

# MEDLEY

- a potpourri of diverse talent

June 2019

## Vision Statement

To create a diverse workforce and promote a positive work environment where all employees are respected and valued for their contributions.

USDA-ARS-Midwest Area Diversity and Equal Opportunity Council (DEOC) members:

Kelli Adkins, Co-Chair, Lexington & Bowling Green, KY

Carl Bernacchi, Chair, Urbana, IL

Vicky Brooks, Peoria, IL

Karen Cichy, East Lansing, MI

Sherry Egbert, West Lafayette, IN

Dennis Halterman, Madison, WI

Bruce Hibbard, Columbia, MO

Leona Horst, Wooster, OH

Christina Olshawsky, AFM, Peoria, IL

John Prueger, Ames, IA

Shawn Rohloff, Morris, MN

Kun Xiao, St. Paul, MN

Paul Scott, Employee Engagement Council

Sherri Buxton, Peoria, IL, MWA Office Advisor; Employee Engagement Council

## Inspiring Women in STEM



Claire Baffaut, Research Hydrologist, USDA-ARS Cropping Systems and Water Quality Research Unit in Columbia, Missouri, was honored this spring as an INSPIRING WOMEN IN STEM, by the Women in Ag Employee Group of the USDA. The Inspiring Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics goes to a female recipient who is engaged in cutting edge research and technology which supports the USDA mission. Dr. Baffaut's research interests include surface and subsurface hydrological processes at the field and watershed

scales. This includes evaluating cropping systems and site-specific management practices for their impacts on water quantity and quality. The Women in Ag announcement included the following text:

*“Tell us about your career journey and what brought you to USDA.*

I first came to USDA-ARS as a post-doctoral student at the National Erosion Laboratory in West Lafayette, Indiana. After I left, I kept ARS in my mind because I really liked the people and the work. However, I first had to obtain my US citizenship, which took several years. Once that was obtained, I had to wait for a good opportunity, but that eventually came along and I was selected for the job.

As a Research Hydrologist, duties include hydrological processes at the field and watershed scales, evaluating cropping systems and site-specific management practices for their impacts on water quantity and quality.

*Highlight the major contributions of your career, especially those that specifically affected/involved women.*

I was recently told by a post-doctoral student that she was looking up to me as a role model. She saw me as someone that was very self-confident and accomplished. I do believe my professional achievements (publications, project lead) do speak about my accomplishments.

As far as self-confidence, I am still working on it. Everyone has doubts. The trick is to acknowledge them without falling for them. I have had several mentees around me and I always enjoy guiding them. I also enjoy the “Women in ASABE Speed Networking” event at the ASABE annual meeting. During this event, student or recently graduated women get to ask any question to more senior women. There is no limit on the type of questions but there is a limit on the time spent visiting with someone.

*Continued on next page...*

## In this issue

Inspiring Women in STEM

Award Recipients

Meet Scott Anderson

EEO/CR Standard and Your Performance Plan

NCAUR Attends High School Career Expo

Meet the DEOC Members

### ***What advice would you give to women, in particular, trying to break into STEM-related fields?***

Being a bit stubborn (within reasons) was helpful to me to overcome early stumbles. Try again! If there is one thing I would do differently it is to ask more questions and to not be afraid of what I don't know.

### ***How do you think USDA could improve in regards to STEM?***

USDA is a good place to work because standards are set and applied fairly and equally for women as well as men (and any other minority). There are a lot of tools to address discrimination. As far as addressing STEM, I can only speak about ARS. I see more and more female scientists being hired. I appreciate this as it makes for a more balanced working environment. So keep at it. The gap is still wide and it is important to have women in all levels of positions. I do believe that it is an important aspect that women consider when they join a field or a place of work."

## **Lisa Ainsworth Receives the NAS Prize in Food and Agriculture Sciences**



The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Prize in Food and Agriculture Sciences, endowed through generous gifts from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research, recognizes research by a mid-career scientist at a U.S. institution who has made an extraordinary contribution to agriculture. This year, the prize was given to a plant physiologist from the MWA, and Research Leader of the Global Change and Photosynthesis Research Unit, Elizabeth Ainsworth. Dr. Ainsworth was recognized for her groundbreaking research to show how crops such as corn and soybeans are affected by increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide and ozone in combination with drought and other environmental stresses, along with potential solutions.

