



MWACOP NEWS NOTES

Midwest Area Council for Office Professionals

April 2014

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MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

Spring greetings to all! We assume all of you are as anxious for warmer weather and sunshine as we are. It seems like it has been such a long winter.

As much as we can count on changing seasons, we can count on the ever-changing work environment, rules, regulations, and procedures. To that end, we are excited and grateful that the MWA has decided to host a training workshop for the area Program Support Assistants and Secretaries the last week of July. Sherri Buxton recently sent an email announcement with preliminary information and will be sending more information as it becomes available. Please take advantage of this opportunity to provide Sherri feedback for agenda items and mark your calendars to attend. We know this will be a very productive workshop.

The MWACOP will soon be soliciting applications for new council members to replace the two members rotating off the council. Please be on the lookout for that email and seriously consider applying. Your ideas and contributions can make a difference! We look forward to welcoming the two new members in June.

As always, please let us know if you have an area of interest you would like us to address in future editions of News Notes or if you see anything that needs updated on the MWACOP website: <http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/mwacop>. You can contact any of the MWACOP members at any time.

Members of the council include:

Marci Bushman (Marci.Bushman@ars.usda.gov) – Sr. Co-Chair

Lori Burma (Lori.Burma@ars.usda.gov) – Jr. Co-Chair

Heather Lewandowski (Heather.Lewandowski@ars.usda.gov) – Ex-Officio

Janeen Polen (Janeen.Polen@ars.usda.gov)

Deborah Schaefer (Deborah.Schaefer@ars.usda.gov)

Robin Brewster (Robin.Brewster@ars.usda.gov) – Recorder

Vicki Jones (Vicki.Jones@ars.usda.gov) – News Notes Editor

Beth Burmeister (Beth.Burmeister@ars.usda.gov)

Missy Stiefel (Missy.Stiefel@ars.usda.gov) – Technical Advisor/NACOP representative

Sherri Buxton (Sherri.Buxton@ars.usda.gov) – Technical Advisor

Marci Bushman & Lori Burma
Co-Chairs

Helpful Hints

ARIS Help

There have been a ton of changes to ARIS in the last year. The Lean Six Sigma group has continued work on this software, to improve the way we do business on research projects and agreements. Keeping up with the latest has been daunting, even for those that work on agreements on a daily basis. Updates have been made to the online ARIS Handbook that can be a great lifeline when you feel the flood waters rising. You can find it at

<http://arsnet.usda.gov/ARIS/Manual/> .

One page that some of us have really appreciated is copied below. It gives the character size for the different sections on projects in ARIS and agreements in AIMS. You can find this on page 30 of Chapter 4D, which was updated in December 2013.

Field Sizes:

Field Name	Size (characters)
Comments (416)	500
Objective	3,200
Approach	3,200
Title of Proposal (Title Case)	148
Reason Research cannot be performed by ARS SY	500
Relevance to Parent Project	Unlimited
Remarks on Signature Screen	1,500
AIMS Comments (AIMS)	1,500
Statement of Mutual Interest	3,200
Mutual Agreements	3,200
Cooperator Agrees to	3,200
ARS Agrees to	3,200
SOW/Budget Comments	1,000

Decision Tree

Nancy Sanders from the National Soil Erosion Research Laboratory in West Lafayette likes to use this Decision Tree when working on new agreements. She thinks she got it off the AFM Website but we can't find it there anymore! You can find it on the Northern Plains Area Grants and Agreements page:

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/Main/docs.htm?docid=16581>, and it's pasted below!

