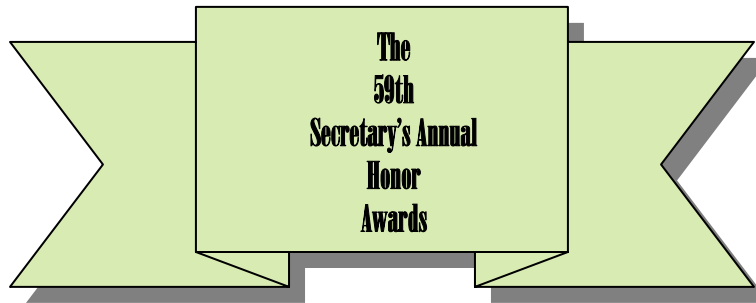


TRANSCRIPT

Farm & Foreign Agricultural Service



Friday, October 20, 2006
10:15 am

Undersecretary's Reception – Whitten Patio

WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS - Butch May

Good morning. Welcome to the Under Secretary's reception for the Farm and Foreign Agricultural Service honorees today. We are here to recognize the recipients of the 59th Secretary's Annual Honor Awards for their extraordinary contributions while performing their duties for the agencies and our FFAS mission area.

My name is Butch May. It is my honor to be your Master of Ceremonies for this morning's activities.

I would like to begin our program with some thoughts from the 30th President of the United States. This is a popular quote from a president whose popularity was anything but quotable. Nevertheless, what Calvin Coolidge said more than 70 years ago withstands the test of time:

Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent.

*Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.
Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts.*

Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.

*The slogan “press on” has solved and always will solve the
problems of the human race.*

**The people we assemble to honor are great examples of the picture
Coolidge painted for us with his remarks.**

**Certainly, among our honorees are talented, smart and well-educated
people. But they did not depend on these attributes alone while
tackling the chores set before them.**

**We acknowledge them today because they exceeded the expectations
of talented, smart and well-educated people with their persistence and
determination.**

**In most cases, they were challenged by a variety of circumstances –
budget constraints, time pressures, even nature’s fury – and they
“pressed on” to solve problems of the human race.**

**Their achievements may not have been heroic or legendary, but they
were important, because they established a benchmark for the rest of
us and enabled government to do best what it is designed to do – serve
the people.**

**Let us begin our celebration by hearing from the Acting Under
Secretary of Farm and Foreign Agricultural Service, Floyd Gaibler.**

COMMENTS FROM THE ACTING UNDER SECRETARY - Floyd Gaibler

**Thank you, Butch. I appreciate your willingness to step in as Master
of Ceremony today.**

**This is an important moment for us in Farm & Foreign Agricultural
Service. We spend a lot of time grinding out the work during the
year, and only a few minutes to acknowledge the great
accomplishments of our employees.**

**There are plenty of excuses for neglecting to say thanks for a job well
done. Among them, we are all very busy.**

Indeed, we are. With a new Farm Bill looming in our future, budget concerns always nagging, and drought conditions plaguing our constituents, there seems to be no relief from the day-to-day pressures to get things done.

Still, it is critically important to stop for a brief moment and thank the people who bear these burdens better than most. The awardees who are with us today have demonstrated to the rest of us that it is possible to carry daily burdens and still excel at important and often extra tasks to which they have been assigned.

The Secretary of Agriculture's Annual Honor Awards give us the tool ... and some might say the excuse ... to stop for that breath of recognition.

I am going to take a minute to help you understand the criteria we use to determine who we award.

There are specific goals we want to achieve each year. They are tied to strategic plans and in some ways, just good common sense. There are seven of these goals. When we ask for nominations from the agencies and field offices, we specify these seven goals as the categories for the nominations.

