

## FSA Does Good

**D**id you know that people who volunteer tend to live four years longer than those who don't? Why do Americans devote 20 billion hours of their time each year to helping others? Why are 31 percent of all Americans involved in charitable activities, such as helping the poor, the sick, or the elderly? It's because they've all learned that reaching out and helping others enriches their own lives.

The following stories are just a few examples of FSA employees with community spirit. These folks have realized that by reaching out to their neighborhood, their church, the environment, the arts – or any place that needs help – they always get back more than they give. Sincere volunteerism fulfills dreams, touches souls, alleviates sorrows, and shrinks needs.



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### Up to Their Ears in Iowa and Indiana

Crawford County, Iowa, CED Dave Kuhn removes silk from ears of sweet corn. Farmers Dale and Kathy Schneider of Crawford County kindly donated 80 bushels of corn in July to the Sioux City Gospel Mission. FSA employees and others volunteered to pick and husk the corn.

In addition, in Vigo County, Ind., farmers Larry Gormong and Terry Hayhurst donated \$300 worth of corn from a 1½-acre site. About a dozen Indiana FSA employees picked the corn for charities, including a boys' club and a community center. Despite the hot sun, volunteers worked quickly to beat hungry raccoons and bugs to the harvest. "It can get a little itchy and sweaty, but it's worth it," said Troy Hobson, CED for Monroe/Owen/Brown Counties, Ind.



photo by Janelle Smith

### Special Delivery from Louisiana to New Mexico

CEDs Patrick Babineaux and Jeff Dufresne load up a ton of goods donated by USDA employees of the Tangipahoa/St. Helena Parishes Service Center. These Service Center workers might not know the New Mexico residents who were struggling to recover from a devastating fire last

May, but it didn't matter. For 2 weeks, 32 employees cleaned out their closets, gathering clothes, shoes, baby items, blankets, toiletries, etc.

Babineaux and Washington/St. Tammany Parishes CED Jeff Dufresne delivered all the donated items to the Louisiana State Office. The items were combined with other donations, and the Forest Service shipped the goods to New Mexico.

**ADMINISTRATOR'S COLUMN** by Associate Administrator George Arredondo

## Listening Sessions Update

The September issue of *FSA NEWS* featured an article on our recent FFAS listening sessions. As you know, FFAS employees nationwide completed more than 3,500 listening sessions in which you expressed concerns on various workplace issues. A report summarizing the listening sessions is available on the FFAS Intranet at: <http://dc.ffasintranet.usda.gov/pas/library/listen/default.htm>. I encourage all employees to review the report.

While you will be hearing much more about the listening sessions results in the coming months – and seeing action – I would like to follow up on our progress and highlight some common themes.

I would first like to thank the 38 individuals who participated in the working groups. These people spent three weeks analyzing and summarizing your comments. This was not easy considering the seriousness of the task. The groups developed insightful recommen-

dations on tough issues – recommendations that will be used as a basis for direction and real improvements.

Many of your concerns stemmed from a problem that has plagued FSA for a long while – lack of sufficient funding and permanent staff to support the ever-increasing program workload. “With the tremendous workload, setting priorities is an impossible task,” one employee said. This adverse situation leads to stress and low morale. One employee noted, “Staffing shortage has greatly impacted everything from morale to quality of work and customer service.”

Employees were also concerned about the shortage of adequate funds for program training, which many see as a lack of investment in efficient program delivery. You also see a need for formal manager training in such areas as supervisory skills and communication, much of this due to lack of information sharing. For instance, field staffs say they are often not advised about new programs in a timely manner. “County offices should be informed and trained on programs before sign up periods are announced to the public,” was one comment. You are also distressed about insufficient program management and accountability.

Employees believe that our mission area needs to work harder to expand workforce diversity and ensure that women, minorities, and persons with disabilities are represented at all levels of management and at higher grades. Many of you expressed that increased training and opportunities for advancement for these groups would help offset this imbalance. Employees also feel division at several levels: between Washington and field employees, federal and county employees, and between agencies.

Many of you believe the Service Center concept has proven successful in serving our customers. However, numerous employees find the open space configuration somewhat disruptive and lacking in privacy for both customers and staff.

