



Advancing Diversity in the Northern Plains Area

VOICES

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Spring 2013

The More Things Change – NPA and the MD 715

By Barbara King
NPA ODEO Program Mgr, Ft. Collins, CO

Once a year federal agencies analyze their workforce demographics and present that analysis in a report entitled Management Directive 715 (MD 715), a report required by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). In this column I will briefly note some findings from the MD 715 data and talk about some of the challenges NPA faces in having a workforce that mirrors the nation's diversity.

Overall, our demographics have remained fairly stable over the years, with two notable changes – that of a shrinking workforce, and an incremental increase in

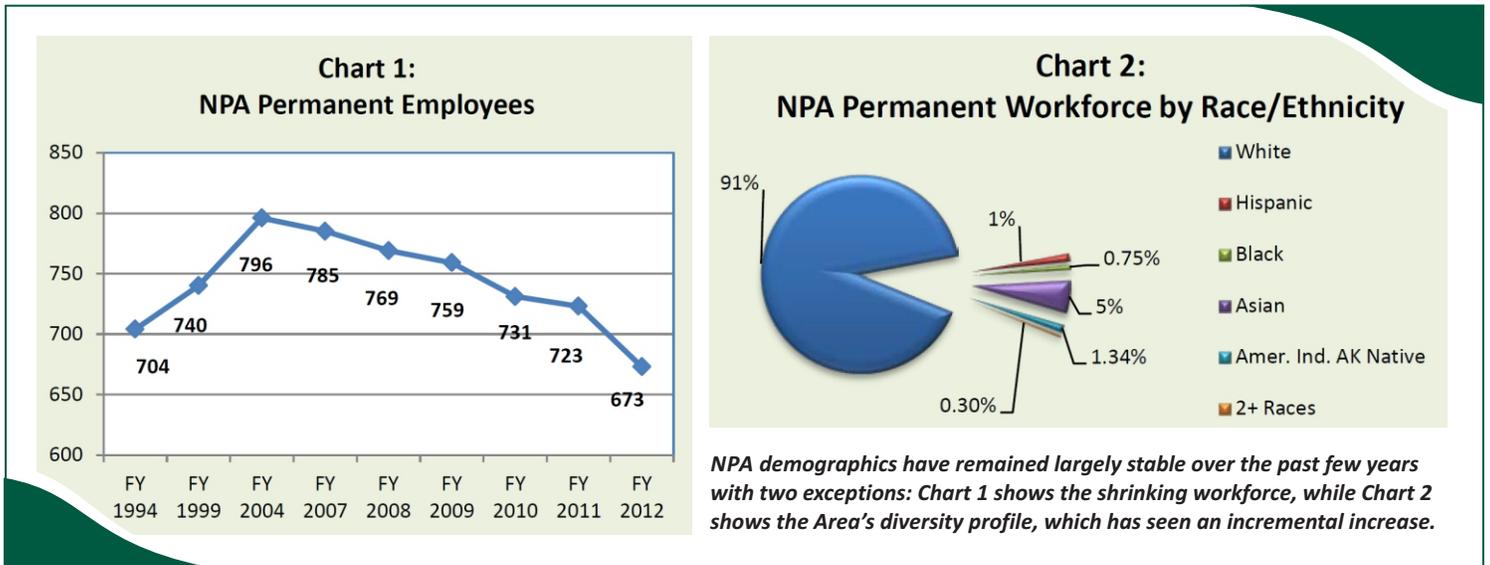
the Area's diversity profile. Since FY 2007 roughly 213 employees have left NPA, and only about 101 new employees have been hired. Most of the separations were because of retirements, so not only has NPA lost a wealth of institutional knowledge and expertise, only about half of all positions vacated have been filled.

The other notable change is that the Area's permanent workforce has become slightly more diverse over the years, due to new hires of women and minorities, and retirements of white males. For instance, white women and minority men and women hired since FY 2007 were hired at rates above their usual participation rates (generally 36%, 5%, and 4% respectively). Of the new hires since FY 2007, 40% were white women, 9% were minority males,

7% were minority women, and 44% were white males. While those have helped to increase the Area's diversity, the workforce profile is not likely to change quickly since the number of new permanent hires in 2008 was 29 and last year five new employees were hired. White males were hired at a rate below their usual participation rate of 54%. White males also accounted for 59% of all separations.

The shrinking of the workforce is expected to continue for the foreseeable future for two reasons – leaner budgets and the aging of the workforce. The average age of NPA employees is now 49, and 55% of the workforce is 50 or older. By 2023, 54% of whites and 52% of minorities will be eligible to retire.

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Notes

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Additionally, over half of all minority employees are eligible to retire, and since their participation is less than 10%, every minority retirement will impact the Area's demographic profile.

One other interesting aspect of the diversity profile is that women's participation has generally been about 40% of the permanent workforce. By age, 47% of employees 39 and younger (137 employees) are female and 63% of those younger than 30 are female. It may well be that women leave the workforce in their 30s and that this 63% participation rate is not unusual. Then again, it may reflect census and labor force data showing that women's participation is increasing relative to that of men. In any event, the next few years should provide a clearer picture of women's participation in ARS/NPA. For instance, will ARS/NPA offer the kinds of jobs and intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction that will attract new employees and retain current employees? Does, or will, ARS/NPA provide the sort of work/life balance so desperately sought not only by parents with young children but also employees of all ages who seek to balance work and family/personal life?

