



# Southern Plains Area

## Advisory Council for Office Professionals

February 2005

### Take Advantage of a Wonderful Opportunity!!

By: Wanda Paradowski

Each year as some members rotate off the Southern Plains Advisory Council for Office Professionals (ACOP), new members come onboard to continue the mission of the Council. We have two members rotating off the Council this summer. Membership to the Council is for a three-year period. We encourage anyone interested in joining the ACOP to contact a current Council member (listed on last page of this newsletter). This is a great opportunity for office professionals to interact

with their peers and expand their horizons.

Takes very little time—one one-day off-site meeting a year and two or three teleconferences a year. Very little investment required for the opportunity to grow professionally and personally.



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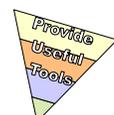
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### SPA Advisory Council for Office Professionals (ACOP) Roles & Responsibilities

- Chair** - Serves as leader and primary contact for the Council. Keeps Area Director informed as to Council business. Determines need for conference calls and meetings of Council members. Keeps Council members up-to-date on Council matters through telephone, correspondence, or email.
- Co-Chair** - Back-up to the Chair and assumes duties of Chair after one year.
- Recorder** - Arranges for teleconferences at request of Chair. Contacts the teleconference center and informs Council members of procedures to follow at time of conference call. Records minutes of teleconferences and meetings, distributing copies to all members via US mail or email. Maintains file of recorded minutes, Council charter, accurate roster and email list of Council members. Originals of the files will be maintained in the Area Office with the Recorder keeping copies.
- Training Coordinator** - Remains abreast of upcoming training sessions within the Area and Agency, notifying office professionals throughout the Area of available opportunities.
- Information Coordinator** - Solicits and compiles information of interest to be distributed in a newsletter for SPA office professionals. The newsletter will be sent to all Council members for their review prior to submission to the Area Office. The Area Office reviews the newsletter prior to distributing.
- Member-at-Large** - Immediate past chairs support Council mission, and offers assistance as needed.
- Technical Advisor** - Appointed by the Area Director to service on the National Advisory Council of Office Professionals, this individual continues to work with the SPA ACOP in promoting Council mission.



## Life In The Shoes of An Office Professional: by: Barbara Hodges

Sometimes life as an Office Professional can become very hectic. There are always deadlines to meet, daily tasks to complete, and travel to be done!! There are a lot of times we don't take the time to simply say "thanks" to the folks who keep us on track and always seem to have the answer or find the answers we are looking for. In this issue of the SPA ACOP newsletter we would like to recognize and say thanks to one of Southern Plains Area's finest. Wanda Robertson seems to always know the answer or know where to find it for the group of scientists she works with. Wanda works under the supervision of Alan Brashears. She supports the Cotton Production and Processing Research Unit and the Livestock Issues Research Unit in Lubbock, Texas. She has worked for ARS for 15 years and has stepped up to the plate on many occasions. When the question was asked to co-workers. "What does Wanda Robertson do to make your life easier?", we received the following responses.

"Wanda does a great job of processing travel in a timely manner." She is very thorough and will catch mistakes if the sum of the expenses is not correct. The thing I appreciate most, in regards to processing travel vouchers, is the way she treats our travel as if she was processing her own. Wanda does a good job of getting on a task and getting it completed. She reminds me of upcoming events and deadlines. It is nice to have someone so diligent about adhering to rules, regulations, and deadlines. "It makes it easier for all of the engineers to get things done."

"She does it all and keeps us in line to boot! Wanda takes care of numerous tasks for us such as travel, ARIS, time-sheets, shipping/receiving, and purchasing under \$2500.00 in addition to answering the phone, making copies, binding documents, proof reading manuscripts and letters, typing letters,

and I am sure that I've missed several other tasks. Did I mention that Wanda tries to keep all of us in-line and informed/updated on all the continuous/never ending/overwhelming changes in travel and personnel rules and regulations. Remember we are all engineers and change does not come easy!!"

"Wanda is an exceptional person and we are blessed to have her working in our unit. She makes sure that our unit works and runs as smoothly as possible. She is a prime example of the kind of 'support' staff that ARS scientists need in order to excel in their positions."

"As a co-worker, I too appreciate all the work Wanda does for not only the CPPRU and LIRU but for the helping hand she's always willing to lend in times of need. When I find myself in a crunch and need a little extra help I've never hesitated to call upon Wanda. I think that working together as a team makes life easier on everyone and I'm glad Wanda's on my team!!"

The bottom line when it comes to Office Professionals - - The Cropping System Research Laboratory is proud to have Wanda on board!

