



GIPSA News

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

September 2008

From the Deputy Administrator

Randall Jones, Washington, DC



Randall Jones

Let me start by saying that it is an honor and privilege to serve as the Deputy Administrator, FGIS. I take this responsibility very seriously and intend to work with each of our team members to make FGIS a great place to work and together we can make this happen.

My goal for our program is straightforward: FGIS will have the best staff that will provide high quality and efficient services to our stakeholders that

facilitates the marketing of grain and grain products.

During my first 30 days as part of the FGIS team, I have had the opportunity to personally visit with many of you. **Administrator Link** and **I** spent 2 days with staff at our facilities in Kansas City. After that, **Mr. Link, John Giler** and **I** traveled to New Orleans and met with staff, attended a portion of the training for our new graders, visited with union officials to discuss issues facing our workforce, and then visited 5 elevators on the river. After 3 busy days in and around New Orleans, we headed west and stopped in Crowley, Louisiana, for a talk and a cup of coffee with the staff there on our way to League City, Texas, where we visited with staff members before we toured export facilities in the area and in Galveston.

I was fortunate to share many meals with staff, and to listen to many of our staff members and industry customers. I was struck by a number of things during my travel and visits. First and foremost, we have a very talented and strongly committed team. I was impressed by everyone's devotion and commitment to customer service. As many of you have heard me say, I am passionate about customer service. During my travels to our field offices and work sites at elevators on the Mississippi River and Gulf Coast, I could not help but feel the deep commitment of the FGIS team to our Program, our mission, and our customers. I have witnessed firsthand that you share my passion as well. Nothing is more critical to the success of our Program than providing high quality and efficient services to our customers.

*Continued, see **From the Deputy Administrator**
on page 5.*



**Help GIPSA
Soar Ahead**

Complete the 2008
Organizational
Assessment Survey
by
September 12, 2008

For more information,
see page 3.

EXTENSION!

Administrator's Awards
Nominations are now being
accepted through
September 19, 2008
For more information,
see page 4.

Names in the News

PERSONNEL

Brian Adam, Rodney Bell, Donnie Damm, Alan Disch, and Ramon Luevano have been selected to fill positions in the Technical Services Division's Grading Services Laboratory.

Brian Hughes is GIPSA's new Information Security Specialist. **Brian** is an Idaho native and comes to us via Helena, Montana, where he worked for a year as a wide-area network administrator for Glacier Bancorp, Inc. Prior to his year in Montana, **Brian** spent 26 years working in IT for his alma mater, Idaho State University (ISU), in various positions. His last 3 years at ISU were spent as an information systems security analyst. In his spare time, **Brian** enjoys spending time hiking and riding Harleys with his wife **Janet**.

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Jeff L'Heureux and **Jake Thein** have joined the Cedar Rapids field office. Both are agricultural commodity graders with official agency experience.

LEAVE DONATION

Megan Johnson, agricultural commodity grader, Grand Forks, has been accepted into the leave donor program. Her 4-year-old daughter was born with arthrogryposis and has required many corrective surgeries, the most recent of which exhausted all of **Megan's** leave. Her daughter will need occupational therapy and physical therapy soon and throughout the rest of her life. Any leave donation would be appreciated. If you would like to donate either annual or restored annual leave to **Megan**, please complete form AD-1043 and either fax it or mail it (not both) to: USDA APHIS MRPBS HRD; Attn: LCT; Butler Square 5th Floor; 100 North 6th Street; Minneapolis, MN 55403; FAX: 612-336-3544. Form AD-1043 **is attached** or can be found on the web at: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/forms/ad.shtml>.

AWARDS

Brian Burk, Aurora, received an extra effort award for investigative thoroughness in preparing a large and complex investigative file that resulted in a complaint being issued against a major packer in the Western Region for its financial insolvency.

Nancy Chasse, Atlanta, received a spot award for her dedication, enthusiasm and willingness to go the extra effort to get the job done.

Judith Johnson, Wichita, received a spot award for displaying exceptional support to the Wichita field office to ensure a smooth transition during the closing of the field office.

