



GIPSA News

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

December 1998

From My Desk

Jim R. Baker

This is a very special time of year for me. It is a great time to spend with family and loved ones and to remember the happenings of the past. I have a lot of memories, especially of the good things that happened this past year. It brings to a close another year and chapter in our lives.

This also is the time of the year when I review what I have done. Did I measure up to my expectations? I had a list of things to do this year. So far, I've gotten through sixty percent of them; I'll add the balance to next year's list. How did you do on your list?

During the past year, I attended a few retirement parties, listened to all of the good remarks made by people leaving, and wondered we all have to wait until someone retires for us and for the retirees to say positive things about careers and people they work with at this Agency. There is never a bad time to share a positive comments, and who wouldn't feel better hearing good words instead of reading or hearing negative ones. One person, on stepping down, said "I should be the one", meaning that instead of receiving the tribute, he should be honoring all of his coworkers for the support and opportunities they had given him over the past many years.

This has been a most challenging year for me and for many of you in this Agency. No one expected the collapse of the Asian market, the drop in export demand, and the effect it would have on commodity prices. When most of the people you talk to are losing money, it is difficult to keep a positive outlook. I do believe that we all have risen to the challenges, some higher than others, and I applaud you.

While I'm on the subject of applauding folks, I want to commend John Rollins and all at GIPSA for the successful Fall Food Drive. I especially commend the Jonesboro Suboffice and the extra efforts of Jimmy Cadle -- the suboffice collected over 1,200 pounds of food!

Action for the Month! Take a look at the community you live in and identify a person, family, or agency that you could help. Then put your commitment into action. Putting good into action is what everybody needs.

Have a great Holiday season and a prosperous New Year!!!

Outlook for '99

*Dave Shipman,
Washington, DC*

This time last year, we were confronted with the financial crisis in Asia and a subsequent decrease in grain exports. USDA's projection of an 11% increase in exports at the beginning of FY 1998 quickly turned into a prediction of no increase by February. At the end of FY 1998, exports were off 5% from FY 1997 levels and almost 19% from FY 1996. Our trust fund reserves were depleted and the prospective workload was anything but encouraging.

This year seems to be directly opposite from last year. We started the fiscal year in October with the Department projecting a slight increase of almost 2% in exports. We're now looking at an increase of over 5% versus last year, and it seems new events are occurring everyday that could increase the workload even more.

*Continued, see **Outlook**
on page 3.*

Names in the News

Personnel

Welcome to **Jackie Mouglin** and **Lora Goeke**, part-time office assistants, in the Des Moines office.

Congratulations to **Catherine Grasso**, P&S Office of Field Operations, who was promoted to an administrative program specialist, and to **Tanika Harris**, secretary, Economic/Statistical Support Staff, who also received a promotion.

Pam Lake was selected to be the new administrative officer in the Atlanta regional office.

Shelli Lopez was selected to fill the laboratory coordinator position in the Physical Properties Lab in the Technical Services Divisions' Inspection Systems Engineering.

Raymond Minks, Office of Policy/Litigation Support, was selected to participate in the 1999-2000 Executive Potential Program, a 12-month part-time program of manage-

rial and executive training and developmental experiences that the USDA Graduate School conducts for high-potential men and women to help them become optimally equipped for future opportunities as federal managers and executives.

Many thanks from the Compliance Division's Review Branch to the following field-based people who assisted us during December in conducting the onsite compliance review of Kansas Grain Inspection Service, Inc.: **Don Akers**, quality assurance specialist, Corpus Christi; **Bob Crook**, assistant manager, Cedar Rapids; **Mitch Doak**, agricultural commodity grader (ACG), Kansas City; **Dave Fulks**, shift supervisor, Portland; **Roy Lyon**, ACG, Wichita; **Eddie Roseberry**, ACG, Baltimore; and **Don Wray**, ACG, Portland. Also assisting on this review from Headquarters was **Bill Ashley**, Deputy Director, Executive Resources Staff.

Awards

Mark Dickson, Field Management Division (FMD), Washington, D.C., received an extra effort award for sustained superior performance contributing to the overall effectiveness of FMD as a member of the Automation and Program Services Branch (APSB) senior programming staff and team leader in support of the Y2K initiative.

