



# SPOTLIGHT ON DIVERSITY

**Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force**

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United States Department of Agriculture

Agricultural Research Service

## BARC Student Discovery Garden Breaks New Ground



*Groundbreaking for the Student Discovery Garden began in early May, and construction of raised beds progressed rapidly.*

One hundred years ago, George Washington Carver wrote, "The thoughtful educator...understands that the most effective and lasting education is the one that makes the pupil handle, discuss and familiarize himself with the real things about him" (*Nature Study and Gardening for Rural Schools*, 1910). This educational philosophy of learning by doing will be embodied in the Beltsville

Area's newest volunteer outreach effort to encourage local students from diverse backgrounds to pursue education in agricultural science. The Student Discovery Garden, currently under construction at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, is a project of the Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce (BADT).

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Spearheaded by BADT's Science, Technology, Education, and Outreach (STEO) subcommittee, planning for the garden began in the fall of 2009. "We are following First Lady Michelle Obama's effort to have a garden as a teaching tool for urban kids," said Lewis Ziska of STEO.

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack is a strong proponent of gardening. In his July 2009 message to USDA employees, available at <http://www.usda.gov/Peoplesgarden>, Secretary Vilsack challenged USDA employees to build more People's Gardens. He wrote that these gardens will "allow young people in particular to understand how hard it is to produce food and how much fun it is to produce food. And we believed that as these local production opportunities were created young people in particular would not only learn the lessons of hard work, but more importantly would be encouraged to be more nutritious eaters."

The Student Discovery Garden at BARC will be composed of seven sections, each exhibiting a different aspect of BARC research, from the breeding of native crops to urban garden containers. Each section will feature a poster providing relevant information.

A sidewalk three feet wide will permit easy access for close viewing of exhibits. Installation of the sidewalk and a water spigot for the garden are being funded by the Beltsville Area. Friends of Agricultural Research-Beltsville ([FAR-B](#)) made a generous donation of \$3,000 to purchase materials for constructing the planting beds. BARC's Farm Crew have been integral to the construction process, and many BADT members have been granted time by their supervisors to participate in this effort. Since any garden needs ongoing maintenance to remain in good shape, it is envisioned that volunteer work hours will be contributed by generous BARC employees and possibly also by community groups.

The Student Discovery Garden will be pesticide- and herbicide-free. Planting beds will be filled with sterilized soil, as a protective measure for the middle-school students who are expected to be the predominant age group served by this teaching tool.

### **Secretary Vilsack's Cultural Transformation Message: A Shared Vision for Us All!**

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack recently sent a video message to USDA employees about his vision for USDA. "I'm calling on all USDA employees to make a commitment to a cultural transformation at USDA," said Vilsack. The Secretary asserted that in the areas of diversity, inclusion, and performance, USDA can do better not only for its customers but also for employees. Vilsack announced that a transformation taskforce comprised of a diverse group of USDA leadership has been launched and is developing a draft plan to meet the goals of this cultural transformation.

Commenting on the Secretary's message, Beltsville Area Director Joseph Spence said, "I think the Secretary is very sincere in his efforts to transform the workplace in USDA. Clearly, the taskforce that he has appointed has an opportunity to have a long lasting impact on USDA. I think the Secretary has outlined some specific goals that he would like to see the taskforce address, and it will be interesting to see what they come up with. I think he has set the tone for his tenure as Secretary.

"Having said the above, I think within the Beltsville Area we should be proactive in terms of meeting several of the goals outlined in his address. We cannot and will not wait for the taskforce to come up with some suggestions. There are many small changes that we can make that will make a big difference in the issues raised by the Secretary. I think the Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce has demonstrated that in the past couple of years, and its proactive activities have made a difference."

