

# NEWS

## Living The Dream

By Sandi Durham, MI STO

**M**any of us dream of a better, more fruitful life. But few of us are ever given the chance to fulfill that dream. Luis and Carmen Sandoval are exceptions.

Luis Sandoval grew up in Mexico and eventually moved to Michigan, where he became a migrant worker for a local family, the Nyes. Off and on for many years, he worked for the Nyes as seasonal help, spending his winters in Hot Springs, AR, working for the Forest Service. In 1984, Sandoval began working full-time with the Nyes as foreman, remaining there for the next 12 years. His fiancée Carmen Sandoval joined him in the States, and they were married in 1986. She also worked for the Nyes, first in the orchards, then in the greenhouse and roadside stand; eventually managing both enterprises.

Those years of orchard experience provided the Sandovals with the knowledge and skills to strike out on their own as "beginning farmers." In 1996, they took the first step when they visited their local county FSA office. Neal Kreitner, Credit Manager, helped them obtain their first operating loan to lease 50 acres of orchard.

The Sandovals did such a good job with their budgeting strategy that they only needed to borrow 53 percent of the loan amount for which they were approved. Carmen, who keeps the books, said, "We were very careful with the loan money and would only use it for actual farm expenses." All other expenses were paid from the salary Carmen earned as a child-care worker. She is also attending college to finish her degree in Child Development.

Carmen Sandoval is very proud of her husband and boasts, "After only 1 year, we were able to hire 2 full-time and 8 seasonal employees." The Sandovals have been approved for a 1997 operating loan, and they hope this will be their last year of needing financial support.

Together, the Sandovals are a 1990s example of the American success story: proving that with hard work and determination anyone can "live the dream."



Luis and Carmen Sandoval pruning trees in their orchard.

## Administrator's Column

I hope everyone knows by now the good news about FSA's staffing levels for next year. Things are looking a lot better than they did this past spring—largely due to the hard work, sacrifice, and commitment of our employees, the employee organizations, and unions.

Earlier this year FSA was told that it needed to reduce the number of non-Federal county employees and the number of Federal employees in order to meet the budget figures for the coming fiscal year by 2,119 in the aggregate (1,850 county, 269 Federal).

Now it appears that the total RIFs will likely be in the range of 200-300. There may be no need to reduce the number of Federal employees beyond buy outs and retirements. On the non-Federal county office side, it looks like we may have to separate only a relatively few people. But not everything's final yet, although at this point we don't anticipate anything that would change this situation.

On the Federal side, while we shouldn't have to do any involuntary separations, there may have to be

some directed reassignments to match up Federal employees with the current workload. For noncivil service county employees, we may need to RIF some people—if we are unable to shift staff between offices. If we end up with some county-level staffing flexibility and are able to make adjustments, we could end up cutting the county office separations in about half.

Like I said, this is good news. Everybody has worked together to help, showing what kinds of good things we can do when we work together with a goal and a purpose in mind. FSA has managed to tighten the belt pretty well this past year, and we're in a position to carry over funds from the current fiscal year to the next. But that's not the only reason things are looking this good.

FSA employees across the country are doing more with less on a regular basis, and still getting the job done. This efficiency speaks well of the tireless dedication of each and every FSA employee, whether in a county, State, or National office position. By working more efficiently, sharing resources, and dedicating ourselves to the job we're here to do, each one of you has managed to add something to this effort. I can honestly say that I'm proud of, and in my limited travels impressed with, the ability and devotion of FSA's people to their tasks. I'm proud to be part of this organization.

In closing, let me say that I will keep you posted on the latest developments as soon as I possibly can. Each FSA employee has the right to know all of the latest information as quickly as practical and possible—even if it is subject to change.



**ADMINISTRATOR**

## Tip Of The Hat To The Farm Loan Folks

The bureaucracy is often criticized for its lack of "atta boys" and other forms of praise, so we decided to give a big round of applause to the farm loan people of FSA. Dealing with a massive reorganization, a name change, revised duties, physical moves, having to fit in with new coworkers, and learning unfamiliar tasks—the hard-working former FmHA staffers have come through it all with flying colors.

