



Conservation News

USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Service

April-May 2011

Message from the State Conservationist



These past couple of months have been very unusual and frustrating as we were dealing with the FY 2011 Federal budget. We had a

number of Continuing Resolutions that kept us funded until April 8, at which time Congress passed and the President signed the 2011 budget. We dealt with some cuts within NRCS, with the most critical one being the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program.

The 2011 Appropriations Bill closed out NRCS funding of RC&D activities. It contained funding for the RC&D program to only cover expenditures up to April 8 and resources needed to bring RC&D activities to a close. NRCS prepared a plan for an orderly closeout of the program and we are in the process of carrying out this plan. National in scope, the plan looks strategically across all agency offices and functions, and will treat all employees equitably, compassionately and fairly.

For the remaining months of FY 2011, RC&D Coordinators and staff are assisting NRCS field, soil survey and state office staffs.

The RC&D program was authorized by the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962. It expanded opportunities for State and local units of government, local non-profit

organizations, soil and water conservation districts, and individuals to improve their communities in multi-county areas. The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the responsibility to administer the RC&D Program to the Chief of NRCS.

Authorization of an RC&D Area by the Secretary allowed federal RC&D funds to be spent in the designated areas. These funds provided for establishing and staffing an RC&D office, development of an RC&D Area Plan, and technical assistance.

The elimination of NRCS RC&D funding in no way affects the ability of RC&D Councils to participate in other NRCS programs. Program eligibility rules are the determinant of whether RC&Ds can participate in NRCS programs, and there are a number of programs that can be excellent opportunities for RC&Ds, such as the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative, Conservation Innovation Grants, and Technical Service Providers. RC&Ds will have to meet all program eligibility requirements just the same as all other potential partners in order to participate.

NRCS is trying to make the best of a difficult situation. We appreciate the dedication and hard work that the RC&D Staffs and Councils have provided in the past 47+ years, and look forward to a continued partnership with the RC&D Councils.


JUAN C. HERNANDEZ
State Conservationist

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Farm Bill Program Signup Deadlines



The following application deadlines remain for FY 2011:

May 20, 2011—Organic Initiative through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

June 30, 2011—Funding for Conservation Activity Plans is still available through EQIP. Applications will be funded as requests are received and eligibility has been determined, as long as funding is available, but no later than June 30.

The following FY 2012 application deadlines have been announced:

July 1, 2011—General EQIP.

July 1, 2011—Irrigation Initiative through EQIP

July 1, 2011—Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative through EQIP

September 2, 2011—Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)

September 2, 2011—New England-New York Forestry Initiative through WHIP

September 2, 2011—Wetland Reserve Program

NRCS Program Benefits Immigrant Farmers

With the technical and financial assistance of NRCS, and the day-to-day assistance and education from Cultivating Community, 12 Androscoggin County immigrant farmers are learning how to build a successful farm business and market their crops.



The immigrant farmers recently signed contracts with NRCS that will provide them financial assistance for five conservation practices, enabling them to produce sustainable crops while conserving natural resources. Funded through EQIP, the conservation practices that will be implemented by the farmers are:

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- crop rotation to improve soil health and provide crop benefits over the length of the rotation;
- cover crops for season protection against soil loss and weed suppression;
- mulching for water conservation, weed suppression and nematode management;

- integrated pest management to manage weeds, insects and diseases that directly or indirectly cause damage; and,
- micro irrigation with pressure regulating emitters producing an irrigation efficiency of 90 percent.

“Working with Cultivating Community has been a rewarding challenge,” stated Lance Gorham, District Conservationist in the Lewiston office. “This collaboration will help introduce a foundation of sound and sustainable agricultural practices”.

One of the immigrant farmers speaks English as well as his native language, and serves as a translator between the immigrants and NRCS and Cultivating Community.

