

ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR OFFICE SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

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Special points of interest:

- New council Member
- Odyssey 2000
- Logo Contest
- Shadowing Program
- New Web Page

COUNCIL MEMBERS ASSIGNED NEW DUTIES



Current Council Members: L to R, Phyllis Hoffman, Ruth Treat, Rhea Fryar, Justine Flowers, Sharon Sheffield, Rayma Cox, and Olivia Pedraza

The annual meeting for the SPA Advisory Council for Office Support Professionals was held in San Antonio, Texas, July 10-11, 2000. Assignments of duties to the council members were as

follows: Phyllis Hoffman - Temple, TX, Chair; Olivia Pedraza - Weslaco, TX, Co-chair; Rayma Cox - Bushland, TX, Recorder; Justine Flowers - Little Rock, AR, Training Coordinator

Sharon Sheffield - Lane, OK, Information Coordinator; Rhea Fryar - Lubbock, TX, Member; and Ruth Treat - Stillwater, OK, Technical Advisor.

WELCOME NEW COUNCIL MEMBER

We would like to welcome Sharon Sheffield as the new member of the SPA Advisory Council for Office Support Professionals! Sharon serves as Secretary to the RL/Scientist of the South Central Agricultural Research Laboratory at Lane, OK. She began her career with USDA-ARS in January 1996 as an Office

Automation Clerk and advanced to Secretary in 1998. Her husband, Doyle, raises cattle on their ranch near Lane. They have two children, Regina and Doug, a son-in-law, Doug, a daughter-in-law, Christy, and one grandson, Corey. She enjoys walking, quilting, collecting teapots, and Coca-Cola items, teaching a Sun-

day School class of twos and threes, working occasionally at a flower shop, and spending time with family and friends. Sharon is excited to be a part of the Council and we are excited to be working with her and are looking forward to her contributions and ideas.

ODYSSEY 2000 NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR OFFICE SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

As you all know, the Odyssey 2000 National Conference was held May 1-5, 2000 at Baltimore, MD. This conference was a huge success and our appreciation goes out to the National Council and everyone else who



Fifties Night Best Dressed-L to R-Dr. Floyd Horn; Kathy Aragon, (NPA) Rhea Fryar, (SPA); Kara Vander Linden (PWA); and Judy Lister (PWA)

helped get this thing off the ground. We applaud you all on the organization, speakers, break out sessions, fun/games, all the hard work, and the chance to network with other office support professionals throughout the Agency. In order to share information gained from the conference we have asked council members and other attendees to write a paragraph about their favorite session and overall comments about the meeting. Each participant was given a notebook with handouts for each break-out session. If you would like a copy of any of the sessions, please contact one of the council members or a participant at the conference.

Break Out Sessions:

- ☼AFM: The Virtual Tour
- ☼Best Management Practices
- ☼Effectively Dealing with Conflict
- ☼Everything You Always Wanted to Know About NPS, But Were

Too Embarrassed to Ask

- ☼Executive Correspondence 101
- ☼Meeting the Challenge: Learning to Live With Congress
- ☼NAL: Ensuring and Enhancing Access To Agricultural Information for a Better Quality of Life
- ☼Redesign of ARS Management Information Systems-RMIS and More
- ☼Taking Control of Your Career
- ☼Team Building: Linking the ARS Team
- ☼The Mystery of the Federal Budget
- ☼Who Says ARS Strategic Planning Can't Be Fun
- ☼Who's Afraid of ARMPS?

"This conference was a huge success and our appreciation goes out to the National Council and everyone else who helped get this thing off the ground."



Odyssey 2000 Welcoming Fifties Reception

Southern Plains Area Swinging Fifties Office Support Professionals: L to R, Rayma Cox, Faye Cook, Sandy Sims, Wanda Paradowski, Anne Steele, Rhonda Wells, Rhea Fryar, Sharon Sheffield

FAVORITE SESSIONS

☞ The National Conference for ARS Office Support Staff, Odyssey 2000: Meeting the Challenge conference in Baltimore, MD was the most productive conference I have ever attended. This conference was put together by the National Advisory Council for Office Support Professionals and they did a wonderful job! I attended many break-out sessions while participating at the conference.