One last point about the MD 715 concerns gender, race, and grades. There are just a few occupations in NPA that have a FPL (Full Promotion Level) beyond GS 11. Men are more likely to hold positions in grades 12 and higher, while women are more likely to hold positions in grades GS 11 and below. For instance technicians (FPL of GS 9) account for 35% of NPA permanent positions and 48% of all female employees in NPA are technicians. Perhaps not surprisingly then, 57% of all employees in grades 1-11 are women, and 75% of all women hold a position in grades 1-9. In contrast, 81% of all employees holding a position in grades 12-15 are men, and 55% of all men hold positions in grades 12-15. White men are almost equally represented in both grade groupings, with 48% in grades 1-11 and 52% in grades 12-15, while 82% of minority males hold positions in grades 12-15.

For those interested in reading the report, it's here: <https://www.ars.usda.gov/SP2/UserFiles/Place/54000000/CREEDiversity/ExecSumm-Full-FY12.pdf>. ♦

Good Things in the NPA!

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

This new column in VOICES will highlight some good things that have happened in the Northern Plains Area. For this column, I will highlight our recent activities with project plan reviews, fondly referred to as the OSQR (Office of Scientific Quality Review) process.

The 1998 Farm Bill required a more rigorous review to ensure the research planning done by our scientists was of the highest quality. Project plans are written every five years to objectives developed by the Office of National Programs. Objectives are typically determined by conversations between scientists and their National Program Leaders who coordinate the National Program across our US and foreign laboratories. The plans are on a staggered review process, by National Program, so not all projects are reviewed in a single year. The plans follow an elaborate format and require an excellent approach to writing scientific proposals. Once the plans are drafted, they are reviewed at the location, then the Area Office and finally the Office of National Programs. After these reviews, the plan is then sent to the OSQR office in Beltsville for external peer review. Anonymous panel members review plan for quality,

make suggestions, and score each plan on a scale of 0 to 8 with 8 representing the highest score.

So, what does this have to do with Good News? I am very proud to report that NPA scores for our most recent National Program review have improved over the last review cycle. NP 301, Plant Genetic Resources, Genomics, and Genetic Improvement, is our largest National Program with 11 plans. Those 11 plans scored an average of 6.7 and six of the plans received scores that warranted "No Revision" necessary. Two additional plans received scores that required "Minor Revision" and three received "Moderate Revision" scores. This was a significant improvement over the past cycle.

I would like to thank all of the scientists and their leaders for their hard work on their plans. Doing the work upfront saves all of us the time and energy of going back through and doing massive revisions. Just as important are the support staff that contribute to these plans. Technical support is essential to keep the work going while the scientists are taking the time to write quality plans and administrative support is essential to assist with formatting the plans and ensuring the plans are complete. Without the entire staff pulling together, the science would not be as high quality as it is. ♦

WHERE IN THE NPA?



Helping mom at work is no easy task! Can you guess where in the NPA this perplexed pair o' medics were found?

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

(See page 13 for details.)

Message From the Director

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

Welcome to Spring! Based on the recent April weather we've had I suspect many of us think we're still in the middle of winter. Perhaps that's a sign of the times. As much as we want the clock to move forward and be able to get out, do some gardening, enjoy warmer weather, etc. it seems that we somehow find ourselves going backwards a bit. I know we occasionally feel that way at work. No matter how much effort we put forth, how good our science is, or how many new ideas we put forward it sometimes seems like we can't move ahead.

"Although the past few years have presented ARS with numerous challenges now is the time for all of us to step up and face them head on."

FY13 has been a challenge for our Agency and for each of you as you strive to do the work you've been asked to do. Our budgets have been significantly reduced. We have numerous vacant positions which at times limit our abilities to fully meet our research mission. We also have new administrative management structures which we are all still growing accustomed to. I'm sure you can continue adding to the list of things that seemingly don't go as well as we would like.

I think it's good for all of us to express our frustrations and ask questions regarding how we're going to change the pathway we're on. I've heard concerns from a number of our employees and know that at times you are worried about the future. I don't think that any of us alone can fix the problems but we can all work together to find the solutions and to move forward in a positive direction.

Let me give you some examples of things that might give you different perspectives on where we are headed:

- The President's FY14 budget pro-

posal shows net increases for ARS and its sister agencies in the REE mission area of USDA. Although many things have to occur for this budget to be enacted it is a positive sign that there is significant internal support for our research efforts.

- During the first quarter of 2013 we have had a substantial number of positive visits with customers and stakeholders across the NPA and at ARS Headquarters. These groups continue to be supportive of our activities and speak highly of the work each of you do. As an example, the RLs in Colorado have all been invited to participate in a field day and discussion meeting with members of the Colorado Wheat Commission without regard to the commodity or discipline our units are working on. They truly want to know more about ARS and look for ways to support agricultural research needs.
- Over the last few months we have had numerous internal research project reviews come back from our Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR) with no revision ratings. In fact, we received notice of one this morning. The scientists work diligently to develop their projects for the next 5 years and regardless of the scores their efforts certainly have been noticed. The quality of the science they are conducting is definitely reflected by the positive comments from these review panels. It is interesting to note that many of those comments point to the ground breaking and/or cutting edge research that only ARS can do.
- My office, as well as other similar entities around the country are actively engaging to address the future of ARS. The challenges we face provide an opportunity to develop a solid vision for the coming years. We recognize the need to focus our efforts. You'll hear more over the coming months.