- The first goal is *Enhancing Economic Opportunity for Agricultural Producers.*

It is followed by these:

- *Supporting Increased Economic Opportunities and Improved Quality of Life in Rural Areas;*
- *Enhancing Protection and Safety of the Nation's Agriculture and Food Supply;*
- *Improving the Nation's Nutrition and Health;*
- *Protecting and Enhancing the Nation's Natural Resource Base and Environment;*
- *Supporting the President's Management Agenda and Civil Rights; and finally,*
- *Heroism and Emergency Response.*

The nominees were submitted under one of these headings. That assures us that we are recognizing contributions that positively influence our strategic missions.

Another important point about recognition that I want to make has to do with the concept of teamwork.

Most of our award winners today are teams of individuals who worked in harmony.

Behind every team is a coach or mentor and others who support the team. They pave the way for team success. It could be a supervisor who approves a budget, opens the door with a phone call, or promotes an idea up the chain of command.

When we acknowledge award recipients today, we are also acknowledging their supporters. Today's Honor Award recipients represent people who are proud of this award in the same way our honored guests ought to be proud.

I spoke a moment ago about the connection between our awards and our strategies. This is an important point. As we work in support of our national security, we have shrunk our budgets and become leaner.

Leaner operations and smaller budgets mean that the Department of Agriculture must prioritize its work to make sure the most critical tasks are done first and done best.

It means that we must work smarter. It requires us to stay focused and communicate our mission skillfully to every employee.

Inventor Thomas Edison said, "*Being busy does not always mean real work. The object of all work is production or accomplishment and to either of these ends there must be forethought, system, planning, intelligence, and honest purpose, as well as perspiration. Seeming to do... is not doing.*"

Our objective today is to recognize the people who do "the doing." We have four excellent examples of teamwork and individual efforts that furthered our strategic missions. We thank them and encourage others to model future activities after their performance.

We also want to recognize four individuals and groups from our mission area who participated on other USDA teams. They were also recipients of this year's Honor Awards.

Let us start the program now by bringing Butch May back to the podium. As he makes his way, let me extend my personal congratulations to all of our recipients. I also want to thank our presenters – Eldon Gould, Teresa Lasseter and Mike Yost – for giving of your time to participate in today’s ceremony.

And thank you all for coming. Please enjoy the moment and show your appreciation to our honorees.

Thank you.

PRESENTATION OF SECRETARY’S AWARD CERTIFICATES - Butch May

Thank you Under Secretary Gaibler.

As the Under Secretary indicated, we are first recognizing four recipients – three teams and an individual -- in this year’s Secretary’s Annual Honor Awards. This is the 59th such award.

In addition, there are Farm & Foreign Agricultural Service employees who earned recognition as members of four broader-based, departmental teams that also earned this year’s honor. I will present those awards as well.

Let’s begin by introducing Eldon Gould, who is our first presenter this morning.

Mr. Gould is Administrator of the Risk Management Agency. A northern Illinois farmer by profession, Administrator Gould has led RMA since last November. He is with us this morning to honor the Avian Influenza International Response Team.

**AVIAN INFLUENZA INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TEAM - RMA Administrator
Eldon Gould**

Thank you, Butch.

The Foreign Agricultural Service and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service are two agencies within the Department of Agriculture which often have common grounds. Animal diseases abroad and at home become international matters tackled by both agencies as we have seen demonstrated numerous times in the past year.

But, never has their work been profiled so significantly as it was when the threat of highly pathogenic avian influenza infected people in Asia.

Both agencies deployed their experts rapidly. They built a team of 33 employees led by FAS Assistant Deputy Administrator Jocelyn Brown. They fused the experts into an emergency response team, went to Congress for funding, which granted them 18-million dollars and raised awareness around the world that this disease needed to be stopped quickly and assuredly.

While the threat is never fully eradicated, we can tell by the diminished media attention and an ease of tensions among U.S. poultry growers, that this team did its job very effectively.

In their logistical planning, they also developed new communications tools and clearance processes that tore down old paradigms and erected new ones, changing the “can’t do” thinking to a new can-do attitude.

For these reasons, Secretary Johanns acknowledges the work of the Avian Influenza International Response Team with this year’s Annual Honor Award.