One of the sessions was 'Taking Control of Your Career' led by Eileen Wolfe. Eileen's objective was to encourage you to take the responsibility for managing your own career. In this session she talked about the basic guides for career growth, which are: train yourself to the fullest, associate yourself with growth if possible, select the kind of work and environment, work hard, if you are young - or young at heart seek experience above money, protect and nourish your health, develop a positive attitude, work to improve your communication skills, and be a team player. She also talked about career planning with the IDP's we all fill out with our performance standards and how important they are to give opportunities to consider career goals and how they fit into the Agency's future plans. She suggests that you prepare an IDP and update it periodically or as needed.

Another break-out session was the 'Redesign of ARS Management Information System: RMIS and More' hosted by Pamela Mason, NPS and Karen Kinney, ITD. This was a very interesting session for anyone who deals with RMIS on a day-to-day basis. They discussed the new system's main objectives, goals, accomplishments, and steps to improve RMIS. The objectives are to support National Program Planning and Management at all levels and provide managers with access to all relevant information. They stated that their goals are to satisfy the National Program and budget accountability requirements, conduct evaluations and assessments, compile information in support of strategic planning, annual budgeting, and NPS, document trends through tracking of NP's and projects over time, prime resource for customers, analysis of cross-cutting issues to

foster cooperation and collaboration, and provide "one-stop" shopping for data. The accomplishments to date are: infrastructure for new system implementation, program/project management planning and modeling, requirements analysis, evaluation of software, and technical project manager for systems development. The steps that will be worked on summer/fall 2000 are: project action plan (Phase I, II), development team to migrate existing system to oracle (Phase I), and role of the requirements analysis reference committee. With the new system all SY's will have access to it and it will be an internet based system.

I also attended the 'Effectively Dealing with Conflict' led by Pat Frick, HQTs. She described conflict as when two people oppose each other because their needs, wants, goals, values, and/or methods are different. She also stated that conflict is almost always accompanied by feelings of anger, hurt frustrations, threat, and anxiety. She suggested that you always find something positive about the person that is so difficult to deal with, even if it is simply that you don't have to live with that person. In this session we talked about how we are all different and we should respect each other's differences. We are what we are...you don't have to like each other, but you must respect each other. We talked about how communication was the key in a relationship of any type, especially a working relationship. She had some guidelines for communication: every situation is different, prepare in advance, anticipate the other's reactions, identify where you think the greatest points of resistance will be, and be sure to identify what is "in it" for the other party. By: Rhea Fryar, Lubbock, TX.

☞ I think the first session I attended, "Taking Control of Your Career," had to have the most impact on me as a person. Eileen Wolfe, Supervisor, Employee Development (Human Resources Division), was the presenter of that session. In her session, she pointed out that there are opportunities for all levels of support professionals to advance. She gave examples of ways to enhance our experience such as detailing to another loca-

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FAVORITE SESSIONS CONTINUED

tion, participating in the Aspiring Leader Program, or just even helping out in other areas of the location where we are located. The Smart Center is also another means available to us to help us in our careers. Eileen even gave herself as an example; she started with the government as a GS-4 and recently retired as a GS-13. Quite a remarkable career, I'd say. On another note, one of the best quotes I heard at the Conference was from Dave Carter of Administrative and Financial Management who spoke on "Team Building: Linking the ARS Team". When asked what do you do around here (meaning your workplace), Dave's response to give is "Anything I can to make the organization work better!" Well said. By: Phyllis Hoffman, Temple, TX