Ray Hart, FMD, Washington, D.C., received an extra effort award for sustained superior performance contributing to the overall effectiveness of FMD as project leader and team member of the APSB office automation team in support of the Y2K initiative.

Mai Ho, FMD, Washington, D.C., received an extra effort award for sustained superior performance contributing to the overall effectiveness of FMD as a member of the APSB senior programming staff in support of the Y2K initiative.

Morris Johnson, FMD, Washington, D.C., received an extra effort award for sustained superior performance contributing to the overall effectiveness of FMD as a member of the APSB office automation team and the Agency's Telecommunications Mission Area Control Office in support of the Y2K initiative.

Retirements

Lynn Burnette, management analyst, Field Operations, will retire on January 2, 1999. After 33 years of service, **Lynn** says he is looking forward to doing a lot of traveling.

Mike Huff, assistant regional supervisor, Atlanta, will retire on January 2, 1999. He says he may take another job if the offer is *just* right. **Mike** has 34 years of service.

Angie Williams, auditor, Ft. Worth, will retire on January 2, 1999. **Angie** has 27 years of service and will be happy not to get up at 5:30 every morning. She plans to spend more time with her family and grandchildren.

In This Issue

Names in the News	2
Getting to Know	3
New Leader Program	4
Travel Bits & Pieces	4
Idea Hotline	5
Grain Advisory Committee	6
NQDB Expo	6
Reaching Out	7
Jonesboro Food Drive	8
1998 Annual Report	8
American Indian Heritage	9
Rice Fee Increase Proposed..	9
Avoiding Sample Rage	10
In Closing by Jim Baker	10

Continued, see Names on page 8.

Outlook, from page 1.

On November 5, USDA announced three significant events that will increase U.S. grain and rice exports. First, USDA announced that it will provide initial shipments of 10,000 tons of wheat to Nicaragua and 10,000 tons of wheat to Catholic Relief Service for distribution in Honduras. Second, we learned that USDA and Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture officials reached agreement on a protocol that will reopen the Brazilian market to U.S. hard red wheat farmers.

Before Brazil closed its market to the United States in 1996, it purchased 800,000 tons of U.S. wheat annually. And finally, U.S. rice exporters won the majority of the contracts awarded by Japan's food agency during its FY 1998 purchase of foreign rice. The United States will ship 60,000 of the 110,000 tons Japan will buy this year.

The next day, November 6, Secretary Glickman announced that USDA and Russian officials had come to terms on a \$625 million agreement

under which USDA will provide Russia 1.7 million metric tons of wheat, 500,000 tons of corn, 500,000 tons of soybeans and soymeal, 120,000 tons of beef, 100,000 tons of rice, 50,000 tons of pork, 30,000 tons of nonfat dry milk, and 100,000 tons of various other commodities donated through private voluntary organizations. USDA expects that shipments of the commodities will begin in early December.

While the current market is unpredictable, events such as these are moving us in the right direction. Our overall workload should be up this year over last. With your continued efforts to provide American agriculture with quality service in a timely and cost effective manner, this year should prove to be a much better year than last.

Getting to Know... Chief

Janet Walton, New Orleans

Harold LaFountain, known as **Chief** to his friends and coworkers, was born on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in Belcourt, North Dakota. His first years of grade school were at St. Ann's Indian Mission on the reservation. From fifth through eighth grade, he attended the Immaculate Conception Indian Mission boarding school in Stephen, South Dakota. He went home only in the summer months. Times were very tough for the LaFountain family. His father had a small farm with a few cows, horses, pigs, and chickens on the reservation. During this time, **Chief** tried growing some wheat and barley. But farming didn't work out for him, and he gave it up in 1950 and started doing construction work. In 1955, he moved to Louisiana where he graduated from Leon Godcheaux High School in 1959. He served in the United States Army from 1961 through 1964, going through basic training at Fort Chafee, Arkansas. He finished his tour of duty at Fort Gordon, Georgia, in the Southeastern Signal School.

