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Advancing Diversity in the Northern Plains Area

VOICES

www.ars.usda.gov/npa/voices

Spring/Summer 2014

Connecting with student workers

By Barbara King
NPA ODEO Program Manager
Area Office, Fort Collins, CO

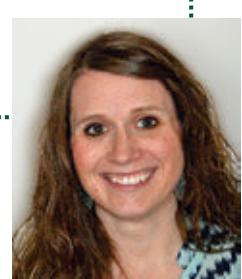
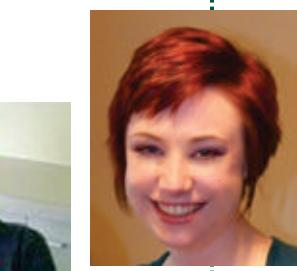
What is not to like about this issue of VOICES and the inspiring stories of just some of our many former students and interns! These stories (found on pages 5-9) would not be possible without the incredible mentoring provided by NPA scientists and technicians. Congratulations to the featured mentors these students lauded, and to all of the other support staff, technicians and scientists who have given a foot-hold to so many other students not featured in this issue.

As I read these stories I can't help wondering just what is the "glue" that nurtures connections to start, grow, and maybe even result in a permanent hire? Certainly personality plays a big role, as does willingness and interest by all parties to stay in touch. But is there something more? At the same time, why is it that some former students with similar personalities and abilities who had equally meaningful experiences, somehow drift away? Or, maybe the student is interested in maintaining contact (think references!) and it's the mentors who turn their attention to the next student and next project. This "drift" is not necessarily bad; all of us can attest to the sheer delight in helping another person find their "sea legs" and moving on without being concerned about keeping in touch. On the other hand, what is it about the many applicants for student and/or permanent positions,

who eagerly apply but don't get selected?

This puzzle of "connect" and "drift" is intriguing, especially in terms of recruitment, retention, and departures. Just since the beginning of FY 14, there have been nine resignations, 12 retirements, and just seven new hires. Compared to 2003, the NPA permanent workforce today is about 16% smaller, although other demographics have not changed much. Recruitment should ramp up this year. Hiring decisions are critical to ensuring that ARS continues to be the "go-to" agency for agriculturally related research, and are crucial to building a workforce with the range of diverse backgrounds and perspectives that are essential to identifying and solving the challenges ARS research addresses.

Hiring officials ultimately have the final say in who gets selected and given the opportunity for connections and contributions. Panelists also have a great deal of input into those decisions. For those of you who are given the opportunity to be involved in recruitments, as part of that process, think about who helped open that first door for you, and how you can open the door for someone whose backgrounds and perspectives may not be similar to yours but is just as capable and eager to be given the chance for contributing to ARS. ♦



MLK Day of Service Project

By Sharon Papiernik
 Research Leader,
 Brookings, SD

On the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, Sharon Nichols, a Biological Science Technician at Brookings, SD, sewed 65 doll bodies as part of a special service project. Her General Federation of Women's Club is filling the bodies with fiberfill and sending them to the Operation Smile organization. Operation Smile is a group of medical professionals who travel to foreign countries and perform free cleft palate surgery on children. Each child is given a doll donated by groups like Sharon's. ♦



The dozens of doll bodies - sewn by Brookings' Sharon Nichols - awaiting stuffing and then shipment to Operation Smile to cheer a child before and after cleft palate surgery.

WHERE IN THE NPA?



These switchgrass plots are being "harvested" with fire as part of a biofuels research project underway at which NPA location? In addition to removing the biomass, the burning also does double duty by returning nutrients to the soil.

(Answers on page 17)

Show your own location pride! Share your pictures of scenic landmarks, fun festivities or occupational oddities that make your location uniquely you!

(Details on page 17)



Message From the Director

By Dr. Larry Chandler
NPA Area Director, Fort Collins, CO

I'm sure most everyone has heard the question "Is the glass half full or half empty?" I'm not sure what you think when you hear it in conversations, but typically it's used to emphasize the difference between positive and negative thinking. Perhaps it's even more about optimism vs pessimism. I was recently reading an article on a business management related website which stated that a cynic would describe the phrase as the difference between "irresponsible hopefulness and practical realism".

Whatever your take is on the quote it does carry a certain connotation that no matter the situation one's viewpoint can either help an organization move forward or maintain a status quo state (or worse). Essentially it's up to all of us to decide how best to deal with our future and whether or not we make lemonade from lemons. As we continue moving through FY14 I prefer to deal with lemonade. I hope everyone will agree that we've seen plenty of challenges in the last few years, but perhaps the Agency may be evolving in a direction that will be positive for each of us individually and for the organization as a whole. We always have to recognize that we will continue to face challenges, but perhaps a dose of optimism is what we've all been waiting for.

As an Agency we are moving ahead under new Leadership. Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young became our Administrator back in late February. I think most of you will recall seeing an email from her dated March 3, 2014 that outlined some of her ideas for ARS. I would encourage you to go back and read it again if you don't recall all of the details. She listed a number of goals that she would like to address in her first 90 days as Administrator. In my view the overall theme of those goals is to address key problems we've all been dealing with and to reinvigorate our organization. She is energetic and wants ARS to continue to be an outstanding research agency.

As I mentioned in the opening paragraph we're coming out of some difficult times. Dr. Jacobs-Young is aware of the challenges and will be asking all of us to step up and help address the issues. I hope you'll do

your part and support her and her team as they move ahead.

NPA Research Leadership Workshop

Our office recently held a Research Leadership Workshop here in Ft. Collins. All NPA Center Directors and Research Leaders were asked to participate. It provided all of us an opportunity to interact directly with Dr. Jacobs-Young, as well as other key leaders of the Agency. More importantly it was the first time in several years that the Area research leadership was able to meet as a group. We focused this workshop on our mission which is "RESEARCH". Now that doesn't mean that other functions within our organization aren't important but the workshop was developed to hopefully re-charge our scientific leadership to tackle some key concerns related to how to accomplish research in the current environment.