As a mid-career scientist, Dr. Ainsworth has had a tremendous impact on the global research community on a wide range of research topics. Most notable is that Dr. Ainsworth is a lead investigator of SoyFACE Global Change Research (Soybean Free Air Concentration Enrichment) Facility. This facility focuses on providing solutions to the question of how to feed the world in the face of global climate change. SoyFACE involves testing plants in open-air field conditions under atmospheric conditions predicted for the year 2050 and beyond. According to her and her collaborator's studies, exposure to ozone pollution over the past 30 years has reduced corn yields by about 10 percent and soybean yields by about 5 percent. They also found significant differences in ozone tolerance among the varieties. This shows the potential for breeding more ozone-tolerant varieties. Dr. Ainsworth's contributions to science, however, extend well beyond her research to include serving on advisory boards, executive boards, taking on editorial responsibilities for top research journals, mentoring students and postdoctoral researchers, and being involved in educational and outreach activities.

## **The Arthur S. Flemming Award Recipient**



Amy Vincent, Research Veterinary Medical Officer, Virus and Prion Research, Ames, Iowa, is a recipient of the Arthur S. Flemming Award. The Arthur S. Flemming Award was established in 1948 to honor outstanding federal employees. Recognized by the President of the United States, agency heads, and the private sector, the winners are selected from all areas of the federal service.

Dr. Vincent was recognized for her help in identifying new types of the influenza A virus. She also led the establishment of a national swine flu monitoring system in the wake of the 2009 rise of the H1N1 virus, spearheading a collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and several services within the USDA. Dr. Vincent's research revealed new information about the genetic evolution of the influenza A virus. She led establishment of a global naming system for the virus, enabling worldwide interaction between researchers.

## **The Unsung Hero Award Recipient**



Kelli Adkins of the Forage-Animal Production Research Unit in Lexington, Kentucky received one of the 2019 Unsung Hero Awards presented each year to recognize USDA federal employees for their service to the public. Kelli was recognized for her willingness to assist other locations when positions became vacant and also for her service on various committees that impact outreach and increase job satisfaction.

## Meet Scott Anderson, MWA Administrative Office Director



*Q. How did you prepare yourself for this current position?*

In addition to my experience from previous roles, I took the time to study ARS, its mission and accomplishments to better understand the work this role supports.

*Q. What life and previous work experiences have prepared you for your current position as Midwest Area Administrative Officer?*

Having spent significant time in the Army, and with the United Nations, helped prepare me for this position. Both are large organizations with a distinct regulatory framework. Adapting to different frameworks in particular helped prepare me for the challenges I've experienced with ARS. Additionally, I have often worked in roles that provide support for an organizational mission and this position is similar in that regard.

*Q. How would you describe your own management style?*

I am very open, supportive and collaborative with a view toward achieving results that better support our scientists.

*Q. What do you see as the greatest challenge to USDA-ARS with respect to ODEO? What is your personal outline for meeting this challenge?*

Until I saw this job posted, I had personally never heard of ARS. Once I studied the organization, I realized what great work is accomplished here and how it positively impacts the public. The greatest challenge is getting better public exposure for ARS which will help us attract a more diverse work force. The diversity of our country is our greatest strength and ARS should reflect that diversity. I see my role as taking opportunities to highlight the great work of ARS.

*Q. Most people seem to like the status quo. How do we institute constructive changes without disrupting what people consider the good things at ARS?*

Most of us are somewhat resistant to change since it often pushes us out of our comfort zone. The key to change management is effective, positive communication. We must take the time to explain why the change is positive and answer everyone's questions about the change.

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

My first advice is that ARS is a great place to work with fantastic people. Communication is the key to success as a supervisor. Take the time to listen and understand before responding and taking action. There are many different ways to solve a problem and our role is to find a path to yes.

*Q. In your personal life, what do you do to 'recharge' yourself from the constant demands of your administrative responsibilities?*

I enjoy exercise, cooking, reading and spending time with family.

## EEO/CR Standard and Your Performance Plan

You have probably noticed that starting this year, Element 1 - your mission critical element, contains the EEO/CR standard, in accordance with the USDA Departmental Regulation on performance management. All employees will be evaluated on their participation and/or leadership in activities that support a diverse and inclusive work environment. As members of the MWA Diversity and Equal Opportunity Council, we would like to offer our assistance to area employees who are interested in incorporating civil rights activities into their yearly accomplishments. To meet expectations in this category, individuals will need to participate in a variety of EEO/Civil Rights activities happening at their workplace. For many of you, it may not take any additional effort to meet expectations in this category. However, in order to receive an 'exceeds expectations' rating for this category, individuals will need to go above and beyond participation in civil rights events and take more of a leadership role, through the organization of presentations, workshops, or projects that promote EEO/civil rights. We have received several inquiries regarding what specific requirements need to be met in order to receive an exceeds rating for this category. We recommend that individuals work closely with their supervisor to review your performance plan and become familiar with what items in your plan constitute an exceeds. Discuss these items with your supervisor and ask for their input on what you can do in the context of these listed items to warrant an exceeds rating.