Decision Tree to Determine Appropriate Agreement Type

	Purpose	Relationship / Benefit to ARS Programs	ARS Involvement During Performance
Use a Contract When:	Acquiring Service or Property	Direct Benefit/Use	No Involvement
Use a Grant When:	Transferring Anything of Value	To Support or Stimulate a Public Purpose	No Involvement
Use an Assistance Type Cooperative Agreement (ACTA) When:	Transferring Anything of Value	To Support or Stimulate a Public Purpose	Substantial Involvement
Use a Specific Cooperative Agreement (SCA) When:	ARS is Paying and Mutual Interest and Contributions toward Research Effort exists	Direct Benefit to ARS in-house research	Substantial Involvement
Use a Research Support Agreement (RSA) When:	Procuring Service/Supplies Directly from a College or University	Direct Benefit to ARS in-house research	Substantial Involvement
Use a Non-Funded Cooperative Agreement (NFCA) When:	Describing Research Work with No Obligation of Funds	Direct Benefit to ARS in-house research	Substantial Involvement
Use a Technology Transfer Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA) When:	Receiving Funds under Federal Technology Transfer Act	Direct Benefit to ARS in-house research	Substantial Involvement
Use a Reimbursable or Trust Fund Agreement When:	ARS Receives Funds to Perform Research Work	Direct Benefit to ARS in-house research	Substantial Involvement

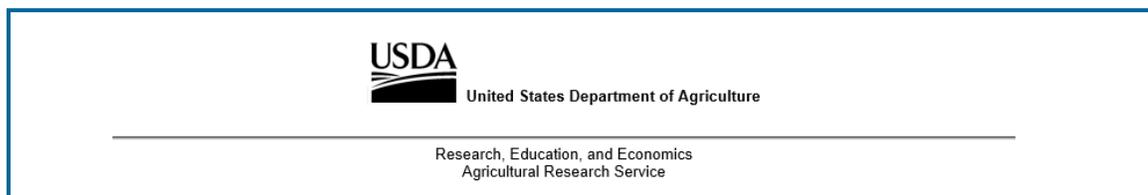
Each project involving cooperation must be assessed individually to ascertain the agreement instrument most appropriate for the project.

HELPFUL HINTS - continued...

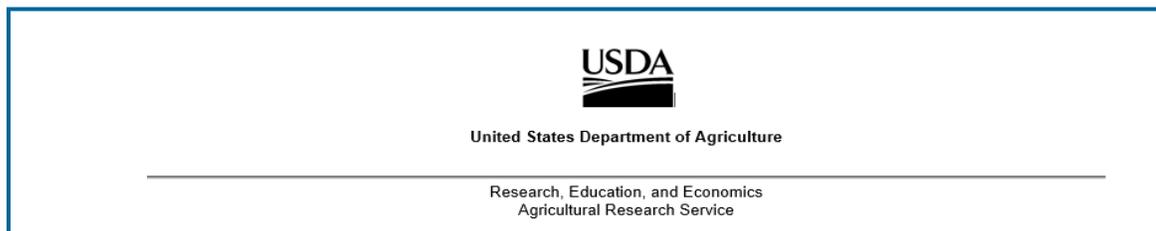
USDA Letterhead

USDA came out with new standards for letterhead last year that removed the ARS logo. There has been some confusion about the letterhead. Below is the correct display of the letterhead:

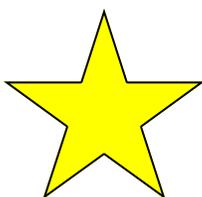
Use this:



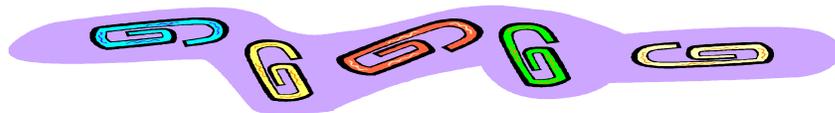
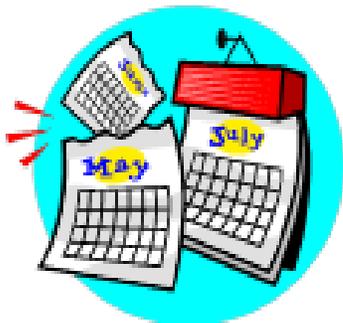
Not this:



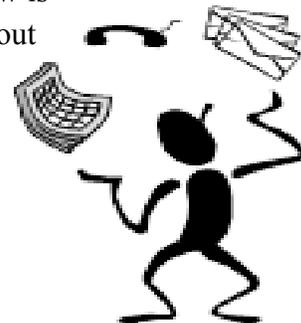
Do you have a go-to tool that you think really helps you get your job done? Drop us a note! If it helps you, it's bound to help someone else. We'd love to share it with the group.



