

NEWS

Athens Employees Help Light the Torch

Athens, Georgia, only an hour's drive from Atlanta, shares more than just a name with the great city in Greece. As its Greek sister did when the first modern Olympic Games were held a century ago, this gracious small city hosted part of this summer's Olympics.

And the city's Farm Service Agency employees turned out to help, as their community welcomed athletes and spectators to competition in soccer, rhythmic gymnastics, and volleyball.

The Athens Federal Executives Association responded enthusiastically to this once-in-a-lifetime challenge, setting up an Olympic Committee to coordinate the efforts of Federal employees who wanted to volunteer their time. And sign up they did, in droves, to work in many capacities, from donating a few hours here and there to taking on major roles in making sure the Games went smoothly.

With up to 150,000 people visiting the city each day during the events, ensuring security was of vital importance, especially after the recent bomb blast in Atlanta. Five Athens FSA employees were in the thick of it, serving as Olympic Security Officers: Bobby Duncan, of the Administrative Office; Mary Parker, who handles conservation duties; Bill Bessent, part of the Loan Resolution Task Force; Eloise Williams, who works with production adjustment; and Barbara Read of compliance.

Then there's Clark Weaver, who also handles conservation efforts. He worked as a transportation specialist, helping maintain a smooth flow of traffic—and paving the way for many dignitaries and VIPs in town for the events.

No matter how big or small the role they decided to play, the volunteers

stood out from the crowd—each issued a special Federal Employee Olympic tee-shirt. But they're leaving a more lasting legacy, as well. The Committee has raised the funds to buy a beautiful polished red granite bench, commemorating Athens' role in helping the Olympic experience come to life for its thousands of participants and visitors.



The Olympic torch makes its way through Athens on July 15.

Administrator's Column



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What's Ahead in FY97

Signup's preliminary figures show that farmers have enrolled almost 99 percent of their contract acreage in the new program. That's an outstanding accomplishment—way over the 93 percent figure that we anticipated, and I want to congratulate each of you for a job well done.

This has been the most fundamental change in farm programs in 60 years—and you did it in record time. I know how hard you worked to get the word out and handle the many questions and issues as they arose.

While you've had a busy time over the last six months, I know you've also been thinking about our future. For the past 60 years, we have been identified largely as the "farm program" agency. Today, we are the Farm Service Agency with ongoing responsibilities and a continuing mission to deliver farm credit, conservation, emergency disaster and crop loss assistance, and other needed programs to the Nation's farmers.

This is not to deny that we face many challenges as we go through a critical period of downsizing and readjustment—starting in FY 1997. While our workload has gone up this year, we knew it would decrease in the years ahead with the decline in crop insurance delivery and some compliance functions. The President's 1997 budget request reflected these workload reductions; however, appropriations actions on Capitol Hill have made additional downsizing a necessity.

Under FY 1997 appropriations, FSA will receive \$956 million for salaries and expenses—\$13 million less than the President's budget, but \$21 million more than the Senate proposed, and \$12 million more than we received in FY 1996. I grant you, it's hard to imagine feeling relieved at a \$13-million cut—unless the alternative could have been far worse. Two weeks ago, that was the situation

we were facing. The Senate's proposed \$34.4 million cut would have meant severe disruptions for our people and for our ability to deliver services to farmers.

We worked very hard presenting our case to the Congress, and I'm pleased that the House and Senate conferees listened to our arguments, and restored a significant portion of the funds the President had requested.

First, Congress gave us buyout authority through the year 2000, and we intend to use it, along with authority for early retirements, to the maximum extent possible. We'll probably need to reduce staffing by about 1,400 positions next year. I can assure you we are pursuing every funding option available to us in order to offer buyouts as an alternative to RIFs.

Second, we've initiated a hiring freeze as another way to minimize a reduction in force. Because States and counties have held costs down this year, in not filling some 300 to 400 vacancies, we can reduce the impact of these budget cuts.

Remember, over the past three years, we've already gone through a critical downsizing as part of the reorganization process. Today, our employment is down by almost 14 percent in Federal staff-years and almost 13 percent in county office staff-years from three years ago—and this was accomplished with minimal RIFs. We're now developing downsizing plans, which will need OMB and Congressional approval before we can go forward with personnel reductions.

