

**ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES**

00:00:13:04 Q: Today is December 4th of the year 2000, I'm Larry Quinn with the Office of Communications at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington. And today we're talk with Patricia Garamendi who is the Deputy Administrator, the Foreign Agricultural Service, but she's also held another special role, being the Director of the Secretary's Millennium Program this year.

00:00:34:06 First of all tell us about some of the background that you had coming into USDA.

00:00:39:20 A: Oh well I came back here with the Clinton Administration and I, my first assignment was as Associate Director of the United States Peace Corps which I enjoyed very much. I worked with 92 countries, did a lot of traveling; placed probably over 25,000 volunteers during five and a half years there.

00:00:56:25 But then coming over to USDA I have an agricultural background, a farmer from California and it was very exciting to be involved with the farm programs and really working with the conservation programs in the

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

FSA office at first. And then during that time the Secretary asked me to chair his Millennium Council and Larry Quinn, you were a member of that council so we met many times.

00:01:25:12 And it was quite an incredible year with what the Secretary was able to put together.

00:01:30:16 Q: What was your goal with that Council?

00:01:31:09 A: Well it was really a... it came as a proclamation from the President of the United States for each department to really celebrate the millennium. And I have to say that Secretary Glickman probably did more to celebrate the millennium than any other department that I have been aware of.

00:01:52:17 He really embraced it and he had so many creative ideas and I had known him for a long time and he knew the kind of energy I had and so he really added this on as one of my assignments. And I had the pleasure of working with all of the agencies within USDA because he wanted each and every agency within USDA to do

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

something to celebrate the millennium.

00:02:16:02 And we started off with a... I mean I can remember our first meetings in his office and he kind of drafted me into this role and when he told me that his first event that he wanted to do was to honor George Washington Carver by dedicating the Beltsville building in his name and he wanted it a week long celebration.

00:02:40:01 Well he had me hooked because I'd always greatly admired Dr. Carver and it gave me a flavor of really he wanted to do major, major events. So we started out with the nuts and bolts as you remember Larry, everybody sent a representative to these council meetings and we literally met every single week for the first six months until everything was rolling.

00:03:07:15 And people came up with wonderful projects and they were all united, tied together. The Secretary recognized, awarded everyone that participated and it was... As you know from your own experience they were always very energized meetings and we pulled together I think as a USDA, we really were team USDA.

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

00:03:28:00 And so I'm happy to be sharing this history with you because when I was asked to do this, I thought well the bicentennial, there must be some history there on how do you organize something on this magnitude. And all I could find were some you know folders that were, you know no technology at that time, 1776, you know, 1976.

00:03:49:28 But you know people were to cut out their logos and they were to mail them around to each other and set up little things. Well it was totally the opposite here when we established this because we had cyber space and we had a web page immediately and people were, we already had, we have a history just on our old website, putting this together.

00:04:10:09 But we also we designed a logo that is USDA celebrating the millennium, the Secretary, his George Washington Carver event, he started off, I mean he had posters all around, it was such a marvelous event and people like Priscilla Kerry (ph.) were just instrumental in making it happen. This wonderful that poster, it is simply

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

service that measures success.

00:04:39:21 And I think that was quite an inspiration to all of us.

The next event that we did was the 25th anniversary of WIC. Now that's Women, Infants and Children, that was really quite a historic time and that whole division did a wonderful job in pulling this all together.

00:04:59:28 And then just recently you know the Secretary named a Hall of Heroes that has you know from Smokey Bear to the founder of the NRCS, the conservation, the soils conservation program to Dole who worked so much for children and it was just very exciting times. The other really substantive thing I think the Secretary gave us great leadership on were the millennium lecture series.

00:05:31:17 And he was really into this, he went out and he had his ideas about what he..., he wanted them to be provocative, he wanted them to be important for this year 2000 and he wanted great diverse participation and those are all in the archives, the records of those lecture series.

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

00:05:53:00 He was always concerned about children being engaged and appreciative of agriculture and so he had us set up a website for children. That was the first ever and it was very well received. He also had always thought of Henry Wallace as his hero so we started by dedicating and naming the Henry A. Wallace room.