MWA Program Support Assistants and Secretaries
 Training Workshop
 July 29-30, 2014 Peoria, IL

REMINDER CALENDAR

It's that time of year for Office Professionals to get busy! Below is a list of tasks that many of you will need to prepare for throughout the remainder of the FY.



- ⇒ Spring Cleanup of Incoming Agreements
- ⇒ Begin gathering data for ARMP and watch for letter from Area Office to initiate the AMRP process
- ⇒ Make sure all employees have mid-term performance review and forward needed information to your AO
- ⇒ Process extensions for Extramural Agreements
- ⇒ Send Detail by Author reports to SYs to update publications and watch for announcement from Area Program Analyst to initiate AD-421 Annual Report process
- ⇒ Ensure any new employees have a performance plan in place 90 days prior to the end of the appraisal period (September 30th)
- ⇒ Send Detail by Author report to SYs to update publications, watch for instructions and deadlines from your AO for performance reviews, and submit all documentation including new performance plans and IDPs to your AO
- ⇒ Prepare AD-700s for new FY RSAs
- ⇒ Prepare new files for the new FY (travel, requisitions, etc.)
- ⇒ Review Telework Agreements and Off-site equipment
- ⇒ Fall Cleanup of Incoming Agreements
- ⇒ Prepare new T&A files for the new T&A year

Don't forget your daily, weekly, and other routine tasks as well! This is just a condensed list for quick reference. A full list for the entire year and routine tasks is available on the MWACOP website at:

<http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/mwacop/sop/docs/CalendarReminder.pdf>

Office Professional Spotlight - Supporting Multiple Locations



Through varying circumstances, Missy Stiefel, Nancy Sanders and Janeen Polen accepted a challenge to support multiple units. They shared their thoughts and strategies on how they make it work.

What is your home unit?

Nancy: West Lafayette, IN – National Soil Erosion Research Laboratory

Missy: East Lansing, MI – Sugarbeet and Bean Research

Janeen: Wooster, OH - Application Technology Research Unit with one project located at the University of Toledo and Corn and Soybean & Wheat Quality Research Unit

What other unit(s) do you support?

Nancy: Urbana, IL - Soybean/Maize Germplasm, Pathology, and Genetics

Missy: Urbana, IL - Global Change and Photosynthesis Research Unit

Janeen: Columbus, OH - Soil Drainage Research Unit

How long have you been supporting multiple units? Why did you accept this challenge?

Janeen: I started serving multiple units from my first day with ARS. When I came onboard in March 2009, I served three units in Wooster and the project in Toledo. Since then, two units merged. I started serving the Columbus unit in 2012. This was normal for me. I did not know anything different. At the 2010 leadership meeting in St. Louis I found that what I do is not what everybody else does.

Nancy: When I took on the responsibility for Urbana unit four years ago, I wanted a challenge. This assignment helped me to organize and manage my time. This is not for the faint of heart.

Missy: The formal arrangement began in FY2009.

How many scientists do you support?

Missy: When I started servicing Urbana, there were four scientists and post-docs. Since then, two units combined. Now there are 11 scientists in the Urbana unit. I support four scientists in my East Lansing unit.

Nancy: I support five scientists in West Lafayette and five scientists in Urbana.

Janeen: I support 10 scientists in Wooster, two scientists in Toledo and four scientists in Columbus. Three of the scientists are Research Leaders.

How do you support the other unit(s) from off-site?

