

ARS & You



Research for the Growing World

October 2011

www.ars.usda.gov



As I look back on all of our scientific and administrative accomplishments in fiscal year 2011 (FY 11), I remain highly optimistic about the future of ARS. I am encouraged by ARS employees' strength, resiliency, and professionalism. I admire your dedication to getting the job done and to achieving our mission.

FY 11 has been a challenging year for the Federal Government and for Federal employees specifically. For ARS in particular, we have undergone leadership changes and budgetary challenges, and have begun an administrative transformation. But, I can't help but focus on the countless scientific achievements and accolades our scientists and employees have garnered this FY. A look back over the *ARS & You* awards sections for the last year demonstrates the remarkable scientific capacity of our employees. I'm also proud of the extraordinary business achievements during

FY 11 we have made, including launching an unprecedented Web-based employee feedback system (*Your Two Cents*), [ARS Cultural Transformation Web site](#), and [Administrative Transformation Web site](#), and implementing a business process board (to identify ways to streamline and improve various ARS business processes).

In this special issue of the newsletter, I wanted to share with you information on several initiatives that ARS has undertaken to ensure we continue to deliver excellent services and world class research to the American public, with fewer resources. In the following sections, **Mike Arnold**, Director, ARS Budget and Program Management Staff; **Lisa Baldus**, Associate Deputy Administrator for ARS Administrative and Financial Management; and **Sharon Drumm**, Staff Officer, Office of National Programs, will provide updates on ARS' budget, ARS' Administrative Transformation efforts, and ARS' *Your Two Cents* and cultural transformation efforts; all dramatically impact ARS future operations. New information continues to unfold, so I urge you to take the time to read "ARS-All" communications and future editions of *ARS & You* when they arrive in your e-mail. We will continue to keep you informed as we obtain new information.

ARS is an agency of problem solvers, and our greatest asset is our employees. The collective knowledge of over 9,000 ARS employees is what will persevere during this time of change. Change brings about shared experiences in which people come together for a collective purpose. As ARS employees, we will collectively continue conducting and supporting quality and relevant research to enhance natural resources; crop and live-stock production and protection; and food quality, safety, and nutrition, all for the greater public good.

Sincerely yours,

Handwritten signature of Edward B. Knipling.

Edward B. Knipling

Budget Updates



Michael A. Arnold.

for reducing the deficit and cutting Federal spending. With such difficult choices yet to be made, Congress has enacted a Continuing Resolution that will fund ARS and the rest of the Federal Government through November 18, 2011. This will allow lawmakers additional time to attempt completion of the appropriations process by perhaps combining some, if not all, of the spending bills, including the Agriculture Appropriations Bill, into an Omnibus spending package or a series of smaller “minibus” packages. An Omnibus bill combines many of the 12 individual spending bills that fund Federal agencies and operations into a single appropriation bill. Congressional members may then vote on a single bill to fund numerous Federal agencies versus many different appropriation bills.

On June 16, 2011, the House of Representatives approved a Fiscal Year 2012 (FY 12) Agriculture Appropriations Bill that cut USDA spending for discretionary programs by \$2.6 billion, or approximately 13% from current FY 2011 spending levels. The measure proposes significant reductions throughout all programs and offices within the Department. Specifically for ARS, the bill proposes \$988 million, a reduction of \$145 million, or 12.8% from our FY 11 operating level of \$1.133 billion.

On September 7, 2011, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed their version of an FY 12 Agriculture Appropriations Bill. The Senate’s measure also proposes reductions below the FY 11 operating level for many of USDA’s programs and agencies. The Senate Bill proposes a funding level of \$1.095 billion for ARS, a \$38 million reduction, or 3.4% from the FY 11 operating level.

Presidential and Congressional efforts to stabilize the country’s long-term financial health continue to bring fiscal uncertainty throughout the Federal Government. As FY 11 ends, Congress continues to wrestle with how to boost the economy without falling short on goals

I want to emphasize that these proposals serve as a starting point for negotiations between the House and Senate. While both the House and Senate agree there should be some reductions in FY 12 Federal spending, there is significant variance between the 12.8% and 3.4% reductions proposed by the House and Senate for ARS. Over the upcoming weeks, discussions will continue between the Administration and Congress on an acceptable FY 12 funding level.

