



GIPSA News

A newsletter for the employees of the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration

February 2009

Transition to the New Administration

Alan Christian, Washington, DC

Inauguration Day was followed by a flurry of activity, briefings, and meetings here in Washington, DC. The Obama Administration is moving quickly to fill positions and get to work on a full agenda of priority items. **Thomas Vilsack** was confirmed as Secretary of Agriculture last week and is leading the USDA transition. I have been designated to serve as GIPSA's acting administrator and will serve in that capacity until a new administrator is appointed by the Secretary. As the transition continues, we will continue to focus on the important initiatives we have underway to improve our organization, our internal operations, and, most importantly, our program delivery.

President Obama's agenda (www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/) contains a number of priorities that GIPSA actively supports. These include:

Rural Agenda

· **Prevent Anticompetitive Behavior Against Family Farms.** The President's Agenda calls for a packer ban to prohibit meatpackers from owning livestock. Establishing a

packer ban would require legislative action. GIPSA is prepared to lead or support Departmental efforts in this area.

· **Prevent Anticompetitive Behavior Against Family Farms.** The President's Agenda seeks to strengthen anti-monopoly laws and producer protections in the marketplace. This would require amendment of the Packers and Stockyards Act. GIPSA is prepared to lead or support Departmental efforts to prepare such legislation. In addition, GIPSA plans to propose regulations required under the 2008 farm bill and implement additional market monitoring programs to ensure producer protection in livestock and poultry markets.

Technology Agenda

· **Improve America's Competitiveness.** The President's Agenda seeks to ensure competitive markets. GIPSA will continue its efforts to educate market participants of the requirements of its authorizing legislation, including the Packers and Stockyards Act and the United States

Grain Standards Act, and aggressively enforce the requirements of these Acts. GIPSA is prepared to provide leadership or support of any Departmental efforts to prepare legislation and/or promulgate regulations to address anti-competitiveness. GIPSA also plans to implement additional market monitoring programs to ensure producer protection in livestock and poultry markets.

· **Create a Transparent and Connected Democracy.** The President's Agenda seeks to open up government to citizens by creating transparency, accountability, and participation for citizens. GIPSA is modernizing its business functions and deploying a portfolio of e-business applications that is improving the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery by reengineering and streamlining business practices, and improving the transparency and availability of the Agency's data for our customers.

*Continued, see **Transition**
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Names in the News

PERSONNEL

Jade Friesz joined the Midwestern Regional Office on January 12, 2009, as the new North Dakota Resident Agent located in Bismarck. **Jade** grew up on a grain and livestock farm in ND and is a graduate of North Dakota State University, NDSU. He was most recently the Beef Barn manager at NDSU in Fargo.

Ray Hollis has been selected to fill the supervisor position in Harlingen, Texas, effective February 15, 2009. **Ray** has over 28 years of experience that will benefit the League City Field Office.

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AWARDS

Linda Alston, Washington, DC, received an award for providing outstanding support to the GIPSA Civil Rights Staff, which contributed to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the Staff.

John Barthel, Denver, received an award for exceeding expectations in all aspects of his established performance plan during FY 2008 and his significant contributions to improving P&SP and achieving agency goals.

Tracy Chesley, Washington, DC, received a performance award for providing outstanding support to the GIPSA Civil Rights Staff, which contributed to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the Staff.

Dawn Cowan, Washington, DC, received a performance award for providing outstanding support to the GIPSA Civil Rights Staff, which contributed to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the Staff.

Agnes Flinn, Des Moines, received a performance award for demonstrating outstanding customer support to the Agency and superior performance, which resulted in significantly increasing the administrative effectiveness and productivity of the Program Support Unit.

Jay Johnson, Des Moines, received an extra effort award for his work in partnering with States, other Federal agencies, and the industry in accomplishing the Packers and Stockyards Program mission.

Jacques Meadows, Washington, DC, received a performance award for providing outstanding support to the GIPSA Civil Rights Staff, which contributed to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the Staff.

Brett Offutt, Washington, DC, received an extra effort award for coordinating and moderating three public meetings to collect information from the industry and stakeholders on regulations required by the 2008 Farm Bill legislation.

Stephen Pollock, Denver, received an extra effort award for his significant contribution to completing his Case Streamlining Leadership Development Program Project, which has resulted in an increase in efficiency for the entire Agency.

George Pulwicz, Des Moines, received an extra effort award for demonstrating dedication, enthusiasm, and skill in completing compliance reviews, conducting investigations, and training new auditors.