Janeen: I use the phone, but mostly e-mail to communicate with all the units. The employees in Toledo and Columbus sign documents, scan them and send them to me. When an original is necessary, they will UPS the documents. We have enough collaborative research between Wooster and Toledo that scientists transfer documents when they travel. While I have done procurement for all three locations, technicians with credit cards make local purchases. Once a month I accompany the Admin staff to Columbus for a staff meeting. About quarterly, I go to Toledo and talk face to face with the staff.

Missy: In the early days, Nancy Horsley, Office Assistant for the Weed Unit, was a lifesaver when she took care of the ARS-115s. She and I handled the work at the time the two units merged. Over the years, there have been adjustments to the list of duties, which have shifted back and forth to the Admin staff. Recently, the Admin office and the Urbana unit hired a temporary Office Assistant.

Office Professional Spotlight - continued...**What are the challenges to supporting multiple units?**

Missy and Nancy: Communication.

Nancy: Often Missy and I work and interact with employees whom we have not met in person. We also work with a different AO for each unit.

Janeen: My biggest challenges are not being able to read moods in an e-mail message and the people who do not read the e-mail!

What is the key to making this working arrangement work?

Missy: Managing my time is the key to being organized. Twice the ARMPS reviews for both units were scheduled within a week of each other. One time it worked for an ARMPS review to be rescheduled. This year was stressful when the NACOP committee was planning the national meeting.

Janeen: The key to getting any job done well is the support system you have. I know I would not be successful without my AO, Admin Secretary, Financial Tech and the IT people. We bounce ideas off each other, and at times pickup each other's slack!

What are the personal and professional benefits?

Janeen: I genuinely like people, and I like to help them. I understood that my ability to pick up Ann Houser's job when she left really helped the Columbus unit and allowed them to hire another technician. I have a solid relationship with the AO and the Admin staff. If I were to become too busy and could not handle the load, they would help. Diane Perry, the administrative office secretary, is the timekeeper and does procurement for Columbus. She does the majority of the travel for all three research units and manages all the Ohio government vehicles. I really do like a challenge, and I'm one of those people that thrive on change. To go along with that I am very mission oriented. This was an opportunity to fill all those squares for me and the units – so it was/is a win-win! I have been doing this for a couple of years now – so I'm almost at that point – What's next?

Nancy: Going home at the end of the day and knowing that I did a good job is personally rewarding. It can be a fun thing if things go smoothly. Do not be afraid to take a risk by accepting a new challenge.

HAPPY ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS DAY

APRIL 23, 2014



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Midwest Area Council for Office Professionals

December 2014

Message from the Co-Chairs

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CO-CHAIRS

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2014 ARS EMPLOYEE
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WELCOME TO MWA

Welcome to the “winter” edition of News Notes! We hope you are all able to decompress a bit after a crazy couple months with the performance evaluation process.

We are sure you will agree that the past few months have kept our minds racing with new processes and procedures. Hopefully, this month will move at a slower pace and allow us to address those matters we have been forced to put on the back burner and get caught up on our tasks.

This year has proved to be a busy and challenging time for all with the Training Workshop, launch of Concur, and the changes to many procedures on top of all of the demands of our personal lives. We commend each of you for your skills and knowledge demonstrated in the work place. We should all be very proud of ourselves and the image we portray for the Midwest Area.

As you all know, the Midwest Area Leadership meeting was held December 2-3 in Ames, Iowa, at the National Center for Animal Health. We encourage you to talk with your Research Leader about the meeting and topics, while reinforcing to them that they can rely on you to assist them in their role as Research Leader and encourage them to utilize your abilities.

If you have an area of interest you would like us to address in future editions of News Notes or if you see anything that needs updated on the MWACOP website, <http://www.arsnet.usda.gov/mwacop>, please contact any of the MWACOP members.

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Vicki Jones (Vicki.Jones@ars.usda.gov) – News Notes Editor

Jessica Jordan-Walker (Jessica.JordanWalker@ars.usda.gov) – SOP/Website Editor

Dorene Hensler (Dorene.Hensler@ars.usda.gov)

Vacant – Technical Advisor/NACOP representative

Sherri Buxton (Sherri.Buxton@ars.usda.gov) – Technical Advisor

Happy holidays to all!