I assure you that we will get through this difficult period in as fair and cost-effective a way as possible. This Agency, and its people, will continue to be a vital force in agriculture. Our mission, first and foremost, is to serve the farmers and ranchers of this country, and the need for our service is as great today as it has ever been. I'll keep you informed as decisions are made.

Grand Bunterch

Nebraska Accepts a Challenge

There's been a lot of talk recently about reorganization, office closures, new election procedures, furloughs, cross-training, loans, "CAT" insurance, and Farm Bill uncertainties. With the merger on October 1, 1995, of the Ag Credit Section of the former FmHA and the former ASCS, there have been many challenges and consolidation pains. "I knew there was some apprehension by employees on how they would fit into the new agency and how they would work together," said Frank Johannsen, Nebraska State Executive Director. "I decided the best way to solve this was for all of us to get personally involved right away, and we did."

Under the leadership of David Studnicka, County Executive Director, Clay County, and Danny Kennedy, Ag Credit Manager, a State-wide model program started with weekly staff meetings so the learning and communications process could begin. The State office asked all CEDs to designate two Program Assistants (PAs) as backup to Ag Credit. Studnicka selected Robyn Kuehler and Sandi Burghardt because of their expertise in FSA programs.

The PAs learned how to process and post loan payments, type security agreements, correspondence, and field visit notices. "It's interesting to see how another branch of government is run," stated Burghardt. Kuehler added, "Working one-on-one with Ag Credit has given me a new perspective in agricultural lending. It is rewarding to see family farmers receive assistance when they are unable to receive credit elsewhere."

"Working with dedicated, professional employees and keeping open lines of communication have been keys for success," stated Kennedy.



Ag Credit Manager Danny D. Kennedy, right, completes a loan analysis with Jerry English, left, farmer, as Clay County Executive Director David Studnicka, center, looks on.

According to Robert Jedlicka, Ag Credit Director, county PAs are being trained by Ag Credit Managers and Technicians to process payments, update security agreements, and type promissory notes. In Nebraska, Ag Credit teams receive assistance from 43 county PAs to handle the workload. "Dodge County could not have accomplished these tasks without the assistance of 3 PAs working 136 hours in the last 20 work days," said Jedlicka. "Our experience shows that the PAs are excellent employees and are interested in learning the new Ag loan programs. Their past experience working for ASCS is very beneficial when they start to work in Ag Credit."

Jeannette Schmidt, Hall County Chief PA, stated "Learning a new program is

always scary, especially when offices are being consolidated. I was hesitant to train in the Ag Credit office. However, all my fears were alleviated because Ag Credit personnel have been courteous and helpful. I feel that our being together will be a success."

"When the County PAs and Ag Credit staffs are working together, the PAs are gaining experience and knowledge about the Ag Credit loan programs," Jedlicka said. "Cross-training within the next two years will be much more meaningful to these employees."

"Nebraska has a good start for one-stop shopping to be a reality in 83 county offices for Nebraska farmers by fall. "We are all in this together," concluded SED Johannsen.

North Carolina CED Helps Launch Educational Campaign

By Betty Soukup

Selectd newspapers across America have been graced by the smiling faces and professional profiles of five U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) employees.

The USDA Office of Public Media and Outreach launched an educational campaign aimed at rural audiences to enhance the understanding citizens have of USDA programs and to introduce some employees who implement them. Advertisements like the one shown were run in 58 different publications, reaching readers in more than 25 States.

Five mission areas of USDA submitted a profile of an exemplary employee. Patricia Mabry, County Executive Director, Jones County, North Carolina, was chosen to represent FSA. Mabry has been a USDA employee for 18 years.

A normal work day for Patricia could include production adjustment, price support, conservation and disaster decisions. She may also assess disaster damage, measure cropland, or conduct a training seminar in another FSA county office.

"She is a roll-up-your-sleeves kind of person," said Harold "Bruno" Mangum, Administrative Officer for the Jones County office. "She has a wonderful, outgoing personality that producers really like," he said.