☞ A team is defined as a group of individuals with diverse skills and abilities working toward a common goal. Team Building: Linking the ARS Team, presented by David L. Carter, reinforced my understanding of the personal actions to strive for to make a team work. They consist of respecting co-workers, extending trust, willingness to listen, giving recognition, sharing information, taking responsibility, and choosing a positive attitude. One point he made was a response to give to people when asked the question "What do you do around here?" "Anything I can to make the organization work better!" and he impressed me that we should all be doing just that. He illustrated the stages of developing an effective team: forming (learning about each other), storming (resisting working together), norming (making progress), and performing (making progress with speed and efficiency). He also presented ways to make our team (ARS) work better and used the word PERFORM to express the characteristics of a high performing team: P (purpose), E (empowerment), R (relationships and communication), F (flexibility), O (optimal performance), R (recognition and approval), and M (morale). For the office support professionals who didn't attend the session I think Mr. Carter would want to share this - If science is the mind, then administrative support is the heart! The ARS body cannot survive with-

out both! You cannot maintain a brilliant mind without an active, healthy heart! All the sessions I attended were great! The conference as a whole was outstanding. By: Sharon Sheffield, Lane, OK.

☞ It is hard for me to choose one session at the National Conference for ARS Office Support Professionals that was my favorite, or what I consider the best of those I attended, because each one was very good and spoke directly to what I needed. I filled in as an alternate, so, therefore, I had to attend the sessions selected by the person for whom I was the alternate. This person chose exactly the sessions that I would have chosen. From the opening session to the closing session, the Conference was great. The speakers and those who led the various sessions were inspirational and enthusiastic. Being able to communicate with others from throughout ARS was so nice and rewarding, and the energy created by everyone attending was very inspiring. I came away with renewed enthusiasm and have brought this enthusiasm back to my location to inspire others. I have made copies of the information we received and shared with the other office professionals and administrative staff at our location. When asked at the end of the Conference on how to improve the next Conference, all I could say was it is going to be hard to improve on this Conference because it is the best I have attended. By: Pat Agold, Kerrville, TX.

☞ I attended the Workshop on "Redesign of ARS Management Information Systems: RMIS and More." This was very interesting to me. That someone could finally see that the RMIS program, which we have today, is very archaic and needs to be changed. The new system will be user friendly, will have spell checker, word wrap, cut/paste, etc. Training will be provided for all users - either by satellite, go to a central location, or have someone come to your office.

There was a Banquet one evening with a great speaker, Edward A. Charlesworth, and he talked about "Goal Setting for Stress and Lifestyle Management." We need to be a "TOTAL PERSON." The "TOTAL PER-

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FAVORITE SESSIONS CONTINUED

SON" program of lifestyle changes include Time Out To Assess Lifestyle and Time Out To Alter Lifestyle. The PERSON include: P - Physical, E - Emotional and Economic, R - Recreational, S - Spiritual, Social and Family, O - Organizational and Occupational, and N - Nutritional. We need to make a chart with our goals and values. Choose to become your own "TOTAL PERSON." You have the freedom to choose alternatives. Life isn't made up of Groundhog days that just repeat themselves. This isn't a dress rehearsal. And your life isn't really a "do over." But it is not too late for your future. Choose to write your own definition of what a positive and fully functional lifestyle means to you. Then begin to live it! By: Rayma Cox, Bushland, TX.

☞The whole conference was enjoyable, but the session I enjoyed most was Marva Nesbit's talk, "Mirror, Mirror". Her speech was so energetic and enthusiastic and she let us know that it's up to us if we want to make a change in our career. By: Rhonda Wells, College Station, TX.

☞It is hard to say which session I enjoyed the most. I really enjoyed all the sessions I attended. The Mystery of the Federal Budget was a very "creative session". It was great to hear that RMIS is now in the process of being redesigned, so I particularly enjoyed that session. Pamela and Karen were very informative. The speakers were great, especially Dr. McClanahan. The exhibits were wonderful. Seeing people you knew, meeting new people, it was great. All in all it was an awesome conference. Thumbs up. By: Olivia Pedraza, Weslaco, TX.