Although the past few years have presented ARS with numerous challenges now is the time for all of us to step up and face them head on. We're an outstanding research organization and, yes, we could do better. Things are not perfect but we

can move towards perfection. We'll have to think differently and develop new paradigms for our work environment. We need to continue to strive to be the best and create a work environment for all employees that is welcoming as well as stimulating. We need to provide opportunities that attract the best and the brightest individuals when hiring occasions arise and then find ways to keep them.



Dr. Chandler

Our mission is science. Despite all the negatives we've encountered during the first 6 months of FY13 let's work together to have the remainder of the year serve as a positive catalyst for future endeavors for each of our labs and for ARS.

I wish everyone a happy and enjoyable spring and summer. I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming ARMP reviews and various other events across the NPA.

Regards,
Larry

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2150 Centre Avenue, Building D, Suite 300
Fort Collins, CO 80526
970-492-7057

Executive Editor: *Barbara King*
Production Editor: *Bethany Redlin*

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It Really Does Get Better

Editor's Note: The following first-person essay is by one of our new members of the Diversity Task Force, Kruger Bryant of the Manhattan location.

When I first started my government career with the USDA Forest Service on the Targhee National Forest in Idaho in April of 1979, I did not feel comfortable acknowledging to my employer that I was gay. That was a time when gay rights were just beginning to be talked about publically, let alone easily accepted.

I stayed with the USDA Forest Service in Idaho for 2 years. I then spent five years on the Medicine Bow National Forest while attending the University of Wyoming and working in the Department of Biochemistry. At the Forest Service I felt I had to stay silent about my family life, especially while in the Compliance Division (law enforcement branch). At the University of Wyoming I was readily accepted since there were many "out" LGBT students, staff and faculty.

Move forward to December of 1987 when I found an opportunity to combine these two worlds and achieved a position as a

Biological Scientific Laboratory Technician (Cell Culture) with the USDA-ARS-ABADRL. Although worried about not being accepted because I was gay, I really needed the employee benefits that come with full-time federal employment, such as health care and leave. Almost simultaneously I met my, now spouse, Greg, and things like life Insurance became important also.

There was a huge worry that came with my job – a fear that my security clearance could be denied or revoked because I was gay. I worried for years about losing my security clearance. No wonder my physician had me on extra -strength stomach acid relievers during those years.

My stress and uneasiness began to come to an end in April 1993 when USDA Secretary Espy included sexual orientation on the USDA Non-Discrimination Statement. In 1995 President Clinton issued Executive Order 12968 which listed sexual orientation as one of the characteristics forbidden as discrimination when granting security clearances. OPM recently issued a directive recognizing "Domestic Partners" for providing travel benefits, for instance in a relocation and in 2009, Secretary Vilsack established a Special Emphasis Program for LGBT employees.



Goodbye Industrial Strength Pepsid.

All of those policy changes have made for a much happier working environment where people like me can now speak freely about families, spouses and what is really going on in our lives.

There is more I could share and say about challenges faced by gay employees, but there have also been many more good things and good people (Shout out to Barbara King, Dr. Chandler and The Diversity Task Force) and that is what we must always try to dwell on and remember – perpetuate the good and it will grow, dwell on the bad and that too will grow. We get to decide how to live our lives now and not let other people decide for us.

If you'd like more information about a History of LGBT issues at USDA try the following link;

<http://ces.ca.uky.edu/tristatediversityconference/presentations/2012/History%20of%20LGBT%20at%20USDA-Dorsey.pdf>

Our Special Emphasis Program Manager is Ronda Ford.

With Hope For The Future ♦

Thankful for Diversity Recruitment Initiatives in ARS!

Editor's Note: The following first-person essay is by Tawanna G. Ross also of the Manhattan location.

I was first introduced to the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in the fall of 1996 at the American Indian Science & Engineering Society's (AISES) regional conference, which was held at Northeastern State University (NSU) in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. At this conference I met for the first time our regional federal representative, Ms. Jimmie Nell Oliver, who was the Administrative Officer of the Grain Marketing and Production Research Center. Ms. Oliver was excited to be working for an agency



Tawanna Ross

that was making such an influential difference with agriculture around the world and brought with her products such as the absorbent Super Slurper, biodegradable packing peanuts and utensils made from corn byproducts to showcase to the AISES members.

In February 1998, I began my career with ARS under the STEP program as an Office Automation Clerk in the Administrative Office, under the supervision of Ms. Jimmie Nell Oliver. After 15 months, I was recruited to work as a Biological Science Aid in the Plant Science & Entomology Research Unit, which is located on the Kansas State University campus. After three years of working under the supervision of Dr. John Fellers, and achieving the title of Biological Science Technician, the Unit found themselves comprised of new scientists and a new Research Leader, as well as in need of a secretary. Being



housed on campus separated the Unit from the Center, thus I fulfilled a detail to aid the Unit during their time of secretarial need, following that detail with another of receptionist at the Center. In 2003, I was hired to the permanent position of Secretary for the Grain Quality & Structure Research Unit.

I believe without the efforts of the Agency and the persistence of Ms. Oliver to continue to add diversity to the Center's workforce that my now over 15 year career would have never been with ARS. Even in these times of budget reductions and uncertainty, I still feel fortunate for the opportunities and experiences that I have been given. ARS has become my other family because of this and I am extremely grateful! ♦

SPECIAL SECTION – SPRING ROUNDUP

While it seemed as if it might never come, spring has finally arrived! Included in this special section are several “Rites of Spring” observed in the NPA in recent weeks, among them spring branding, gardening tips, science fairs and take your Daughters and Sons to Work Day!

Rural Rite of Spring!

Spring is a busy time of year at Fort Keogh (Miles City, MT), according to Biological Science Technician Stacie Kageyama: “We have calves being born every day. This year, we started branding the Genetics research calves on April 3. In addition to branding, we’ll be collecting blood from each calf for DNA extraction for genetics research projects.” Stacie sent along some pictures to illustrate her point.

Line 1 Hereford cow with calf



L-R: Mike Landers (Montana State University),
Dennis Logan (Montana State University)



Andy Roberts (ARS Research Animal Scientist)



Travis Mulliniks (New Mexico State University graduate student) and Dennis Logan on horseback (Montana State University).

We still use horses at Fort Keogh rather than ATVs. Foreground, Brooke Shipp (ARS Physiology Technician); on horse, Tom Mott (Montana State University)

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A Composite Genetic Cattle (CGC) calf at Fort Keogh, Miles City, MT.

Brooke Shipp (ARS Physiology Technician), Stacie Kageyama (ARS Genetics Technician) drawing blood for DNA extraction

Tips for Preparing Your Spring Garden

By Justin Tanner
 Bio. Science Lab Tech., Fort Collins, CO

Ready or not spring is here. The days are getting longer and almost overnight new leaves are emerging from winter dormancy. Here in the NPA gardening has its challenges but it is well worth the effort. We want to make sure you are ready with a few gardening tips to get you and your garden ready for spring. In our previous edition we highlighted the efforts of the “Peoples Garden” project. This time we offer some tips on starting a “People’s Garden” project that you can do in your own backyard.

A good garden starts with the soil. You have many options when preparing your patch of earth for planting. Whether you plan on growing organic or conventionally, adding compost or other organic matter is a great idea. If you have very hard or heavy clay soil you can turn it with a shovel or tiller, when moist this task will be easier. Deeply loosening the soil allows your vegetable roots to more easily penetrate further down into the soil profile which helps increase drought tolerance. Soil inoculants or granular fertilizers can also be mixed in along with compost. However if you are using a no till approach don't disturb the soil by turning it.



This container garden beautifies the front entryway to the National Center for Genetic Resources Preservation in Fort Collins. It also educates visitors about the different plants in its seed collections from across the world .

Mulch is another important tool to have in your arsenal. Mulch is a layer of material, usually organic matter, placed on top of the soil. Options include straw, leaves, and even cardboard and newspaper. Placed properly it will help to prevent weeds from robbing your garden of valuable moisture and nutrients, and help to insulate the soil from erosion and water evaporation. Mulch depth is also important. If you apply too thinly, weeds will be able to penetrate and you will have to reapply often. Alternately, overly thick mulch can become waterlogged and promote anaerobic conditions. A mulch layer 2-4 inches is generally advisable.

Mulch can be applied around plants, in between rows and even in your footpath. If you are direct sowing seeds mulch can be applied after your seedlings germinate and begin to establish themselves.

If space is limited you can still plant in containers. Use a soil-less potting mix. Field soil is mineral based and will not give you the same results in a pot as in the ground. The confined space of a container means that roots become crowded and have a greater need for water and air. Potting mixes are composed of organic matter, usually from peat, with other amendments like perlite, compost and fertilizers. If you are reusing potting containers it is a good idea to wash the pots to remove old potting mix followed by a rinse in a 10% bleach solution to kill disease causing microorganisms that may be lingering there from the last time the container was used.

Plant selection is another important aspect to garden preparation. For our northern climate it is helpful to select varieties that will be able to produce quickly such as early maturing types and fast growing crops like leafy vegetables and radishes.

If and when you run into problems don't be afraid to ask for help. Your local agriculture extension agent will be glad to hear from you. They will be able to offer valuable local information. ♦

SPECIAL SECTION - SPRING ROUNDUP

'Take Your Kids to Work' Day Marked at Logan

By Tom Monaco
Research Ecologist, Logan, UT

The Forage and Range Research Laboratory (FRRL) hosted an event for National Take Your Daughters and Sons to Work Day. Below is a brief synopsis of the activities the youngsters enjoyed.

At 10:00 am Shaun Bushman, Geneticist, welcomed kids to the FRRL and spoke about careers in science. Shaun also talked about how research projects at the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) typically involve a project leader (scientist) and a support scientist. The kids learned what education and experiences are required to pursue a career with the ARS.

In the laboratory of Doug Johnson and Kevin Connors, Plant Physiologists, Kevin illustrated the diverse western landscapes where native wildflower species are collected. Example seeds and plants were

observed and the kids learned how ARS research on native species provides important wildlife habitat and food for grazing animals on western rangelands.

In the laboratories of Steve Larson, Shaun Bushman, and Ivan Mott (Geneticists), Science Technicians Lisa Michaels, Lin Johnson, and Kim Thorsted, demonstrated the process of DNA extraction from plants and how this information can be used to identify genetic relationships between plants. After gloving-up, the kids were shown how DNA fragments are analyzed with gel electrophoresis, viewed under UV light, and digitized for further computer analysis.

At the FRRL farm equipment workshop and compound, Ron Reed, Rangeland Scientist, gave a guided tour of some of the tractors, implements, seeders, and combines used for research plot establishment and seed harvesting. The kids were particularly excited about sitting up in the combine and viewing the mechanisms

that collect and clean seed. One tractor equipped with a GPS system was discussed in terms of how it enables the operator to stay on course within fields and maximize harvesting efficiency. A rangeland drill, used to seed the species being evaluated/developed at FRRL, was also shown to the kids.

Within research plots located a few miles north of the FRRL building in North Logan, Tom Jones, Geneticist, led a walking tour of native grasses and wildflowers used for ecological restoration of western rangelands. Basin wild rye, a tall grass that can exceed 7 feet in height was the first species shown. Next, the youngsters were introduced to Snake River wheatgrass, a native species with a scientific name that is very difficult to pronounce--*Elymus wawawaiensis*. Dr. Jones also showed off plots containing two different squirreltail species and contrasted seed traits of these grass species with domesticated grass species like corn. ♦



In FRRL, conference room. Left to right around table, Tom Monaco (ARS), Ryan Monaco, Tom Jones (ARS) Ayden Hockstein, Shaun Bushman (ARS), Erik Nielson, and Dale Nielson (ARS).



In FRRL, molecular biology laboratory. Left to right, Lin Johnson (ARS), Ayden Hockstein, Erik Nielson, and Ryan Monaco.

SPECIAL SECTION – SPRING ROUNDUP

Getting a Real Taste of ‘Work in the NPA’ at Mandan!



Riley on clean-up duty.



Restocking First Aid kits.

USDA-ARS Rangeland Scientist Holly Johnson, with the Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory in Mandan, ND, had a little extra help on April 25th in recognition of this year’s “Take Your Daughters and Sons to Work Day.” Holly’s daughter, Mackenzie, and son, Riley, turned up to help to clean out the greenhouse and restock vehicle first aid kits for mom.



Lunch break.



Mackenzie on clean-up duty.



Day’s end.

It’s Spring, and It’s Science Fair Time!

By Virginia L. Jin
 Soil Scientist, Lincoln, NE

The Nebraska Junior Science Academy recently held their Southeast Regional Science Fair on Saturday, March 2, 2013. Drs. Kristina Friesen, Virginia Jin, and Jerry Zhu from the Lincoln, NE ARS participated as judges in the junior high school and high school competitions. And it was GREAT! The Lincoln scientists had a fantastic time interacting with these bright students and challenging them to dig in even further

into their projects. Over 50 students participated in the science fair, representing many schools from southeast Nebraska. Topics included behavioral / social / consumer sciences, medicine / health / chemistry, earth / space / engineering / physics, environmental sciences / zoology / microbiology, and botany.

The students were really creative, giving presentations with titles like “The Scent of Taste,” “Don’t Soil It,” “Where’s the Beef?” and “Water Quality of Antelope

Creek.” Ten winners from each junior high and high school divisions

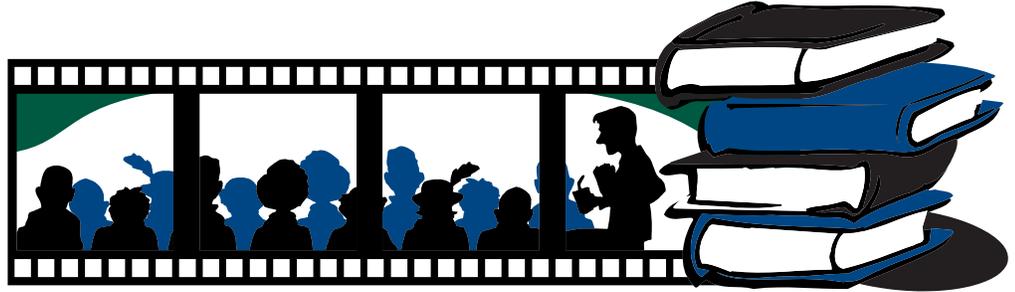
were selected to advance to a state-wide competition, and the top 10 senior winners at the state level were invited to attend the American Junior Academy of Sciences meeting held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Association of Academies of Sciences. ♦



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

"Lincoln"

Review by V.L. Jin
Lincoln, NE

It is a stormy night on a street bustling with Union soldiers when we first see Lincoln, played by Daniel Day-Lewis, sitting stoop-shouldered in the rickety shelter of a raised covered platform. Haggard, detached but alert, he is chatting with two somber-faced older black soldiers about the war, their freedom, and the not-so-invisible bonds that keep true freedom and equality out of their reach. A couple of young white soldiers barge in for an audience with the President, the black soldiers invisible to them. Eager to impress, one white soldier begins reciting the Gettysburg Address but cannot remember the entire speech before being rushed off. As Lincoln turns his attention back to the black soldiers, the somber conversation resumes, but ends with one of the black soldiers picking up the address where the white soldier left off, reciting as he walks into darkness "...that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

A loaded beginning, to be sure - thick with symbolism in the these human interactions, in the setting of a rainy night, in the elevation of the President above the mud, perhaps even in the magnitude of the task before him. Platform or no, politics is muddy all around, as director Steven Spielberg makes abundantly clear. While Spielberg and screenwriter Tony Kushner take liberties with some character portrayals and even the first emotional

scene described above (which never happened in all likelihood), the movie presents a better historical portrayal of Lincoln's personal and political relationships than many previous movies on this subject.