The Avian Influenza International Response Team members are from FAS: Jocelyn Brown - Team Leader; Grant Pettrie; Wayne Molstad; Peter Benson; Kristofer Dodge; Micah Rosenblum; Anna Ferus; Andrew White; Brian Guse; Bruce Crossan; and Jason Sandahl.

From APHIS: Tracy Duvernouy; Dan Sheesley; Clifford Graham; John Hurley and Gordon Cleveland;

Other team members who were unable to be here today are: Steve Beasley, Jennifer Maurer, Oulie Keita, Gary Laidig, Rod McSherry, John Wade, Eric Hoffman, Glenn Germaine, Ned Cardenas, Linda Logan, Peter Fernandez, Cheryl French, John Shaw, Lorrie Brundige, Joseph Anelli, Jennifer Grannis, and Cheryl Hall.

Congratulations.

TRANSITION TO 2ND PRESENTATION - Butch May

Thank you, Eldon and honorees.

Our next presenter is Farm Service Agency Administrator Teresa Lasseter.

Like Eldon, Teresa has been in her current role for a year, although she has a month's seniority on Eldon.

Teresa, a native of Georgia, has spent nearly 30 years around FSA, mostly in her home state. She spent a few years in Washington as an Associate Administrator before returning home.

We are all pleased to have her back in the nation's capital again.

Please welcome Administrator Lasseter.

AWARD TO PATRICIA KELLY - FSA Administrator Teresa Lasseter

Thank you, Butch.

This is going to be a fun presentation for me, because I admire Patricia Kelly.

I have had the privilege of observing Patricia at work during budget presentations to the Under Secretary.

Patricia Kelly took over the reins as Chief Financial Officer of the Risk Management Agency after the position sat vacant for more than two years. That in itself was a real challenge.

But on top of that, Patricia had some major obstacles to overcome. Like all of our agencies, RMA was being asked to support the President's Management Agenda. However, she was starting on shaky grounds. Auditors identified a material weakness in the agency's 2004 financial records, which had to be fixed.

That became one of Patricia's three goals, which she began to address immediately. The goals were to improve the financial audit, improve internal controls and implement an integrated general ledger.

Working with the Office of the Inspector General, auditors and her staff, Patricia resolved the material weakness and garnered concurrence from OIG and the auditors on her plan going forward.

Meantime, she fixed her internal control issues by implementing a wide range of improvements, including implementation of Circular A-123, Appendix A, which is the federal government's version of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. RMA will be compliant with Circular A-123 this year.

Then, after a thorough review of RMA's Central General Ledger, Patricia directed her staff through a process that converted a previously antiquated system into an acceptable version with less manual intervention, fewer errors and faster performance.

I am sure that Patricia Kelly will tell us that the turn-around she has driven would not have happened without cooperation and eager involvement from her staff.

John Quincy Adams, our 6th President, said, "*If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.*"

Please join me in congratulating Patricia Kelly for her exceptional work with RMA.

TRANSITION TO 3RD PRESENTATION - Butch May

Thank you, Teresa, and congratulations, Patricia.

Our next presenter gets to pull a double shift this morning. I am sure he is up to the task.

Michael Yost became Administrator of the Foreign Agricultural Service earlier this year after serving as Associate Administrator for the Farm Service Agency. The Minnesota native is a fourth generation crop farmer who served on several advisory boards with USDA before choosing to come to Washington as a fully engaged government executive.

Michael is here this morning to present two awards, the first to a team from Mississippi who did tireless work following Hurricane Katrina. And a second award to a team that modernized the rice marketing assistance loan program.

Please welcome Mike Yost.

HURRICANE KATRINA: MS DISTRICT DIRECTORS IV & V - FAS Administrator
Michael Yost

Thank you, Butch.

Monday, August 29, 2005, is a day that will long be remembered in southern Mississippi. That was the day Hurricane Katrina came inland. It carried wind speeds of more than 100 miles per hour that lasted for six hours.

Two-hundred people died. Homes, businesses and most things standing were flattened. It took weeks before power and gas were restored. It took weeks before water was safe to drink.

Despite these conditions, Mississippi's Farm Service Agency employees set aside their personal concerns and went back to work in order to serve their rural constituents. They returned to damaged offices; offices without electricity. In many cases, farmers were already lined up with questions and obviously with needs.

Two districts were hit hard by Katrina's devastation. District Four and District Five. They are led by Larry Rogers and William Parish.

Using whatever resources they could muster, Rogers and Parish and their emotionally taxed staffs took names and numbers of producers with desperate stories of destruction and despair. They heard about buildings destroyed, livestock killed, milk and eggs dumped on the ground for lack of market access, and a long list of other damages.

Understanding the situation, colleagues from FSA offices to the north came to their rescue. They brought travel trailers and many set up temporary offices. They wrote up 24-thousand applications for Emergency Conservation Program assistance alone.

The long lines, waiting, and writing out applications in longhand tried everyone's patience.

Mississippi's employees worked tirelessly. They showed remarkable character and dedication under stressful circumstances. They made personal sacrifices to help farmers recover from the disaster – and enormous contribution to people in need.

At the helm of all of this effort were two men: Larry Rogers and William Parish.

For these reasons, the Secretary of Agriculture would like to recognize the directors of Mississippi Districts Four and Five for their leadership and commitment to their rural communities by granting them this year's Secretary's Honor Award.

Please join me in congratulating Larry Rogers and William Parish.

RICE MARKETING: ASSISTANCE LOAN GROUP - Michael Yost

If someone could provide you with 100-million dollars, wouldn't you be happy?

The Farm Service Agency was certainly happy with its Rice Marketing Assistance Loan Group when the team improved its administration to the point that it trimmed 100-million dollars from its expenses. It was like a gift... a very welcomed gift.

How did they do it? They used exceptionally innovative ideas and creative skills to develop and implement an improved market-oriented approach for the rice marketing loan assistance program.

The approach provided an effective safety net for producers, prevented unnecessary spending and minimized potential forfeitures.

The group, led by Tom Tice of FSA's Economic and Policy Analysis Staff, analyzed 10 years of market data. It allowed them to discover important price relationships that existed in the world rice market. It revealed itself as a key variable affecting marketing assistance loan program benefits and costs.

To go any further into the detail, which would require me to use phrases such as "quantitative methodologies," might put some of you to sleep. And I would probably get tongue-tied. So, suffice it to say, *they done good and saved a hundred-million bucks to boot.*

The market-oriented approach improved the administration of the program by creating the safety net, preventing wasted expenditures and minimizing forfeitures. That was good enough for the Secretary to declare Tom Tice and his Rice Marketing Assistance Loan Group winners of the 2006 Secretary's Honor Award.

The Awardees are: Tom Tice, team leader, and Dennis Shields. William Chambers and Edward Rall were unable to be here today.

Congratulations, gentlemen.

TRANSITION TO OTHER AWARDS - Butch May

Thank you, Mike.

It is my pleasure to recognize the recipients of the Secretary's Employee Recognition and Remembrance Award. This award is a special award this year to recognize those whose efforts far exceeded their normal performance of their duties.

Along with Mr. Parrish and Mr. Rogers, the Mississippi State team is being recognized for their tireless hours of dedication to the farmers of Mississippi during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

This team consists of 55 dedicated employees deserving of this award. Ms. Deborah Smith is here today to accept this award on their behalf. Deborah, please be sure to convey our appreciation to the other members of the team for their outstanding work after this extremely destructive natural disaster.

We have four other award-winning groups and individuals to recognize this morning. They are all members of the Farm and Foreign Agricultural Service staff. Each served on teams or task forces with others from the Department of Agriculture.

USDA HUMAN CAPITAL TEAM - Butch May

Joe Migyanka is our first recipient.

Joe was part of the Department of Agriculture's Human Capital Team. As the name would imply, the team worked on human resource issues.

