

NEWS

FSA Showcases Electronic Government

On August 9-10, the National Information Technology Center (NITC) sponsored its third USDA Technology Showcase in WDC on the Whitten Building patio. USDA agencies exhibited information technology services they provide to customers. Sixteen USDA agencies and offices participated, including FSA, NRCS, and Rural Development, which displayed a number of exhibits jointly in support of the Service Center Modernization Initiative (SCMI). FSA led four of these exhibits.

"The exhibits gave us a chance to display how service centers will soon be doing business," says Diane Sharp, Production, Emergencies, and Compliance Division Director. "These projects will make our work easier, less time consuming, and will improve accuracy and save money. Most importantly, they will enable us to provide even better service to farmers."

Thanks to everyone involved for the hard work and initiative invested in these projects!

Exhibits Led by FSA:

Common Land Unit (CLU)

The CLU is a data layer critical to the Geographic Information System (GIS). GIS is a computer-based system to collect and manage information related to land. The CLU layer will include all farm fields, rangeland, and pastureland in the U.S. In conjunction with digital imagery and other data, FSA will use CLU to manage programs, monitor compliance, and respond to natural disasters. FSA has digitizing centers in seven states (Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Virginia) which have completed the CLU layer for 120 counties.

Land Use Project

The Land Use Project is the method for gathering commodity reporting data through the use of PCs at the service centers, and eventually via the Web. FSA currently collects this information through its acreage reporting system (FSA-578). The Land Use Project allows commodity reporting through the selection of producers with their associated links to land. The project will allow data and geospatial information collection at the field level. This field level data can then be summarized by farm, unit, or any level needed by a particular program or agency.

Service Center Information Management System (SCIMS)

SCIMS is an information repository of customer, land, and program data shared by service center partner

See **FSA SHOWCASES**
continued on page 4



CLU exhibitors Michael Lord and Jim Heald, WDC.

photos by Eric Parsons



Land Use and SCIMS exhibitors Nancy Accardo, Mo.; Kathy Garner, Minn.; Jack Stanley, WDC; Judy Paglia, WDC; and Craig McCain, La.

ADMINISTRATOR'S COLUMN

Time Off for a Healthy Perspective

On August 7, I granted an 8-hour time-off award to all permanent FSA state office and service center employees. This award recognizes both part-time and full-time field employees who have risen to the enormous demands of their jobs while providing the highest level of service to our Nation's farmers and ranchers.

FSA employees throughout the country often push themselves beyond reasonable limits to deliver the impossible in unbelievable timeframes. As we all know, field employees' workload has steadily escalated over the past few years, from Agricultural Marketing Transition Act-related duties to the ever more demanding Conservation Reserve Program signups. From increased loan demand to Consent Decree activities – it means more to do for FSA field staff.

Despite the heavy job responsibilities, all of you continue to expertly address challenges delivering new and existing farm and farm loan programs, while

facing limited personnel and financial resources. This fiscal year alone, FSA's field employees delivered 22 new programs, while capably tackling even more work brought about by an unrelenting series of natural disasters.

All of this effort has afforded little opportunity for field employees to catch up on backlogged work or to take leave. And, although I am making every effort to secure additional staffing and budgetary resources to relieve some of the burden in the upcoming fiscal year, our increased workload shows no sign of abating in the near future. In fiscal year 2001, FSA field employees will confront another tough loan season and more new programs to deliver.

As such, I want to remind you how important it is to keep our priorities straight. While the work we do is crucial for so many, taking much-deserved time off for ourselves and our families is necessary for our mental and physical health and to help maintain a positive outlook.

As we know, time-off awards and accumulated annual and compensatory leave don't do you much good unless you use them. Many field office employees' initial reaction to this might be that they don't have time to take off with so much work facing them. But we must realize that continually putting in long extra hours after the office closes or on the weekends is draining and unhealthy for even the heartiest employee.

The onus for employees' taking time off lies with FSA's managers as well. One of any manager's main responsibilities is the occupational health and safety of

all of their employees. Therefore, I urge all FSA field managers to ensure that every single employee not only has the opportunity to use the time-off award and take other appropriate leave, but is encouraged to do so.