Lori Burma & Beth Burmeister, Co-Chairs

Midwest Area Office Professionals Training Workshop

A training workshop for office professionals was held July 29-30, 2014. This workshop was sponsored and hosted by the Midwest Area Office in Peoria, Illinois. The theme of the workshop was *“Cultivate your Growth in ARS.”*

All office professionals in the Midwest Area were invited and encouraged to attend. There were approximately 35 total office professionals in attendance; including a special attendee, Kay Richardson from Bowling Green, Kentucky, who was a new face to all since Kentucky was just incorporated into the Midwest Area under the recent reorganization. Although Kay had just undergone surgery in the previous weeks, she determinedly attended the workshop.

Kicking off the event was an informal gathering at a local establishment the evening of July 28 where many attendees came together to greet one another and enjoy some social time before getting down to business.

The next morning the two-day workshop opened with a warm welcome from Area Director, Dr. Robert Matteri, and consisted of general sessions along with two breakout sessions.



General session speakers and topics were:

- Dr. J.L.Willett, Associate MWA Director: *“RPES – Assisting Your Scientists”*
- Willis Collie, Director, EBSC: *“Update from the EBSC”*
- Dr. Joe Rich, RL & Heather Lewandoski, PSA: *“Working Together to Establish an Effective Team”*
- Dr. Paul Sebesta, CD, NCUR: *“ARS – Affecting our Lives Outside of 8-5”*
- Desirea Feicke, HACU IT intern, EBSC: *“Utilizing Outlook/Lync”*
- Dr. Renee Wagner, Tech Transfer Coordinator & Albert Tsui, Patent Advisor: *“Tech Transfer & You”*
- Andrea Miller, Acting Project Mgr., AFMCSP: *“AFM Customer Service Portal”*
- Heather Lewadowski, PSA: *“Best Practices”*
- Mari Gomez, Work/Life & Wellness Program Specialist: *“Customer Service – Working with Different Personalities”*

Breakout session speakers and topics were:

- Lori Wilson-Voss, MWA Program Analyst: *ARIS/AIMS*
- Kit Mernick, EBSC Travel Specialist: *Travel*



Midwest Area Office Professionals Training Workshop continued.....

This workshop provided a great venue for networking amongst the attendees while gaining knowledge in all areas of our job. All speakers were very informative, captivating, and interesting, and a few were quite humorous. Feedback received indicated that the most beneficial information for the workplace was obtained from the ARIS/AIMS outbreak session. Many good handouts were received and new information conveyed to all.



Everyone was very anxious for some experience with the new travel system, Concur; however, that session was plagued with several obstacles which prevented the hands-on training many had hoped for.

At the conclusion of the workshop, everyone completed an evaluation sheet. The committee then met and reviewed all evaluations and discussed the success of the workshop. Very positive feedback was noted, and the workshop as a whole received a very good overall rating. Some topic suggestions for future trainings included: performance reviews/advancing your career; AgLearn; purchasing; and new hires, just to name a few.

If you were unable to attend this workshop, please take advantage of the opportunity in the future the next time a workshop is offered. You will find it to be a very fulfilling and worthwhile experience.



Helpful Grammar Hints

It's and Its

It's is a contraction of "it is"
Its is a gender-neutral possessive noun

Correct: It's [it is] a beautiful day.
Incorrect: Its a beautiful day.

Correct: The dog wagged its tail.
Incorrect: The dog wagged it's tail.



Your and You're

"your" means belonging to you
"you're" is a contraction of "you are"

Correct: That is your chocolate.
Incorrect: That is you're chocolate.

Your boss sends you an e-mail that reads,
"Thank you for your hard work." How do you respond?

Correct: You're welcome.
Incorrect: Your welcome.

Suggestion Box

It has been suggested to the MWACOP that we host a conference call on a regular basis (monthly; quarterly) as a roundtable forum. All PSAs/secretaries would be invited to call in and topics of discussion would be announced prior to the call. Guest speakers may be invited as well.