The DEOC is made up of members from each research location in the MWA (please check out the short bios of each member elsewhere in this MEDLEY issue) and we are happy to work with individuals to promote EEO/civil rights activities. While specific activity planning should be carried out by individuals, we can provide some examples of what other groups within the MWA have done to promote EEO and civil rights. We encourage everyone to read, and contribute to, the MEDLEY newsletters that are published on a quarterly basis. Listed below, is a summary of outreach and EEO/civil rights activities that have taken place in the MWA over the past few years. While this isn't meant to be an exhaustive or detailed summary, it might be a helpful resource for those of you looking to make a concerted effort in expanding your EEO/civil rights-related activities. Please do not hesitate to contact any of us if you have any questions and we look forward to your support and participation.

Summary of a few MWA ODEO activities that have occurred at other locations follows:

- Outreach to community groups through science festivals, careers days, or school visits.
- Mentoring of students from diverse backgrounds.
- Documented efforts to obtain a diverse applicant pool for open positions and efforts to hire/integrate employees from diverse backgrounds.
- Organize and implement location-wide activities related to ODEO (host speakers with diverse perspectives, workshops, informational seminars, etc.).
- Active service on ODEO-related committees in work-related scientific societies with documented impact.
- Participation on the MWA DEOC – three-year terms with individuals from each location.
- Submission of MEDLEY articles, such as:
  - \* Perspectives from USDA employees with a unique background or disability
  - \* Issues that affect subsets of USDA employees (e.g. work/family balance, raising family members with disabilities, adjusting to new work environments, veteran experiences, etc.)
  - \* Factors that directly affect workplace environments related to diversity
  - \* Summary/photos of outreach events or location-wide ODEO activities

## NCAUR Attends Canton High School Career Expo

Submitted by Heather Walker, Jennifer Teresi and Gary Kuzniar

On March 22, 2019, NCAUR's Outreach Committee at USDA-ARS in Peoria, Illinois, attended the first ever Canton High School Career Expo in Canton, Illinois. Gary Kuzniar, Heather Walker, and Jennifer Teresi gave talks and demonstrations for junior and senior students as well as teachers and administration of Canton High School and Spoon River College.

Gary Kuzniar, a Plant Polymer Research Unit technician, discussed research using naturally derived polymers (starch, cellulose, proteins, and simple modifications of those) as a goal of the Plant Polymer Research unit. Gary discussed what polymers are and where sources of those are found in agricultural processes. He demonstrated how to make slime which is a non-Newtonian fluid (neither a solid or a liquid). The students really enjoyed the slime!

Heather Walker, a Crop Bioprotection Research Unit technician, talked about using bacteria as a biocontrol agent to protect crops as one goal of the Crop Bioprotection Research unit. She discussed the method of 16s rRNA sequencing and Polymerase Chain Reaction. Heather demonstrated agarose gel electrophoresis to visualize DNA sequencing and how these methods are used to identify bacteria. She also talked about her laboratory's current work with *Lysinibacillus* to look at the potential Plant Growth-Promoting Rhizobacteria activities in conjunction with scientists at the University of Antioquia in Colombia.

Jennifer Teresi, a Mycotoxin Prevention and Applied Microbiology Research technician, discussed food safety concerns regarding toxins produced by fungal pathogens that infect cereal crops and the ongoing ARS research to prevent, detect, and eliminate these toxins from our food supply. As a demonstration of technologies used to screen and detect toxin contaminated grain, corn kernels coated in fluorescent material were placed in a UV light box. Similarly, infected kernels can be visualized and separated because of UV fluorescent metabolites produced by the fungus. Additionally, the concept of biosensors and antibody detection methods were demonstrated using a magnet on a stick that was run through a container of healthy corn kernels contaminated with metal washers painted yellow to represent the toxin-containing kernels.

Brochures for all 7 Research Units and NCAUR were available for distribution. NCAUR was one of 43 vendors that participated in the first ever Canton High School Career Expo.

### Fun with Slime!



Jennifer Teresi,  
Gary Kuzniar, and  
Heather Walker



Jennifer Teresi



Heather Walker



Gary Kuzniar

## Meet the DEOC Members



Dr. Carl Bernacchi is a Research Plant Physiologist with the Global Change and Photosynthesis Research Unit in Urbana, Illinois. Carl studies photosynthesis from scales ranging from the chloroplast to the globe in the context of crop productivity and climate change. Carl has been involved in the DEOC for his fourth year, with two years as Chair. He is also actively involved in outreach activities ranging from extension, education, and involvement in national/international scientific societies.