I enjoyed the two days we were together. We had frank conversations which are always useful. We asked the participants to develop actionable ideas to address strategic resource and research needs, leadership development and laboratory life. We want to know how to do things better and have ARS remain a top notch research organization. We certainly didn't answer all the questions and solve all the problems. However, you will see some of the results of our discussions in the weeks to come. It was important that we were able to get together and I appreciate everyone's participation in the meeting. It was well worth the time.

Future AO Meeting

Speaking of meetings, we are going to plan to gather our Administrative Officers together within the next few months. This group of individuals and their staffs also have numerous challenges to address. We all know that our offices and labs don't run well without their help along with the able assistance from our PSAs and secretaries. The AOs have some difficult issues to deal with as do the RLs and CDs. We want them to be able to come in and give the Area Office some advice and work directly on some of their concerns. You'll be hearing more about this in the weeks to come.

Finally, we're preparing for the annual

ARMP reviews. We're tweaking things a bit due to some last minute schedule challenges on our calendars but we still intend to visit and interact with each location in the coming months as we address planning for FY15. During each review we'll hold an all-employee meeting. I encourage all of you to attend. As in past years we'll provide some updates and let you know what's currently occurring in the Agency. However, we also want to visit about the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. I really want to hear your feedback so I hope you'll be prepared to talk to us. Our role will be just to listen so this is your time to let us know what you're thinking. We look forward to seeing you.

By the way, the 2014 Federal Viewpoint Survey came out the week of May 5. If you received an invitation to participate,

Continued next page →



Dr. Chandler

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Director...

Continued from page 3

I hope you did so. The survey was anonymous so that you could truly answer the questions as frankly as you cared to. We do want to know your concerns so that we can address them. I think you'll hear over the coming months that we are actively working to address many of the issues from the 2013 survey. Participating in the survey is valuable and can result in a better organization and work environment if we get honest feedback. You may think that your comments won't have an impact. However, I assure you that we are listening. We are committed to addressing your concerns.

I hope everyone has a great summer!!! Enjoy some great outdoor time with your family and friends.

Larry

LOCATIONS IN THE NORTHERN PLAINS AREA

Colorado:

Akron
Fort Collins

Kansas:

Manhattan

Nebraska:

Clay Center
Lincoln

North Dakota:

Fargo
Grand Forks
Mandan

South Dakota:

Brookings

Montana:

Miles City
Sidney

Utah:

Logan

Wyoming:

Cheyenne

Good Things in the NPA!



2014 New Scientists' Orientation: (Left to right) Sarah Lupton, Huihui Zhang, Andrew Foote, Lauren Porensky, Michael Bukowski, Melinda Yerka, Larry Chandler, Stephanie Greene, Mickey McGuire

*By Dr. Mickey McGuire
Associate Area Director
Ft. Collins, CO*

Over the past several years, ARS has seen budget cuts, program and location closures and delays in hiring. One central tenet the Agency has held through these tough times is that impacted employees will be offered a new job. This central tenet has required holding vacant positions open that could be filled by impacted employees. It looks like the worst is over and, although we are looking at potential cuts in the President's FY 15 budget proposal to Congress, ARS is moving forward. As many of you know, all scientists that are hired into the NPA enter a three year program called the Newly Appointed Scientific Professional Development Program (NASPDP). Part of this program entails an orientation workshop that is typically held on an annual basis. Due to the tough times described above, we hired very few new scientists in 2013 and a workshop was not held. However, in April of 2014, seven newly appointed scientists attended the workshop held in Fort Collins. To me, this

signifies a significant positive event; we are once again hiring new scientists that can hit the ground running and make a significant impact to national and international agricultural research priorities.

The workshop overlapped with our leadership conference for the first half day. Our new scientists were able to meet with people from headquarters, including Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young and interact with the NPA Research Leaders, Center Directors and Area Directors. Over the next day and a half, a talented group of instructors then led the new scientists through a series of presentations designed to inspire, instruct and set them on the right course. These instructors were from various locations across the NPA such that a variety of ideas and opinions could be shared. Evaluations were uniformly positive and even an experienced scientist that is transferring into the NPA from another area was appreciative of the content of the workshop.

Since the orientation workshop, NPA has offered positions to four new scientists and we are looking forward to our next workshop sometime in 2015. Our future, indeed, is bright! ♦



SPECIAL SECTION - Where Are They Now?

ARS: Impacting Young Lives

The following special section features the "VOICES" of former ARS student workers from across the NPA. Our thanks to them for sharing their stories and impressions "post ARS" and our best wishes for their continued success!

Thunyaporn "Naggie" Jeradechachai



Naggie worked as a student laboratory assistant under Dr. James Buckner (now retired) at IGBR/RRVARC in **Fargo, ND**. Naggie was hired through an RSA with NDSU and worked from May 2010 through May 2012.

1. Where are you now?

Now, I am in Thailand (temporarily) on business. I still live and work in Fargo.

2. What are you doing now?

I am the Crop Quality Specialist working at the Northern Crops Institute in Fargo (part of North Dakota State University).

3. How did your ARS experience help you along the way?

Very much. I learned many laboratory techniques that cannot be taught in school. I learned from washing dishes correctly to complex analyses to data interpretation. The training that my supervisor took time and patient to teach me was priceless. She was a great mentor to me. .

4. If you are enrolled in a degree program, what are your plans once you graduate?

NA

5. Any advice you would give to people considering a job with ARS?

Work can be difficult at first, just keep improving.

6. Was there any one thing that stood out from your time with ARS?

Our section always had great birthday parties! ♦

Alison Bowman



Alison worked as a biological science aide under Dr. William Kemp and Marcia Hagen at RRVARC in **Fargo, ND** from October 2011 to August 2013.

1. Where are you now?

Omaha, Nebraska

2. What are you doing now?

I am currently enrolled in the M.P.H. program at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. I am also a part of two research projects on campus, both involving infectious diseases.