Let us know what you think.....good idea, would you participate, how often would you like the calls? Please email any council member with comments/suggestions. Your input will be valuable and appreciated.

Office Professional Spotlight

Congratulations to Heather Lewandowski on her new role as the Administrative Officer at the Columbia Location, effective October 5!

Heather began her employment with ARS in June of 1998 as a GS-6 Secretary with the Plant Genetics Research Unit in Columbia, Missouri, and was promoted to a GS-7 PSA in 2003 as the result of a desk audit. Heather is a native of Columbia and plans to stay with ARS until she retires.



Some of the challenges that she will be facing as the new AO in the coming year will be learning new processes and meeting data call deadlines, all while coordinating the move of the Admin Office to a new location on University property!

Heather is inspired by taking on new challenges when the opportunity arises. One of her favorite quotes is:

*"If you are not willing to learn, no one can help you.
If you are determined to learn, no one can stop you."*

Heather took on a new personal challenge by giving a presentation at the "Cultivate Your Growth in ARS" Office Professionals Conference held in Peoria in July of this year. Her presentation was a testament to having overcome any intimidation she may have felt about public speaking. Heather also strives to implement changes that improve processes and empower others. She suggested the use of a shared network drive to ensure that selected information is available to others at their location. This means that the RL now has access and is empowered to go in and see the information without having to ask for it.

Heather's enthusiasm and leadership are an inspiration, and we wish her all the best in her new position!

2014 ARS Employee Recognition Program Award Winners

Sherri L. Buxton: Administrative and Program Management Award in the category of Customer Service and Technical Expertise “For outstanding customer service, process management and improvement, and development of office professionals in the Midwest Area.”

Heather Lewandowski: Office Professional of the Year “For outstanding organizational and creative support that broadened the impact of the Plant Genetics Research Unit and enabled the effective implementation of the ARS Mission.”

National Advisory Council for Office Professionals (NACOP): Talent Management “For their processes and practices designed to attract, develop, motivate, and retain productive, engaged employees in the office professional field.” Council members currently include Tangele “Tee” Terry, AFM-NCRBSC, Co-Chair; Melissa Stiefel, MWA, Co-Chair; Cathy Lonaberger, Office of the Administrator, Technical Advisor; Brooke Bowers, PWA; Dawn Reed, SEA; Brenda Holmes, NEA; Linda Parnell, PA; Janel Nierman, PA; Darleen Nelson, SEA; Rose McIntosh, NEA; and Trudy Pinkerton, PA.

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL!!

The deadline for 2015 nominations has been extended and is now due to the Midwest Area Office February 6, 2015. We encourage you to submit nominations for deserving personnel.

Retirement Announcements

Becky Roland retired on November 28, 2014. Becky worked for ARS at the National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment (NLAE) in Ames, Iowa, for 12 years.

When asked about her plans for retirement, Becky said for the first couple of weeks she will be assisting her sister who is moving back to the Des Moines area after being in Maine for the last year. Once she has her settled, she plans to kick back, enjoy the holidays, and not think about too much until after the first of the year when she will try to find something that interests her, whether it be volunteering or working a day or two a week for extra money.

Becky says she will definitely miss everyone at NLAE, plus others that she has had the pleasure to work with at the National Center for Animal Health, the Area Office, and other locations.

She said she won't miss getting up early every day (although she may still do that, but won't have to rush to get ready to go to work), driving in ice and snow, trying to figure out what Concur is going to do next (or not do), and finding out what new rules and regulations are coming our way!

Becky said it's been a good run, but it's time to hang up her keyboard and see what's next. Everyone at NLAE will greatly miss Becky. She is a co-worker who has been a friend to all and is always ready and willing to help out with whatever needs to be done administratively.



