Watershed Management Internship Program

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The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), also known as the people's department, is considered one of the largest agencies within the federal government consisting of 17 departments. The agency's mission is “provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management” (USDA). As one of the largest organizations, the agency’s mission is thus divided into a number of individual departments intended to target, address through policies and implement in order to follow-through with the public. As such, the USDA provides an abundance of services through its established 17 departments: Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP) Economic Research Service (ERS) Farm Service Agency (FSA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) Forest Service (FS) Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) National Agricultural Library (NAL) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Risk Management Agency (RMA) Rural Development (RD). While each department has its individual functions, they each work together in providing the public’s needs while conserving our natural resources.

Under the mission statement, the USDA plans to expand economic opportunity through innovation, helping rural America to thrive; to promote agriculture production sustainability that better nourishes Americans while also helping feed others throughout the world; and to preserve and conserve our Nation's natural resources through restored forests, improved watersheds, and healthy private working lands (USDA). In addition, the agency's vision statements is “To expand economic opportunity through innovation, helping rural America to thrive; to promote
agriculture production sustainability that better nourishes Americans while also helping feed others throughout the world; and to preserve and conserve our Nation’s natural resources through restored forests, improved watersheds, and healthy private working land” (USDA, Pg. 6).

As a Graduate Student at San Diego State University (SDSU) – Imperial Valley Campus and Watershed Management Intern/Student Liaison with the USDA-HSI and SDSU-IVCampus Partnership, I have learned a vast amount of information about the USDA and, in addition, have developed a number of skills that can be applied to my upcoming career as a young professional. During my internship, I supported a wide-ranging and varied regional higher education initiatives, activities, events, projects, and programs to promote the U.S. Forest Service, USDA, and other federal agencies in natural resources and environmental management, such as the AgDiscovery Program, a summer residential program funded by USDA-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), focusing on plant and animal science, wildlife management, and agribusiness.

In addition, I also contributed on a number of field trips and other multi-faceted processes that allow students to further explore prospective educational career pathways within the USDA and other interagency cooperation. I also coordinated in various Campus-wide events and attended field trips that have exposed me to the variety of different challenges facing agriculture. For example, one of the projects that I was involved in coordinating and working on the logistics was the 2013 AgroBaja Trade Show in Mexicali, B.C., México, networking with agricultural producers, suppliers, and service providers from the states of México. On this event we learned that México is one of the most important agricultural trade partners for the U.S. and the imperative of linking and improving foreign market access for U.S. agriculture to the world. This binational trade show is popularly acclaimed as one of the largest agricultural expos in
México with varied showcases and wide-ranging exhibitions of its leading agricultural commodities and products.

In addition, another project under the partnership that was executed was VIP Tour of the Import/Export Agricultural Operations and Commercial, Pedestrian, and Vehicle Inspection of the Imperial County Port of Entry on the U.S.-México border crossing in Calexico, CA provided by the Chief for Agricultural Operations from the DHS – U.S. CBP: Agriculture Division. On this event, we learned first-hand about the joint task force first-line of defense in protecting America’s agricultural resources, with an integrated agricultural science and enforcement-based approach through a USDA interagency Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on the processing functions, inspections, entry, collections, and verification. The Calexico East port of entry location is considered one of the largest agricultural checkpoint facilities between U.S.-México.

One of the many on-campus coordinated events included the Local Harvest Farmers Market “Showcase” that promoted the concept of healthy eating choices to the community it serves, to provide and facilitate access to fruits and vegetable, promote USDA’s ChooseMyPlate.gov visual cue as a reminder to make healthier food choices for a healthier lifestyle, and USDA’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) on its nutrition assistance and benefits. In addition, I participated in an educational hands-on workshop “How to create an edible landscape... with fruits and vegetables” on-Campus, building a sample backyard garden box to readily have available healthy food options. This was targeted to promote the importance of stimulating the regional accessibility on the concept of healthy eating choices, as Imperial County is one of the U.S. Counties with highest percent of Hispanic populations.
Another on-campus event that was coordinated and produced was the Panel Conversation at SDSU-IVCampus targeted and geared toward USDA-related career pathways within USDA Service Centers; it was titled Rural Access to the USDA Service Center in the Imperial Valley. This event focused on informing student and the community about the different number of programs, services, and resources by the USDA-Farm Service Agency (FSA) – helping farmers, ranchers, and agricultural partners to keep farming and in business; the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) – providing voluntary technical assistance to conserve, maintain, and improve natural resources; and the USDA-Rural Development (RD) – offering financial support to individuals, business, and communities through varied loans and grants to improve the economic stability of its surrounding community, business, residents, farmers and ranchers, and improve the quality of life in rural areas.

In addition, I provided workshops and presentations to student organizations, clubs, and associations on a variety of topics related to educational career pathways within natural resources and environmental management, participate in Imperial County Higher Education Week activities scheduled throughout the Imperial Valley, which targeted and geared towards its 2,000+ high school students, to create a college-going culture. Furthermore, I also attend monthly meetings of the Imperial County Partnership for Higher Education (ICPHE) of incorporating the similarities that connect “College Ready & Career Ready” and promoted (USDA) Pathways Program for Students and Recent Graduates to Federal Careers through USAJobs® – Student Jobs @ https://www.usajobs.gov/StudentsAndGrads.

Furthermore, Working for the Great Outdoors Educational Excursion & Learning Experience with "American Icon – Smokey Bear" to the USDA-FS / Cleveland National Forest – Descanso Ranger District in Alpine, CA was a transformational experience. Student were able to
learn about the world-famous Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, beginning at the Mexican border until reaching the Canadian border. In addition, students also visited the Laguna Mountain Recreation Area mountaintop overlooking vistas at 6,000 ft. elevation with the surrounding forest backdrop at El Prado Campground and its historical Ranger's Cabin built in 1911. Furthermore, the USDA-FS / Southern California Consortium (SCC) informed SDSU-IVCampus’ students on the varied and wide-ranging Student Trainee positions to join the U.S. Forest Service in working for the great outdoors.

Thus, through my recent internship with the USDA-HSI and SDSU-IVCampus Partnership Internship allowed me to not only be involved and engaged in various Campus-wide events and attended field trips, it exposed me to the different departments within the agency and the variety of different challenges facing agriculture: food security, nutrition, natural resources, conservation, rural development, and other related issues.

As a result of my internship with the USDA-HSI and SDSU-IVCampus Partnership, I am happy to report that not only did the internship prepare me for post-graduation employment, it has given me the great opportunity of being extended an offer to work with the USDA-FS / Inyo National Forest – Mammoth & Mono Lake Ranger Districts in Mammoth Lakes, CA. There, I will support and contribute to its mission, goals, and objectives of Caring for the Land and Serving People a further learn about the agency and challenges agriculture foresees as challenges in the “now” and foreseeable future, along with the policies and strategies that are being developed and implemented in order to address the challenges at hand.