Even with the immense responsibilities of running a county office, Patricia Mabry still finds time to share her skills and talents with her community. She is a charter member of the Jones County Jaycees and served as both president

and vice-president. She serves on local committees to solve problems of solid waste, safety and social service issues. She is a dedicated supporter of the Jones County Special Olympics and does volunteer work with the

exceptional class at Pollockville Elementary School.

"She is a true public servant and always leaves you with that impression," Mangum said.



Patricia Mabry carries her Carolina legacy in the lilting cadence of her speech

and in her commitment to her fellow Carolinians. She is the Executive Director of the United States Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency in Jones County, North Carolina. It is her job to help farmers on farm commodity programs, ownership and operating loans, and disaster insurance.

When you are driven by the need to make a difference in someone else's life,

your mission goes far beyond the bounds of your job. Patricia Mabry was a charter member of the Jones County Jaycees, serving as president. She is on the board of the Jones County Department of Social Services and she still finds time to be active in her church.

Patricia makes a difference. We're glad she does.

Our programs are in good hands in Jones County. For Patricia and thousands of other USDA employees, commitment comes from within.

If you would like more information about how the United States Department of Agriculture can help your family or your community, write USDA Farm Service Agency, County AG Building, Highway 70, Columbiana, AL 35051.



USDA... We touch your life every day.

The Customer Speaks

In early 1996 an interagency team comprised of the Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rural Development, as well as two partner groups, National Conservation Districts Employee Association and the National Federation of Federal Employees, met with groups of USDA Service Center customers. These meetings were carefully designed "group interviews," called focus groups, with producers and single-family housing borrowers. These focus groups wanted to find answers to two major questions:

- What kind of service do customers want?
- What kind of system can best deal with customer complaints?

In all, 37 focus groups were conducted in 19 States. These focus groups, while part of the USDA Service Center implementation project, are part of President Clinton's directive to Federal agencies to improve customer service.

"While there was criticism, there was also a lot of praise for local USDA Service Center staff, especially for the FSA folks," stated Leonard Covello, FSA team member and leader of this focus group project. As one producer put it, "I'd say they are excellent! You know, if you don't get something signed, they'll get hold of you to set up a date to get it done." Another producer commented, "They went the extra mile to accommodate me. They tell you they'll do something, and they do it."

According to Covello, customers want:

- Personalized, face-to-face service
- Fewer, simpler regulations and forms
- A knowledgeable staff with a positive attitude



Interagency focus group "Listening Team"

- Flexibility in programs with local authority to apply requirements
- Timely information, and service and a local accessible staff
- Consistency within an office and between offices
- Follow-through on promises
- More privacy while transacting business

Customers reported they don't complain because it won't do any good, it isn't worth their time and effort, they don't know who to complain to, or they are afraid to complain, or they don't want to cause problems for staff. They also advised, if you want us to complain, make it easy to complain, behave in a way that encourages people to share their complaints, make it safe to complain and give local staff more authority to resolve complaints. After

receiving a complaint, customers wanted agencies to "Be responsive."

A set of customer service standards reflecting survey results has been included in the new USDA Service Center brochure. An interagency team will draft a prototype complaint system reflecting the thousands of comments received from the focus groups which will be tested with employees and customers before it is implemented.

A report containing customers' comments was sent to the Office of the Secretary and to the State FACs. If you are interested in the report, a copy is on the FSA bulletin board (BBS) system. Since the other Service Center partner agencies do not have a similar system, please share your report with them.

USDA Assists Volunteer Group in Poland



Randall Hawkinson, center left, with PISIPAR inspectors from Opole, Poland, and representatives of a grain storage facility in Radzikowice.

The Office of the Deputy Administrator for Commodity Operations (DACO) and the Kansas City Commodity Office (KCCO) recently provided assistance to the Volunteers in Overseas Cooperative Assistance (VOCA). Through a grant from the Agency for International Development, VOCA has been actively assisting the Polish government in a grain storage and marketing project. This project aims to establish a licensed warehouse system and to develop legislation to regulate the many grain exchanges in Poland. In addition, VOCA offers technical advisory assistance in:

- establishing internationally accepted grading and weighing standards,
- training and technical assistance to establish cooperative grain elevators,
- training elevator managers and financial managers of both cooperatives and private elevators for compliance with established Polish regulations,
- developing either a private entity or a government agency to inspect and

license elevators under established Polish regulations.