There were some positive notes, too. Employees appreciate flexible work schedules, the acquisition in the field of modern computing equipment, and the establishment of a National EEO/CR Advisory Council. You stressed the importance of publishing our mission area’s many positive program and civil rights accomplishments. Employees also praised job advancement and training activities like job mentoring and group manager training. You also noted that you should be recognized for the accomplishments we have made, and I can personally attest that we have come a long way.

But we have a long way to go. I don’t pretend to have an easy fix for the complex issues brought forward in the listening sessions. And I understand the frustration of many of you who believe the listening sessions were just another “feel good” management activity that will soon be brushed aside. But this is not so. The Administrators of FFAS are dedicated to resolving problems affecting our work environment.

I will work with Administrator Kelly to ensure that each level within our mission area demonstrates accountability by working with employees to address concerns within our control. Given the nature of the issues, this will take some time. Administrator Kelly and I will develop a process to ensure that others understand the importance of these issues.

We cannot accomplish this, or any other task, without your individual

### FSA NEWS

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support, leadership, and commitment to facilitate improving FSA. We all have to be accountable for our actions.

The working groups suggested we fix timelines for resolving issues with measurable accomplishments. The

agencies are following up on this by reporting to the Under Secretary actions taken by October 2, with quarterly progress reports thereafter. Just as importantly, we will report back to you on our progress. The open discussion fostered by the listening sessions

represents a positive step forward in finding the right balance for a healthy work environment.



## Leaders Among Us

by Anne Belleville, Program Technician, Rhode Island County Office, R.I.; and FSA NEWS Editorial Board Member

**F**ive of us FSAers are ready to tackle the world. We participated in the USDA Graduate School's Aspiring Leader Program (ALP), a leadership development course for grade level 5-7 employees. The 6-month program strengthens managerial skills, such as oral and written communication, decisiveness, problem solving, self-direction, and customer service.

For ALP, we participated in training sessions and team activities, and read books relating to management. We conducted manager interviews and completed shadowing assignments with Federal managers. We also performed a 30-day developmental assignment at a host agency and completed several self-study exercises. All of these requirements had a timetable for completion, and we submitted reports to the Graduate School. Keep in mind that we achieved all of these goals while also performing our regular work duties.

We started ALP last January with a week-long orientation session in Williamsburg, Va. Group activities helped us learn about our strengths and weaknesses, personality types, conflict management styles, and the skills needed for effective communication. Mother Nature provided a few snow days which allowed extracurricular time for fun activities like playing games,

watching a movie, and making a snowman. I was involved in a cut-throat "Go Fish" card game, if you can imagine that!

In March, Lancaster, Pa., hosted "The Teams at Work Session," focusing on teambuilding, cultural awareness, and customer service. Group exercises, visual aids, and role playing helped us better understand these areas. This time the weather cooperated – sunny and warm. During the evenings, we took advantage of the region's numerous factory outlets. Many people went home with a lot more baggage than they came with. Being a seasoned shopper, I brought an extra carry-on.

The final session, in Hunt Valley, Md., consisted of the "Presentation/

Transitioning Workshop" and our graduation ceremony. This week in July was the culmination of all we learned during the course, while preparing us to use our newly acquired knowledge. As the days passed, the realization set in that this journey was nearing its end. All of our hard work and effort were rewarded on graduation day. This meant saying goodbye to the many people I had come to know and shared so many wonderful experiences with. Needless to say, I had my pack of tissues handy.

The program was well worth my time. I learned skills I need to work effectively in a team environment while remaining committed to personal development. Congratulations to all my fellow FSA ALP graduates!



photo courtesy of Sherry Miller

FSA ALP graduates Sherry Miller, Maine State Office; Michelle Ontiveros, Pinal County Office, Ariz.; Diane Clayton, South Dakota State Office; April Boop, Greene County Office, Ohio; and Anne Belleville, Rhode Island County Office, R.I.

## FSA DOES GOOD

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photo courtesy of Hoard's Dairyman

### Rhode Island Gives Cows a New Home

Portsmouth, R.I. FSA State committee member Louis Escobar stands in front of his cattle's new digs. In July 1998, Escobar saw part of his livelihood go up in flames. That's when his barn, used to milk 60 dairy cattle, caught fire. Thankfully, no one was injured and all the cows were safe, but the barn was destroyed.

