



USDA's Office of Advocacy and Outreach...

# Staying Connected

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

JUNE/JULY 2013

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Farm-to-School Program	2
Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) Program	2
1890 Program	3
JITA Snacks	3
Featured Funding Opportunity	3
Did You Know?	3
Whitaker Small Farm Group	3
Farmworker Program	4
East Arkansas Enterprise Community	4
New North Florida Cooperative Association	4
StrikeForce Initiative	5
Upcoming Events	5
OAO Employee Spotlight	5

## INTERESTED IN BEING FEATURED?

Email photos and articles about your organization and events to:

[AdvocacyandOutreach@osec.usda.gov](mailto:AdvocacyandOutreach@osec.usda.gov)

# Message from the Director



**Carolyn Parker**  
Director, Office of Advocacy and Outreach

I would like to thank each and every one of you for the hard work you do each day to ensure greater access to and participation in USDA programs and services, particularly among small and beginning farmers and ranchers, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, low-income migrant and seasonal farm workers, and the students and communities of Hispanic-Serving Institutions and the 1890 and 1994 Land-Grant Institutions. We realize and appreciate that your support and involvement is what makes these programs successful.

USDA's Office of Advocacy and Outreach is proud to present to you our inaugural issue of Staying Connected; a newsletter that features our shared successes and highlights information that is relevant to our partners. We value your feedback and endeavor to focus each issue on topics that are important to you.

## 1994 Program Encourages New Partnerships

The USDA 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Colleges and Universities Program (1994 Program) is a joint land-grant development initiative between USDA and the Nation's 1994 Tribal Land-Grant Institutions. The 1994 Program has four major program areas designed to build the Land-Grant capacities of Tribal Colleges and Universities, assist Tribal communities in their economic development, strengthen Tribal sovereignty, and increase the diversity of USDA.

With the help of the Office of Advocacy and Outreach, First Nations Development Institute (a 2501 grant recipient) worked with Dine College to develop a two-day Training Institute: "Convening for Navajo Nation Chapter Grazing Officials."

This training was developed for approximately 60 Navajo Nation Grazing Officials, farm board members, observers from the Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture, the Soil & Water Conservation District, and the Local Governance Office in Tsaile, Arizona.

The coordination of this training with First Nations resulted in partnerships among USDA, tribally serving organizations, Tribal Land-Grant institutions, and Indian Tribes.

Training was given on conservation planning, land withdrawal, leadership development in the area of conflict resolution, Navajo Philosophy as it relates to farming and ranching, and the role of grazing officials in USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

As a result of this coordination and partnership between First Nations and

Dine College, this school's land-grant's capacity was strengthened to serve the Navajo Nation with a better understanding of the opportunities they can create through curriculum, training, workshops, and research to benefit farmers and ranchers.



Navajo grazing officials in a 2-day training institute at Dine College in Tsaile, Arizona.

USDA PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

# America's Youth Off to Healthy Start



Individual farm to school programs are shaped by the communities and regions they serve. Bringing more locally sourced, fresh fruits



and vegetables into school cafeterias is a seminal activity of many farm-to-school efforts. Another focus of many farm to school-programs is



procuring locally sourced, minimally processed, main meal items to make school meals representative of regional options.

These programs increase a child's consumption of fruits and vegetables while providing increased market opportunities for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food processors and food

manufactures which, in turn support economic development across numerous sectors.

Farm-to-school programs are believed to strengthen children and communities' knowledge of and attitudes toward agriculture, food, nutrition, and the environment.

USDA's vision of school cafeterias championing U.S. agriculture and proudly promoting regionally sourced foods that meet or exceed school nutrition standards are the norm, not the exception.

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA) amended Section 18 of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to establish a Farm-to-School program. The purpose of this program was to assist eligible entities-through grants and technical assistance—to implement farm-to-school programs that improve access to local foods in eligible schools.

To fulfill the farm-to-school mandate in the HHFKA, USDA awards up to \$5 million in

grants every year to help schools connect with local producers and teach kids where their food comes from. These funds support activities ranging from training, planning, and developing partnerships, to purchasing equipment, planting school gardens, and organizing field trips. Grantees include schools and school districts, Indian Tribal organizations, agriculture producers and producer groups, non-profit entities, and state and local agencies.

The request for applications for fiscal year 2014 grant funding was released on February 6, 2013, and applications were due midnight EST, April 24, 2013. USDA will host a series of webinars related to the applications process. To learn more about the Farm-to-School Program and how to apply for a grant, visit the farm-to-school website (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/Default.htm>) or email [farmentoschool@fns.usda.gov](mailto:farmentoschool@fns.usda.gov).

