

# NHC NEWS

*A Monthly Bulletin of the Northwest Horticultural Council*

## USDA

The political leadership of the U.S. Department of Agriculture changes with each new Administration. The role of these top-tier appointed officials has in the past been one of explaining the needs of U.S. agriculture to those in control of the White House and Congress, whether Republican or Democratic. Certainly every USDA secretary has worked to achieve his (or in the case of Secretary Veneman, her) president's agenda, but usually the fundamental aim was to keep those in farm states (the rather significant land mass between the country's east and west coasts) fairly happy—without breaking the federal budget.

With the Obama Administration's political appointees at USDA now largely confirmed by Congress and at work in the Jamie L. Whitten Building, major change is afoot.

With global warming, energy independence, third-world development and consumer nutrition initiatives near the top of the White House agenda, USDA now is seen as an important tool to achieve policy objectives rarely at the forefront at that federal department.

Evidence of this shift in focus can be drawn from the number of USDA political appointments from non-traditional agricultural pasts. As number two at USDA, Kathleen Merrigan, a former staff member to Senator Leahy of Vermont and who helped develop USDA's organics program. From the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, where he was head of agricultural development, comes Dr. Rajiv Shah, USDA's new chief scientist. From the same Seattle-based foundation's global health program, Rachael Goldfarb is now counselor to the under secretary for research, education and economics. From Global Volunteers, Bud

Philbrook is deputy undersecretary for farm and foreign agricultural services. From the State Department, where he was a senior democracy and governance advisor, Michael Michener, now sits as the new administrator of the Foreign Agricultural Service.

Secretary Tom Vilsack, an attorney who was once governor of Iowa, some view as more from the global social activist tradition of FDR's secretary of agriculture Henry Wallace (himself from Iowa) than that of other, more traditional USDA secretaries. It may be expected that Secretary Vilsack will be spending a good deal of his tenure cajoling U.S. agricultural groups toward acceptance of White House policy initiatives, as opposed to bringing the views of agriculture to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

The upshot is to expect greater use of the Foreign Agriculture Service to further international aid and development (and less attention to promoting U.S. agricultural exports); the Agricultural Research Service to target more work at global warming; there to be more battles with Big Sugar and soda firms over nutrition policy; and funding wars to soon rage as the Administration looks to traditional agricultural commodity programs for deep budget cuts--given a ballooning federal deficit.



## ***Travel***

### ***Christian Schlect***

**August 20-23** – USApple's 2009 Apple Crop Outlook and Marketing Conference and meeting of the board of directors of the United States Apple Association, Chicago, Illinois.

**August 25** – Pacific Northwest Food Safety Committee meeting, Wenatchee, Washington.

**August 26** – WSU's Safety of Northwest Produce conference, Wenatchee, Washington.

### ***Deborah Carter***

**August 25** – Pacific Northwest Food Safety Committee meeting, Wenatchee, Washington.

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### ***Mark Powers***

**August 25-September 5** – Travel to Jakarta, Indonesia and Bangkok, Thailand to meet with U.S. Embassy officials; then speak at Asia Fruit Congress, Hong Kong, China.

### ***Mike Willett***

**August 13** – Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission's 2009 summer technical research review, Chelan, Washington.

A lot of Ukrainians were living out [on the steppes], and wherever fate takes them, Ukrainians invariably plant apple trees and pear trees, and hollyhocks in front of their windows. They can't get along without such things.

*Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev  
Reformer [1945-1964]*

*The Northwest Horticultural Council represents the deciduous tree fruit industry of Idaho, Oregon and Washington on national and international policy matters of interest to growers and shippers. Its members are:*

- *Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers*
- *Idaho Apple Commission*
- *Oregon Sweet Cherry Commission*
- *Pacific Northwest Canned Pear Service*
- *Washington Apple Commission*
- *Washington State Fruit Commission*
- *Washington Tree Fruit Research Comm.*
- *Wenatchee Valley Traffic Assn.*
- *Yakima Valley Growers-Shippers Assn.*

*The NHC also advises the Fresh Pear Committee (Portland) on certain issues related to food safety, crisis control and international trade.*



- **Christian Schlect**, President
- **Mark Powers**, Vice President
- **Michael J. Willett, Ph.D.**, Vice President for Scientific Affairs
- **Deborah Carter**, Technical Issues Manager

**Street address:**

105 So. 18<sup>th</sup> Street  
Suite 105

Yakima, Washington 98901 USA

Telephone: (509) 453-3193

Facsimile: (509) 457-7615

E-mail: [general@nwhort.org](mailto:general@nwhort.org)

Web site: [www.nwhort.org](http://www.nwhort.org)