Jerald Lenz, Aurora, received an extra effort award for investigative thoroughness in preparing a large and complex investigative file that resulted in a complaint being issued against a major packer in the Western Region for its financial insolvency.

Roy Lyon, Wichita, received a spot award for displaying exceptional support to the Wichita Field Office to ensure a smooth transition during the closing of the field office.

Sherri Murphy, Washington, DC, received a time-off award for providing invaluable administrative support to the Field Management Division which contributed greatly to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the division.

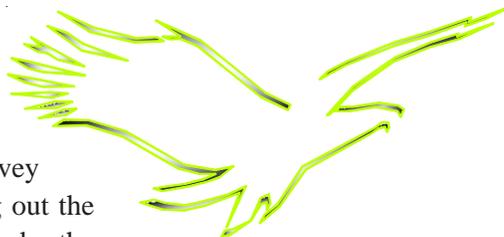
Denise Ruggles, Kansas City, received a spot award for conducting monthly FGIS user-fee situation meetings for FGIS upper management, thus providing invaluable cost analysis and recommendations to ensure FGIS managers are operating within their allocations.

Russell Simon, III, Atlanta, received a spot award for his positive attitude, enthusiasm, and willingness to learn, understand, and participate in assigned tasks as an 1890 National Scholar intern in the Eastern Regional Office.

Soaring Ahead: 2008 Organizational Assessment Survey

Caroline C. Thorpe, Washington, DC

Until September 12, 2008, you have the opportunity to communicate your thoughts and ideas about GIPSA through the Organizational Assessment Survey (OAS). Please consider filling out the survey. Access to it is available by the Internet. For details, please see Rosemary Mayne's August 18, 2008, e-mail to all employees.



To ensure that we gather information needed to measure and improve our work environment, all employees are encouraged to fill out the survey. Completing the survey is voluntary and can be done during work hours. Most people need less than 30 minutes to do it.

The survey is completely anonymous. GIPSA contracted with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to administer the survey and process the results. Any computer with a connection to the internet can be used to respond to the survey, not just the computers at GIPSA. Be assured that no individual responses will be identified, so please answer openly and honestly.

After the surveys are collected and the results analyzed, you will receive a report summarizing GIPSA's current strengths and weaknesses. Based on data from the 2006 OAS, GIPSA has made a number of changes and the 2008 survey will help determine the impact of these changes. The results will be used to identify further actions that could further improve GIPSA's organizational effectiveness.

Please take some time to provide your input to GIPSA. Your opinions are valued and this is a great opportunity for you to help shape the evolution of the work environment at GIPSA. The Agency can only address your concerns if we know about them.

If you have any questions or concerns about accessing the survey, please contact Rosemary Mayne (rosemary.k.mayne@usda.gov or (202) 720-6242) or Caroline Thorpe (caroline.c.thorpe@usda.gov or (202) 690-2332).

Issuances

Terri Henry, Washington, DC

- FGIS Issuance Change No. 106 to the Grain Inspection Handbook, Book II, with sections of Book II revised to show changes made to the reporting requirements for garlic. These changes were made to conform with, and be compatible for the linear data transfer to the new Inspection Data Warehouse. All changes are dated June 16, 2008
- FGIS Directive 9180-61, "Official Calibrations for the Dickeyjohn GAC2100 Moisture Meter," dated August 1, 2008
- FGIS Policy Memorandum Reference No. 216, "11/64" x 3/4" slotted and oblong-hole sieves" dated August 14, 2008
- Deleted - GIPSA 2450.1, "Application for and Monitoring of GIPSA Research Grants," dated 5-17-02

Container Training Sessions

Bob Lijewski, Washington, DC

In an effort to standardize inspection processes, the Policies and Procedures Branch (PPB) will hold several training sessions for official personnel involved in the inspection and weighing of bulk grain and processed products loaded into freight containers. The training will cover stowage examinations, sampling, weighing, and inspection procedures. The training also will include inspection procedures for phytosanitary certification.