Cultivating Community... whose mission is to empower local communities by creating access to fresh food, work with youth leaders, train new American



(continued on page 3)

Immigrant Farmers (continued)

farmers, and promote social and environmental justice all through farming...leases 30 acres at the Packard-Littlefield Farm in Lisbon to assist them in carrying out their New American Sustainable Agriculture Project (NASAP). The purpose of NASAP is to assist immigrant and refugee farmers to build successful farm businesses that are consistent with their culture, lifestyle aspirations, and individual goals, by providing classroom and field-based trainings. Sustainable production practices and direct

marketing are important components of the program. Each of the 12 immigrant farmers will use a portion of the leased land to plant and take care of their vegetable farm.

Cultivating Community also has an EQIP contract through NRCS for the same five conservation practices. They have a desire to improve the soil health of the farmland they are using while managing their crops to produce a more sustainable level of quality and nutrition in their vegeta-

bles. The EQIP contracts signed by Cultivating Community and the 12 immigrant farmers total \$110,000. In addition to feeding their families, the produce will be disbursed to local families and sold at farmers markets.

In 2005, the farm from which Cultivating Community is leasing land was protected forever from development using funding from the Land for Maine's Future Program and the NRCS Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

Southern Maine Farm Receives Assistance to Extend Growing Season

The owner of Maple Springs Farm in Harrison is the recipient of federal funding assistance from NRCS to build a seasonal high tunnel on his farm. Mark Heidmann, proprietor, is excited that he will be able to extend his growing season and increase his yields as a result of this high tunnel addition.

A seasonal high tunnel is a greenhouse-like structure, at least six feet in height, which modifies the climate inside to create more favorable growing conditions for vegetable and other specialty crops grown in the natural soil beneath it. Participating farms can receive funding for a maximum area of 2,178 square feet. Through EQIP, funding for these seasonal high tunnels is being made available through a pilot study to test the potential conservation benefits of growing under these structures. This is the second year of the three-year study.



Maple Springs Farm was established in 1998. The first several years were spent in building two greenhouses, gradually expanding the plantings over about six acres, building the foundation for healthy soil, and establishing the initial plants of crops such as perennial flowers, raspberries and apples. Heidmann opened the farm for retail business in 2002. They use three main criteria for choosing their vegetable and fruit crops: beauty,

flavor and diversity; therefore, they carefully select varieties from many sources. In addition to selling his produce at local farmers markets, they offer Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) memberships.

The new high tunnel will measure 30 feet by 96 feet, or 2,880 square feet; 2,178 square feet will be funded through NRCS, but the entire structure will be maintained to NRCS standards and specifications. The tunnel is expected to be completed in May.

"The High Tunnel Pilot project offers great conservation benefits to farm producers and area farm markets", said Wayne Munroe, District Conservationist in Scarborough, "with additional value to increase quality local food supply."

Newer Employees Receive Engineering Training



Thanks to the expertise of the NRCS engineering staff, eight of the newer NRCS and District employees recently attended a three-day Introduction to NRCS Engineering for Conservation Practices training session in Augusta. Engineers Dan Baumert, Mark Roskos, Adam Cattrell and Candi Gilpatric shared their technical knowledge on such topics as nutrient management structures, hydrology, hydraulics, survey, waterways, drainage, design packets, access roads, crossings, and construction materials.

Level Survey Training Exercise



l to r: Wito Rivera-Gonzalez, Scarborough; Bob Bills, Lewiston; and Barry Southard, Machias.



Adam Cattrell, Lewiston (trainer)



Alex Stace, So Paris

In conjunction with National Volunteer Week, which was observed the week of April 10-16, two Earth Team Volunteers in the Somerset County office were recognized for donating their time, talents and energy during Fiscal Year 2010. The Somerset County office recorded more than 2,100 hours of volunteer hours in 2010, the highest number of hours in NRCS offices in Maine.

The two volunteers, Pam Guerin and Rose Caron, were brought on through the National Able Network, designed to provide supportive services for individuals 55 years of age or older. The volunteers provide assistance in such areas as office administration, project assistance and educational efforts, to name just a few.

The Somerset County NRCS and SWCD office was recently presented with an award from State Conservationist Juan Hernandez for their continuous support of the NRCS Earth Team Volunteer Program.

Earth Team Volunteer Awards Presented



l to r: Pam Guerin, Rose Caron and NRCS District Conservationist Kevin White.

Civil Rights and Outreach Corner

Agriculture for Me by Heidi Bunn, Agricultural Engineer, Bangor Field Office/Member, CRAC



Ever wonder where the money from the Maine Agriculture specialty plate goes? The ag plate was first introduced to Maine in 2007 in an effort to raise money

for the grassroots program “Maine Ag in the Classroom Association” (MAITCA). In conjunction with the USDA, MAITCA’s goal is to “promote the understanding of agriculture and natural resources among students, educators and the general public.”

They have several programs which target students including *Read “ME” Agriculture* which is held during Ag Week. MAITCA chooses a book each year from funds from the ag plate which showcases different types of agriculture/aquaculture in Maine; this year they created their own book entitled *Ag for Me*. So I blindly decided to volunteer to read to a class and talk about my connection to agriculture.

“A class” turned into four classes: two preschool classes, one k-3 and one 4-8. At which point, I panicked and thought “what did I get myself into?” How do you explain what an agricultural engineer does to 48 preschoolers who are bouncing off the walls due to copious amounts of sugar? Better yet, how do you keep the attention of a hormone laden 8th grader? Delving deep into my engineering toolbox, I came out armed with a glue stick and construction paper. Several paper cuts later and as many pictures of “poop” that I could find, I was ready for the preschoolers.

As I walked into the school, I was welcomed by a self-proclaimed “Iron Man” who inquired as to who I was and why I was there. I told him I was there to teach him about agriculture, but in my head I thought, “here we go...this is *Gulliver’s Travels* all over again.” Thus, I prepared myself to be tied to a miniature chair. Luckily, I was spared (perhaps because I promised them cool conservation coloring books) and upon reading *Ag for ME* and showcasing several pictures of NRCS manure storages, I sat in the little chair and answered questions about manure spreading, fish and pollinators from potential employees of the NRCS in 2036.

“I got kids to start thinking about where their food comes from and how important protecting our natural resources is.”

The next day I went to teach the K-3 grade class only to discover that they would be combined with the 4-8 grade class. With two different lesson plans prepared and an array of ages, I opted for the plan which I thought would persuade them to all want to be agricultural engineers (not that I am biased or anything). So with world domination, I mean, agriculture in mind, we discussed manure management, composting, fish passage and timber bridge construction. I challenged them to build their own bridge out of vegetables (it was Ag Week after all).

After splitting them into two teams (big kids vs. little kids), I stepped back and watched them create the bridge with the longest span out of potatoes, carrots and celery. I hadn’t planned to do this project with the younger kids, but they completely blew me away. Not only did the older kids copy their design, but Team Little Kids beat them by 9 inches! They were cutting notches out of the potatoes to set the carrots and/or celery into to make them more stable and placed scrap pieces under the potatoes to prevent them from rolling.



Afterwards when I asked how many of them wanted to be agricultural engineers, 80% of the class raised their hands! Granted, I didn’t convince all of them to follow in my footsteps, but I did what the program was designed to do: I got kids to start thinking about where their food comes from and how important protecting our natural resources is.

So the next time someone asks, “I wonder where money from the ag plate goes?” you can tell them that it ensures that kids know that chips and French fries come from potatoes and not from the magic supermarket fairy.

Agriculture after a Tsunami: The Impact on Japan

- by Autumn Birt, District Conservationist, Midcoast Region/Asian-Pacific Islander SEPM



Photo Source: MSNBC

Japan continues to reel from the compounding impacts of the earthquakes, tsunami, and nuclear disasters. Long-term effects are hard to gauge and will be unique to Japan based

on its landscape and use. But after the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia, a few trends regarding this event and its influence can be foreseen.

Japan is a large importer of agricultural products, totaling 60% of food consumed. These include corn and soybeans for animal feed. Japan has largely tried to be self-sufficient in terms of rice production as an assurance of national food security. However, Japan does import rice as well. The landscape of Japan is mountainous with only 12-13% of the land farmed often through terracing. For these reasons, it would be easy to assume the tsunami and other disasters will have an insignificant impact on Japan's agricultural production.



Photo Source: "Big Picture Agriculture"; What Effect will the recent Tsunami, Earthquake, and Nuclear Disaster have upon Japan's Agriculture?, K. McDonald; March 2011.

However, the northern region where the most impact has occurred is the center for most of Japan's agricultural production. A quarter of all the rice paddy lands are found in the northern district as well as a significant portion of Japan's pork, poultry and beef industries. Reports from Japan's farm ministry report that 4.8 metric tons of the 24 metric tons of feed that Japan produces each year comes from the northern areas near the center of the affected region. Fifteen percent of Japan's dairy industry is also located in the affected zone. Orchards and small vegetable farms have been destroyed by sea water or may be affected by radiation.

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Impacts after the 2004 Indonesian tsunami included landscape change, soil erosion from the tidal wave's force, marine soil and sand deposition onto alluvial soils used in crop production, and salinization of soils. Coastal lakes and wetlands were lost or infiltrated with salt water, affecting irrigation. Surprisingly, some of the marine deposits had a high cation exchange capacity and high amount of plant available phosphorus. However, in general the saline water contained excess of neutral soluble salts including chlorides and sulfates.

Crop production in Sumatra was significantly decreased the first year after the 2004 tsunami due to the high soil salinity and lack of irrigation water. Poor plant growth in saline soils is associated with high osmotic stress. Root growth is reduced affecting nutrient uptake. Phosphorus availability is decreased in saline soils generally due to the higher soil phosphorus fixation. Salinity is

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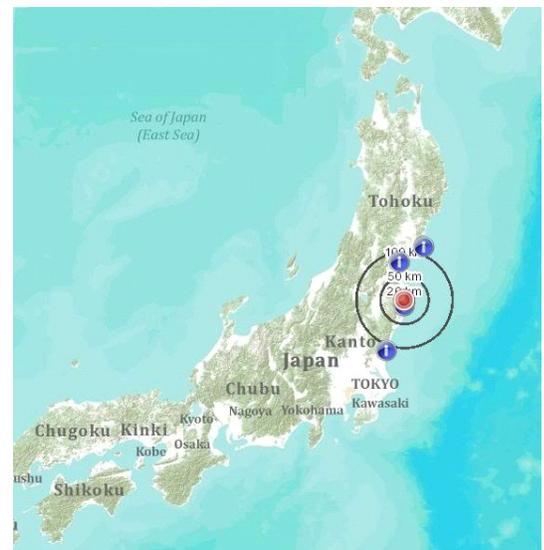


Photo source: "Big Picture Agriculture"; What Effect will the recent Tsunami, Earthquake, and Nuclear Disaster have upon Japan's Agriculture?, K. McDonald; March 2011.

Agriculture after a Tsunami (continued)

harmful to the soil-biota as well. These affects were short lived in much of the area impacted by the 2004 tsunami due to the heavy monsoon rains. By 2006, soil quality, ph, and agriculture production had mostly recovered to pre-tsunami levels. Japan receives less rainfall so the affects may be longer lasting.

What will be unique and of significant importance to Japan is the affect on its seafood industry including ports. The earthquake and tsunami destroyed many fishing ports and vessels, and wiped away aquaculture and wild seedbeds for scallops and oysters. Potential contamination of seawater is a growing concern.

May is Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. It is also the time Japan normally would plant rice paddies. As we begin our field season, the first trials determining the impacts of the trio of disasters will be only beginning in Japan. Stay tuned for updates!