John Rollins, Atlanta, received a spot award for his assistance in facilitating Enterprise Content Management training.

Kevin Smith, Washington, DC, received a performance award for providing outstanding support to the GIPSA Civil Rights Staff, which contributed to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the Staff.

*Continued, see Names
on page 3.*

Foreign Policy Agenda

• **Renewing American Diplomacy/Seek New Partnerships in Asia.** In FY 2008, the United States shipped an estimated \$9.6 billion, or 48 percent of its grain and oilseed exports to Asia. GIPSA has established an outreach program that places representatives in Asia on long-term temporary duty assignments to prevent and resolve issues related to grain quality that could interrupt trade to this region. GIPSA's representatives work proactively with overseas Asian customers and their governments to address immediate and long-term issues related to the inspection, grading, and trading of U.S. grain. GIPSA is committed to continuing this successful partnership as resources allow.

In a January 26, 2009, news release, **Secretary Vilsack** outlined some of his key priorities for USDA (www.usda.gov), which included, among other items: supporting the profitability of farmers and ranchers by providing a safety net that works for all of agriculture, including independent producers and local and organic agriculture, and enforcing the Packers and Stockyards Act.

Secretary Vilsack also said he intends to move quickly on the major challenges facing the Department -- modernizing USDA's computer systems and addressing civil rights issues. "We need to do a better job of responding to challenges, apologizing for mistakes when we make them, empowering our employees to make decisions and drive change, and emphasizing a transparent and inclusive style of governing."

It is an exciting time in government, and we have a great opportunity to identify our important initiatives that support the President's agenda and renew our efforts to get those accomplished. The **Secretary** has pledged his support for the President's agenda; and once we demonstrate that our initiatives will make a positive difference, and I am confident we will have the support of the **Secretary** and this Administration in achieving our goals.

Craig Stephens, Atlanta, received a spot award for his assistance in facilitating Enterprise Content Management training.

LaDondra Taylor, Des Moines, received a performance award for demonstrating an outstanding extra effort, dedication, and a professional attitude to customers and employees that contributed to the efficiency and effectiveness of the Agency.

Caroline Thorpe, Washington, DC, received an award for her initiative and proactive approach to classroom and distance learning opportunities that significantly enhanced the GIPSA training program during fiscal year 2008.

Bryice Wilke, Des Moines, received a performance award for demonstrating leadership and willingness to provide technical expertise to enhance the Agency's regulatory abilities with respect to carcass weighing and evaluation device.

Thank You

Megan Johnson, Grand Forks

I am a recipient of the Leave Donation Program for my daughter Brooke, who was born with a condition called arthrogyriposis.

We have been receiving so many donations for her therapy appointments and doctor visits that I wanted to thank all of the generous people who donated to us. We really appreciate all the leave and wish everyone a happy and prosperous new year!!!

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts!!

Issuances

Terri Henry, Washington, DC

- ❑ FGIS Program Notice 09-01, “Practical Examination Scoring,” dated December 23, 2008
- ❑ FGIS Directive 9180.71, “Fumonisin Testing Services,” dated December 29, 2008
- ❑ FGIS Directive 9000.1, “Performance Appraisal System-Field Performance Appraisal and Standards,” dated January 6, 2009
- ❑ Aflatoxin Handbook, Issuance Change No. 20, dated January 5, 2009
- ❑ FGIS Policy Memorandum Reference No. 219, “Additional Qualified Laboratories,” dated January 15, 2009
- ❑ FGIS Program Notice 09-04, “Approval of Fluorescent Lamps,” dated January 26, 2009

Are EEO/CR issues or concerns affecting your employment with GIPSA? Do you have questions? Need help?

Then let your voice be heard.

Call the EEO Advisory Committee at...

1-800-639-5167

Civil Rights Hotline

Travel Bits and Pieces

Monica Alexander, Washington, DC

New Privately-Owned Vehicle Rates. GSA has published the new privately owned vehicle mileage rates, which became effective for all travel on or after January 1, 2009.

Below you will find information on revising requests for reimbursement for travel using privately-owned vehicles that were made prior to this notification:

- GovTrip travelers should remove the POV mileage expense and re-add it to the document (the new rate will appear)
- Travelers submitting SF-1164's should revise their documents and claim the new rate(s) before submitting them to their local office for processing.

Travelers who have already received incorrect reimbursement at the old rates in GovTrip or through an SF-1164 will be provided guidance later on how to refund any excess reimbursement.