From Deputy Administrator Carolyn B. Cooksie, who assumed her new duties in July 1996, down to the lowest-paid assistant in the county office, each farm loan employee has done whatever it took to accomplish the voluminous workload and keep the flow of loan money uninterrupted to those who needed it. \$2.3 billion in FY '97 isn't bad, and says a lot about the dedicated employees who continue to understand the importance of what they do and how they do it. For those readers unfamiliar with what this all means, read on.

FSA makes and guarantees loans to purchase real estate (\$80 million in direct and \$525 million in guaranteed loans in FY '97); and to purchase equipment, cattle, seed, feed, fertilizer, etc. (\$574 million in direct and \$1 billion in guaranteed loans in FY '97). Also under its umbrella are emergency loans, which are available to farmers who have suffered losses due to a natural disaster, and other programs such as youth loans, beginning farmer loans, and loans to socially-disadvantaged farmers. Obligations of emergency loans in FY '97 totaled \$144 million. Sounds like a lot of work, and it is, everyday.

—Those who make them and those who service them—

So, our hats are off to all of you involved in loans, and keep up the good work. You're a vital part of FSA, and you are appreciated!

### FSA News

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## First Ever National Food Recovery & Gleaning Summit Takes Place



Kansas City Commodity Office staff members pose with food collected for distribution to local food banks and shelters in the 1997 USDA Food Drive.

**V**ice President Al Gore, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, Administrator Kelly, and about 30 FSA staff - among hundreds of participants - kicked off the first National Food Recovery and Gleaning Summit in Washington, D. C. September 15 and 16. The Summit is part of an ambitious new effort to recover previously wasted food and provide it to the hungry.

The Vice President also announced the results of a major report on hunger, showing that 12 million American households experienced some food insecurity — defined as limited or uncertain access to enough food. Of those, 4 million reported moderate or severe hunger.

FSA employees across the Nation are responding to this problem, participating in the promising new gleaning initiative. In a two-week food drive just prior to the Summit, USDA employees collected nearly 673,000 pounds of food. 133,500 pounds of that was brought in by FSA employees, includ-

ing over 40,000 pounds of nonperishable food just from Louisiana (over 11,000 pounds from one county); and over 15,000 pounds of potatoes from New Mexico. The food was distributed to local food banks and shelters. Competition was fierce between some States, and media blitzes in some areas urged USDA staff and customers to donate. At the Kansas City Federal office complex, staffers used trucks and forklifts to display the daily haul of the three FSA offices sharing the site.

Building on a commitment to their communities, FSA hosted video downlinks of the

Summit in 13 states for producers, staff members, volunteers, and the public. The Albany County office in New York, the site of a successful Summer of Gleaning project last year, had a full schedule including workshops and a field gleaning trip. In other areas, such as Iowa, local FSA and NRCS offices cooperated in various activities.

FSA staff in Illinois received the first ever "Heroes of Food Recovery" award for their on-going fresh vegetable gleaning projects, Harvesting Hope. The projects, coordinated by Rod Atterberry, CED, Mason County, and State Executive Director Stephen Scates, recovered and distributed over 71 tons of fresh vegetables in 1996, and have already recovered another 29 tons so far this year.

In support of the goals of the National Summit, FSA has commitments from 19 States to create or expand field gleaning projects for the 1998 crop year. These 19 States are the first wave in the Agency's commitment to have a gleaning project in all States by the year 2000.



Illinois FSA staff and farmers receiving "Heroes of Food Recovery" award at USDA National Food Recovery and Gleaning Summit program. Secretary Dan Glickman is 3rd from left.

## Aerial Photography Field Office—FSA's Photo Experts

By Kerry Winston Jones, APFO, UT

**T**o people familiar with the USDA, the term "field office" usually brings to mind a quiet little place with a few workers. But FSA's Aerial Photography Field Office (APFO) is something else entirely. In 1996, the 96 employees of this "quiet little office" in Salt Lake City inspected over 50,000 square miles of aerial photography for the Forest Service and over 16,000 square miles for the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Other agencies such as the Department of Defense and the Department of Interior use the services of the APFO for land-use planning, resource management and photo mapping.