3. How did your ARS experience help you along the way?

I learned the importance of teamwork as well as being organized.

4. If you are enrolled in a degree program, what are your plans once you graduate?

After the completion of my master's degree I hope continue my education in an epidemiology PhD program.

5. Any advice you would give to people considering a job with ARS?

(no answer provided)



Naggie Jeradechachai, a meeting presenter, is pictured at far left.

Continued next page →

SPECIAL SECTION - Where Are They Now?

Bowman...*Continued from page 5***6. Was there any one thing that stood out from your time with ARS?**

I enjoyed working in an environment with a large variety of people from all different disciplines and backgrounds. ♦

Emilie (Vomhof) DeKrey



Emilie worked as a biological science aide under Dr. James Buckner (now retired) at RRVARC in **Fargo, ND** from June 2004 to August 2005, and then as a Post-doc from May 2010 to May 2012.

training because the USDA-ARS experience prepared me with the skills needed for doing novel research.

4. If you are enrolled in a degree program, what are you plans once you graduate?

I graduated with my Ph.D. in May 2010 (started Aug. 2005), did a 2 yr post-doc with the USDA in Grand Forks and am doing a 2nd post-doc at the Trudeau Institute. I hope to return to the USDA as an SY scientist.

5. Any advice you would give to people considering a job with ARS?

Take it! It was the best experience for both my undergraduate fellowship and my post-doctoral fellowship. The working environment is excellent and skills you can learn are invaluable.

6. Was there any one thing that stood out from your time with ARS?

I can't think of one single experience but overall the people you get to work along side are the best! At both the USDA-ARS facilities at Fargo and Grand Forks, the people work to help and teach each other and the work ethic sets a great example for what it takes to get great research done. ♦

Amber Goss



Amber worked as a Biological Science Aid under Dr. John Gaskin at NPARL in Sidney, MT for three summers from 2003 to 2005.

1. Where are you now?*Billings, MT***2. What are you doing now?**

I'm a Certified Clinical Research Coordinator, at the Montana Cancer Consortium. I work as a coordinator for the cancer treatment trials and coordinate with the physician, their staff, and the participant. I screen records for eligible participants and after a participant voluntarily consents to take part, I register them to the trial. Throughout the participant's treatment I monitor their study compliance, the compliance of the site treating them, and the participant's safety. I continue to follow the participant for several years after they have completed their treatment as well.

In addition, I am also responsible for working with the trial sponsors and the National Cancer Institute to collect and submit all of the necessary data on the trial participant.

When I'm not directly working with one of my trial participants I work to promote cancer clinical trial awareness and local access to them by presenting at health fairs and community events.

3. How did your ARS experience help you along the way?

My ARS experience reminded me how much I enjoyed science and excelled in it. I changed my major at college after my first summer at ARS from Business and Pre-Law to Biology and Forensic Anthropology. While I was already on my way to changing my major prior to that summer at ARS I wouldn't have included biology without it which is actually what has helped me in my career today.

I use my biology background every day in my clinical trials field and the help and wonderful teaching I had from John Gaskin at ARS was an important step in helping me discover my way here.

4. If you are enrolled in a degree program, what are you plans once you graduate?*N/A**Continued next page* →

SPECIAL SECTION - Where Are They Now?

GOSS...

Continued from page 6

5. Any advice you would give to people considering a job with ARS?

If you're considering a job at ARS, I would tell you to absolutely do it. Working at ARS is the best way to apply the concepts you're learning in many science related curriculums with hands on work. Many of the concepts I learned and studied in molecular biology at college finally came together for me because of all the hands on time I spent doing molecular biology work with and learning in the ARS lab.

6. Was there any one thing that stood out from your time with ARS?

As I reflect on my time at ARS I remember everyone I came in contact with always being so willing to take the time to educate. From explaining the big picture about their overall research to teaching about the one small process we might be completing at the time I feel that it was important to everyone to take the extra few minutes to educate me and I feel that is what made my time at ARS invaluable. ♦

"...having the ARS on my resume...strengthens my appeal to future employers, scholarship committees, etc."
~ J. Miller

1. Where are you now?

I am attending college at Minot State University, in my fourth of five years toward my degree...

2. What are you doing now?

...which is a Bachelor of Arts in Chemistry and Mathematics. I am keeping busy with a math research internship, working on a problem that combines physics, chemistry, and, of course, math. I recently had the privilege of presenting my findings thus far at the Joint Mathematics Meetings in Baltimore, MD.

3. How did your ARS experience help you along the way?

Working for the ARS has been a huge influence on my career so far—it allowed me to pursue and solidify my interests in science and research. In addition, the skills and work ethic I learned there are still useful to me today. Not only that, having the ARS on my resume, as well as connections to respected scientists, strengthens my appeal to future employers, scholarship committees, etc.

4. If you are enrolled in a degree program, what are you plans once you graduate?

Once I graduate from MSU, next spring, I plan on attending graduate school for chemistry, either at UND, NDSU, or the South Dakota School of Mines. My interests are material chemistry or chemical engineering.

5. Any advice you would give to people considering a job with ARS?

For those considering working with the ARS, I say, "do it!" It is an incredible opportunity. Though it may not always be the easiest summer job, the benefits will stay with you the rest of your career.

6. Was there any one thing that stood

out from your time with ARS?

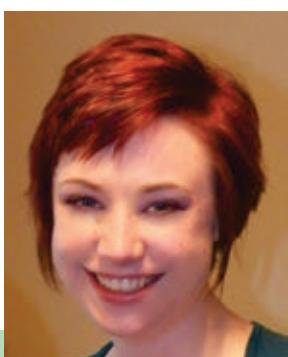
The thing that set the ARS apart from other jobs was, to me, the people I worked with. Spending time with students with the same education goals as myself, and working under scientists who have already met that goal, encouraged me to set higher goals and follow them. ♦

Anna Fischer



Anna worked as a Biological Sciences Aide under Dr. John Hendrickson at NGPRL in **Mandan, ND** from May 2004 to August 2010.