In anticipation of reduced spending levels for FY 12, ARS has been working with USDA to seek a variety of tools to minimize the impact on agency employees and to ensure equitable treatment among those impacted. On October 5, Dr. Knipling announced that ARS has Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERAs)—“early-outs”—and can offer Voluntary Separation Incentive Payments (VSIPs)—“buy-outs”—to eligible employees. Employees can submit applications for VERA and/or VSIP **starting Monday, December 5 at 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time, and ending Monday, December 19, 2011 at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time.** Contact the ARS Human Resources Benefits Division for more information.

We will continue to keep you updated on our budget

Administrative Transformation



Lisa Baldus.

USDA Connect* is the place for up-to-date information on ARS’ Administrative Transformation efforts. So far, more than 5,000 ARS employees are following this site. In late July, the proposed new ARS Business Service Center leadership team met with ARS Area Directors to seek information about how

best to manage and support ARS employees. ARS leaders nominated employees from across the agency to work side-by-side with administrative transformation project teams to provide input into the overall architecture of administrative support for the research mission. Our diverse customer base is what makes us

unique as an agency. That said, I want to thank the ARS employees who are actively involved with this effort. Many employees are investing a lot of time and energy into ARS' future, and that does not go unrecognized.

* You will need to use e-authentication to access these sites.

The proposed virtual organization staffing charts for the three Business Service Centers and the Headquarters Divisions are available on [USDA Connect](#). Our team is working on an implementation plan, which will ensure the Business Ser-

vice Centers' sustained operational success. In addition, the Restructuring Core Team presented listening sessions (in person and webinars) in September and will have more in the coming months. To ensure future efficiency and success, we need to hear from you. So, please make time to attend and provide constructive feedback. We will send announcements about upcoming listening sessions via "ARS-All" e-mail messages.



ARS leaders are committed to ensuring a successful administrative transformation. Let me acknowledge that nothing is without risk. Not unlike research, we make decisions based on current information and careful

analysis, and make improvements/adjustments along the way as needed to sustain and exceed customer expectations. Throughout our administrative transformation, I want to assure you that the mission of ARS remains the same. We will continue to solve agricultural problems worldwide.

Some of you may have heard about the USDA Departmental Administrative Services Project. I want to reassure you that ARS leaders are working closely with the Department and are providing input and guidance to **Secretary Vilsack** and his staff. We will keep you posted as that project evolves.

Finally, I encourage you to engage in this process, recommend others to participate and follow updates

on USDA Connect or provide feedback via *Your Two Cents*. We engage in truly meaningful work every day, and I am proud to be serving that mission with all of you.

Lisa A. Baldus

Your Two Cents and Cultural Transformation



Sharon Drumm.

When **Dr. Knipling** launched the *Your Two Cents* (Y2C) employee feedback program in May of 2010, we weren't sure how employees would respond. But we did know that feedback from the field indicated that ARS

leadership needed a new way of communicating with employees, and that research indicates "[a]n engaged employee is someone who is fully involved in and enthusiastic about his or her work and therefore will further the interests of the organization." (See white paper on employee engagement titled *Why ARS Should Invest in Employee Engagement* by ARS Speech Writer **Linda Drew**). Drew's paper cites research suggesting that engaged employees are "loyal, more customer focused, have less absenteeism and safety incidents, and are less likely to leave their jobs."



www.ars.usda.gov/yourtwocents

Through hard work and perseverance by employees, the Y2C response team and focus group, and other leaders in ARS, Y2C has become

ingrained in our ARS culture, and has contributed much to the way we interact and communicate with each other. Nearly 800 individual ideas have led to **120 actions** (of which 93 are completed), ranging from minor facility issues to agencywide policy changes. Perhaps most indicative of ARS employees' willingness to engage in meaningful discussion, over 500 comments have been left on those aforementioned ideas.

That’s just the beginning. Reacting to the clear message from Y2C that employees are willing to engage for the benefit of our organization, and answering **USDA Secretary Vilsack’s** call for **cultural transformation*** in the Department, ARS has launched a shared learning environment called *Review, Refresh, and Reform*, where employees can **track ARS’ cultural transformation activities**, speak directly with each other through **personal essays** and **videos**, engage in a **shared learning environment**, and find tools for **personal and career growth**. This new Web site is linked to Y2C and the **USDA Connect*** ARS Administrative Transformation site (mentioned above).

