



## FFAS HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION NEWSLETTER



Farm and Foreign  
Agricultural Services  
Human Resources Division

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### Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences

Renee Starr-Beauford  
Human Resources Specialist  
Talent Acquisition Branch

Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS) are a national society that welcomes membership of people of all racial and ethnic group participation in agricultural and related sciences careers.

#### The objectives of MANRRS are to:

- Increase the number of students studying agricultural sciences, natural resources, and related fields at both the undergraduate and graduate levels;
- Foster a bond of fellowship among students, faculty, staff and administration in colleges and/or schools of agriculture;
- Encourage scholarly achievement, advancement and excellence among members; and
- Promote careers and academic counseling for undergraduate and graduate students, and enhance their academic studies, research skills, and professional and leadership development skills.



MANRRS goal is to provide its student members - from junior high school through doctoral programs, with the support needed to become productive citizens by engaging them in leadership development activities, educational opportunities, job readiness training, and by facilitating internship placement and permanent employment.

FSA agrees that potential employees who are interested in agronomy and related scientific fields field are a valuable resource to populate our workplace as we put our succession plans into place. Our new workforce will likely be an influx of young adults; we believe it is our responsibility to develop these young adults to their greatest desired potential. To hold true to this process FSA suggests that leaders and employees research MANRRS to determine how it could help to strategically align the new workforce objectives with those within USDA.

MANRRS schedules annual as well as quarterly meetings and events in support of its membership. On March 31 – April 2, 2011 MANRRS held their 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Career Fair & Training Conference in the Kansas City, Missouri metropolitan area; the Overland Park Convention Center in Overland Park, Kansas. The theme for the 2011 Training conference was: “MANRRS: Cultivating a Generation of Excellence!”

## MANRRS (continued)

Awaiting the students were opportunities to network, attend workshops, share ideas, and visit the Career Fair where they explored various employment opportunities with many world-renowned private agriculture industry leaders, colleges and universities, and federal and state agencies. The training workshops included topics from Bioscience, to Cross Cultural Competence, to How to get admitted into a College of Veterinary Medicine. Furthering the liveliness of the conference, competitions were scheduled that awarded first, second, and third place prizes. Competitions included topics such as Oral Research, Public Speaking, Graduate Research Discussion, and Chapter of the Year.

On March 31<sup>st</sup>, Michael Gonzales, Chief, HRD Talent Acquisition Branch, and Rodger Matthews, Associated Deputy Administrator for RMA, attended the Opening General Session banquet. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, Recruiters representing FFAS monitored and marketed the USDA Display Booth for the MANRRS Career Fair: Renee Starr-Beauford and Michael Wheeler (HRD); Ned Bergman (FSA-KCCO); Marsha Young (EEO/Civil Rights); and Wilma Hines and Rachel Anderson (RMA).

During this time many students showed a vast interest in FFAS. The focus of FFAS recruitment was on the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) and Loan Assistant/Specialist positions that were currently advertising open vacancies. Students were also referred to and provided the process for applying for Federal positions through the USAJobs website. All applicants were prepared, very professional, and interested in employment with FFAS.

This annual event establishes and continues to maintain a solid recruitment foundation for attracting potential employees to USDA. It provides an opportunity to promote awareness of the services and employment opportunities that FFAS provides to the community. Get interested in MANRRS in support of your success.

Learn more at [http://www.manrrs.org/upcoming\\_conference.aspx](http://www.manrrs.org/upcoming_conference.aspx)

## 2011 Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day

Mondina McClain, Talent Acquisition Branch  
Tammi Parrott, Leadership and Employee Development Branch

The Human Resources Division participated in the 2011 Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day Events, a nationwide program to show our daughters and sons the value of education.

Mondina McClain of the Employee/Labor Relations and Benefits Branch (ELRBB), Benefits and Performance Management Section (BAPMS) in WDC represented FFAS at the annual USDA/Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day. This USDA event includes a collaboration of celebrations with Earth Day Awareness, USDA Farmer's Market, and the Peoples Garden. It helped students discover the power and possibilities associated with a balanced work and family life, and provided students an opportunity to share how they envision their future. The ELRBB/BAPMS staffed the exhibit booth sharing information on the agency, student programs, as well as provided students with informative trinkets. Mr. Philip Short, Deputy Administrator for Management met with the students, gave a warm welcome and presented them with Certificates of Participation.

## Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day (continued)

- Tammi Parrott of the Leadership and Employee Development Branch sponsored an Eye/Hand Coordination activity where students utilized and measured their skills using computer competitions. Students ages 8 to 18 attended the eye hand coordination session and accessed games and intranet websites. Games provided coordination with spelling, word assembly, word search, word scrambling, and eye hand coordination for resolving puzzles and directions. Students were able to access the intranet to gain knowledge on Agriculture history, Agriculture programs, and Agricultural dietary guidelines. The eye hand coordination session was attended by 127 youths. LEDB Staff provided assistance and direction. All attendees were entertained and some asked for additional time in the session at a later time.
- HRD's Occupation Nurses, Kathleen Tharp, RN and Teresa Bergman, RN, developed a Human Trivia activity for the students that attended "Take your student to work day." During the exercise the nurses measured student's height, weight and blood pressure. Human body trivia facts sheets and other information were provided. Handouts also included nutritional facts and the pyramid guide. The nurses provided each student with key chains, band aids, pens and other health related information.
- Cassandra Hayes of the Delegated Examining Section provided Information on Students Programs - Resume Writing, in two sessions. One session consisted of age groups 8-13 years old and the other group was 14-18 years old. Students were provided worksheets to teach the information that is needed to apply for Government and private industry positions and also provided information on how to search for student programs.

The events engaged students in activities that were educational and entertaining. The students had positive feedback from the activities with FFAS HRD.

### The Assessment Project

Vilma Alejandro, Personnel Psychologist  
Debbie Schmidt, Chief, Delegated Examining Section  
Human Resources Division

As the landscape of our workforce is changing and the competition of luring the top talent to one's agency is becoming fierce, the Human Resource Division (HRD) recognized the criticality of enhancing our current selection assessments and processes. In April of 2010, HRD launched a project in collaboration with The Hay Group, a consulting firm, to analyze and create more effective applicant assessment tools for the following mission critical occupations (MCOs) within the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Risk Management Agency (RMA): 1101 District Director; 1101 Program Technician; 301 Administrative Specialist; 1165 Farm Loan Officer and Manager; 1145 Agricultural Program Specialist; 1146 Agricultural Marketing Specialist; 2210 Java, .Net and Project Manager; 1101 Risk Management Specialist; and 1801 Compliance Investigator.

Additionally, HRD invested in the development of a management selection assessment and interview package. All assessments identified above have been deployed and are currently in use. The success of this project is attributed to the countless hours of investment from subject matter experts (SMEs) in the field and the national headquarters. These high performing employees provided great insight about the positions. Field offices in Pennsylvania and North

## Assessment Project (continued)

Carolina opened their doors to our in-house Personnel Psychologist and the consultants as part of the job observation phase in the development process. Additionally, leaders from across FSA volunteered their time to be part of a focus panel to assist in the development of the management competency model. It was the result of this model that led to the development of the management assessment tool. HRD valued the approach of “planning with rather than planning for” as the method to ensure capturing the whole perspective of the job series.



Recently the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) launched a new assessment portal entitled USAJobAssess. HRD is excited that OPM is introducing the Federal government to these new selection methodologies. This new launch will assist managers in embracing the new paradigm shift in Federal selection methodologies and practices; thus equipping FSA to accurately identify levels of proficiency of critical competencies for all positions. However, this level of quality cannot be achieved without the commitment of leadership and SMEs. The development phase of any selection assessments requires the following steps with the assistance of various SMEs within the occupation:

- Job Analysis
  - Identification of Relevant Job Performance Dimensions
  - Identification of KSAs and Competencies necessary for the Job
  - Development of Assessment Device to Measures KSAs/Competencies
  - Validation of Assessment Device
  - Use of the Assessment Devices in the Processing of Applicants
- Implementation

HRD is currently in the pilot phase of the Resume Evaluation Tool with Information Technology Services Division (ITSD). The results of the pilot will assist HRD in improving the implementation process, since it is a new approach for the agency and the customer. The Resume Evaluation Tool is a standard approach for assessing applicants' resume. The goal of the assessment is to identify the top performers from the applicant pool. We are hopeful that this approach will be duplicated across many of our positions in the agency. OPM is currently conducting a similar pilot for Executive Service Positions. Finally, FAS also has initiated a similar project with the Hay Group with the assistance of HRD.

The Talent Acquisition Branch established a Development Team to collaborate with hiring managers and SME's to develop new assessments for the remaining MCO's for FSA and RMA that are not covered under USAJOBS Assess. As previously indicated, the development phase involves multiple steps and the assistance of various SMEs. In addition, a Deployment Team has been established to provide quality review to insure assessments adequately measure the critical competencies and are supported by the job analysis. HR Staffing Practitioners are available to answer questions regarding any of the assessment products.

