



GIPSA News

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

October 1998

From My Desk

Jim R. Baker

On September 21, 1998, I visited Alcorn State University in Mississippi with **Eugene Bass**. We were hosted by **Mr. Clifton Peters**, the USDA liaison to Alcorn.

The university is located 40 miles south of Vicksburg and 40 miles from Natchez — there is no city nearby, but there is a strong rural community that provides strong support for this University. Alcorn is the Nation’s oldest Black Land Grant institution. The school hosts a Swine Center of Excellence and the Mississippi River Research Center. We visited with President Bristow and many of the agricultural professors. Pride and achievement were evident on everyone’s part.

I personally wanted to learn more about the Ag Hope program and the students involved it. The primary objective of Ag Hope (Agriculture — Helps Our People Earn) is to recruit students in the food and agriculture sciences. It is hoped that students working and studying as participants in Ag Hope will acquire a greater appreciation for the food and agricultural sciences, and take advantage of the many career opportunities available in these fields of study. To be eligible, high school students must be juniors or seniors by February 1 of the current school year and exhibit above average academic performance. The 6-week study program begins in June and ends in July of each year. This marks the sixth year of the Ag Hope Program and it is continuing to reach its recruitment goals.

I visited with twelve college students who enrolled at Alcorn thanks to their involvement with Ag Hope. They enrolled in Ag Hope in high school, and then spent six weeks learning about agriculture and what it means to this country. Many said that they had no interest in agriculture prior to being in the program. Now they want to have careers in the agriculture-related fields.

I am so proud that GIPSA supports this important program and hope that we can do more. I wish that all dollars we invest in youth had such a positive return.

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Names in the News

Personnel

The International Monitoring Staff (IMS) is pleased to announce that **Ellie Speelman** and **Ed Durgin** (Portland Field Office) have accepted the two Grain Marketing Specialist positions recently announced for IMS. We heartily congratulate them both!

Ken Critchfield was selected to be the manager of the Wichita Field Office. **Ken** assumed his new duties on September 13, 1998. **Ron Cates** will become the new manager of the League City Field Office effective October 25, 1998.

Effective October 1, 1998, **Daniel Van Ackeren** was reassigned as the Director, Office of Field Operations, and **Michael Caughlin** has been reassigned as Director, Office of Policy/Litigation Support.

Many thanks from the Compliance Division's Review Branch to the following people who have assisted us with conducting these recent onsite compliance reviews: **Donnell Keith**, ACG, Portland, **Joe Hearn**, QAS, League City, and **Dave Skallerud**, ACG, Cedar Rapids, for the review of the State of Missouri; and **Chuck Britton**, QAS, California Federal/State Office, **Jim Tullous**, Assistant FOM, Grand Forks, and **Ken Weaver**, Assistant FOM, Kansas City, for the review of four official agencies in the Cedar Rapids circuit.

Condolences

Jack Brannigan, a retired auditor, died on May 8, 1998. He began his career with P&S in Chicago and had been in Washington, DC, office for 20 years before retiring to Sheboygan, WI, with his wife, **Catherine**.

Awards

Carla Cambre, Erin Dubroc, Rose Fremin, Amelia Gautreau, Angela Marine, and Joanne Matherne, New Orleans, received extra effort awards for continuing excellence in the performance of duties as members of the New Orleans Field Office clerical team.

Roy Hughes, Wichita, received a cash award for the demanding task of standardizing all of the NIRT instruments in the Wichita circuit. Roy traveled frequently and worked long, irregular hours to minimize disruption to the agencies.

James McLaurin, Terrell Bailey, and Gary Holmes, New Orleans, received extra effort awards for continuing excellence in the performance of duties in the equipment program.

Stephen Michel, New Orleans, received an extra effort award for exceptional performance, dedication, and effort in the creation, revision, and upgrading of the Standard Operating Procedure manuals for Automated Weights Systems in the New Orleans Field Office.

20-Year Service Award

Tess Butler, Washington, DC

10-Year Service Award

Marianne Plaus, Washington, DC

Correction #2: In the September newsletter, we stated that Joanne Peterson was the first GIPSA employee to receive Vice President Gore's Hammer Award for her work on the Federal Blue Pages in 1996, and that Amy Van Skiver was our second recipient. Well, actually, Lynn Burnette, Washington, also received a Hammer Award in 1996 for his work on the Blue Pages.

