N	I	T	R	O	G	E	N	L	O	A	N
A	O	R	N	M	N	O					
V	A	N	E	H	E	R	O	I	X		
A			G	O	R	M	O	O	I		
L	A	I	R			G		I	N	T	O
		N	E	T		Y	O	W	L		U
	P		T		O	A			A	M	S
N	A	S	S		H	A	T	C	H		

THOSE EFFICIENT AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS

- In the 1700s, one farm worker could feed three people.
- In 1979, one farm worker could feed 60 people.
- In the year 2000, one farm worker feeds 80 people.



Source: United Press Syndicate

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
Month of May		Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month
May 5-6	Columbus, Ohio	Administrator Kelly to attend NASCOE Midwest Area Rally
May 7-8	Kansas City, Mo.	John Williams, Deputy Administrator for Management; and Robert Springer, Executive Director for State Operations; to attend Administrative Officers training conference
May 14-17	Salina, Kan.	Associate Administrator Parks Shackelford to attend Midwest Private Lands working group meeting
May 15-21	New Orleans, La.	Larry Mitchell, Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, to attend FSA Price Support Division training
May 26-27	San Francisco, Calif.	Associate Administrator Parks Shackelford to attend American Cotton Shippers Association 7 th Annual Convention
May 29		Memorial Day

Note: The above is subject to change.