

NEWS

Secretary Glickman Visits Kansas City FSA

There was excitement in the air in Kansas City FSA offices on June 8, as Secretary Glickman and Deputy Under Secretary Tom Grau treated USDA employees to a visit. They made the trip, in part, to express their appreciation to FSA Kansas City Management Office (KCMO) and Risk Management Agency (RMA) employees for their exceptional work in getting disaster relief payments out to producers. The Secretary gave a speech for all Kansas City USDA employees and took a tour of KCMO facilities.

In his speech, Secretary Glickman said, "Here in Kansas City, the work you do is not just about systems and software, payment schedules, and planting data. It's about helping people survive and ultimately to thrive. Thousands of farmers and ranchers will be able to stay on their land because of

The work of every USDA employee contributes to the betterment of your respective communities. Here and around the Nation, you rose to the occasion brilliantly, and it wasn't just for the job, it was to help other families in crisis—and for that you have my deepest gratitude.

—Secretary Glickman

the work you have done over the last several months. I know your achievement required great sacrifice, dedication and, frankly, some very long hours. There were loads of overtime, canceled vacations, short lunches, and long nights away from your families."

Glickman recognized other Kansas City FSA accomplishments, including processing over 2 million applications for loan deficiency payments for the 1998 crop year and handling a

65-percent increase in loan program demand. He acknowledged that while USDA's workload is much greater than in the last decade, the Department has 22,000 fewer workers than 5 years ago — a 17-percent cut. He told of his appreciation for the Kansas folks who volunteered to go to Texas to help employees with their crushing workload in a time of disaster and thanked all employees for their success in gleaning and food recovery.

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Secretary Glickman and Rosemary Hall, Chief of KCMO's Production Adjustment and Risk Management Division (PARMD).



Keith Claussen, Todd Pfeifer, and Sharon Marshall (all of PARMD) present an overview of CLDAP software for Secretary Glickman and Tom Grau.
photos by Cheryl Gill

ADMINISTRATOR'S COLUMN *from Associate Administrator Jim Kearney*

FSA Exceeds Workforce Recruitment Program Goal

I am pleased to tell you that FSA surpassed its 1999 national summer employment goal for the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) for College Students with Disabilities, doubling the number of placements in headquarters from 1998. The Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services (FFAS) mission area was the highest WRP employer in USDA, with 22 placements nationwide.

WRP is an employment recruitment and referral program for college students and recent college graduates with disabilities. To be eligible for this program, students must have a targeted disability, be enrolled in a college or university and working toward a degree or certificate, submit an application package, and be interviewed by a WRP recruiter. Only those students who are determined to be job-ready through the application and interview process are included in the WRP database. This year, recruiters

visited nearly 190 colleges and universities nationwide. The WRP database now includes more than 1,100 students and recent graduates looking for temporary and permanent employment.

From this database, FSA employed 13 WRP summer interns nationwide this year — our goal was 9. This included 4 field placements in the Texas State Office; El Paso, Texas County Office; Pennyan, New York County Office; and Albany, New York County Office. In addition to the summer placements, FSA made 1 permanent placement using the WRP database.

I am especially proud of these figures because I strongly support WRP. I believe an important step toward improving our workforce diversity is encouraging a better understanding among people of different backgrounds, including people with disabilities. A basic misconception of WRP students is that they are hired mainly as clerical workers. In fact, most WRP students hold positions related to their degrees — positions such as Employee Relations Assistant, Economics Assistant, Accounting Technician, Management Assistant, and Office Automation Clerk. Grade levels range from 3 to 7, with the majority of students hired at grade 4 and higher. Also, the WRP students come from a broad range of universities and community colleges all over the Nation, including the University of Montana, Illinois State University, Fingerlakes Community College in New York, and George Mason University in Virginia.

Hiring help through WRP is mutually beneficial to the students and our Agency. WRP introduces students to a professional work environment where they can put their studies to use assisting our professional and technical employees. The students can explore different work areas within FSA and learn about future employment prospects. The Agency benefits from the students' educational experience, and we all become more familiar and comfortable working with people with disabilities. The students have much to share as they are a culturally diverse group, covering a wide age range, and are hungry for real-life work experiences.