(References available upon request.)

“Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History”

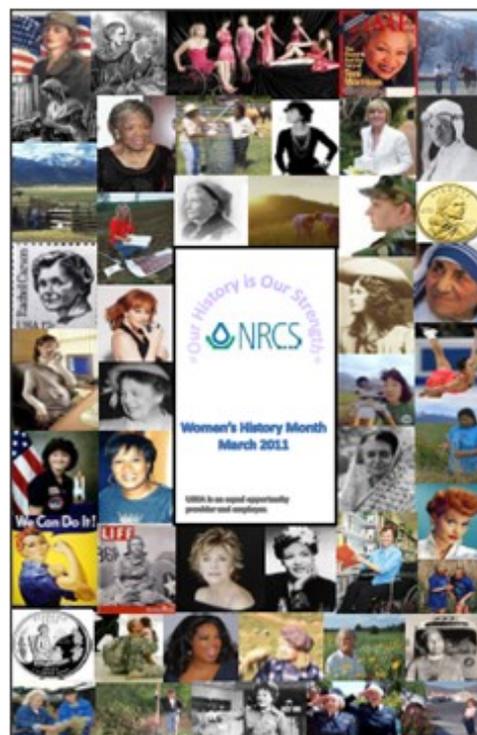
- by Helena Swiatek, District Conservationist, Houlton/Federal Women’s Program Manager

That is the title of a book by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, a Harvard historian who was known for describing history as a tribute to "the silent work of ordinary people". My father bought me this book to remind me that even the smallest contribution can make history.

March was Women’s History Month, during which time we thought of all those women who behaved “badly”, and in doing so shaped our future. Rosa Parks broke Alabama state racial segregation law in 1955 and was fined \$10 for not giving up her seat to a white man. Many credit this simple action as sparking the civil rights movement that reshaped the American landscape. Susan B. Anthony was arrested for the simple act of voting in 1872. At the end of her 4-month trial, she was fined only \$100. One New York paper observed, "If it

is a mere question of who got the best of it, Miss Anthony is still ahead. She has voted and the American constitution has survived the shock. Fining her \$100 does not rule out the fact that...women voted, and went home, and the world jogged on as before."

These women, knowingly and unknowingly through simple actions, have helped change this country for the better. As I read about all those famous women in that book my father bought, I never thought I would contribute as they did. However, just the other day I realized that I am the first female District Conservationist in Houlton, Maine. And while this will never make the history books, or even the NRCS central files, I feel like I can claim a small piece of women’s history for myself.



Quotable Quotes

“Duty is the sublimest word in our language. Do your duty in all things. You cannot do more. You should never wish to do less.”
— Robert E. Lee—Inscribed beneath his bust in the Hall of Fame

“The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value.”
— Theodore Roosevelt