Kelli Adkins is the Program Support Assistant for the Forage-Animal Production Research Unit located in Lexington, Kentucky and assists the MWA office in the review of RPES cases. Kelli is the representative for both Lexington and Bowling Green, KY. Kelli has been with ARS for 13 years and has over 22 years of Federal Service between ARS, Department of the Army and the Department of the Navy. She enjoys spending time with her husband, kids and grandkids, the beach and traveling.



Vicky Brooks is the Program Support Assistant for the Crop Bioprotection Research Unit, Peoria, Illinois. Vicky has also worked as an assistant professor at the University of the Philippines, Los Banos for seven years teaching management, and agribusiness management. Vicky received a Fulbright Scholarship in 2006 to study at Illinois State University receiving her M.S. in Agribusiness. She has a B.S. in Agribusiness Management from University of the Philippines, Los Banos. She enjoys traveling, biking, dancing, watching movies, badminton, poker, and other card games.



Sherry Egbert is the Administrative Officer for the West Lafayette, Indiana Location and the Acting AO for the Food Animal Environmental Systems Research Unit, Bowling Green, Kentucky. As a 20-year Air Force veteran, Sherry has lived in various locations throughout Europe and cowboy country (Texas & Wyoming). These frequent moves ignited her love to travel. She spent most of her childhood in Connecticut so naturally she is an avid Red Sox fan! Sherry put down roots in Indiana 15 years ago when she started her Federal Service as a Human Resource Assistant for the U.S. Marine Corps. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her 4 grandchildren and her Rottweiler named Bob.



Dr. Dennis Halterman is a Research Geneticist in the Vegetable Crops Research Unit located in Madison, Wisconsin. His research involves the identification of disease resistance traits in wild potato relatives and understanding the molecular mechanisms involved in plant-microbe interactions. For the past several years, Dennis has been involved in public outreach and education events that promote the USDA, the potato industry, plant pathology, and science communication at the local, national, and international level.



Bruce E. Hibbard is a Research Entomologist and Acting Research Leader for the Plant Genetics Research Unit in Columbia, Missouri. His research interests include all things *Diabrotica* (corn rootworms). Recently, this has included collaborative research on their transcriptome, microbiome, metabolome, and improving larval artificial diets. Throughout his career he has worked on management, host-plant resistance, resistance management, behavior, ecology, chemical ecology, host-plant interactions, and tritrophic interactions.



Leona Horst is a Plant Pathologist/Horticulturist for Application Technology Research located in Wooster, Ohio. She plans, conducts, and completes reports for IR4 trials on ornamentals, fruits and vegetables at various locations with different soil types. She also collaborates with other ARS and University scientists on various projects including biological control of diseases on ornamentals in the greenhouse; spray drift studies in greenhouse and field locations; sample preparation and operation of scanning electron microscopes or transmission electron microscope under a variety of conditions and samples including pesticide characterization and deposition.

*Continued on next page...*

## Meet the DEOC Members (continued)



Christina Olshawsky is the Human Resources Liaison for the Midwest Area Administrative Office, Peoria, Illinois. Christina is originally from Michigan but moved to Illinois with her family in 2006 after serving in the U.S. Navy. Christina spends most of her time with her family and she enjoys reading, musicals and golfing with her husband.



Shawn Rohloff is the Purchasing Agent for the Morris, Minnesota Location. Shawn enjoys spending quality time at the lake with family and friends. She loves to spoil her grandkids and she is a farm girl.



Kun Xiao is a Biological Science Lab Technician at the Cereal Disease Lab in St. Paul, Minnesota . Kun has been working with USDA since 2006.

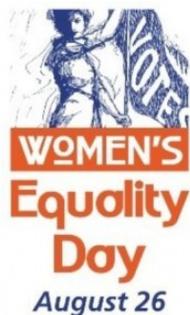
Members not shown: Karen Cichy, representative for East Lansing, Michigan, and John Prueger, representative for Ames, IA.

## Special Emphasis Programs/Observances/Resources and Information

Special Emphasis Programs (SEPs) are an integral part of the overall civil rights, human resources and program delivery functions. The purpose of the SEPs is to provide oversight, guidance, direction, enforcement and assistance to enhance opportunities for women, minorities, and people with disabilities in all employment and program delivery activities.

**Employment activities:** Recruitment, hiring, promotions, separations, awards, training, or any other employment action which impacts on the inclusion of and equal opportunity for women, minorities, and people with disabilities.