I thank everyone who made the 1999 WRP summer placements such a success. Keep in mind that FSA can hire from the WRP database of students year-round. I encourage you, when possible, to consider using WRP as an employment resource when temporary or permanent positions become available. As FSA continues to ensure that our Nation's farmers and ranchers thrive, let us foster the vitality of our own workforce. Our goal in FSA is equality not only for our customers, but for employees as well.

To find out more about WRP, please contact LeAndrea Alsobrook, FFAS Disability Employment Program Manager. She can be reached at (202) 418-8982 (voice) or (202) 418-9116 (TDD).



FSA NEWS

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GLICKMAN

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During his speech, the Secretary presented a plaque in recognition of USDA employees nationwide who are helping farmers and ranchers get through the farm crisis. Jerry Patterson, Deputy Director, Information Technology Services Development from FSA, and Bobbie Waggoner, RMA's Assistant Deputy Administrator, Research and Development, accepted the plaque on behalf of all employees. A replica of the plaque will be sent to all FSA state offices and RMA regional service centers around the country.

Glickman Tours KCMO Offices

In a walk through KCMO's software development center, the Secretary got a first-hand look at how FSA employees gather and process data and an explanation of how KCMO's Crop Loss Disaster Assistance Program (CLDAP) software works in the field. Rosemary Hall, Chief of KCMO's Production Adjustment and Risk Management Division (PARMD), and members of her staff demonstrated the software.

Hall also emphasized to the Secretary how closely FSA worked with RMA employees to combine information for the disaster programs. Denise

Hoffmann, Director of RMA's Actuarial Division, says, "The hardest thing was meshing five years of data collected for totally different purposes. But, we know a lot more now." Hall agrees, saying, "When the time comes to work with RMA again to deliver programs, things will go much smoother. We've gotten over a huge hurdle."

The Secretary commended FSA and RMA for their partnership. "I know it wasn't easy," he said, "but you came through with flying colors. You were able to pull together data on vastly different computer systems so that farmers could spend more time farming and less time doing paperwork in county offices. You have paved the way for a common computing environment for all of USDA."

Hall says she enjoyed meeting Secretary Glickman. "He showed a keen interest in the software demonstration, asked meaningful questions, and was easy to talk with. It meant so much to us that he took such an interest in our work." Patterson says the employees really appreciated the Secretary taking time to visit them. "It was a great gesture on his part to personally recognize the extraordinary efforts of so many employees," he said.

School Supply Drive Ends August 20



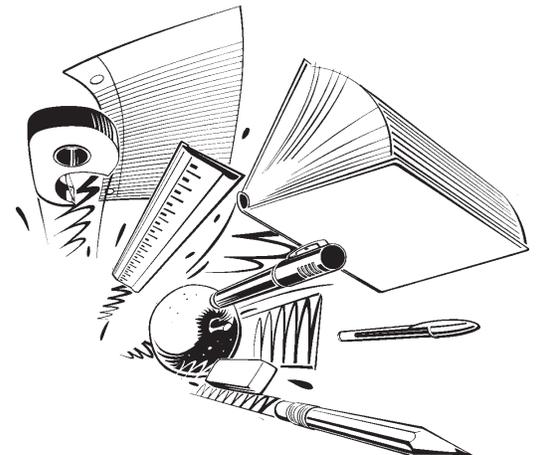
Giving a little helps a lot! If you work in the Washington, D.C. area, please remember that FSA is once again collecting school supplies for children at USDA's adopted school, Van Ness Elementary. The month-long drive ends August 20. You can drop off donations at any of the collection boxes located in each Deputy Administrator's office and in the Administrator's office.

For those at headquarters who have questions, please call Alex King, FSA Coordinator, at (202) 720-7565. If you're not in the Washington, D.C. vicinity, but want to help, find out if a school in your area needs any supplies.

Suggested School Supplies

- binders
- folders
- tablets
- index cards
- dividers
- pencils
- book bags
- pens
- graph paper
- composition notebooks
- loose paper
- crayons
- rulers
- glue/paste
- erasers

Thanks for helping make sure students face the first day of school fully prepared!



Jerry Patterson accepts award from the Secretary on behalf of FSA employees.

