

NEWS

Milking Grass for All It's Worth

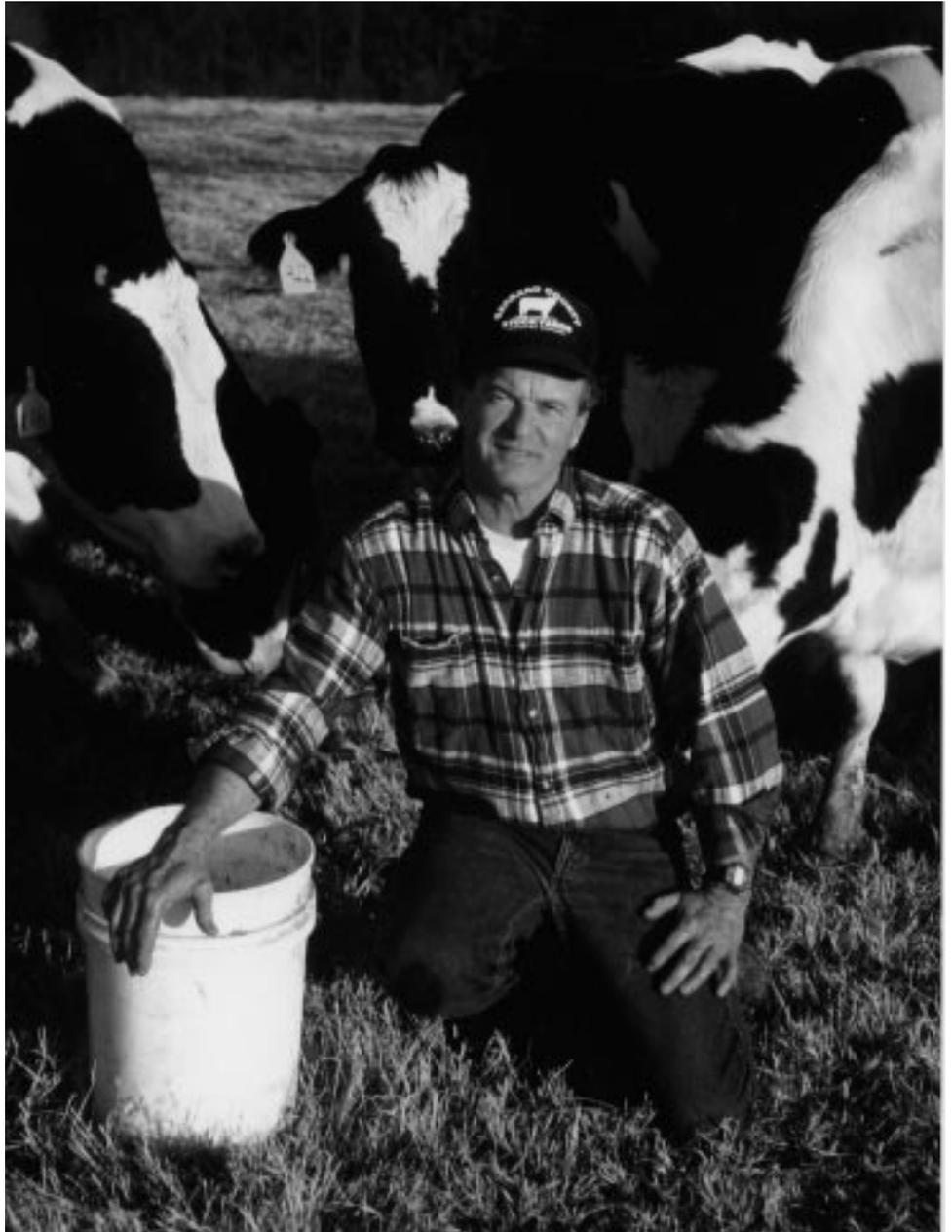
What's the secret to a successful dairy? Just make sure it stays April all year 'round!