## Partnership with HACU Strengthens USDA through Diversity

At the Hispanic association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) 26th Annual Conference, USDA was presented with the "Outstanding HACU Public Sector Partner Award" by Dr. Antonio Flores, President and CEO of HACU.

The award recognizes and honors "extraordinary efforts and success by a Federal agency that has excelled in advancing the mission and goals of HACU. USDA has been an active and long-term partner in HACU's National Internship Program and in the USDA-HACU Leadership Group," said Dr. Flores.

The HACU program supports human capital efforts across the Federal spectrum by providing direct access to college students from the undergraduate to the PhD level.

HACU's diverse network of institutions has connected USDA to students in difficult-to-recruit majors such as animal science, civil engineering, and wildlife biology, among others.

HACU's National Internship Program offers college and university students paid internships within their area of study.

In FY2012, USDA hosted 96

HACU interns across the country-some as far away as Alaska and Puerto Rico.

"This internship was a great opportunity for me to obtain hands-on experience by conduction wildlife and botany surveys. As a future wildlife biologist, I feel that this experience has built a solid foundation for a career path within the USDA Forest Service" said Octaviano Lucero, a HACU Intern in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

The HACU intern experience is much more than professional development. For many

students, this experience is their first time away from home and living in another city or town. HACU and USDA provide interns with a support system to ease the transition from school to work.

With 99 percent of HACU interns ending their internship with a more favorable perception of USDA, they enthusiastically share information about the scope and depth of USDA's work with their peers.

Interns become part of the HACU Alumni Association upon completion of the program and continue mentorships with their supervisors.

# A Look at the 1890 Program Over the Past Year

The USDA/1890 Program was developed to (1) attract students to careers in agriculture and related fields; (2) share expertise and resources in areas such as agricultural research, extension and teaching programs, technology development, limited-resource farmer and minority farmer programs, and rural development programs; (3) increase involvement by the 1890 Land-Grant Institutions and Tuskegee University in delivering USDA programs.

More than 135,000 undergraduate and graduate students attend 1890 Land-Grant institutions. Last year alone, the 1890 Program Liaisons worked with more than 43,000 students who ranged from elementary to graduate level to provide opportunities for agriculture education, access to USDA Internships and careers, information on

Federal policies affecting their communities, and exposure to USDA agencies and programs. Last year, the 1890 Program conducted outreach to more than 13,000 farmers.

As part of its outreach efforts, Program Liaisons provided information to help ensure the equitable treatment of rural and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

The program also works closely with the USDA/1890 Task Force, which brings together USDA officials and 1890 land-grant university leaders to discuss and provide guidance about issues of mutual interest to USDA and 1890 Institutions,

Among other things, this joint effort aims to ensure that the partnership between the two entities is productive through the use of collaborative research, and grant and employment opportunities for students, faculty, and research staff.



USDA/1890 scholars (from left) Lynh Ly, Mickelle Storr, Karla Wooten, Jasmine Rosebrough, Arndreya Howard, and Michael Mathews (2011-2012)

## Featured Funding Opportunities

USDA is soliciting applications for:

**Rural Development Cooperative Grant**  
[http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP\\_RCDG.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_RCDG.html)

**Rural Business Opportunity Grant**  
[http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP\\_RBOG.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_RBOG.html)

**Food for Progress Program**  
<http://www.fas.usda.gov/excredits/FoodAid/FFP/ApplyForProgram.asp>

## PARTNER SUCCESS STORY

### Kentucky State Helps Business Go From Small Scale to National Sales

Ms. Alice Glover of Louisville, KY retired from being a social worker to become a value-added producer. She produces JITA Snacks LLC, which includes gourmet pork rinds, white chili, and watermelon and cantaloupe juices. By working with the Kentucky State University's (KSU) OASDFR Small Farm Program, Ms. Glover's company has grown from a small kitchen to a successful business with 65 local outlets and a website for nationwide sales ([www.jitaporkrinds.com](http://www.jitaporkrinds.com)).

Ms. Glover received a permit to fry pork rinds on the Louisville, KY waterfront where her flavorful products were well received. But with adverse weather causing problems with her fryer, she moved indoors and started selling pork rinds at barber shops and beauty salons. She had a dream and a business plan-but no capital and low credit scores -so traditional lenders refused her credit.

But Community Ventures Corporation, Inc., working with KSU, loaned Ms. Glover \$1,000 in 2007 to buy inventory for her business, which she repaid in 2009. Community Ventures then loaned her \$5,000 in 2009 to purchase 35,000 labels and 25,000 bags for her products, which are bagged and inspected by hand.

