

# MEDLEY

- a potpourri of diverse talent

November, 2014

## The American Cranberry Crowned Jewel of the Bog at the 2014 USA Science & Engineering Festival

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### Vision Statement

The vision of the Council is to create a diverse workforce and promote a positive work environment where all employees are respected and valued for their contributions.

By Eric Wiesman, Brandon Schlautman, Eduardo Covarrubias, and Juan Zalapa

WASHINGTON, D.C.—For researchers in Dr. Juan Zalapa’s Cranberry Genetics and Genomics Lab, part of the USDA-ARS Vegetable Crops Research Unit at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, cranberries are more than a side dish on their Thanksgiving tables, they are the main course in their daily studies. Wisconsin produces 60% of these little red super-fruits. Modern molecular genetic tools combined with classical breeding strategies are used to improve fruit yield and quality; thereby, making them part of a healthy diet while at the same time helping Wisconsin cranberry producers grow more cranberries in increasingly sustainable ways to ensure that Wisconsin continues to lead the nation in production. The Zalapa group has been actively involved in making their cranberry research available to the public through outreach events, serving over 4,000 people in nine diverse events over the past year alone. Due to this commitment to outreach, Dr. Zalapa’s lab was recently sponsored by the National Science Foundation as an exhibitor at the USA Science & Engineering Festival in Washington, D.C. on April 25-27. This was a four day extravaganza at one of the largest science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)



USDA-ARS Cranberry Genetics Lab members (from left to right) Eduardo Covarrubias, Eric Wiesman, and Brandon Schlautman shown with their exhibit at the 2014 USA Science & Engineering Festival in Washington, DC.

MEDLEY

Midwest Area Diversity and Outreach Notes

festivals in the world with over with over 325,000 attendees and 3,000 hands-on exhibits.

The USA Science & Engineering Festival engaged the greatest minds in science as well as the most dynamic leaders in business, technology, government, education, and culture. Moreover, the exhibitors, performers, speakers, partners, sponsors, and advisors at this festival are a “who-is-who” of STEM disciplines in the United States. Some of the biggest names in STEM and the arts gathered in our nation’s capital for the festival including television icons such as Jamie Hyneman and Adam Savage from Mythbusters, Mike Rowe of Dirty Jobs, Bill Nye the Science Guy, and renowned scientists such as Michio Kaku, author of the book “The Future of the Mind,” and Dr. William Phillips, Nobel Prize winning Physicist. Participants from the Zalapa lab included USDA-ARS Technician Eric Wiesman and UW-Madison graduate students Brandon Schlautman and Eduardo Covarrubias.

The festival brought science out of the laboratories and into the streets to educate a large, diverse audience of all ages and backgrounds, from professionals to novices, from science enthusiasts to the merely curious. In many cases, the hands-on experiences presented at the festival can be best described as “magic,” but the science and engineering concepts acquired by the attendees are actually the best way for them to learn how science impacts almost every part of our daily lives, from the simplest to most complex tasks. Whether interested in learning the fundamentals of science or wanting to become a scientist or engineer, the festival allowed the public to learn or re-invigorate their interest in science while inspiring the next generation of STEM professionals. Thousands of young minds were fascinated by the STEM exhibits and enjoyed the opportunity to meet “real scientists” at the festival. Parents were not left out of the festival fun, as they were also involved in the activities. Some parents even wondered how they can get their children interested in science without being an expert themselves. Events like this are a great way to introduce science to people who may not get the chance to experience it. The United States, land of the “American Dream”, is a place full of tremendous possibility. The festival provided kids a feeling of what it is like to be a U.S. scientist and gave them the ability to dream big regardless of the challenges they might face.

At the festival, visitors to the Zalapa Lab’s display learned how the cranberry was crowned jewel of the bog. Multiple experimental stations such as “Sink or Swim” and “Cranberry’s Colorful Acidity” allowed the public to observe some of the unique adaptations which have allowed cranberry to thrive in



Young attendees of the cranberry exhibit learn floating properties of cranberries and other fruits and vegetables with lab member Brandon Schlautman.

an otherwise foreboding place, the bogs of North America. Attendees learned how unique cranberry physiology such as floating helps them disperse their seeds in their native environments and how that same ability to float continues to help farmers grow and harvest cranberries today! In addition, we taught attendees how a variety of phytochemicals can show a range of colors in nature depending on the pH of the fruit and other chemical cell properties. These chemicals, including anthocyanins, are responsible for many health benefits of eating cranberries. Finally, many people also took the opportunity to take a picture of themselves harvesting cranberries from a Wisconsin cranberry bed. Attendees really enjoyed learning about cranberries, as described by one of the attendees, Jackie Giraldo-Smith: “Great exhibitors! I love how the cranberries are harvested. This was a fun and informative booth at the USA Science & Engineering Festival.”

