

Following is the list of FSA's Special Emphasis Observances, updated: 1/16/2015

Farm Service Agency: Special Emphasis Observance Programs

JANUARY: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Day

The first observance of the Federal legal holiday honoring the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. was established on January 20, 1986. This holiday serves as time for Americans to reflect on the principles of racial equality and nonviolent social change espoused by Martin Luther King, Jr.

FEBRUARY: African American History (Black History Month)

In 1926, Dr. Carter G. Woodson instituted the first week-long celebration to raise awareness of African Americans' contributions to history. 50 years later, the week became a month, and today February is celebrated as African American History Month. The month of February was chosen because it celebrates the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, both of whom dramatically affected the lives of African Americans. Frederick Douglass (1817-1895) was a writer, lecturer, editor, and civil rights activist who escaped slavery at age 21 and went on to campaign for the abolition of slavery, establish a newspaper, and hold the office of Minister to Haiti. He was a major voice in the anti-slavery/civil rights movement of his time. Abraham Lincoln (born February 12, 1809), as the sixteenth president of the United States, issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, thereby declaring that all slaves within the Confederacy would be permanently free.

MARCH: National Women's History Month

The purpose of National Women's History Month is to increase consciousness and knowledge of women's history: to take one month of the year to remember the contributions of notable and ordinary women, in hopes that the day will soon come when it's impossible to teach or learn history without remembering these contributions. Women's History Week was instituted in 1978 in an effort to begin adding women's history into educational curricula. In 1987, the National Women's History Project successfully petitioned Congress to include all of March as a celebration of the economic, political and social contributions of women.

MAY: Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month

National Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month observance began in 1979 as Asian Heritage Week, established by congressional proclamation. In May 1990, the holiday was expanded further when President George Bush signed a proclamation making it month-long for that year. On October 23, 1992, Bush signed legislation designating May of every year Asian Pacific American Heritage Month.

JUNE: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Pride Month

In June of 1969, patrons and supporters of the Stonewall Inn in New York City staged an uprising to resist the police harassment and persecution to which LGBT Americans were commonly subjected. This uprising marks the beginning of a movement to outlaw discriminatory laws and practices against Americans. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender LGBT Pride Month. On June 2, 2000, President Clinton issued Proclamation No. 7316 for Gay and Lesbian Pride Month. On June 1, 2009, President Obama issued Proclamation No. 8387 for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Month.

AUGUST: Women's Equality Day Program

Women's Equality Day is a day proclaimed each year by the United States President to commemorate the granting of the vote to women throughout the country. Women in the United States were granted the right to vote on August 26, 1920, when the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution was certified as law. Every president has published a proclamation for Women's Equality Day since 1972, the year after legislation was first introduced in Congress by Bella Abzug. This resolution was passed in 1971 designating **August 26** of each year as Women's Equality Day.

SEPTEMBER: National Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15)

National Hispanic Heritage Month honors the culture, heritage, and contributions of Hispanic Americans each year. The event began in 1968 when Congress deemed the week, including September 15 and 16, National Hispanic Heritage Week to celebrate the contributions and achievements of the diverse cultures within the Hispanic community.

OCTOBER: National Disability Employment Awareness Month

In the beginning, Congress, with the aim of helping disabled veterans, designated the first week of October as National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week in 1945. In 1990, the U.S. saw changes such as the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. By presidential proclamation, a full month was designated as National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

NOVEMBER: National American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage Month

In 1976, Congress designated a week of October to celebrate Native American Awareness Week. The week served as recognition for the great influence American Indians have had upon the U.S. In August of 1990, when President Bush approved the designation of November as National American Indian Heritage Month. November is traditionally a time when many American Indians hold fall harvest and world-renewal ceremonies, powwows, dances, and various feasts. The holiday recognizes hundreds of different tribes and approximately 250 languages, and celebrates the history, tradition, and values of American Indians.