She took a food safety course at the University of Tennessee and converted her basement into a 400 sq.-ft. USDA-certified meat processing plant for her pork rinds. She took training on Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Points at the University of Kentucky, then worked with KSU to expand the business to include white chili as well as watermelon and cantaloupe juices with the raw produce purchased from local small farmers that participate in the KSU OASDFR Program.

She utilizes the free service of the Kentucky Department of Agriculture to market under the Kentucky Proud label. Her future plans include automating her production and expanding to new markets.



## Did You Know...

You have a **RIGHT** to ask for a **Receipt for Service**.

All USDA representatives must provide you with a receipt upon request, for any approved, denied, or requested services.

**DON'T LEAVE WITHOUT IT.**

Should you experience any problems obtaining a **Receipt for Service**, call the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach toll-free at:

1-800-880-4183

## PARTNER SUCCESS STORY

## Grant Funding Allows Whitaker to Help Train Small Farmers

Whitaker Small Farm Group began in a small office in Garner, NC, with the help of a grant from the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmer and Rancher Competitive Grant Program (OASDFR grant). Charles Whitaker has been able to serve over 740 farm and forest landowners, operators, and beginning farmers from chronically underserved populations.



One of the people impacted by these efforts is Abigail Beltran, who owns a 7.5 acre farm in

Faison, NC. Ms. Beltran says that Whitaker Small Farm Group's programs "were the catalyst that gave me the confidence to broaden my goals and dreams and look at other possibilities for my little family farm."

Ms. Beltran erected a heated greenhouse on her small farm and began growing tomatoes

and other crops. As she participated in additional training through the project, her farm became a natural community site to offer additional skills training. She and about 390 other farmers received training in soil recipes, hydroponic lettuce growing, tomato grafting, mushroom log inoculation, economics of greenhouse management, marketing, and writing a business plan.

The OASDFR grant allowed Mr. Whitaker to realize his goals. He states, "my goals are simple...go into the communities where people are difficult to reach and educate the farmers, particularly women and young farmers, bring in new farmers, help active farmers sustain their farms and increase disposable income....all gained through smart farming practices."

## Farmworker Program Helps Create New Alliances

The Office of Farmworker Affairs was created as part of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, and operates within the Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO).

The mission of the Farmworker Program is to maintain external communication with community-based organizations (CBO), farm worker organizations, educational institutions, and state and local agencies in order to keep abreast of emerging issues within the agricultural labor community. This outreach allows USDA agencies to assess the needs of the farmworker community and disseminate information to help them address their issues, and match the needs of farmworkers with USDA programs and resources, among other things.

The Farmworker Office, led by Christine

Chavez, has established several partnerships with various Federal agencies working on farmworker issues. These partnerships include Department of Education—Migrant Education, Health and Human Services—Migrant Health, Department of Labor—Wage and Hour Division, Environmental Protection Agency—Pesticide Protection Division, and Department of Justice—Civil Rights Division. OAO works with each of these agencies to discuss how to better serve this population.

In October 2012, OAO hosted the First Annual Farmworker Women Gathering. A group of 40 female farmworkers convened in Washington, DC to discuss the important role they play in agriculture and rural America. The group was comprised of current and former agricultural workers,

along with the descendants of farmworker families. These women are all community leaders, activists and advocates who joined forces to form the first national farmworker women's organization in the United States, named Alianza Nacional de Campesinas (The National Alliance of Farmworker Women).



Christine Chavez, second from left, with participants of the College Assistance Migrant Program at California State University, Fresno

## USDA PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

## NRCS to Lead Secretary's StrikeForce Initiative for 2013

The USDA StrikeForce Initiative is helping to provide assistance and relief to persistent poverty counties by improving participation in and access to USDA's programs and services.

Over the last two years, the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Rural Development (RD), and the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) have worked together to provide strategic outreach to the rural communities in selected Strike Force States.

For calendar year 2013, NRCS will be leading coordination of StrikeForce activities

at the field and Headquarters levels, and working with all USDA agencies to ensure that StrikeForce activities at the Department and in the field work seamlessly together.

Since fiscal year (FY) 2011, StrikeForce has served 210 counties in Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Mississippi, Nevada, and New Mexico. In addition, affiliated targeted outreach is occurring in 25 counties of the Colonias region of Texas and Tribal regions of Arizona and Utah. USDA has helped thousands of minority producers, individuals, and communities in these persistent poverty counties.

In FY 2012, nearly \$2 billion in obligations were made to farmers, ranchers, businesses, communities, and individuals as a result of the program information and accessibility provided by USDA agencies and their partners through training, workshops and demonstrations. Because of these successes, Secretary Vilsack has added seven more States to the StrikeForce Initiative: Alabama, Alaska, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Virginia.