Commodity Packaging — Hold the Scotch Tape

Do you ever think much about the packaging your food comes in? Ben Myatt does just about every day. He's a Packaging Specialist with Commodity Operations and, with a degree in Packaging Engineering, handles the intricacies of researching and developing commodity packaging for food shipped through USDA's food assistance programs. Approximately 130 million people in over 90 countries receive food through USDA foreign food aid assistance, and about 1 out of 7 Americans depends on food from its domestic programs.

Myatt has traveled all over the world to ensure that American food commodities arrive safe and sound. There are lots of things to consider when developing a package, including strength, resistance to infestation, and maintaining the quality of the food. "The package must be able to go from cradle to grave — to protect food from the mill point in the U.S. all the way to a village overseas," Myatt explains.

His most recent trip was in March to Ghana, Africa, to inspect food packaging shipped through the P.L. 480, Title



Grits are loaded onto flatbed trucks for transportation to warehouses and villages.

II, Food for Peace program, providing food for needy recipients in lesser-developed countries. For this, his fourth trip to Africa, Myatt was looking specifically at the packaging of 1,500 metric tons of soy-fortified sorghum grits. He evaluated ship and port operations, including how the food was loaded and off-loaded, storage procedures, and port and ship cleanliness. Myatt also looked for ways to prevent theft, reduce handling and food loss, and shorten the time the food spends at the port.

Myatt then traveled to northern Ghana where Catholic Relief Services distributed the grits mainly to women, infants, and children. Villagers prepare the grits many different ways, Myatt says, including making a porridge

blended with local spices and vegetable oil (shipped from the U.S. in 4-liter tins and 20-liter pails).

While in Ghana, Myatt gave a presentation as part of a Commodity Storage and Loss Reduction Project workshop. This multi-agency project aims to reduce losses throughout the food-aid pipeline. This includes, among other things, looking at packaging, shipping, transportation, and general food-aid management. To an audience of overseas food program managers, Myatt discussed his responsibilities with USDA and outlined some commodity operations initiatives to improve packaging.

The best part of the trip for Myatt? "It's amazing to see the product of American agriculture actually reach its destination and benefit people so far away," he says. "In one school feeding center I went to, I visited 100 kids who really look forward to this meal. In the poorer villages of Ghana, food is an incentive to attend school, because, unfortunately, it might be the only meal of the day some of these kids get."

Myatt says he will continue to work on improving packaging, as that is a crucial factor in safeguarding the quality of food provided by American farmers and millers.



Myatt inspects bags of grits as they are off-loaded from the ship.



Myatt visits a school feeding center in northern Ghana.

The Millennium Bug — Threat or Pest?

You know about the millennium bug. The problem stems from the fact that, years ago, when computers were slow, memories small, and hard-drives barely invented, every "bit" of information in a computer file or program was expensive. To save space in files, programmers used only six digits to signify dates, so that July 4, 1974, would read "070474."

Unfortunately, computers using this format will assume that January 1, 2000 is January 1, 1900. At midnight, December 31, each computer will think to itself, "Hey, it's only 1900. I haven't been invented yet!" and shut down, committing electronic suicide. The world will immediately grind to a halt. Elevators will stall, food will run out, cars won't run, the power will go out. Small appliances will attack their owners. People will trample each other fleeing exploding computers. Streets and roads will be jammed by immobilized cars and traffic lights that don't work. The banking system will crash, and money will become worthless, but that won't matter because there won't be anything in the stores anyway. People will have to use the barter system.

At least that's the impression one might get from reading some news stories on the "Y2K" crisis. The truth is a lot less alarming. There won't really be any exploding computers. Undoubtedly there will be some problems caused by computers that have not been made "Y2K compliant" — just how much disruption is a matter of much debate. But you can be pretty sure, for instance, that your car will still run. It may have computers inside to control the ignition and fuel injection systems, but those devices are only concerned with what's going on in your engine. In most cases they couldn't care less what date it is. The same is mostly true for elevators, air conditioners, microwave ovens, and many other

devices that use computer chips to help them work.

