

# NEWS

## *West Virginia Launches Hay Drive for Florida Farmers*

In July, West Virginia FSA employees kicked off a local effort to collect donated hay for drought-stricken farmers and ranchers in Florida. Jefferson County employees in Ranson coordinated the effort to collect and transport the donated hay by truck to Florida. The hay filled more than eight semi-trailers. In fact, the 40 farmers who donated hay to this effort gave so much that eight tractor trailers weren't enough to carry it all. Several more tons await another drive, possibly in September. Said one organizer, "If the farmers are out of hay now, they'll be out of hay for the rest of the year. If they need more, we'll bring it down."

The campaign's inspiration came from two local farmers, Tyree Kable and Lyle Tabb. Kable saw the horror stories on TV about full hay sheds burned by fire; parched, fallow fields scorched by the sun; and dairy cattle starving for hay. The two approached Jefferson CED Mike Sienkiewicz with their idea. Sienkiewicz and other county office employees enthusiastically embraced the effort and set out to spread the word.

The campaign was coordinated with area farmers, who expressed their desire to help their Florida counterparts who lost large amounts of hay and forage. Sienkiewicz notes, "It's remarkable that in times of need farmers bond together to help each other — they're just a special breed of people."

Southern States Cooperative was the collection and loading point for the hay, and volunteers accepted donations to assist in off-setting the fuel



Volunteers help out with hay drive.



Larry Mitchell (left), representing the Administrator's Office, assists volunteers.

cost for hauling the hay. The generous \$5,000 raised for gas mostly came from non-farmers. Farm Aid donated \$1,000 of it. Co-organizer Tabb remarks, "The farmer response on this end was exactly what I expected, but that the general public would donate money was just great!"

Billy Burke, SED, West Virginia, made the trip to Florida, along with 20 other farmers. "Every farmer knows Mother Nature can be unpredictable," says Burke. And that's why he took leave from work and spent two days driving

to make the trip. He says he knows Florida farmers would do the same if help was needed in West Virginia.

The hay was offered to several Florida counties and was enough to feed 500 head of cattle for 25 days. Kathleen DeFord, Putnam County CED, watched trucks arrive and remarked, "It brings tears to your eyes. This is someone's hard work coming together." Tabb explains, "This is a people project, not a government one. There was no excuse not to help — it's just something farmers do."

### *Hay Net*

The National Office is involved in the hay effort as well. Administrator Kelly is encouraging all FSA employees to reach out to provide support to their local farmers. In August, Secretary Glickman introduced the Hay Net, a new program FSA is spearheading to match farmers and ranchers without enough hay to feed their drought-stressed livestock with those having surplus hay.

Farmers and ranchers who need hay can register at local FSA offices and receive a list of the closest producers with hay to spare, and vice versa. Farmers can then contact one other and make appropriate arrangements. The Hay Net will operate for six months.

## ADMINISTRATOR'S COLUMN

### *The Drive Towards Diversity in County Office Committees*

**A**utumn will soon be here again. And with that, a time of renewal for our public's voice in FSA as we once again gear up for county office committee (COC) elections.

I know the committee system has been under attack for its membership not being representational of the farming public. Some people feel the system is outdated and we should do away with it. I disagree. COCs are the farming community's unique opportunity to have direct input into Federal programs for the benefit of local farmers. And, we continue to make great strides toward ensuring that COCs are more representational of the community.

Due to state and county outreach efforts, for instance, we have seen a sharp increase in the participation of minority farmers. In 1998, 303 Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indian/Alaskan Natives served on COCs. This is a 78-percent increase from 1997's level of 170. We can all take pride in this achievement.

This was also a landmark year for the participation of women on COCs. Over the years, we have seen steady but slow increases with this group. But thanks to your stepped up efforts, participation of women increased from 594 in 1997 to 816 in 1998, or 37 percent. Many of you actively sought out women who are co-owners of farms and encouraged them to participate in the elections. This is important because while women often equally shoulder the responsibility for their farm's success, they have been traditionally under represented on COCs. This increased representation is an accomplishment that reflects well on all of us.

But we still have more to do. Since committee membership should reflect the diversity of the individuals served by the programs, we need to continue reaching out to under represented groups. We also want to encourage as many farmers as possible to vote. As we get closer to the October 26<sup>th</sup> deadline for nomination, please keep in mind that there are many avenues available for you to encourage a broad number of voters and candidates. Our recent national and state outreach training for SEDs and state outreach coordinators may have given you some ideas for this.