Get Ready for the Administrator's Awards

Jim R. Baker

Now is the time to get your nominations together for the Third Annual Administrator's Awards.

These awards are presented to GIPSA employees in recognition of outstanding contributions to the mission of the agency. They are special because they are given by GIPSA folks to GIPSA folks. Anyone may nominate anyone.

The Administrator's Awards include the Distinguished Award, Superior Award, Equal Employment Opportunity/Civil Rights Award, and Safety Award.

If you can think of a person, or a group of people, who have made extra efforts to recruit underrepresented groups; participated in volunteer activities related to affirmative action or civil rights; given special assistance in training activities; provided significant leadership or supervision in support of affirmative action or civil rights; contributed to the safety and health of others; or whose noteworthy career is an example to others — nominate them for this award!

I encourage each of you to take the time to nominate someone or a group of GIPSA employees for any or all of the Administrator's Awards. This is an informal process. You can use a nomination form or you can just jot down your reasons for nominating someone on a piece of paper.

Send in your nominations to me by November 1, 1998! I'm looking forward to presenting my awards to deserving members of the GIPSA team.

Nomination Information

Nomination forms for the Administrator's Awards are available from your supervisor or you may submit your nomination on plain paper. Instructions on submitting nominations are in GIPSA Directive 4451.1, "Incentive Awards Program," dated 7/29/96.

Mail your nominations to:

Incentive Awards Committee
Office of the Administrator
USDA, GIPSA
STOP 3601
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-3601

Nominations for the Third Annual Administrator's Awards
must be postmarked by:

November 1, 1998.

On-Line Elevator

Nelson Buck, Washington, DC

I recently designed a series of web pages entitled "Introduction to Grain Elevators" to show demonstrations of the operation and testing of bulk-weighting scales and the operation and testing of gate limit switches.

These pages are now posted on GIPSA's home page. To find the pages, look under FGIS Programs and Services/New Inspection Methods and Instrumentation:

<http://www.usda.gov/gipsa/progser/vrml/intro.htm>

You can also reach the information from the Latest Additions page on the GIPSA web site.

The pages I developed include working three-dimensional models of a shipping bin and diversion gate, including one with miswired limit switches which you can test on-line. Viewing the 3-D models requires a Virtual Reality Modeling Language (VRML) browser (such as Cosmo Player), which can be downloaded free by following a link from the first page of the series. These VRML browsers require a Pentium processor and Windows 95.

Disability

Awareness

Month



October 1998

Travel Bits & Pieces

Peggy Smith, Washington, DC

Mileage Increase. Effective September 8, 1998, the mileage reimbursement rates for advantageous use of a privately owned vehicle (POV) on official travel has been increased. Mileage for use of a privately-owned

airplane has increased from 85 to 88 cents per mile, the use of a privately-owned automobile from 31 to 32.5 cents per mile, and the cost of a privately-owned motorcycle from 25 to 26 cents per mile.

VISA Card Update. Nation's Bank is working furiously to get current cardholders transferred from American Express by December 1. Current American Express cardholders will receive new cards as their old ones expire even if they will only use them for a short period of time. The new expiration dates will be set as if the contract with American Express was not expiring. Despite an expiration date on the card of a time past November 30, 1998, the cards will deactivate at 11:59 p.m. on November 30.

Electronic Ticketing. More and more airlines are using E-tickets due to ease and efficiency. With an e-ticket, you still receive all of the same airline and airport services that you are accustomed to with a paper ticket. All you need is a photo ID to obtain your boarding pass and since your ticket is stored electronically, there's nothing to lose or nothing to forget. A receipt for your ticket is mailed several days after your ticket is issued. Simply treat this receipt in the same way you would treat a paper ticket receipt.

Telephone Calls. Just a reminder that while on official travel, travelers are allowed one personal phone call home per day to speak to members of the immediate family (spouse, minor children, and anyone sharing the same residence with the employee), with an aggregate amount not to exceed \$5 per lodging night.

*Continued, see **Travel**
on page 7.*

September 4, 1998

TO: James R. Baker
Administrator
Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration

FROM: Keith Kelly
Administrator
Farm Service Agency

SUBJECT: Vessel Loading Observation Procedure (VLOP)

I commend your agency's cooperative efforts to ensure that only clean, sound, and damage-free food commodities are loaded onto steamship vessels for shipment overseas under foreign food assistance programs administered by the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) and the Agency for International Development (AID). Specifically, your field personnel under the VLOP continue to monitor the loading of blended and fortified food commodities packaged in multiwall paper bags since August 1994. As expected, the VLOP has greatly improved CCC's efforts in establishing accountability for damaged bags/commodities, and most importantly, has reduced the number of damaged bags/commodities being delivered to needy recipients overseas. ... Because of your field personnel's diligence working under the VLOP, the damaged bags/commodities [are] not loaded onto vessels.