Becky Atkinson-Haley retired on October 31, 2014. Overall, she had 20 years of federal service with over 11 years of military and eight years of civil service. Becky spent just shy of five years with ARS in the Livestock Behavioral Research Unit, West Lafayette, Indiana. In addition, Becky worked 23 years at Purdue University in the Food Science, Biology, and Animal Science Departments.

Becky has many projects planned for her retirement. She owns the three bedroom, 100 year-old house which belonged to her great-great grandparents and four acres. This spring she plans to plant a huge garden and sell the produce at the farmer's market. Currently, she is refurbishing a Ford 8N tractor. After all these years of working, Becky is looking forward to being home.

Becky offers this advice: “Don't try to do everything. Do what you can. Then ask for help.”

Welcome to the MWA!

Kay Richardson

Animal Waste Management Research Unit, Bowling Green, Kentucky



Kay Richardson began her federal career in the late 1970s in temporary positions with the Department of Defense while her family was stationed in Germany. Later Kay joined the Army and served two years where she repaired teletypes (pre-computers). She also worked for the Census Bureau and the VA Medical Centers in Louisville, Kentucky, and Nashville, Tennessee. Kay commuted almost two hours each way to work in Nashville for four years. When an ARS position became available in Bowling Green, Kentucky, Kay joined the Animal Waste Management Research Unit and has worked there for the last 11 years.

When Kay was brand new to her ARS position, she served on the Mid South Area Council for Office Professionals. Through her participation on the council, she made some really good friends and networking connections.

Kay does travel, WebTA, CATS, ARIS, and appraisals for her location. Since she and the AO are the only administrative employees at the Food Animal Environment Systems Research unit, they serve as back ups for each other. "We work well together. We do what has to be done (as there is no Purchasing Agent or Financial Tech)."

To help Kay get through a work day, she listens to piano and Native American flute music. Kay also uses stretching, walking away from her desk, and talking to co-workers as methods for coping with office stress.

After work, Kay loves reading and cooking. She also enjoys doing needlecraft, sewing, embroidering, cross-stitching, knitting, and crocheting. She is learning to paint. Kay is married with two sons, a stepdaughter, and nine grandchildren.

Larla Ritchie



Livestock Behavioral Research Unit, West Lafayette, Indiana

Larla Ritchie is the Office Automation Assistant for the Livestock Behavioral Research Unit following Becky Atkinson-Haley's retirement. She joined ARS in November 2014. She is a recent graduate of Purdue University with a degree in Animal Sciences.

Kelli Adkins

Forage-Animal Production Research Unit, Lexington, Kentucky



Kelli Adkins was born in Michigan but was raised in California. As a military spouse, she has lived in Guam and Japan. Kelli began her civil service career 26 years ago (but with broken service time has a little over 17 years of service) with the Department of the Navy in Fallbrook, California. She has also worked with the Defense Commissary Agency (Japan) and the Department of the Army (Fort Knox, Kentucky) before joining ARS at the Forage-Animal Production Research Unit in Lexington, Kentucky.

Kelli has served on the Mid-South Area Council for Office Professionals (MSACOP) in various capacities: member, Jr. Co-Chair, Sr. Co-Chair and Ex-Officio. One project of the MSACOP was a photo directory of the office professionals in the Mid-South Area. Kelli saved this resource on her desktop. She found it helpful to have it readily available when she needed to contact someone from another location.

Since Kelli's AO is off-site and nine hours away, Kelli prepares personnel documents, reconciles accounts, and drafts the budget numbers for ARMPs in addition to her normal Program Support Assistant tasks.

With her experience in working with different facets of the Government, Kelli has learned that everything changes. She has learned that you can control some things and some things you can't. Kelli's advice is "Don't get caught up in the deadlines. Things happen. Do what you can. Keep the communication line open. If you are running late with a deadline, let the person know."

Kelli and her husband have six children between the ages of 17-34 and ten grandchildren between the ages of five months and 12 years old. She and her husband enjoy following their youngest son's baseball team. Kelli enjoys vacationing by the ocean, knitting, crocheting, being outside, doing yard work, and visiting antique stores.