Escobar is dedicated to agriculture and keeps his urban community informed about the industry's ups and downs. His neighbors, appreciating these efforts, rallied around Escobar with fundraisers to help rebuild his barn. Many FSA employees participated, including Rhode Island SED Paul Brule who helped Escobar locate a farm to temporarily milk his cows. State committee member Ruth James helped organize a fundraising dinner and auction that brought in \$7,500. Escobar received a total of \$125,000, plus donated materials and services to build an even better barn with 70 stalls and hospital pens. "I never dreamed the community would respond like this," said Escobar.



### Nebraska Fishes for a Cure

Syracuse, Neb. USDA Service Center employees teamed up in July for the Otoe County, Neb. Relay for Life to benefit the American Cancer Society.

USDA staffers and their families left to right, back row, are: Andrew and Wes Finkner, FSA; Janene Heyen, FSA; Sherry Stubbendeck, FSA;

Susan Eisenhauer, FSA; Betty Teten, FSA; Deana Reichmuth, FSA; and Roger Reichmuth, NRCS. Front row: Judy James, RD, Team Leader; Mary and Elizabeth Finkner, FSA; and Audrey, Cathy, and Clayton Rakes, FSA.

The team, which had someone walking on a track from 6 p.m. on Friday to 8 a.m. Saturday, raised \$1,100. The team also won an award for their "fishy" campsite theme. The team festively decorated tents in their campsite with fishing bobbers, tackle boxes, poles, and nets. From one special pole dangled a wooden fish that read, "Fishing for a Cure." The team members wore fishing hats and used fish-shaped flashlights as they walked around the track.

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## Truckloads of Corn in Tennessee

Tennessee SED Dave McDole (left) helps sort corn donated by Tommy Marrison. Marrison, a farmer in Benton County, Tenn., had a problem when he couldn't harvest 5,000 ears of corn last July. FSA had a solution. Benton County CED Mark Hargis and his staff,

along with NRCS, volunteered to pick the \$800 worth of corn. As CED Hargis picked the corn, he wondered about the fact that countless people are still in need in this country. He said, "We're so well off that we fail to see the need of so many."

The staff delivered the corn in two truckloads to Nashville. Tennessee State Office employees then sent the corn on its way to two local charities – Second Harvest and the Nashville Union Mission. Mission representative Justin Mathews thanked all involved. "It is only through the help of people like yourself that we are able to continue providing food and hope," he said.

### OCTOBER IS NATIONAL PIZZA MONTH

- Americans eat 100 acres of pizza each day, or 350 slices per second.
- Kids between the ages of 3 and 11 prefer pizza over all other foods for lunch and dinner.
- Pepperoni is America's favorite topping. Anchovies rank last on the list of favorites.
- More pizza is consumed during Super Bowl week than any other week of the year.
- The world's largest pizza was created in 1987 by Lorenzo Amato and Louis Piancone of Havana, Florida. The pie measured 140 feet across and weighed 44,457 pounds. It was cut into 94,248 slices and eaten by 30,000 spectators.



Source: PIZZA TODAY magazine

## Kansas Sticks To It For A Good Cause

by Trish Smith, Outreach Coordinator, Kansas State Office

FSA employee Terry Hawk bravely faces the needle with a supportive American Red Cross worker at his side.

Hawk is one of 52 Kansas State Office employees who have donated blood in three State Office blood drives over the past year.

The State Office Employees' Committee organized the first drive in June 1999. The effort was in response to a Red Cross plea for blood donations to

help replenish deleted stocks used for injured victims of the May 1999 Haysville, Kan. tornado.

Employees have donated 52 units of blood, enough to help 156 patients! Based on employees' marvelous response, the State Office intends to conduct future blood drives.



photo by Roger Lemmons

## Outreach Works on Lake Sakakawea

by Jim Meisenheimer, Regional Public Affairs Specialist

Outreach is about building lasting relationships and working together to solve problems. North Dakota SED Scott Stofferahn put this knowledge to the test in June. That's when he, along with Rural Development head Charles Mertens and NRCS head Tom Jewett, conducted a USDA conference with the Great Plains Tribal Nations. The conference setting was the picturesque Lake Sakakawea on North Dakota's Ford Berthold Indian Reservation.

Conference participants included tribal leaders, farmers, and ranchers from 6 North Dakota and 3 South Dakota tribes. Representatives from FSA, NRCS, Rural Development, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Fort Berthold Community College, the State Department of Agriculture, and the State Extension Service attended.