Johannah Miller



Johannah worked as a biological science aide under Dr. Mark Leibig at NGPRL in **Mandan, ND** for two summers, 2011 and 2012.

1. Where are you now?

I am currently living in Custer, MT with my fiancé where we farm, focusing on irrigated spring/winter wheat and sugar beets, and ranch, running about 350 head of cows.

2. What are you doing now?

I am currently completing my final semester of my Masters in nursing as a Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP). I will be graduating May 3rd, 2014 and plan on working as a family nurse practitioner in and around the Billings, MT area.

3. How did your ARS experience help you along the way?

The experience at ARS has helped me

Continued next page →

SPECIAL SECTION - Where Are They Now?

Fischer...*Continued from page 7*

realize that even the most knowledgeable and educated research scientists don't always have all the answers and may need to collaborate with other scientists in order to find those answers. Working at ARS taught me the importance of team work and working with others in order to reach a common goal.

4. If you are enrolled in a degree program, what are you plans once you graduate?

Upon completion of my Masters in nursing degree, I am planning on obtaining a position as a family nurse practitioner with a focus in rural healthcare.

5. Any advice you would give to people considering a job with ARS?

I would highly recommend ARS for anyone looking for a position or considering a job with ARS. I would share with potential employees, that working for ARS provides an opportunity to experience new situations working with all aspects of agricultural research; learn and understand the importance of collecting and analyzing agricultural experimental data; and be part of an amazing group of scientists and support staff. Some of the tasks at ARS are completed in conditions that may not be ideal and some are very repetitive, detailed, and tedious. The benefits of working at ARS, including working with a great group of people, setting your own hours (if acceptable by your supervisor), no nights / holidays / weekends, and traveling to different areas, greatly outweigh the sometimes daunting tasks of agricultural research.

6. Was there any one thing that stood out from your time with ARS?

I feel that the one thing that stood out the most from my time with ARS is the long-term relationships that I have developed as a result of working at this facility. I have had the opportunity to establish both professional and personal relationships with both Dr. Hendrickson and Mary Kay Tokach and continue to remain in contact with them over the years. ♦

Danny Wikenheiser



Danny worked as a biological science aide under Dr. Mark Leibig at NGPRL in **Mandan, ND** for two summers, 2007 and 2008.

1. Where are you now?

University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Little Rock, AR.

2. What are you doing now?

I am currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Immunology. Our lab is primarily focused on understanding the mechanisms of host B cell antibody responses to Plasmodium, the causative agent of malaria.

3. How did your ARS experience help you along the way?

My position at ARS allowed me to gain an understanding of the fundamentals of laboratory work. Perhaps most importantly, the position taught me the necessity of being meticulous, thorough, and patient when conducting scientific research.

4. If you are enrolled in a degree program, what are you plans once you graduate?

Immediately following graduation (2016), I will pursue a post-doctoral position studying host-pathogen interaction, with an emphasis on immunologic responses. Initially, I had hoped to pursue a full-time undergrada-

ate professorship while conducting minimal research at the undergraduate level. However, I am beginning to feel that a permanent career in academics as an independent principal investigator will be a better fit.

5. Any advice you would give to people considering a job with ARS?

I think an ARS position is an excellent opportunity to provide useful laboratory experience if one is interested in pursuing a career in science.

6. Was there any one thing that stood out from your time with ARS?

The thing that strikes me as most significant regarding my position at ARS was the mentorship provided by Dr. Liebig. In addition to teaching me a great deal about science and how to conduct it properly, Dr. Liebig conveyed how to deftly manage and interact with co-workers at multiple levels to achieve common goals. Though it's early in my academic career, I consider Dr. Liebig to be the best boss and mentor I've worked for. ♦

Corie Lund



Corie worked as a biological science aide and then as a graduate research assistant under Dr. John Hendrickson at NGPRL in **Mandan, ND** from May 2002 to August 2006.

Continued next page →



SPECIAL SECTION - Where Are They Now?

Lund...

Continued from page 8

1. Where are you now?

I am working in Selfridge, ND.

2. What are you doing now?

I am a District Conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

3. How did your ARS experience help you along the way?

I grew up on a ranch and loved working with cattle. When I first applied with ARS as summer help, I wanted to work with the livestock crew but they were already full. It was suggested that I apply with Dr. John Hendrickson and the range crew. I have to admit that I was a little disappointed to not be working with cattle but it was a blessing in disguise. I developed a true passion for rangeland. I had the privilege to work on Dr. Hendrickson's crew for 3 years and then through a collaboration with North Dakota State University, ARS gave me the opportunity to go to Graduate School.

4. If you are enrolled in a degree program, what are you plans once you

graduate?

I graduated from North Dakota State University with a B.S. in Animal and Range Sciences and a M.S. in Range Sciences. I wanted to find a job that I could work directly with producers on how to improve their farm/ranch sustainability.

5. Any advice you would give to people considering a job with ARS?

If you have the opportunity to work for ARS while going to college, do it. Even if it isn't in the exact field you are interested in. You will learn a lot and gain valuable contacts.

6. Was there any one thing that stood out from your time with ARS?

Learning how to identify grasses and forbs from Mary Kay Tokach, the Range Technician. She made it so much fun that even during our lunch breaks, we would walk around trying to find new plants. I am still addicted to plant ID. I've even bought plant ID books from other countries while on vacation so that I can identify the local flora. ♦



Matthew Jones

(Photo not available.)

Matthew worked as a biological aide under Dr. Michael Ellsbury (now retired) at NCARL, Brookings, SD from 2002-2006.

1. Where are you now?

Brookings, SD

2. What are you doing now?

Work as a chiropractor at Hungerford Chiropractic and Physical Therapy in Brookings, SD

3. How did your ARS experience help you along the way?

I learned the importance of teamwork as well as being organized.