Here's some problems that could crop up. The General Accounting Office reports that a number of government agencies had not become Y2K compliant in their mission-critical systems by the March 1, 1999 deadline set by the Administration. What this means is that there may be disruptions in some Federal and local services when 2000 rolls around. The worst Federal offenders were the Departments of Defense, State, and Transportation, which were 88, 88, and 89 percent compliant respectively. The Department of Agriculture was identified as being 96 percent compliant.

How does FSA stack up with the millennium bug? Well, it looks like you can leave the pesticide at home. According to management, all of the systems critical to doing our job will be compliant in time for the New Year. Barry Ohler, Director of the Information Technology Services Division, credits Joyce Scott, FSA's Y2K leader in the Kansas City Management Office, with much of the success for our compliance. "She has done such a tremendous job," he said. "Because of her impressive work, FSA is a Y2K innovator followed by many in private industry."

But most computers aren't working for the government; they're working for individuals or businesses. This is where there is the most uncertainty. The problem is that there are millions of lines of computer code — the instructions that make computers run — that have to be gone over inch-by-inch and fixed. This is such a huge task that some bugs are bound to be missed, and some of the work is bound to remain unfinished altogether by the year 2000. And that means, for instance, that your pharmacy may have problems filling a prescription.

The software that monitors your power, gas, or telephone company may have a bug in it, causing interruptions in service. The local grocery store may have trouble keeping its shelves filled because of hiccups in the computers that control inventory. And so on. It wouldn't hurt to make sure you have enough of the necessities of life to get you through a week or two, before January 1.

The millennium bug may affect your computer at home or at work, even if it is "Y2K compliant." For instance, if you've set up your own database using 6-digit dates, you may find it's not working properly when the New Year rolls around. So it may pay to go over your files and make sure that there is nothing in them that might confuse your computer.

But don't worry. It's not going to explode.

FARM FACT

There were 1.9 million farms in the U.S. in 1997. Women operated 165,102 of them, up from 145,156 in 1992.



RSVP for Cheerful Assistance

by Linda Blum, Program Assistant, Emmet County FSA Office, Iowa

The end of last year was a hectic and exhausting time for our office. Like so many other county offices, we faced a tremendous overload of loan deficiency, marketing loss assistance, and farm program payments. I think we might still be assembling and mailing payment transaction statements to this day if not for the cheerful, friendly folks from the local Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

Almost daily from September through December, 20 volunteers filled our back room with chatter and laughter as they went to work mailing payments. We were all amazed how quickly they could get a job done. Larry Niles, our CED, always provided cookies and rolls for the RSVPers, but

they wouldn't stop for a break until they had a good hour or so of work under their belts.

When the crisis had passed, we thanked the volunteers with a luncheon, with food furnished by our CED, program technicians, and county committee. We presented the volunteers with FSA ballpoint pens provided by the State Office. It was a fitting thank you for the 800 hours they collectively put in.

We truly couldn't have completed our work as timely as we did without these wonderful folks. They seemed as grateful to be working for us as we were to have them, and they said they'd be ready this fall to come back and help us again.

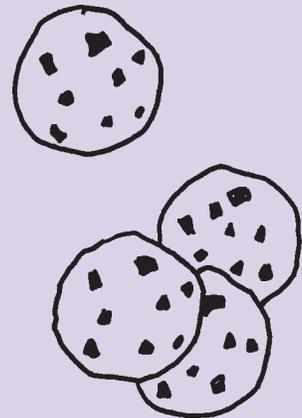


16 of the 20 RSVP volunteers. From left to right, front row: Thelma Moffitt, Nell Schubert, Edna Billings, Artis England, Jeannette Richardson, Minna Mix, Helen Brant, and Nina Moffitt. Back row: Izetta Partello, Pearl Zitterich, Mary Haag, Pearl Johnson, Rachel Moe, Ruth Reed, Dale Reed, and George Dawson.

TOLL HOUSE COOKIES

The first chocolate chip cookies were made accidentally in 1930, when Ruth Wakefield, an innkeeper in Whitman, Mass., was trying to make all-chocolate cookies by breaking a semi-sweet chocolate bar into a buttery batter, thinking the morsels would melt throughout. It didn't produce the all-chocolate cookies she wanted, but the new variety proved very popular with her guests. She named the chocolate chip cookies "Toll House cookies" after her inn, The Toll House Inn (originally on the toll road between Boston and New Bedford, where horses were changed and people ate).