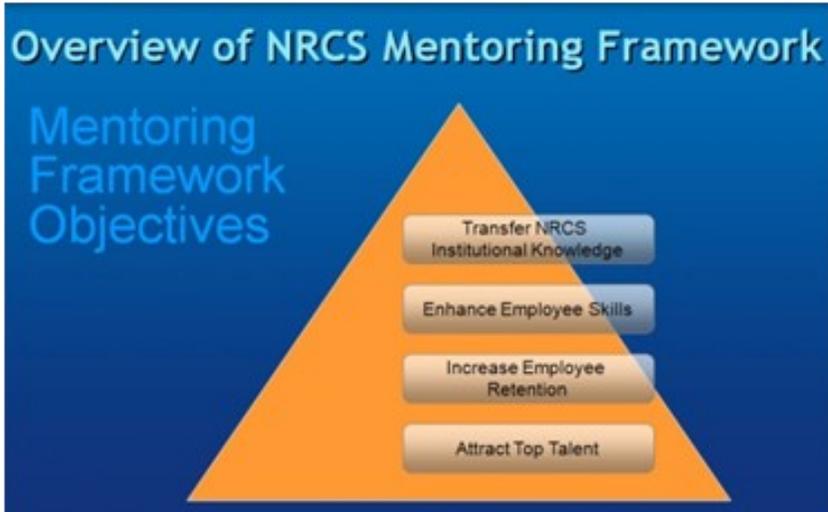
NRCS Mentoring Program

—by Stephanie Landry, Human Resources Assistant/Mentoring Coordinator

In early February, participants of the 2011 New England NRCS Mentoring Program gathered in Portsmouth, NH for the annual Mentor/Protégé training. NRCS employees from seven states, including nine employees from Maine, took part in this year's program. The NRCS Mentoring Program provides employees with opportunities to form new connections, broaden employee experience, assist in developing goals, and cultivate new opportunities.

The NRCS Mentoring Program has four key objectives:

1. Transfer NRCS Institutional Knowledge,
2. Enhance Employee Skills,
3. Increase Employee Retention, and
4. Attract Top Talent.



Through these objectives, NRCS can strengthen its foundation in order to ensure a resource of talented, highly-skilled, motivated employees for the future.

The definition of a protégé is someone who wants to enhance his or her professional experience by learning new skills and participating in new opportunities. A successful protégé is highly motivated and shows an interest in professional and personal

growth. He or she must be committed to learning from others, and open and receptive to receiving coaching and feedback.

A good mentor is an experienced employee with a specific skill or knowledge in an area that complements the protégé's developmental need or interest. The mentor serves as a role model and provides guidance and support to the protégé with his or her developmental goals. Successful mentors show genuine interest in the needs and development of others and their organization.

If you are interested in participating in the NRCS Mentoring Program in 2012, please visit <https://www.nrcsmentoring.com/> to begin the application process.

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Personnel Actions

New Hires

Benjamin Naumann, GS-9 Fish Biologist, Bangor Field Office, effective March 27, 2011.

Wito Rivera-Gonzalez, GS-5 Soil Conservationist (SCEP Program), Scarborough Field Office, effective February 27, 2011.

Reassignments

Peter Abello, GS-9 Soil Conservationist, Skowhegan Field Office, to Belfast Field Office, effective March 13, 2011.

Carl Bickford, GS-9 Soil Scientist, Dover-Foxcroft Field Office, to GS-9 Forester, Skowhegan Field Office, effective April 24, 2011.

Welcome New NRCS Employees

Ben Naumann, Fish Biologist in the Bangor Field Office, was born in Bar Harbor and raised in the small lobster fishing town of Gouldsboro. He received a B.S. in environmental science with an emphasis in fisheries biology from Unity College in 2002 and a Master of Science in Zoology at the University of Guelph, Canada in 2008. The Master of Science project focused on describing critical habitat for *Coregonus zenithicus*, a proposed species at risk within the Great Lakes. He has worked in various fisheries positions from Alaska to Maine and in between. Most recently he has worked for three years with Project SHARE (salmon habitat and river enhancement) in Downeast Maine on stream restoration and enhancement projects, focusing specifically on culvert crossings and adding large wood into streams for complexity. Time off is spent with his two dogs, and always enjoys throwing a fly line to rising trout.



Alexander Stace, Soil Conservationist in the So. Paris Field Office, was born and raised in Rhode Island. He received his B.S. in Forestry from the University of Maine.

Alexander worked for the Virginia Department of Forestry in Southampton County, Virginia and as a County Forester in Halifax County, Virginia prior to coming to NRCS.



Robert Bills, Soil Conservation Technician in the Lewiston Field Office, attended Paul Smith's College in New York and the University of Maine at Orono. He spent a brief time with International Paper and has worked for private land use consulting firms since 1977. For the last 23 years he has been self employed in Whitefield as a Professional Forester, Soils Site Evaluator and Professional Land Surveyor.

Bob has three beautiful college-age daughters, loves canoeing, lumberjack competitions, and is finding that NRCS is using his skill sets in fascinating and completely different applications than his past work experiences.