☞I couldn't pick one certain session--I felt that they were all outstanding!! They were all very informative and motivating. I can't imagine anyone walking away that Friday not feeling uplifted about their role in USDA/ARS. When you're around that many positive people for a week you return home feeling very much a part of a team--"A piece of the puzzle." By: Barbara Hodges, Lubbock, TX.

☞I enjoyed all the sessions I attended at the National Conference, but Wiz Horner's opening remarks really impressed me. Briefly - he told us to commit to our job; accept uncertainties; take risks; take the initiative; be accountable; add value; and to manage our own morale. He also stated that we should improve continuously and to be a fixer - not a finger pointer. By: Wanda Paradowski, College Station, TX.

☞How I Spent My National Conference
There's one big problem with hosting a national conference...you don't always get to be a participant. Instead, you get to work behind the scenes to keep problems invisible. So I missed out on the "meat" of the conference. One event that I did get to be part of, mostly because I helped organize it, was the optional session on Tuesday evening, "Who Wants to Be an ARS Millionaire?" As you can guess, it was a take off on the ever popular tv quiz show, and I had the dubious honor of playing Regis. Because this was an optional event, we had a small group, but it apparently was just the right group for having fun. Just about everyone got to be a contestant, and we even had prizes. Questions touched on ARS history, our research, our locations, secretarial duties, common forms and procedures, and some administrative topics. Contestants moved up the points ladder with each correct answer. Yes, we had life lines...we started with the three from the show: phone a friend, poll the audience, and the fifty/fifty. Toward the end of the session, we somehow had managed to develop a fourth one, peeking at the audience for facial clues and gestures. Some folks would call this cheating, but our group insisted it was "team building." In the end we all came away with a stockpile of laughter endorphins, some new friends, and a little bit more knowledge about ARS. If you don't believe me, just ask Anne Steele what they use for guard animals at El Reno. By: Ruth Treat, Stillwater, OK.

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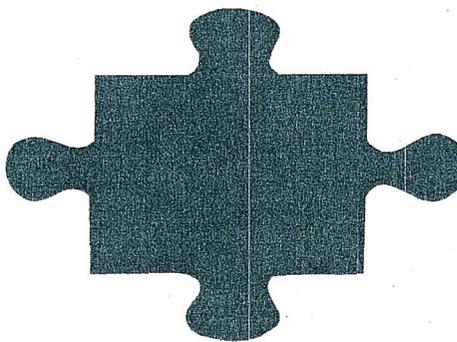
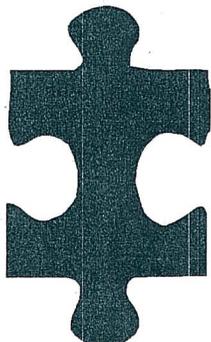
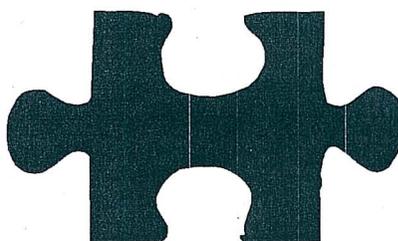
Name the New Management Information

There is an informal "contest" to name the new management information system (something better than "RMIS II" or "Son/Daughter of RMIS"). We have set up an e-mail address in GroupWise: new@ars.usda.gov (will display as "new, system name" in the directory). All ARS folks are invited to "name the new management information system". Submit to this address an acronym for the new system and spell out what it means (example: RMIS=Research Management Information System). You can submit multiple entries. Please be sure to include your name and other contact information. Absolutely any ARS employee can submit an entry (this includes not only the Area program analysts, but folks on the NPS Computer Staff, the CIO office, etc). Depending on how many entries are received, either Dr. Horn will choose the winner directly from the list of all entries, or there will need to be a reviewing process. There is no deadline for entries as of yet.

