



GIPSA News

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

September 2007

A History of the Farm Bill

Jim Link, Washington, DC

As the summer winds down and the fiscal year comes to an end, we patiently await the 2007 Farm Bill. The House of Representatives passed their version just before they left for their August recess and the Senate soon will start to draft their version. Eventually, the House and Senate will meet in conference to put together a final version that will make its way to the President's desk.

Farm Bills are written every 5 years and they reach far beyond the boundaries of the field and forest. Farm policy really has an impact on just about everyone. It's more than just about subsidies for commodities. It's also about food and nutrition, conservation, wildlife habitat, renewable energy, rural development, international trade, research, and education.

The first Farm Bill, known as the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, was a result of the Great Depression. All Americans experienced hardship, but rural residents were hit the hardest. Because the prices of agricultural products were too low, the government had to step in. Shortly after the Agricultural Adjustment Act,

huge dust storms swept across the central United States in the wake of severe drought in our Great Plains region. The Dust Bowl forced Congress to step in and supplemental Acts were passed in 1935 creating the Soil Conservation Service (now known as the Natural Resources Conservation Service).

The 1938 Farm Bill, also known as the Agricultural Adjustment Act, continued to decrease commodity surpluses by using acreage allotments to increase crop prices, and continued to build on conservation policy by increasing payments to participants. During the 1940s, U.S. agriculture entered a sustained period of productivity gains. World War II increased demand for our agricultural products worldwide, and farmers and ranchers benefited from the high prices. After the war ended, surpluses grew and demand fell and the Farm Bills of 1949 and 1954 did little to control surpluses and less for conservation.

It was in the 1960s that farm programs were once again aimed at reducing acreage. The 1965 Act established a cropland adjustment program that provided payments to

producers who volunteered to convert cropland into uses that would conserve our natural resources and preserve wildlife habitat. By the end of the decade, a Russian crop failure triggered an increase in demand and prices started to rise. Farmers were urged by the Secretary of Agriculture to plant fence row to fence row.

Continued, see Farm Bill on page 9.

In This Issue

Names in the News	2
Albert Nelson Retires	3
Regulatory Info	4
Issuances	4
Travel Bits & Pieces	5
Import Inspections	6
Mentoring 1890 Scholar	6
P&SP Automation System	7
TSP Site Changes	7
IT Tidbit	8
A Little Extra Effort	8
Confidential Emails	8
EAP Reminder	9
For Your Health	10

Names in the News

PERSONNEL

Mai Ho, Information Technology Staff, has left GIPSA after 9 years with the agency to accept a position with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. **Mai** played an important role in keeping our former certificate program operational and a pivotal role in testing the new FGISonline Certificate program.

Wanda Jimenez, Civil Rights Staff, has left GIPSA after 12 years with the Agency. **Wanda** accepted a job with the U.S. Army Medical Research and Material Command, U.S. Garrison at Fort Detrick, Maryland.

Donna Melton, Management Support Staff, has left after nearly 20 years with GIPSA. **Donna** is moving



Donna Melton

on to a new career as a program analyst at the Internal Revenue Service in New Carrollton, Maryland. Donna began her Federal career in 1987 with the Treasury Department and in 1989 she joined P&S as a secretary. She continued her career with the newly formed GIPSA and later became a program analyst. She gained expertise in travel, personnel, and procurement functions, and served as a valuable resource for information and assistance in the Agency.

Carol Remmers, GIPSA's Information Systems Security Program Manager, has accepted a position with the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service. Carol was a tremendous asset to GIPSA in keeping our desktops and servers secure and our GIPSA staff aware of security issues.

Kevin Studer joined the Business Practices Unit in Des Moines, Iowa, as a Legal Specialist on August 5, 2007. **Kevin** was reared on a farm and attended high school in Hampton, Iowa. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Iowa State University, a Master of Public Administration from Drake University, and a Juris Prudence degree from the University of Iowa. He has worked with U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley as his Agriculture Counsel and served as the Legislative Director for Congressman Elton Gallegly. **Kevin** has also been a Legislative Assistant for U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell.