Based on evaluations, combined with comments provided by AID, private voluntary organizations, and other interested parties, this office has decided to expand the VLOP to include all food commodities loaded onto all conveyances. We also are taking necessary steps, including the implementation of inspection procedures, to ensure that U.S. ports and port warehouses are clean and infestation free. These measures will further ensure that the Department of Agriculture provide only clean, safe, and sound commodities under these programs. We look forward to working with your office on these important quality initiatives.

Best Wishes to Jim Decker

Richard Pffor, Washington, DC

On September 24, 53 co-workers and guests, including Administrator **Jim Baker**, senior managers, and guests from Norfolk Southern Railroad and the Association of American Railroads (AAR), gathered at a farewell luncheon for **Jim Decker**, who retired after 20 years with FGIS/GIPSA.

During his career, **Jim** was instrumental in establishing GIPSA's Railroad Track Scale Testing Program.

Jim came to FGIS with broad experience in industrial weights and measures, including 5 years with Toledo Scale Company, 11 years with Hercules Power Company, where he was supervisor of their Weighing Department, and 6 years with State of Maryland as a weights and measures inspector.

He joined the Agency as a scales and weighing specialist in the Atlanta Regional Office. A year later, the regional offices were closed and **Jim** was selected to work in the newly-created Track Scale Testing Pro-

gram. Originally, **Jim's** home in Walkersville, MD, was his duty station, but it wasn't long before he transferred to Washington headquarters. Since then, **Jim** has spent all his time either working in or assisting in the development of the track scale program.

In 1980-81, **Jim** learned the AAR Master Scale Program, became a National Institute of Standards and Technology-certified metrologist, and put one of the two original track scale test cars in service. For the first few years, **Jim** tested all Master and official railroad track scales east of the Mississippi River.

Despite an Agency reorganization, the program continued to grow in size during the 1980's. During these years and into 1990, **Jim** traveled more than 75 percent of his time; some years it approached 80 percent.

By 1990, the program had grown so much that additional test equipment was needed. In 1992, a third

test car was purchased and **Jim** was instrumental in training a scale specialist in Chicago on the operation of the new car and the program.

In 1994, FGIS was selected by the Norfolk Southern Corporation to test their scales. **Jim** was instrumental in obtaining this contract which we have serviced ever since.

At this time, we decided to reorganize the Track Scale Program and make use of the scale specialists in the field to perform the testing in their area. **Jim** took on the entire responsibility of training our field specialists and an ACG out of the Stuttgart Field Office. Also during this time, we determined that two additional test cars were needed specifically to perform commercial scale testing.

Today, the Railroad Track Scale Testing Program operates 5 test cars throughout 48 states and is staffed by 7 scale specialists and 1 agricultural commodity grader. Last year, the program produced just short of one quarter million dollars in revenue.

Few people like **Jim** can look back on their career and know that they built a successful program that will long continue to serve our customers.

Jim was sent on his way with hearty thanks for his work on the track scale program and with our thanks for the credit he has been to USDA, the Agency, and the Weighing and Equipment Branch.

Best wishes to **Jim** and his beautiful wife, **Mary**, for a happy and long retirement.

September Issuances

Charlie Turner, Washington, DC

- ❑ PN98-19, "Revised Stowage Examination Procedures for Barges, and Rail," dated 9-1-98.
- ❑ PN98-20, "Licensing for Moisture Testing", dated 9-1-98
- ❑ PN98-21, "Dockage and Conspicuous Admixture Determination in Canola," dated 9-18-98.
- ❑ Aflatoxin Handbook (Issuance Change 2), Chapter 7, Afla-Cup Method," dated 9/27/98.



GIPSA Idea Hotline Update

Norma Phelps, Washington, DC



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

Suggestor

Suggestion

Jill Ainsworth, Indianapolis, IN
Tom Reagan, Beaumont, TX

Process Awards in Separate checks In Lieu Of Salary Checks
Stress GIPSA's Commitment to Food Safety,
Along With Other USDA Agencies

Amy R. Van Skiver, Atlanta, GA
Dawn Cowan, Washington, DC
Tom Reagan, Beaumont, TX

Translate Program Booklets Into Spanish
Provide Capability to Transmit T&A's From Personal Computers
Initiate a Food Drive to Help Hurricane Victims

September's tee-shirt winner: Amy Van Skiver, Atlanta, GA!