Chief started working in the grain industry in 1969 with the Destrehan Board of Trade. In 1977, in the midst of the grain scandals, the Federal government took over export inspections from private organizations, including the Board of Trade. **Chief** came into FGIS as an agricultural commodity grader. In 1978, he was promoted to supervisory agricultural commodity grader. Today, he supervises the work of four to nine employees at the elevator sites.

Chief and his lovely wife **Judy** are the proud parents of three sons and one daughter. On his off days, **Chief** enjoys bass fishing and playing golf. He currently is living in Reserve, Louisiana.

According to his coworkers, **Chief** is a joy to work with and there's never a dull moment when he is around. We salute **Chief** as we celebrate Native American Heritage Month!

*Happy
Holidays
and
Best Wishes
for a Joyous
New Year!*

New Leader Program

Susan Fall, Minneapolis

The week of November 2, 1998, was momentous. Jesse Ventura, an ex-wrestler with no college education and little political experience was elected governor of the State of Minnesota. Newt Gingrich stepped down as Speaker of the House. And, I graduated from the New Leader Program after 6 months of never-ending work and late nights. The world is changing.

GIPSA is changing. In the past, individuals were trained for specific tasks in a specific area; cross utilization was a foreign concept. This approach crippled our workforce by not using the creativity of all workers.

GIPSA is becoming more progressive and is looking to the future. The introduction of new technology, downsizing, and "doing more with less" has changed the way we look at things. Individuals are being cross utilized as our work becomes more interdependent and interconnected. We all have to extend ourselves and be willing to take chances. To do this, we need to develop some basic abilities that cross all job types. These abilities include team building, creative thinking, interpersonal skills, oral communication, conflict management, and working effectively in a diverse workforce, to name a few.

The New Leader Program teaches these skills and more. It encourages stepping out of the box and creating new ideas. I entered the program assuming that it would be a lot of classroom time, taking notes, and doing reports. No such luck! The participants create their own 6-month IDP which may include community volunteer work, they role play, form teams,

and go through forming, storming, norming, and performing phases of team building. It is a very hands-on, emotional education. Conflict resolution is learned and put to use in the sessions. Diversity among ideas, cultures, races, and genders is recognized, accepted, and built upon. Individuals learn about their agencies by conducting research, shadowing individuals, and doing a 30-day detail. Networking is also a big part of the program. A participant who does the least amount of work will get something out of this program, but you get what you put into it. This is a 6-month period when you can explore your abilities and stretch.

FGIS is changing. With the advance of technology, we will be a smaller, more interdependent agency. We will need these skills to survive. I would encourage anyone who is willing to work and step outside of their

work area to apply for this program. The program is very good and the instructors are excellent. I also will be available to assist anyone who enters the program by answering questions and sharing ideas.

The individuals who enter the program are not the only ones affected. I would like to thank the people in the **Minneapolis Field Office** for their support and for taking up the slack while I was gone. I would like to thank the **Board of Appeals and Review** members, and especially **David Lowe**, for their assistance while I was out of the office. I also would like to thank the individuals who gave me their time during the past 6 months: **David Shipman**, for allowing me to interview him; **John Sharpe** for allowing me to do a detail with him, and, last but not least, **Marianne Plaus**, for letting me shadow her. Thank you!

Travel Bits & Pieces

Peggy Smith, Washington, DC

VISA Travel Card Update. By now you will have received and possibly used your new NationsBank VISA card. Please be sure you have signed and returned the signature card that was attached to the top of the paper to which your card was attached.

You probably noticed that at the bottom of that paper it stated that you had a \$25,000 credit limit. That amount is just a default set up between the Department and NationsBank. You do not have a credit limit. You must pay your account balance in full every billing cycle.

For those travelers who use another Travel Management Center other than American Express, the first time you travel with your VISA card, be sure your reservationist changes your profile to reflect that your transportation expenses will now be charged to the VISA card. Please be advised that you are still obligated to pay any balance left with your American Express account.



GIPSA Idea Hotline Update

Norma Phelps, Washington, DC

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

Suggestor

Suggestion

Thomas Wrenn, Grand Forks, ND

Request FSA to Notify Applicable F/O When Emergency Food Aid Invitations are Let

Nabil Azmy, Kansas City, MO

Use Pass/Fail Rating System On A Trial Basis With FGIS Employees
Redesign GIPSA News
House Kansas City Field Office in TSD
Reevaluate Anchor Agreements Between BAR, QAS's, and FOM's
Allow BAR Members To Participate in Compliance Reviews

November's tee-shirt winner: **Nabil Azmy, Kansas City, MO!**

GIPSA Hotline Ideas Accepted and Approved for Implementation During November 1998

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.