RETIREMENTS

Richard Hardy, Information Technology Staff, Washington, DC, retired on August 31, after 28 years of service with USDA. **Richard's** support in the Operations Branch will be missed. **Richard** plans to start retirement by enjoying his garden.

Phil Meachem, Stuttgart, retired on August 31 after 33 years and 3 days of service! **Phil** plans to "break-out the fishing gear and get off the highways and enjoy life to the fullest with my wife and grands back in Peoria, Illinois."

Roy Hughes, Wichita Field Office, retired August 3, 2007, after more than 31 years of service. We wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

AWARDS

Terry Baron, Western Regional Office, received an extra effort award for going above and beyond the call of duty in maintaining a superior performance level in carrying out her duties and responsibilities.

Carol Carter, Western Regional Office, received an extra effort award for going above and beyond the call of duty in maintaining a superior performance level in carrying out her duties and responsibilities.

James Elswick, Western Regional Office, received an extra effort award for going above and beyond the call of duty in maintaining a superior performance level in carrying out his duties and responsibilities.

Roger Friedrich, Technical Services Division, received an award for assisting P&SP in the development of program brochures.

Jennifer Hill, Market and Program Analysis Staff, Washington, D.C., received a spot award for displaying outstanding effort and initiative in completing projects and assignments in an exceptionally competent manner for the Market and Program Analysis Staff.

*Continued, see Names
on page 3.*

Names from page 2.

Myron Simmons, Western Regional Office, received an extra effort award for going above and beyond the call of duty in maintaining a superior performance level in carrying out his duties and responsibilities.

Patricia Tolle, assistant administrative officer, Western Regional Office, received a spot award for her extra effort in collateral duty assignments for information technology administration.

Philip Warren, resident agent, received an extra effort award for conducting and completing six investigations that resulted in formal investigative reports forwarded for further action in the past 14 months. One was a complex weight fraud case that involved extensive analysis and documentation with a decision pending. Two others have resulted in the issuance of orders. The remaining reports are in various stages in the further action process.

10-YEAR SERVICE AWARD

Nathaniel Puryear, New Orleans, LA

15-YEAR SERVICE AWARDS

Henry Jordan, Jr., League City, TX
Tammi Lindsey, Washington, DC

*Continued, see More Names
on page 4.*

Albert Nelson Retires

Regina Landry, Crowley

Friends, family and co-workers attended a retirement party for **Albert C. Nelson** on August 25, 2007. **Albert** is retiring after 36 years of dedicated service to the United States Government. (Pictures of **Albert's** retirement party can be found in J:\FGI specific\shared\A_Nelson Retirement\.)



Albert Nelson receives thanks and best wishes from Crowley Officer-in-Charge Wayne Melvin.

After proudly serving in the United States Marine Corps for 4 years, **Albert** joined the Federal Grain In-

spection Service in September 1975 working in the New Orleans Field Office. **Albert** was one of only two FGIS employees who survived the grain elevator explosion in Westwego, Louisiana on December 22, 1977. After a lengthy recuperation, **Albert** was happy to return to work and remained in New Orleans until 1986, when **Albert**, his wife **Jean** and two sons, **Kenny** and **Patrick**, transferred to Wichita, Kansas. They stayed in Wichita until 1989, when they transferred to League City, Texas; back to the south and warmer weather.

Six years later, in 1995, **Albert** returned to where it all began. He worked in the New Orleans Field Office until March 2000. Over the years, **Albert** enjoyed getting to know his fellow employees, working in different offices, and working on many details.

It was on one of these details that **Albert** found the people he wanted to end his career with and the city he wanted to retire in. **Albert** worked on detail for several months at the Port of Lake Charles; a duty point of the Crowley, Louisiana Suboffice before transferring to Lake Charles in March 2000.

Albert and his close knit family; which has grown to include daughter-in-law **Tameka**, and grandchildren **Amiya** and **Jaden** are planning to remain in Lake Charles, where they own an investment business.

After retirement, **Albert** will be working full time in his business, when he isn't cruising to some far off destination.

More Names, from page 3.

Regulatory Info

Tess Butler, Washington, DC

20-YEAR SERVICE AWARDS

Bruce Gardner, Des Moines, IA
Donna Melton, Washington, DC
Robert Merritt, Howard Lake, MN
Ganga Murthy, Kansas City, MO
Glenn Plumley, Madison, WI
Gerald Raymond, New Orleans, LA

25-YEAR SERVICE AWARDS

Joseph Moore, Atlanta, GA

30-YEAR SERVICE AWARDS

Alan Heimsch, Stuttgart, AR
Elizabeth Hughes, Portland, OR
Robert Krouse, Kansas City, MO
Frederick Lindseth, Grand Forks, ND
Joel Menking, League City, TX
Julia Nelis, Washington, DC
Virginia Roseberry, Washington, DC
Roger Schneider, Washington, DC
Alan Wadyko, League City, TX

35-YEAR SERVICE AWARDS

Donald Folk, Cedar Rapids, IA
Daniel Murphy, Kansas City, MO
Clyde Steves, Stuttgart, AR

- Solicitation of Nominations for Members of the Grain Inspection Advisory Committee, published August 20, 2007
- Guideline Change Involving Volume Discounts in Tariffs, published August 14, 2007
- Amendment to Certification of Colorado's Central Filing System, published August 8, 2007
- Poultry Contracts; Initiation, Performance, and Termination, published August 1, 2007

Issuances

Terri Henry, Washington, D.C.

- FGIS Program Directive 9170.3, "Forwarding Samples to the Technical Services Division," dated July 25, 2007
- Aflatoxin Handbook, Chapter 6, Diachemix Aflatoxin FPA Test Kit, update of Chapter 1 and the Table of Contents to include this change dated July 30, 2007
- Issuance Change No. 8 to the DON (Vomitoxin) Handbook, dated July 30, 2007
- FGIS Program Directive 9290.16, "Inspection Data Warehouse (IDW) for Grain Program Services," dated July 30, 2007
- Packers and Stockyards Program PM-9730-07-028, dated July 30, 2007. This policy memorandum describes P&SP policy regarding voluntary deductions from the proceeds of the sale of livestock
- P&SP Directive 9700-10, "Filing Letters of Notice." Issuance Change 1, dated July 24, 2007. This issuance change rescinds the directive as P&SP no longer maintains hard copies of issued notices
- P&SP Directive 9700-13, "Developing Program Policies," dated August 1, 2007. This version 2 replaces the former directive dated March 2, 2006
- Grain Inspection Handbook, Book II, Grain Grading Procedures, Issuance Change No. 104, dated August 9, 2007
- Packers and Stockyards Program PM-9750-07-014, "Standardization of Equipment Used in Carcass Weight Purchases," dated August 16, 2007

Travel Bits & Pieces

Monica Alexander, Washington, DC

GovTrip Update. GIPSA recently completed a survey administered by the USDA Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) requesting information on our training needs to implement the new GovTrip e-government travel system (www.govtrip.com). GIPSA has 523 registered travelers in the current travel system. Training on the GovTrip system will be administered to travelers, arrangers (schedulers), approving officials, and the Agency's travel administrators.

The OCFO anticipates that the users of GovTrip will need at least 1 day of training, which will include instruction on document processing, travel arrangement processing, and approver routing and reviewing. The training will be administered using various methods, including hands-on, auditorium style, or Web casts. GIPSA plans to train six employees, and use the "Train-the-Trainer" method to meet the majority of the Agency's training needs. Further details of the training are forthcoming.

Bank of America Account Management. Each quarter, the Agency is assessed on the management of several financial, human capital, strategic planning, and e-government elements in accordance with the *President's Management Agenda*. One key element is financial management, of which individual billing accounts, particularly the Bank of America travel credit card accounts is "scored." The scores -- **green**, **red**, and **yellow** -- are based on the percentage of delinquent funds versus the total amount of the outstanding balances, with 1.9% or less, 2-4%, and greater than 4% representing the scores, respectively.

In the last quarter, GIPSA received a "red" in the individual billing accounts element, because over 6% of the outstanding travel card balances was delinquent. Delinquent accounts are those 31 days or more overdue. The delinquencies were primarily due to charges made for travel far in advance of the actual travel date and actually not due to credit card abuse.

With this in mind, we offer the following advice to reduce the number of delinquent travel card accounts.

1. Choose flights that are "YCA" only.
2. Limit the use of "YCA/_CA combination" fares. When choosing "YCA/_CA combination" fares, FedTraveler will charge the credit card immediately and the fare will not be eligible for the 3-5 day purchase before the travel date. We understand that the fares can be significantly inexpensive; however, the advance purchase may cause the travel account to become delinquent.
3. Make travel arrangements closer to the travel dates, which may reduce the occurrence of advance charges.
4. Cardholders should submit their travel vouchers for payment within 5 days of the completion of travel to ensure expedited reimbursement.
5. Cardholders should pay their travel bills before the due date. For faster payments, cardholders can make the payments online at <https://www.myeasypayment.com/Enter.aspx>. The online payment process is FREE.

We understand that the Agency should strive to obtain the most cost-effective fee for expenses; however we must also consider the implications of our decisions on the fiscal reputation of our Agency.

Any questions regarding this matter should be discussed with your supervisor or me as the Agency's travel coordinator.

Let's do our part in helping GIPSA "**Get to Green**"!

Employee Assistance Program

Call for confidential help.

Washington, DC personnel, call...
301-570-3900
or 1-800-222-0364

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

Breaking into “Import” Inspection Services in California

Chuck Britton, Sacramento

In July 2007, Cal-Agri Inspection Co. Ltd., an official inspection agency in California, broke history in the State by providing the first “official sampling inspection” of an imported bulk rice shipment at the Penny Newman Elevator in Stockton, California.

The request came after numerous inquiries and information sharing by FGIS duty point personnel in West Sacramento and Homeland Security, Customs Border Protection (CBP), and Plant Quarantine (PPQ) officials in San Francisco. Cal-Agri provided official sampling and inspection on a 29,000-ton shipment of White broken Rice from India. The inspection involved continuous on-line belt sampling of the cargo during discharging into the elevator. The agency provided sublot samples every 1,000 tons, sieved all samples for infestation, checked condition, and saved all specimens and weed seeds for PPQ and CBP. They also provided key information as to holds discharged, storage bin information inside the elevator, along with actual date and time. The samples were collected by CBP and analyzed in a San Francisco-area laboratory.

The main concerns of PPQ and CBP were the presence of insects and weed seeds, but most of all the dreaded “Khapra beetle” (KB), which is considered to be the world’s most destructive pest of grain products and seeds. The Khapra beetle thrives in the climate and regions of India and Bangladesh. During several meetings and discussions with FGIS duty point officers and PPQ/CBP officials, it was decided that official sampling inspection would be a proactive and safe way to prevent a contamination, and allow for immediate notification. During the offloading, evidence of the KB insect fragments were found and later identified, along with numerous weed seeds from the official samples.

The vessel took a week to discharge and Cal-Agri played a major role in a most important function of an “imported foreign rice shipment.” The agency is hoping the opportunity to sample inbound bulk cargo will continue and open the door for future requests for USDA official services for imported shipments into the State. The interaction and cooperation among the Government agencies proved to be a most positive and valuable experience.

Mentoring a USDA/1890 National Scholar

Robby Obiekwe, Eastern Regional Office

I represented GIPSA as a mentor for USDA/1890 National Scholars Program held at the National Conference Center, Lansdowne, Virginia, during the week of July 9-13, 2007.

The National Scholars Program is a major effort of USDA and the 1890 Historically Black Land Grant Institutions to award scholarships to students to attend 1 of the 18 historically Black universities or colleges and study agriculture, food, or natural resource sciences.