Dairy farming can be a tough business. Just ask FSA County Committee member Tom Trantham. Ten years ago the Pelzer, South Carolina, dairyman was almost ready to throw in the towel and get a 9-to-5 job. Today, he's doing just fine, thank you, and other dairy farmers are lining up to learn his secrets.

Tom's problem wasn't that he didn't know what he was doing. He had one of the top-producing herds in the State. The trouble was that his profit margin was razor-thin, and he was working 16-hour days just to stay even. Then, one year he couldn't meet the requirements for his annual operating loan from the Farmers Home Administration. As a result, he had to turn his cows out to pasture.

That's when he discovered a cheaper, easier, and healthier way to feed cattle. Tom soon found that when he grazed cattle instead of feeding them hay or silage, they produced more milk. And the biggest increase came in April, when the sweet new grass came up.

Putting cows out to pasture not only cost less, it involved a lot less work and could result in better-fed, higher producing, and healthier animals. And Tom noticed that if he kept moving the cows from paddock to paddock, they would naturally graze on the most nutritious young growth, and leave the older, tougher grass alone.



Tom Trantham poses proudly with some of his cows. Since he started his program of feeding them on new growth pasture, he says, "People always tell me how nice and healthy they look."

Administrator's Column



Fiscal Year '97 Budget Realities

Nobody likes being the bearer of bad news, and I am no exception. One topic we can't avoid, however, is the budgetary impact on our payroll and what it means for Agency staff at all levels. Quite simply, we are forced to reduce the number of FSA employees. We have no choice.

The problem is twofold: Congress appropriated less money for salaries than we asked for, and the 1996 Farm Bill reduced our workload in field offices, although there is still a lot of work to do. This is on top of the streamlining that began with reorganization in fiscal year 1994 and personnel reductions that took place then. I had hoped that those actions, coupled with normal attrition and buyout incentives, would meet whatever staffing problems might arise. Unfortunately, it didn't turn out that way.

Fewer employees than we had hoped took the buyouts. Also, the people who chose buyouts or early retirement were not evenly distributed around the country based on workload. This means that some areas will face more RIFs than others. We have, however, worked very hard to make sure that reductions, including buyouts, have the same impact in proportion to the workload in each area. The bottom line is that we have to reduce the workforce by between 250 and 300 employees out of about 20,000. Notices should go out soon to those affected employees.

I realize that some people believe that county workers are taking the brunt of the downsizing. This is not the case. Including the reductions now in progress, the overall impact on the number of Federal and county

employees is about equal. Since 1993, we've reduced the Federal workforce by about 17 percent and the county personnel by about 20 percent. The 3 percent difference is because the 1996 Farm Bill reduced the need for some land measurement services and annual sign-ups, and eliminated the sale of catastrophic crop insurance from county offices in 14 States. Also, credit is a new function of county offices as a result of reorganization. Ag credit managers came to us as Federal employees, though seriously understaffed in many instances.

So far, when compared on a percentage basis, the biggest hit has actually occurred in Washington, D.C. From 1993 and including the reductions now taking place, we have reduced the Headquarters workforce from 1,333 FTEs to 906. This is a reduction of 32 percent compared to a county office workforce reduction of 20 percent.

These changes are something we cannot avoid. We are doing our utmost to be as fair as we know how to be. We understand that some hardworking and loyal employees will face disruptions in their careers and see their financial stability threatened—through no fault of their own. We will do our best to minimize this distress and make this transition as smooth as possible. The Congress's reductions in funding for salaries was not good for our employees, and not good for America's farmers either. We all know, however, that Congress holds the purse strings, and we can spend only what Congress appropriates. I don't like what we have to do, but there are no other choices. We have to play the hand we are dealt.

Grand Buntrock

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Risk Management Employees Help Heal Chernobyl Victims

Johnnie Purdue, Director of FSA Risk Management's Compliance Division in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Cliff Parker, Chief of the Underwriting Services Branch, figured it would be an experience to remember when they decided to sponsor the visits of a couple of Belarussian children to their community. They got all they bargained for, and more.