Thanks again to all of you for your exceptional service and unselfish commitment to our customers. Your tremendous accomplishments have not gone unnoticed. The time-off award is but a small token of my utmost gratitude and respect for all FSA employees – our Agency's most valuable resource.



FSA NEWS

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Wisconsin State Office Spotlights Stress

by Jim Meisenheimer, Regional Public Affairs Specialist

Farmers aren't the only ones who face stress generated by the farm crisis. We all know that FSA employees feel it too – especially those who work with farmers firsthand. FSA programs can only go so far to help struggling producers. It's hard for FSA employees to accept that fact and know how to deal with farmers who face financial hardship.

The Wisconsin State Office, recognizing the psychological needs of FSA employees, is doing something about it. SED Doug Caruso and Outreach Specialist Susan Hunter arranged with a group of representatives from the Wisconsin Farm Center, the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison, and Family Service of Madison to present three self-help seminars to their state's FSA managers and employees last May. This group had already held workshops titled, "Responding to the Ongoing Farm Crisis – Creating a Farm Family Support Network" throughout the state for professional community caregivers who work with farmers and their families. The group quickly tailored the program specifically for FSA employees.

Studies show that during tough economic times, farmers typically work even harder, which can result in exhaustion, cognitive problems, and a higher incidence of accidents. Stress and fear of losing a farm can cause emotional loss of spirit, diminished self-esteem, and anger. Like death, losing a farm causes grief. UW found that farmers are one-and-a-half to two-times more likely to commit suicide than the general public, and older farmers are more at risk.

A discouraging statistic, and although FSA employees are not trained therapists, there are things we can do to help farmers and fellow employees



Susan Hunter and SED Doug Caruso arranged the seminars.

deal with stress. Roger Williams, a professor and chairperson of Professional Development and Applied Studies at UW, who led the sessions, emphasized the importance of listening and talking through problems with farmers and coworkers. "It's a good idea to know which agencies in your community can provide help to a person who seems depressed or mentions suicide," Williams added.

A CED attending a session related how, on a recent farm visit, he spoke with a depressed farmer for several hours. The CED persuaded the farmer to go with him to a hospital. A few days later the farmer met the CED and thanked him for his persistence.

Mike Bielke, an In-Home Family Therapist with Family Service of Madison, spoke about what to do when farmers become angry about their financial situations. "Don't take it personally. Try to understand what has happened to the farmer and acknowledge the anger." He added that every office should have a safety plan. When making farm visits, Bielke recommended that FSA employees practice safety and make sure their whereabouts are known to someone at the office.

Bielke underscored the need for FSA employees to alleviate their own stress and not feel guilty about a farmer's financial situation. "Exercise, listen to music – anything that helps relieve your tension," he suggested. Don't take your job home with you.

Jeanne Meier, Director of the Wisconsin Farm Center at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, spoke on the services available to Wisconsin farmers at no cost. The Wisconsin Farm Center provides several free services for farmers, including a toll-free hotline, farm credit advisers, farm mediation, the Farm Link program, and the Future Fields program.

Wisconsin State Office staff wanted all state employees, COC members, COC advisors, and field reporters to benefit from the self-help seminars. Since it wasn't feasible for everyone to attend the seminars, the State Office videotaped one of the sessions and provided a copy of the video and supporting resource material to each service center. Rural Development, NRCS, and other employees at each service center are also being invited to view the tapes with the FSA employees.

FSA SHOWCASES

continued from first page

agencies. SCIMS provides a basis to begin automating service center work processes and internal operations. Its information repositories will simplify execution of internal administrative and management tasks. SCIMS will help service centers better manage the delivery of customer service, saving time and effort on the part of both customers and service center employees.

Systematic Tracking for Optimal Risk Management (STORM)

STORM is a web-based application that eliminates the need for paper-based tracking of disaster event information reported by service centers. STORM allows authorized service center employees to input Flash Report and Damage Assessment Report (DAR) data online. Via the Internet, authorized individuals from any location can immediately view disaster information reported by their service center. STORM will enable other approved users at the local level to vote and comment on specific DARs.