**She's one of the BEST and we thank her for the job she does.**



## Tips

by: Olivia Pedraza

Recently I had to mail out brochures for an organic conference we were co-sponsoring. I was sent a list of names and addresses on an Excel spreadsheet. I wondered how I was going to type all 1500+names and addresses to mailing labels or if there was a way that Microsoft Word had a feature that could do that for me. Surely with all this modern technology...well, Microsoft does have a feature to do this and I would like to share it with you. There are six (6) steps to do this:

Click on Tools — Letters & Mailing — Mail Merge Wizard

On Select Document Type — select Labels

Step 1: Click Next: Starting Document —  
Click on label options — select label size

Step 2: Click Next: Select Recipients  
Select Use an Existing List  
Click on Browse to find and select your list

Step 3: Click Next: Arrange Your Labels  
Click on Address Book  
Check recipient's name format  
Click on Match Fields and specify address field components  
Click OK — Click OK

Step 4: Click Next: Preview Your Labels

Step 5: Click Next: Complete the Merger

Step 6: Print

What a Time Saver!



## Ask Smurfy:

by: Ruth Treat

Smurfy was really pleased with all the nice comments on the last column, especially since some came from people other than the office professionals. It's wonderful that this newsletter is being distributed, and read, throughout SPA. Some of the information can be useful to a variety of people at a location.

Just a follow-up on the COI-115 issue. Yes, the 115 accepts first name and middle initial, so for those folks who go by their middle name, it's a problem. But there's no reason that you all can't capture the name info to your running COI list just the same.

### **Dear Smurfy:**

I'm putting together the budget for a grant proposal. Is ARS going to take overhead out of my award when (not if) I get it? If so, how much? Pinching Pennies

### **Dear Pinching:**

Good Point. Yes, ARS will most definitely take a cut, except in a very few situations. It's called IPSC (Indirect Program Support Costs), and it's 10% of the total award to ARS. Whether IPSC is assessed is determined by how the Source of Funds is coded. ARIS reference table will show you if the source is always waived...usually these are your not-for-profit organizations, as registered with IRS (because there are a goodly number of us who would tell you that the Federal Government is not-for-profit...although IRS says differently). Some sources of funds are never waived. For the rest a request for a waiver can be submitted, but waivers are rarely, rarely approved. An example of a situation where a waiver might be granted is when the grant proposal is submitted by your university cooperator and the granting organization's program specifically disallows overhead; thus when funds are sub-awarded down to you, they are still subject to this restriction. CSREES has a few programs like this, and the Federal regulation that covers this is included in the Request for Proposals package. In this case, when you do the 425, you can cite the regulation and explain the situation. As for the amount, it's always the first 10% of the award. If you know how much your direct costs are, you can multiply that number by 11-11%. This will give you the indirect cost amount. Add the direct cost amount and the indirect cost amount

to come up with the total amount you need to request from the granting organization. And hey lookie...the indirect cost amount shows up to be 10% of that grand total. *Magic!*

### **Dear Smurfy:**

Right after I approved a 115 record I noticed a typo. Can you please drop it back to me for correction? Fastest Fingers in the West

### **Dear Fingers:**

Sorry but no. Unless your 115 is coded Yes for Hot Topic, it's going straight to the Tektran people, totally bypassing Area and NPS. Oh, we can see it, and NPS can see it, but we aren't in the approval routing. Now if the record is marked sensitive, that's another story. It will come in here for Anne to print off and Dr. Coppedge to approve. You can contact Anne about your record. If you're really nice, she'll drop it back to you.

As for how to correct your non-sensitive 115, you'll just have to wait until the 115 shows up in Active, and then make a work record, fix it, and send it on through again. The good news is that this straight-through routing means that the record shows up in Active very quickly, so be on the lookout for it.

### **Dear Smurfy:**

You just sent me my file copy of our project plan, and I noticed that you had made several changes to the journal abbreviations in the Literature Cited section. What's up with that? Uncited

### **Dear Uncited:**

Believe it or not there are some standards for abbreviations of words in journal titles. I actually have a handy

dandy book that lists a ton of journals. And even if it doesn't list a specific journal (it's a 1991 catalog and there are several new journals out there now), I can generally find something else that uses a particular word. The great thing about this book is that you may already have it in your office; one of my predecessors provided purchase information and encouraged everyone to get one...I know I had one in Stillwater. Look around to see if you can't find Serial Sources for the BIOSIS Previews Databases. It's gray, about an inch thick. The title note in the front says that it is published annually by BIOSIS, 2100 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103-1399. If you don't have one, I'd heartily recommend that you check out getting one. It's most definitely weighted toward the biological science journals, but it has several in the natural resources arena, enough to get you started.

