



APRIL 2009

VOICES

Advancing diversity and its unique contributions in the NPA

Demographics and Diversity in the Northern Plains Area

By Barbara King, Fort Collins

The other day a co-worker asked me for a definition of diversity, and especially how diversity relates to race, gender, and ethnicity. My short answer was that diversity is represented by each of us, and is voiced by the perspectives each of us has gained through our experiences, which in turn are largely framed by our backgrounds of race, gender, ethnicity, culture, national origin, generation, class, etc.

When talking about diversity, conversations often get bogged down in talking about “the count,” as in, what is the breakdown of employees by race, gender, ethnicity, disabilities, etc. While the “count” is part of what constitutes diversity, the “count” is also important in that every employer is required by Executive Order 11246 (signed by President Johnson in 1965) to prepare an annual report on the demographics of its workforce. The MD-715 is the annual report required of federal agencies.

The purpose of these annual reports is to describe the workforce in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, and disabilities, compare the workforce to the available labor force, and identify any barriers to employment for any groups that are under-represented. The goal is to have a workforce that reflects the demographics of the available labor force.

Recruitment efforts in the NPA reflect a commitment to diversify our workforce. Even so, the numbers of employees from under-represented groups remains below expectations. In FY 08 the NPA had 1,031 employees (769 permanent and 262 temporary). About 92% of the permanent workforce is White, 60% is male, and about 9% reports a disability. The breakdown of employees from

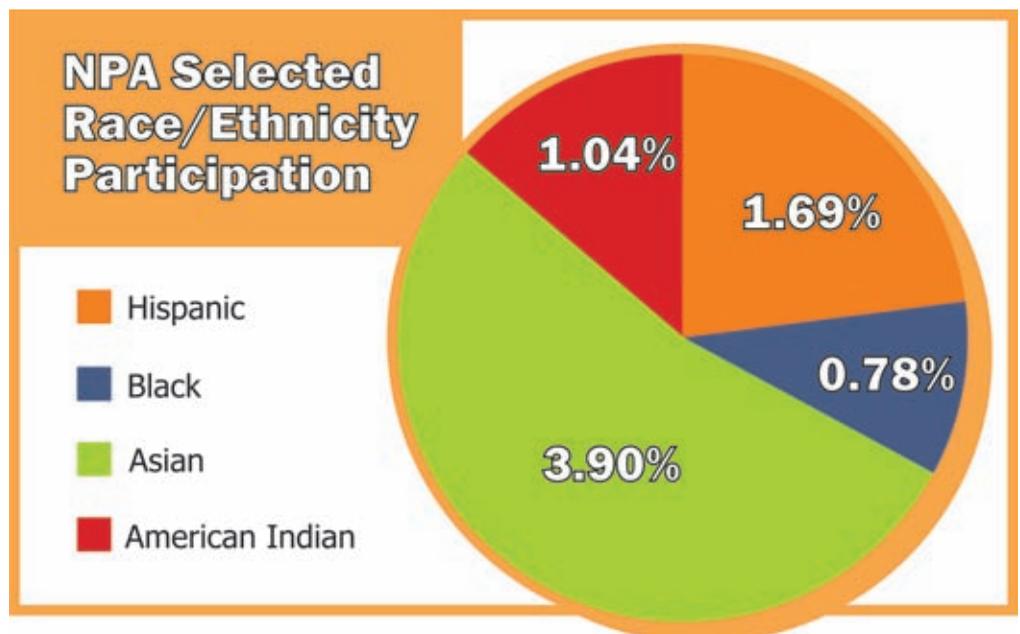
under-represented groups (about 8% of the permanent workforce) is shown in the chart below.

Participation rates have remained fairly steady over the years, and the NPA continues to be under-represented for Hispanic males and females, Black males and females, and Asian females.

Continued next page

Breakdown of NPA employees from under-represented groups

Approximately 8% of NPA's workforce is made up of under represented groups including Blacks, Asians, Hispanics and American Indians.



Demographics...

Continued from page 1

If this past year is any indication, though, there is a glimmer of hope that the NPA may begin to see noticeable increases in the participation rates of under-represented groups in the permanent workforce. For instance, although minorities comprise about 8% of the permanent workforce, they accounted for 15% of new hires and 4% of separations. In comparison, white men accounted for 36% of new hires and 48% of separations (relative to their participation rate of 55%) and white women accounted for 48% of new hires and 48% of separations (relative to their participation rate of 37%).