Change Forms--FGIS-908, FGIS-943, FGIS-944, and FGIS-938--to 2-Part Form
(Implemented In-Part--FGIS-938 To Be Reduced To A 2-Part Form)



Modify The Triannual Renewal Procedure for Inspectors



Scrap The Customer Service Award Program



List FAX Numbers For Each Individual On The GIPSA Phone Directory

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.**

Grain Advisory Committee Meets

Marianne Plaus, Washington, DC

GIPSA's Grain Inspection Advisory Committee met in Washington, D.C., on November 3-4, 1998. The agenda included discussions of the projected impact of biotechnology on grain markets, outlook for grain exports, GIPSA's financial status, reauthorization, geographic boundaries for official agencies, and program updates.

All of the presentations were excellent. The comments of **Daniel Amstutz**, President and CEO of the North American Export Grain Association (NAEGA), were particularly interesting. Mr. Amstutz discussed the impact of biotechnology on grain markets. He stated that seed companies and biotechnology firms have been more aggressive in developing genetically modified organisms (GMOs) than in educating international markets and getting world-wide market support for them. A lack of understanding about long-term benefits of GMOs has resulted little demand for them outside certain segments of the agricultural community.

To foster support and demand for GMOs, Mr. Amstutz suggested that domestic and international consumers must learn that the ultimate long-term benefit of GMOs is that they may increase crop yields and contribute to combating world hunger. To date, GMOs have mostly benefited the U.S. farmer — a benefit not of much importance to the rest of the world. Mr. Amstutz encouraged seed companies to educate international consumers about the benefits of GMOs and to promote their approval in each country to which the U.S. exports. Front-end approval will go a

long way toward facilitating the world trade of GMOs.

Gaining the approval of the European Union (EU), one of the most vocal opponents of GMOs, will be difficult. While the United States has a large and efficient food safety network, which includes the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, and USDA, no such coordinated effort exists within the EU. Consequently, each new GMO must be approved by each of the 15 member countries — a time consuming task. Mr. Amstutz likened what we are now seeing with GMOs to the beef hormone issue

which began 15 years ago and continues to this day.

To gain acceptance of GMOs in the EU and worldwide, NAEGA has proposed forming a trilateral commission comprised of EU, Japanese, and U.S. biotechnology experts that would be charged with objectively testing GMOs for safety. NAEGA has not yet gained acceptance for its proposal. In Mr. Amstutz' opinion, the lack of acceptance is due to the unwillingness of each country to cede its sovereignty to such a commission.

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

NQDB Expo

On Monday, October 26, 1998, Grain Inspection University and the Cedar Rapids Field Office hosted the National Quality Data Base (NQDB) Exposition in Cedar Rapids, IA.

Official agencies located throughout the Midwest attended. Software companies offering NQDB links were available to explain their systems. Attendees had the opportunity to meet GIPSA's National NQDB coordinator Theresa DeJaynes and talk about how they will access the national database.

The NQDB data will provide a comprehensive database that will help GIPSA carry out national trend analyses of particular grains, maintain and improve statistical baseline ratios used in other statistical applications, and provide the official system with the information it needs to provide more timely responses to potential problem areas.

Transferring local inspection information to the National Quality Data Base is scheduled to begin in January 1999.

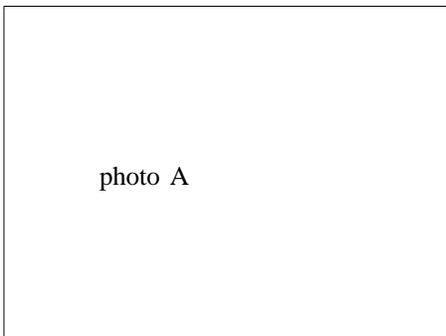


photo A

Software company representative Mike Meyers (seated) explains his system to Tim Buhlman, Grand Forks Grain Inspection.