The first session was hosted by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture on August 27, 2008, in Elizabeth City, NC. The second training session will take place at Kankakee Grain Inspection in Essex, IL, on September 17, 2008. PPB will also provide training at the FGIS National Grain Center in Kansas City, MO, in late October, and at a site in the Pacific Northwest on a date to be determined.

Deadline Extended for Administrator's Awards Nominations

James E. Link, Washington, DC

The deadline to submit nominations for the 13th Annual Administrator's Awards has been extended until **September 19, 2008**.

In the past 12 years, the Administrator's Awards have offered unique opportunities for GIPSA employees to recognize the outstanding accomplishments of our coworkers – those who went the extra mile, made an extra effort, did something especially noteworthy, or just work at an exemplary level each day. This year, we are continuing the tradition of acknowledging the contributions of our fellow employees. Remember, anyone may nominate anyone, regardless of grade level. Administrator's Awards are given for the following categories:

1. **Distinguished and Superior Individual Awards** are for employees who make extra effort to fulfill GIPSA's mission.
2. **Distinguished and Superior Group Awards** for those teams of GIPSA employees that have come together to meet an Agency need.
3. **EEO/Civil Rights Awards** recognize an individual(s) who contributes to ensuring that GIPSA is free from prejudice and discrimination.
4. **Safety Awards** are for individual(s) who have helped make our work environment safer and healthier.
5. **GIPSA Support Awards** recognize a non-GIPSA employee who has provided direction or support that has furthered GIPSA's effectiveness.

The deadline for submitting your nomination is **September 19, 2008** (nominations must be "postmarked" by this date and can be sent via U.S. post office, fax, or e-mail).

Mail nominations to:
Incentive Awards Committee
Office of the Administrator
USDA/GIPSA
STOP 3611
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-3611

Fax your nomination to:
202-720-4628

E-mail your nomination to:
Ruth.Ortiz@udsa.gov

For a sample nomination, please see attachment 2-B of GIPSA Directive 4451.1, "Employee Recognition Program". Please address the selection criteria for Distinguished and Superior Individual Awards, EEO/Civil Rights Awards, and Safety Awards in Section 3.6 (2) of the Directive. If you have questions about the program, please contact the co-chairs of our awards committee: **Ruth Ortiz**, 202-720-6719; or **Monica Alexander**, 202-720-7045.

After a dozen years, we may become complacent and take exceptional contributions for granted. Please don't! People are what make GIPSA the productive, successful organization it is today. Please take the time to look around and use the Administrator's Awards to recognize those who play a vital role in our success.

I look forward to seeing this year's nominations!

From the Deputy Administrator, from page 1.

Also, when visiting with our staff in Washington, DC, and around the country, it became clear to me that we must be prepared for a transition in our workforce. As you well know, many of our team members have been with the Program since the 1970s, which means that they are eligible to retire. In fact, 47 percent of our FGIS staff is either eligible to retire today or will be eligible within the next 5 years. A priority for me and the management team is to ensure that we have a workable succession plan in place to ensure that during the vital transition period for our Program that we maintain our high level of service. I will work with all managers to create opportunities for our staff to gain the necessary skills and abilities to seamlessly fill positions that become available. There is not a more critical issue facing FGIS than the retirement of a significant portion of our workforce.

I will point out that while this is a challenge for our Program, it is certainly an opportunity for team members to move into positions of greater responsibility. I encourage each of you to discuss with your supervisor as

to how you can best prepare yourself for these opportunities. We must successfully navigate this challenge for the continued success of our Program.

The export facilities were very complimentary of our current services. They, like any businesses, remain focused on reducing costs and increasing revenue. Consequently, there is a constant push by our industry customers for us to provide faster service at lower costs. I encourage each of you to continue to provide the high level of service for which we are known around the world.

In early September, **Mr. Link, John Giler, John Sharpe, Bob Krouse,** and **I** will meet with the Board of Directors of the American Association of Grain Inspection and Weighing Agencies (AAGIWA) in Kansas City. This meeting will be an excellent opportunity for us to discuss current issues, and to meet with these critical partners as we make plans for the upcoming year.