When the Number Two nuclear reactor at the Chernobyl power plant blew up in 1986, it spread a large cloud of radioactive gas and particles over much of eastern Europe. But although the radioactive fallout came down as far away as Scandinavia, it was the people of Belarus, a now-independent former Soviet "republic" next door to Ukraine, who felt the brunt of the disaster. More than 70 percent of Chernobyl's fallout settled on the tiny country, contaminating water supplies, affecting crops, and being breathed in by livestock and humans. The result has been an epidemic of radiation-related health problems.

The radiation has been especially cruel to Belarussian children. Its lingering effects cause a number of ailments, from vitamin deficiencies to immune system problems, thyroid disorders, birth defects, and leukemia. The poor condition of the country's health care system and a lack of proper nutrition make a bad situation worse: many children are just not getting proper medical treatment.

Johnny and Cliff learned about the sponsorship program at their church, when someone from the American Belarussian Relief Organization came to speak. The group brings sick kids to the United States for six weeks at a time to get medical treatment, a chance to heal, and some good food



Three of the sixty Belarussian children sponsored by North Carolina families this summer frolic in a public swimming pool. Inna, the girl on the right, was sponsored by FSA Risk Management employee Cliff Parker. "They practically lived in the swimming pool," says Cliff.

in their bellies. With the blessings of their wives Vi and Debbie, they each agreed to have a Belarussian child as a guest in his home for a six-week stay. By so doing, they accepted the responsibility of providing round-the-clock supervision, getting the child to medical appointments—some as far as 90 miles away—and even giving financial and spiritual help.

Sixty children between the ages of seven and fourteen arrived in Washington, D.C., on July 6, and were bused to Zebulon, North Carolina, to meet the families with whom they'd be staying. The kids seemed tired and disoriented after the long journey, but it didn't take long for them to perk up. In a couple of weeks they were having the time of their lives, enjoying the same pastimes as the local kids,

and stuffing themselves with fresh fruits and vegetables. One boy ate 17 bananas in a single day.

"The girls took right away to Barbie dolls," says Cliff, "And the boys love the Chicago Bulls, and especially Michael Jordan." All of the kids enjoyed sightseeing trips in North Carolina's mountains, and some have gone on more extensive trips or spent time at a church summer camp.

It hasn't all been easy—few of the children speak any English, and there was only one interpreter for the whole group. And, of course, there have been the usual crises and troubles that come with any kids. But when it was finally time to return home, the

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FSA AmeriCorps Members and Area Volunteers Mark National Week of Food Recovery Efforts



Illinois River Valley Project team members present gleaned peas to Secretary Glickman for the Chicago Food Bank. Shown at far right is Rod Atterberry, AmeriCorps Coordinator, and Stephen Scates, SED.

USDA promoted a new weapon in the battle against hunger this summer by sponsoring special “Summer of Gleaning” AmeriCorps projects in 20 States. This year, in partnership with dozens of locally-based community service groups, FSA members of AmeriCorps worked with farmers, agribusinesses, food distribution organizations, institutions, and restaurants to recover and distribute food that would otherwise be wasted.

Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman announced the effort saying, “Every year millions of pounds of nutritious, uneaten food is thrown away. It is my highest personal priority to find ways to get this food to the hungry—before it finds its way to the dumpster.”

Focusing on the first-ever “National Week of Food Recovery” held in August, AmeriCorps volunteers carried out food gleaning projects in at least 15 States, working alongside State and local dignitaries and community residents. The rescued produce and vegetables were distributed to local families in need.

On August 19 and 20, the Illinois FSA celebrated two gleaning projects, “Harvesting Hope of Southern Illinois” and “Harvesting Hope,” along with 100 local officials, volunteers, and Congressional staffers. By mid-August, over 133,835 pounds of produce, one twentieth of the total nationwide, was gleaned and delivered to more than 23,000 recipients.