State and county office newsletters reach a broad sector of the community. Use them to emphasize that spouses can be eligible to vote and be nominated. Target mailings concerning elections to under represented groups, such as small, limited resource farmers. Feature articles that highlight women and minority committee members or their accomplishments in farming. Mention the upcoming elections in all public speaking engagements and to local radio and television stations. Reach out to all agricultural organizations, especially women and minority groups, and emphasize the importance of service on COCs.

COC members help administer farm programs that directly affect the health, welfare, and economic well-being of every American. The broader the participation by all levels of farmers, the greater the confidence the people will have in the committee system and its ability to represent everyone. Our COC members continuously serve the nation effectively and unselfishly. They serve out of commitment to other farmers and American agriculture.

#### **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, Steve Thompson.

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

### *Budget Update*

By now most of you are aware of Notice PM-2059 advising employees of possible reductions in force (RIF). Based on current budget estimates working their way through Congress, FSA will need to reduce both Federal and county office employment during fiscal year 1999. This means our Agency would have about 30 percent fewer FTE's than just a few years ago.

The unfortunate fact is that this is a real possibility. However, I want you to know that I am doing everything I can to reduce or eliminate these cuts. I am working with Secretary Glickman and Congress to restore some or all of the needed funds.

It is no secret that U.S. agriculture has not been running smoothly. We are seeing some of the lowest prices in

*Continued on next page*

many years coupled with various disasters across the country. One major effect of this has and will continue to be an increased workload for us.

Before leaving for the August recess, the Senate agreed to consider an amendment to the Department's fiscal year 1999 appropriation. This amendment would provide up to \$500 million to address disaster-related problems facing farmers and ranchers. The Secretary has informed the Senate that the funds could be used for Supplemental Crop Insurance Benefits, the Crop Pasture Flood Compensation Program, and Livestock Disaster Programs. This measure will soon go to a conference where differences in the Senate and House versions will be worked out.

In addition, on August 12<sup>th</sup>, President Clinton signed into law the Emergency Farm Financial Relief Act which allows

America's farmers to receive their entire year's worth of Production Flexibility Contract payments — worth more than \$5.5 billion — in one early lump sum. These measures will certainly translate into additional work for all of you. I know that and so does the Secretary, and we are doing everything possible to communicate that message to Congress.

In the event that we do not receive additional funds for salaries, we will need to reduce the workforce as soon as possible in the new fiscal year in order to minimize the impact. The longer we wait to reduce FTE's into fiscal year 1999, the less the savings. The less the savings, the more FTE's we will have to cut to meet our salary budget. That is why I needed to put out the notice now. For those of you who attended the recent NASCOE meeting, both Robert Springer, Executive Director for State Operations, and I discussed this in great detail.

This is one of the unpleasant parts of my job and I want to assure everyone that we are doing everything possible to prevent RIF's. We have asked the Secretary for early out and buyout authority. We are working with the Secretary and Congress to restore funds for salaries. But, if the relief we seek does not come, we must go ahead to minimize reductions.

I will keep you informed as the process moves forward.

## Have Mower, Will Travel

**N**ever thought those household chores your parents made you do would get you anywhere in life? That's not how Quinton Mitleff sees it. This Poinsett County, Ark. youth has turned a wealth of experience mowing his family's lawn into a springboard for his own summer business.

Mitleff, an 18-year-old high school senior, got the idea to start a lawn care business when he heard about FSA's Youth Loan Program through Fred Schweighart, his FFA advisor. Dennis Stephens, Farm Loan Manager in Poinsett County, keeps the local FFA chapters and their sponsors informed about the program.

Mitleff received a loan in 1997 and purchased a weedeater and riding lawn mower. Then, in Spring 1998, he obtained another loan to buy a second riding mower and a trailer to transport his equipment. This past summer, he kept eight lawns in tip-top shape.

Through his business and with help from FSA, Mitleff has developed skills in money management, organization, and recordkeeping. "Quinton is very responsible, often paying his loan installments ahead of schedule," says Stephens. And, last April, for the first time, Mitleff joined the millions of lucky Americans to file income tax returns.