Besides just looking at participation rates, it is also interesting to consider occupations and grades by gender, race,

and ethnicity. Women hold the majority of administrative support and technician positions, while men hold the majority of professional, officials and managers, and SY positions. Generally, minority males hold positions in the officials and managers or professionals categories, while minority females hold technician, administrative, or officials and managers occupations. In the SY category, white males account for 75%, white females account for 12%, minority males account for 11%, and minority females account for 2%.

By GS grades, the majority of minority males hold positions in grades 13-14, while the majority of white females hold positions in grades 1-8. Neither white males nor minority females are clustered

in any one particular grade range; white males are about equally distributed in grades 1-8, 9-11, and 13-14, while minority females are about equally distributed in grades 1-8 and 9-11. Additional information about the NPA workforce can be found at <http://www.ars.usda.gov/Main/docs.htm?docid=16578> then click on MD 715 – NPA Workforce Data.

As NPA becomes more diverse – by race, gender, ethnicity, culture, generation, class, etc. – all of us will benefit by having richer and deeper conversations as a result of the synergy that comes about when people from different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives interact regularly with one another. ■

Labadie, Schneider Named to NPA Diversity Task Force

Peggy Labadie: Laramie

For a great deal of my life I have worked “Hands On” jobs in the health care system both for humans and animals. I sustained a permanent injury to my back in 2005 and had to change the “type” of jobs that I could do. Working in a sedentary position instead of standing, lifting, moving, etc all day was a challenging transition for me. I have been an accounting tech with USDA, ARS, ABADRL, in Laramie Wyoming, since November, 2006. This is the first federal position that I have held. I am learning a great deal about federal regulations, human resources, and the budget process. I’m the AgLearn administrator for our location along with taking care of the administrative travel for Laramie.

My desire to be part of the Diversity Taskforce stems from the 15 years that I had the pleasure to work with young-uns, old-ens, and developmentally disabled folks. I was exposed to the

positive impact that they could have in society, when in appropriate environments, trained with diligence and patience, and praised for a task well done! One of the goals that I have for myself through the Diversity Task Force is to share that we are all a piece of a large puzzle. We just have to find the place where we fit, so that we can work together as a whole and thereby successfully complete the “picture”. Each piece (no matter how trivial) of the puzzle is important for the picture to be finished. ■

Dave Schneider: Brookings

Dave is a Research Technician at the North Central Agricultural Research Laboratory located in Brookings, South Dakota. Dave has been a technician with ARS for 20 years. He currently works for Dr. Kenton Dashiell on developing and testing corn lines for natural host plant resistance to rootworm larval feeding,

screening soybean lines to select for improved lateral root growth, which increases soil aggregate structure, to reduce soil erosion, and screening soybean lines to select for natural host plant resistance to soybean aphid feeding. Dave and his wife Sheila have two kids, Tyler and Abby. In his free time he enjoys hunting, fishing, and golfing. ■



Dave Schneider

Northern Plains Notes

By Northern Plains Area Director Will Blackburn

Fires, floods, blizzards and rain storms – not just another spring in the NPA. The downtown of Miles City suffered a major fire in late March that destroyed several buildings. Dr. Mark Petersen, the RL of Miles City, certainly has had an interesting first few weeks with his new job. Residents of Mandan and Bismarck have spent considerable effort and time shoveling snow and pushing belongings to higher ground to escape the ever-rising Missouri River.

Along the Red River Valley, especially in Fargo, an almost endless effort of filling sandbags and building temporary levees has, at least as this is being written, saved much of the city from what could have been a devastating flood.

Downriver in Grand Forks, efforts continue to contain the river to avoid a repeat of the 1997 flood. Times like these are truly a test of resiliency and determination, and NPA employees in these impacted locations have demonstrated time and again their ability to join forces to overcome the challenges of Mother Nature. I wish all employees well and extend my hopes that everyone's home will remain dry and everyone's family will remain safe.

On-Site Reviews Underway

Three locations hosted On-Site Reviews (formerly called Expert Reviews) since January: Lincoln (Agroecosystem Management), Akron (Central Great Plains Research Station), and Clay Center (Meat Safety and Quality, Environmental Management, and Animal Health). The following research units will be reviewed this year: Mandan (Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory), Cheyenne (Rangeland Resource) Fort Collins (Agricultural Systems Research, Soil Plant Nutrient, and Water Management).