GIPSA Hotline Ideas Accepted and Approved for Implementation During September 1997

This list does not necessarily indicate that the idea was implemented as suggested or that it is currently in place (it could be in the development/implementation stage). To avoid the chance of misinterpretation, please call the Hotline if you have any concerns or questions regarding the following list of ideas.

No Ideas Were Implemented During September

Keep those ideas coming in! Send your ideas to the GIPSA Idea Hotline via GroupWise to GIPSAIDEA; HP Desk to Ideas; Internet to ideas@fgis.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.**

Stowage Exam Procedures Revised

John Giler, Washington, DC

If dependent minor children or dependent family members physically unable to stay alone are moved to a location away from the official duty station's immediate commuting area, authorized phone calls of a personal nature may be made to this alternate location.

For those who do not have immediate family at the official duty station, authorized phone calls are permitted to a nonfamily member within the employee's local duty station's immediate commuting area to notify him or her of the traveler's safe arrival and to check on the traveler's residence.

There is no specific daily allowance, however, the total amount that may be claimed is \$5 times the number of lodging nights.

On September 1, 1998, GIPSA published a program notice [FGIS-PN-98-19] announcing changes to the stowage examination procedures for barges and rail cars. Specifically, these changes allow barge checks from the deck and allow additional residual cargo in rail cars.

To some, these changes may be viewed as a loosening of our standards. However, these changes were needed to fit the needs of the current grain market. These issues were introduced for discussion as safety concerns and as common sense approaches to inspection.

Several official agencies voiced concern the safety of climbing down an extension ladder to check a barge. Further, many grain companies prohibit their employees from entering barges. Some official agencies indicated a potential loss of their barge business because their customers avoided official samples as a means to avoid the liability for onsite injuries. For rail situations, a common sense tolerance for residual cargo was suggested to improve car loading efficiency and eliminate unnecessary cleaning of carriers. It was clear something was needed to keep the inspection program relevant in today's market.

The need for change was discussed in a joint meeting with the National Grain and Feed Association (NGFA) and the North American Export Grain Association (NAEGA). These associations were targeted for input because NGFA primarily represents interior market grain handlers while NAEGA represents grain export companies. Bringing these two groups together provided an opportunity to concurrently discuss inspection needs of barge/rail shippers [NGFA] and the inspection needs of barge/rail receivers [NAEGA]. Acceptable changes were suggested for immediate implementation after the industry discussions.

Many times we question how the grain market will accept our procedural changes. These changes appear to be good based on the unsolicited comments received from the grain industry. These commenters complimented GIPSA on taking the initiative to incorporate good common sense in their inspection procedures. In fact, they hope more of this will happen in the future.



1999 Holidays

New Year's Day 1999	Friday, January 1
Martin Luther King's Birthday	Monday, January 18
Washington's Birthday	Monday, February 15
Memorial Day	Monday, May 31
Independence Day	Monday, July 5
Labor Day	Monday, September 6
Columbus Day	Monday, October 11
Veterans Day	Thursday, November 11
Thanksgiving	Thursday, November 25
Christmas	Friday, December 24
New Year's Day 2000	Friday, December 31

Use or Lose Annual Leave

Peggy Smith, Washington, DC

It's that time of year to begin thinking about your annual leave ceiling. Annual leave which exceeds personal annual leave ceilings at the end of the leave year could be lost if not used. For most employees, the maximum amount of annual leave that may be carried over from one leave year to the next is 240 hours. For certain other employees, the maximum carryover is 360 hours. With some exceptions, members of the Senior Executive Service are entitled to a maximum carryover of 720 hours.

Before forfeited annual leave may be considered for restoration, the following conditions must be met:

1. The leave must be requested in

writing and approved in writing no later than 3 pay periods prior to the end of the leave year. In leave year 1998, this cut off date is the end of pay period 23, November 21, 1998;

2. The prescheduled and approved leave was canceled in writing by the supervisor with the approval of a higher level official;
3. Cancellation of the preapproved leave was based on an emergency, unusual operational demands, or other exigencies; or
4. The leave was forfeited due to personal illness or administrative error.

