

# ARS Northeast Area Engagement

On March 11, 2015  
the **ARS Northeast Area Diversity Taskforce**  
had a special March meeting in Beltsville.

This particular meeting was to  
meet, mix, mingle and merge  
the former **North Atlantic Area** and **Beltsville Area** members together!



# *ARS Northeast Area Engagement*

Twenty-five people attended, including **Gloria Mead** (who drove down from Delaware State University), and **Tim Welch** (who drove in from Leetown, West Virginia). We also linked up with six other people via the marvels of telecommunications.



***Verneta Gaskins**  
setting up the  
essential telecom link.*



***Gloria Mead**, introducing herself*

**Martha Tomecek** (*NEA Diversity Taskforce Chair*) welcomed everyone, reviewed the agenda, and introduced our leaders **Drs. Swietlik** and **Onwulata** to speak....



*Northeast Area Diversity Task Force at Beltsville*  
**Conference and Training Meeting**  
 Wednesday, March 11, 2015  
**9:00AM-3:00PM**  
 Henry A. Wallace Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, BARC-West  
 10300 Baltimore Avenue  
 Building 003, Rm. 020  
 Beltsville, Maryland 20705

| Time            | Session  | Location   |
|-----------------|--|--|
| 9:00AM-9:30AM   | <b>Continental Breakfast and Networking</b>  | Building 003, Conference Room 020                    |
| 9:30AM-10:00AM  | <b>Introductions and Welcome with Opening of Call</b><br>Conference Lead- Ms. Martha Tomecek<br>Dr. Danusz Swietlik, <i>Northeast Area Director</i><br>Dr. Charles Onwulata, <i>NEA Associate Director /Task Force Liaison</i><br>Ms. Martha Tomecek, <i>NEA Diversity Task Force at Beltsville, Chair</i> | Building 003, Conference Room 020                    |
| 10:00AM-10:45AM | <b>Overview of Task Force Function, Accomplishments and Goals</b><br>Representation by NEA Diversity Task Force at Beltsville<br>Subcommittees:<br><i>Special Emphasis</i><br><i>Communications</i><br><i>Science, Technology and Educational Outreach</i><br><i>Leadership Advisory</i>                   | Building 003, Conference Room 020                    |
|                 | <b>Break</b>   | Building 003, Foyer                                  |
| 11:00AM-12:30PM | <b>New Member Engagement</b><br>Open discussions revolving around:<br>New member recruitment throughout locations      Limitations and obstacle unique to locations<br>Integrated programs for area inclusion      Possibilities of simultaneous Diversity events  | Building 003, Conference Room 020                    |
|                 | <b>Lunch</b><br>(open to all Task Force Members)   | TBD  |
| 1:30PM-3:00PM   | <b>Tour of the Beltsville Area and Meeting Conclusion</b><br>(open to all Task Force Members)  | Participants to meet at the entrance of Building 003 |



## Dr. Dariusz Swietlik....

*"Why is diversity important? I'm sure your thoughts are similar to mine. It is the right thing to do!*

*We do not work with diversity to fulfill directives, performance evaluations, etc. It is common sense and it is the right thing to do. Just look at the diversity in this room. We have different backgrounds, different accents not as homogenous as we would find in our individual countries.*

*In Poland, where I was born, everyone looks the same. This country is very diverse. We have to keep working at the diversity and understanding each other. We are stronger because of diversity. Our religions are just as diverse. We have to communicate with each other. The Area Office is diverse also. We think differently, we are culturally different and we have different expectations. By your participation you are the leaders in this endeavor, designing programs that promote diversity.*

*When we speak to others it may mean something different to the receiver. Each may have different expectations and we must be careful to make sure everyone understands requests and expectations. It is very important to be clear about all requests. I am behind the Taskforce one hundred percent and I will continue to support you. I would like to take this moment to thank you for all you do...*

*I would also like to thank **Jenny Allen**, our EEO/Civil Rights Manager. You are the perfect person for the job!"*



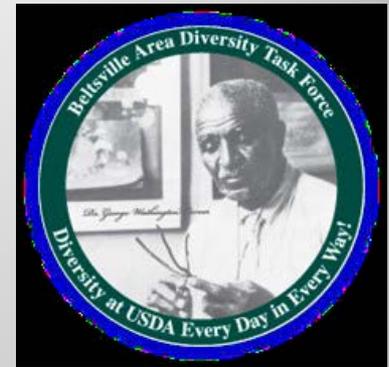
## Dr. Charles Onwulata....