Randall Hawkinson, a Warehouse Examiner and Technical Expert with KCCO was selected by VOCA's Senior Project Advisor, Joe Allen, to visit Poland and assist with this project. Phase I involves the development of a regulatory program, modeled in part after USDA's warehouse licensing and warehouse examination programs. Randall determined the storage capacity and evaluated the grading equipment for 20 warehouses selected for the pilot project. The storage capacity in the selected warehouses varied in size from 300,000 to 2.2 million bushels.

Randall traveled by train and automobile to warehouses located near Warsaw and several other cities. He was assisted by Panstwowa Inspekcja Skupu I Przetworstwa Artykulow Rolnych (PISIPAR) personnel and interpreters at all locations. In translation, PISIPAR stands for State Inspection for the Procurement and

Processing of Agricultural Commodities. The successful completion of his assignment helped to ensure that the project remained on schedule.

Some highlights of the trip included a ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw attended by the Queen of England, the traditional "Blessing of the Eggs" on Easter weekend, and a visit to Wawel castle in Krakow.

Reflecting on this assignment, Randall said, "I'll probably draw upon this experience for the rest of my life. It was both humbling and a great honor to work with the Polish people. It was easy to go the extra mile working with a group so eager to learn and trying so hard to make this project a success."

FSA Employees Receive USDA Honor Awards

On June 5, Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman presented USDA's Superior Service Award to 8 individuals and 2 groups from the Farm Service Agency during the Secretary's 50th Honor Awards Ceremony held in Washington, D.C.

Recognition was given to those employees ready and willing—even eager—to render service over and above that officially required. The individual awardees were: Penny J. Fleming, Fulton County, Hickman, Kentucky; and Carol Ann Moffett, Dover, Delaware State FSA Office. FSA groups receiving USDA honors were the USDA Hurricane Opal Response Team, Montgomery,

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New Regulations Change Government-Wide Recruiting

By James Smith, HRD

As a result of downsizing and reorganization efforts that currently exist throughout the Federal government, President Clinton mandated that the Office of Personnel Management develop new regulations governing how agencies are to provide career transition services to their employees. These regulations are in effect government-wide and affect recruiting procedures. There are two parts to these regulations: the Federal government-wide plan, referred to as the Interagency Career Transition Assistance Program, and the Department of Agriculture-wide plan, referred to as the Career Transition Assistance Program. The Federal plan was effective February 29, 1996, and the USDA Plan on April 28.

In summary, these regulations have three major components:

- (1) to provide career transition services (e.g. application preparation techniques, interviewing techniques, career counseling, and related services);
- (2) to give selection priority to well-qualified surplus and displaced candidates who APPLY to a specific publicized vacancy announcement in their local commuting area; and
- (3) to give re-hiring priority through USDA's Reemployment Priority Listing (RPL) before considering candidates outside of USDA. The RPL is a centralized listing of former USDA employees who have been displaced as a result of a reduction-in-force.

Under these regulations, personnel actions such as non-competitive changes to lower grades, competitive promotions, temporary promotions and appointments of 90 days or more, reinstatements and most reassignments cannot be implemented without agencies first giving consideration to surplus and/or displaced employees. Personnel actions such as reclassification, excepted service appointment/conversions, career ladder promotions, job swaps, and the movement of surplus and/or displaced employees are a few of the actions exempt from these regulations. The Human Resources Division is finalizing a plan specific to the entire FFAS Mission Area, and a notice on these new regulations will be issued.

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Alabama—Robert Springer, Group Leader; and members of the Electronic Distribution System Project, Washington, D.C.—Ken Rachfal, Group Leader.