As Professor Allen Guelzo, director of the Civil War studies department at Gettysburg College, says in his review of the movie in *The Daily Beast* (12/11/2012), "The fundamental concern of Lincoln is the passage of the 13th Amendment, and Lincoln's struggles to make that passage happen in the House of Representatives. This is, in other words, partly a courtroom drama and partly a re-incarnation of Mr. Smith Goes to Washington."

Viewed as a movie with its expected embellishments but not as a documentary, "Lincoln" well captures the political, legal, and personal dynamics between its various characters and the general flavor of the time. It is also easy to make loose (and I emphasize loose) parallels with our government today – internal political conflicts over rights and freedoms (bearing arms, equal pay, marriage equality) while a long protracted war continues.

Day-Lewis's portrayal of a haggard, reedy-voiced President was moving and, by all accounts, more accurate than the deep-chested voice-overs we often hear on historical audio tours. While the other actors in the movie certainly added to the complexity of the plot, particularly Sally Field as Lincoln's wife Mary and Tommy Lee Jones as Thaddeus Stevens, Day-Lewis carries this movie in a way that brings this historical era and its historical developments in sharper focus and with greater contemporary relevance than any other fiction-based historical movie I've seen in a long time. Though occasionally slow-paced, its definitely worth the time to see. ♦

BOOK REVIEW

"You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation"

By Deborah Tannen

Review by Lisa Durso
Lincoln, NE

Under the guise of a self-improvement book for a popular audience, "You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation" provides a practical guide to interpreting workplace communication across the gender continuum. Although framed as gender-based, I found the book to be broadly applicable even within same-gender workplace interactions. What I found most helpful from this book was that it provided practical examples of the subtext of conversations.

Studies show that people from different parts of the country, different economic groups, and different ethnic backgrounds have distinctive conversational styles, with well defined, but unstated rules that influence how messages are communicated and understood. The premise of this book is that communication styles and strategies develop in childhood and that male and female children grow up in different conversational cultures. The research Tannen presents to support this hypothesis is very interesting. The author states "In boys' groups, social relations are assumed to be hierarchical; each boy's challenge is to negotiate as high a status for himself as he can. In contrast, girls expect each other to maintain at least the appearance of equality (though we all know that not all girls are really equal)." Most adults use an amalgam of styles, and daily professional behavior requires skills from both cultures.

Continued next page →

On the Shelf

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The book opens with an example of two interpretations of the same scenario. The author and her husband work in different parts of the country, and see each other on weekends. Both of them receive comments about the arrangement from co-workers. The author is not bothered by comments such as “That must be rough,” and responds by acknowledging and reinforcing their concern: “The worst part is having to pack and unpack all the time.” Her husband is aggravated by the comments from co-workers, and feels that there is a condescending subtext (you, because of your poor choices, are in a situation that deserves pity). The same event has two interpretations. She sees the comment as an effort by someone to make a connection; he sees the comment as a subtle power-play.

In a second example from the book, a man and a woman walk by an ice cream store. The woman asks the man if he would like some ice cream. The man says no. The woman gets annoyed. The subtext here is that the woman sees the ice cream store, and wants to go in.

However, proclaiming “I would like to get ice cream” seems to her to be selfish and rude. Although she says “would you like to get ice cream?”, she means “I would like ice cream, would you like to have some ice cream with me.” She then interprets the man’s response not as a simple statement about his current lack of desire for ice cream, but as a rejection of wanting to get ice cream with her. I found this example to be particularly illuminating. It explains why the women in my college dorm all thought I was rude. Although they said “would you like to get pizza,” what they meant was “would you like to get pizza with us.” I was not aware of the subtext.

The book provides perspectives and vocabulary to talk about communication issues. After reading the book I am more aware of how my own communications can be interpreted in different ways. I am also more effective at troubleshooting personnel issues at work, and providing practical ways to implement the professional behavior that is required for everyone to work safely and efficiently in

the laboratory and in the field. Based on what I learned from the book, I have tools that allow me to dissect communication problems. For example, an employee came to me one summer with concerns about a co-worker. Before I read the book, my response would have been vague – encouraging both women to be courteous to each other, and to not let small things bother them. After reading the book, I could ask directed questions to determine the specific behavior on both women’s part that was causing the problem, and then provide both parties with practical strategies, specific behaviors, and a common vocabulary to eliminate the issue.

“You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation” Is a useful guide to identifying and understanding gender differences in ways of speaking, while at the same time acknowledging the dangers of generalizations. Tannen emphasizes that there is not a right or wrong way to communicate. “The styles of women and men both make sense, and our challenge is to understand the logic of both”.