4. If you are enrolled in a degree program, what are you plans once you graduate? NA

5. Any advice you would give to people considering a job with ARS?

Excellent opportunity to work with very gifted scientists and technicians providing they are willing to work hard and have an open mind to learn.

6. Was there any one thing that stood out from your time with ARS?

I really enjoyed all the people that I worked with and the relationships have lasted long after my time with ARS. ♦

Corie Lund standing in a no-till garden demonstration site at her local NRCS office, far left.

At left, Corie hard at work as a summer student at the Mandan, ND ARS lab.

Connect... with your co-workers!

Axon – the ARS Intranet:

The newest addition to our “Connections Toolbox” is Axon, our ARS Intranet, which provides everyone in ARS a handy means to stay in touch and collaborate on a variety of projects. **TIP:** One of the cooler new features is the “Administrator’s Corner” which includes a blog by Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young; FY2015 budget information; notices of upcoming “Inform and Engage” webinars; and recordings of past webinars (some with transcripts provided), including the recent “State of the Agency” webinar held in late June. Check it out at Axon!

<https://axon.ars.usda.gov>

R3 - ARS Cultural Transformation (CT) Website:

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/YourTwocents/ctblog/index.html>

CT Blog:

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/YourTwocents/ctblog/Blog.html>

Y2C:

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/yourtwocents/>

Admin. Transformation

(USDA Connect Website - use e-Auth):

<https://connections.usda.gov/communities/service/html/communityview?communityUuid=d8f08ee1-a34a-4f66-ac0cf6483b4acd97>

VOICES - Technology Corner

By Heather Gossel
Information Management Spec. / OCIO
Ft. Collins, CO

Welcome to the Technology Corner, where we share technology updates in our Agency. For more information on any IT issues, your first line of contact is your local IT support who can then funnel questions to the Business Service Centers if needed.

Axon – the ARS Intranet

Axon was launched on June 2, 2014. It is a central place where ARS employees can find, access, and share information and resources. If you haven’t already, take a look: <https://axon.ars.usda.gov>

Use the same username and password as your e-mail account, usually arsnet\first.last.

StARS

Also consider nominating a coworker in StARS, our informal peer recognition program designed to give employees a way to recognize anyone in ARS for exemplifying the best in USDA; a nomination shows appreciation for something done above and beyond regular business.

<https://axon.ars.usda.gov/Engage/Stars%20Program/Pages/Home.aspx>

What is an axon?

An axon (from Greek, axis), also known as a nerve fiber, is a long, slender projection of a nerve cell, or neuron, that typically conducts electrical impulses away from the neuron's cell body. The function of the axon is to transmit information to different neurons, muscles, and glands.

In this way, our Intranet site's main function is to transmit information throughout our Agency. For content submissions or questions, contact axon@ars.usda.gov.

This Week @USDA

Each week, USDA shares highlights of some of the key announcements, activities, and current events related to work at USDA. These stories are selected from

Agencies' Weekly Reports, news items, and other stories that have been reported to USDA. For possible inclusion in *This Week @USDA*, please send your items to the ARS Information Staff through your Location's normal channels, or to info@ars.usda.gov. To see the weekly video, go [here](#).

Cisco VPN being replaced with Junos Pulse VPN

The Cisco VPN, which was used for remote access to ARSNet for telework or travel, was replaced by Junos Pulse from Juniper Networks. Things to keep in mind about Junos:

If your computer does not meet the minimum security requirements, you will not be able to connect to Junos Pulse until the following is complete:

- Windows updates must be current
- A full virus scan must have been run in the past 30 days
- The new VPN appliance supports Windows Vista or above and will not support Windows XP. Since XP is no longer allowed on all ARS networks, this shouldn't be an issue.

SharePoint 2010

The full migration from SharePoint 2003 to SharePoint 2010 was delayed due to hosting environment issues at USDA, ITS. A few team sites have been migrated or created in 2010, but the rest are still pending. No firm date is available at this time.

BlackBerry Sunset

The USDA CIO Council decided to end support for BlackBerry mobile devices by January 2016. At this point, investments in new BlackBerry mobile devices is strongly discouraged. All new BlackBerry device refreshes should be to an Apple, Android, or Windows 8 mobile device.

Most BlackBerry devices can be replaced at little or no cost to business units through the regular device upgrade programs offered by wireless providers. ♦



A Taste of the NPA

Historic cookbook includes traditional okra dish

By Kruger Bryant

Bio. Science Tech., Manhattan, KS

On Wednesday, February 19th, the CGAHR celebrated Black History month led by Dr. Scott Bean who presented a locally produced video entitled, *The Long Road: Black History at K-State*.

"The video highlighted the experiences of five African American K-State icons. One desegregated a Kansas swimming pool, another integrated a neighborhood, and one began a football career as the first Black football player at Kansas State and ended it with the Green Bay Packers. Stories include Dr. Martin Luther King's visit to K-State, the impact of his assassination, and a motivational segment...". More details about the video can be found at:

<http://www.meac.org/LongRoad.html>

Participants enjoyed soda pop, cookies and a traditional dish of okra, corn and tomato stew, the recipe for which was obtained from Carolyn Quick Tillery's, historical cookbook, *Southern Homecoming Traditions*. According to the

inside coverleaf: "An African American Heritage Cookbook...focuses on food and history of one of America's most influential institutions, The Atlanta University Center, an affiliation of six schools-Morehouse, Spelman and Morris Brown Colleges, Clark-Atlanta University, Interdenominational Theological Center, and Morehouse School of Medicine..."

A melting pot of speeches, songs, stories and photographs, *Southern Homecoming Traditions* pays tribute to African-Americans who, instead of waiting for a seat at our nation's table, made that table bigger. Enhanced by inspiring African proverbs ("Teach a woman and you teach a nation") and touching on remembrances, this is both a food lover's delight and a joyous living history of black America's continuing influence on American cuisine and culture."

The authoress, Carolyn Quick Tillery, is a former Air Force officer and prosecuting attorney.