Annual leave forfeited under the above conditions may be restored at

the beginning of the new 1999 leave year and, generally, must be used by the end of the second leave year after restoration — leave restored in leave year 1999 must be used by the end of leave year 2000.

If you are projected to have annual leave that otherwise would be subject to forfeiture at the end of the leave year, you can donate it to the Leave Transfer Program. You may donate no more than the number of hours remaining in the leave year (as of the date you sign the leave donor form) for which you are scheduled to work and receive pay. If you wish to donate your leave, you must complete an AD-1043 and send it to APHIS Business Services-Minneapolis.

Civil Rights Corner

Raymond Jones, Washington, DC

The Agency recently entered into two very important agreements with the bargaining unit that should prove to be positive steps in meeting established Civil Rights goals in GIPSA.

The first agreement gave the green light to implementing an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Program. GIPSA employees are now authorized to use the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Conflict Prevention and Resolution (CPR) Program, which provides an opportunity for employees to resolve workplace conflicts at the earliest stage before they become adversarial and before they become EEO com-

plaints. The CPR Program uses mediation as an avenue for employees to resolve the conflict confidentially in an informal setting. Employees are encouraged to take advantage of this opportunity.

The Agency also entered into an agreement to conduct Reprisal Panels. Reprisal Panels address allegations of reprisal which have been raised through formal EEO complaints. The intent is to deal with allegations of reprisal early in the formal complaint process and to take appropriate action, if necessary, to correct any retaliation by supervisors and managers. The Reprisal Panel

policy was mandated by the Department through Personnel Bulletin Number 752-1 as a result of recommendations made by the Civil Rights Action Team.

The GIPSA Civil Rights Staff will coordinate all efforts in implementing both the CPR Program and the Reprisal Panels. All Employee memorandums giving details on information in this article will be forthcoming.

In the interim, if you require information or have questions on the CPR Program or Reprisal Panels, please call the Civil Rights Staff at (202) 720-0218.

Tomorrow's Leaders Dawn Today

Joseph Barney, Technical Center

"Tomorrow's Leaders Dawn Today" -- that's the vision statement for the working team I had the pleasure to be associated with during a period of professional and personal growth in 1998. In the fall of 1997, I saw an advertisement for a curriculum of leadership development known as "The New Leader Program" offered by the USDA Graduate School that looked interesting. The New Leader Program is geared toward developing the skills of new team leaders at Federal agencies. I applied and a short time later I was notified that I had been accepted into the January 1998 class. I was excited and proud that GIPSA and the Graduate School's Leadership Development Academy believed that I had the potential for growth in the 21st century.

When I got the full information packet, the program appeared daunting. It was a 7-month program with requirements including three 1-week classroom sessions in far away cities, a shadow assignment away from my department, a 6-week detail away from my office, several written reports covering these assignments as well as management literature reviews, and, looming in the distance, a 1-hour team presentation prior to graduation. I began to wonder what I had gotten myself into.

My apprehension was soon allayed. The first afternoon, I met the seven other members of Team 13. Very quickly, we gelled into a cohesive working team. We went through classes together, reviewed requirements together, socialized together, and formed a bond that would be our mutual support throughout the program.

The curriculum included classes on such topics as Self-Assessment (Myers Briggs), Problem Solving, Conflict Management, Diversity, and Learning Teams. The individual assignments were meant to complement the tenets put forth at the on-site classes. Through it all, Team 13 remained in contact with each other by fax, e-mail, and phone. The team support helped each individual maintain his/her proper pace and keep the team communication open for continuous, consistent progress toward development of the final team presentation.

Upon graduating from the program in August, I felt as though I had been provided with the opportunity to develop my competencies and strengthen my weaknesses. These achievements will give me the foundation to pursue my professional as well as personal goals of team leadership in the 21st century Federal workforce and growth in my family relationships. Graduating from the program does not end the process. The New Leader Program lays the foundation for and gives guidance to the continual personal development of one's capabilities. The bond of friendship that developed with the other members of Team 13 provides me with a support network and a lifetime of fond memories of seven wonderful people.

**Whatever the
problem,
we are here
to help you
find a solution...**

For confidential
assistance,
call your Employee
Assistance Program

Washington, DC
personnel --
call 301-570-3900

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

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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Washington, D.C. 20250-3601
Phone (202) 720-5091
FAX (202) 205-9237
Internet: dstewart@fgis.usda.gov

by October 26, 1998!