Photo courtesy of Little Big Horn College

Reaching Out: *Biological Science Technician Kim Mann from Sidney, MT helps students do their own strawberry DNA extractions in a special hands-on exercise at the 2nd Annual Little Big Horn College Ag & Science Expo held March 19th in Crow Agency, MT. The Expo’s aim is to interest area high school students in pursuing careers in science and agriculture.*

Celebrating Women’s History

On Friday, March 15, the Center for Grain and Animal Health Research in Manhattan, KS observed Women’s History Month by viewing the first half of the PBS film “One woman one vote, narrated by Susan Sarandon. This is an excellent video that chronicles the history of the women’s suffrage movement, which culminated in the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. The first portion of the film describes the formation of various groups and individuals fighting for the right to vote and how the movement spread and intensified during the latter part of the 19th century. We will view the remainder of the film at a later date.

A Taste of the NPA

Celebrating the Chinese New Year in Korea

By V.L. Jin
Soil Scientist, Lincoln, NE

The traditional Korean dish for celebrating the Chinese New Year is Tteokguk, or Rice Cake Soup (Tteok = rice cake; guk = soup or broth). This soup is eaten for good luck in welcoming a prosperous and happy year ahead. The preferred

type of rice cake used in this soup is garaetteok, which are thin oval slices of unsweetened rice cake. This can be purchased year-round, usually frozen, in any Asian market that sells Korean food. Often, dumplings (mandu) are also added - these, too, can be purchased premade in the frozen food section of Asian markets. This mild soup is best served with tangy, crunchy vegetable side dishes like kimchee, or any number of other vinegar-dressed fresh or pickled vegetables. ♦

Korean Rice Cake Soup – Tteokguk (떡국)

Ingredients:

Beef Broth (or anchovy broth):
1/2 pound (230 grams) beef brisket
4 cups sliced garaetteok (rice cake
– if hardened, soak in cold water
10-20 minutes before use)
1/2 medium onion
5 - 6 cloves of garlic
3 scallions - white parts
1 - 2 tablespoons soup soy sauce
Salt and pepper to taste

Garnish:

Beef removed from the broth
1/2 teaspoon minced garlic
1/2 teaspoon sesame oil
salt and pepper
1 egg
1 scallion
1/2 sheet gim (nori)



새해 복 많이 받으세요!

"May you receive many blessings
this New Year!"

Directions:

BROTH: In a large pot, bring the meat, onion, scallions and garlic to a boil in 14 cups of water. Reduce the heat to medium low, and skim off the fat. Simmer, covered, until the meat is tender enough to shred (1 to 1-1/2 hours). Remove the meat and cool. Discard the vegetables. Stir soy sauce into the broth, salt and pepper to taste.

GARNISH: To make egg garnish, lightly beat one egg. Cook in an oiled or non-stick skillet at low-medium heat until cooked through. Slice into short thin strips. Alternatively, drizzle the lightly beaten egg directly into the boiling soup right before turning the heat off (or omit the egg part entirely if preferred). Shred the cooled beef into thin 1 - 1 1/2-inch long strips and combine well with garlic, sesame oil, and salt and pepper to taste. Slice the scallion diagonally into thin strips. Roast the gim on a hot skillet. Cut into thin 1 1/2-inch strips with kitchen shears, or simply crush them with hands.

Return the broth to a boil. **Add the rice cake slices and boil until soft, usually about 5 - 8 minutes. Ladle the steaming soup into individual bowls and garnish with the shredded beef, egg, scallion and gim strips.

**Mandu (dumplings) can be added with the rice cakes, stirring gently so they don't stick to the bottom of the pot. Boil until all of them float, and continue to cook for another minute or two.

Serves 4

Parents Nurture Appreciation of Diversity

By *Bethany Redlin*
 Tech. Info. Spec., Sidney, MT

Valuing diversity is for me a learned response. Having grown up in a big family (seven children) on a dryland wheat farm on the sparsely populated prairies of Eastern Montana, exposure to other cultures was generally limited by location and resources. My parents, however, were determined that I and my siblings should “meet the world.”

My dad, a World War II veteran who had seen first-hand the devastation the war had wrought in Europe and Japan, felt strongly that respect and communication between nations and cultures was vital to preventing similar disastrous altercations in the future. He also had (and has) a deep appreciation for and curiosity about other peoples, nations and ideas, in part fed by a year spent at Oxford University after the war as a Ruskin

Scholar. There, his fellow students came from all across the globe, further fueling his fascination with other cultures. He developed life-long friendships at Oxford and also picked up a passion for green tea!

My mother, an English teacher, was no less curious about the world, although her opportunities to explore it early were more limited. To compensate for the limitations their large family placed on them, my parents both read extensively and took advantage of whatever opportunities came available (missionary talks at church) to expand their knowledge of the world’s peoples. Happily, my parents were able to travel frequently later in life, experiencing first-hand the many pleasures and insights diversity affords us.

Their shared delight in learning about the world was something they wanted to pass on to their children as well. Unable to afford vacation trips to other sites and

countries in those early years, they did the next best thing. They brought the world to us, hosting visitors from across the oceans (and across the country) through a wide variety of exchange programs while we were growing up. Our guests were all of different nationalities, races, ages, income levels and political persuasions. I don’t believe it was calculated on their part, but they couldn’t have provided us a broader perspective if they had tried.

For example, our first guest was a 47-year-old farmer from Peru who spoke no English. I can still see my parents and Elberto camped out around the dining

room table littered with maps, magazines, newspapers and pictures. They would sit there for hours in the evening - long after we had been sent to bed - drinking tea and copiously consulting their English-Spanish dictionaries to learn more about his family and farming operation in South America, the details of which they would share

with us the next day. Most fascinating to young minds: stories of rafting his cattle to market in piranha-infested waters!