Travel Card Policy Training-Deadline Extended. Due to delays in distributing cards to travelers, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer has extended the deadline for completing the online and hardcopy travel card policy training. All travel cardholders must complete the mandatory travel card policy training by **March 13, 2009**. Certificates of completion (online users) or tests (hardcopy users) must be submitted to Mary McCoy by fax at 202-690-2173, e-mail at mary.m.mccoy@usda.gov, or in person in Room 1633-S.

Current Privately Owned Vehicle Reimbursement Rates

Modes of Transportation	Effective/Applicability Date	Rate per mile
Airplane	January 1, 2009	\$1.24
Automobile		
If no Government Owned Vehicle available	January 1, 2009	\$0.55
If Government Owned Vehicle available	January 1, 2007	\$0.285
If committed to use Government Owned Vehicle	January 1, 2007	\$0.125
Motorcycle	January 1, 2009	\$0.52

P&SP at the American Farm Bureau Federation National Convention

Julie Shamblin, Resident Agent, South Texas

Deputy administrator **Alan Christian**, MRO resident agent supervisor **Stuart Frank**, and I attended the 90th Annual Meeting of the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) on January 11 -12, 2009, in San Antonio, Texas. This year's theme was "Forward Farm Bureau".

At the meeting, 369 voting delegates representing every state and agricultural commodity deliberated on policies affecting farmers' and ranchers' productivity and profitability.

P&S hosted a booth during the trade show. Many producers stopped by to chat and pick up information on the program. And, **former Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer** toured the exhibits and stopped by each USDA booth.



Stuart Frank and Julie Shamblin staffing P&SP's booth at the 90th Annual Meeting of the American Farm Bureau Federation.

I attended the "2009 Livestock Market Outlook" session presented by **Dr. Chris Hurt**, agricultural economics professor at Purdue University. Hurt said commodity prices and input costs such as fuel and fertilizer soared in 2008, until late September, when the U.S. financial crisis was realized. Biofuels had helped generate a higher demand for grain commodities, resulting in higher prices. **Dr. Hurt** stated it is unclear what will happen in the near future. Livestock and poultry farms are expected to do better than in recent years because feed prices have come down and demand has been rising. But the tumbling worldwide economy could affect that demand. The total domestic production of beef, pork, and poultry is expected to decrease from 94.1 billion pounds in 2008 to 93.1 billion pounds in 2009. Beef production will likely decrease by 0.2 percent and pork production by 1.3 percent. **Dr. Hurt** expects that cow herd sizes will decrease in the near future. The overriding message was that producers need to wait and see. "Give it a little time. Time tends to help markets get through adjustment periods," **Dr. Hurt** said.

Discrimination Prohibited

*Dawn Cowan
Washington, DC*

The Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Program prohibits discrimination based on race, color, gender, national origin, religion, age, and disability in all employment activities. Within USDA, marital or family status, political beliefs, parental status, sexual orientation, or protected genetic information are also prohibited forms of discrimination. The EEO program focuses on personnel policies, practices, and procedures, as well as working conditions and the work environment.

The Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Complaint Process is governed by Federal regulations (29 CFR, Part 1614). The Agency's Complaint Program is conducted in compliance with these regulations. The complaint process is broken down into separate parts: the informal process (or counseling stage) and the formal process. The purpose of the informal process is to attempt an informal resolution of an issue(s) raised by an employee. It is the last attempt by the complainant and responding official to resolve the dispute before a formal complaint is filed.

If you have any questions or concerns, contact **Dawn Cowan** of the Civil Rights Staff at 202-720-0218. If you feel you've been discriminated against, you must contact Dawn within 45 calendar days of the alleged act of discrimination to file a complaint.

IT Tidbit

Robert Kayne, Washington, DC

Testing an Application. Wikipedia defines “software testing” as “the process used to measure the quality of developed computer software.” A software tester finds and reports differences between actual behavior of a software product and its expected behavior.

Testing is a process of investigation performed on behalf of stakeholders to reveal quality-related information about the product with respect to the context in which it operates. This includes, but is not limited to, the process of executing a program or application with the intent of finding errors. Quality is not an absolute; it needs to have value to some person. With that in mind, testing can never completely establish the correctness of arbitrary computer software, but rather furnishes a criticism or comparison of the state and behavior of the product versus an expected behavior.