Also, later this fall, **Administrator Link, John Giler,** and **I** plan to visit many of our other field offices around the country, as well as our industry customers and

other stakeholders. I very much look forward to this opportunity to meet more of our FGIS team members.

I would be remiss if I failed to thank all of you for your generous hospitality during my first few weeks on the team. There is not enough time or space within this newsletter to list each of you who have been so kind. At each and every office, from Washington, DC, to Kansas City and from Louisiana to Texas, I have been overwhelmed by your kindness and the warm reception that you have given me. Thank you very much.

Before, I close I want to encourage each of you to feel free to contact me regarding any issues or concerns that you may have. I can be reached by e-mail at randall.jones@usda.gov, or by telephone at 202-720-9170. Or if you prefer, you may use my confidential e-mail address at <http://dcweb2/FGISConfidential/>. You can rest assured that I will personally respond to each of your inquiries.

Let's all work together to make FGIS a strong organization, a great place to work, and a program that continues to be known as the USDA agency that helps the U.S. grain industry – from farmer to exporter – successfully market America's grain both home and abroad.



Randall Jones, Sharon Lathrop and Luke Shokere discuss commodity testing at the Technical Center in Kansas City.



Tandace Scholdberg and Daishia Nelson, Technical Services Division, explain biotech testing to Randall Jones.

Personnel Notes

Monica Alexander, Washington, DC

Excused Absence for Active Military Service. The HRDG 4630 is being updated to reflect OPM's latest guidance on excused absence after returning from a deployment. Previous guidance stated that employees were eligible for 5 days of excused absence one time, regardless of the number of deployments. To further support our heroes, OPM has now changed that guidance to indicate that the 5 days is to be granted upon an employee's return from each deployment. The HRDG update is at: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/4630/4630sdsf.shtml#return

Use/Lose Annual Leave. The 2008 Annual Use/Lose Reminder is on the web at:

- http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/pay_leave_tod/pay_leave_tod_news.shtml
- <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/index.shtml>
- Actual document address: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/pay_leave_tod/downloads/2008Use_Lose_Leave_Ltr.pdf

For the 2008 leave year, all use/lose must be scheduled, in writing, by the end of pay period 23 (November 22, 2008). The authority to restore leave for operational emergencies (exigencies of the public business) has been delegated to programs. Requests for restorations for all other reasons must be submitted to the acting assistant human relations officer Paula Bailey-Johnson. Guidance on the restoration process is found at: http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/tod_self_study/use_lose.shtml#whatis.

LincPass Updates. GIPSA employees are making progress in enrolling in the new HSPD-12 Program! As of August 21, 100% of our employees were sponsored, meaning they will receive an e-mail notification to enroll. Of the 782 employees on our roster, 303 (39%) of our employees are enrolled. Many employees are taking advantage of mobile enrollment stations in their local area. These employees will receive and activate their LincPass later in the year.

All employees or the employees' local office have been issued LincPass card holders that are to be used exclusively for holding the LincPass. The holder contains a metal backing that protects the card from improper scanning and potential demagnetization. Employees are required to use the holder to protect the LincPass.

Effective August 2008, the MRP Personnel Security Office offers an HSPD-12 HelpDesk for GIPSA employees that may need assistance in checking the status of their cards, locating an enrollment station, and addressing general questions regarding HSPD-12. Employees are encouraged to consult with their administrative office first before using the HSPD-12 HelpDesk, since the Agency may have a resolution to their issue. The HelpDesk is open from 8:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. (Central time) Monday through Friday at 612-336-3430 or 3431.

Wooden Selected for Executive Leadership Program



Mark Wooden

Mark Wooden, Compliance Division, Kansas City, has been selected to participate in the USDA Graduate School's Executive

Leadership Program (ELP). His selection for the program is reflective of his excellent skills and abilities and potential as a leader.

The ELP is a 9-month program for full-time permanent GS-11/12/13 employees who have demonstrated significant leadership potential with minimal supervisory experience. The ELP prepares high-potential employees for a career in Federal leadership or management.