All these tools represent an unprecedented opportunity to get involved in the agency’s business, further your own career, or simply connect with your colleagues across the country. These new resources can help us combat stress and deal with uncertainty in a positive way, ultimately making ARS stronger and more successful at delivering our critical science mission.

Do any of these things, but do something to engage!

Shawn D. Dumm

Around ARS



Former ARS Interns Douglas Soffe and Samantha Yarrington.

Hagerstown Community College students **Douglas Soffe**, of Mercersburg, PA, and **Samantha Yarrington**, of Martinsburg, WV, recently finished

15-week internships at ARS’ Appalachian Fruit Research Station in Kearneysville, WV. Biotechnology majors, Samantha worked with Molecular Biolo-

gist **Chris Dardick** and Doug worked with Research Molecular Biologist **Carole Bassett**. They looked at the effects of various environmental and genetic problems on fruit. Doug analyzed drought resistance genes in Gala apples, while Samantha studied the genetic link between peaches and nectarines in the hopes of identifying disease-resistant genes. Bassett notes, “Interns represent the next generation of highly skilled and technologically educated workers for the scientific workforce. Many of them find jobs in biotechnology or are inspired to seek graduate degrees.” ❖



Autumn Rose Greenfield with her science fair project.

ARS scientific mentoring reaps multiple awards, as demonstrated by mentee **Autumn Rose Greenfield**, of San Antonio, TX. Research Leader **Peggy Tomasula**, ARS Dairy and Functional Foods Research Unit, Wyndmoor, PA, guided Autumn Rose on her research creating PLA (polylactic acid)

films—used in food packaging—to protect foods against bacteria. Her research garnered her the Junior Academy of Texas 4th Grand Prize in Microbiology (qualified for State competition at Texas A&M University); the Alamo Regional Science & Engineering Fair 1st place in Microbiology; State competition at Texas A&M University 1st place in Microbiology; and the **I-SWEEEP** (International Sustainable World Energy, Engineering & Environmental Project Olympiad), an international science fair held in Houston, TX, Bronze award (3rd place and \$400 cash). Autumn Rose notes, “Not only did I place in the above competitions, but the knowledge and experience is priceless.” She expressed sincere thanks and gratitude for Tomasula’s help.❖

Notable Awards

Soil Scientist **Kurt Spokas**, ARS Soil and Water Management Research Unit, St. Paul, MN, was named the 2011 Inspiring Young Scientist for the American Society of Agronomy's Environmental Quality Section. This award recognizes new scientists who have made an outstanding contribution in the area of Soil and Water Management and Conservation. He was honored at the joint American Society of Agronomy (ASA), Soil Science Society of America (SSSA), and Crop Science Society of America (CSSA) International Meeting on October 18, in San Antonio, TX. ❖

Research Leader **H. Duane Norman**, ARS Animal Improvement Programs Laboratory, Beltsville, MD, was named the World Dairy Expo's 2011 Industry Person of the Year. The recognition is given annually to an individual for their excellence in research, development, education, marketing, or other field that is part of the dairy industry. The award was presented at the World Dairy Expo's "Dinner with the Stars" in Madison, WI, October 5. ❖



Amy Vincent.

Veterinary Medical Officer **Amy Vincent**, ARS Virus and Prion Research Unit, Ames, IA, was named one of Pfizer Animal Health's inaugural winners of the company's "10 under 40" Swine Veterinarian Award Program. This biennial program recognizes 10 veterinarians

under the age of 40 who are making significant contributions to swine medicine. The company honored Vincent and others at the 2011 Allen D. Lemman Swine Conference held on September 17-20, 2011 in St. Paul, MN. ❖



Judi Stasko.

The National Society for Histotechnology awarded Supervisory Electron Microscopist **Judi Stasko**, ARS National Animal Disease Center, Ames, IA, the 2011 Rosemary and Donald Ostermeier Memorial Award at its recent awards banquet, held September 18, 2011, in Cincinnati, OH. This prestigious award is presented annually to a recipient who is dedicated and devoted to their profession, co-workers, staff, and employer. Stasko was nominated for this award by individuals at local, state and national levels who were impacted by her knowledge, skills and service to the field. ❖

A number of ARS employees were recipients of the President's Volunteer Service Award and Call to Service Award. The President's Council on Service and Civil Participation created this award program as a way to thank and honor Americans who, by their demonstrated commitment and example, inspire others to engage in volunteer service. Award winners were honored at the USDA Secretary's 63rd Honor Awards Program held last month.