Before beginning any test, one must first decide if the test has value and then whether it should be performed manually or through an automated process. There are pros and cons to both manual and automated testing:

MANUAL TESTING

Pros

- ✓ Lower cost of test case design.
- ✓ Minimal requirement for tools or tool expertise.
- ✓ A tester can start preparing test cases as soon as requirements are ready.

Cons

- ✓ High cost of test execution (cost = execution time * labor rate).
- ✓ The time to execute test cases is high.
- ✓ Scripted test execution is tedious and sometimes simply boring.
- ✓ It is error-prone and the quality depends on tester’s attention to detail.

AUTOMATED TESTING

Pros

- ✓ Frees testers for more intelligent types of testing (e.g., exploratory testing) or testing of complex, business-logic related functions of an application.
- ✓ Reduces time to execute test cases (it is especially helpful with Regression Testing, which takes the most time to complete).
- ✓ Allows more frequent testing.
- ✓ Low cost of test execution.
- ✓ Increases accuracy and reliability of quality assessment in a release cycle.

Cons

- ✓ Cost of test scripts development and maintenance is high, which should be counter balanced by using repeatable actions and other reusable code.
- ✓ Requires more technical expertise and requires programming skills.
- ✓ Cannot be introduced late in the development cycle since it requires considerable amount of time to setup, design, and create.
- ✓ Easy to spend time on automating something that should not be automated.

GIPSA uses Hewlett Packard’s testing suite, which includes Quick Test Professional (QTP) and Load Runner (LR). QTP is used for functional and/or regression testing of a process, or a group of processes, in an application to see if the process actually works, or, if not, where it fails. LR is used to stress test a process, or a group of processes, in an application to see how many users it takes to do the same thing at the same time to reveal points of stress in the system, which may or may not cause the process to fail in the future.

Employee Assistance Program

Call for confidential help.

Washington, DC personnel, call...
1-800-222-0364

Field personnel, call...
1-800-222-0364

Leadership Development Program Graduation II

Rosemary Mayne, Washington, DC

When the GIPSA Leadership Development Program (LDP) graduation took place in December 2007, one class participant was absent. **Steven Pollock** was recovering his health and unable to attend the final session. But showing great dedication, **Steve** was determined to complete the training requirements. He did and, on January 15, 2009, he received his graduation plaque from acting administrator **Alan Christian**. I was proud to join members of the Business and Economic Analysis Division to witness **Steve's** graduation.

The following excerpt is from **Steve's** paper about the impact of the program. "The 2007 LDP program had many highlights for me. For example, I benefitted very much from the OPM Leadership 360 survey, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and the associated one-on-one coaching elements. They helped me learn and acknowledge more about my strengths and weaknesses, my style, perspective, and what motivates me. The classroom sessions, reading material, and exercises of the LDP helped me realize that people of any type can be effective leaders, and that leadership can be exercised in many ways. In my case, the coaching session in particular helped convince me that I may be best suited to effectively exercise leadership by being a 'thought leader.' ... The brightest highlight of all for me was the LDP project... because the project profoundly impacted me by deepening my involvement, understanding, and commitment to PSP."

Congratulations to **Steve** for his determination to meet all the requirements to complete the program and for investing himself in all the aspects of the program so he could experience a real impact.



Steven Pollock receives his hard-earned LDP graduation plaque from acting administrator Alan Christian.

For Your Health

Mavis Rogers, Washington, DC

If you are like most people, you have probably put off more than one task that feels daunting. The problem with delaying action is that it often adds to your stress level. Procrastination can become a habit, and the longer you put something off, the harder it becomes to get started. Here are a few ideas that may help.

- ▶ **Say "Good-bye" to Excuses.** Make a commitment to giving up the excuses that give you permission to put things off. But, never beat yourself up if you don't move ahead. Catch yourself in the "act" of procrastination, and when you do, ask yourself, "Does this get me closer to my goal?"
- ▶ **Plan Early and Often.** Break big goals into smaller, easily attainable goals. And, put it in writing. That will help you feel like you have started and you are on your way.
- ▶ **Develop a Tool Kit.** Write a daily "to-do" list. Use concrete reminders to build confidence. Take advantage of time management and goal setting tools such as electronic scheduling programs or even sticky notes. The simplest way to overcome procrastination is to take action. Take your first step today.

GIPSA News is the employee newsletter of the USDA Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration. Send your news, ideas, suggestions, comments, questions, or thoughts for the next issue to:

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by February 25, 2009!

Retiring? To be included on our email distribution list after you retire from GIPSA, please send your email address to dana.b.stewart@usda.gov.

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