In early April, the PWA Workforce Diversity Committee (PWA-WFDC) met for a 2-day Training Workshop to explore, deliberate and establish workforce diversity goals for the Pacific West Area. Both Drs. Hammond and Onwulata were participants, as well as many of the location committee members from throughout the PWA.

The goal is to promote recruitment, hiring, retention and advancement of groups with low participation rates in the PWA workforce, such as women, minorities, persons with disabilities and veterans. The primary objectives of the event were to:

- Identify barriers that hinder diversity and inclusion in the PWA workforce;
- Develop realistic strategies to overcome barriers; set reasonable/pragmatic goals, milestones and outcomes;
- Deliver recommendations for implementation to the Area Leadership

Participants received training on workforce demographics and statistics, Hispanic Serving Institutions, USDA Future Scientists Program, Veterans and Persons with Disabilities Hiring Strategies, Outreach and Diversity, and Human Resources Hiring Practices.

As an outcome of the training workshop Sub-Committees were formed to address the following initiatives:

- Hiring/Retention – PWA Hiring Program (Roadmap: L/A Appts-Pathways-Permanent Positions)
- PWA Publication – PWA Diversity Publication (Bi-annually)
- Employee Development – New PWA Mentoring Program (for all non-SY employees)

These initiatives are still in the planning stages and the PWA-WFDC welcomes any employee who would like to volunteer to participate on these Sub-Committees to contact Jan Lewis, PWA/ODEO Program Manager, jan.lewis@ars.usda.gov or 510-559-6003, for more information.


Welcome to the new “PWA Diversity Publication”. This is just one outcome of the PWA Workforce Diversity Committee Training Workshop held earlier this year in April.

I am delighted by the outreach and diversity efforts that you’ve shared for this inaugural issue. It is encouraging to learn of your continuing efforts to leverage our PWA diversity and are engaging in activities that celebrate diversity and inclusion.

You have my continued personal commitment to these important and critical endeavors.

We are all in this together.
Students from elementary schools across Twin Falls visited the College of Southern Idaho Expo Center on May 18th to learn from many different professionals. The “Careers on Wheels” event was aimed to draw students’ attention to the many different career opportunities available to them as they get older. The fifth-graders learned about the education involved in pursuing certain careers, demands and responsibilities, work environment and many other things. David Tarkalson and Imad Eujayl from ARS Kimberly, ID participated, they presented information about job duties of ARS scientists and the role science plays in our society to approximately 200 area 5th graders.

~Submitted by Kara Vander Linden
Members of the ARS and University of California, Davis research community in Salinas worked with 120 fifth graders from the Los Padres Elementary School to study ways to address the drought in California. Located in east Salinas, the school is less than a mile from the Crop Improvement and Protection Research Unit, and serves one of the city’s most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Close to 97% of the students identify as Hispanic, and 88% of the students qualify for subsidized school lunch. The goal was to familiarize the students with agricultural research and the scientific method, so we asked them: given the historic drought in California, why can’t we just grow crops using sea water? All students knew at the onset that this was a bad idea. But why?

Students were first given gummy bears to study osmosis, and measured them before and after immersion in water of varying salinities. The students found that gummy bears in fresh water expanded, but gummy bears in salt water stayed the same size, or shrunk. Students were then given different crop seeds and water with three different concentrations of salt: 0 salt water (fresh water), 0.2x sea water, and 1x sea water. The students counted the number of seeds that germinated over the course of a week, and they found that fewer seeds germinated in 0.2x sea water than in fresh water. In the 1x sea water, only a couple of corn seeds grew, while all other seeds dried up and died.

For three weeks, our researchers visited the students in their classroom. After, the students walked down the street to visit the station. They met with 14 researchers who demonstrated techniques used in their research, such as plating fungi, insect identification, molecular biology procedures, and lettuce crossing. They learned about the USDA lettuce germplasm collection, and they had group photos taken during a demonstration of a drone used in the fields. The outreach event was coordinated by USDA-ARS Research Technician Polly Goldman. “I’m very excited to see the development of this next generation of curious, energetic, and engaged scientists,” she said afterwards.

The highlight, the students said, was the drone. And getting to eat the gummy bears.

~Submitted by Renée L. Eriksen and Polly Goldman

UPWARD BOUND PROGRAM-PULLMAN, WA

This is the 10th class of interns and the 10th anniversary of Pullman’s outreach and education program, “Pumping-Up the Math and Science Pipeline.” As in the past, ARS Pullman partners with several WSU Upward Bound Programs in eastern Washington, which select the interns and provide funding for on-campus housing for the students. The mentors are scientists from ARS and WSU labs throughout the university and each mentor supports an intern on grant funds.

The Upward Bound program focuses on 1st generation high school students from families without a tradition of attending college. Since the inception of the internship program, ARS/WSU has hosted over 80 students and teacher interns. This year, Dan Skinner (ARS Scientist) will host a teacher intern, who previously was his student intern. Most of the interns go on to colleges or universities.

~Submitted by David Weller

OUTREACH-SALINAS, CA

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Yakima Agricultural Research Laboratory (YARL) was visited by biochemistry students from Yakima Valley Community College in Yakima, WA and by entomology students from Central Washington University in Ellensburg, WA. Students discussed research with YARL scientists, were provided a tour of the lab, and learned about job opportunities for students and graduates.

Each year, YARL scientists mentor undergraduate research projects through an NSF-funded Research for Undergraduates program at Heritage University in Toppenish, WA. Students discussed research with YARL scientists, were provided a tour of the lab, and learned about job opportunities for students and graduates.

John Williams (Hydrologist), John McCallum (Chemist) and Hero Gollany (Soil Chemist) from the Columbia Plateau Conservation Research Center (USDA-ARS-CPCRC, Pendleton, Oregon) participated this year on March 16th. They presented PowerPoint slides and information to encourage students to explore various career opportunities with USDA-ARS, and related how they use math, chemistry, and physics on the job.

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