We hope this great exposure on a national stage will help the cranberry, “the most American of all fruits,” expand its role as a Thanksgiving staple to become an iconic and uniquely American fruit worth eating and talking about all year long!

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**Interview with Dr. Steve Shafer, Ph.D., Associative Administrator, Office of National Programs, USDA-ARS**

I interviewed Dr. Steven Shafer for the “Medley” about his position as the Associate Administrator for National Programs in the Agricultural Research Service (ARS). Some of his previous positions in USDA include Director of ARS’ Beltsville Agricultural Research Center; ARS Deputy Administrator for Natural Resources and Sustainable Agricultural Systems; Midwest Area Director; ARS National Program Leader for Global Change research; Deputy Director for Environment and Plant Health in the USDA Office of Risk Assessment and Cost-Benefit Analysis; plant pest risk analyst in the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service; and ARS Research Plant Pathologist at Raleigh, North Carolina. His personal research focused on the effects of air quality on plants, microorganisms, and soils. He received his B.S. Agr. and M.S. degrees from The Ohio State University and a PhD. from North Carolina State University, all in plant pathology. He is a native of Marion, Ohio.

*Interview by Charles Krause, Supervisory Plant Pathology,  
Application Technology Research Unit*

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### How did you prepare yourself for this current position?

*In a haphazard way, would be the best way to put it. When I was a GS-13 SY, I decided to explore career paths besides ARS research, which I had been doing since right after I finished my PhD in plant pathology at NC State in late 1983. I applied for, and was accepted into what was then called the Mid-Level Leadership Training Program (MLLTP), and through contacts and detail opportunities in that, I left ARS in 1997 to work in risk assessment and policy for APHIS. I did that for a year, and then was invited to apply for a position in the USDA Office of Risk Assessment and Cost-Benefit Analysis, which was offered to me, and I worked there for about 2 years. Then I had the opportunity to come back to ARS as a National Program Leader, which was the job I had aspired to when I was in the MLLTP, so I figured I was set for my career. A couple years into that, my boss, Deputy Administrator Al Dedrick, literally browbeat me to apply for the PEAK Program, which was ARS’ internal SES training program, so I wound up in that. That led to several SES positions, including Associate Area Director and then Area Director for the Midwest Area, then they called me back to Headquarters to be Deputy Administrator for Natural Resources and Sustainable Agricultural Systems, the job Al Dedrick had been in. After about 5 years in that, the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center was reorganized, and a new SES Center Director position was created, and it seemed like a really great opportunity to be involved with ARS’ largest Center, so I asked to be put into the Center Director position. Frankly, I thought I might retire from that position in several years, but then Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young was promoted from Associate Administrator for National Programs to the position of ARS Administrator. She asked me to come back to ONP for a couple months as Acting Associate Administrator, and I did so fully expecting to return to the Center. But then she asked me to stay in the position, and I couldn’t turn down the chance to be part of the new Administrator’s team. So my “preparation” for my current position has been a combination of a couple training/developmental opportunities, and pretty much blind luck of having interesting opportunities drop into my lap, chances to move around and into different positions. I like having new challenges, and moving into new positions keeps me invigorated and interested. Being open to moving from where I live has been essential. I moved from Raleigh to DC to Peoria and back to DC. In general, opportunities to advance often don’t occur where you work currently, so if you want to do different things, you have to be willing to move.*



### How would you describe your own management style?

*People other than I would be best to describe my management style. I like to think that I am NOT a micromanager, although one person’s micromanagement is another’s prudent oversight. In general, I like to set goals and direction for people, define the boundaries delimiting those goals, offer my guidance, and then get out of the way of people I think can do the job. I try to be available for consultation, I like to check in and get occasional updates, but in general, after I describe*

*the desired outcome and hoped-for impact, I try to give people room to work. I try to use all sorts of management strategies as befit the task at hand. I am happiest with a participatory form of decision making, where I can lay out the desired outcome to a group, empower them to generate options on how to get there, and then engage in back-and-forth discussions on the pros and cons of the options, whether aspects of one option can be combined with another, and so forth, until these conversations lead me to a decision I am comfortable in making. This sort of thing is possible when one has the luxury of time, of course, so setting a goal and a deadline for when the decision is to be made is a key aspect. Consensus is another approach, also time consuming. At minimum, I try to engage in a consultative form of decision making, by asking people I think have good insights on an issue to provide me with input before I make a decision.*

### *What are the types of personal attributes one must possess to excel in ARS?*

*ARS' mission is innovation. That mission drives the Agency's basic personality, so having the ability to imagine different ways of dealing with a challenge is highly valued here. Even if you are not in a research position, maybe you are in an admin position, that imagination about how to get something done differently and effectively is something that is valued all across the Agency. The researchers, of course, must have great curiosity, a desire to solve a mystery or a problem, determination. Tolerance for risks is important. A thick skin helps. Whether your job is directly in research or your job is to support research in some way, being a team player is essential. Very few research or admin functions are accomplished by people working alone any more. You have to be able to work in groups of different sizes and functions. Recognize the value of diversity in every aspect of what that means.*

### *You have a high stress job, how do you recharge yourself?*

*I enjoy music. I play baritone sax in the Greenbelt Concert Band, which rehearses once a week and plays concerts throughout the year. And I serve on the Board of Directors for the Prince George's Philharmonic, which is community service that also serves that interest in music, and my wife plays violin in the Philharmonic, so there is a personal connection. I have three rescue dogs, all mixed-breeds ranging in age from about 2 years to nearly 14 years. My wife and I get a lot of amusement watching them do what they do. I like reading all sorts of stuff, particularly history, especially American history around the time of the Founding Fathers, and history of science, and history of Christianity. Those sorts of topics serve my need to understand why our society is what it is today. My wife and I like to travel overseas. We had a great vacation to Peru earlier this year. And as I said above, putting myself into new job responsibilities helps me recharge. I like being on a steep learning curve.*



### *What kind of changes have you witnessed concerning outreach, diversity, and equal opportunity since you started your career with ARS?*

*Frankly, I don't remember a lot of talk about it during my first few years in ARS, back in the mid-1980s. Probably there was talk and I wasn't listening. It seems to me that I noticed more conversation about it in the 1990s. Now we hear a lot about it, and we should, not only because it's the right thing to be thinking and doing in 21<sup>st</sup> century America, but because it serves ARS best. As I said earlier, ARS' mission is innovation, and you don't get innovation when everyone around the table has the same background, life experiences, and so forth. As an agency for innovation, we will be most successful if the outward evidences of our diversity reflect a deeper diversity of experience, thought, imagination, desire, talent, and so on. The more diversity sitting at the table, the better the chances are that we will come up with something really innovative. As an organization, diversity is something we should insist on.*

### *How would you characterize ARS? What are the values that ARS brings to the society?*

*We are, of course, the USDA's primary in-house research agency, and our mission goes all the way back to the establishment of the Department in 1862. I think that is a source of pride for us. Some say we are a problem-solving agency, but of course, one person's problem is another's opportunity, so I tend to think more in terms of us enabling science-based decisions. I don't engage the question of what is ARS' balance between basic and applied research, I think that falls apart in our mission context. We do research to explain how agricultural systems work, in terms of physical, chemical, and biological sciences. When we get good at explaining how things work, we work on predicting how that system might respond to different circumstances, such as climate change, or new management techniques, or a new pest coming onto the scene, or a new variety of livestock or crop introduced into the system. And when we get good at predicting response to change, we use that predictability to develop a basis for supporting decisions that need science as part of that decision. Maybe it's*

a farmer trying to decide how to deal with a wet corner of the field, or maybe it's the President of the United States negotiating with a foreign leader about food or natural resources. Whoever it is, if they need good science in agriculture to make a decision, we're ready. In contrast to the university system, some like to say that ARS does "long term, high risk research." As an investor (and as a taxpayer, I am an investor in ARS research), I prefer to say we engage in research that requires sustained investment for high-impact payoffs. We bring major bang for the taxpayers' bucks. What ARS does with \$1 billion a year is simply amazing, and the evidence is in every grocery store in the country.

*If you had one significant change to make in ARS, what would it be?*

*It would be great if the ARS workforce truly looked like 21<sup>st</sup> century American society in terms of diversity, and we should continually work toward that, but the fact is that not every segment of American diversity has an equal interest in agriculture, science, or agricultural science. Some parts of the country are more diverse than others, so success in achieving diversity will be uneven, I suspect. But that's reason to keep working at it. As for the mission itself, I would like to see our research become increasingly trans-disciplinary, with increased emphasis on addressing grand challenges, wicked problems that are hard to define, let alone solve, things that require large, diverse teams to tackle. Our National Programs serve us well as organizing principles, but we must make sure we don't think of them as boxes that constrain what we do.*