Secretary Johanns recognized the team's efforts in implementing the Human Capital initiative, which resulted in a positive, or "green" status rating, the highest on the President's Management Agenda scorecard.

Congratulations, Joe.

KATRINA DISASTER FOOD ASSISTANCE - Butch May

Our next recognition today goes to the team that worked on the Katrina Disaster Food Assistance effort.

Again, these individuals put in long hours and demonstrated extraordinary resilience, commitment and cooperation. They met all requests for food assistance when helping victims of three violent hurricanes – Katrina, Rita and Wilma.

The following five members of FFAS from the Kansas City office participated on the team that Secretary Johanns recognizes with this year's Honor Award. They are not with us today, but I would like you to know who they are:

Nancy Heitzelman; Rachel Hight; Linda Bolton; Judy Purkey; and Karen Hayes. We acknowledge their contribution and thank them from afar.

ASIAN SOYBEAN RUST TEAM - Butch May

Our next recipient is Heyward Baker. Heyward was a member of the Asian Soybean Rust Team. Secretary Johanns recognizes the team for its advanced planning, rapid response and recovery of a disaster. In fact, much of the threat was averted by using science-based and technological strategies. The effort addressed and mitigated risks of the dreaded Asian Soybean Rust, a devastating plant disease.

Congratulations, Heyward.

OPERATION SALSA JOINT TASK FORCE - Butch May

And concluding the awards...

John Paulette and Crystal Simpson took part in Operation Salsa as part of a Joint Task Force.

The task force's assignment was to uncover a complex conspiracy to defraud the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation and several private insurance companies. Their outstanding dedication and performance earned John and Crystal the 2006 Secretary's Honor Award.

Congratulations John and Crystal. We will be sure their certificates and keepsakes are presented to them at their offices.

INTRODUCE ELLEN TERPSTRA - Butch May

For my final duty this morning, I would like to introduce Deputy Under Secretary Ellen Terpstra.

Ellen joined the FFAS staff at the beginning of this year. Prior to that, she was Administrator of Foreign Agricultural Service. Before joining USDA, she presided over the USA Rice Federation, and before that the U.S. Apple Association.

Ellen has focused her career on international food and trade policy, also serving as trade negotiator and policy coordinator for the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

Please join me in welcoming Ellen Terpstra.

CLOSING REMARKS- Deputy Under Secretary Ellen Terpstra

Thank you, Butch.

Under Secretary Gaibler said earlier that our selection of this year's honorees met an important objective. Their accomplishments were in direct relation to the strategic mission of the Department of Agriculture.

The Avian Influenza team certainly did its part to enhance protection and safety of the nation's agriculture and food supply.

Patricia Kelly did a remarkable job of supporting the President's Management Agenda.

The Mississippi District Directors and team did their heroic part to ensure emergency response.

The Rice Marketing team came through with enhanced economic opportunity for America's agricultural producers.

The Asian Soybean Rust Team also provided protection and safety to the nation's food supply.

The Human Capital Team supported the President's Management Agenda and Civil Rights as did Operation Salsa's Joint Task Force.

And the team that provided food assistance following Hurricane Katrina exemplified emergency responsiveness.

All of our award winners have excelled at their work and enabled their agencies and the department to meet goals. We could say that that's what's expected; not a big deal.

But it is a big deal, because we cannot achieve our larger objectives if we don't complete the day-to-day chores that align with them.

Listening to the accomplishments is inspiring. We all get caught up in our routines and often go home wondering what we did. Did it make a difference?

The answer is of course it did. We have proof right here. So, thank you for your achievements, but also for reminding us that our work matters.

As a final thought, before we adjourn to refreshments, which will be served in the back of the atrium, let me also quote from a former President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln.

"I am a success today," said Lincoln, "because I had a friend who believed in me and I didn't have the heart to let him down."

We are among lots of friends today. Let us dare not let each other down. The testimonies we heard this morning defines what we are capable of doing.

Let us come back next year with even more stories of great accomplishments.

Thank you for attending our ceremony this morning, and please join us for refreshments.