Wito Rivera-Gonzalez is a GS-5 Soil Conservationist in the Scarborough Field Office through the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP). Wito is from Adjuntas, Puerto Rico and is studying for his Master's Degree in Agricultural Education at the University of Puerto Rico.

Photo: Wito is training to make Highly Erodible Land (HEL) determinations on a farm in South Berwick.

Embracing Unity and Diversity Day—Part II

For the second year in a row, three sessions were held simultaneously throughout Maine around the topic of “Embracing Unity and Diversity”. With each focusing on different special emphasis groups, the sessions were planned by the Maine Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPMs) and Maine’s Civil Rights Committee.

As was done last year, the sessions were held jointly with the Farm Service Agency. “The joint activity last year was just the beginning to NRCS and FSA working together on such endeavors,” said NRCS State Conservationist Juan Hernandez. “In the past year we have also joined forces on the State Civil Rights Committee. On a trial basis, we are putting our heads together to accomplish the functions of the committee, including identifying and conducting outreach to the underserved; identifying problems, issues, or concerns relating to civil rights and EEO; assessing recruitment activities; and informing employees of civil rights and activities...just to name a few.”

The locations and planners of the three sessions were:

- Presque Isle—Jade Gianforte, NRCS Hispanic SEPM; Seth Jones, NRCS American Indian/Alaska Native SEPM; and Mary Anne Coffin and Brad Hansen, FSA.
- Bangor—Wayne Munroe, NRCS Black SEPM; Leslie Nelson/Helena Swiatek, NRCS Federal Women’s Program Manager; and Elaine Moceus, FSA.
- Lewiston— Autumn Birt, NRCS Asian American/Pacific Islander SEPM; David Tingley/Heidi Nelson, NRCS Disabled/Veteran SEPM; Lance Gorham, NRCS Gay/Lesbian/Bi-Sexual/Transgender SEPM; and Elisabeth Isbister, FSA.

“We are making pretty good progress in serving a diverse customer base and in maintaining and improving our workforce diversity,” said Hernandez. “My desire for you is that you continue your dedication, enthusiasm, and hard work. Your hard work on behalf of customer service and conservation programs is an important part of helping us meet the needs of all producers, including those in underserved segments of the agriculture industry.”

The following are some of the photos from the sessions showing the diverse speakers and food samples that NRCS and FSA employees enjoyed.

Presque Isle

David Slagger, a Maliseet Tribal Member, spoke to the northern group about the history of Tribes in the U.S. and the interaction between Tribal, State and Federal governments.



John Dennis, Tribal Historian with the Aroostook Band of MicMac Indians, gave a presentation on the history of Northeastern Indians and their culture. He showed and talked about some artifacts and provided an Indian

Drumming Demonstration, as shown here.



State Conservationist Juan Hernandez provided information to the group on Puerto Rico: “The Enchantment Island.”

Diversity Day Photos (Continued)

Bangor



Kim Bradford, NRCS Sociologist located in Washington, DC, spoke to the central group about Black History Month and the Battle of Gettysburg.



Eloise Vitelli, Director of Program and Policy for Women, Work and Community, spoke on Overcoming Barriers in Public Service.



Chief Brenda Commander of the Maliseet Indians spoke about her tenure as Chief of the Tribe and its challenges and benefits.



Tori Morrill of Inanna, a musician with Sister in Rhythm, gave a presentation that explored the heritage and rhythms of West Africa. She also gave an African drum demonstration, as shown here.

Lewiston



William Scaggs (center), Senior Training Coordinator with the Office of Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights, converses with FSA employees at the southern Maine session. Scaggs spoke

about Including Sexual Orientation and Gender Identify in Diversity.



Carl Perry (right), NRCS employee, spoke about "What You Should Know About the Veteran Subculture in America."



Cara Clark (seated), Visual Information Specialist with NRCS in Illinois, talked about the challenges and triumphs as a person with a disability.



Food Samplings