

## **NIFA's Military and Veterans Portfolio**

Representing USDA's Research, Education and Economics (REE) mission area, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) has been at the forefront of understanding and addressing the challenges associated with military family life. In collaboration with the Land-grant University (LGU) System and Cooperative Extension Service (CES), NIFA has administered quality research and evidence-based educational programs that strengthen military and veteran families for thirty years. Today, initiatives are developed in conjunction with the Department of Defense, Service Branches, and Garrison Commands or created under programs like AgrAbility and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development to meet the unique and pressing needs of Service members, Wounded Warriors, Veterans, and their families.

### **NIFA Programs**

NIFA administers grants that support the National AgrAbility Project (NAP) as well as state AgrAbility Projects that engage Veterans. NAP participates in public awareness activities focused on Veterans at events such as the National Veterans Small Business Conference. NAP also sends AgrAbility resource kits to Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals participating in the Spinal Cord Injury Vocational Integration Program. In a pilot program that includes NAP, American Legion, Ability One / Source America, and USDA Rural Development and Farm Service Agency, a resource guide and website <http://rv2a.org> with information on programs and opportunities available to Veterans was developed.

#### **The Beginning Farmers and Ranchers Development Program**

(<http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/beginningfarmerandrancher.cfm>) develops and offers education, training, outreach and mentoring programs to ensure the success of the next generation of farmers, including Veterans. The 2014 Farm Bill includes a 5% set aside for Veteran farmers and ranchers, approximately one million annually through 2018. As one example, the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service and ARS Poultry Production and Product Safety Research Unit developed a comprehensive modular training program that provides new and beginning farmers with relevant knowledge and tools to operate efficient and sustainable farms and ranches, focused primarily on integrated poultry, livestock and agroforestry systems; including specialized materials for returning Veterans.

The Food and Agriculture Resilience Program for Military Veterans (FARM-Vets) is proposed as a new and purposeful program in FY15 to lead and bring to bear all possible farm-related opportunities, including beginning farmer, hydroponics, aquaculture, and special niches so that interested Veterans are matched with opportunities that promote individual and community economic development. FARM-Vets will also encourage research and educational initiatives that engage Wounded Warriors, including those experiencing post-traumatic stress (PTS) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) in proven and promising agricultural, animal, environmental, and horticultural therapies.

#### **DoD – USDA Extension Military Partnership**

This mission-focused partnership cultivates collaborations with educational institutions and non-governmental and community-based organizations with expertise in early childhood education, youth development and related fields to support the family programs, workforce development, and child care and youth development needs of the Department of Defense (DoD). Through this partnership between NIFA and DoD's Office of Military Community & Family Policy (MC&FP), programs and training support military youth, families, and communities as well as non-military audiences.

Key projects and lead institutions include the Virtual Lab School (Ohio State University), Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness (Pennsylvania State University), Community Capacity Building (University of Georgia), Military REACH and Family Readiness Training (University of Minnesota), Child Care Training and Technical Assistance (University of Nebraska-Lincoln), Military Families Learning Network (eXtension), Child and Youth Deployment Support and Military Academic Advancement Program (Kansas State), Project Youth Extension Service (North Carolina State), Healthy Base Initiative Evaluation (Cornell), Child Care Curriculum Development and Overall Leadership (Purdue).

#### **Service Branch and Garrison Level Commands**

NIFA administers research projects funded by Air Force: Family Advocacy Program (Kansas State), Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (Penn State) and Extension initiatives funded by Army and Army Reserves: Family Advocacy Program (Cornell University), Evidenced Based Programming (Cornell), and Wounded Warriors (Texas AgriLife Extension Service). NIFA also administers funding from Garrison Level Commands that support Extension educators on Army bases at Forts Bliss and Hood and Joint Base San Antonio in Texas (Texas AgriLife), Fort Campbell in KY (University of Tennessee), and Fort Drum in New York (Jefferson County Cooperative Extension). Dedicated programming promotes the financial security, healthy relationships, and child nutrition of Soldiers, Airmen, and their loved ones. Recently developed MOUs with Coast Guard, National Guard Bureau, and US Special Operations Command are expected to provide additional research and programming opportunities in FY14.

#### **4-H Military Partnership**

4-H National Headquarters at NIFA has developed partnerships with the Army, Navy, and Air Force to develop and support military children, youth and family programs on military installations around the world, as well as the families of National Guard and Reserves living in communities far removed from military installations. 4-H is the CES's youth development program providing research-based, non-formal, educational program and organization for youth (5-19 years). Programming opportunities occur at community, state, regional and national levels throughout the United States, District of Columbia, and its territories. Each State/Territory has an Extension 4-H military liaison that works with military partners in their state.

#### **Related Efforts**

Complementary to these efforts, NIFA's Veterans Emphasis Program Manager (VEPM) co-chairs the department-wide task force, USDA for Veterans, Reservists, and Military Families (VRMF). The VRMF, a subcommittee of the National Food and Agriculture Council, is charged with strengthening and coordinating programmatic and outreach efforts to better serve military and veteran families across all agencies within USDA.

The VRMF has produced a briefing book for USDA leadership that includes a work plan to enhance programmatic and outreach efforts to Veterans and military families in five areas: research and data; business and credit services; families and youth; housing; and employment opportunities in the food and agricultural sector.

Collectively, these efforts strengthen military-connected individuals, families, and the communities in which they live. Through our thriving partnership with DoD, VA, Military Services, and the expertise of the land-grant and Cooperative Extension system, NIFA honors the sacrifices of Service members, Veterans and their families by enhancing their quality of life through high-quality research, education, and outreach.

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