As for my making changes on your plan, you just got lucky. Normally I don't have time to review these critically. I do, however, make time to check your text references against the Lit Cited section. Good thing too, because I have never found 100% perfection. There is always at least one citation with nothing in the text, or vice versa. Before you send in the project plan, it's good to do a double check on this. Check name spellings too, as well as years, and et al. versus no et al. These are the most common errors I find. Believe me, errors like this do make a difference to a reviewer. It shows a lack of attention to detail, which is not a very good thing when you are doing critical research. You lose credibility fast.

## What Has OSQR Done for You Lately?

By: Ruth Treat

There have indeed been a few changes in the documentation requirements for OSQR. These all show up in the guidelines posted on the OSQR web site, but I'll give you a little preview.

First, beginning with the NP108 panel, we no longer have to use the full justification on our text in either the prospectus or project plan. Everything should be left justified. YEWHAW! This may seem like a minor thing, particularly on the prospectus, but you would be utterly amazed at what I have seen come in here. When there are several people contributing sections to these documents, and you all are busy doing your copy/paste, it's very easy to pull in a section that is formatted differently and then forget to make it consistent with everything else. This is something that I really have to watch out for. I'll still have to watch out for it, but I think it will be easier for you all because you normally don't use the full justification. So things you pull in should pull in perfectly now.

The second benefit of the left justification format is that it will make it much easier for you to control where you insert your figures and tables into the project plan. You can put a figure in the middle of a paragraph without having to fiddle with the last

line of text before the figure to assure that it goes all the way to the right margin.

The second big change on the project plan is that you will be using one page numbering format. No more of the i, ii, etc. The cover sheet will be page 1 (although the sheet won't show header), table of contents will be page 2, and so on. This means that the only section break you will need for the entire document will be between page 1 and 2. Page breaks, yes, but only the one section break. So to all of you people who have asked me to help with the page numbers because you can't get them to work right, this one's for you!

A third change, also to the project plan, won't really affect you too much. On the PrePlan, I am now allowed to send just PDF file to OSQR...no hard copy. So whenever possible, I'm going to be taking your Word file and making a PDF of it just for sending. I do request that you send me your file in Word, not PDF. I do go into your file, and I do make changes to it. I do read the project plans, and when I see a punctuation or grammar or spelling problem I go crazy unless I can fix it. I also frequently have to change footers, or work on the signature page, or fix justification, or any one of several other

things. So Word is what I need from you.

The one project plan content change is a biggie. We have a new section to summarize what was accomplished on the project that is being replaced. In two pages you will need to give the project info ( number, title, duration, investigators) and then for each major project objective you need to summarize the most significant accomplishments and related impacts (cite pubs as appropriate), provide reasons why objectives were not met or had to be modified, and relate objectives from the old project to the objectives proposed on the new project. This will allow the panelists to better understand research progress and the basis for the research that you are proposing for the new project. Oh, by the way...these two pages don't count against the page limit.

I've heard rumors about a few other changes in the works, and I'll get word out to you as things change. As always, when you have a project that is getting ready to go into review, I encourage you and all of the scientists who will be preparing parts of the documentation to go to the OSQR web site and check out the latest requirements.

Happy OSQRing!

## Calendar Reminders

### March

- Women's History Month
- St. Patrick's Day
- Spring Clean-up on 425's ONLY



### April

- April Fool's Day
- Take Our Daughters/Sons to Work
- National Administrative Professionals Week/Day
- Type performance elements on Per-



formance Appraisal (AD-435) for Cat. 5, 7, 8, and 9 employees. Distribute to supervisors with current year original performance plan and instructions for completion.

- Prepare new performance standards and Individual Development Plan (IDP, form ARS-48).

### May

- Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month
- Cinco de Mayo



- Mother's Day
- Federal Holiday—Memorial Day Observance
- Return completed Appraisal forms (AD-435) for Cat. 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 employees, along with Award forms (AD-287), to the Area Office.
- Solicit SY's for equipment, travel and personnel needs for the Annual Resource Management Plan Systems (ARMPS). Provide information to RL for narrative section of the ARMPS.

