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USDA

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Inside Information

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CHITCHAT FOR NOW

Budget press conference...film news...another newsletter...annual report time...a brochure about services...and other chitchat just for information officers. That's what you'll find herein, as they say.

* * *

Cruising out of his office the other day, Ed Goodpaster suddenly announced: "Everyone should have a tape deck in his car!"

Turns out Ed, a country music lover, wants a tape deck to keep up-to-date on Jim Johnson's radio output. "That would make driving home in Washington traffic almost worthwhile," Ed says. (Sorry, Christmas is 315 days away.)

* * *

BUDGET
PRESS CONFERENCE
BREAKS RECORD

Every year, USDA holds a press conference the Saturday before the budget is announced...amidst considerable griping and bellyaching from press regulars who must cut their weekends. Numbers usually vary from 15-20 press folks.

This year, according to Joe McDavid, the place was swamped...had over 100 in attendance...Joe worked like mad getting chairs so people wouldn't have to sit on the floor.

We think the increase came about for a couple of reasons, though maybe there are more. Speculation here has it that food is getting to be pretty important. That's fine, maybe, to think people are thinking food and USDA at the same time.

On the other hand, maybe folks are more interested in how their money is being spent today than they've been before. That leads to some other thoughts we should leave alone, no doubt.

* * *

PARDON US...

Speaking of budget, the Commodity News Service--among others who splashed budget news all over--reported that the new FY 1980 USDA budget reveals no startling program slashes and offers no clues on how the department might fare under major government reorganization plans.

Well, readers of "Inside..." might differ with that thought. After all, what could be more startling than the USDA regional information shops we're hoping to develop? What could be more major...as far as information officers are concerned? Come now, CNS!

The regional information plans received further airing the other day when Jim Webster, GPA, got a Congressional inquiry about present regional operations.

Seems Jack Gilchrist, special assistant to the Commissioner of Agriculture in Georgia, wrote a friend on the Hill asking why AMS et al information folks issued food information but seldom got involved in explaining farm programs. ("Inside..." refers to the shops as AMS et al because they serve programs of AMS, APHIS, FSQS, and FGIS.)

ASK, AND THOU
SHALL RECEIVE...
AN ANSWER

The friend then asked Jim about the situation.

Jim's response, in part, points out that Jack fingered a central problem...that the AMS regional shops served four agencies, not all USDA...that some other agencies have somewhat similar, but different, regional information structures.

For instance, SEA has regional information offices in New Orleans, Berkeley, Peoria, and Beltsville. FNS has them in Atlanta, Dallas, Chicago, Denver, San Francisco, Boston, and Princeton. FS has nine in other cities.

On the other hand, FmHA, ASCS, and other agencies have none. SCS has no regional offices but has an information specialist in each state.

None of the existing regional information officers have responsibilities that encompass price support, farm credit, or disaster programs. Various agency information staffs in the field do get called on now and then to help on such programs and on others related to the Department as a whole. And they do the best they can when called upon.

So, Jim pointed out, we're asking for overall USDA regional information staffs. They will provide information which people seek and deserve from USDA...without making undue demands on single-agency information people who are neither expected nor organized to work outside the boundaries of their agency's programs.

* * *

TASK AT HAND

Obviously, plans need to be developed more firmly about the USDA regional information situation. So...a task force of GPA and agency information folks will start to work on the matter over the next couple of months.

Stan Prochaska, AMS, will head the group to analyze the existing system and to advise GPA how to implement a new system that will have the greatest benefit to the Department, its agencies, and its publics.

Keep reading "Inside..." for details. No, folks, this wasn't a set-up.

* * *

John Crowley, GPA's eminent author of the "People on the Farm" series, is working on another best seller.

Well...it's the Secretary's annual report. Plans call for it to be off the press by March 1.

CONCISE
AND COMPREHENSIVE

This year it will be a concise and comprehensive overview of the department's activities, plus all the trends in all the commodities, both nationally and internationally.

John says because of agency help, it's a good roundup. "As I gathered the material I became convinced that no one else in the department has such an overview. That's a serious flaw." ("Inside..." suggests that you write John and reserve a copy.)

Something else you might like to get is called "Services Available Through the U.S. Department of Agriculture."

YOU WANT...
YOU CAN GET

It's a directory that explains what services and programs do and how and where to obtain them. Should be a handy-dandy answering item to keep right by your telephone.

If you don't have a copy by the time this issue of "Inside..." reaches you, write or call Bill Whyte, Special Reports Div., GPA.

* * *

MAINE'S LANDREY SICK

Word from the state of Maine tells us that Horace Landrey, information officer for the state department of agriculture there, is on extended sick leave. No details, however.

LIBBY HELPING

Elwood Libby has taken over temporarily.

* * *

Bob Keifer of GPA's motion picture division says editing is now completed and prints are being made on the FS film shot in New Mexico. (That's the job where cameramen had a forced landing...the film's about different kinds of fuelwood for local burning.)

FILM CLIPS...

Bob says the film will have original music composed and played by a guitar player and singer discovered by soundman, Floyd DeFrance, at the motel "lounge" where the crew was staying.

Other films in the mill...another for FS on habitat and environment...one on wind energy for SEA...one on Civil Service Reform for the Office of Personnel. Then there's also a new opening sequence for "A Better Way," USDA's half-hour weekly TV show.

* * *

As reported last week, USDA has its own paper chase...and maybe some of the rest of you have one too.

GPA has a three-phase approach to let folks know about the problem--in addition to the exclusive, early-on scoop "Inside..." gave you last week.

ANYBODY
GOT THE PAPER?

First, there probably soon will be a working meeting with the D.C. printing liaison specialists...a copy of the GPO announcement will be given to all agency information heads...and the Secretary, assistant secretaries and agency administrators will get a briefing on the situation.

Now the bad news: Nelson Fitton's publications division will be reviewing publications more carefully in the future...requiring more justification for printing possibly...returning more material with marginal purpose and content...returning more for rewriting when quality is questionable...returning camera ready material when it's doubtful that a good reproduction job can be done from it.

That means more time will be required to move material. Nelson says that means you can help by submitting well-justified, well-written material in good camera ready condition. (Some folks are just naturally mean!)

But hold on! Nelson also points out that the situation requires us to cut back on low priority printing, budget to pay more for paper and printing in 1979, plan carefully and further ahead, and try to reduce number of rush jobs.

We should be doing that all the time anyway, sez "Inside..."
* * *

The mail brought another newsletter...this one from the ACE visual committee. (Wups, it's now called the graphic design technical committee.) Ruth Thompson, La. State is chairwoman.

A NEW LETTER...
AND A QUESTION

We were flattered...Ruth uses our format...or we use Ruth's... or we both use someone else's.

Anyhow...of the many items Ruth included, one in particular probably has haunted many of us. We'll label it "higher visibility."

Ruth wrote: "You're doing a good job (in her case, she probably meant extension folks, information folks, and probably designers), but who knows it?"

Perhaps some would answer, "Why should anyone know us...we're here to do a job...so let's just do it." And that could be countered with, "but times have changed. If the well dries up, we can't do a job."

Ruth answered her question with a question: "What am I doing to solve that very real problem?" Then she offered a way...develop a design program that will be unified, contemporary, forceful, dignified, and terrific. She also asked to see what others are doing or would like to do...and so does "Inside Information." Write, folks.

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