I've never had so much fun reading and found so much related to African American history as is contained within

this wonderful historic cookbook. Two thumbs up folks - a must read and a great gift idea for whoever appreciates authentic "Soul Food" and Southern Cooking in general!

The recipe is adapted from page 204 of this wonderful resource.

Gardeners Note: Okra is a warm weather loving crop that was brought to the US by African slaves and is quite easy to grow so long as daytime temps get warm and nighttime temps are no lower than 50-60F. There are many varieties from dwarf plants that grow only a foot or so high to the original plants that can reach 7' here in Manhattan Kansas. Delicious fried, stewed and as filler in dishes such as meatloaf, it's a very versatile veggie. Basically a weed, it's undemanding when it comes to soil conditions, and a very pretty ornamental that can be container grown in a large enough pot. Check out the following USDA-ARS link for more information on okra:

<http://www.ba.ars.usda.gov/hb66/097okra.pdf>

Happy Eating! ♦

Baked Okra, Corn & Tomato Casserole

"You can almost hear the back screen door slam, the fan humming, chairs scraping against the broom-scrubbed hardwood floor, and the red Kool-Aid being poured. Amen?"

Ingredients:

- 3 cups sliced fresh okra (frozen will do)
- 1/3 cup chopped Canadian bacon, fatback, salt pork or pork belly
- 1 large tomato, chopped or 1 can chopped tomatoes
- 1/2 cup frozen corn
- 1 large onion
- 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/3-1/2 teaspoon ground pepper
- Several tablespoons chicken broth or water

Preparation:

- Turn Crockpot on low and coat with a thin layer of butter.
- Layer half of the okra, pork, tomato, corn and onion slices.
- Sprinkle evenly with half of the salt and pepper. Repeat and sprinkle with the broth.
- Cover and bake until the vegetables are tender, ~6-8 hours.
- Alternatively you can cook in a pre-heated 350F oven in a 1 3/4 quart casserole for 40-45 minutes.

Makes 6 servings and keeps well in the 'fridge for some delicious eating later in the week.

Diversity - On the Shelf and on the Screen

Editor's note: "On the Shelf and On the Screen" provides reviews of books and videos that deal with diversity as another means of learning about diversity. We invite you to contribute your recommendations for inclusion in future editions of "Voices" – simply email your recommendations with a short description to:

NPA-DTF@ars.usda.gov



FILM REVIEW

"12 Years a Slave"

Review by Kruger Bryant
Manhattan, KS

When I first sat down to watch *12 Years a Slave* I had no idea what a powerful movie this would be. Right from the very first few minutes you are drawn into the life of slave Solomon Northup, a former freeman from New York State who was kidnapped from his family and sold into slavery in Louisiana.

Flashbacks are used to tell his back-story and fill the viewer in on his family and pre-slave life while maintaining a tense, ugly picture of the brutality and violence that his life has become. Which is not to say that it's all about the misery of slavery. There are scenes of the humanity of the people, all of whom have either been stolen from their homes in Africa or born into this inhuman era of the Antebellum South, scenes of tenderness and love found in misery but the framing of Solomon, his family, lover Patsey and the slave owners in the unyielding realities of slavery in America does not make this the sort of movie I would be comfortable watching with my grandparents or pre-teens due to the violence and some brief nudity and sex.

This is a very powerful movie that, although it has a good musical score which includes the musician John Legend, will not leave you whistling its tunes after you've viewed it. You will, however, find yourself mentally reviewing how awful slavery was and, if you realize it's still being practiced around the world even now, will leave you at least pensive, if not angry, for days.

The movie was filmed in the area of

Louisiana where the real Solomon Northup was held captive and so when you see the slaves sweating in the fields at their almost superhuman tasks, it's because they really are working in 108 degree weather trying to cut enough sugar cane, or pluck enough cotton, to please their master(s). Although none of the original plantations where Solomon lived and worked were actually used in the filming, all were within a few miles of the originals and representative of the time and place. So take some of the scenes with a grain of salt but the director (Steve McQueen-not that Steve McQueen) had good intentions and he has made a gripping, memorable movie of misery, love and perseverance. Although beautifully filmed, the subject matter remains ugly and uncompromising.

The storyline is based upon the real Solomon Northup's life whose narrative, in the memoir, also named *12 Years a*

Slave, was used to produce this fictionalized account of his sub-human experience of being owned by evil/bad slave-owners Edwin and Mistress Epps (played by Michael Fassbender of Prometheus fame and Sarah Paulson). Benedict Cumberbatch (England's current Sherlock Holmes star) plays a kind but nevertheless proponent of the system slave-owner. Brad Pitt plays Bass, the Canadian abolitionist who helps Solomon. Solomon, his wife, Margaret, and lover Patsey are played, respectively, by Chiwetel Ejiofor, Quvenzhane Wallis and Lupita Nyong'o.

Thumbs up for this but it is rated R for good reasons. ♦

BOOK REVIEW

"Far From the Tree"

By Andrew Solomon
(Scribner, 2012)

Review by Barbara King
Fort Collins, CO

This book, at 700+ pages of narrative, is best read in moments of quiet with a pen nearby for underlining and jotting down your thoughts. A quick read it is not. But a very rewarding read for those who have the time and desire to be challenged, informed, and enriched. The premise of the book is that differences are at the core of our identities and that the diversity of our differences is what binds us together.

Solomon's book is a series of essays on what he calls horizontal identities – those traits not shared by one's parents – including his own story of growing up gay. Other essays dig into Deafness; Dwarfism; Down Syndrome; Autism; Schizophrenia;



Solomon Northup

Continued next page →

On the Shelf....

Continued from page 12

Prodigies; Rape; Crime; Transgender; and Fatherhood. Each of these essays was compiled through research and especially interviews with individuals and their families. Each chapter delves into how these identities/differences confront parents, families and individuals themselves as they navigate through life when that life isn't what anyone expected, especially parents.