Pamela R. Mason
Assistant to the Deputy Administrator
USDA-Agricultural Research Service
5601 Sunnyside Avenue
Beltsville, MD 20705-5135
Ph:301-504-4583
Fax:301-504-4580
E-mail: prm@ars.usda.gov
Pager: 301- 507-0243

LOGO CONTEST FOR SPA ACOSP

SPA ACOSP members met in July to outline goals for the coming year. One of these goals is to have a logo designed for the SPA Council. A contest open to all SPA employees will be held in the near future with the winner being recognized at the Leadership Conference to be held in Spring, 2001. So, everyone put on your thinking cap and let your creativity come through—submit a design. Look for more information to come about official entry rules and deadline!



“Look for more information to come about official entry rules and deadline! “

SHADOWING PROGRAM

Robin Pound, OAA, at the Areawide Pest Management Research Unit in College Station, TX participated in the Shadowing Program earlier this year. This is her testimony on how the program helped her. If you feel you or someone in your office could benefit from this program, please contact a council member or look on our web site for the Shadowing Program form.

I arrived at the USDA-ARS office in Lubbock the afternoon of April 11, 2000. I was greeted by Rhea Fryar. Rhea introduced me to Dr. Dan Upchurch, Research Leader of Plant Stress and Water Conservation Laboratory. The location of the office is called the Cropping Systems Research Laboratory. After meeting Dr. Upchurch, I was introduced to the Administrative office staff, and was given a quick tour of the immediate office area.

Rhea and I then went to her office. Before we began our training, Rhea suggested that she would take notes, while she gave me instructions. I agreed.

We began discussing 416 and 417's, including how to modify a 416/417 on RMIS. She instructed/trained me while she took notes.

Rhea then went over the ARS 425 form and how it is used to obtain authorization to apply for and use funds from sources outside ARS.

Rhea discussed the usefulness of briefing packets and that they are generated by the RMIS system.

On the 2nd day I met with Debbie Cummings to discuss personnel items. We discussed what forms are needed to complete a packet for Student Temporary Employment Program. We then discussed each form, and I was given a

sample student packet.

Next, I met with Shonda Mowery to discuss Temporary Student Appointments and LA 180 Appointments. We then discussed the forms that need to be completed for new hires. I was given an example packet of these.

In the afternoon, I met with Rhea to discuss filing of projects. She recommended using "classification folders" in order to organize and separate 425's, 421's, 550's, 416's, and 417's.

The next item discussed was 115's and manuscripts. We briefly discussed how to transfer ASCII files into RMIS. Rhea briefly described how to input 115 into RMIS. Due to being at the end of the day, and running short of time I was not able to complete the entire input, but I believe I got the basics of it.

The third and last day of my training consisted of a short tour of the facility by Rhea. Rhea had to cover the front desk/switchboard this morning, so I worked on updating the REE directory for our unit. Then it was time to head back to College Station.

Overall the shadowing program was helpful to me, because it gave me a chance to have one-on-one (individual) training. Therefore it is more personable and allows more flexibility than a group-training course. I also like the style of training that Rhea used. She instructed/trained me while she took notes. This worked very well for me. I also feel like Shonda and Debbie were a great help. All seem to be knowledgeable and take great pride in their job. Although the training session was fairly short, I feel like it was very effective. I definitely would recommend shadow training, at this particular location.

"Overall the shadowing program was helpful to me, because it gave me a chance to have one-on-one (individual) training."

Call Me What You Want, So Long as You Call Me For Dinner

Every so often the topic of working titles for office support staff comes up, usually when one person discovers that someone else is calling herself a Program Office Assistant or something similar. Or the Area Office sends out a memo to secretaries and program assistants. Or someone asks your RL if he won't have his executive assistant fax something right away.

So what's the deal with working titles, anyway? What are they, and what do they really mean?

A working title defines the function of the position in an organizational sense. It does not change the official series classification, or the grade, or the pay. Research Leader is the working title for the head of a management unit, but that person is still classified as an engineer, or an entomologist, or a pathologist, etc. And a Branch Chief may be a personnel specialist, or an information technologist, or an architect/engineer. And both your Area and Location Administrative Officers are in the 0341 Administrative Officer series. You get the picture. These particular working titles, of course, are formally established through HRD.