To listen to the Secretary's message on cultural transformation at USDA in its entirety, go to [mms://ocbmtcwmp.usda.gov/content/secy/task\\_force1C/AP.wmv](https://mms://ocbmtcwmp.usda.gov/content/secy/task_force1C/AP.wmv). In that video, Secretary Vilsack asks us to assist him in his effort to make USDA a premier organization and model employer. He outlines elements of this cultural transformation, such as the following:

- An inclusive workplace environment where there is equity of opportunity and all employees are empowered to reach their fullest potential
- A commitment by USDA employees to improve USDA's past and future record on civil rights
- A renewed commitment to creating diversity in the workforce

If you have not yet listened to Secretary Vilsack's message, you owe it to yourself to do so. This message is motivational and compelling. It has inspired me to do all that I can do to help USDA reach its goal of becoming a premier organization and model employer. Embracing diversity is beneficial for everyone, as we all add value in some unique and special way.

– *Tasha Sprague (Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce, Communications Subcommittee co-chair)*

### Mentoring Program Promotes Inclusive Workforce

"People helping people" is the motto of the Beltsville Area Mentoring Program (BAMP), originally created in 1990 and revived in 2009. Mentors and mentees who are participating in the 2010-2011 session of the program were informed of their acceptance in late April, and the program kicked off in mid-May.

BAMP's mission is to help full-time Federal employees of the Beltsville Area (from GS-2 through GS-15 and Wage Grade) to reach their full potential with regard to career development; give individuals access to mentors to assist in setting and realizing career goals; and provide career guidance and support in a culturally inclusive workforce.

A mentee gains support from having an objective listener who can talk about job and career issues in a positive and confidential manner, provide fresh ideas, appraise the mentee's strengths and weaknesses, give guidance and support in setting and reaching goals, and explain how the organizational structure works.

Mentors obtain a chance to give back what they have received, the opportunity to watch someone grow, the satisfaction of providing assistance, and increased knowledge on how to successfully mentor someone. Both mentees and mentors benefit from the chance to broaden their networks and identify formal training opportunities.

BAMP was the 1996 winner of the Beltsville Area Civil Rights Organization Award for its ongoing efforts and leadership in advancing equal opportunity/civil rights and promoting participation of women, minorities and individuals with disabilities in career development.

BAMP is run by a committee of 14 volunteers – two each from Animal and Natural Resources Institute (ANRI), Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center (BHNRC), Plant Science Institute (PSI), Arboretum, Facility Services (FS-MEO), Research Support Services (RSS-MEO), and the Area Office. The committee matches mentees with mentors by considering the mentee's goals and the mentor's experience and qualifications. Mentors and mentees maintain a formal relationship for a one-year period.

BAMP (Morse Solomon, chair; Jenny Allen, assistant chair) is administered through the Beltsville Area Diversity & Outreach Office. Participation in the mentoring program requires supervisory approval. For more information, call (301) 504-6507.

### Visit us at Field Day - BA Diversity Task Force booth



#### *Fun for the Whole Family!*

Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC)  
Celebrating 100 Years of Research in Beltsville  
Saturday, June 5, 2010, 10 am to 4 pm - rain or shine.

Hay Rides - Petting Zoo - Farm Machinery  
Research Exhibits - Hands on Demonstrations  
Light Refreshments for Sale

Signing and Handicapped Access Vans Available

[Travel Directions](#)   [Image Gallery of Past Field Days](#)

### Helpful Websites

Cooperative Resolution

<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/programs/coopres/>

Outreach, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity (ODEO)

<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/complaint.htm>

Outreach and Recruitment

<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/recruitment.htm>

Reasonable Accommodation

<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/accomodation.htm>

### Observe Diversity Throughout the Year

January – Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday

February – Black History Month

March – National Women’s History Month

May – Asian American/Pacific Islander Heritage Month;  
Cinco de Mayo

June – National Gay & Lesbian Pride Month

August – Women’s Equality Day

September – National Hispanic Heritage Month

October - National Disability Awareness Month

November – National American Indian Heritage Month

**Spotlight on Diversity** is produced by the Communications Subcommittee of the Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce. Members of the Communications Subcommittee are Tasha Sprague (co-chair), Wendy Jacobs (co-chair), David Baer, Ken Deahl, Cecilia Wilkinson Enns, Janet Novotny, Catherine Parsons, and Ali Sadeghi.