## Taking Calcium Pills: Yes, No, or Maybe by Dr. Gene Lester, Research Entomologist

My research and other ARS researchers have shown that post harvest fruits receiving calcium supplementation more than aids in making fruit firmer, fruit store longer, taste better, and have a greater nutritional content. The same can be said for humans: calcium is more than a benefit for stronger bones and to stave off osteoporosis. Calcium has been shown to have other benefits, it may

- Lower the risk of colon cancer
- Reduce cholesterol levels
- Reduce blood pressure
- Aid in weight loss
- Ease premenstrual symptoms

Yet the daily intake of calcium from food in the U.S. on average is 690 milligrams, well below the recommended amounts for children or adults. The U.S. Surgeon General Richard Camona, MD, recommends we have a daily intake of

- Children 3 to 8 - 800 mg
- Children 9 to 17 - 1,300 mg
- Adults 18 to 50 - 1,500 mg
- Women over 50 - 1,500 mg
- Men 51 to 65 - 1,200 mg
- Men over 65 - 1,500 mg

If your consumption of calcium is below the recommended level, boost your intake by eating calcium-rich foods, which contain many minerals, vitamins, antioxidants and other health-related compounds. The USDA recommends five or more 1-cup servings per day of plant-based foods. [The plant-based foods highest in calcium based on 1-cup amounts—using milk as a reference - are](#)

- Milk - 306 mg
- Spinach - 291 mg
- Collards - 266 mg
- Turnip greens - 249 mg
- Beans - 191 mg
- Okra - 177 mg
- Beet greens 164 mg
- Tofu ¼ block - 163 mg
- Cabbage - 158 mg

- Papaya - 73 mg
- Orange - 72 mg
- Onion - 72 mg
- Celery - 63 mg
- Broccoli - 62 mg
- Lettuce 1 head - 57 mg

Source: ([www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/data/SR17](http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/data/SR17))

While insufficient calcium is unhealthy, so is too much. Intakes of more than 2,500 mg per day can block the absorption of other nutrients and will likely harm the kidneys.

If you have had kidney stones contact your consulting physician as calcium increases the risk of stones in people who absorb too much calcium. A simple urine test can determine if you have this disorder. Otherwise, consuming calcium, especially dairy products, can actually reduce the occurrence of kidney stones as it blocks the absorption of oxalates, the stone-forming substance naturally found in foods.

If calcium supplementation is necessary, and likely it will be, make your decision based on

- Amount of calcium per pill
- Calcium source/absorbability
- Vitamin D and Magnesium
- Lead content

Amount of calcium per pill. The body can not absorb more than 500 mg of calcium at one time. Therefore select a brand that contains approximately 250 mg per pill. For a total dosage of greater than 500 mg per day, take low dose installments separated by a few hours such as in the morning, afternoon, and or evening.

Calcium source/absorbability. There are three main sources of calcium

- **Coral calcium:** the Federal Trade Commission has acted to stop claims that coral calcium is absorbed better than other forms. Whether it is super, supreme, or some other descriptor hyping the calcium, all calcium from oyster shell, limestone, chalk and coral is calcium carbonate and the absorbability is the same. The FTC says consumers should be wary of coral calcium claims, higher cost, and

high lead levels.

- **Calcium carbonate:** this generic calcium source tends to be the lowest cost of the three, but comes in higher calcium concentrations per pill, usually 500 mg, proving less flexible in how consumers can regulate their installment intake. All antacids contain calcium in this form. Calcium carbonate is best absorbed when taken with food.
- **Calcium citrate:** is well absorbed even on an empty stomach and is better absorbed than calcium carbonate. Calcium citrate comes in greater variety of dosages per pill providing the greatest flexibility in installment intakes.

A good reference to compare and contrast the various brands of calcium supplements can be viewed in the January 2005 issue of Consumer Reports. This issue of Consumer Reports served as the overall information source for this article.

Vitamin D and Magnesium. Vitamin D and magnesium aid in calcium absorption. People who do not consume fatty fish, drink milk, or spend time in the sun do not have sufficient levels of D. Children need 400 IU, and adults need 1000 IU of Vitamin D per day. Most calcium products listing “+ Vitamin D” have adequate levels of Vitamin D. Magnesium (Mg) also aids in building and maintaining strong bones. A calcium supplement with Mg is advised if your diet is low in green vegetables, whole grain food, nuts and seeds.

Lead content. No federal standard exist for lead content in supplements. However California law requires supplements with 1.5 µg or more of lead to bear a warning label.