The conference focused on USDA programs, Native American culture, and the present and future state of agriculture for Great Plains tribes. Conference attendees had some tough questions for USDA staff on program eligibility and delivery, among other topics.

Tribal Chairman Tex Hall called for USDA to work more closely with the

tribes, the farmers, and their families. He said, "Agriculture is the backbone of our economy, and we need to keep the producers on the land. We need to put our heads together and come up with solutions."

Jerry Lunak, Intertribal Agriculture Council, said that many Native American producers become frustrated with programs not tailored specifically for them. The USDA heads responded with suggestions to make the programs better serve their needs and requested attendees' help in working on this.

Ross Racine, director of the Intertribal Agriculture Council, emphasized that, "USDA must listen to what the barriers are for Native Americans and figure out ways to remove them." Racine highlighted the need to expose the tribes to new programs and ideas. "Someone has to be there on a daily basis to answer questions. If I don't see you again in three years, that's not outreach." Racine also spoke of the progress USDA has made over the last few years. "At a similar meeting in 1994, the question was: 'What is USDA?' Six years later, the number of people participating in USDA programs has probably quadrupled."

This conference was an important step forward for USDA. "If you say no to someone in the office out here, they won't return," said Stofferahn. "We want them to come back again. Is there a reason some Native Americans are not taking advantage of our programs? Let's find out why and resolve the problem. That's what much of this conference was about."

Stofferahn added that, in the past, USDA officials here didn't focus on service for



photo by  
Glenda Embry  
Tribal Chairman  
Tex Hall.

Native American tribal groups. But now he and the Rural Development and NRCS state heads are encouraging USDA employees to be more assertive – to go out and meet with people face to face. "While the three of us are not the first USDA directors to set foot on a reservation, I can categorically state that USDA is asserting its presence here more than any other time in history. USDA's relationship with Native American customers has never been better."

Don Staudinger, state FSA outreach coordinator said, "We were pleased with the Native American turnout at the conference. We had a lot more producers than government representatives. Staudinger praised state outreach worker Valerie Martinez for her tireless efforts to plan the conference.



photo by Glenda Embry  
Tom Jewett, NRCS; Scott Stofferahn, FSA; Charles Mertens, RD.



photo by Jim Meisenheimer  
Horses near the Fort Berthold reservation. Horses are a way of life for tribal members.

## Challenges Don't Stop Love

**F**SA employee Bill Becker and his wife Brenda have caught the eye of South Dakota Senator Tim Johnson. Johnson nominated the Beckers to be "Angels in Adoption," a Congressional Coalition on Adoption honor that recognizes adoption role models across the country.

Bill, Farm Loan Manager in Redfield, S.D., and Brenda went through years of infertility procedures with no success. Finally, they decided to adopt and began the lengthy and expensive process of adopting a child from another country. "The paperwork was endless," says Bill. "You're dealing with a social worker here and one in another country, so everything has to be translated."

It all became worth it in December 1991 when they got the call that a 10-month-old girl in Chile needed loving



Bill Becker.

parents. The 3-month process had stretched into 9 months by the time they were told they could travel to Chile to pick up 19-month-old Vanessa.

In 1998, wanting a little brother for Vanessa, the Beckers started the

paperwork again and were gifted with 6-month-old Damon from Guatemala. Vanessa and Damon are healthy and happy in their new home. Nine-year-old Vanessa wants to learn Spanish and some day visit Chile to help people there.

The Beckers estimate their costs at \$50,000 for both children. "We definitely used creative money management," Brenda said. "It's too bad that most couples who want to adopt can't afford it. You can get a low-interest loan for college, but not to adopt a child." Asked if they would do it all again, the Beckers agreed it was definitely worth the time and money. Brenda says, "Mother's Day used to be hard for me, but now it's really something to celebrate."