Advisory, from page 6.

Mr. Amstutz would like to see countries consider the long-term benefit of increased true, worldwide market competitiveness. Furthermore, Mr. Amstutz encourages those who may not concur with the NAEGA proposal to offer new ideas.

In the effort to gain approval of GMOs worldwide, Mr. Amstutz believes that two subissues, labeling and grading, are really non-issues. NAEGA has never opposed the concept of labeling of grain shipments and would accept a label that stated "may contain GMOs." Further, he does not foresee a need to change the U.S. Standards for Grain as new GMOs are developed because, theoretically, GMOs and non-GMOs should grade the same. The common language created by the standards facilitates the trade of bulk grain. In Mr. Amstutz words, the bulk grain business is not going away; the need for the standards in their current format will continue.

Mr. Amstutz concluded by saying that the world community will eventually accept GMOs, but he cannot predict how long it will take. While the future of GMOs is bright, he is concerned about the interim.

For a copy of the full meeting minutes, please contact me at telephone (202) 690-3460 or via e-mail to mplaus@fgisdc.usda.gov.

The next Grain Inspection Advisory Committee meeting will be in early spring in Kansas City, MO.

Reaching Out!

January Events

- 6-8 1999 Barley Improvement Conference, New Orleans, LA
- 11-13 Agribusiness Association of Iowa EXPO '99, Des Moines, IA
- 12-14 Spokane Ag Expo, Spokane, WA
- 19-21 MO-AG Industries, Inc. 1999 Trade Show & Convention, Columbia, MO
- 20-22 51st Annual International Poultry Exposition, Atlanta, GA
- 31-Feb 3 AAGIWA Annual Meeting, Las Vegas, NV

If you'd like to represent GIPSA at any of these or other events in your area, the GIPSA display booth and other educational materials are available for your use. For outreach assistance, contact Dana Stewart, at telephone 202-720-5091, via FAX 202-205-9237, or via e-mail to dstewart@fgis.usda.gov.

GIPSA at Weiner Rice Festival

Bill Strickland, Jonesboro

Weiner, Arkansas, hosted its annual Fall Rice Festival on October 10-11, 1998. Weiner is located in the heart of northeast Arkansas' fertile rice country. The Rice Festival gives the Jonesboro Suboffice a good opportunity to let the public learn about our rice inspection services.

Agricultural commodity technician **Wanda Liles**, and agricultural commodity graders **Danny Harpole** and **Kenny Layne** volunteered to staff a GIPSA display booth. **Wanda** took charge and organized the booth. She staffed the booth on Saturday and Sunday. She was joined by **Danny** on Saturday and **Kenny** on Sunday.

Thanks to **Wanda**, **Danny**, and **Kenny** for volunteering their time on a holiday weekend to reach out to our customers and the public at the Rice Festival.

photo B

Kenny Layne and Wanda Liles, Jonesboro, reaching out at the Weiner Rice Festival!

Names, from page 2.

William Kelly, FMD, Washington, D.C., received an extra effort award for sustained superior performance contributing to the overall effectiveness of FMD as a member of the APSB office automation team and FGIS LAN Manager in support of the Y2K initiative.

Doug Lacefield and **Carol Remmers**, FMD, Washington, D.C., received extra effort awards for sustained superior performance contributing to the overall effectiveness of FMD as members of the APSB office automation team in support of the Y2K initiative.

Yohanna Lorio, FMD, New Orleans, Louisiana, received an extra effort award for outstanding technical support during the field office upgrade of the New Orleans and

Stuttgart Field Offices and conversion of the New Orleans LAN to Novell Netware.

Joanne Nielsen, Technical Services Division, received a Certificate of Appreciation for coordinating TSD's Combined Federal Campaign.

Angela Roper, FMD, New Orleans, LA, received a spot award for helping out the clerical staff while a clerk was on extended sick leave. Her clerical experience helped the New Orleans Field Office to issue the export ship papers and submitted samples in a timely manner.