Mitleff also spent time during the summer working at the local school bus shop helping prepare the buses for the upcoming school year. He plans to use his experience with that and repairing his own mowers to train in small engine repair and maintenance. "Mitleff has a knack for keeping equipment running smooth," Stephens says.



(left to right)  
Joni Cagle, Program Technician; Sandra Spears, Farm Loan Officer; Quinton Mitleff; and Fred Schweighart.

## District Director as Land Custodian

by Bruno Mangum, CC, North Carolina

**J**im Rouse's land is a model of environmental enhancement. Over the past five years, Rouse, District Director from Moss Hill, N.C., has implemented a series of conservation techniques on his 562-acre property. His efforts haven't gone unnoticed. The North Carolina Forest Service recently named him a certified Forest Steward, making him one of only three Lenoir County landowners to receive that honor.

The North Carolina Forest Service certifies landowners who manage and improve their properties to benefit wildlife, trees, water, soil, and other environmental resources. Rouse has done just that. He planted permanent and seasonal wildlife food plots, maintained ditch banks to benefit small game and water quality, and planted wind rows and wildlife corridors. He also installed grass waterways and set aside former cropland for small game cover and nesting areas.



Rouse (left) receives congratulations from Bert Noble, Lenoir County Ranger, on his qualification as a certified Forest Steward.

Rouse paid for all of this himself, except for the reforestation, for which he received cost sharing. Superior Wildlife Habitat Services, a local consulting company, furnished their services on habitat enhancement and reforestation of harvested trees that was crucial to rehabilitating his property.

Rouse's farm has been in the family for more than 200 years. He grows tobacco, wheat, corn, and soybeans

on 262 acres. Woodlands now encompass the other 300 where rabbit, quail, fox, bobcat, deer, raccoon, possum, and other wildlife now thrive. And, as part of the Wild Turkey Restoration Project, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission helped Rouse stock his property with wild turkeys. Three years ago, they released 16 turkeys on the farm. "There were never turkeys on this property in my lifetime," Rouse says. "Now, every time I visit the area I see a few more. We're up to about 25 now."

Rouse, a District Director since 1973 and long-time advisor to farmers on the benefits of conservation, genuinely respects his property. "This land really is not mine," he says. "I am just the custodian, the caretaker for now. My goal is to leave the land in better shape than when I got it — and it was in pretty good shape then. I only hope my heirs have the same attitude."

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## FSA Employee Finishes Big Ride

**B**rad Murray has finished the GTE Big Ride, a bike tour across America to raise money for the American Lung Association. He racked up 3,363 miles, and while not every minute was a joy, he says he'd jump at the chance to do it again.

Along the way, he put up with snow, hail storms, and tornadoes. He suffered heat exhaustion while riding over 100 miles in one day in Wyoming's 100-degree heat. And one of his wheels broke on a Sunday far from the nearest bike shop — when he was carrying other people's knapsacks and other gear. All in all, though, he had a terrific time.

"One thing I didn't realize was my lack of training for hills," Brad told FSA NEWS. "We don't have a lot of hills in Iowa, and it took a while to develop a whole set of muscles for going up mountains."

Brad arrived in Washington on August 1 and spent a few days seeing the sights. Now he's back at work in the Iowa state office, dreaming of the day he'll be able to hit the road again.



### AGRICULTURAL FACT:

We don't just eat or wear our agricultural products. They are also used in the manufacture of many everyday products including:

Health care — surgical sutures, x-ray film, pharmaceuticals, heart valves

Education — crayons, chalk

Manufacturing — solvents, detergents, adhesives

Construction — paints, tar, drywall

Personal Care — shampoo, toothpaste, lotions, cosmetics

Transportation — fuel, tires, antifreeze

—Source: American Farm Bureau

## Risky Business

by USDA Secretary Dan Glickman

**H**aving spent time recently in Texas, Oklahoma, Florida, South Carolina, and the Dakotas, I have talked to farmers who lost their family land and many more who are barely hanging on.

Whether the culprit is Mother Nature or the marketplace, folks in agriculture are hurting today because of circumstances far beyond their control. Our Nation must come to their aid.

There are a number of actions we can take:

Getting ample disaster assistance to farmers and ranchers must be a top national priority when Congress returns from its August recess.