Congratulations, **Mark!**

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

ACG Training Program

On August 6-7, 2008, members of GIPSA's headquarters' staff provided training at the New Orleans Field Office to 20 new agricultural commodity graders (ACG) from the New Orleans, League City, and Toledo field offices.

The 2-day session was part of ongoing training to prepare employees for the mission critical ACG occupation category.

Headquarters presenters were **John Sharpe, Bob Lijewski, Marianne Plaus, Larry Freese, Ed Durgin, and Rosemary Mayne**. Components of the training included the History of FGIS and GIPSA, Laws and Regulations, Grain Handling Practices, the Purpose of Standards, the Role of the Certificate, Overview of Grain Markets, Customer Service, and the Statistics of Sampling and Inspection.

Evaluation scores rated the training as "Excellent"!



ACG Training Program: (back row, left to right): Andrew Greenfield, Kerwin Lee, Robert Dorman, Kirk Lessassier, Henry Jordan, Rufus Dundy, Myron Emanuel, Darrel Washington, Aaron Williams, Joseph Russelburg, Kennedy Green, Arthur Williams, Gilbert Knight, Niles Ree, Leon Ross, Lewis Newman, and Allen Duplechin; and (front row, left to right) Joann Perriloux, Jennifer Hill, Kathleen Celestine, Lisa Williams, Mary Vial, and Hannelore Voilmer.

Wichita Field Office Closing

The Wichita, Kansas, field office and the Kansas City, Missouri, duty point will officially close effective October 1, 2008. GIPSA plans to streamline and centralize many oversight activities to the FGIS National Grain Center (aka the Technical Center) in Kansas City, Missouri.

Centralization of oversight activities has been made possible by the development of a new web-based enterprise-wide information management system. The system streamlines GIPSA internal operations and provides GIPSA-authorized State and private entities direct access to mission critical information.

During the past 2 years, as GIPSA deployed new web-based applications, re-engineered business processes, and prepared to streamline and centralize oversight operations, staffing in the Wichita duty point was allowed to decline through attrition.

Our Own Published Author!



Fannie Webb, agricultural commodity technician, New Orleans, has realized her dream of becoming a published book author.

Fannie's new book is "Always Thinking," a collection of poems and short stories. She also has several poems published in the Library of Congress' Book of Anthology.

Fannie first joined GIPSA as an intermittent employee in September 2006. She loves to write in her spare time and is already working on her second book. She would like to thank everyone who has shown her support and encouragement!

To find **Fannie's** book, go to www.Xlibris.com and search for "Always Thinking" (book ID #47114) by **Fannie J. Robinson-Webb**.

Travel Bits & Pieces

Monica Alexander, Washington, DC

Airline Baggage Fees. Effective May 5, 2008, several domestic airlines implemented new checked baggage fees that the GSA city pair tickets purchased by the Agency may not cover. Since this time, some major airlines decided to charge baggage fees for all checked luggage. Government travelers will likely have to pay this amount as well. Payment of baggage fees is authorized by DM2300-001, Agriculture Travel Regulation, section 9.0, "Miscellaneous Expenses," if the approving official deems them appropriate. Travelers, travel preparers, and approving officials should be prepared for the increase in costs to the travel, as appropriate. The Department recommends that approving officials be reasonable in their determinations of appropriate. The chart below explains fees for participating airlines. Fees are subject to change or increase when travel commences. Please adhere to airline rules when traveling.