30-Year Service Awards

LeRoy Baker, Moscow, ID
Mary Long, Technical Center

20-Year Service Awards

Bob Baker, Portland, OR
Florence Hamm, New Orleans, LA
Henry Jackson, Jonesboro, AR
Andrew Kuykendall, League City, TX
Gerald Schillereff, Portland, OR
Arthur Boline, Jr., Duluth, MN

15-Year Service Awards

Michael Clem, Jonesboro, AR
Anita Heckenbach, Technical Center

10-Year Service Awards

Cathy Brenner, Technical Center
Gertrude Curry, Technical Center
Gerome Grant, League City, TX
Shelli Lopez, Technical Center
Mark Wooden, Kansas City, MO

Jonesboro Food Drive

Bill Strickland, Jonesboro, AR

photo C

Jimmy Cadle

When we asked for a volunteer to head up the Jonesboro Suboffice's food drive, all who were present strongly recommended agricultural commodity grader **Jimmy Cadle** for the job (especially since he wasn't there to vote in the matter). **Jimmy's** response was that since his co-workers showed so much confidence in him, he would accept the challenge! **Jimmy** also reminded us that since we were all so encouraging of him, he was sure that each of us would be very supportive of his

efforts to make this one of the best drives yet. We were all assured that we could count on **Jimmy** to remind us to participate!

Jimmy did an exceptional job! The suboffice's 16 total employees collected and distributed 1,214 pounds of food to a local Jonesboro food bank!

All of our food drives are important, but we are especially proud of **Jim's** efforts during this time of "thanksgiving."

1998 Annual Report Available

GIPSA's 1998 Annual Report is hot off the press! The report summarizes the Agency's organizational structure and functions, program activities and accomplishments, management initiatives, and financial status for fiscal year 1998.

The report is available for downloading and browsing from GIPSA's home page (www.usda.gov/gipsa); limited amounts of hard copies also are available from Dana Stewart, 202-720-5091. Hard copies are being sent to all field locations.

SPB Observes American Indian Heritage Month

Shelly Carter, Washington, DC

In observance of American Indian Heritage Month, the Standards and Procedures Branch (SPB) welcomed my cousin, **Kristine Poaphybitty**, and her daughters **Tahnee**, age 9, and **Sasha**, age 2, to the office for a “show-and-tell” and a lunch of corn stew. **Kristine, Tahnee, Sasha, and I** are enrolled members of the Comanche Tribe of Oklahoma.

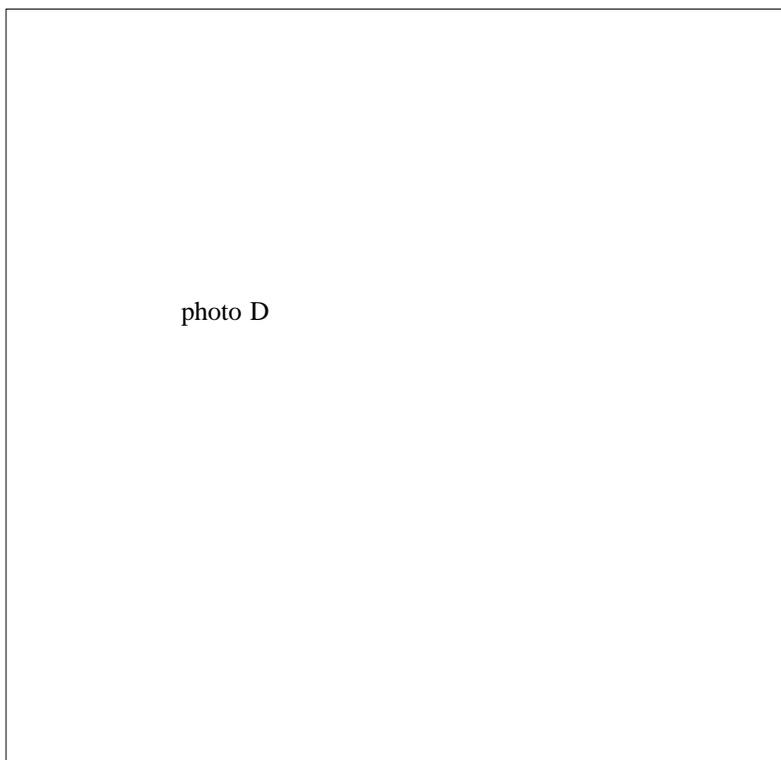


photo D

Shelly Carter (back right), her cousin Kristine Poaphybitty, and Kristine's daughters Tahnee and Sasha help the Standards and Procedures Branch celebrate American Indian Heritage Month.