**Program delivery activities:** These activities include outreach, training, public notification, program accessibility or any system, practice or procedure or other activity which increases the knowledge of and participation by women, minorities, and people with disabilities.



### Women's Equality Day, August 26, 2018

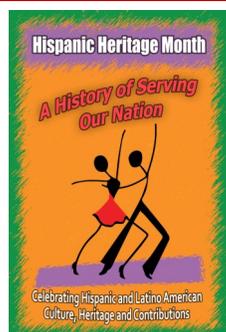
**National Theme:** "Celebrating Women's Right to Vote. Expanding Opportunities to All"

#### Resources & Information:

Ms. Foundation for Women: <http://forwomen.org/?gclid=CNXqzdXvy8MCFYdj7Aodl0cAmw>

Equal Means Equal: (<http://equalmeanequal.com/topics/>)

National Women's History Project [www.nwhp.org](http://www.nwhp.org)



### Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 - October 15)

**National Theme:** "Hispanic Americans: A History of Serving Our Nation"

#### Resources & Information:

Smithsonian Latino Center: <http://latino.si.edu/>

National Hispanic Heritage Month: <http://hispanicheritagemonth.gov/index.html>

Hispanic Heritage Month: [www.hispanicheritagemonth.org/index.php/hispanic-heritage-month/88-hispanic-heritage-month-theme-2019](http://www.hispanicheritagemonth.org/index.php/hispanic-heritage-month/88-hispanic-heritage-month-theme-2019)

## USDA-ARS FY 2020 Diversity/Special Emphasis Observances Calendar

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (October)

Veteran's Day (November 11, 2019)

National American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage Month (November)

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday (January 20, 2020)

National African American History Month (February)

Women's History Month (March)

Take our Daughters/Sons to Work Day (April 23, 2020)

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month (May)

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Pride Month (June)

Women's Equality Day (August 26, 2020)



Additional resources for diversity awareness material and ideas for special observances (catalog, pins, videos, etc.) are available from the following resources:

**ARS EEO Video Library:** <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/files/ARS%20Video%20Library%20Catalog1.pdf>

**Diversity Store:** [www.diversitystore.com](http://www.diversitystore.com); Phone: 800-200-5964; Email – [hmsdc@aol.com](mailto:hmsdc@aol.com)

**Smithsonian:** <http://www.si.edu/>; Phone: 202-633-1000; Email: [info@si.edu](mailto:info@si.edu)

**USDA Department-wide Monthly Observances – Links for Websites:** <http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/observances.html>

Observance events/activities should be conducted in a most cost-efficient manner.



**You can earn credit for diversity training when you participate in a Special Emphasis Observance event (i.e., Women's Equality Day, Veterans Day, etc.).**

- ◆ How? There are two options, as applicable:
  1. Record your own learning in AgLearn if the learning item allows users to do so upon completion of the learning item. Access AgLearn and go to Record Learning.
  2. Contact your Designated Location AgLearn Administrator or Debra Owens-Coleman, Acting MWA Outreach, Diversity and Equal Opportunity Program, at [debra.owenscoleman@ars.usda.gov](mailto:debra.owenscoleman@ars.usda.gov) or 979-260-9416.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotope, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

**REE Mission Area EEO Counseling:** 202-720-3410, 800-340-4289, TDD: 202-720-3303

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/AboutUs/docs.htm?docid=23089>; Axon: <https://axon.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/Pages/Home.aspx>

**Cooperative Resolution Program:** Jeff Schmitt; 301-504-1352, [jeff.schmitt@ars.usda.gov](mailto:jeff.schmitt@ars.usda.gov) or [coopres@ars.usda.gov](mailto:coopres@ars.usda.gov)

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/odeo/coopres>; Axon: <https://axon.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/Pages/Home.aspx>

**Reasonable Accommodation Program:** Tonya B. Morris, 301-504-4339, [tonya.b.morris@ars.usda.gov](mailto:tonya.b.morris@ars.usda.gov)

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/AboutUs/docs.htm?docid=23085>; Axon: <https://axon.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/Pages/Home.aspx>

**Outreach and Recruitment Branch Area Contact:** Debra Owens-Coleman, 979-260-9416, [debra.owens-coleman@ars.usda.gov](mailto:debra.owens-coleman@ars.usda.gov).

<https://www.ars.usda.gov/AboutUs/docs.htm?docid=23072>; Axon: <https://axon.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/Pages/Home.aspx>

**Office of Outreach, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity (ODEO) Home Page:**

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/ODEO> Axon: <https://axon.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/Pages/Home.aspx>