| Airline | 1st Bag Fee (Each Way) | 2nd Bag Fee (Each Way) | Effective Date | Exemptions (Check Website for a Complete List) | Applicable Area |
|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| <u>Air Canada</u> | N/A | \$25 | May 15, 2008 | Elite Frequent Flyers, Latitude and Executive Class tickets | Domestic Canada, U.S. |
| <u>Air Iran</u> | N/A | \$10 online check-in or \$20 airport check-in Note: fee will increase to \$25 on 9/18/08 | 5/15/08 – 9/17/08 New fee will take effect on 9/18/08 for tickets issued on or after 8/14/08 | n/a | Systemwide |
| <u>Alaska</u> | N/A | \$25 | For tickets purchased on or after 05/01/08 for travel on or after 07/01/08 | Elite Frequent Flyers, First Class Tickets, travel within Alaska, travel to/from Guadajajara or Mexico City | Domestic U.S. |
| <u>American</u> | \$15 | \$25 | 2nd bag fee eff. 5/12/08 1st bag fee eff. 6/15/08 | Elite Frequent Flyers, Full Fare Economy, Business and First Class Tickets | U.S., Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Canada |
| <u>Continental</u> | N/A | \$25 | May 5, 2008 | Elite Frequent Flyers, Presidential and First/Business First Tickets | U.S., Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Canada |
| <u>Delta</u> | N/A | \$50 | For tickets purchased on or after 7/31/08 for travel on or after 8/5/08. For tickets purchased prior to 7/31/08, 2nd bag fee is \$25 | Elite Frequent Flyers and First/Business Class Tickets | Domestic, Including U.S |
| <u>Frontier</u> | N/A | \$25 | June 10, 2008 | Elite Frequent Flyers and First/Business Class tickets | Systemwide |
| <u>JetBlue</u> | N/A | \$20 | June 1, 2008 | n/a | Systemwide |
| <u>Northwest</u> | \$15 | \$25 | 2nd bag fee effective 8/5/08 1st bag fee effective 8/28/08 | Elite Frequent Flyers, Full Fare, First Class Tickets | U.S., Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean |
| <u>Spirit</u> | \$15 online check-in or \$25 airport check-in | \$25 online or airport check-in | June 10, 2008 | n/a | Systemwide |
| <u>Southwest</u> | No fee | No fee | n/a | n/a | Systemwide |
| <u>United</u> | \$15 | \$25 | 2nd bag fee effective 5/5/08 1st bag fee effective 8/18/08 | Elite Frequent Flyers, International Tickets (except Canada) | U.S. and Canada, Puerto Rico and St. Thomas |
| <u>US Airways</u> | \$15 | \$25 | 2nd bag fee effective 5/5/08 1st bag fee effective 7/9/08 | Elite Frequent Flyers, First and Business Class Tickets | U.S. to or from Canada, Latin America, the Caribbean |

Procedures for Creating FY 2009 Travel Authorizations. For travel booked in FY 2008 that occurs in FY 2009:

- Use FY 2008 accounting codes to book and create an authorization in the current year for a trip to be taken in the subsequent year.
- GovTrip will allow the trip to be booked, approved, and taken. Traveler must get the document approved so that any reservations can be booked through the TMC, if applicable.
- GovTrip will not allow a financial record (obligation) to be created and sent to FFIS at the time of approval, and will REJECT the record in GovTrip because of an edit in the system that will not allow current year accounting and future fiscal year trip dates to occur.
- After the trip is completed in FY 2009 and the traveler attempts to voucher for reimbursement of the trip, GovTrip will require the traveler to AMEND the authorization in GovTrip by changing the accounting codes to FY 2009.
- Traveler should SIGN the document, and obtain APPROVAL again.
- Upon approval of the document, GovTrip will allow the traveler to prepare a VOUCHER for the trip.

Continued, Travel on page 9.

Travel, from page 8.

Procedures for Creating Travel Authorizations that Cross Fiscal Years. For travel trips that cross fiscal years (FY 2008 and FY 2009):

- GovTrip will require the traveler to select current year accounting codes when booking and creating the authorization in the current year.
- GovTrip will process a financial obligation record to FFIS when the trip has been approved.
- When **vouchering** for that trip in the subsequent year (FY 2009), the traveler **must distribute** the travel expenses based on the number of days in each fiscal year that the trip occurred. For example, travel occurring September 29-October 3 should be distributed as September 29 and 30 (FY 2008) and October 1-3 (FY 2009).