Half the cookies baked in American homes are chocolate chip, with seven billion eaten annually.



Geographic Information System on the Move

by Larry Hill, CED, Phillips County FSA Office, Mont.; and Dave Tidwell, Program Specialist, Farm Programs' Production, Emergencies, and Compliance Division, Washington, D.C.

This spring FSA in Montana showcased for grade-school students geographic software that will soon be a fixture in FSA offices around the country. Geographic Information System (GIS) stores national and local maps and digital images, allowing users to view and manipulate them with just a click of a mouse. The software ties specific points on its digital maps to correlating points on the Earth, so its maps and measured distances are as accurate as those measured directly from the ground.

In April, in the Montana State Capitol's rotunda, Program Specialist Edna Price from the Montana State Office and I presented a program for local students and others on the future of GIS and FSA. We also exhibited aerial photography to the public. Our efforts were part of the Montana Geographic Information Council's "Geography Matters in Montana" outreach day. The council's local technical work group helps local, state, and Federal agencies coordinate various computer-driven geographic data projects. Rotunda Day 1999 featured demonstrations of various applications of GIS technology.

While GIS software is fascinating enough to grab the attention of fourth-graders, think what it will mean for FSA employees who are used to handling large, cumbersome maps. Various USDA agencies, including FSA, will soon be using GIS to replace outdated program compliance methods and to input applications, payments, and other variables for many USDA programs.



Edna Price (right) helps students locate their houses, school, and the Montana State Capitol on an aerial photograph.

photo by Larry Hill

As state and county offices receive their new computers, FSA will be implementing GIS throughout the Nation and training employees to use the software. The cost-effective GIS technology will help the field offices provide timely program delivery and will reduce burdens on our customers. And, as FSA's customers increasingly apply GIS technology within their own operations, it is crucial that USDA service centers deliver products and services that take advantage of similar technology.

AUGUST 7 IS NATIONAL MUSTARD DAY



Don't be shy about slathering this condiment on hotdogs or any other foods. Nutritionally, a gram of mustard has a mere four calories, no cholesterol, trace amounts of vegetable fat, and is around

30 percent protein. Mustard contains calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, and Vitamin B; and it stimulates the appetite and digestion and clears the sinuses.



DOWN

1. FSA commodity that can be extra long staple or upland
2. Receding glaciers formed thousands of these in the Midwest
3. This state's state animal is the buffalo, which weighs from 800 to 2,000 pounds and stands nearly 6 feet high at the shoulder
4. Administrator Kelly took an _____ of office to become the Executive Vice President of CCC
5. You hear a lot of clucking here
6. Summertime thirst quencher
7. The state bird of Hawaii (which is celebrating 40 years of statehood this month) is the nene, a type of _____

ACROSS

1. In plants, this converts the sun's light into food
7. You could do farm site visits in a _____ Metro
8. Karen Olson is the SED in this chilly state
9. Driving two horses in single file
10. FSA extends itself to communities via this
12. To find out about FSA, farmers can _____ to the Internet, then go to our website
13. This state's state office is in Lincoln
15. An ear of corn never has an _____ number of rows
17. Many FSA employees have to display government _____ when entering the workplace
18. Don't let your cattle herd stray into this narrow ravine
19. What birds do to their feathers to keep them clean

11. FSA disaster assistance umbrella
14. The older the chicken, the bigger this is
16. Room _____ grow

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
August 4-8	Oklahoma City, Okla.	Administrator Kelly; Associate Administrator Parks Shackelford; Carolyn Cooksie, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs; Larry Mitchell, Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs; and John Williams, Acting Deputy Administrator for Management to attend 40 th Annual NASCOE Convention
August 10	Kansas City, Mo.	Vicki Hicks, Deputy Administrator for Commodity Operations, to attend USDA/FSA Domestic Industry Conference
August 16-18	New Orleans, La.	Associate Administrator Jim Kearney to attend Blacks in Government Conference
August 24-26	Albuquerque, N.M.	Larry Mitchell to attend Cooperative Marketing Association training

Note: The above is subject to change.