In Iowa, Bob Soukup, FSA Midwest Area Director; Dale Lundy, FSA State Committee Member; Tom Grau, Iowa SED, and several Iowa State office employees helped out at the Great Meat Cookout held at the Grubb YMCA, by preparing and serving over 100 meals to inner city families. In Des Moines, FSA employees helped AmeriCorps members distribute 1,000 pounds of produce, meat, bakery goods, and other items donated by local businesses and rescued from farmers’ markets.

Not to be outdone, Maryland FSA Team Members rescued 23,725 pounds of produce. They distributed more than 9,000 pounds of surplus food for the Maryland Homeless Veterans and the Helping Up Mission in Baltimore.

In New Mexico, FSA and New Mexico AmeriCorps Members and 4 volunteers got together to rescue 450 pounds of surplus produce, including chiles, squash, and tomatoes, from a produce stand and small gardens. This was added to 3,550 pounds collected by other State AmeriCorps Team Members, and distributed to Navajo tribal chapter houses in Arizona and Utah.

Nancy Tegtmeier, Assistant Director of the Illinois Conference of Churches, which helped fund the effort in Illinois, said she was greatly impressed with the hard work and enthusiasm of FSA’s people. She was worried about what will happen to charity efforts after older members are gone, but, “After working with the Illinois FSA AmeriCorps volunteers this year, I am assured that our future is in good hands!”

The Multi-Perils of Spot Checking

By Martin G. Bomar, CED, Charlotte County, VA

Spot checking various land uses is not without its surprises. While performing typical compliance duties, one may have a flat tire several (hundred) miles from civilization or come across unfriendly dogs at a producer's home... etc. You get the picture. Unfortunately, shocks to the nervous system and dangers are, at times, a part of our field visits.

One peril (and there aren't many) this writer particularly dislikes is an encounter with a certain genus of God's kingdom. Not many surprises take years from my life and evoke instant perspiration like stepping on a snake. Shown in the photo is a giant, multi-fanged, man-eating pit viper (at least, that's how it looked to me). Facing this reptile was stressful enough; regaining consciousness an hour later and not knowing where he might be was more worrisome.

Once my breathing slowed down, and I realized I could move, I began walking back to the truck, wherever it was. I also determined, as I tried to figure which way was north through the intense ringing in my head, that the wetland I had set out to inspect indeed did not appear to be drained intentionally. But, of course, someone else of technical expertise should make the final, on-site determination.

Upon thorough self-assessment, we all can identify something of which we are fearful. These "phobias" vary in degree, from one that is obvious and known to others, thus evoking teasing, to something that is so intimidating that one may be reluctant to even acknowledge its existence. I'm not afraid of heights, public speaking, needles, nor the dark. But I admit that snakes tend to ring my phobia chimes. I've been advised to "harness my fear," but I've told my



Martin Bomar, CED, Charlotte County, Virginia, meets up with a "pit viper" during a typical spot-checking day. Object at upper right is the sole of Martin's shoe.

employees and even my neighbor's five-year-old that it's just not that easy. Watch out for those unforeseen surprises!

Career Transition Assistance

Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services employees now have access to career transition information through "Planning Your Future—A Federal Employee's Survival Guide," a home page on the World Wide Web, providing career transition services through the Internet. This page was developed by three Federal employees (including one from FSA) and two contractors to provide support services to Federal employees facing career

transition, retirement, or reduction in force. It can be accessed at <http://SafetyNet.doleta.gov>

It is a user-friendly guide to employment resources on the Internet, including advice on resumes, networking, interviewing, and using headhunters. It contains information on going back to school, starting your own business, relocation, and researching the job market. Job opportunities include private industry (many major American corporations advertise

their vacancies on the Internet) and jobs advertised through State and local government sites. Information on Federal vacancies is also accessible and soon, through a link with the Office of Personnel Management, the text of all Federal vacancy announcements will be available. Retirement subjects include travel, volunteering, financial planning, and tax issues. More information available—check it out!