New GIPSA GovTrip HelpDesk Procedures and Contact Information. To provide efficient GovTrip assistance, the GIPSA Management Support Staff (MSS) has implemented a new GIPSA GovTrip HelpDesk. The HelpDesk will allow MSS to better manage resources, provide organized and efficient services to customers, and track the type of issue and workload associated with GovTrip problems. Effective immediately, Travelers and Administrative Points of Contacts should use one of the following options when requesting GovTrip assistance:

1. Go to *inGIPSA* and input a HelpDesk Ticket, by choosing GovTrip topic that is most closely related to their issue, or
2. Call 202-720-1033

Customers should expect most issues to be addressed within 24 hours, however some issues may require further research, which may take as much as 3 days. In rare occasions, some matters may take more than one week. The HelpDesk is available from 7:30 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. (Eastern time), Monday through Friday.

We look forward to providing you with efficient and courteous service!

New Travel Card Program-SmartPay2. USDA will implement a new travel card program called SmartPay2 between October 1 and November 30, 2008. The U.S. Bank will become the new government travel card vendor, replacing Bank of America. The Department anticipates a seamless transition and the Agency has already started the crossover process. Employees are encouraged to be familiar with how they will be impacted by the transition:

- All current travel card holders will be issued new cards automatically during this timeframe and will not need to reapply.
- Employees that do not currently have a government travel credit card will not be issued a card. However, if the employee plans to travel during the first quarter of FY2009, they should apply immediately.
- Employees that held government travel cards, but were revoked, due to misuse or delinquency will not be reinstated at the present time. USDA is working on a reinstatement policy and process that will be issued in the near future. Affected employees will continue to travel using the current procedures until further notice.
- All card holders will have to complete bank-issued travel card training before the card is activated. USDA and U.S. Bank will issue the training to the Agency in September or shortly thereafter. The training will educate employees about their responsibilities as a card holder. Employees who do not complete the training will not be able to activate their card.

IT Tidbit

Angela Emrich, Washington, DC

The Network Telecom Branch (NTB) has been busy this year working to reduce telecommunications costs. These cost savings have been found by identifying and disconnecting unused phone lines, features, and wireless devices; reviewing telephone bills for errors; updating service plans on wireless devices; and, most importantly, consolidating our wireless accounts to take advantage of shared-minute plans. All of this detective work has saved our agency almost \$4,000 in one-time credits and refunds and a whopping \$84,000 in yearly savings.

If you're wondering how you can help, follow these simple rules:

-  Report unused phone lines and wireless devices to NTB.
-  Dial mobile-to-mobile within your wireless carrier whenever possible.
-  Don't dial 411 for directory assistance – use the internet to look up a number or use a free service such as 800-FREE411 or 800-GOOG411.
-  Follow the Employee Exit Checklist to ensure that phone lines and devices are disconnected when an employee leaves the Agency.
-  Remember your desk and wireless phones are not your personal lines. They can be used for limited personal use; however, use your personal calling card or personal wireless device for long distance when making personal calls.
-  Don't go around the system – using features such as *69, dialing long distance access codes, or any other feature you might see advertised on TV leads to unnecessary costs. Also, don't accept offers from telemarketers that offer to add the charge to your phone bill.

We will continue to look for savings and, with your help, we can save even more!

Employee Assistance Program

Call for confidential help.

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

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

National Grain Center Update

This month at the National Grain Center... the steel arrived and the addition to the existing Technical Center building is going up!





TSD Team Wins “Software Shootout”

Dave Funk, Technical Center

Technical Services Division (TSD) scientists **Cathy Brenner, Rich Pierce,** and I participated in the “Software Shootout” event at the International Diffuse Reflectance Conference (IDRC) in Chambersburg, PA, on August 6, 2008. The IDRC is a top conference for scientists dealing with Near-infrared Spectroscopy (NIR). It is held every 2 years at a small college in south-central Pennsylvania and draws scientists from many countries. Twenty nations were represented at this year’s conference.

The participants in the Software Shootout competition were expert NIR calibration developers who attempted to create the best possible statistical calibrations for a predefined set of NIR data. This year’s dataset was of particular interest to GIPSA because the goal was to develop the best possible calibrations for several wheat functionality parameters. **Phil Williams,** a retired scientist from the Canadian Grain Commission, contributed the dataset.