NPA Matching Funds Awarded for Summer Internships

The Area Office is once again providing matching funding for summer interns and apprentices, and proposals from the following nine scientists were selected to receive partial funding: Dr. Maria Jenderek (Fort Collins) and Dr. Mike Lehman (Brookings) received partial funding to each hire an apprentice, and Dr. Harvey Blackburn and Dr. Dale Shaner (Fort Collins), Dr. Dan Cook and Dr. Doug Johnson (Logan), Dr. Rebecca Phillips (Mandan), Dr. James Campbell (Manhattan), and Dr. Upendra Sainju (Sidney) will each hire an intern.

As in past years, the Area Office received far more proposals than we could fund, and several positions were filled by students responding to the announcements posted on the NPA web site.

The Native American Indian Internship Program is in its fifth year, and Sidney, Mandan, Brookings, Fargo, and Grand Forks are all hoping to host intern(s) this summer. Student selections have not yet been finalized as of this writing.

NPA Excellence Award Winners

The following employees were selected for the 2008 NPA Awards of Excellence: Kathie Peterson (Cheyenne and Laramie), for Administrative Management Support; Joan Rosch (Clay Center), for Secretarial Support; William Iversen (Sidney) for Scientific Support; Jeff Anderes (Manhattan) for Information Technology; and JoAnne Gresens (Manhattan) for Safety, Health, and Environment.

ARS Funding in FY 2010

On the national level, President Obama's proposed budget continues to grab headlines and generate consider-

able discussion in Congress, the media and around kitchen tables. The proposed 2010 budget should go to Congress in early May, but how ARS will be affected remains

to be seen. In a recent interview with Government Executive (March 27 issue) Secretary Vilsack indicated that he will focus on three main issues: tying performance to results, upgrading technology, and dealing with the aging workforce both in terms of recruitment and preserving institutional knowledge. As this year unfolds, I anticipate that all federal agencies will come under increasing scrutiny, with an emphasis on accountability. ■



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Building Community

• Special Feature •

"We often talk about community in various ways. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines community as: "an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location" or "a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society." This article explores how workplace community is expressed throughout locations in the Northern Plains Area.



Celebrating Asian American / Pacific Islander Heritage Month at Manhattan

Tools for 'Community' Building

By JoAnne Gresens, Manhattan

Whether you were born and raised in or near the town in which your location is situated or moved into it from elsewhere, that community and its people are probably major factors in your decision to either remain or leave. The same holds true for our workplace communities, where we spend half or more of our waking hours, and a sense of community (or lack of it) is what makes a location more than just a place that generates a paycheck. Quoting Barbara King, "How we treat others, demonstrate support for one another, listen to one another, and the extent to which we each show genuine concern for others' well-being are the bedrock of workplace community." (March 2008 issue of *VOICES*)

What sorts of activities bring NPA employees out of the corners of their individual workspaces to merge as part of a larger workplace community? Some of these activities are Agency and location sponsored or encouraged, while others are initiated by employees themselves. Some are common to all or most locations while others are unique to a particular one. For example, because of local custom and availability, it is easier for some locations than others to celebrate the local harvest of corn, or even Rocky Mountain oysters, as the main entrée of an employee picnic. Regardless, there are many "tools" employed by NPA locations to build community in the workplace, both "officially" and "informally."

Official Gatherings, Work Groups

To support functional work efforts, individual management units often hold monthly meetings to enhance communication among their workgroups and to provide an opportunity for new employees to meet the people they will interact with on a daily basis. On a larger scale, most locations hold periodic meetings, open to everyone, that serve to introduce our newcomers to the larger workforce. These meetings give employees across management units a chance to find out

what else is happening within their workplace community as a whole, and also provide an excellent platform for questions and answers which benefits everyone in attendance.

Specific workgroups, such as Safety Committees, Animal Care Committees, and EMS (Environmental Management System) Committees may be required. Whether employees volunteer or are assigned, the structure of these committees is designed to represent a cross section of location personnel. These specialty groups provide an opportunity to work with, and become acquainted with, others outside one's regular working group.

Ad hoc Work Groups

Special projects can also bring together groups of people that may not normally work together but who share a common interest. For instance, one location has an Energy Committee that focuses on identifying and implementing conservation strategies and tracking energy usage. Other groups, whether they call themselves a Landscaping Committee or a Grounds Committee, have taken on fun and useful projects such as planning and planting "beneficial landscaping" for the facility entrance, or designing and installing a rain garden on the property. Whatever these ad hoc committees come to be called, people have combined their talents to have fun while at the same time creating something useful that can be enjoyed by all.

Special Emphasis Observances

In support of ARS's Special Emphasis Observances, employees are invited to participate in activities designed to promote awareness and, hopefully, to encourage an increase in our workforce participation of underrepresented populations. Many locations have committees to arrange these events.