Charging On!

By Diane Cudd, MSD

Use of the government-wide purchase card is continuing to grow by leaps and bounds. All but 5 State offices now have the card, and the time and money the users are saving is making everyone happy.

Vendors love it because they receive their money without the usual delays; customers love it because they don't have to deal with the hassle of waiting days, even weeks, to get their supplies and services; and Budget Division loves it because the cost of "purchasing" is much less. The average cost to process a purchase order is \$77, compared to \$32 for a credit card transaction—less than half the cost. At a time when money is at a premium, every cent counts!

A significant change to agency policy regarding credit cards has also taken place. Cardholders are no longer required to be contracting officers. Because of this, cards have been issued to employees in the Compliance Field Offices, Regional Service Offices, and the International Cooperative Development offices in Washington, DC.



Each cardholder is allowed a single purchase limit of \$2,500. The monthly maximum is determined by the credit card Program Coordinator in consultation with the cardholder's Division Director based upon the estimated amount of purchasing that will be done.

More improvements are underway by the Office of Operations, including relaxing some purchasing restrictions, eliminating the approving official level, and, most importantly, the implementation of the NFC Purchase Card

Management System. This system will allow cardholders to pay their statements electronically, which means no more Miscellaneous Payments System forms, and lowers the cost of processing a transaction to a mere \$17.

How much easier can it get? Stay tuned. With more and more users coming on board, more and more improvements are bound to follow. And to those 5 States still holding out: What are you waiting for?

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The only problem was that this new growth wasn't usually available. Soon, he was trying to figure out how to give his cows young, tender shoots to eat all year long. To describe his goal, he coined the term "Twelve Aprils."

By 1991, he was ready to go to Clemson University with a proposal for a research project. At first the Clemson researchers were skeptical, but that changed when they visited Tom's farm and got a look at what he'd managed to accomplish. "They jumped on it," he says.

Using a three-year grant from two USDA programs called Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, and Agriculture in Concert with the Environment, Tom and a team of two dairy scientists and an agronomist came up with a combination of different kinds of grasses, and even a variety of alfalfa, that has resulted in Tom's cows getting young growth to eat nine or ten months out of the year. Tom even thinks he may make it to 12 months this year.

As far as Tom's concerned, the past three years have been "the most

enjoyable in my life as a dairyman." His cows are sleek and healthy, they produce well, and his costs are way down. Even his veterinary bills are lower: the cows just don't get sick very much.

But the kicker is that now he works 10 hours a day instead of 16, and finally has enough time to enjoy life. "I almost feel like I'm on vacation," Tom says.

He uses part of that extra time to spread the good word about his new grazing method, speaking at meetings and seminars—sometimes to overflow crowds of dairy farmers. Farmers in the South can benefit the most, but Tom believes that even in places where it isn't possible to use it all year 'round, it still offers benefits. "If you're in Michigan or Wisconsin, you're not going to get 12 Aprils," he says, "But it's worth the effort if you get only one extra."

The project is now working on its final report. "After that report comes out, there's gonna be a lot of people who want to learn how to do it," he says. That'll mean more work for Tom, of course. But he doesn't seem to mind.

Mentor/Mentee Program Update

The Kick Off Ceremony of the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), and Risk Management Agency (RMA) Mentoring Program held last November proved a great send off to get interested people to participate in the Program. Approximately 75 employees are now part of the Program.

According to Mary Baskerville, Human Resources Division, and National Office Program Coordinator, an orientation was held in April where participants learned their roles, Program boundaries, and were officially introduced to their partners. Mentees signed up to enhance their present career skills and identify future skills necessary for career growth.

Some Mentors commented, "I did not realize that I was going to learn as much about myself as I did, because my working with Mentees made me examine my career and where I want to be in the future." "I am really glad that I joined the Program because I had to look at my own goals along with assisting my partner in setting realistic goals; therefore, it gave me a chance to see if I am on track with my career too."