Working titles don't all have to be set up by HRD, though, and that's what is happening with our office support professionals. One of the recommendations of the Secretarial Review Task Group back in 1994 was that ARS allow the use of working titles, and they suggested several that we're now seeing used fairly universally: Program Assistant, Executive Assistant, Program Office Manager.

Does this change your grade...no. Does this change your pay...no. Does this change the way you view your role...perhaps. Some people are proud to be called secretary, and that's wonderful, for them. Others feel that they do so many other things besides secretarial duties that the title secretary doesn't really apply. That's fine too. Sit down with your supervisor and come up with a title that does mean something, to you and to those you associate with. And then use it on your letterhead, on your business cards, on your door sign. Hey, put it on your license plate if you want to, but don't expect the Government to pay for that one though.

In visiting with Cecelia Stortzum, REE Policy and a member of the original Task Group, she offers a few comments on the subject (I've paraphrased here):

The use of working titles was an easy way to let secretaries feel better about being able to give themselves a title to use on correspondence they send, etc. The titles do not need to be formally established, and they will not change the classification of the position or the grade levels.

When coming up with working titles, this needs to be done in a manner consistent with others in the same location/area. Keep in mind that there are no established principles or practices on this, and no hierarchy in how it is done. Does it matter if a Lab Director's secretary and an RL's secretary have the same working title? Not at all. It's just a title, like Research Leader. But if it makes someone feel good about themselves and the job they do here in the organization, they should pursue it. What they can't do is call themselves by a working title that is already established (such as program analyst) or that gives the appearance of more authority than is warranted in the position (such as assistant lab director).

So if you aren't using a working title and you think one is appropriate for what you are doing, we encourage you to sit down with your supervisor and discuss it. Sometimes it's the little things that mean a lot.

"A working title defines the function of the position in an organizational sense."

INSPIRATION

When she looked ahead, Florence Chadwick saw nothing but a solid wall of fog. Her body was numb. She had been swimming for nearly sixteen hours.

Already she was the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions. Now, at age 34, her goal was to become the first woman to swim from Catalina Island to the California coast.

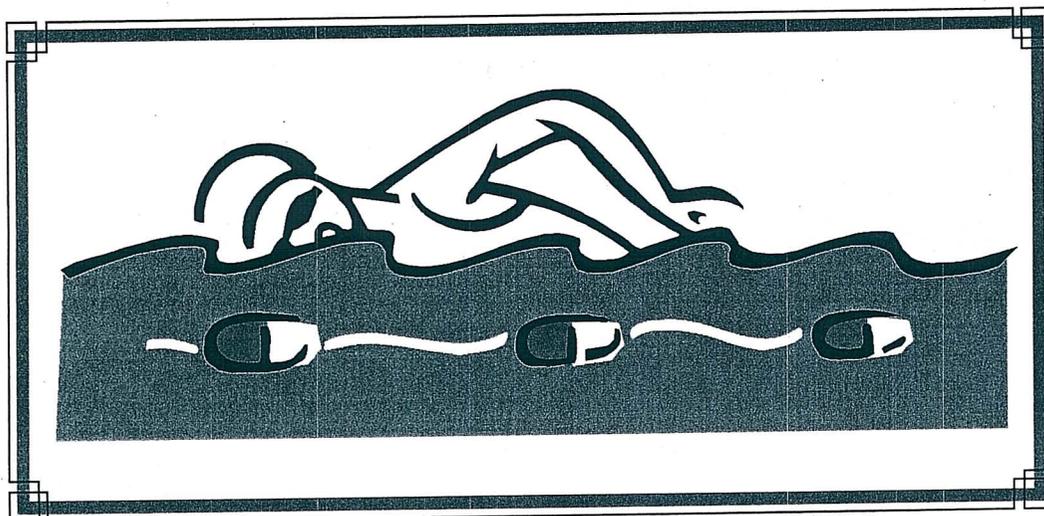
On that Fourth of July morning in 1952, the sea was like an ice bath and the fog was so dense she could hardly see her support boats. Sharks cruised toward her lone figure, only to be driven away by rifle shots. Against the frigid grip of the sea, she struggled on - hour after hour - while millions watched on national television.