A compelling theme running through the book is that genetic manipulation and medical advances already can and in some cases have the potential of eradicating horizontal identities. For instance, cochlear implants are seen by some in the deaf community as a genocidal attack while others treasure the opportunity to give their children the chance for the life the parents know – a hearing world. Solomon acknowledges that even he longed as a teen to be like everyone else. Solomon asks readers to imagine what life and society would be like if these differences disappeared through medical advances. Just how would it be if every-

"Each chapter delves into how these identities / differences confront parents, families and individuals themselves as they navigate through life when that life isn't what anyone expected, especially parents."

one was, well, like everyone else? Other themes are acceptance, and the crush of responsibility that so often falls to families, and especially to parents. Marriages are strengthened or in some cases, stretched to the breaking point due to the never-ending caretaking and financial costs associated with many disabilities. For some parents, it's just too much, while others grow stronger.

While the topics are complicated and the

issues are complex and intertwined, Solomon's writing and presentation are both optimistic and empathic. Many times disabilities are portrayed as tragic and individuals with disabilities as brave or stoic. Not so with *Far From the Tree*. What Solomon achieves in this book is challenging readers to think about topics and situations that may be uncomfortable yet are told in a way that is both informative and real. Solomon's research and style aside, what really makes the book are the stories that individuals with disabilities, their parents and siblings tell which can include sadness, resentments, and also great pride and optimism.

This is a marvelous book that can easily be read in small pieces; say one chapter with a long rest before tackling the next. Each story is different of course, but a prevailing theme is unconditional love, and the beauty of everyday people facing extremely challenging personal, financial, and emotional circumstances who come out richer for the experience of learning what it means to be human. ♦

ARS scientist wins University 'Green and Gold' award

Prem Jauhar, a research geneticist in Cereals Crop Research at the Red River Valley Agricultural Research Center in Fargo, ND was recently awarded the Vice President's Green and Golden Globe Diversity Award at North Dakota State University's fifth annual diversity awards ceremony last April in Fargo

Created by the NDSU Division of Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach, the event acknowledges efforts of students, faculty and staff from across the university who create a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment where all people can learn and work.

"The Green and Golden Globes Diversity Awards provide an opportunity for all of us to recognize the efforts of those individuals and groups that are working to make NDSU a more inclusive and diverse community," said Evie Myers, vice president for equity, diversity and global outreach. "For the past five years, we have celebrated the diversity-related work of NDSU faculty, staff and students and members of the Fargo-Moorhead



community."

Dr. Jauhar noted that he was "honored and humbled" by the award. "My

recognition was a surprise to me!" he added. "Our children from Long Island and Minneapolis were invited by the NDSU to attend the ceremony. President Bresciani invited us all for breakfast at the Memorial Union on April 30. It was a nice interaction."

Dr. Jauhar received his award for among other things his creation of four scholarships/endowments at NDSU for academically bright, but financially stressed students.

He is happy to have been able to set up the scholarships, noting they have "benefitted many students in the last 5 years. And the scholarships have been widely appreciated not only by the recipients but also by the teachers, faculty, and administrators at North Dakota State University."

Dr. Jauhar also got another surprise at the Awards Ceremony when he learned the Study Room in the Office of Multicultural Programs was being dedicated in his name! ♦

What's all the buzz about? A visit to ABADRU's 'gnat ranch'

By Lee Cohnstaedt

Research Entomologist, Manhattan, KS

The Arthropod-Borne Animal Diseases Research Unit (ABADRU) insectary at the Center for Grain and Animal Health Research hosted more than 70 people from the USDA Center, Kansas State University, and the wide horizons classes at Manhattan High School for an open house recently. During the tours the visitors were able to see the custom rearing facilities for mosquitoes and midges and saw the incubators that housed the adults (Figure 1) and the rearing racks (Figure 2). The history of ABADRU and their research results were also discussed.

Visitors learned that ABADRU is the largest "gnat ranch" in the United States of America. They produce 2.5 million biting midges a year that are used by researchers



Female biting midge, *Culicoides sonorensis*

around the country. Having a steady year-round supply of insects allows researchers to conduct research such as insecticide susceptibility, diapause induction and termination, salivary studies, and infection studies.

The insectary has maintained midge colonies for over 50 years and during that time

several advancements have made midge rearing more efficient such as a customized rearing rack system, artificial blood feeding apparatus, and special rearing media and food. Although only native species of mosquitoes and Culicoides are reared at the facilities so there is no possibilities of introducing exotic insects to Kansas; the insectary staff did demonstrate their biosecurity elements such as air curtains and insect traps to collect stray insects from escaping the facilities. In addition to this, the insectary has no pathogens, so there is no chance of encountering infected insects or materials during the visits.

Lastly, one of the big advancements in midge rearing was the use of artificial feeders. These blood feeders use sheep blood and artificial membranes made from silicon and nylons to feed the midges, therefore no animals are needed or harmed to provide blood meals. ♦



Figure 1. Entomology Technician Bill Yarnell shows the insect incubators which control the temperature and humidity for the adult habitat.



Figure 2. Entomology Technician James Kempert discusses the larval midge rearing habitat with students. (NOTE: The "blackout box" is included as a reminder to employees that permissions are needed to use identifiable photos of students in VOICES.)

Special emphasis resources added to DTF Bulletin Board

Updated information for Asian-American/Pacific Islanders Month and GLBT Pride month have been added to the ODEO SharePoint Bulletin Board. By using your ARSNet ID (first name.last name) and your e-mail password you'll be able to gain access to this and other information for planning activities using the following link:

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/Main/docs.htm?docid=16578>

Go to the bottom of the page and click on:

"NPA Diversity Bulletin Board", then click on the link labeled, "Special Emphasis Months--Resources" and you'll find resources for each of the USDA approved celebratory months, including information on past celebrations as well as additional resources such as listings of federal Asian-American & Pacific Islander groups, the

USDA LGBT Employment Program Area fact sheet and more.