The TSD scientists and the other 7 contestants (from 4 countries) applied a great diversity of chemometric (chemistry + statistics) methods to “go for the gold.” The methods included mind-numbing names such as Partial Least Squares Regression, Principal Component Regression, Multiple Linear Regression, Artificial Neural Networks, Derivatives, Multiplicative Scatter Correction, Standardized Normal Variate, Support Vector Machines, and Ratios of Second Derivatives.

Each contestant had 15 minutes to explain their calibration strategies, give their calibration statistics in a standardized format, and describe what they had learned in the process. TSD’s presentation was built around the theme of “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly,” referring to wheat protein, Farinograph water absorption, and four other parameters (test weight, particle size index, Farinograph development time, and Farinograph mixing tolerance index), respectively.

The anonymous panel of judges rated TSD’s calibration results and explanations the best! The winners were announced at the final conference banquet on August 7, 2008.

Idea Hotline Update

*Norma Phelps
Washington, DC*

Here is the idea received on the GIPSA Idea Hotline during August 2008. If you have questions about any ideas or the Hotline, please call me at 202-720-1017.

Idea Received During August 2008

Gretchen VanWalbeek
Des Moines

- Improving annual report compliance of market agencies selling on commission and tariff

Keep those ideas coming in! Send your ideas to the GIPSA Idea Hotline via e-mail: gipsa-ideas@gipsadc.usda.gov; FAX to 202-720-1015; or telephone 800-455-3447 or 202-720-1013. **We encourage you to send ideas via fax or e-mail to reduce the possibility of transcription errors; however, ideas will be accepted regardless of the method you choose to use.**

For Your Health

Mavis Rogers, Washington, DC

10 Superfoods That Should Be in Your Daily Diet.



- ❶ **Garlic.** This is a powerful organosulfate that is important in detoxification. It will help clean your body of leftover chemical residue from drugs or pollutants, secondhand smoke and metabolites from alcohol.
- ❷ **Tofu.** This is made from soybeans, which have all the benefits of other beans, including stabilizing blood sugar levels to prevent diabetes. Try stir-frying it.
- ❸ **Mushrooms.** Maitake and shitake mushrooms are among the best sources of beta-glucan, which is known to stimulate the immune system. They also contain the protein lectin, which hinders cancer cells growth.
- ❹ **Blueberries.** These have an extraordinary amount of antioxidants, but many people are surprised to learn that one of their compounds, flavonoids, makes you smarter by boosting neuron signals in your brain. Look for wild varieties, which pack more antioxidants.
- ❺ **Kale.** This is possibly the healthiest food on earth. Kale is rich in isothiocyanates, a phytochemical that suppresses tumor growth. Kale also contains indoles, nitrogen compounds that prevent lesions from converting to cancer cells.
- ❻ **Flaxseed.** In addition to omega-3 fatty acids, flaxseed contains lignans, which are antioxidants that suppress tumor growth. If you cannot find flaxseed cracked, buy it whole, grind it, and sprinkle a teaspoon over cereal.
- ❼ **Beans.** Like other legumes, kidney and garbanzo beans are high in saponins, which are compounds that shield your DNA from invasion by so-called free radicals — unstable atoms that damage tissue and are associated with cancer.
- ❽ **Carrots.** Besides beta carotene—which helps prevent many types of cancer—carrots contain falcarinol, a chemical that slows the growth of cancer cells.
- ❾ **Tomatoes.** These are loaded with lycopene (an important phytochemical with antioxidant properties) and glutamic acid (an amino acid) which work together to prevent prostate cancer. Shop for organic varieties with a deep red color at your local farmers market.
- ❿ **Strawberries.** If you do a lot of grilling, eat strawberries. They are high in folic acids that scavenge the carcinogenic amines that are created when meat is cooked over high temperatures. They are one of the most important foods to buy organic, because they have a unique capacity for leaching pesticides.

Courtesy: MSN Health and Fitness

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 September 25, 2008!

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