Continued next page →

Tools...

Continued from page 4

Other locations invite volunteers to sign up and organize something for an observance of their choice. The least formal arrangement simply calls for someone taking the initiative and relying on volunteer support to help carry out the plan. These gatherings generally follow the schedule of monthly observances, but are sometimes consolidated into one or two larger events during the year. Fellow employees and visiting scientists are often persuaded to share their culture through presentations and exhibits. Additionally, many NPA scientists travel overseas and, upon their return to the location, are more than willing to describe their experiences. Ethnic foods are often incorporated as part of these celebrations, or it might be something as simple as a slide show and brown bag luncheon. Locations also make use of video presentations, bulletin boards and electronic communication to share information about specific observances. One of our locations has prepared a poster entitled, "We Are From Everywhere," composed of various maps marking the birthplace of each location employee to illustrate how diverse the geographical and cultural backgrounds of the present workforce is.

Employee Associations

From formally structured employee associations to more loosely organized groups, location employees band together to share both good times and bad. We celebrate retirements and weddings, and provide support and condolences during illnesses, family losses and community disasters. These groups spearhead non-work related gatherings that bring people together on a more personal level. Partially or wholly funded through dues or donations, the monies collected are often supplemented through fund raisers and often feature food as the main attraction.

Outside Community Outreach

Employees at many locations volunteer their time to participate in the Adopt-A-Highway Program which is a great way



This Fairy "Goth" Mother celebrated Halloween in Miles City this fall



The Easter Bunny hops in for a surprise visit at a Sidney location meeting



Recycling outdated electronics at an annual e-cycling event held at the Sidney location

of supporting the community at large. Chili cook-offs have become a popular way of contributing to the Combined Federal Campaign and, in addition to serving up bowls of chili, bring everyone together for some good-natured competition and socializing, while benefiting many worthy organizations. Another outreach activity is donating towards a community's annual holiday drive by collecting food and gifts for the needy. One location goes even further by supporting its community's food drives throughout the entire year.

Holiday Celebrations

Enjoying the holiday season with your coworkers might include an informal

gathering with a shared collection of homemade treats, a larger pot luck event or it could be a more formal affair held offsite. Options can include an intimate gathering of immediate coworkers, or an expanded affair to include all employees. One of our locations holds a Thanksgiving celebration with turkey and all the trimmings each year where visitors from other countries can sample traditional fare and a uniquely American holiday. St. Patrick's Day and Halloween are also fun observances that invite people to dress for the occasion and partake of foods likely to tint lips in the party's theme colors.

Tools for 'Community Building'... *Continued from page 5*

Another location holds a new year luncheon – to ring in the New Fiscal Year!

Summer Fun and Food

Summer barbeques and picnics are popular throughout NPA whether held onsite or off. Some locations have multiple worksites, which tends to pose a problem when trying to get all employees gathered in one place. But, it seems that once the effort is made, these events are likely to become tradition. One location, with employees at three separate worksites, still manages to bait everyone to an annual summer barbeque, illustrating that the principles of positive community can reach beyond the physical boundaries of a single building.

Many locations routinely incorporate food into scheduled break times to celebrate birthdays, departing employees, or for no reason other than it might be your turn to bring the donuts. People take turns providing light snacks or, as in the

case of one location, the employee association distributes fruit and/or donuts and bagels the first Wednesday of each month. At some locations, barley seminars are held on occasion or regularly, after work hours, at a local pub. Another informal, and quite unique activity, includes a quilting group that participates in an annual weekend retreat at a nearby national park.

Whatever the size of the location, how it is physically organized or number of employees, NPA locations are figuring out ways to bring employees together. Although smaller locations may not have all the resources of larger ones, there are still opportunities to build community with the creative and energetic organizers at hand.

Reaping the Benefits

It's probably true that workplace community has evolved over time, largely due to dual-career couples, greater commutes

between work and home, and growing desires to have a more balanced lifestyle combining work, recreation, family, friends, volunteerism, etc. At the same time, the location and workplace community may be especially important to younger employees or employees new to the location. A recent study revealed that employees who feel more engaged with their co-workers also feel more engaged with their job.

Those who feel they are part of a community at work typically have a desire to help maintain and contribute to that community. This strong sense of community brings together people with different jobs so they can work side-by-side with an appreciation of each other's contributions towards their common mission (research). Engaged and vibrant workplace communities benefit everyone as evidenced by the multitude of activities and approaches found throughout the NPA. ■



Where in the NPA?