*“...There are really two different processes that we are trying to bring together. We are bringing together agriculture and a diverse population. Just as Dr. Swietlik said earlier, working with diversity is what you do from your heart. The lives we touch today will help others in years to come. Agriculture is not an everyday concept to everyone. Some kids think eggs and milk come from the back of the grocery store! The Northeast Area can only be strengthened by bringing these areas together....”*





## Martha Tomecek gave the history of the former *Beltsville* Diversity Taskforce



“The history of the Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce was not a straight path. There was an earlier committee that fizzled out. The passion was re-ignited in 2008. With a core group of 35 to 40 people, we started over.

We developed 4 subcommittees under the general body. The first subcommittee was the ***Communications Subcommittee***. It was important to take the pulse of the people we were trying to serve. We developed a survey to send out to all employees. Feedback was good, but more importantly we were able to focus on what was important to us all.

Next subcommittee was the ***Leadership Advisory Subcommittee***. This group would advise administration. Under the leadership of this committee, we developed and implemented the Best Hiring Practices for all non-SY positions. The ***Special Emphasis Subcommittee*** was developed to highlight our diversity. The ***Science, Technology, Education and Outreach Subcommittee*** was developed to highlight agricultural research and share that research with the community. The signature of this committee is the **Student Discovery Garden (SDG)**. You will hear more about these subcommittees a little later.

The Diversity Taskforce won the **2009 Outreach, Diversity and Equal Opportunity Award** for Agricultural Research Service in the Non-Supervisory/Non-Managerial Category, and again in 2011...”

**We then heard specifics about each of the four subcommittees:**

***Communications Subcommittee - Tasha Sprague***

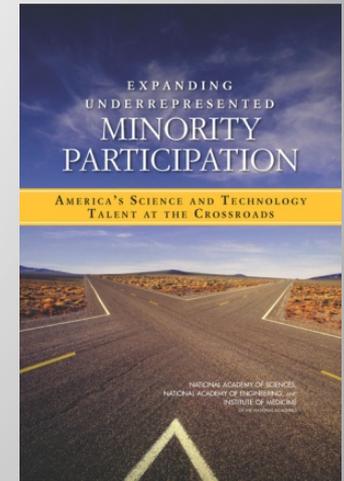
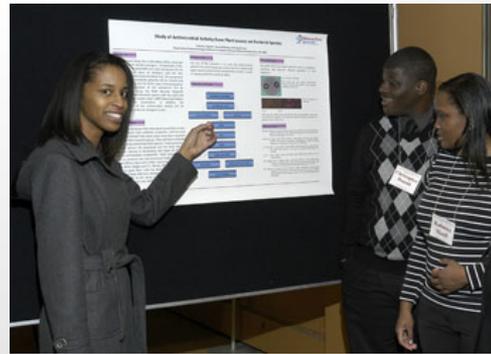
***Leadership Advisory Subcommittee - Monica Santin-Duran***

***Special Emphasis Subcommittee - Verneta Gaskins***

***Science, Technology, Education and Outreach - Lew Ziska***



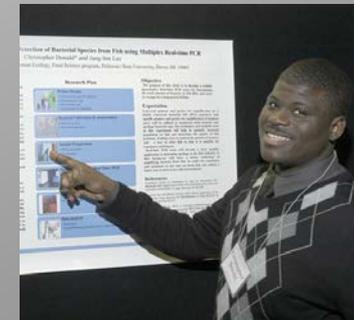




## Leadership Advisory Subcommittee- Monica Santin-Duran

What have we done in previous years:

- BHP (REE recruitment agreement): We developed the Best Hiring Practices as a recruitment agreement to enhance diversity in hiring practices
- First Beltsville Area (BA) Graduate Student Agricultural Research Symposium (February 2011).
- We invited 23 students and 29 faculty members from HBCU's for a 2-day research Symposium. Students presented their research, either as an oral presentation or a poster presentation. Students were matched with scientists employed here as mentors with similar research interests.
- HSI (Hispanic Serving Institutions) Summit held here in June 2012 with Hispanic Program Directors to make them aware of the possibility of research collaborations with scientists in the Beltsville area.
- National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) representatives met with SY's about the availability of grants.
- Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) New Project Directors Training (January 2014)
- 2014 Summer Learning Experience- hosted 30 (HSI) students
- 2015- 40 student applications

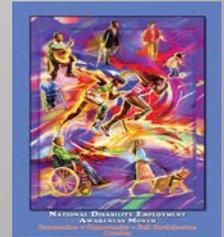




## Special Emphasis Subcommittee – Verneta Gaskins

The Special Emphasis Subcommittee was one of the first subcommittees of the Area Diversity Task Force when the Task Force was established in 2008. Since that time the committee has been dedicated to enhancing the awareness of diversity among the Area employees as well as reaching out to local schools in our community through Special Emphasis Diversity Programs. These programs include speakers, Videos “Lunch and Learn” series, panel discussions, handouts, and Tastes of Culture.

Most of our programs are in recognition of the nationally recognized Special Emphasis themes such as Hispanic Heritage Month, African American History Month, Women’s History Month, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender but we have also sponsored or participated in many culturally enhancing diversity events such as our Fitness Walks and Cultural Food Festivals.



We have also provided programs to Area employees explaining USDA resources, such as the USDA TARGETCenter.

The Special Emphasis Subcommittee also prepared programming for the last BARC Field Day, which included Fidos for Freedom, Martial Arts demonstration, Hispanic and African American dance troupes,

The Power Panther and Howard U soccer team for “Let’s Move”, and Cat in the Hat reading circle. From 2008 through 2012 the Special Emphasis Subcommittee has worked diligently to foster a workplace environment of inclusiveness and acceptance among the Area staff and local community.



# Science, Technology, Education and Outreach - Lew Ziska

## What does the Student Discovery Garden (SDG) do?

•STEO considers the garden:

- \* a means to get kids, particularly middle school students from urban areas, interested in all aspects of agricultural research.
- \* a means to “show-off” the range and impact of the research being done at Beltsville.
- \* SDG visits



***Student Discover Garden YouTube video (~ 2 mins):***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PlydujoFByk>

## Student Discovery Garden's 7 raised Beds and what they represent :

- Flower Garden – (highlighting varieties coming from National Arboretum)
- *Native American Crops (beans, cotton, peanuts, tomatoes & peppers) usually wild varieties*
- African American History (crops introduced by slaves)
- *Pollinator and herb garden (from bees to medicinal plants)*
- Biofuel (examples of plants used for biofuel and why)
- *Nutrition – BHNRC (features plants that pack a nutritional punch)*
- Urban garden (vegetable plants grown anywhere)

Additional items; weather station, rain barrel, native vs. exotic exhibit, mushroom logs, peach tree and urban containers



## What Else Does the Garden's Space Have to Offer?

The garden is adjacent to an open picnic area available for groups and employees to use. This space is where anyone can go to think, relax, observe and enjoy the aspect of a garden. In addition, this area could be considered an evolving work space for USDA employees.

- Employees can use the picnic area for events
- Anyone can take the self-guided tour
- Anyone can volunteer planting, weeding, harvesting vegetables
- It's a model that might inspire others to consider creating a garden for themselves at home

**FAR-B** has supported the garden since its inception and has financed several imperative projects including the central sidewalk and hydrant installation.

Garden tours are usually chaperoned by STEO personnel but the signage allows for self guidance.





## What happens to the produce from the Garden?

*All vegetables that are grown in the SDG are donated to a local Food Pantry*

During the summer season, every week, STEO harvests vegetables from all of the plots. STEO members also help glean leftover research plots to boost the weekly donation. The result is a steady supply of fresh vegetables to the local pantry during the summer season.