## Depressed: Don't hesitate to get help

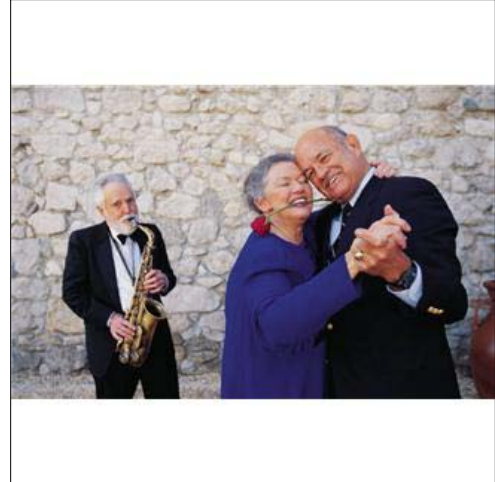
Submitted by: Bonnie Kisko  
Worklife and Wellness Ambassador  
Florida State FSA Office

Depression is one of the most common medical conditions that affect over 19 million Americans yearly. Women are 2 times more likely to suffer with depression than men. The disease affects men and women of all ages, races, and economic levels. An estimated 33 to 35 million U.S. adults are likely to experience depression at some point during their lifetime.

The way depression is defined and understood has changed through history as more knowledge has been acquired about the physical and mental changes that occurs when a person is depressed. Research has shown that depression physically changes the neurological makeup of the brain.

### Some symptoms of depression:

- mood change, nearly every day during most of the day
- marked diminished interest or pleasure in almost all activities
- significant weight loss (when not dieting), weight gain, or a change in appetite
- insomnia or hypersomnia (excess sleep)
- fatigue or loss of energy
- feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt
- impaired ability to concentrate or indecisiveness
- recurrent thoughts of death, recurrent suicidal



**To take a confidential depression assessment test click on this website:**

<https://www.magellanassist.com/mem/library/assess/defaultscreen.aspx?screen=CESD>

### Get Free Confidential Assistance through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

If you need to speak with an EAP counselor, call Federal Occupational Health at 800-222-0364, TTY 888-262-7848. Employees may receive up to 4 free counseling sessions. If an outside referral is made by the EAP, the employee may have to pay out-of-pocket costs for services not covered through their health insurance plan.

### Helpful Resources

Listed below are some websites that provide information to help you understand the symptoms, types of depression, treatment, publications, where to find help and more:

- [National Mental Health Association](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)
- [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](#)
- [Federal Occupational Health](#)
- [Mental Health Organizations and Websites](#)

## Emerging Issues

Whilemenia Duncan  
Communications Officer

Excerpted from applicable Web Sites noted below

### One Year of Federal Hiring Reforms

Obama, eager to hire a new generation of recruits and make government “cool again”, one year ago ordered federal agencies to complete the process in 80 days. To mark the anniversary, John Berry, director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the man tasked by President Obama with pushing most of the reforms, is scheduled to recap a year’s worth of work at the National Press Club.

Read about agencies cutting the average length of time to hire new workers.

<http://www.opm.gov/news/opm-director-marks-dramatic-progress-with-hiring-reform.1664.aspx>

### 2010 Hiring Reform at FFAS

Major changes have occurred with the implementation of the President’s Hiring

Reform Initiative. HRD has branded hiring reform and smoothly integrated it into FFAS’s hiring process. HRD’s says a special thank you to Mark Florance, MSD in Kansas City for developing the Hiring Reform Logo and Jonathan Leaman, ITSD/HR Liaison in WDC, for his assistance in creating the website. Click on the Logo and take a look at some tools you can use to facilitate a collaborative hiring and informational relationship with the Human Resources Division.



Stay on the lookout for additional promotional activities and informational material relative to Hiring Reform.

### Who Is John Berry and What Are His "Bold Ideas" for the Federal Workforce?



Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Director John Berry gave a speech at Syracuse University. In his address, Berry called for "bold ideas" to reform the civil service.

I know it's all about change, but some perspective is in order, especially when one of the "bold ideas" being floated is to abolish the position classification system and replace it with something like a three-level apprentice to expert scheme.

Follow this link <http://www.fedsmith.com/article/2184/who-john-berry-what-his-bold.html>

### Federal Eye: How Many Federal and Postal Workers Can Retire?

A recent article issued through a federal publication listed that federal government and postal service employees who are eligible to retire represent a significant percentage of the millions of fulltime workforce members.

OPM and other followers and observers of the retirement eligibles warns that a proposals to significantly increase payroll deductions of federal workers to contribute to their pension funds may hasten an exodus of older, experienced workers eligible to retire.

## Emerging Issues (continued)

Lawmakers and White House negotiators are seriously considering the proposal as one of just a few areas of agreement on how to reduce the federal deficit, according to The Post.

To read the entire article, please [click here](#).

## Career Opportunities in FFAS

All jobs (headquarters and field) open throughout each Agency may be obtained by accessing:

**FSA** Federal (GS) positions & FSA County Office (CO) positions:

<http://jobsearch.usajobs.opm.gov/a9agfsa.asp>

**FAS** Positions:

<http://jobsearch.usajobs.opm.gov/a9agfas.asp>

**RMA** Positions:

<http://jobsearch.usajobs.opm.gov/a9agrma.asp>

*Provide feedback and articles for publication to the Editor at [whilemenia.duncan@kcc.usda.gov](mailto:whilemenia.duncan@kcc.usda.gov)*

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