The purpose of the USDA/ 1890 National Scholars Program is to:

strengthen the long-term partnership between USDA and the 1890 institutions; increase the number of students studying agriculture, food, and natural resource sciences; and offer career opportunities to USDA/ 1890 National Scholars at the USDA.

I was assigned to mentor **Russell W. Simon, II**. **Russell** will be attending South Carolina State University, majoring in Agricultural Business/ Management.

The requirements for a mentor are to: provide guidance for professional development; serve as a teacher by

imparting various organizational skills; instruct the scholar in the power and political framework of the organization; attempt to build self-esteem and self improvement; promote and influence visibility of the scholar; ensure the scholar is taking the appropriate classes for his major; disseminate pertinent organizational information; assist with career planning and goal setting; and convene regular monthly meetings

I am looking forward to the opportunity to mentor **Russell** and feel this will be a win-win relationship for both **Russell** and the Agency.

P&SP Develops New Automation System

Debbie Shipman, Washington, DC

On May 14, 2007, P&SP organized a user group to begin working with USDA/Rural Development's (RD) Centralized Service Center in St. Louis to develop a new automation system. The group is comprised of: Des Moines' **Gayle Barnett**, **Kristie Pirtle**, and **Jay Johnson**; Atlanta's **Herple Ellis**, **Pamela Lake**, and **Creig Stephens**; Denver's **James Elswick**, **John VerLinden**, **Carol Carter**, and **Jason Lopez**; and Headquarters' **Peter Jackson**, **Roger Schneider**, and **William Crutchfield** (project coordinator). Paradigm Technologies is under contract to advise the group on the integration of the new workflow Standard Operating Procedures

(SOPs) into the new system. The new system will replace the existing BIDS, R&I, S&W, Pending, TRAP, Quarterly Report, and many of the various spreadsheets that are used by P&SP staff members to capture data.

During June, the P&SP Management Team gave employees the opportunity to name P&SP's new automation system. **Kathy Boyd** was selected as the winner with the name "Packers and Stockyards Automated System (PSAS)" and **Barbara McKee** was first runner up.

The user group proposed a two-part system. One will address P&SP's account records database that maintains information about registrants, scales, bonds, etc. The other

will be the workflow system that tracks and manages the new business processes. RD anticipates that the entire development will take less than a year and the first phases will be operational by next spring. The database portion of the system should be ready first and may be ready for deployment even earlier than scheduled.

Clem Mitchell, RD's PSAS project manager, reported that the application will help reduce the data entry load for P&SP's program staff. **Clem** also states that PSAS will allow the program's scanned documents to be stored in a state-of-the-art Enterprise Content Management (ECM) system. This will improve security controls, make for easier access by its users, and include document versioning controls. PSAS will improve P&SP's data reliability by integrating several systems across multiple databases into a single, complete integrated system. Unlike the old system, the new system will be able to better check data completeness and accuracy. The multi-tiered, web-based implementation will provide a basis for a future extension to allow for the capture of data by the livestock industry entities whom GIPSA regulates via a web-based public interface.

P&SP envisions PSAS to be a great success!

TSP Site Changes

Monica Alexander, Washington, DC

The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) is implementing new enhancements to the TSP website to reduce the use of personal identifiable information (PII) to access accounts. Effective October 2007, TSP website users will no longer use their Social Security numbers to access the TSP website, ThriftLine, or when communicating with TSP.

Users will receive a new account number from TSP by mail in September. Users are asked to make any corrections to their addresses as soon as possible to avoid any delays. The new account number will be used to access the TSP website, ThriftLine, and on all TSP forms. Social Security numbers will continue to be used when reporting information to the IRS or when calling the ThriftLine as an added protection measure.

For updates on the conversion from Social Security numbers to account numbers, please visit the TSP website at www.tsp.gov. To make changes to your address, please contact the GIPSA processing specialist in Minneapolis at 612-336-3332.

IT Tidbit

David Will, Washington, DC

If you are sending an email to ask for help or make an inquiry, a well-chosen subject line can make it more likely that you will receive a timely response. A concise and meaningful subject line lets the recipient know immediately what the email is about. In an overloaded inbox, good subject lines can help the recipient process email more efficiently. Ultimately, an email with a decent subject line may well be opened and answered ahead of one that has a subject line that is meaningless, generic, or worst of all, non-existent.