The Mentees responded, "My counselor advised me to always be prepared if new career opportunities suddenly appear." "Through the advice of my partner, I have decided to look into going back to school. I will start with only one class and see how I do. I had wanted to go back to school for several years; but, without encouragement, I would not have taken the time to investigate it."

Mentoring is an excellent way to provide guidance and support at various stages in one's career,



Mentor John Miranda, FAS, Assistant Deputy Administrator for International Cooperation and Development, talks to Mentee Janise Zygmunt, FSA, Agricultural Economist, Economic and Policy Analysis Staff, during orientation program.

especially at the beginning. It can also improve communications among people at different levels and in different organizational units.

"Update meetings are also part of the Program," stated Baskerville. "The update meeting held in July was about becoming better listeners and communicators in the workplace. Career coaching and networking were also on the agenda. These were just a few positive benefits of being in the Program during FY '96. I encourage National employees to think about whom they would like to become their Mentor or Mentee and join as a pair during the upcoming open season. We look forward to seeing your application!"

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children were refreshed and strengthened, and their sponsors tired but satisfied. Cliff calls the experience "real challenging," but he's quick to point out that he also received a lot of gratification in return.

The American Belarussian Relief Organization also helps Belarussian adults and children suffering from leukemia and other serious radiation-related illnesses, and sends medical supplies, toys for children in orphanages, and other aid to Belarus. Persons interested in further information can contact: American-Belarussian Relief Organization, 3654 Covered Bridge Rd., Clayton, NC 27520.

Platte County Adjuster Goes To Paralympics in Atlanta

By Christine Zeigler, PA, Missouri State Office

The Centennial Olympic Games concluded in Atlanta, Georgia, on August 4, but Olympics of another sort also called Atlanta “home” August 12-18. The 3rd Annual Paralympic Congress convened August 12, followed by 2-day Paralympic events. The Paralympic Congress is a “World Congress on Disability” consisting of representatives from other countries and various States in the U.S. whose main goal is helping people become aware of the Paralympic Games. Their motto is, “Humanity, Equality, and Destiny.”

David Farris, a Loss Adjustment Contractor at the Platte County FSA office, qualified as an alternate in the bicycle race by placing third in the Paralympic Final Trials in Trexeltown, PA. The bicycle event is not a road race; instead, it is held in an indoor arena with a concrete track, called a “velodrome.” In preparation for racing, Dave rode his bicycle at least 3 times a week, approximately 10 miles each time.

Dave was injured in a farming accident in 1979 and uses a prosthetic leg. He became involved in the Paralympic Congress due to his participation in the Missouri Agribility Project for the last 2 years. He served as the National Spokesperson for the Agribility Project, which has chapters in 13 States, at the Paralympic Congress. As the Missouri Agribility Project representative, Dave serves on the Advisory Committee on promotion and pinpointing of disabled farmers’ needs. USDA funded the grant to establish the project, which provides

outreach services, education, and adaptation techniques to farmers with disabilities. The National Agribility Project also consists of funding from the Breaking New Ground Resource Center at Purdue University and the National Easter Seals Society.

Even though as an alternate he didn’t get to compete in the Paralympic bicycle races, Dave says it was still a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. “Even though I didn’t get to compete, I still enjoyed being there for my teammates and cheering them on to victory,” said Dave. “The best part was getting to meet people from all over the world who had come to participate and compete in the Paralympic Games.”



Dave Farris, left, and his friends at the Trexeltown, PA trials. Shown are Farris, Barbara Buchanian, and Mike Marsh.



Administrator Buntrock accepts an Honorary American FFA Degree from Andy McCall, National FFA Officer Team, western region vice president, Texas, in Kansas City, MO, November 15. Mr. Buntrock was honored for making a positive difference in the lives of young people and for his tremendous dedication and commitment to agricultural education and the FFA. The award was presented by the National FFA Alumni Association and the National Vocational Agriculture Teachers’ Association.