Alongside Florence in one of the boats, her mother and her trainer offered encouragement. They told her it wasn't much farther. But all she could see was fog. They urged her not to quit. She never had . . . until then. With only a half mile to go, she asked to be pulled out.

Still thawing her chilled body several hours later, she told a reporter, "Look, I'm not excusing myself, but if I could have seen land I might have made it." It was not fatigue or even the cold water that defeated her. It was the fog. She was unable to see her goal.

Two months later, she tried again. This time, despite the same dense fog, she swam with her faith intact and her goal clearly pictured in her mind. She knew that somewhere behind that fog was land and this time she made it! Florence Chadwick became the first woman to swim the Catalina Channel, eclipsing the men's record by two hours!

"She was unable to see her goal."



Organization Address

Phyllis Hoffmann
USDA-ARS, S&WR LAB NRSR
808 East Blackland Road
Temple, TX 76502
254/770-6501
Fax: 254/770-6561
Email: gates@brc.tamus.edu

Olivia Pedraza
USDA-ARS
Bldg 402
2301 S. International Blvd
Weslaco, TX 78596
956/565-2423
Fax: 956/565-9584
Email: olivia@pop.tamu.edu

Rayma Cox
USDA-ARS, SPA, CPRL
P.O. Drawer 10
Bushland, TX 79012
806/356-5724
FAX: 806/356-5750
Email: rcox@ag.gov

Justine Flowers
USDA-ARS, DNIRI
Two Financial Centre, Rm 309
10825 Financial Center Pkwy
Little Rock, AR 72211
501/954-8882
Fax: 501/954-9596
Email: jfarslr@delta.ach.uams.edu

Sharon Sheffield
USDA-ARS, SCARL
P.O. Box 159, Hwy. 3 West
Lane, OK 74555
580/889-7395
Fax: 580/889-5783
Email: ssheffield-usda@lane-ag.org

Rhea D. Fryar
USDA - ARS
3810 4th Street
Lubbock, TX 79415
806/749-5560
Fax: 806/723-5272
Email: rfryar@lbk.ars.usda.gov

Ruth Treat
USDA-ARS
1301 N. Western Street
Stillwater, OK 74075-2714
405/624-4141 X241
Fax: 405/624-4142
Email: rtreat@pswcr1.ars.usda.gov

NEW WEB PAGE

The SPA ACOSP now has a new homepage! This new homepage has information about the council members, our charter, newsletter, SPA directory, an approved actual subsistence table, information about the shadowing program, information about the orientation packet, and many useful web site links. We are going to keep the directory up to date so if you see something in the directory that needs to be changed, please let Rhea Fryar know and she will make the changes immediately. The web page is located at <http://www.spa.ars.usda.gov/acosp.htm>

Would you like to serve on the SPA Advisory Council? Each year as some members rotate off the Council, new members come onboard to continue the mission of the Council which has set out to serve the SPA Secretaries/Program Support employees, Location Research and Administrative Team, and Area Director in an advisory capacity. The Council also strives to strengthen and improve the professional image of all SPA secretaries and program support employees through orientation, training, and networking. Membership to the Council is for a three-year period. In order for our Council to continue its mission, new members are needed each July. Anyone interested in joining the Advisory Council, please contact a current Council member. Your name will be submitted to the Area Director for consideration and appointment.

“Use of a company or product name by the Department does not imply approval or recommendation of the product to the exclusion of others which also may be suitable.”

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To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250, or call 202/720-7327 (voice) or 202/720-1127 (TDD).

Please contact Sharon Sheffield if you would like to contribute an article that supports the SPA ACOSP mission.