.....
...can you find this trussed up Apis specimen? The insect is sticking out its tongue (proboscis) to lap up a little drop of sugar water in this stimulus experiment.

(Answer on page 12.)

Show your own location pride! Share your pictures of scenic landmarks, fun festivities or occupational oddities that make your location uniquely you!

*Please e-mail your pictures (with captions) to Beth Redlin at:
 Beth.Redlin@ars.usda.gov
 or to Barbara King at:
 Barbara.King@ars.usda.gov*

'Building Community' at Annual Resource Day

By Mary Brodahl, Fort Collins

The 2008 Colorado Wyoming (CO-WY) Resource Day was a day of conversation, networking, humor, awards, food, unit presentations, and a special guest presentation by Dianne Odland (Public Affairs Specialist from ARS Information Products and Services Branch) on "Science in Your Shopping Cart."

The 2008 event emphasized community outreach and scientific collaboration within and beyond ARS. Unit oral and poster presentations focused on the people, community and professional outreach, as well as the science of each research unit. An Area Office (AO) presentation introduced us to area office personnel, their alter egos (in Halloween costume), and the jobs they do.

Each research unit presented awards to staff members who showed exemplary team work and collaboration in the past year. An award also recognized valued collaborators from Colorado State University. New this year was an award for the unit with outstanding community outreach and scientific collaboration. The unit winning this award gets the honor of hosting and displaying a trophy which will eventually be passed on to the next winner in two years. Rangeland Resources Research Unit located in Fort Collins, Nunn, CO and Cheyenne, WY was the 2008 winner.

Finally, Diane Odland's presentation "Science in Your Shopping Cart" highlighted some of the consumer

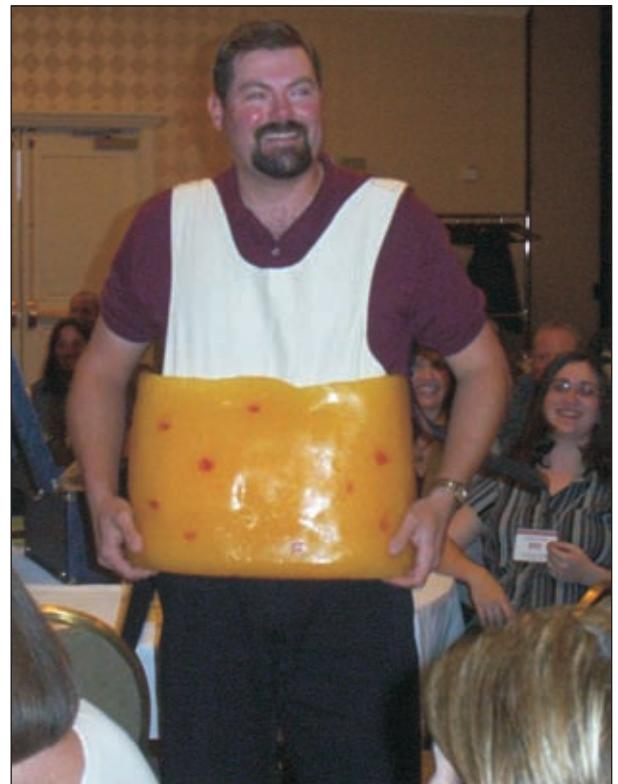
products that resulted from ARS research. Additionally, the table centerpieces were all products of ARS scientific research. Participants were able to touch, eat, and in a few cases, wear the products ARS science helps produce.

Resource Day has been a biennial event for the past 10+ years. The purpose of the event is to give administrative, scientific support and research personnel of the Colorado and Wyoming ARS research units, along with NPA Area Office staff a chance to get together and find out who's who and what we are all up to. Introductions to other research and personnel through Resource Day often spark future collaborations. ■



Award-winning Collaborators

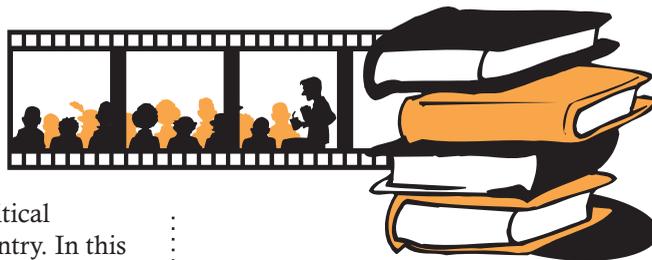
Dr. Jack Morgan (RL) and Terrance Booth (Research Rangeland Management Specialist) of the Rangeland Resources Research Unit accept the CO-WY council Community Outreach and Collaboration Award.



Science in Your Shopping Cart

Bradly Floyd (Bio Sciences Research Technician) from the Soil Plant Nutrient Research Unit tries on 20 lbs of abdominal fat in the Science in Your Shopping Cart presentation.

On the Shelf and on the Screen: Book, Video Reviews on Diversity



Editor's note: "On the Shelf and On the Screen" provides reviews of books and videos that deal with diversity as another means of learning about diversity. We invite you to contribute your recommendations for inclusion in future editions of "Voices" – simply email your recommendations with a short description to: NPA-DTF@ars.usda.gov

Playing the Enemy: Nelson Mandela and the Game that Made a Nation by John Carlin

Review by Theresa Pitts-Singer, Logan

Admittedly, I picked up this book because I am a rugby fan, but it could have covered a different game and still had the same effect. What was great was that in reading this book I learned a lot about South Africa, apartheid, local racial discrimination, culture, and histories, and the personality of Nelson Mandela. This book reads like a Hollywood movie, and near the end I found myself in tears as the author drew me into the drama and intensity of a World Cup Rugby game resulting in an unimaginable bonding experience for the people of South Africa. I really wished I could have witnessed the climatic historic moment at the book's end. It's a book of hope for all culturally diverse citizens who choose to follow a wise and charismatic leader and who inevitably share a common pride in their nation. ■

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down, by Anne Fadiman

Review by Ellen Klinger, Logan

The more diverse America becomes with the mixing of cultures from all around the world, it is inevitable that

communication becomes critical between citizens of this country. In this book, Fadiman retells the true story of a refugee Hmong family living in California who has a daughter, Lia, with severe epilepsy. Through many medical visits, and miscommunication between the family and the doctors, Lia's situation worsens. Is the family to blame for not following directions they do not understand and turning to the ways of healing they have known their whole lives? This book is an interesting mix of storytelling, historical facts and personal experiences with the family that brings you to ponder the importance of understanding people in your community and respecting the ideals and customs they believe, regardless of their ethnic background. ■

Slumdog Millionaire

Review by Francisco Calderón, Akron

The movie *Slumdog Millionaire* has generated a wide range of responses ranging from critical acclaim to large public protests. It is hard to watch this movie and remain ambivalent because the plot brings forth socio-cultural issues in an un-apologetic way, while at the same time presenting us with a memorable and entertaining story.

The movie is based on the novel "Q and A" by Vikas Swarup, an Indian government official turned novelist. It tells the story of how a poor boy in Mumbai becomes the star of a very popular TV quiz show, in the midst of incredible adversity. The tale of his TV success is intertwined with a love story, as well as issues of abuse and redemption, making for a rich and engaging drama. Notice I did not use fun as an adjective. Mumbai

serves as an incredible backdrop, because of the marked contrasts of India's economic success story, where complex problems of poverty, child slavery, and police corruption coexist or are followed by scenes of opulence. The images of the slums are heart-wrenching and it is hard to imagine such living conditions from my vantage point of American society. In a recent interview, Swarup stated that a possible reason for the novel's worldwide acceptance is that the themes of love, loss, friendship and humanity transcend cultural barriers. The author, in a different interview, explained that there was never an attempt to glamorize India or pander to a western audience, which counter-intuitively has seemingly enhanced the mainstream appeal. However, the film's crude and brutal content has been criticized by sectors of the Indian society, which argue that it denies the recent surge in prosperity and living standards in the country. The term "poverty porn" has been used to describe the film.

My take is that this is a movie worth seeing, so long as the movie-goer understands that there are many scenes of intense and graphic violence and abuse. Some scenes involve abduction, mutilation, and slavery of children, which made it particularly hard to stomach for me. One positive aspect of the film which I found particularly amazing was the quality of the small children's acting in the movie. There is talk that this could be the best picture of the year. My view is that the movie is very good, with outstanding cinematography and soundtrack. I have found myself thinking often about the film, so it definitely leaves a fairly long-lasting aftertaste. Go see it and see what you think. ■

Recruitment Procedures for Permanent Employees Explained

By Mike Wiggett, Fort Collins

There are basically two ways we recruit for permanent positions. When advertising to all U.S. citizens outside the Federal Government, we use the Demonstration Projection, better known as DEMO, which is a special hiring authority delegated only to ARS and the Forest Service. DEMO allows for more flexibility, such as recruitment incentives and a 3-year probationary period for Category 1 scientists, as well as giving veterans absolute preference when they are deemed qualified. When targeting our recruitment for Federal employees only, we use Alternative Merit Promotion (AMP). Veteran's preference does not apply to AMP.