00:06:16:24 And he brought in all of Henry Wallace's family and he had a Henry Wallace lecture series where Senator George McGovern came and he talked to us about Henry Wallace and it's very interesting because it tied together with the George Washington Carver, all these linkages that only in near history do you look at.

00:06:40:08 He talked about how Henry Wallace was influenced by George Washington Carver who would go with his father to the university and George Washington Carver would hold his hand and walk him around the gardens and talk to him about the flowers and then he'd come back and tell his father how brilliant he was.

00:06:58:14 And so Henry Wallace always thought that that was why

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

he loved agricultural and was such a wonderful Secretary of Agriculture for us. The... you know he had, he was always concerned about diversity and this is a year when he really wanted to have a total healing within the Department of Agriculture.

00:07:20:12 And he had all of us focus on that. And of course with my Peace Corps background that was a natural for me and to capture this, what he wanted to happen here. One of the programs that he put together was this tapestry of American agriculture. And it's a brochure that really addresses minority farmers and in a very rich way.

00:07:45:01 And it was really a project of all, of many people within USDA. I think, I mean from the communications office to the agricultural library and all the research and work that went into that. Also in regards to that he wanted us to celebrate century farms. And so the first ever century farms calendar was produced during this time.

00:08:14:10 And it is just beautiful and I think that it tells so much about the Secretary himself, not only did we

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

produce this calendar but we celebrated the participants in it and we had a reception bringing them up. There was one in particular he wanted to make sure that we had an African-American farmer, that we had an Asian farmer and we had an Hispanic farmer and a Native American featured as a century farmer.

00:08:40:22 And as you know from history it, many people could not own their farms during that time. So we took a very broad view of what a century farmer was and a great example is Chester Thigpin (ph.), here's a picture of Chester Thigpin and he was quite an inspiration. He was a tree farmer of the year and he couldn't have owned his land for 100 years cause, but it was the land that his family had worked as slaves.

00:09:13:21 And he'd gone off in the service, had saved enough money and had come back and had bought that land that his family had only worked even though they couldn't own it. And he developed that into one of the most wonderful tree farms you could ever imagine and his sons came up and met with the Secretary and were honored by him.

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

00:09:34:02 Another wonderful story is the... an Asian farmer, people kept saying oh you can't find, we can't find an Asian farmer that's been able to own their land for 100 years. Well this is Larry Chikuna (ph.) and Larry Chikuna I went to high school with him and I knew that his family had worked that land in California since the late 1800s.

00:09:59:28 But of course under the Asian exclusion act they could own it you know because of the internment camps, they had their land taken away from them for a period of time, but by golly they had worked that land for over a century and he's a very, very successful strawberry grower as you could see. The other, to recognize a Hispanic, this was wonderful because this is in Puerto Rico.

00:10:29:09 And they even sent in their actual land-grant application and this is a beautiful farm also.

00:10:38:25 Q: So it sounds very much like a celebration of the heritage of agriculture during this millennium year?

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

00:10:43:25 A: Yes it was. It was very aspect of agriculture and the heritage of agriculture, yes.

00:10:50:01 Q: Agriculture has had its root since the beginning of our nation and still feeds people not only in this nation but around the world. And that maybe leads me to some of the work you're doing today, it certainly pulls upon your Peace Corps background, tell us about the work you do today.

00:11:04:10 A: Well today I am Deputy Administrator for the Foreign Agriculture Service and I'm almost the National Food Security Coordinator and it's a wonderful job because it's to answer the goals of the world food summit in 1996 they set out, with all the nation's leaders, everybody from around the world to half world hunger by the 2015.

00:11:35:01 And so what we did here at USDA is we didn't just say oh we'll work on it, we put (unint.) on an action plan and the action plan was developed in 1998 and it was solutions to hunger and it was with many other agencies

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

and with the seven elements. And yes it was an action plan, we were working, we have the X Act, the Food Safety Committee that meets regularly appointed by... as a commission by the President of the United States.