Avoid "hijacking" existing subjects. Unfortunately, people often start an entirely unrelated topic by replying to a previous email but neglect to change the subject line accordingly. If you wish to discuss a new and unrelated topic, it is best to start a new email.

Using good subject lines can increase the effectiveness of your message as well as make you appear more professional.

A Little Extra Effort!!!

John Barthel, Western Regional Office

GIPSA employees continually work in an environment where American agriculture is served by our efforts, but we sometimes receive little recognition that anything positive was accomplished. **Patti Tolle**, assistant administrative officer, and **Jim Morcaldi**, Financial Unit supervisor, in the Western Regional Office, recently demonstrated how a little extra effort directly benefited an unpaid livestock seller.

Patti received a call from the bookkeeper for the current livestock market operator in Brush, Colorado. An attorney representing an unpaid livestock seller contacted the market and demanded payment on a \$19,000 custodial check issued in 2003 by the previous entity that had operated the auction market. The livestock seller had misplaced the check and recently found it. What could be done?

Patti's easy response would have been to reply that the market has been out of business for 4 years and the unpaid check is too old for a bond claim. Instead, she discussed the situation with **Jim**, who considered both his knowledge of the circumstances under which the previous market operator closed and that this was a custodial check. He checked the State of Colorado website's list of dormant accounts that have been turned over to the State by banks. He found the livestock seller listed by name and address as a person who was due payment from the Colorado unclaimed property fund. **Jim** obtained the contact information and returned a call to the bookkeeper to provide the information that Colorado is holding funds identified in the livestock seller's name.

Patti's and **Jim's** extra effort provided the livestock seller with information that might result in a potential remedy. A little extra effort made a difference!

Confidential Emails

Just a reminder, the confidential communication sites that employees may use to contact **Administrator Jim Link** or **FGIS Deputy Administrator Dave Shipman** are just that – confidential. The sites do not reference or save your network login or email address. If you want a response, please include your contact information.

Both of the confidential communication sites are accessible from the *inGIPSA* website.

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

Employee Assistance Program Reminder

Albert Conerly, Washington, DC

Increased public awareness of environmental issues during the 1980s led to Farm Bills that focused on the conservation of our natural resources and pollution reduction. For the first time, farmers had to meet certain criteria demonstrating sustainability in order to qualify for federal crop insurance and loan programs. The importance of environmental issues continued throughout the 1990s and still exists today.

Getting back to the debate on the current Farm Bill... USDA continues to play an aggressive role in the process. During the summer of 2005, **Secretary Johanns** and the Department's leadership engaged the public by hosting Farm Bill listening sessions across the country. Senior officials went to 48 states and listened directly to what farmers and ranchers had to say about farm policy. It was from these candid comments that USDA drafted proposals, which were released in January of this year. The USDA proposal included legislative language that went title by title stemming from what we heard during the listening sessions. Many of the proposed recommendations became part of the House version of the Farm Bill.

We will have to wait and see what the Senate will do, but we do want to have a Farm Bill this year that we can take to the President so he can sign, so we can tell you what the farm program is going to look like for the next 5 years, and a farm bill that we can all be proud to support.

GIPSA's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides professional, confidential, and referral services that can help you and your family deal with life challenges. EAP services are available to you at no cost. Call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for confidential help if you need it. Employees can have up to six confidential EAP visits with a qualified counselor. EAP counselors are located throughout the country, ensuring that care is never far away.

◆ **Who May Use the Program?** All GIPSA employees may use the program at any time. Employees are encouraged to contact a counselor whenever they are experiencing problems. In many situations, family members of GIPSA employees are also eligible for EAP services.

◆ **Key Features of the EAP.** The EAP is always there for you, even if it is the middle of the night or a holiday. Simply call the toll-free EAP telephone number 800-222-0364.