We also need to jumpstart exports. U.S. agricultural trade is declining because many Asian economies (including some of our best customers) are in disarray. Until Asia recovers, exports are likely to struggle. Strong support for the International Monetary Fund, which is aiding Asia's revival, must be at the top of Agriculture's trade agenda. This is the most effective action we can take to boost exports. The President has pledged his support. Now, it is up to Congress to act.

We need to stitch a sturdy farm safety net. We know the farm bill works well when prices and exports are strong, but it was not built to deal with a one-two punch from Mother Nature and the marketplace. No one wants a return to the days of Government telling farmers what and how much to plant. But, our farm policy should take into account the fact that markets rise and fall, and Mother Nature can be mean.

USDA needs more flexibility to respond to changing market conditions. I am encouraged by the recent vote in Congress to allow USDA to advance market transition payments to farmers. I also want the ability to extend commodity loans during hard times.

Congress also should reverse the "one-strike" credit law which bars any producer who ever had a USDA debt forgiveness from receiving another Government farm loan. That is wrong. If a farmer is deemed creditworthy, that farmer deserves a second chance.

USDA is examining ways to fill in the gaps between crop insurance, disaster aid, and folks' ability to make a living on the land. These gaps are most apparent in regions where farmers have been hard hit by year after year of bad weather. We need a safety net that can ensure no farm family who makes prudent, responsible decisions loses their land to an act of God.

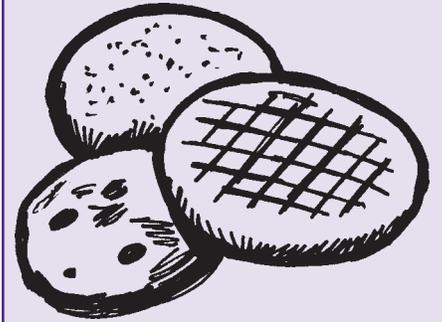
And, Congress should let USDA replenish its emergency livestock reserve. Right now, USDA has no authority to help ranchers devastated by disaster. This reserve would put USDA in a position to help.

Agriculture is risky business, but it is risk that our farmers and ranchers should not have to shoulder alone. I hope the lesson we all take away from this long, hot summer is: No matter how market oriented our farm policies become, there will always be a place for Government in agriculture. That place is making sure farm families have a secure future on the land.

### FOOD FACT:

The largest cookie ever made was a chocolate chip one with an area of 908 feet. It was made at the annual Riponfest in Ripon, Wis., on July 11, 1992. It was 34 feet in diameter and contained nearly 4 million chocolate chips. Got milk?

—Source: The Food Files



## **NATIONAL FARM SAFETY WEEK IS SEPTEMBER 20-26**

### **Be Protected From the Unexpected**

Studies show that the men and women who feed America face more than their fair share of on-the-job hazards. The National Safety Council reports that agriculture is “one of the three most dangerous occupations in the United States,” says Brad Rein, of USDA’s Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES). “Farmers and ranchers expect to come close to experiencing a serious injury sometime during their lives. This perception is based on reality. These high rates of injury, job-related illness, and disability increase the demand for farm safety education and research programs.”

USDA has been working in this area since the 1940s with support for its farm safety programs. Since 1975, CSREES has helped implement farm safety education by providing seed money that helps farm safety specialists develop programs across the country.

Farmers and farm workers who are unable to work due to injuries lose up to \$4 million annually. Minnesota farmer Kevin Paap and extension safety specialist John Shutske stress this when they meet with state farm insurers. Their goal is to convince farmers to make safety a priority.

Some of the most important safety tips include using a roll-over protective structure and safety belt on tractors, using machinery guards and personal protective equipment, such as hard hats and safety shoes, and conducting safety checks around the farm.

People who have experienced injuries firsthand carry a strong message.



Ashley Lerch is a 12-year-old Iowa girl confined to a wheelchair since the age of three due to a farming accident. She tells her story to groups of children and adults alike. Lerch is just one of 27,000 children who are injured on a farm or ranch each year. An estimated 300 children die each year from farming accidents.

Fortunately, more programs are being designed to teach kids about farm safety and how to avoid potential injuries. The Fair Labor Standards Act for Agriculture now requires all 14- and 15-year-olds to be certified before operating hazardous machinery. In Maine, for instance, hospitalizations from harvest-related injuries dropped more than 50 percent since crop specialist Steve John began giving safety presentations at high schools. Because children are now learning more about farm safety than in generations

past, they may be more alert to potential dangers in their adult years.