*Do you have any "out-of-the box" ideas on how to address the large number of ARS employees that are/or will soon be eligible to retire.*

*Beg them to stay, at least to mentor their replacements awhile. I think our best selling points relate to the immense challenges facing the need to feed more than 9 billion people by mid-century. Megan Clark, whom I believe still is the head of CSIRO, the main government research agency in Australia, did an analysis that concluded, basically, that the world has to produce as much food during the 21<sup>st</sup> century as during all of human history UP TO the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How can we do that? We can expand production acreage, we can increase the amount we harvest per acre, and we can waste less. That's about it. When has there been a bigger challenge in human history? When was there ever a better time to be a scientist interested in throwing physical, chemical, and biological sciences at solving an immense issue? Who wouldn't want to be part of that? I'm at the end of my career. I have a lot of envy for people who will grab onto this, whether they are scientists or people with administrative and management skills to support it and pull it off. I try to convey the urgency of this, and the exciting opportunities, when I talk to people younger than I. Which is almost everybody.*

*What advice would you give for a new ARS supervisor that manages a group of high-energy research people?*

*Get a book called "First Among Equals: How to Manage a Group of Professionals", by Patrick McKenna and David Maister. It's about leading creative people when you may or may not have all the authorities you need, intelligent people operating independently, largely as free agents, with loose supervision. Pretty much describes an ARS Research Leader's job in many respects. It's been out a number of years, but there are good insights there. Keep in mind that the people we want most may be among the more challenging to supervise. We seek out people who are creative, independent thinkers, who challenge status quo, and then we are surprised when they present challenges to managers and supervisors. You have to give them enough freedom to exercise their creativity. Remind them that their leadership has to be at a rate that can be absorbed by the organization. Try not to take offense. I take my job very seriously, but I try not to take MYSELF too seriously, although I fail at that frequently. Some years ago, a fellow National Program Leader told me that NPLs have "situational celebrity", meaning that their notoriety and influence probably stem from their position, not necessarily from them personally. There is a lot of wisdom in that for all management positions. Give creative people a challenge, do the best you can in moving resources to them, show interest in their work, help them find the right scientific and user audiences, publicly celebrate their victories, privately deal with problems. Develop a thick skin. Find as many reasons as possible to laugh.*

We are proud to be living our “American Dream” as members of the USDA-ARS VCRU Cranberry Genetics and Genomics Lab heeding the advice President Obama gave us at the USA Science & Engineering Festival, “Make the discoveries that will allow us to live longer, healthier lives; that’s not just the power of science, that’s the promise of America.” In the meantime, we will continue to help increase public awareness of the importance of science in our everyday lives and contribute to a strong educational foundation for the next generation of STEM leaders through science outreach!

USDA-ARS Cranberry Genetics Lab Technician Eric Wiesman takes the chance to harvest cranberries himself.



### How Much Do You Know About EEO?

1. What does EEOC stand for?
  - A. 15
  - B. 30
  - C. 45
2. Within how many days of an alleged discriminatory act should you contact the EEO Office to file a complaint?
  - A. Transfer
  - B. Hiring
  - C. Promotion
  - D. All of the above
3. Which of the following are illegal bases of discrimination?
  - A. Race
  - B. Color
  - C. National Origin
  - D. Religion
  - E. Sex
  - F. All of the above
4. What does ADR stand for?
  5. It is illegal to discriminate in any aspect of employment, including:
    - A. Transfer
    - B. Hiring
    - C. Promotion
    - D. All of the above
  6. Which law makes it illegal to discriminate against someone on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex?
    - A. True
    - B. False
  7. What is GINA?
    - A. True
    - B. False
  8. The standard timeframe for the informal complaint process is 30 days?
    - A. True
    - B. False

See last page for answers

### Feds Feed Families program at NCAUR

Atanu Biswas, Research Chemist, Plant Polymer Research Unit, NCAUR, Peoria, IL

The Feds Feed Families program at NCAUR, Peoria, IL donated a total of 1066.5 pounds of food to local shelters during two separate drives. The employees rallied last November and donated 490 pounds of food to a local pantry in response to the tornadoes that devastated local communities. They added an additional 576.5 pounds this summer for the regular food drive. In addition, 57.7 pounds of pet food and pet care products were collected and donated to two local animal shelters.



Kudos to Melinda Nunnally for leading the Feds Feed Families program at NCAUR, Peoria, IL.