STORM exhibitors Kay Niner and Ray McIlwain, WDC; and Keith Claussen, KCMO.

Joint Agency Exhibits:

Business Process Reengineering (BPR)

BPR service center pilot sites test and evaluate new hardware, software, and business processes prior to national roll-out. BPR pilot sites are working on implementing a communications network with common hardware and software that will enable USDA employees to provide service to USDA customers anywhere, anytime. Feedback from pilot testing is used to refine processes to ensure they meet the needs of USDA service center staff and customers.

Combined Administrative Management System (CAMS)

CAMS is a software database that provides a human resources management system for USDA's service centers. CAMS contains employee information, such as training taken and position title. CAMS interfaces with the National Finance Payroll Center in New Orleans and also provides self-service to employees through the Internet. USDA personnel offices currently use CAMS to service over 29,000 employees.

Electronic Access Initiatives (EAI)

EAI aims to make the web a mainstream way of doing business for USDA service centers. This includes implementing common

processes and technical architecture for web services. An essential part of EAI is the formation of three centralized web farms located in Fort Collins, Colo.; Kansas City, Mo.; and St. Louis, Mo. The web farm infrastructure will enable secure and private communications between the agencies and the public, our partners, program clients, and our own employees.

USDA Lending Kiosks

The lending kiosk is an interactive touch-screen computer display that informs people of USDA lending programs, helps determine eligibility for particular programs, and provides a contact point for additional information. The kiosk can work 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, to promote our programs and prequalify applicants. Currently, 9 Business Process Reengineering pilot sites use the kiosks, and other kiosks have been placed in more remote areas to give potential customers an opportunity to learn about USDA lending programs without traveling to a service center.

Mobile Service Center

The mobile office is a "service center on wheels" used to increase USDA presence in underserved areas. Equipped with telecommunications, an NT server, laptop computers, and printers, the mobile office allows full program delivery activities from virtually any location. The office is flexible, allowing partner organizations to also deliver services, improving the ability to meet collective needs of underserved populations. The two existing mobile service centers will be deployed by three 1890 universities, which will share the vans on an 18-month rotating schedule.

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Office Information Profile (OIP)

OIP is a web-based system developed as a joint resource for the service center agencies and their partner organizations. The database contains USDA site and office information. OIP tracks the movement and collocation of USDA offices at service center sites in accordance with the 1994 Reorganization Plan. The application provides management reporting capability, and a public interface provides contact information for USDA services to the general public. OIP also serves as the foundation for a number of other USDA information systems.

FSA PUBLIC WEBSITE FACTS FOR THE MONTH OF JULY

- An average of 10,000 people visit our website each weekday.
- There are an average of 150,000 hits each weekday.
- One-third of user sessions are from private industry.
- Ten percent of user sessions are from outside the U.S. and Canada.
- Ten percent of sessions are on Saturdays and Sundays.
- One-third of sessions are "after hours" from 5:01 p.m. to 7:59 a.m.



Source: KCMO Web Staff

Kansas City Makes the Move

Kansas City, Mo., is showing off something new on its landscape. A brand new building on Beacon Drive is now the home of approximately 1,500 USDA workers, including 1,100 FSAers. The single facility houses employees from 5 USDA agencies: FSA, RMA, OGC, FNS, and GIPSA. Employees moved from 9 different locations from March through mid-July.

Waymon Ponds, Director of FSA's Kansas City Administrative Office, says it took 2 years to build the 6-floor facility. Construction was completed February 29, on schedule and within budget. "The old main building on Ward Parkway wasn't able to house all of FSA, and we had no room for expansion," he explains.

"The new building has many advantages," says Ponds. "It will negate the need to travel among sites and improve communication within FSA and with other agencies. We will be able to consolidate some administrative func-



Kansas City's new building at 6501 Beacon Drive.

photo by Warren Lindsey

tions and save money used for leasing separate facilities." The building also sports a full-service cafeteria, fitness center, ESRA store, and a 600-person conference facility – amenities that were unavailable until now.

