



SPOTLIGHT ON DIVERSITY

Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force

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http://www.ars.usda.gov/Aboutus/BA_Diversity_Task_Force

United States Department of Agriculture

Agricultural Research Service

Come One, Come All: May 5, 2011 Fitness Walk, Garden Opening, & Cultural Food Festival

It's that time of year again! Time to get fit and enjoy the summer sun. Time to get things growing in the garden and learn more about our natural world. Most of all, it's time to appreciate the contributions of our comrades, enjoy some international cuisine, and celebrate!

Join the Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce (BADT) on May 5 for a fitness walk, the season opening of the BA Student Discovery Garden, and a cultural food festival. The walk will begin at 11:00 a.m. at the main entrance of Building 003 and continue around the Circle Drive sidewalk. Health awareness informational packets will be available, courtesy of the Blue Cross/Blue Shield service team.

After an invigorating walk, enjoy mouth-watering delicacies as you take a relaxing stroll through our newly redesigned Student Discovery Garden. This year's main garden exhibits will focus on medicinal herbs, pollinators, urban gardening, bio-fuel, nutrition, native plants, African American heritage, and an ornamental & flower garden. Special garden exhibits will include a mushroom garden, a rain barrel, a compost area, an exotic plant exhibit, and a soon-to-be-installed weather station.

The potluck, picnic-style cultural food festival will be held at the Garden between buildings 006 and 007 (or, in case of rain, in building 003, room 020). Employees are invited to contribute culinary classics unique to their heritage to the potluck.

Students from Andrew Jackson Academy will be visiting the Garden on May 5 to learn about the research done here at BARC. This is part of BADT's ongoing campaign of outreach to the community to encourage learning and leadership as it relates to agriculture, scientific research, and nutrition.

To learn about how you can become a part of this positive movement or simply to get more information, we encourage you to attend this event and pick up a brochure or talk to a Taskforce member. We welcome your feedback.

– Mary Ann Guaragna



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ARS scientists interact with grad students, provide invaluable feedback and mentoring

Reactions to the first [Beltsville Area Graduate Student Agricultural Research Symposium](#), held February 10-11, were overwhelmingly positive. In addition to [poster and oral presentations](#) by students, the event included time for students to meet with ARS mentors, as well as an opening dinner and a networking breakfast.

Students voiced their appreciation of the opportunities for networking, mentoring, and exposure to ARS research, as well as being able to present their own research. A sampling of student comments includes the following:

- “It opened my eyes to a new world of research.”
- “It was really helpful for me in many ways, especially being exposed to the scientific community.”
- “The opportunity to interact and connect with peers and professionals is invaluable.”

Many aspects of the symposium, notably “networking, participation in conferences, and presentation of research” and “engaged mentors,” are among interventions identified in a recent National Academy of Sciences report ([Expanding Underrepresented Minority Participation: America’s Science and Technology Talent at the Crossroads](#), 2010) as being effective in increasing minority participation in the field of science.

Feedback about the symposium from ARS scientists tended to focus on the value of the symposium to the students, but they also acknowledged that they themselves benefited from interacting with the students and their university advisors and being exposed to research being conducted at 1890’s universities. One called the experience “invigorating.”

Also mentioned in was the potential for future post-doctoral research appointments and/or employment. Several ARS staff suggested providing mechanisms to facilitate following through on the connections made with

students and universities during the symposium “so that the symposium has long-term outcomes.”

Student participants came from five of the [1890’s institutions](#) (Delaware State University, North Carolina A&T State University, Southern University and A&M College, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and Virginia State University), as well as the University of the District of Columbia and George Mason University.

Oral presentations were given by Mary K. Beals, Olcay Boyacioglu, Glenn Chappell, Michaela Danzy, Vanessa Ferchaud, Yongsheg Li, Meshack Mudoh, and Ryan Nicholas.

Posters were presented by Michline Brice, Chris Chapell, Christopher Donald, Ahmed Elobeid, Amy Gilliam, Ar’Quette Grant, Bridget Hagens, Osman Hassan, Madhuri H. Hathurusinghe, Said Hayek, Tanganika Johnson, Talaysha Lingham, KaLonna Maul, Kendra McCain, Matthew Miller, Brian Mims, Jason Preuett, Yaqoob Thurston, Alexander Wooten, and Harriett Wynn.

The opening dinner featured a talk by plant pathologist [Robert E. Davis](#), research leader of the Molecular Plant Pathology Laboratory, who was inducted into the ARS Science Hall of Fame in 2008 for his revolutionary discovery of spiroplasmas, a previously unrecognized form of life. Davis confided to the audience, “All of us scientists feel like students. That feeling will probably never leave you if you do research.”