APFO's major function is to provide scale-accurate photographic enlargements to FSA county offices. These are used to assist individual farmers with land-use planning, and to deter-

mine precise acreage. The film vault at APFO contains over 50,000 rolls of film, some dating back to 1950. The majority of its products are black-and-white 24-by-24-inch photographs for use by the county offices.

Despite the new photographic technologies that have become available in recent years, those old-fashioned 24-by-24-inch black-and-white enlargements remain the most cost-effective way to support the various needs of the FSA county offices. A total of 120,334 photo enlargements were produced, inspected and shipped last year, supplying coverage of 435 FSA counties. However, APFO also sells annually over \$3 million worth of aerial photography to other Federal, State and local government agencies and the general public. The Photographic Services Branch is responsible for producing the aerial

photographic products furnished to USDA and other Federal and non-Federal customers. During 1996, more than 549,108 black-and-white products and 401,842 color products were produced. Sales receipts recover most of the operational costs of the office.

To better manage the work flow with a continually decreasing workforce, APFO has implemented a quality improvement program. Self-directed work teams are working to identify problem areas, research possible causes and develop new solutions. Other employees are working together to streamline APFO processes and serve customers better. So, the APFO is not just an average government office. It is a lively place dedicated to serving the needs of the Farm Service Agency and providing continual support to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Nation's farmers.



Kent Williams, Management Analyst, and Rodney Johnson, Cartographic Technician, measure the accuracy of an aerial photograph.

## Seeing Beyond Our Nose

**P**roviding fair and equal access to our programs. Increasing numbers of minorities and limited-resource farmers on county committees. That's what "outreach" means for the diverse group of folks on the Outreach Programs Staff. Established in 1996, the staff, "works hard to see that FSA's customers receive information in a timely and substantive manner," said Lou Anne Kling, Director. "In the future, we expect to conduct more tracking and building of databases to support our outreach efforts."

Today, the Outreach Programs Staff focuses on educating FSA employees about how certain groups historically have been prevented from fully participating in our programs. "FSA offices that encourage **ALL** farmers to visit are the most effective ones at providing access to our programs," says Kling. "When we understand the person next to us and see him or her as our neighbor, even if we are different colors or have different heritages, it is much easier to work together."

The Outreach Programs Staff is involved with youth initiatives as well, including these projects funded during fiscal year 1997:

- FSA, working with the National Hmong Development Corporation, held Town Hall meetings in Minnesota and Wisconsin to explain USDA programs and how to gain access to them. Hmong youths acted as translators for adults to help cross the language barrier.
- A Mentoring program to help motivate college students to consider the Department of Agriculture and the U.S. government as a career and to provide educational excellence for Hispanic Americans through the USDA Center of Excellence for Hispanic Americans, the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico, and the Metropolitan University of Puerto Rico, in partnership with NRCS and other USDA agencies.



Jorge Comas, Hispanic Coordinator, visited the farm of Karleng Cherta Lee of the Hmong community in Fresno, California, and talked to a Hispanic farm worker with a shipment of Don-gua (Winter Melon) to be sent to Canada for the Asian community there. Standing on the truck is Karleng Cherta, Lee's brother.

- In Mound Bayou, MS, training and mentoring were provided to low-income rural youths to help in their career decision, hopefully toward agriculture.
- Training 100 rural, unemployed high-school youths in managing, harvesting, and marketing sweet potatoes and hot peppers by Alcorn State University and the Potato Growers Association Co-op in Mississippi. The harvesting of hot peppers is hazardous and requires special training.
- At Prairie View A&M University, Texas, introduction of agriculture as a vocation to urban Dallas, Texas, youths via workshops, farm work experience, and creation of an inner-city Farmers' Market owned and managed by youth.
- At Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, Cloquet, Minnesota, a 1994 Land Grant College will hire a full-time employee to conduct outreach on farm loans to Indian reservations and schools in the service areas of the college with emphasis on youth loans and beginning farmer loans. This is a 3-year program done in conjunction with the Minnesota State Office.

In the coming two years, the Outreach Staff intends to make further use of town-hall meetings in locations with diverse populations and develop informational videos and publications in various languages.