00:12:08:24 Created by President Clinton and then it comes together with three other federal agencies, the State Department, also USAID and Department of Agriculture to an inner agency working group. And this group they keep it moving along. And this year we had a progress report and this is the progress report that I hope is somewhere in the archives and it's called "A Millennium, Food from Hunger".

00:12:40:02 And it is really incredible what has been accomplished in these eight years. You know I mean, I know that you probably have talked to people about the gleaning effort where you know ten million pounds of food have been gleaned from fields. I mean people working together, the private, the public partnership.

00:13:03:02 But the extra effort that the Undersecretary of Food and Nutrition has made to make sure that children do

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

not go to bed hungry at night because we still have hunger in America and that is, remains a challenge although we've made much progress. But around the world we're really falling quite short, we're not staying on top of it, we're on target and so it really it is a challenge for those in the future.

00:13:30:29 And everything that USDA does is food security, whether it's economic policy to deal with agriculture, whether it's trade and investment, whether it's research and development, food safety nets, mapping, topography, I mean all of these things you know, sustainable agriculture, the environment, they all come together to help with food security around the world.

00:13:53:20 And we do a lot of food aid but really our goal as a Department is to move people from food aid to food security so they can feed themselves and so the food system works out there.

00:14:03:22 Q: And keeping the world green reminds me that you have another part of the millennium program that I didn't ask you about and that's the millennium green program,

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

let's talk about that.

00:14:15:24 A: Thank you Larry, I have had a good time here because I think I've been able to work on things that are very near and dear to my heart. Millennium green was created when the White House Millennium Council wanted to, you know they had many projects, they had Mars Millennium, they had Millennium Trails, they had history projects, but they didn't have like a green project to celebrate the millennium.

00:14:40:16 So the First Lady turned to our Secretary, Secretary Glickman and asked if he would chair a millennium green and the purpose of millennium green is to plant a tree for every American this year, to work on millennium roads, to plant a million millennium gardens and the First Lady came to Department of Agriculture December 1999 and she laid down a challenge to all of us.

00:15:14:09 And I think her words were that she used in her speech were from Martin Luther King and as she said our planet is the most important treasure for us to preserve in this year 2000 and she said Dr. King once said, if I

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

were to die tomorrow I would still plant a tree today because every time we plant a tree we do it knowing we may never sit under its shade.

00:15:42:01 Every time we plant a tree, we leave embedded in its roots the story of who we are as a people and as a nation and who we want to be. And I, you know here at USDA we have the forestry department, they have been great leaders in this whole effort and of course she's been the chairman and we actually planted a tree.

00:16:03:26 We planted a tree with her but we also named the wonderful white oak tree out front the Hillary Rodham Clinton tree in honor of the millennium. And I think that people should make note that we actually had a millennium garden in front of USDA. I don't think that's been done since the '30s when we used to plow out front.

00:16:24:08 But they all of our, everybody just joined in and they were just thrilled. So we actually not only did we have our own farmers market here at USDA, but we also had a millennium vegetable garden and part of the

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

millennium garden was to you know, every time you plant a garden to save road to harvest to take to a food bank.

00:16:44:25 Now there's a wonderful thing to teach children in the schools, I mean it really touched so many lives and we had many wonderful partners with millennium green and it may be the most lasting legacy. We worked with other federal agencies but we worked with many non-profits and I think also relationships you know the first time that they will have been invited into USDA, I hope that those relationships will carry on well into this millennium.

00:17:12:13 Q: I'm sure you'll carry lots of new memories from the time that you've spent here at USDA, any ones that you want to share?

00:17:19:00 A: Oh I just, I find myself choked up many times because I, it's a good Department and there are so many good people and I think really to sit there in the front row and here the First Lady talk about the work we do here, it was and to quote Dr. King, it really is

ORAL HISTORY WITH PATRICIA GARAMENDI  
DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR  
FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICES

full circle for me in my life because my life has been one of service and what could be more important than to protect our land, protect our water, feed our children.

00:17:51:01 So I have many happy memories.

00:17:53:25 Q: Thank you very much Patricia Garamendi for being with us to talk about your work here at USDA. I'm Larry Quinn with the Office of Communications at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington.

END OF INTERVIEW