People of all ages can benefit from farm safety programs. For example, research shows farmers over the age of 65 account for up to 70 percent of farm accidents in Kansas. Therefore, programs such as Older Kansans in Agriculture have been developed to alert these farmers about potential farming hazards and, hopefully, lead to a decrease in the numbers of injuries and fatalities.

Rein says, “The success of all types of agriculture is tied to the level of safety in the workplace. This good measure of safety is one of the few things that can ensure a sustainable future for American agriculture and protect the millions of people who enter the agricultural workplace every day.”

## Thanks to the Interns

Each summer, students all across the country serve internships with FSA. The Agency gets some extra help from bright, efficient students who bring a fresh perspective and insight to our work. The students gain college credit, practical work experience to complement their majors, an exploration into career possibilities, and summer income.

Vera Byers, intern coordinator stationed in Kansas City, Mo., handles the various nationwide internship programs. She reviews submitted applications and refers them to field offices, which then choose interns based on their qualifications.

Alfreda Terrell, Human Resources Staff, coordinates the internship programs here in Washington. She says FSA recruits students in several ways. The Agency advertises in the Departmental Summer Intern Brochure that is circulated to hundreds of colleges across the country. FSA includes internship information in field announcements and keeps college career centers informed of opportunities. Students who apply are selected from job announcements contained in those brochures.

FSA offers a variety of internship programs through USDA. One program, through the Urban League, introduces 14 through 19-year-olds to a professional work environment. FSA hosted three Urban League students in Washington this summer.

Another program, run through the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), is targeted toward Hispanic students across the country. Milagros Hernandez, an Outreach Programs Staff intern, found out about HACU through a flier at her college, University of Maryland. Hernandez spent her summer creating spreadsheets of agricultural census materials, among other duties.

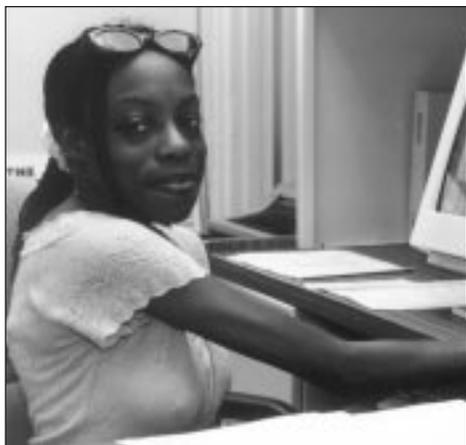
Monique Myrie became an intern through the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP). WRP is generally targeted towards persons with disabilities. Each spring, WRP employees conduct interviews on college campuses with interested students. Myrie is working towards an associates degree at Montgomery College in Maryland. Her job with FSA involves answering phones, preparing letters, xeroxing, light typing, and filing. Myrie hopes to continue working at FSA through the fall while attending college.

Sam Appelbaum, a communications major at George Mason University in Virginia, also entered the internship program through WRP. Appelbaum works in the Public Affairs Staff as a writer and editor. "This position has increased my writing and interpersonal skills, and it's been nice working in such a professional environment," he says.

Another Washington summer intern, Kim Speight, is on her third internship with FSA because "the program offers a lot to college students." Speight, who attends the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, is considering a career in agribusiness. At FSA, Speight performs clerical tasks and also provides backup during vacation periods.

The association between FSA and the interns often doesn't end with summer. Some interns stay on to work during fall classes or the holiday season. Some also return through the Student Career Experience Program, designed to train students in their field of study.

The internship programs are mutually beneficial to FSA and the students. It is a win-win situation for all involved.



Monique Myrie



Sam Appelbaum



Kim Speight

## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
September 2-3	McAllen and Corpus Christi, Texas	Administrator Kelly to attend farm forums
September 15	Washington D.C.	USDA Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15-October 15) Program
September 20-26		Farm Safety Week
September 21	St. Louis, Mo.	Carolyn Cooksie, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs, to attend environmental training
September 26-30	Charleston, S.C.	Administrator Kelly to attend NASDA annual convention
September 30	Victoria, Texas	Administrator Kelly to attend South Texas Cotton and Grain Association meeting
October 1-2	Kansas City, Mo.	Carolyn Cooksie to attend KACS and KASCOE annual convention.

*Note: The above is subject to change.*