## Southern Plains Greening Award

Following are excerpts from an article written by Don Comis, ARS Information Staff:

Forget Red or Blue: Color Texas Green, By Don Comis, November 24, 2004

The greening of the Agricultural Research Service leapfrogged this year from the Beltsville, MD, area outside of the nation's capital to the Agency's Southern Plains Area (SPA), which includes Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

The ARS Conservation and Production Laboratory in Bushland, TX, was the first winner of a new annual award called the Southern Plains Area Greening Award. This award recognizes SPA locations that have demonstrated progress in making environmentally friendly choices. The Bushland lab has been using biodiesel since 2000 to power stationary engines used to generate electricity as part of a wind/hybrid power project.. It will soon test emissions from various biodiesel fuels in these engines, in coordination with scientists at the ARS Eastern Regional Research Center in Wyndmoor, PA.

The new award is part of SPA's implementation of requirement by Title IX of the 2002 Farm Bill that all federal procurement offices give preference to USDA - designated biobased items as substitutes for petroleum or other less environmentally friendly ingredients. Bio-based products are usually made, at least in significant part, from U.S. crops and animal products."

Dr. Onstad promoted the "Bio-based Initiative" to SPA; the strategy for implementing the initiative and the award is the idea of Mike Downing, Area Procurement and Realty Officer.

A wide array of Bio-based products are available for use. The United Soybean Board (USB) has compiled information kits for government users in four different areas: 1) Facility, Building, and Equipment Maintenance; 2) Building Construction and Renovation; 3) Janitorial and Cleaning; 4) Printing. The kits are intended to make it easier for interested buyers to identify products that can meet their needs. Each package contains product-specific information provided by manufacturers interested in pursuing federal procurement opportunities. To obtain a copy of one or more of these informational packages, please email: [\[edsoybean@pffifferling.com\]\(mailto:edsoybean@pffifferling.com\). The USB news letter is available at : \[www.unitedsoybean.org/newusers\]\(http://www.unitedsoybean.org/newusers\) or call 1-800 989-8721.](mailto:unit-</a></p>
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In April, SPA locations will be asked to submit accomplishments in support of the Biobased Products Initiative. Through SPA Greening Award, the location that has demonstrated continued efforts, progress, and achievements in making environmentally friendly choices in: 1) Alternative Fuel Vehicle./Alternative; 2) Biobased Products; 3) Energy Efficient Purchases such as Energy Star and Low Power Consuming Products; 4) Environmentally Preferable Products; and 5) Recycling Program for purchases and disposals. For more information on Biobased products visit their website : [www.biobased.ocs.usda.gov/public/index.cfm](http://www.biobased.ocs.usda.gov/public/index.cfm). The site also contains helpful links to OFEE Green Purchasing, GSA and DLA. For assistance you may contact Mike Downing at (979)260-9446 or [m Downing@spa.ars.usda.gov](mailto:m Downing@spa.ars.usda.gov).

## New Leader Program

by Karen Wilcox

I was given the opportunity to participate in the New Leader Program offered by the USDA Graduate School. This is a six-month intense training program which affords participants the opportunity to gain skills for becoming a good leader. This is not supervisory training per se, but leadership training.

The description of the course on the website is: The New Leader Program (NLP) is a six-month leadership development program designed to develop future public service leaders by providing assessment, experiential learning and individual development opportunities. The program develops future public service leaders by providing a solid training and development foundation of leadership skills and team building, which are enhanced by agency developmental experiences.

After completing the Leadership Effectiveness Inventory (LEI) and Myers-

Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) assessments, participants are given their results. The LEI offers insight into the individual's developmental needs - not weaknesses, but developmental needs. The MBTI offers insight into the individuals personality.

During the program, participants are required to complete a 30-day detail outside of their agency. The detail position should address at least one of the participant's developmental needs. Another requirement is for the participant to complete a one-week shadowing assignment of an individual who is a GS-13 or above. There are numerous other requirements during the six-month period.

The happiest day for me was December 17, 2004 — graduation day! That was the day that we all received our plaques and graduated from the program.

The program requires a substantial monetary commitment for your office

and a substantial time commitment from the participant. The monetary commitment consists of the registration fee, travel to the residential training sessions, and study materials. The time commitment for the participant can be definitely overwhelming. Your supervisor must be willing to work with you as far as the time and funds are concerned.

Information on this program and others offered by the USDA Graduate School is available at: <http://www.grad.usda.gov>

Please remember that as with any training, you must obtain your supervisors approval to attend.

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## WEB PAGE

The SPA ACOP homepage is updated periodically and has information about the Council members, our charter, SPA directory, information about the shadowing program, information about the orientation packet, and many useful website 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 Noelia Martinez know and she will make the changes immediately. The web page is located at <http://www.spa.ars.usda.gov/acosp.htm>

## MEMBERSHIP TO COUNCIL

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 is 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.

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Please contact Noelia Martinez if you would like to contribute an article that support, the SPA ACOP Mission.