Plans are underway for an open house to mark the official grand opening of the building.

Listening Sessions Promote Workplace Strength

Secretary Glickman notes that, “Every agency, every county, every office needs to find a way to deal with issues of human relations before they get out of hand.” In response to the Secretary’s call for action, our workplace environment took a front seat in July when FFAS mission area employees and managers throughout the country participated in listening sessions. The sessions gave employees a chance to voice their concerns and help find answers for them.

During the sessions, managers listened while employees spoke about workplace attitudes, actions, and policies that were a source of concern to them. Every employee in the mission area had an opportunity to provide input. There was also a venue for employees to submit contributions anonymously – many people took advantage of this option.

After the meetings, four focus groups on accountability, civil rights, training, and workplace environment convened in Washington, DC to prepare a sum-

mary of employee concerns and recommendations. Focus group members, primarily nominated by various FFAS unions and employee associations, represented all levels of the FFAS mission area from across the country. The groups worked many hours to bring together thousands of pages from the listening sessions.

Under Secretary Schumacher presented a preliminary listening session report to the Secretary during the first week of August. At the same time, each group continued reviews and finalized a comprehensive report on August 18. This report was forwarded to the Secretary on August 22 and should soon be available to all FFAS employees.

Ron Holling, Assistant to EDSO, who chaired the project for FSA says, “The groups were faced with a mountain of information, and I was impressed with the quality product they produced from it. They took great pains to ensure that they passed on information accurately without watering it down, and FFAS presented their report to the Secretary

without edits or management changes.”

The findings reflected employee concerns throughout the country, including insufficient funding and staff, heavy workloads, management issues such as need for manager training, and concerns about the Federal versus county system and their different funding. During this process, every level of FSA management either personally heard or read respective listening session comments, and many SEDs and other managers have begun to address concerns within their span of control.

Holling notes that, “I know that this review occurred when FSA employees were extremely busy. However, I believe that great benefits will result, and I am confident that the issues raised will be addressed.” Administrator Kelly adds that, “This initiative will be a very important investment in the future of FFAS. We all have the responsibility to work together to make our workplace environment the very best we can.”

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Accountability Group. Back row: Penny Stevenson, FAS, WDC; Jane Neis, RMA, Mo.; Laurie Montgomery, FSA, WDC; Linda Werven, FSA, N.D.; and Judy Potter, FSA, Iowa. Front row: Joe Lopez, FAS, WDC; Yavatta Morris, FSA, WDC; and Eric Wenberg, FAS, WDC.



Civil Rights Group. Back row: Scott Bown, FSA, Utah; Marcia Bunger, FSA, S.D.; Sharon Thomas, FSA, Mo.; Leo Beatty, FSA, Miss.; Terri Franklin, FSA, Mo.; Patricia Wetmore, FAS, WDC; and Pamela Jackson, FSA, Mo. Front row: Pat Proebstel, FSA, Mont.; Shirley Moore, FSA, Ark.; Ann Asmus, FSA, N.M.; and Silva Fields, RMA, WDC. Not pictured: Pamela Steed, RMA, WDC.

photos by Eric Parsons

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Training Group. Sandi Davenport, FSA, WDC; Katherine Nishiurak, FAS, WDC; Clifton Parker, RMA, N.C.; Karen Denio, FSA, Nev.; and Emiko Purdy, FAS, WDC.



Workplace Environment Group. Ray Smart, FSA, Va.; Janet Casey, FSA, Texas; Lisa Brown, FSA, WDC; Mary Lou Tilton, FSA, N.J.; Clay Combes, FSA, Okla.; Andrea Pettijohn, FSA, Okla.; Pat Stackler, FSA, Del.; and Jim Williams, FSA, WDC. Not pictured: Mary Moore, FSA, Colo.; and Andrea Worrells, RMA, WDC.