Kling thinks the expertise of her staff is outstanding, and that their variety of backgrounds mesh well. Carole Powell focuses on women's and gender issues; Jorge Comas—with his bilingual skills—deals with Hispanic outreach; Cliff Herron works with African-American issues such as the 1890 Universities and Colleges.

Lynn Pickinpaugh and Powell work together on outreach to Asian and Pacific Islanders, and Mike Hill directs his efforts toward the Native-American population. Dawn Kral and Jomita Smith round out the Staff with administrative support.

The Outreach Programs Staff is located in the Portals Building, 1250 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C., 20024, Suite 508. Telephone: 202-690-1098 and fax: 202-690-4727. They welcome your comments and suggestions.

## El Rancho Torres - An FSA Success Story

By Scott C. Hallett, WA STO

It was a cold January day in 1993, when Manuel Torres' name was drawn from a hat as first in line to buy a farm that had been in USDA inventory for the past 6 years. The 60-acre farm was located near Omak, Washington, with about 37 acres of established orchard. The place needed a lot of fixing up — but Manuel and his family were more than willing to do the work.

Getting the FSA direct farm loan was the beginning of a dream come true for Torres, who believes that anything is possible for those who are willing to take a risk and work hard. Working hard is nothing new to him: he started out as a migrant laborer in the '60s, toiling in the orchards of California, Oregon and Washington for 6 months each year, and returning to Mexico to work the rest of the year on his uncle's ranch. While Manuel was on the road, his wife Victoria tended to the children in Jocotepec, Mexico. They now have 7 children, all born in Mexico, but now all American citizens — except for Agustin, who expects to complete the naturalization process this Fall.

Stu Skidmore, District Credit Manager, has known Torres and his family for several years, and was involved with their operation from the start. "Mr. and Mrs. Torres settled in the area in 1983, and eventually operated 3 orchard leases in addition to his regular job working in someone else's orchard," says Skidmore. "On top of that, he also worked for the cemetery district with his youngest son, Juan, doing everything from mowing the grass to digging graves." Sons Roberto and Jose continue to operate the leases to this day.

From the beginning, the farm was a team effort. Torres does not speak English well; his 21-year-old daughter



Manuel, Alma, Victoria, and Juan Torres stand in front of one of the new trellis system methods of a modern orchard. Trees using this system should produce twice the expected harvest from a traditional system.

Alma is the main interpreter for the family. It was his son Juan who spotted the ad in the local newspaper notifying prospective buyers of the opportunity to apply for the farm, and daughter Maria took charge of the application paperwork. Just completing the application process took 3 weeks and many phone calls to the county office. "I'm sure they got real tired of us asking questions" says Torres, "but they were very helpful."

After getting the loan to purchase the ranch, Torres received operating loans for the next 3 years. By the end of that time, however, the operation was successful enough to forgo any additional loans. Operating expenses were kept low through plain hard work. In the first two months of operation, the entire 37 acres was pruned in the snow by just Manuel and Victoria Torres with son "Chemel" (Jose Manuel).

The improvements to the ranch are best appreciated by those who saw it before the Torres family got it. The shop, a former barn, was full of manure and straw. It is now cleaned up, repainted inside and out, has a new roof and glass windows. The other outbuildings have been repaired, and the house has been remodeled extensively. "Working on the house is my vacation in the winter," says Torres. "I would rather be working than anything else."

Torres has a high regard for the FSA people involved with his loan. "Everyone in the office has been helpful and I am happy with all of them. When I have a problem, I come to Stu," he says. But he gets deadly serious when he says that his vision is, "to work and live and never sell the ranch. I'd never sell. No matter how much money they would give me."

## Small Farm Commission Holds Public Forum

**T**he 20-plus members of the National Commission on Small Farms, including Secretary Dan Glickman and Deputy Secretary Richard Rominger, held their first meeting recently in Memphis, Tennessee. The Commission was set up to find ways to improve USDA service to small farming operations.

“We cannot let America’s small farm heritage, the foundation of our rural communities, just slip through our fingers,” Glickman said. “We must carefully look at the barriers facing small farms and seek solutions to these problems. This is the charge I have given to the men and women who will serve on this commission.”