Feel free to contact your local NRCS State Office for more information. <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>

**PARTNER SUCCESS STORY**

## Organization Helps Farmers Market Alternative Crops

The East Arkansas Enterprise Community (EAEC) received a grant from the Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmer and Rancher Competitive Grant Program (OASDFR grant) to help socially disadvantaged farmers in Arkansas Delta counties to market their vegetable produce. The EAEC and its grant partner, the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB), have provided outreach and technical assistance for the producers to be successful at growing and marketing alternative crops. They have also helped to create a permanent farmers' market in the region.



Although the Delta counties targeted for this project are among the most economically depressed counties in the nation, this program has fostered a high level of energy and cooperation among state agencies, private organizations, universities, local government officials, farmers, and food processors.

The Marketing of Alternative Crops project allows the farmers to participate in programs that will enhance their personal income, help revitalize the economy of the local communities, and increase access to healthy food for people who live in the region.

Several new partnerships have emerged, including the Heifer USA Program (Seeds of Change) and the Walmart/Walton foundation, 1890 Land-Grant Initiative (Sustainable Agriculture Consortium for Historically Disadvantaged Farmers). Through these efforts, Delta farmers have been provided opportunities to increase their knowledge and receive technical support needed to successfully produce alternative crops.

## Employee Spotlight



Kenya Nicholas is the Acting Program Director of the Outreach and Assistance for socially Disadvantaged Farmer and Rancher Competitive Grant Program (formerly called the "2501 Program"). She began her career at USDA 22 years ago in the Farm Service agency, but has been working with the Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO) since May 2012.

She majored in accounting at Strayer University, which prepared her for a loan specialist position with the Rural Utilities Service in 1998.

In 2004, she transferred to Rural Business and Cooperative service where she managed several programs, including the rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program, the Rural Business Opportunity Grant Program, and processed several loans under the Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program.

In addition to being acting Program Director of the OAO's grant program, Kenya manages the Minority Farm register and is also responsible for synchronizing USDA's cultural transformation initiatives, including the implementation of the delivery of programs and services to historically underserved communities.

Kenya is the proud mother of two children and the wife of a fireman who is a veteran of the U.S. Air force. She is a native of Ft. Pierce, Florida, and enjoys scripting plays and movies in her spare time.

## Non-Profit Co-Op Helps Build Collaborative Partnerships

**PARTNER SUCCESS STORY**

New North Florida Cooperative Association, Inc. (NNFC) is a non-profit farmer cooperative headquartered in Marianna, FL that was established in 1995 by Glyn Holmes to aid socially disadvantaged farmers. NNFC has developed alternative market opportunities for socially disadvantaged farmers by cultivating schools as outlets for fresh and value-added agricultural products in six southern states, including Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas. The NNFC farm-to-school model has received national recognition and demonstrates transferability through the vertical integration of production, processing, and distribution.



Glyn Holmes, Founder, NNFC

Through these efforts, NNFC has developed a model for market development that addresses the specific needs and capabilities of socially disadvantaged farmers, while focusing on networking and capacity building among these farmers.

NNFC's training and assistance efforts reach over 200 farmers and include topics such as enterprise

development, marketing, farm business management, and distribution. NNFC's efforts over the years have helped socially disadvantaged farmers overcome numerous barriers and difficulties, including weather, credit, government regulations, social attitudes, and discrimination.

NNFC has also developed many public and private partnerships and has established an effective mechanism for educational programming, farmer networking and outreach, and assistance for small-scale farmers, producer groups and cooperative throughout the Southern United States. Twenty to thirty group training activities are conducted each year with participating farmers and groups.

Mr. Holmes has worked for more than 15 years to enhance the economic viability of small-scale farm operations. NNFC is a second-year recipient of 2501 funding from the Office of Outreach and Advocacy. The funding has been used to help address the needs of African-American farmers in developing alternative markets, specifically relating to farm-to-school programs.

NNFC's future goals include working with USDA to develop a Southern Small Farmer Distribution Network to help farmers connect with USDA programs in their local areas to market their agricultural products.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

- American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) Board of Directors Retreat, Reno, NV— June 26-28, 2013
- USDA 1890 Task Force Executive Council and Task Force Meeting, Washington DC— July 24-25, 2013

The U.S. department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination against its customers. If you believe you experienced discrimination when obtaining services from USDA, participating in a USDA program, or participating in a program that receives financial assistance from USDA, you may file a complaint with USDA. Information about how to file a discrimination complaint is at: [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html) and is available from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights.