



**United States Department of Agriculture**

Research, Education, and Economics  
Agricultural Research Service  
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**SUBJECT:** Workforce Diversity in the Mid South Area (MSA)  
**T0:** All Mid South Area Personnel  
**FROM:** Edgar G . King, Jr.  
Area Director, Mid South Area

Through this memorandum, and in keeping with the ARS mission, I want to state my strong commitment to providing a wholesome and amiable work environment for all employees of the Mid South Area. We will, therefore, incorporate a philosophy among our employees of fostering a culture that is built on trust, respect, teamwork, communication, empowerment, and commitment in an environment free of discrimination. In addition, the Mid South Area should become a model employer by building and maintaining a workforce that reflects the rich diversity of the Nation. This is an issue that requires our immediate attention and commitment.

As I have stated before, diversification of the MSA workforce is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. Diversity, under a good standard for accountability leads to a highly productive and more innovative workforce, in which everyone adds their own strengths to achieve common goals. The latest census reveals that women and minorities make up an ever- growing share of the American workforce. The USA TODAY Diversity index was created in 1991 to measure how racially and ethnically diverse the Nation's population is. The 2000 diversity index is 49, increasing from 34 in 1980. This means that the chance of two randomly chosen U.S. residents being of different cultural background is 49 out of 100 or almost 1 out of 2. Therefore, we as an Agency, have to step up our efforts in recruitment and retention efforts involving this diverse pool of potential employees.



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## All Mid South Area Personnel

Our goal is to be competitive in adding the most qualified minority and under represented employees to our workforce.

For an Agency to be positioned for success, it must design and implement a diversity program to include those specific elements that serve to build and maintain its diverse, high quality workforce. In general, the MSA diversity program should include elements that build diversity, through recruitment, outreach, and hiring; elements that maintain diversity, through the Agency's use of learning and developmental rewards and recognition; and by creating an environment that fosters effective cross cultural communication, inclusion, and assimilation.

To achieve the above stated goals, a MSA Workforce Diversity Committee (WDC) was established in 1998 under my leadership to provide advice and recommendations to the Area Director for enhancing diversity in the workforce. This year I am instituting some changes in the membership and goals of the committee. I have appointed Dr. Deepak Bhatnagar, Research Geneticist, New Orleans, LA, and Ms. Betty Shepherd, Location Administrative Officer, Auburn, AL, as Co Chairs of the Committee. Ms. Shepherd has served on the Committee since its inception and as Co Chair brings to the leadership of the Committee her experience of the last few years. Dr. Bhatnagar is a well recognized scientist in ARS, and the MSA. He received the ARS Outstanding Senior Scientist Award in 1999. In addition, Deepak has demonstrated exceptional leadership and initiative in promoting and fostering interpersonal communication across cultures in a diverse workforce within ARS. He was recognized with the USDA Secretary's Honor Award for Equal Opportunity in 1995. The task of the WDC under Dr. Bhatnagar and Shepherd's leadership will be to make recommendations to me regarding:

- Achieving a diverse, high quality workforce by successfully attracting and employing a representative employee mix;
- Ensuring that valuable employees stay with the Agency and in the Mid South Area; and
- Developing a supportive work environment by providing all the employees of the Mid South Area with the guidance and tools needed to perform the work of the Agency to the very best of their abilities.

All Mid South Area Personnel

The task of the WDC will not be to engage in solving EEO disputes or to oversee any issues that overlap with EEO/Civil Rights, but only to make recommendations to prepare the MSA workforce to deal with the demographic realities occurring in our Nation.

I encourage you to actively support the efforts of the MSA Workforce Diversity Committee. Your participation in MSA's goal to increase, maintain, and assimilate a diverse workforce is expected.

cc:

F. P. Horn

V. I. Prince