“Crummy” Tires Make Great Playgrounds

by Mike Kaufman, Regional Public Affairs Specialist

Earth Day, held each April, may be long gone this year, but its dividends can reach far into the future. To illustrate, the Ohio FSA State Office staff participated in an Ottawa-Glandorf High School Earth Day event by delivering donated tires for recycling to a supermarket parking lot. The project, initiated by the Soil and Water Conservation District in Putnam County, Ohio, netted over 600 tires and the \$600 needed to recycle them. The tires were processed into 12,000 pounds of “rubber crumb” for playground mulch.

This method of recycling tires produces a safer playground material, as well as preventing air pollution that normally results from burning old tires. Since 1993, Ohio landfills have banned the dumping of used tires because the tires are nonbiodegradable, and when piled up, occupy a space that is 70 percent air. Tires also are notorious for working their way to the surface due to

the presence of methane gas in the landfills. With Ohio accumulating over 17 million used tires each year, stockpiles of old remnant tires present both a growing fire hazard and a continuous repository for stagnant water which breeds mosquitoes and disease. So processing, rather than piling, used tires has multiple environmental benefits.

Ohio FSA employees are proud to have participated in the project. Providing school children with safer playgrounds while improving the environment is a win/win project. Stewardship of the land has long been a hallmark of agriculture, and FSA will continue to promote environmental preservation.



Mike Kaufman and Tracy Ginther, an Ottawa-Glandorf High School student volunteer, at a tire collection site in Putnam County, Ohio.

photo by Kyle Kaufman

Perceptions of Farming

According to the marketing research firm Roper Starch Worldwide, farmers tend to think the public has a negative perception of farming, but a recent survey by Roper found this to be untrue:

- Eighty-five percent of consumers have a high opinion of the U.S. food industry, and 82 percent have a high opinion of farmers and agriculture.
- Roper asked focus group members to name the five professions they considered most important. Farming was not among them, but when they were asked, “Why didn’t you include farming? Don’t you like to eat?” they invariably asked, “Can I change my answer?”
- While polled farmers feel consumers hear only the negative about biotechnology in agriculture, the reality is that consumers often don’t know enough. Forty-one percent of consumers said they didn’t know if biotechnology has more benefits than drawbacks. Most polled consumers were openminded when given information about using biotechnology to improve food taste and nutritional value and to boost production.



Source: Southwest Farm Press

Answers to August’s Puzzle

E	M	P	I	R	E	S	T	A	T	E		B
S		E		A		E		T		G		U
P	R	A	I	R	I	E		E	R	G	O	T
Y		N		E			L		D			T
		U			T	R	E	E		D		E
P	A	T	I	O			M		P	E	A	R
U			R		A					E		
B	I	O	E	N	G	I	N	E	E	R	E	D



SHEEP FACTS

- Sheep have poor eyesight but an excellent sense of hearing.
- A lamb can identify its mother by her bleat.
- Sheep have no top front teeth but the roofs of their mouths are hard. This permits sheep to eat vegetation close to the ground and prevents them from pulling up plant roots.
- There are 150 yards (450 feet) of wool yarn in a baseball.
- One mature ewe produces 7 to 10 pounds of newly shorn wool a year – enough to make a man’s suit.

Source: CyberSpace Farm

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
September 4		Labor Day
September 12-14	Albuquerque, N.M.	Associate Administrator George Arredondo to attend Workload Measurement Training
September 14-15	Spearsfish, S.D.	Carolyn Cooksie, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs, to speak at the National Council of State Agricultural Finance Programs annual meeting
September 15-16	Lakewood, Colo.	Associate Administrator George Arredondo to visit the Colorado State Office
September 15 - October 15		Hispanic Heritage Month
September 19-20	New Orleans, La.	Associate Administrator George Arredondo to attend Workload Measurement Training
September 26-28	Kansas City, Mo.	Alex King, Acting Deputy Administrator for Commodity Operations, to attend USDA/FSA Domestic Industry Conference
September 27-29	Annapolis, Md.	Conference of State Executive Directors and State Committee Chairs

Note: The above is subject to change.