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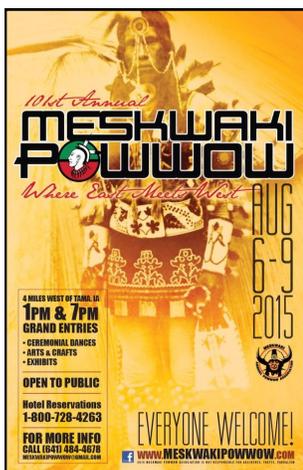
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Crossroads of Diversity

Celebrating the things that make us unique and those that join us together

A newsletter of the Joint Civil Rights Committee of USDA Rural Development, USDA Farm Service Agency, and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

JULY 2015



The 101st Annual Meskwaki Indian Powwow will be held August 6th – 9th in an area historically known as “Old Battleground” four miles west of Tama on Highway E-49. The site is along the east bank of the Iowa River near the original 80-acre Meskwaki Settlement.

Cost is \$7 for adults and \$5 for children six and older. Performances are scheduled at 1 p.m. and 7 p.m. daily. For more information please visit www.meskwakipowwow.com, call (641) 484-4678 or email meskwakipowwow@gmail.com.

During the four-day Meskwaki Powwow the gathered Indians celebrate and perform, in full-dress regalia, dances that have been handed down for generations.

While the dancing, the most colorful and intriguing aspect of the Powwow, has drawn the most attention from the outside world, the entire event is a time of reaffirmation, hope, worship, kinship and making new friends.

The annual Meskwaki Powwow originated from the traditional religious and social beliefs of the Meskwaki Tribe. Today it is not so much a religious event, but more of a social gathering.

The event is derived from the “Green Corn Dance” and other social events from the early years of the Tribe. The “Green Corn Dance” was an annual event that took place during the harvesting of crops.

From 1902 to 1912, the Tribe held weeklong “Field Days” with dancing, games and horse racing. These events were focused more on being a social event rather than a harvest celebration.

In 1912 the Chief appointed 15 men to plan an event for the next year. The men changed the name from “Field Days” to “Powwow.” The first powwow was held at the present location on the only Indian settlement in Iowa.

(Information for this article came from a brochure promoting the 101st Annual Meskwaki Indian Powwow. In that brochure Jonathan Buffalo, Tribal Historian, was credited for contributing historical information.)

Historic Events Conclude June LGBT Pride Month

This information was taken from an article written by NRCS National LGBT SEPM, Meghan Walter

“When all Americans are treated as equal we are all more free. For all our differences, we are one people – stronger together than we will ever be alone. We are big and vast and diverse; a nation of people with different backgrounds and beliefs, different experiences and stories, but bound by our shared ideal that no matter who you are or what you look like, how you started off, or how and who you love, America is a place where you can write your own destiny. ”

-- excerpts from [President Barack Obama’s remarks on the Supreme Court’s decision on marriage equality](#)



If you paid attention to the national news, you know that June 2015 turned out to be a momentous and historic time for LGBT equality. At the end of June, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of marriage equality in the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case, which guarantees to same-sex couples the freedom to marry and the right to recognition of their marriages. The issue of marriage equality is relevant to the federal workplace and USDA because of the far-reaching legal protections and benefits that are afforded to married couples through employment benefits, such as

access to health insurance, retirement, social security, and spousal family leave, just to name a few. These employment benefits are often the safety net that saves a family from disease, poverty, and distress. The *Obergefell* decision is a boon to USDA in particular, in that many USDA agencies are known for encouraging employees to move and gain multi-state experience. Now our LGBT employees won’t have to think twice about whether their marriage (and all the legal protections and benefits that come with it) will be recognized in another state, if they choose to apply for a new position or take a detail to a new state.

However, the work towards the pursuit of equality is not done yet – even as marriage equality becomes a reality nationwide, 52% of same-sex couples live in states where they can be fired for their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, according to the [Movement Advancement Project](#). While one cannot be fired from federal employment because of sexual orientation or gender identity, spouses who work for the state or in the private sector can, in fact, be fired in 28 states. This can impact an LGBT employee’s ability to get multi-state experience – he or she may be less likely to take a promotion or new job in a state that doesn’t provide employment protections for their spouse. This patchwork of nondiscrimination laws across the country affects USDA’s ability to attract and retain the most talented employees. So our work must continue.

At USDA, we are the People’s Department – we are by and for the people. We represent the diversity of America. USDA is big and vast and diverse – a department full of employees with different backgrounds and beliefs; customers with different experiences and stories. We are bound together by our shared love of serving rural America, working the land, and preserving our nation’s food security. For all our differences, we are one department, drawn together to serve. We are stronger because of our differences, not in spite of them. **No matter who you are or what you look like or whom you love, USDA is a place where you can write your own destiny.**

Thank you for your commitment to making USDA a welcoming workplace and an employer of choice.

CelebrAsian Festival Held in Des Moines May 22-23

Submitted by Greg Townley, NRCS Asian American Pacific Islander Special Emphasis Program Manager



The 2015 CelebrAsian Festival was held May 22 - 23 in Des Moines' Western Gateway Park. This year marked the 13th year of the festival and it highlighted the 40th anniversary of Southeast Asian refugees and their journeys to America. Former Iowa Governor Robert D. Ray was also honored for making the trip to America, and specifically to Iowa, possible for many of the refugees.

The annual event is planned by the Iowa Asian Alliance to help unite different Asian communities in Iowa. This year more than 50,000 people attended. Folks from various Asian countries, as well as people

just wanting to experience Asian culture. The event included food and entertainment in various villages representing Asian countries, as well as stage performances.

The Iowa Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staffed a booth at the event and provided outreach materials to the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) population in Iowa. Assisting at the booth were Judy Martinson, James Gibbs, Jean Sandstrom, Alan Lauver and Greg Townley.

Information provided to attendees discussed career opportunities in NRCS, as well as conservation programs, grass and tree planting options, rain gardens, water conservation options, water quality, urban conservation, and volunteer opportunities.

Posters were given to teachers who stopped by the booth to help them teach about conservation in their classrooms. Children's conservation materials were also popular with booth visitors.

Plan to be a part of next year's event and learn more about the rich culture of several Asian countries.

Highlights of the Asian American/Pacific Islander Women in Workforce

Recent data shows Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) workers have more favorable economic outcomes than workers in any other racial group. In 2013 in the U.S. there were around 7.8 million Asian American (AA) women and 442,000 Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (PI) women (16 years of age and over) in the U.S. Of those, 4.6 million AA women and 283,000 PI women were in the civilian labor force.

The aggregate statistics, while positive, do tell an incomplete story of the economic status within the AAPI community. There is a great deal of variation and disparity between AA women and PI women, as well as among women in different Asian communities.

Earlier this summer a [White House Summit](#) on AAPIs was held in Washington, D.C. with more than 2,000 community leaders, business leaders, advocates and artists engaging with cabinet officials, administration leaders and nationally recognized AAPI leaders. They discussed issues facing the AAPI community such as economic growth, education, healthcare, civil rights and immigration.

USDA Helps Veteran Farmer Restore Native Prairie Ecosystem in Boone County

Submitted by Andy Hunziker, Farm Service Agency Farm Loan Manager

As a former U.S. Navy SEAL, Jathan Chicoine has never lost the desire to be a part of something larger than himself. His life experiences and personal challenges reintegrating back into civilian life following the military have provided him a unique perspective as he serves as a veteran advocate and continues to work toward creating a better environment for his brothers and sisters in military service.



Today, alongside Chicoine's role as the Veterans Services Coordinator for Iowa State University, he is collaborating with others in developing models for self-sustainable farming and developing diverse ecosystems by restoring native prairie, oak savanna, and other native habitats on his father's farm through the management of a bison family herd.

After his military service and while obtaining both undergraduate and master's degrees focused on cultural anthropology, he continued to travel, interacting with people and cultures from around the world. Through those experiences, he gained deeper appreciation for the Iowa landscape which inspired his interest in farming.

The Farm Service Agency Farm Loan Program was essential to Chicoine purchasing bison. With the loan program, he purchased his first group of bison in 2012 and brought them home to the family farm north of Ames, Iowa.

As a veteran beginning farmer, the Farm Service Agency loan program helped Chicoine realize his goal of starting up his own niche market and bringing bison back to the family's native pasture. Partnering with NRCS, specifically utilizing the EQIP program, he has been better able work toward his vision of restoring native prairie ecosystems. As keystone species of the tall grass prairie, bison are essential to that effort, contributing to a healthy ecosystem able to support a wide diversity of plant and animal life.

Chicoine expresses a deep sense of gratitude to the agencies that are assisting veterans, military personnel and their families in farming. He believes that many veterans carry experience and knowledge that are important, bringing a natural work ethic, self-discipline, ability to work independently as well as on a team, and are natural leaders of our families, communities and society. Some might even suggest that prairie restoration, taking generations to fully realize, requires personal fortitude, something he credits to his time in the SEALs.

Chicoine's mission for his family's farm maintains a strong social mission that sees itself in the context of a larger inclusive system in which we all live. He plans his first harvest of bison this fall and would like to begin farm tours in the near future.

As a long-term goal, he and his family are working toward developing a learning center at the farm as a place to learn and expand possible options for people interested in farming.

Rural Development Staff Attend 3-Day Civil Rights Leadership Training

The Civil Rights National Office, in collaboration with Human Resources and The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Early Resolution and Conciliation Division, recently presented a three-day leadership training titled “Strengthening our Foundation in Making USDA Rural Development a Great Place to Work.” This training was held June 29 – July 2nd in St. Louis.

Kate Sand, Michelle Moore, Ann Knight and Cassie Marso from USDA Rural Development’s team in Iowa attended the conference.

The training was designed to provide program directors, supervisor/managers, and individuals with Civil Rights responsibilities comprehensive and thought provoking information on such topics as:

- Organizational engagement-leadership, communication, engagement, and conflict management.
- Title VII Employment Law-managers/employees responsibilities and rights and the significance of mediation.
- Program Civil Rights-Civil Rights laws, compliance review concept and methodology, ADR, roles of program managers and state civil rights managers and coordinators in carrying out civil rights duties.
- Diversity-When differences are valued, discrimination decreases and productivity increases. Learning how to confront biases and change paradigms so that trust, communication and teamwork can be improved.

The presenters included: Angilla Denton, Director, USDA Rural Development’s Office of Civil Rights; Anita Adkins, Director Human Rights; Adriano Vasquez, EEO Branch Chief; Cyrus Salazar, Director Early Resolution and Conciliation Division ASCR; Sharese Paylor, Program Compliance Branch Chief; and Edward Profit, Deputy Program Manager Early Resolution and Conciliation Division ASCR.

The goal of this training was to provide Rural Development employees at various levels of responsibilities with information and the sharing of ideas concerning civil rights as it pertains to the laws and executive orders which govern how we as program providers and mission area employees engage with our internal and external customers.

National Hispanic Heritage Month—Sept. 15—Oct. 15.



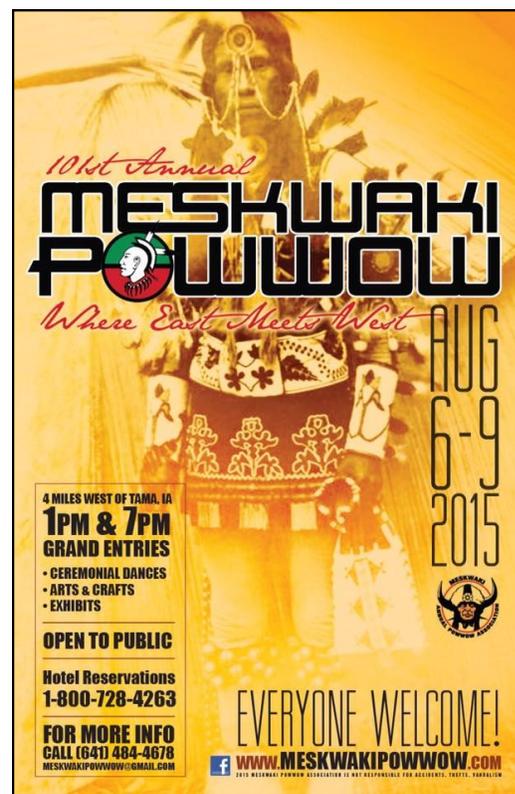
Each year, Americans observe National Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15 to October 15, by celebrating the histories, cultures and contributions of American citizens whose ancestors came from Spain, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America.

The observation started in 1968 as Hispanic Heritage Week under President Lyndon Johnson and was expanded by President Ronald Reagan in 1988 to cover a 30-day period starting on September 15 and ending on October 15. It was enacted into law on August 17, 1988, on the approval of Public Law 100-402.

The day of September 15 is significant because it is the anniversary of independence for Latin American countries Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. In addition, Mexico and Chile celebrate their independence days on September 16 and September 18, respectively. Also, Columbus Day or Día de la Raza, which is October 12, falls within this 30 day period.

2015 USDA Special Emphasis Managers (SEPM) in Iowa

NAME	SEPM AREA
RD — Linea Baldwin FSA — Adriana Foxen NRCS — Greg Townley	Asian/Pacific Islander
RD — Ellen Walker FSA — Anna Boecker NRCS — Shafer Ridgeway	African American
RD — Cindy Pelzer FSA — Wendi Denham NRCS — Nichole Williams	Federal Women
RD — Whitney Baragary FSA — Deb Mitchell NRCS — Renae Nicholson	Hispanic
RD — Mandy Couture FSA — Roxan Kuntz NRCS — Abby Beltz	Native American
RD — Mike Boyle FSA — Todd Dirksen NRCS — Joe Thompson	People with Disabilities
RD — Kim Clay FSA — Gretchen McLain NRCS — Jean Sandstrom	LGBT
FSA — Anthony Hunziker NRCS — Joe Thompson	Veterans



Request for Future Submissions

This newsletter will be published again next quarter. The committee appeals to all readers to submit articles. Previous submissions have included articles on diversity issues and challenges, celebrations of cultures, conference and meeting announcements and much more. Please submit to your agencies state civil rights coordinator.

FSA: Patti Murray; patricia.murray@ia.usda.gov

NRCS: Kevin McCall kevin.mccall@ia.usda.gov

RD: Darin Leach darin.leach@ia.usda.gov



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