2011 ARS Winners

Bronze Award (The employee must have provided a minimum of 100 hours and a maximum of 249 hours of service to a qualifying organization over the 12-month period beginning July 1, 2009, and ending June 30, 2010.)

Charlene Brown

Edward Clark

Ned Edwards, Jr.

Otis Faulkenberry

Julie Grogan

Dilip Lakshman

Tamara McKinney

Gary Miller

Sharon Sheffield

David L. Straus

Silver Award (The employee must have provided a minimum of 250 hours and a maximum of 499 hours of service to a qualifying organization over the 12-month period beginning July 1, 2009, and ending June 30, 2010.)

Tim Abney

Brant Bigger

Daniel Bullock

Amy Helms

Ronald Marble

Kimberly McMunn

Lisa Neven

Michael Strauss

Gold Award (The employee must have provided 500 hours or more of service to a qualifying organization over the 12-month period beginning July 1, 2009, and ending June 30, 2010.)

Michael Bryant

John Herbst

Call to Service Award (The employee must have provided 4,000 hours or more of service to a qualifying organization over the employee's lifetime.)

Anne Kenny Chapman

Pamela Freeman

Brenda Hofman

Charles Webber



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack (l) and Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan (r), present the President's Volunteer Service Award and Call to Service Award to Charlene Brown, Agricultural Research Service.



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack (l) and Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan (r), present the President's Volunteer Service Award and Call to Service Award to Patricia Cleveland, Agricultural Research Service.

Do You Know....Terrell Jones?

This month, we are featuring a story about an ARS employee because we are as proud of the people that conduct, help perform, and support ARS research as we are about the research itself.



ARS Biological Science Aid Terrell Jones.

Biological Science Aid **Terrell Jones**, with the **ARS Crop Protection and Management Research Unit (CPMRU)** in Tifton, GA, is a native of Stewart County in southwestern Georgia and a third-generation farmer. Terrell, a senior at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in

Tifton, has worked with ARS Research Agronomist **Carroll Johnson** and Research Technician **Dan Evarts** for 3 years.

Terrell and his father, Bill Jones, farm 500 acres of cotton and 300 acres of peanuts. But, growing up, Terrell always pondered where the cotton went after it was ginned, and who actually ended up with the garments made from the cotton they grew. A few years ago, Terrell decided to start manufacturing his own clothing line with the cotton that he personally produced, with every step of the manufacturing process occurring in the USA—growing, ginning, spinning, weaving, and sewing. Initial discussions with insiders in the cotton industry advised Terrell to outsource the entire process to a foreign country. This was unacceptable to Terrell and largely contradicted his dream of producing a “Made in the USA” product.

Finding U.S. businesses to complete the process was daunting. Terrell persisted and his diligence resulted in his own custom clothing line—**Jones American Clothing**—which was launched summer 2011. He used a simple, logical philosophy: Why outsource manufacturing to another country when there are plenty of people in the USA to do it who desperately need the work? “I realize U.S. labor costs and resources are higher. However, there are still plenty of profitable

opportunities to manufacture basic items here,” says Terrell. He says he plans to keep Jones American Clothing a U.S. product—made from cotton that he has personally grown on his family’s farm.

CPMRU is located in the heart of commercial agriculture in the southeastern United States. CPMRU conducts basic and applied research in weed science, nematology, entomology, and general agronomics for cropping systems in the region. Terrell has an active role in experiments related to weed control in organic peanut, Vidalia® sweet onions, and vegetables, along with research on herbicide resistance in cotton. The array of ARS research projects, along with the diverse, free-thinking ARS staff, has encouraged Terrell to be equally creative.

“We are proud of Terrell and appreciate his stellar contributions to our research programs,” says Johnson. “While we may have encouraged him to ‘think outside the box’, he is also an inspiration for us.” He is scheduled to graduate in December 2011, but that’s just the beginning for this American farmer/businessman. He plans to expand his product line in 2012. The Georgia Farm Monitor recently interviewed Terrell; watch here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CD4k81A9E4>.

Written by Terrell Jones and Carroll Johnson.



Terrell assisting with research on biodegradable mulches.

Please submit story ideas and national award items to Tara T. Weaver-Missick, tara.weavermissick@ars.usda.gov or call 301-504-1663.