*Thanks to the American News, Aberdeen, S.D.*



photo by Virginia Vernon

## Watch Where You're Throwing That!

Was it the brightly colored corn husks, or possibly the candy the float riders threw to onlookers that got them noticed? Either way, the USDA Service

Center in Rock Port, Mo. won first prize for their float in July's Atchison County, Mo. Fair. USDA employees decorated

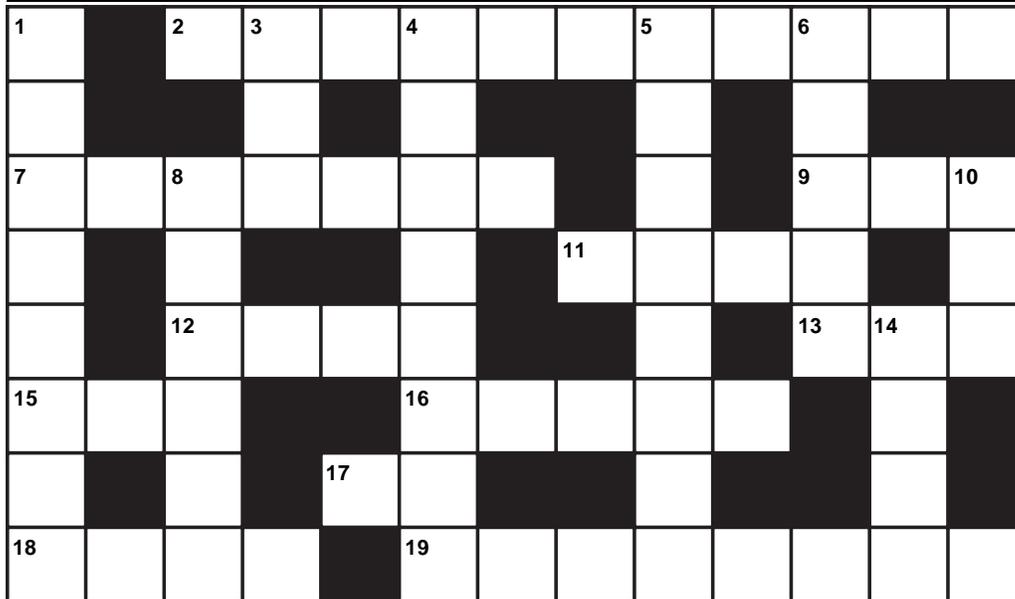
the float with hay bales and corn stalks and also passed out service center information directories to the crowd.

### PUMPKIN FACTS

- Pumpkins originated in Central America.
- They were once thought to remove freckles and cure snake bites.
- They range in size from less than a pound to over 1,000 pounds.
- They are 90 percent water.
- 80 percent of the pumpkin supply in the U.S. is available in October.

*Source: Lagniappe, Louisiana FSA State Office's monthly newsletter*

## OCTOBER FSA CROSSWORD



**ACROSS**

- 2. Are these field depressions caused by UFOs or are they a hoax?
- 7. Cotton can be woven into this soft napped fabric great for taking naps on
- 9. Plant photosynthesis agent
- 11. Some WWII flying \_\_\_\_\_ became crop dusters after the war
- 12. In 1996, producers applied for AMTA by signing these
- 13. This USDA office prevents fraud and abuse in Department operations
- 15. Poke holes in your leather belt with this
- 16. This company provides the backbone for the USDA Internet network
- 17. Soup \_\_ salad?
- 18. \_\_\_\_\_ as pie
- 19. Unlike other varieties of bats, the fruit bat relies on this rather than echo-location to maintain orientation

**DOWN**

- 1. For the Common Computing Environment, FSA pilot sites are using cutting-edge \_\_\_\_\_ that will eventually be used by all service centers
- 3. Film star \_\_\_\_ Tin Tin acted superbly in a variety of western movies
- 4. This cooker uses steam to quickly cook soups, meats, and vegetables, etc. in heat above the boiling point
- 5. FSA programs assist farmers and these
- 6. Cowboys in a rodeo use this to rope calves
- 8. The partly fermented juice of these produces hard cider, while their fully fermented juice produces vinegar
- 10. Old horse
- 14. Mosquito bites might make your livestock do this

## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
Month of October		Disability Employment Awareness Month
October 5-6	Owensboro, Ky.	Carolyn Cooksie, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs; and Robert Springer, Executive Director for State Operations; to attend joint KASCOE/KACS/CASE meeting
October 9		Columbus Day
October 16-19	Nashville, Tenn.	John Williams, Deputy Administrator for Management, to attend Human Resources Planning Meeting
October 17-18	Linthium Heights, Md.	Associate Administrator George Arredondo to attend Partnership Council Roundtable
October 25-28	Louisville, Ky.	Administrator Kelly to attend 73 <sup>rd</sup> Annual FFA Convention

*Note: The above is subject to change.*