The following FSA Human Resources Division employees were nominated by different USDA agencies and received recognition for outstanding achievement as group members: Cynthia Green, Government Connection Apprenticeship Program Group, Washington, D.C.; Susan C. Brown, Stephen P. Crisp, Linda M. Jackson, and Michaela E. Wavrek, USDA Awards Implementation Group, Office of the Secretary, Washington, D.C.; and Alfreda Terrell, USDA/Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Group, Office of the Secretary, Washington, D.C.

For more information, read the 50th Annual Honor Awards program booklet.



Robert Stearns, 2nd from right, 1995 Albert R. Todd Award winner pictured with the Windham County Committee (left to right)—Ken Bvell, member; Linda Rich, Vice Chairman; John Ennis, Chairman, Walt Stone, CAFEC President. The award

is for outstanding farm conservation efforts and was presented for the implementation of a rotational grazing system (which is based on conservation principles) by the Connecticut Association of Farmer-Elected Committeemen.

KCCO and KCMO Working Together

By Lois Crooks and Bob Lynch

The development of the Kansas City Commodity Office (KCCO) and the Kansas City Management Office (KCMO) has been along parallel lines since about 1962. In April 1983, KCCO and KCMO assumed their current names and, with the most recent reorganization, their current structure.

KCCO manages the acquisition, handling, storage, transportation, and disposition of agricultural commodities in support of Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) program commitments, and administers the U.S. Warehouse Act.

Some of the CCC programs deal with distribution of commodities to other countries for humanitarian reasons. The purchase of \$137 million of various commodities for humanitarian food assistance to the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union is one example. Another is the 1.4 metric tons of processed and bulk commodities sent to South African drought stricken countries.

More recently, disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and drought have found KCCO ready, willing, and able to provide rapid assistance in the form of bulk grains, processed commodities, dairy products, packaging, and transportation. Employees responded within a few hours of notification when hurricane Marilyn struck the Virgin Islands in September 1995.

Under domestic feeding programs, KCCO purchases and distributes commodities for the school lunch program, family programs, penal and correctional institutions, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Veterans Affairs, and Department of Defense.

These activities have been accomplished, without interruption, since the early part of World War II. In the 1980's, new computerized data-based systems were developed and placed in operation, resulting in improved service. At the same time the number of personnel to support this operation was reduced from 800 in the 1980's to the present 325—with no appreciable reduction in service.

KCCO has excelled in managing excess inventories of grains by using such diverse methods as Payment-in-Kind, exchange programs, and generic certificates where producers were paid for deficiency payments in product instead of cash. Similar methods were also used to bring the bailed cotton inventory under control in the late 1980's.

Approximately 100 warehouse examiners stationed throughout the United States work diligently to assure that inventories are stored properly and protected from theft and damage.

KCMO works in support of KCCO, CCC, tobacco and peanut associations, cotton co-ops, and State and county offices by providing centralized development and maintenance support of FSA-ADP systems, and by functioning as the National Accounting Office. KCMO also provides personnel services, procurement, administrative services, contractor services, building maintenance, and security.

The whole State and County Office Automation Project (SCOAP) was developed in KCMO. Application software is tested, then distributed by KCMO to State and 2,600 county offices which rely on KCMO's planning, development, and implementation of automation systems to support

the development of farm program policy and the processing of farm program activity.

SCOAP collects accounting and farm program information from county offices, consolidates information at the State level, and transmits data to the KCMO mainframe.

In addition to SCOAP, new systems are designed and existing systems maintained in support of commodity operations for inventory, processing, storing, distributing, and ensuring payment.

A prime example of KCMO computer technicians' abilities was seen in the quick response in designing a system for rapid check processing of emergency payments during the 1993 floods. Promises of checks being released within two weeks meant the program had to be designed, tested, and installed in seven to eight working days. This was accomplished and the system performed properly.

Accounting support is also a part of the KCMO service package. Financial services include issuance of CCC checks, central claims, Concentration Banking, and Commodity Certificate On-line Inquiry.

These tasks are being efficiently accomplished even though the work force has been downsized from about 1,200 to the current 860 (excluding newly transferred former FCIC and FmHA personnel). Computer expertise and streamlined procedures have allowed this reduction in personnel without a reduction in service. The team of KCCO and KCMO continues to produce the necessary services for our agricultural customers.