Many times supervisors will recruit using both DEMO and AMP to obtain a larger pool of candidates. They often recruit at different grade levels as well. Therefore, a position that was advertised both DEMO and AMP at GS-5/6/7 could have up to seven Certificates of Eligible Candidates.

You might say why so many? You could have one DEMO Cert each for GS-5, GS-6 and GS-7, one AMP Cert each for GS-5, GS-6 and GS-7, and possibly a noncompetitive certificate for former Federal Employees with Career Status. Other noncompetitive eligible's may include individuals who qualify under the Veterans' Recruitment Appointment, a disability authority, or

who have former service with the Peace Corps or VISTA. The selecting official can make a selection off any of the certificates.

Sometimes you may hear that a supervisor does not get to see all the applicants that were considered qualified for the job. How would that happen? Under DEMO, Veterans' Preference applies. If you had 3 or more veterans who applied for a position and were certified as qualified, the supervisor would receive a cert(s) with the veterans' names only to consider. It is highly unlikely that the supervisor would be able to find grounds to file for passover for that many veterans in order to reach the candidates who do not have preference. ■

A Taste of the NPA!

By Dana Blumenthal, Fort Collins
 & Cheyenne

Before getting into science, as a senior in college, I decided to make a bit of extra money by baking scones for the student run café. To get the recipe, I asked my mom to ask the baker of my favorite scones from back home for his recipe, tasted my way through the cookbook he suggested (he had sold the bakery and couldn't legally divulge the recipe), and then combining my two favorites.

The result was a huge hit, and I ended up supporting myself for the next two years, albeit marginally, by baking scones. Mocha chip scones were by far the most popular flavor, selling at about twice the rate of the others. ■

MOCHA CHIP SCONES

Mix: 2 cups flour
 ½ teaspoon salt
 1/3 cup sugar
 2 teaspoons baking powder

Cut in: (aim for pea-size to lima-bean-size chunks – if smaller the scone will be cakey)
 1/2 stick butter

Mix separately:
 1 egg
 ½ cup cream
 1.5 teaspoons vanilla
 1 tablespoon instant espresso powder

Mix wet into dry ingredients, mixing as little as possible to make things hold together, and adding:
 6-8 ounces of dark chocolate

Drop onto a cookie tray as individual scones and flatten a bit with a fork.
Bake at 375 degrees for 20-35 minutes, until slightly brown on top.

For other flavors, leave out the espresso powder and add in other yummy things. Some of my favorites are toasted walnuts with white chocolate, toasted almonds with dark chocolate, and raspberry (use frozen berries). They're best fresh, but can be saved for a day or frozen if wrapped individually in plastic wrap.

My Experience as a Hispanic ARS Scientist

By Eduardo Casas, Clay Center

When I was asked to write this article, I did not think that my experience as a Hispanic scientist was different than any other scientist working at the U. S. Meat Animal Research Center (or ARS for that matter). After thinking about it, I believe there are just slight differences when compared with other people; however, this could be open for debate. It is possible that these differences are not due to cultural or ethnical background and are just personal differences (not that I am an odd character or anything like that). I will try to describe them and you be the judge.

One difference is how to address people. My parents always taught me to respect people, as I am sure your parents did to you. However, in Spanish-speaking countries there is a clear difference when addressing somebody respectfully and when you are talking to somebody you are familiar with. When addressing somebody in Spanish you may use the word "Usted" as a sign of respect, or "Tu" as a sign of familiarity. That difference does not exist in English. In English you only use "You", regardless of whom you are addressing.

Not only that, I was also taught to address people by their title as a sign of respect: Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr., etc. In some Spanish-speaking countries you even address your parents as "Sir" or "Madam." It has been difficult for me to call people that I respect, or that I am not familiar with, by their first name. It is my understanding that Spanish is not the only language that makes this difference (Japan's language and culture also makes differences when addressing people). Calling people by their first name has been the most difficult experience to overcome (although I believe, or hope, that I have done so).

Performance plans. I have always tried (emphasis on trying) to do a better job than my performance plan calls for. The



In Spanish-speaking countries there is a clear difference when addressing somebody respectfully and when you are talking to somebody you are familiar with....It has been difficult for me to call people that I respect, or that I am not familiar with, by their first name.



reason behind this is because I do not want somebody to say that I get an undeserving appraisal just because I am from a minority group. However, I never think that I belong to a minority group when I am working (If in fact I do belong to one). I do not think I would be doing well at my job if I didn't like it (I think I am doing well, but you would have to ask my supervisor if it is so).