## Coping With Change: Effective Listening

Jan Lewis, Employee Relations and Jeff Schmitt, Human Resource specialist

Office of Outreach, Diversity and Equal Opportunity  
Cooperative Resolution Program (CRP)

Downsizing, reorganization and the loss of resources (oh my!) – both human and financial, are significant changes that have incurred throughout the agency. How many of you have been running around frantically as we continually seek to identify new resources (again, both human and financial) and strive to meet performance expectations? Okay ... maybe for some it hasn't been *that* dramatic. In any case, we'd like to take a moment to share a few ideas with you on how to *address* the *stress* of this mayhem.

All of these changes can present a challenge to workplace communications. In addition, the ease and accessibility of technology (i.e., e-mail, texting) has also contributed to the folly that can easily lead to miscommunication. Now, more than ever it is important that we become proactive in our communication efforts. Effective face-to-face communication maximizes productivity and minimizes workplace conflict. One important component of effective communication is listening.

***"We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we can speak" ~ Epictetus***

You may ask: *Why should I improve my listening skills?* Answer: *You will, if success and successful relationships are important to you.* In order to be successful in life, at work or otherwise, one needs to be a good listener. We also want to be mindful of the things we are saying – after all, we do not want to be tactless.

Let's talk a little about listening. We listen:

- To obtain information.
- To understand.
- For enjoyment.
- To learn.

Given all this listening we do, you would think we'd be good at it! In fact most of us are not, and research indicates that we remember 25 to 50 percent of what we hear. That means that when we talk to our boss, colleagues, customers or spouse for 10 minutes, they pay attention to less than half of the conversation.

Listening is a complex process that involves hearing, understanding, and analysis. This requires conscious effort – it is not a passive act, as many seem to believe. Minimizing distractions will help to focus all of our attention on the person with whom we are speaking. That means, during conversations, we must refrain from sending emails or texts and turn-off our cell phones (like at the movie theater). After all, that's the least we would expect in return when trying to effectively communicate with them.

We should be sure we are consciously aware of both verbal and emotional information that is being communicated. This requires that we "read between the lines," as the old saying goes. Another point to consider is also to be mindful of *how* something is being said and not just the content. What emotion(s) do you observe from the speaker?

### CRP can help

Let's face it, many of us are not naturally gifted to be able to say the right thing at the right time. Right? Right. In fact, when communications and emotions clash, we find ourselves at even more of a disadvantage.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

PEANUTS CLASSICS By Charles M. Schulz



They say, “Hindsight is 20-20”. We can all reflect, looking back on a moment, a predicament or a confrontation when we struggled through that particularly “uncomfortable” conversation. Now, in that hindsight, we wish we would have said something better, more collaborative, and less destructive. No one has all the answers, but we can help. CRP can better prepare you for those tough face-to-face conversations in the workplace.

***“The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.” ~Dorothy Nevill***

While our alternative dispute resolution (ADR) services have typically been used to quickly address workplace conflict when it occurs (early intervention); we also employ services (consultation, conflict coaching, etc.) that provide useful skills to help REE employees address issues more proactively before they grow into much bigger problems. For example, if you find yourself in a situation where you need to have a “delicate” conversation with someone that you sense may not receive it well, call us -- we may be able to provide some suggestions for you to maximize the message and minimize the impact.

We’d love to assist you with your communication efforts. CRP offers a variety of ADR services – mediation, facilitation, facilitated dialogue and conflict coaching. Detailed descriptions of those services are on our webpage:

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/AboutUs/docs.htm?docid=23169>.

We also offer a variety of communication trainings by customer requests, tailored to specific customer needs. If you’d like to reach us by phone: Servicing the following:

Jan Lewis: 301-504-1450

Jeff Schmitt: 301-504-1352

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**EEO and Compliance Branch:** 202-720-3410, 800-340-4289,  
TDD: 202-720-3303

**Reasonable accommodation:** 202-720-6161

**Outreach and Recruitment Branch:** 202-720-6161

**Cooperative resolution program:** 202-720-6161

[WWW.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/](http://WWW.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/)

### How Much Do You Know About EEO? ANSWER SHEET

1. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
2. C, 45 calendar days
3. F
4. Alternative Dispute Resolution (a process in which a neutral third party assists the parties involved in conflict in reaching a voluntary and mutually agreeable resolution)
5. D
6. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
7. Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA), which prohibits genetic information discrimination in employment
8. A. (NOTE: the process can be extended up to 90 days)

Share you're your stories and photos! Send Medley submission to any MWA ODEO committee member for consideration. Contact information is on the first page.

Photos are great with a paragraph or two.

Thanks.

Jane Johnson, Chair

USDA-ARS-Midwest Area Diversity and Equal Opportunity Committee