◆ **Confidential Service.** All EAP services are treated with the strictest confidence. The personal information that you share with your counselor is confidential, unless you sign a release of information form, or if the law requires disclosure.

◆ **Get Help for a Variety of Problems.** You can turn to the EAP for help with anything that interferes with your job or personal life. Among other things, your EAP can help you with:

- Stress Management
- Family/parenting issues
- Alcohol, drugs, and other substance misuse or abuse
- Burnout
- Marital/relationship problems
- Dependent care issues
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Anger Management
- Legal Concerns
- Financial issues
- Coping with change
- Self-esteem
- Grief or bereavement

If you have any questions about your program services, please call the EAP, toll-free, at 800-222-0364.

For Your Health

Mavis Rogers, Washington, DC

It is hurricane season again. With the memories of Katrina and Rita all too vivid, and fears of another disaster abundant, families must begin thinking now about disaster plans. Even people who feel they have plans in place ready should review them. If 2005 taught us anything, it is that a hurricane can be almost unimaginably devastating.

The better you prepare for a disaster, the better chance you have of being able to survive it, says the Insurance Information Institute in New York. Without a doubt, these are words to live by. Most people think about major natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes and how to prepare for them, at least to some extent. But less dramatic, more common incidents such as house fires or extended power outages can wreak havoc too.

With that in mind, experts say the first step of any planning agenda must be securing the safety of all family members. Safeguarding any property or valuable personal information comes second. A number of websites offer good safety tips for creating evacuation plans and emergency supply kits. Most notably is The American Red Cross (www.redcross.org) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (www.ready.gov).

While you cannot do anything unless you ensure your physical safety, you will also need to have financial safety measures in place. Start by purchasing a container or safe to store duplicates of important documents, such as your mortgage records and deeds, your will and testament, home/life insurance policies, stock/

bond certificates, etc. Make sure this container is not only waterproof but fireproof. Families should make a list of financial accounts and prescription drug/medical needs as well.

“This ranges from protecting your financial documents to making sure you have spending money available” said Mark Cybulski, a spokesman for MassMutual Financial Group in Springfield, Massachusetts. “The container should be something you can grab if you need to leave the house in a hurry.”

Families should also have a game plan in mind for how they will cope with expenses if they are forced to abandon their home. Keeping a stash of cash in an envelope in case local banks or ATMs are shut down is a start, with small denominations preferable. The smaller the bill, the more useable it is in more places. Keeping a supply of quarters on hand can be helpful for smaller purchases as well as emergency pay phone calls.

Taking a broader approach to financial management, people should also have a savings account or other liquid investments accessible if they are out of work for a while or need to cover emergency costs. If all your funds are tied up in stocks, bonds, or IRAs, it could be difficult to get your hands on them quickly, and avoid surcharges and penalties. Another easy step you can take is to photocopy the front and back of all the cards in your wallet, so you have a record of your accounts, contacts, and creditors.

The Insurance Information Institute says families should take steps to protect their property, especially those

living along the Gulf Coast and other parts of the East Coast that are vulnerable to hurricanes and high winds. Meteorologists have predicted that we are in the midst of a geologic cycle in which we may experience powerful hurricane seasons regularly until 2020 or 2025. This is not a threat to take lightly.

The Institute for Business and Home Safety (www.ibhs.org) has some good tips for protecting property from floods, freezing conditions, high winds, fires, earthquakes, and other natural disasters.

Families can get information about flood damage and insurance from the National Flood Insurance Program (www.floodsmart.gov).

Whatever it takes to be prepared, you should do it. You may only get one chance!

Courtesy: Wayne Terrance

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:

Dana Stewart

USDA, GIPSA, Stop 3614
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-3614
Phone (202) 720-5091
FAX (202) 690-2333
dana.b.stewart@usda.gov

by September 25, 2007!

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.

OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR
USDA, GRAIN INSPECTION, PACKERS
AND STOCKYARDS ADMINISTRATION
STOP 3601
1400 INDEPENDENCE AVENUE, SW
WASHINGTON, DC 20250-3601