Q&As from the Marketing and Regulatory Programs Town Hall Meeting

Eugene Bass, Washington, DC

1. Why aren't managers and supervisors penalized and held accountable for their actions regarding discriminatory practices?

Managers and supervisors are held accountable for their actions and for making sound management decisions regarding the well-being of their employees. To date, GIPSA has not received an adverse EEOC decision or final agency decision where a manager/supervisor was found to have discriminated against a complainant.

2. Why don't we get notified when people are selected for promotions?

Personnel actions, including employees selected for promotions and reassignments at headquarters and field locations, are publicized in the GIPSA Newsletter. The newsletter also recognizes employees who receive awards for job-related activities. This information is published each month, GIPSA-wide for all employees.

3. When is GIPSA planning to include personnel, managerial, and financial skills background (academic or experience) into its selection criteria for supervisory personnel?

GIPSA realizes that successful supervisors require a variety of managerial skills ranging from competencies in program activities to interpersonal relations and administrative skills. Usually the primary skill needed by the first line supervisor is technical (job-related) followed by people skills. During their probationary period, supervisors receive 40 hours of supervisory training. As supervisors advance to the secondary supervisory levels, the emphasis shifts from technical to interpersonal relations and people skills. Supervisors promoted to secondary levels accumulate additional people and administrative skills through experience and training. Position descriptions and the vacancy announcements reflect these priorities in the selection process. In FY 1999, all GIPSA supervisors will receive refresher training on supervisory administrative and people skills, financial management, and building stronger employee relationships. In addition, GIPSA is implementing long-term systematic training for its supervisors to ensure that their interpersonal and administrative skills are maintained.

4. Can we have a program that allows cross-utilization among the three Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) agencies?

GIPSA has provided employees with opportunities to perform work assignments with other MRP agencies -- the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and the Agricultural Marketing Service. Recently, most temporary details have been to the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and were the result of inactive or slow periods of work at field locations. These details minimized the need to conduct RIFs and furloughs that negatively impact employees and their families. Also, details have been used quite extensively within GIPSA to provide opportunities for training and career development in other Agency divisions and branches. It is GIPSA's policy that there must be a need or request for employees to go on detail. Keeping with this policy, GIPSA will continue to use cross-utilization opportunities when possible to provide training and development opportunities for employees.

Continued, see Q&A on page 11.

Q&A, from page 10.

5. Why is there a disparity in grade levels between black females and white females in the Technical Services Division (TSD)? How can black females get ahead in the Agency?

Currently, the highest grade level held by a Black females at TSD is GS-7. Vacant positions at higher grade levels in TSD are not very frequent, and many of the positions with higher pay require experts, such as chemists, physicists, and engineers, who have specialized degrees and experience.

Training opportunities are, however, abundant at TSD and management is committed to helping employees schedule and attend requested or specialized training and still get their work done. The USA Careers Internet job development program has been taken very seriously at the Technical Center, and employees are starting to examine their own career options for moving ahead either in GIPSA or elsewhere.

All employees are encouraged to continuously examine available career enhancement opportunities, whether those opportunities are in GIPSA, in other government agencies, or in the private sector.

6. Why are the fees we charge to official agencies for oversight not being raised since we are raising fees in other programs to compensate for the Federal cost-of-living increase?

First, the fees for this program are not being raised because the program is financially sound. The FY 1995 consolidation of several offices reduced the overall obligations to this program, and allowed us to become more efficient at a reduced cost even as the number of inspections performed by official agencies has declined (2.4 million inspections in FY 95 versus 1.9 million in FY 97). The Agency had a \$56,381 positive margin in this account in FY 97, and retained earnings of over \$4 million in that trust fund. This year costs and revenue are running at about the same levels so a fee increase is not warranted.

The viability of field offices that perform oversight will be a function of workload performed by the official agencies they oversee, along with other advances in technology that allow us to do our work more efficiently. Official agencies are being tasked with assuming more responsibility for the work they perform. Field office personnel are being encouraged to serve as "coaches" in this new environment as official agency managers take on more responsibility. The new QA/QC program, along with other advances in computer applications, such as the Internet, will provide everyone in the official system with information to manage their respective programs. Even the adoption of the new moisture meter has made changes in how field offices interact with official agencies during the checktesting process.

All of this is not to say there is not a need for field offices whose role is to provide oversight to official agencies. There is a need, but how this oversight will be provided will be dictated by marketing trends and practices, and technology far more than fee increases.

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