



January 2011

SPOTLIGHT ON DIVERSITY

Beltsville Area Diversity Task Force

Visit us at:

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

United States Department of Agriculture

Agricultural Research Service

Volunteers needed for collaborative venture: Graduate Student Agricultural Research Symposium

Your assistance can help to make the Graduate Student Agricultural Research Symposium an enriching experience for the graduate students who attend – and for yourself as well. This symposium sponsored by the Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce (BADT) is scheduled for **February 10-11, 2011** (or, in case of snow, March 10-11) at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC).

This event has already drawn an enthusiastic response, according to Eton Codling, chair of BADT's Leadership Advisory Subcommittee. Registered attendees are graduate students from 1890 Institutions that have Capacity Building grants or other agreements with BARC scientists.

As explained by BADT Chair Verneta Gaskins, "The agenda has been developed to maximize opportunities for graduate students and scientists to dialogue about agricultural research. Graduate students will make either brief oral or poster presentations to an audience of ARS scientists and university representatives from partnering colleges and universities. Their presentations will pertain to BARC's current research areas such as climate change, environmental studies, food safety, and plant sciences."



For BARC scientists, the advantages of taking part in the symposium include the potential for developing collaborative research ventures with participating institutions and getting a sneak peek at the upcoming generation of potential future employees.

Gaskins noted, "There will be time reserved for encouraging graduate students to interact 'one-on-one' with BARC scientists or support scientists during this symposium. Talking to BARC scientific personnel will inform students of our ongoing research and potentially forge collaborative relationships with their universities."

Talk to your supervisor about volunteering to help with the symposium. Activities designed to inspire young people to seek careers at USDA are considered to be mission-related volunteer work. Federal employees are encouraged to engage in activities of this type, with supervisory approval (see pages 16-17 of <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/pdf/413-08.pdf>).

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BARC scientists and support scientists are needed to comment on the students' research projects and presentations, to share their experiences about careers at USDA, the Agricultural Research Service, and the Beltsville Area, and to talk to students "one-on-one." Volunteers are also needed for set-up on the day before the symposium, February 9 (snow date March 9) and to transport students from their hotel to several functions at BARC, if necessary.

"You are encouraged to save the date for this event," said Gaskins. "Your participation in the research discussions will be equally beneficial to yourself and the students, who are the future of BARC and ARS. You would not want to miss this opportunity."

To volunteer, please e-mail: BARC.Diversity@ars.usda.gov or jenny.allen@ars.usda.gov. If you plan to attend the student presentations, it would be helpful if you would register in advance so the Taskforce knows how many attendees to plan for. The registration form is available at <http://tinyurl.com/25lsj97>.

Many Thanks!

Many of you have participated in and supported the efforts of the BA Diversity Taskforce this year. We thank you all!

A few people and groups to whom we particularly wish to express our gratitude for helping with Student Discovery Garden are the following:



Friends of Agricultural Research-Beltsville ([FAR-B](#)), for their generous support in every way.



Farm Crew members who helped in constructing the fence and/or the garden beds, including Jared Bouma, John Bouma, Ted Currier, Rick Hill, Stew MacMaster, and George Meyers (who also contributed the creative flower pots and sunflower sculptures).



Jay Green of the Visitor Center, who assisted with driving students to the garden.



Jim Plaskowitz for photographing the garden on several occasions and assisting with website maintenance.

With heartfelt thanks,

Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce

First fruits of Student Discovery Garden: Not only veggies, but also job training

A gleaning harvest brought the first year of BA's Student Discovery Garden to a successful close. Student Jacob Brandon of Reservoir High School joined Diversity Taskforce members Martha Tomecek, Verneta Gaskins, Talo Pastor-Corrales, Mary Ann Guaragna, Monica Santin Duran, Sue Mischke, and Ali Sadeghi in harvesting carrots (118 pounds), sweet peppers (53 pounds), hot peppers (9 pounds), and pumpkins (14 pounds).



The produce was contributed to [DC Central Kitchen](#), a program that recycles food, trains unemployed adults in food service skills, and serves thousands of meals per day.

Nearly 200 students visited the Student Discovery Garden during its opening season. Plans call for weekly student tours in 2011.

If you are a BA employee interested in volunteering with the Student Discovery Garden, contact the ARS National Visitor Center (NVC@ars.usda.gov, 301-504-9403). Volunteers are needed in the late spring, summer, and fall.



To arrange for a group of students or teachers to visit the Garden, contact the ARS National Visitor Center (NVC@ars.usda.gov, 301-504-9403).

– Cecilia Wilkinson Enns

Celebrating diversity with healthy activities and delicious international food

The Fall Cultural Food Festival and Fitness Walk was a huge success, with close to 100 people from BARC and NAL participating. The event started with a scenic 20-minute walk beginning at the Log Lodge Visitor's Center.

The walk was followed by an extravagant food festival with a wide variety of cultural dishes including Hispanic, Indian, Asian, and traditional American cuisine. A Wii fitness game was available for those who were interested.

Weight checks and blood pressure screening were provided courtesy of the health unit from the George Washington Carver Center.



BA Diversity Taskforce's Special Emphasis Subcommittee (Valorie Akuffo, Jenny Allen, Verneta Gaskins, Mary Ann Guaragna, Savi Natarajan, and Catherine Parsons) plans to hold a repeat event in the spring and hopes for even greater participation!

Watch for announcements in **Spotlight** and on the [BA Diversity Taskforce website](#).

Got questions?

Call or e-mail the current chairpersons:

BADT – Verneta Gaskins (301)504-6510;
verneta.gaskins@ars.usda.gov

Leadership Advisory – Eton Codling (301)504-5708;
eton.codling@ars.usda.gov

Science and Technical Education Outreach – Lewis Ziska (301)504-6639; l.ziska@ars.usda.gov

Special Emphasis – Verneta Gaskins (301)504-6510;
verneta.gaskins@ars.usda.gov

Communications – Wendy Jacobs (301)504-6591;
wendy.jacobs@ars.usda.gov and Tasha Sprague
(301)504-5864; tasha.sprague@ars.usda.gov

Helpful websites

Cooperative Resolution

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

Outreach, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity (ODEO)

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

Outreach and Recruitment

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

Reasonable Accommodation

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

Observe diversity throughout the year

January – Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday

February – Black History Month

March – National Women's History Month

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

June – National Gay & Lesbian Pride Month

August – Women's Equality Day

September – National Hispanic Heritage Month

October - National Disability Awareness Month

November – National American Indian Heritage Month

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