Some *Student Discovery Garden* figures

| Year | Visitors | Produce |
|------|----------|---------|
| 2010 | 100      | 150     |
| 2011 | 250      | 200     |
| 2012 | 1000     | 850     |
| 2013 | 510      | 1000    |
| 2014 | 390      | 425     |
| AVG  | 450      | 525     |

*“Thank you” to Herman’s Garden seed program at Seed Savers Exchange for providing seeds to the SDG for the 4<sup>th</sup> year.*

**After a 15 minute break the new and old members discussed limitations and obstacles to our different (and *diverse*) geographic locations. Webinars and more phone conferences were discussed, while rotating meetings through the various locations was also discussed as a possibility.**





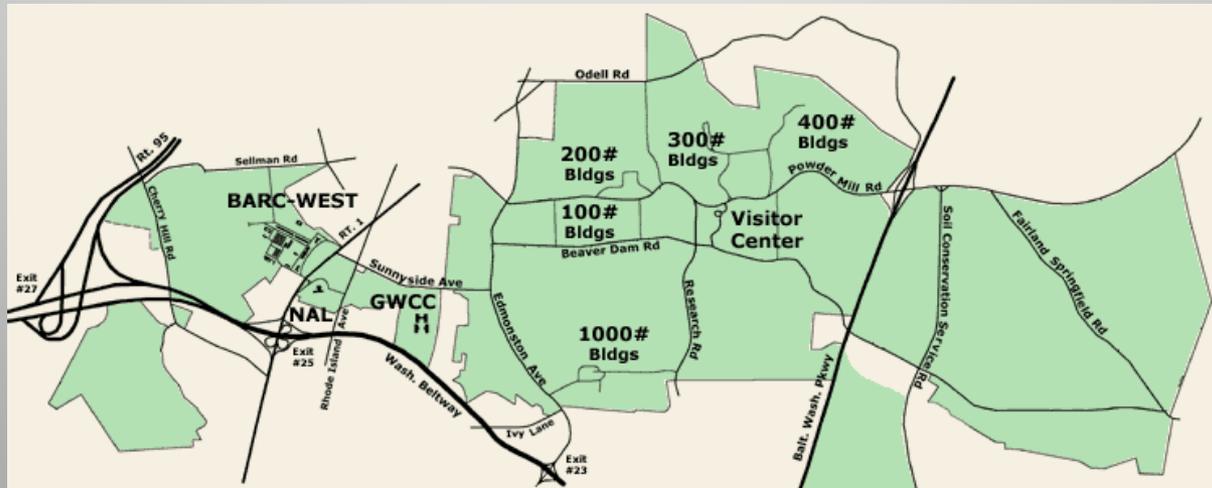
*Maratha Tomecek  
taking care to include our  
'virtual' attendees',  
while ensuring  
everyone could  
communicate clearly.*



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Most people then walked to nearby Chipotles for a group lunch and/or checked out the Student Discovery Garden.

After the group lunch, two of the members (plus one non-member) opted to take Jay Green's tour of the approximately 7,000 acres at the Beltsville facility.



*Truth be told, Jay didn't drive 3 people in the Soybean-powered bus; he used a regular vehicle 😊*

A special thank you goes to the ***Friends of the Agricultural Research Center - Beltsville (FAR-B)*** who continually support *the Taskforce* and who provided funds for refreshments at this meeting.



# *ARS Northeast Area Engagement*

**Special thanks to Edith Blackwell for taking copious notes and providing them to the membership; they were used to make this PowerPoint.**



# *ARS Northeast Area Engagement*

## **Meeting sign-up list:**

Dr. Dariusz Swietlik  
Dr. Charles Onwalata  
Sue Mischke  
Rachel Anderson  
Tunesha Phipps  
Edith Blackwell  
Catherine Parsons  
Savi Natarajan  
Yaguang Luo  
Special Guests  
Mary Ann Guaragna  
Vernetta Gaskins  
Jenny Allen  
Kate White  
Timothy Welch  
Lew Ziska  
LeAnn Blomberg  
Adrienne Lebega  
Matt Greenstone  
Tasha Sprague  
Jitu Patel  
Jay Green  
Martha Tomecek  
Monica Santin-Duran  
Gloria Meade - ARS, Wyndmoor Division assigned at Delaware State University  
Timothy Welch - ARS, Fish and Aquaculture, Leetown, West Virginia