Davis noted that his first research at Beltsville involved searching for the cause –then thought to be a virus – of plant diseases called yellows diseases. Before long, research conducted in Japan required him to change his focus from looking for a virus to looking for a prokaryote. “Here’s a lesson for you graduate students,” he said. “Be flexible!”

Friday’s keynote speaker was Farook Sait, director of the Civil Rights Division of USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service. Sait told symposium attendees that he was originally from India and had come to the United

States, “this pinnacle of greatness,” to pursue his college education at a historically-Black college. He spoke of USDA’s contributions to national and international progress in agriculture, and of the need to exercise self-discipline and make good choices in order to excel. He advised the student participants, “Luck is the intersection of preparation and opportunity.”

— Cecilia Wilkinson Enns



Beltsville Area Graduate Student Symposium poster presentations



Beltsville Area Graduate Student Symposium keynote speaker Mr. Farook Sait, Director, Civil Rights Division, USDA, Food Safety and Inspection Service



Beltsville Area Graduate Student Symposium Moderator Dr. Ramon Jordan, Associate Director, National Arboretum



Beltsville Area Graduate Student Symposium student speaker



Beltsville Area Graduate Student Symposium Moderator Dr. Joan Lunney, Research Chemist, Animal Parasitic Diseases Laboratory

BARC Employee in the Spotlight:
Edith Blackwell

Blackwell was recently interviewed for **Spotlight on Diversity** by Tasha Sprague.

Edith Blackwell, a chemist in the Food Composition and Methods Development Laboratory, is in her third year of serving on the Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce (BADT). She also served on an earlier diversity-related committee (during Dr. Phyllis Johnson's tenure as Area Director) when the focus was more on special emphasis and multicultural programs.

Sprague: What was your key motivating factor for joining and volunteering for the BA Diversity Taskforce?

Blackwell: The idea that this committee was going in a new direction. The committee was expanding and seemed to genuinely be interested in promoting diversity.

Sprague: What does diversity mean to you? Why do you think it is important to have such a committee here at BARC?

Blackwell: Diversity is accepting and utilizing the skills of all cultures. It is important to have the Diversity Taskforce because BARC is a multicultural environment, as is America, and you can't be fully successful in a single culture by ignoring all others.

Sprague: In your opinion, how is the committee improving and benefitting BARC?

Blackwell: Through the leadership of Dr. Spence and the guidance of Dr. Sexton, the Diversity Taskforce is putting actions to words. Dr. Spence is committed to following through on the recommendations presented to him by the committee.

Sprague: Are there any areas you would like the Diversity Taskforce to address in the future?

Blackwell: In my opinion, the committee is covering the entire spectrum. We may want to expand in the areas we have covered; however, the committee has managed in such a short time to focus in on elementary students, through graduate students, and beyond. The Student Discovery Garden is assisting with the outreach to elementary students, the Graduate Symposium covered university-level students, and the Best Hiring Practices (BHP) is for those who are job-ready.

Sprague: Would you like to share any other thoughts?

Blackwell: The Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce is working to make a difference because we have the right people! We have a core group of people who are dedicated to getting the job done.

Got questions?

Call or e-mail the current chairpersons:

BADT – Verneta Gaskins (301)504-6510;
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Special Emphasis – Verneta Gaskins (301)504-6510;
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Communications – Tasha Sprague (301)504-5864;
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Observe diversity throughout the year

January – Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday

February – Black History Month

March – National Women’s History Month

May – Cinco de Mayo - Fitness Walk and International Food Festival in conjunction with the season opening of the Student Discovery Garden - May 5, 2011, 11:00am
(See article on page 1.)

Asian American/Pacific Islander Heritage Month - Lunch and Learn - May 18, 2011, 12:00noon - 1:00pm, Building 003, Room 020.

June – National Gay & Lesbian Pride Month - Lunch and Learn - June 15, 2011, 12:00noon - 1:00pm, Building 003, Room 020

August – Women’s Equality Day - August 26, 2011

September – National Hispanic Heritage Month - Lunch and Learn, September 21, 2011, 12:00noon - 1:00pm, Building 003, Room 020.

October - National Disability Awareness Month

November – National American Indian Heritage Month

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>

Spotlight on Diversity is produced by the Communications Subcommittee of the Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce. Members of the Communications Subcommittee are Tasha Sprague (*chair*), Ken Deahl, Cecilia Wilkinson Enns, Catherine Parsons, and Frances Trough.