Another summer our guests were three, poor inner city kids from Chicago, a brother and sister (James and Janet, ages 8 and 12) who were black, and another young boy (Mike, 10) who was white, all part of the “Friendly Town” program. That summer was a real eye-opener for us, less due to racial differences than economic ones and the urban-rural contrast. We knew we weren’t “poor”, but it was shocking to learn how “rich” we were as seen through the eyes of our young visitors.

A foreign exchange student from Brazil also provided another unique insight for us as teenagers. Coming from a wealthy family, Katia freely talked about her twin sister and mother, but rarely mentioned her father. It was only after she had been with us for awhile that she told us her

father was a Communist who had had to leave the country, something she had been afraid to share given the cold-war attitudes of many Americans at the time. We were surprised at her hesitation, but had to acknowledge that, even in our free country, there may have been some justification for her concern.

Today, I continue to prize the opportunity to meet and talk with others who live and think differently, not just for the novelty, but because it expands my own way of thinking, allowing me to look at people and problems from new angles and hopefully to generate new solutions. I’ve learned that valuing diversity spurs not only empathy, but creativity. Now that’s a valuable lesson learned! ♦

My parents...were determined that I and my siblings should “meet the world.”

~ Beth Redlin

Connect...
with your co-workers!

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/>

Administrative Transformation (USDA Connect Website - use e-Auth):
<https://connections.usda.gov/communiies/service/html/communityview?communityUuiid=d8f08ee1-a34a-4f66-ac0c-f6483b4acd97>

Your NPA Diversity Task Force Members

Leadership Core

Barbara King

NPA ODEO Program Manager
Area Office, Fort Collins, CO
970-492-7053
Barbara.King@ars.usda.gov

Carol Chitko-McKown

Chair, Task Force
Research Microbiologist, Clay Center, NE
(402) 762-4372
Carol.ChitkoMcKown@ars.usda.gov

Virginia Jin

Chair-Elect, Task Force
Research Soil Scientist, Lincoln, NE
402-472-5137
Virginia.Jin@ars.usda.gov

Location Members

Kruger Bryant

Bio. Science Tech., Manhattan, KS
785-537-5587
Kruger.Bryant@ars.usda.gov

Francisco Calderón

Research Soil Scientist, Akron, CO
970-345-0526
Francisco.Calderon@ars.usda.gov

David Dierig

Research Leader - NCGRP, Fort Collins, CO
970-495-3265 ext. 177
David.Dierig@ars.usda.gov

John Gaskin

Research Leader, Sidney, MT
406-433-9444
John.Gaskin@ars.usda.gov

Stacie Kageyama

Bio. Science Tech., Miles City, MT
406-874-8202
Stacie.Kageyama@ars.usda.gov

Bill Kemp

Center Director, Fargo, ND
701-239-1371
William.Kemp@ars.usda.gov

Isela Losek

Secretary, Grand Forks, ND
701-795-8370
Isela.Losek@ars.usda.gov

Kristine Nichols

Research Microbiologist, Mandan, ND
701-667-3008
Kristine.Nichols@ars.usda.gov

Sharon Papiernik

Research Leader, Brookings, SD
605-693-5201
Sharon.Papiernik@ars.usda.gov

Mark Petersen

Research Leader, Miles City, MT
406-874-8219
Mark.Petersen@ars.usda.gov

Larry Renner

Electronics Tech, Mandan, ND
701-667-3027
Larry.Renner@ars.usda.gov

Theresa Pitts-Singer

Research Entomologist, Logan, UT
435-797-0581
Theresa.Pitts-Singer@ars.usda.gov

Northern Plains Area Advisory Team

Larry Chandler

Area Director
Fort Collins, CO
970-492-7057
Larry.Chandler@ars.usda.gov

Mickey McGuire

Associate Area Director
Fort Collins, CO
970-492-7058
Michael.McGuire@ars.usda.gov

Heather Gossel

IT Specialist, Fort Collins, CO
Information Technology Branch, WBSC
970-492-7047
Heather.Gossel@ars.usda.gov

Beth Redlin

Tech. Info. Specialist, Sidney, MT
406-433-9427
Beth.Redlin@ars.usda.gov

Where in the NPA? - Answer Key
This puzzled pair was helping Mom (Holly Johnson) at the Northern Great Plains Research Laboratory in Mandan, ND.
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Share Your Favorite Pictures!
E-mail your photos and captions to Barbara King or Beth Redlin (addresses on this page).

ARS Office of Outreach, Diversity & Equal Opportunity (ODEO)

ARS ODEO Staff - Dr. Don McLellan, Dir.
Street Add: 1400 Independence Ave. SW,
Room 3913 South Building
Phone: (202) 720-6161
Fax: (202) 690-0109
TDD: (202) 720-3303
Complaints: (202) 720-6161
Toll Free: (800) 340-4289
Website: www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ODEO/

Cooperative Resolution Program:

Jan Lewis (301) 504-1450
Jeff Schmitt (301) 504-1352

Outreach & Recruitment Branch:

Tracey Troutman (301) 504-1480
<http://www.ars.usda.gov/careers/docs.htm?docid=1356>