Remember, you don't have to be a member of a specific group to head, or participate in a Special Emphasis activity. All are welcome! Also, if you have resources to share with everyone in the NPA, then please contact your local Diversity Task Force member and they'll assist you in getting it posted to the site. ♦

Earth Day Activities

Submitted By Kristine Nichols

Research Microbiologist, Mandan, ND

Earth Day is an annual community event in Bismarck-Mandan, and the USDA-ARS Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory (NGPRL) has participated in classroom and evening events since at least 2010. That participation was made especially evident in the poster for the 2014 event, in which two of the three pictures used in the promotional poster featured NGPRL activities from previous years.

In the first picture, a boy peers into a microscope to look at microarthropods, ciliates, bacteria, and fungi collected from soil. Next to him a video taken of these 'bugs' is on display. Other microscopes and magnifying glasses are set up for visitors to look at ants, earthworms, and mushrooms. In addition, demonstrations on water infiltration, soil structure, and aggregate stability are also used to educate students.

In the second picture, Justin Feld, a former technician with Dr. Rebecca Phillips, demonstrates a robot that is used



Photos of displays and activities from Mandan ARS's exhibit booths were included on the 2014 posters for the 7th annual Earth Day Festival held in the Bismarck-Mandan community. NGPRL has been participating for several years.

in the field to collect and measure greenhouse gases evolving from the soil. At the Earth Day event, visitors could blow in a tube and see how carbon dioxide levels increased as the data was graphed in real-time. Earth Day favorites also include biodegradable packing peanuts which visitors can watch dissolve in buckets of water before their eyes, and 'Water-Gems' which can be used in pots and vases to hold water for growing plants as well as keeping diapers dry.

These items were developed from ARS research.

The classroom events are held throughout the day and local schools bring their students in for 30-minute presentations with the classes rotating between presenters. In the evenings, displays are open to the public. For more information about the Bismarck Earth Day Festival, please go to:
<http://blog.earthdayfestivalbismarck.com/>. ♦

Juneteenth commemorates end of slavery in U.S.

Juneteenth is the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the United States. From its Galveston, Texas origin in 1865, the observance of June 19th as the African American Emancipation Day has spread across the United States and beyond. Today Juneteenth commemorates African American freedom and emphasizes education and achievement. It is a day, a week, and in some areas a month marked with celebrations, guest speakers, picnics and family gatherings. For more see:

USDA ARS Link to Juneteenth History
<http://www.ars.usda.gov/SP2UserFiles/Place/54000000/CREEODiversity/JuneteenthHistory.pdf> ♦

This past June, President Obama issued the following statement in observance of Juneteenth:

"On this day in 1865, two years after President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, word finally reached the people of Galveston, Texas that the Civil War was over.

All enslaved men, women and children were now free.

Though it would take decades of struggle and collective effort before African Americans were granted equal treatment and protection under the law, Juneteenth is recognized by Americans everywhere as a symbolic milestone in our journey toward a more perfect union.

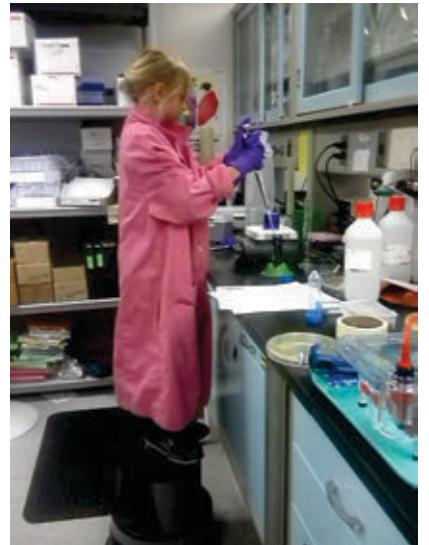
With the recent ground breaking of the first Smithsonian Museum dedicated to African American History and Culture, and the dedication of a monument to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the National Mall, this Juneteenth offers another opportunity to reflect on how far we've come as a nation.

And it's also a chance to recommit ourselves to the ongoing work of guaranteeing liberty and equal rights for all Americans."

Take Your Child to Work Day at USMARC

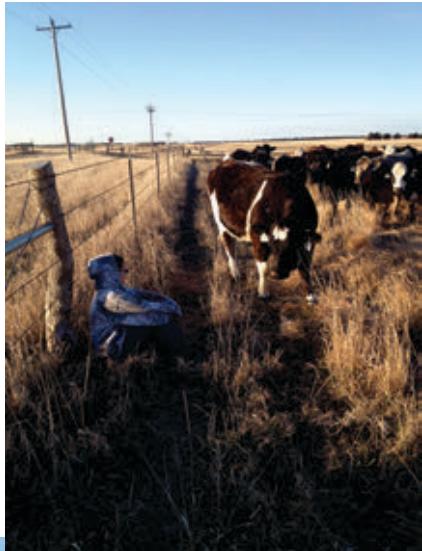


Pictured back row, left to right: USMARC's Chad Engle and visiting children: Samuel R., Hunter R., Ray N., Maddie L., Maggie R. Front, left to right: Allie T., Xavier H., Skylar K.



SKYLAR

MADDIE



Researchers at the US Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, NE had some extra help in April when their sons and daughters joined them at the lab for a day to celebrate "Take your Daughters and Sons to Work Day." The youngsters helped out in the field and the lab, some working with USMARC's GPE (germplasm evaluation) cattle; some helping to fix fence, while others moved indoors to the food safety microbiology lab of the Meat Safety and Quality Research Unit, and other labs to help out Mom and Dad! ♦

ALLIE



MADDIE

RAY



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Share Your Favorite Pictures!
E-mail your photos and captions to
Barbara King or Beth Redlin
(Grain, Forage and Bioenergy
Research Unit, Lincoln, NE).

This particular bioenergy experiment-
tial plot is found near Mead, NE
Research Unit, Lincoln, NE).
Where in the NPA? - Answer Key

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