Writing a manuscript is a nightmare!! An important component of my job is to write scientific papers. I do not consider myself a good writer (nor do I know that I ever will be one). Writing a manuscript in English is very different than writing it in other languages (Spanish would my case).

A manuscript written in Spanish takes 30% to 50% more space than in English. Part is because the grammatical rules of Spanish make its writing a little bit longer. Also the fact that Spanish readers/writers like the "verbosity" of the language (Once I wrote a manuscript in Spanish using English style composition. One reviewer indicated that the manuscript seemed like a bad translation from English). I was (and still am) used to writing like that. You don't need to go farther than this article; I ramble

on and on, with (personal) comments in parenthesis, about everything. Writing concisely is very difficult for me.

It has been hard to adapt to the "I" part of the job. I was taught to use "we" to talk about achievements or successes (even if the achievements are personal). That is, if we talk about a scientific project in which I collaborate (or lead), I would say: "We (as in ARS or as in USMARC or as in the team) are doing this, on this particular subject." You will hear me talk about "our" or "the" project. You would seldom hear me talk about "my" project, even if it is in fact my project. This has been another difference that I have had to modify.

These are the experiences from which I have seen the most differences. I wonder if they are unique or not to me. Maybe these experiences are similar from those of any other scientist or employee working in ARS and I just don't know it. ■

Upcoming USDA National Observances

May

Asian American / Pacific Islander Heritage Month
Cinco De Mayo

June

National Gay and Lesbian Pride Month

August

Women's Equality Day

September 15 - October 15

National Hispanic Heritage Month

October

National Disability Awareness Month

November

National American Indian Heritage Month

What I Like About Working for ARS - An Undergraduate Profile

By Guatam Sarath, Lincoln



Erik Mellgren
*Junior, Biochemistry and Biology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
 Grain, Forage and Bioenergy Research Unit, Lincoln, NE*

What made you interested in working for the GBFRU?

I was interested in this lab because of the opportunity to participate in research right away. Also the prospect of working on something that is such a political “hot-button” (bioenergy) issue right now was very appealing.

Are you learning skills that will help you in the future?

I am gaining all kinds of skills that will apply towards future work in grad school and scientific research as a career. These are skills I would not have been able to gain otherwise

Would you recommend a cohort for this type of experience?

I would recommend my experience to any of my friends (if resources were available) because it has prepared me for my future goals while being very flexible around my needs as a student.

Would you consider a career in the ARS at some future time?

I am unsure of my long-term career goals, but yes, I would consider the ARS. ■

As part of the freshman orientation course, the Biochemistry Department at UN-Lincoln, has a number of practicing biochemists give a short (15 min) lecture on how they got to where they are, and what they enjoy about their work. I normally present every year on working for the ARS. Erik was part of this class a couple of years ago and approached me about working in the lab after my presentation – he has a strong interest in biofuels and had read about the GBFRU and their work on bioenergy. He was hired into the GBFRU during his sophomore year.

~ Guatam Sarath

Another Successful Student Experience

Nick Tharp (an undergraduate student at Purdue University), who did a summer internship with the National Animal Germplasm Program (Ft. Collins) received a second place award in the graduate student poster competition at the Midwest Section meetings of the American Society of Animal Science. Nick earned the award using the work he did with the Fort Collins group on shipping temperature and pH levels of boar semen. Thanks to all who helped him along, particularly since as a result of his undergraduate experiences with ARS two summers ago, he has decided to go on to graduate school.

~ Harvey Blackburn, Fort Collins



ARS Native American Internships

Pictured are the 2008 Native American Interns that worked at the Grand Forks, ND Human Nutrition Center. To learn more about the program, see the Dec. 2006 and Aug. 2007 editions of VOICES.



Nearly two dozen NPA researchers and administrative personnel participated in the annual ARS Native American Internship Program Cultural Awareness Workshop at the United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, ND earlier this month in preparation for the arrival of their 2009 interns this summer.

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Share Your Favorite Pictures!
E-mail your photos and captions to Barbara King or Beth Redlin (addresses on this page).

This picture is from an experiment done by graduate student Cory Vorel at the Logan, UT "bee lab." The bee is bound up in order to expose it to a stimulus (sugar water) that is touched to its antennae, to see if the bee will respond by sticking out its tongue. It did!

Where in the NPA? - Answer Key

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