When school permits, **Kristine** and the girls attend and participate in many pow-wow competitions throughout the year, both here in the United States and in Canada. **Kristine** spoke about the “pow-wow life” and how for some, competition winnings is the only way to put food on the table and clothes on their backs.

Kristine also spoke of how we, as Comanches, wear our regalia. **Tahnee** wore her traditional buckskin and **Sasha** wore her traditional cloth dress. She explained that Comanche women always wear an apron and that our knife pouches are worn in the front. She brought many different styles of pouches and crowns to show Comanche beadwork.

Thanks to the SPB associates for welcoming my family and joining us in observing American Indian Heritage Month.

Rice Fee Increase Proposed

In the November 25, 1998, *Federal Register*, GIPSA proposed increasing by approximately 3.6 percent certain fees for Federal rice inspection services.

Rice inspection services are provided upon customer request; and GIPSA must recover from the customer the cost of providing such services. GIPSA is proposing to recover a projected January 1, 1999, 3.6 percent increase in Federal salary costs. The proposed increase will affect only that portion of the fees associated with the hourly salaries paid to Federal employees and administrative personnel; overhead recovery is not being proposed.

The current rice inspection fees were last amended on July 3, 1996 (61 FR 34714), with a tri-level fee increase with effective dates of August 2, 1996; January 1, 1997; and January 1, 1998.

The comment period closes January 25, 1999.

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 December 28, 1998!

In Closing... Holiday Reflections

Jim Baker

The holiday season is here and the new year is just around the corner. At this very special time of year, I always find myself thinking back over the year's highs and lows, and challenges and accomplishments.

I'm proud of what everyone in GIPSA has done this year. We faced challenges including tough finances and a major reorganization. We found opportunities to better serve our customers through new services and improved technology. We have remembered those in need and given of ourselves through food drives, charitable donations, and the Combined Federal Campaign. We have mourned the loss of some members of the GIPSA family. And, we have mourned the loss of others like us, including the seven who lost their lives in the DeBruce Grain Elevator explosion. We have greeted new colleagues, and wished fond farewells and happy retirements to a good many of our friends. All in all, it's been a year of change, challenge, and opportunity — it was a year both unique and like many others.

As you reflect back over this year, I hope you too have memories of good times and fulfilled hopes.

Best wishes to you and yours for a holiday season and new year filled with health and happiness.

Avoiding Sample Rage

Thomas J. Wrenn, Grand Forks

As of October 23, 1998, a total of 265 bean, peas, and lentil samples have been dropped in the Grand Forks Field Office "drop box" after official hours. A "drop box" that collected 265 samples is a powerful message sent to our office by our customers using our services.

The process began in the summer of 1996. As we were moving from downtown to our current location, I was approached by several edible bean managers asking if we would consider putting in an outdoor, after-hours "drop box" for samples. I informed them that I would consider their suggestion.

During the fall of '96 and the winter of '97, I called, visited, and sent for information on drop boxes. Having one built was too costly; using an old, outdoor mailbox from the Post Office was impossible since they are recycled. My best response came from a high school librarian who sent me materials on an outdoor book drop. Of course, the floods in the spring of 1997 put a halt on any purchasing.

What do the customers do when they walk up to the door 2 minutes after closing time?

In the fall of 1997, there was a renewed interest in the drop box. We completed a purchase order at a cost of \$1,500. The drop box arrived on October 20, 1997, and was installed and ready for use by October 23, 1997. An individual putting sample(s) into the box hears the samples fall onto a spring activated floor. The floor cushions the fall to help prevent the probability of creating split beans in the sample(s).

We sent memos to our customers informing them of our newest service. The first sample was placed in the box on November 12, 1997. On July 9, 1998, we received the most samples in the box at one time: 10. Overall, the box receives more samples during the summer and fall months because plants work longer hours.

The drop box paid for itself in savings on postage alone within 9 months. Above all, because the box is open 24 hours a day, it has improved service to our customers by freeing up their precious time.

OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR
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