Glickman directed the commission to look at a wide range of programs and issues, including credit, risk management, education, and outreach, and to recommend improvements. The commission will determine how to ensure that small farms are treated fairly and have an equal opportunity to compete in vertically-integrated agricultural



Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, Deputy Secretary Richard Rominger and members of the National Commission on Small Farms at the Commission’s first meeting in Memphis, Tennessee.

systems; and look at ways to encourage small farms to adopt better production practices—such as value-added cooperatives or direct marketing—to improve their profitability.

Tennessee FSA State Director Dave McDole and NRCS State Conservationist James Ford heard testimony from small and limited-resource farmers regarding difficulty in maintaining the economic viability of their operations. Some of the common problems reported were lack of available markets, small farmers’ crops, excessive paperwork to apply for USDA assistance, lack of fair trading practices, and lack of funding for small farm ownership programs.

“I was impressed by the positive attitude and eagerness of the Commission to search for positive solutions to the many problems faced by today’s small farmers,” McDole said. “I believe that hearings of this nature will go a long way toward improving the plight of American small farmers.”



FSA Administrator Keith Kelly, speaking at the Illinois State Fair. Waiting to speak are left to right Illinois Senator Richard Durbin and Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman.

## FSA State Committee Receives USDA Honor Award For Environmental Protection

By Erica Haspiel-Szlosek

**E**ach year many deserving USDA employees receive Honor Awards from the Secretary of Agriculture. However, this year was unique since an award was bestowed on a State Committee as the result of a nomination by another agency, recognizing the group's work in environmental protection.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service nominated the California Farm Service Agency State Committee for an Honor Award celebrating the State Committee's innovation in developing the review process used in the new Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP was established by the 1996 Farm Bill and provides funding for farmers who submit proposals to solve soil and water quality or other related resource problems.



Bill Lyons, center, Chairperson, accepts a USDA Honor Award on behalf of the California State Committee from Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, left, and Richard Rominger, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture.

In 1995, faced with reduced funding for the Agricultural Conservation Program, the California State Committee invited representatives from environmental, agricultural and resource industries around the state to meet and evaluate the program. Based on their

input, the Committee conceived a new approach using local working groups to identify agriculturally-related resource problems, and to propose solutions. Priority was given to proposals that solved more than one problem, had multiple community benefits, and pooled outside resources. Today, this process has been adopted nationwide.

FSA News congratulates the members of the California State Committee for their initiative and resourcefulness: William J. Lyons, Jr., Chairperson; Vanessa Arellano; Guido Lombardi; William "Chip" Struckmeyer; Joe Zanger and Dr. Jerome Siebert. State Executive Director John G. Smythe and FSA Conservation Specialist Larry Plumb also received Honor Awards for their efforts.

## Building A Successful Truck Farm

By Bruce N. Cordes, IA STO

**T**he Farm Service Agency (FSA) makes and guarantees farm operating loans and provides technical management assistance to eligible family farmers and ranchers. A "family farm" is defined as one that a family can operate and manage itself, with a reasonable amount of hired labor if needed.

In Iowa, Floyd and Rosa Robert are approved borrowers and recently Roger Holtz (Credit Manager) and Pat Warmbier (CED) of the Harrison County office, visited their farm to see how their operation is doing.

The Roberts are from southern New Jersey, an area known for truck-farming operations. They moved to Iowa in 1995 and purchased a 20-acre farm,

and in 1997 they were approved for a loan to start a truck-farming operation. They used the capital to buy seed, fertilizer and cover some labor costs as well as buying equipment, including a cooling unit for storing produce and a tractor. Rosa manages the day-to-day operations, and this first year her crops included mustard, collards, and jalapeno peppers. The produce will be marketed in Des Moines, IA, Omaha and Lincoln, NE and as far away as St. Louis, MO.

It's been an interesting first year for the Roberts, what with a late freeze, strong spring winds, and getting the irrigation system installed, and finding hired labor. Future plans include putting up a greenhouse so they can start their own transplants.



Roger Holtz, Credit Manager and Rosa Robert, FSA client, inspect a field of turnip greens.

The Roberts got a lot of satisfaction from seeing the crops growing and the fruits of their labors made ready for market. It proved that by working as a team, FSA is helping the Roberts to reach their goal of owning a successful truck-farming operation.