



FARM AID 2016 at USDA

Thursday, September 15th

11:30 am – 1:30 pm

Jefferson Auditorium
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC

SPEAKER BIOS

Ben Burkett is the state coordinator of the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, a state association of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/ Land Assistance Fund. The Federation, an umbrella organization now composed of 35 cooperatives representing 12,000 African-American farm families from Texas to North Carolina, assists farmers in land retention and the development of economically self-sufficient communities. Member cooperatives purchase supplies and receive marketing, financial and technical assistance through the federation. Ben is involved in several cooperatives, believing that that is the only way you can make it in the rural south. He is a founding member of the Indian Springs Farmers Association, in Petal, Mississippi. Ben is the cooperative's former manager and treasurer.

He also serves as president of the National Family Farm Coalition, an organization that pursues policies to: enact the Food from Family Farms Act; restore competition to the farm and food sector; negotiate fair trade agreements; promote food security and food safety; hold U.S. government agencies accountable; and minimize the risks of genetic engineering. He also represents the Coalition on the Via Campesina Food Sovereignty Commission and is a board member of the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC).

Ben is community activist and an experienced vegetable and timber farmer. His extended knowledge of agriculture has taken him to Senegal, South Africa, Kenya, Nicaragua, Lebanon, and Zimbabwe. Ben exchanges knowledge and information with small-scale farmers. In turn, he has hosted West African honey, rice and vegetable producers who visited the United States to learn irrigation, marketing and packaging techniques from African-American farmers. Ben also serves as a resource to USDA and congressional elected officials to assist in developing agricultural programs. Currently, he serves on the USDA Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee.

Ben Burkett is a graduate of Alcorn State University. He lives in Petal, Mississippi and has one daughter, Darnella, and one granddaughter, Denver.

Stephen Carpenter is a Senior Staff Attorney and the Deputy Director at Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. (FLAG) in Minnesota. FLAG is a nonprofit law firm that works on behalf of family farmers. Carpenter is a graduate of Drury College in Springfield, Missouri, and of Stanford Law School. He was a *Stanford Law Review* Executive Editor and received a Skadden Foundation Fellowship that brought him to FLAG in 1993.

At FLAG, Carpenter's work has centered on discrimination in agricultural lending, debtor-creditor issues, disaster assistance, federal farm programs, sustainable agriculture and direct marketing, and the problems of farmers contracting for livestock production. He served as Senior Counsel in the [Office of the Monitor](#) in the *Pigford* case and is presently the court-appointed Ombudsman for the *In re Black Farmers Discrimination* case.

Carpenter has conducted frequent FLAG trainings for farmers, advocates, and attorneys and has spoken to farmers and their advocates in more than thirty states. He has authored and edited several FLAG publications and has written a number of articles for law reviews. Carpenter also is an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota Law School.

Val Dolcini was selected to serve as the Administrator for the Farm Service Agency in September 2014. He previously served as state executive director of the California Farm Service Agency, a position he was appointed to in 1999 by President Bill Clinton and again in 2009 by President Barack Obama. Dolcini also served as the acting Farm Service Agency Administrator in 2011.

As state executive director, Dolcini was responsible for overseeing 30 county offices responsible and for administering farm programs and policies in one of the nation's largest agricultural states.

Dolcini has many years of public and private leadership experience. Prior to accepting the state executive director position, he managed government relations activities for Accenture LLC, a global consulting firm. In that position, he strategized with business teams about relationship development and consulted on a wide range of political matters.

He previously served in a senior staff position for the California governor and lieutenant governor as well as members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

A fifth-generation Californian and a native of Davis, Calif., Dolcini has served on numerous non-profit boards and commissions in his community. Dolcini received his bachelor's degree in history from San Francisco State University and a juris doctorate from Golden Gate University School of Law.

Dr. Joe Leonard is the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at USDA. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack swore in Dr. Joe Leonard, Jr., as Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights on April 6, 2009. Nominated by President Barack Obama and confirmed by the U.S. Senate on April 2, 2009, Assistant Secretary Leonard has a strong academic, legislative and working history in civil rights.

Assistant Secretary Leonard is a native of Austin, TX. He holds a Ph.D. in American history with a specialization in civil rights history from Howard University, Washington, DC; an M.A. degree from Southern University, Baton Rouge, LA; and a B.A. degree from Huston-Tillotson University in Austin, TX.

Before joining USDA, Assistant Secretary Leonard served as Executive Director of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) under the leadership of Representative Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick (D-MI)). While at the CBC, Leonard managed the daily activities of the Caucus and helped guide the legislative policy for its 43 congressional members.

Prior to his role at the CBC, Assistant Secretary Leonard served as the Executive Director of the Black Leadership Forum, an umbrella organization of 32 member groups that together work to develop and implement progressive public policies for social change. He has also served as the Washington, DC Bureau Chief of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition and Director of the Arthur Fleming Institute of the Center for Policy Alternatives.

Assistant Secretary Leonard and his wife, Dr. Natasha Cole-Leonard are proud parents of a 8-year-old son Cole.

Scott Marlow is the Executive Director of the Rural Advancement Foundation International - USA, a non-profit organization based in Pittsboro, NC. Scott previously directed RAFI's Farm Sustainability program, providing in-depth financial counseling to farmers in crisis, education on disaster assistance programs and access to credit, and addressing the needs of mid-scale farmers who are increasing the sustainability of their farms by transitioning to higher-value specialty markets. Scott's specialty is financial infrastructure, including access to credit and risk management, and how that infrastructure addresses food security and global climate change.

He has served on the steering committee of the National Task Force to Renew Agriculture of the Middle, the Organization Council of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, the Board of the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, the Board of the NC Farm Transition Network, and the NC Agricultural Advancement Consortium and serves on the Advisory Committee of the NC Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund. He has a Masters Degree in Crop Science from NC State University, and a BA in Political Science from Duke University.

Carolyn Mugar has served as the executive director of Farm Aid since its inception in 1985. Farm Aid works with local, regional and national organizations to promote fair farm policies and grassroots organizing campaigns designed to defend and bolster family farm-centered agriculture. Farm Aid's annual concert—a festival of music, good food and hands-on activities about food and farming—raises funds to support Farm Aid's work to keep family farmers on the land, raises awareness of the value of family farm agriculture, and inspires people to choose family farm food.

As an Armenian-American, Carolyn is active in the Armenian-American community. In 1994, she founded The Armenian Tree Project (ATP), which assists the Armenian people in using trees to improve their standard of living. ATP protects the global environment, conserves the indigenous ecosystem, and promotes self-sufficiency by aiding those with the fewest resources first.

Before joining Farm Aid, Carolyn worked as a union organizer addressing concerns involving the health and

safety of workers. She currently serves on the Advisory Board of *Mother Jones*, an independent and investigative non-profit news organization, and is President of the Armenian Assembly of America. Carolyn received a J.D. from Northeastern Law School and a B.A. from the New School for Social Research.

Doug O'Brien is the Senior Policy Advisor for Rural Affairs at the White House Domestic Policy Council.

Previously, O'Brien served as a senior adviser to Secretary Vilsack and as chief of staff to former Deputy Agriculture Secretary Kathleen Merrigan. His work there focused on USDA and administration priorities such as minority farmer class action lawsuits, the *Know Your Farmer Know Your Food* program, the bioeconomy, and targeting resources to impoverished rural areas.

Before working at USDA, O'Brien was the assistant director of the Ohio Agriculture Department, senior adviser to Iowa Democratic Gov. Chet Culver, and counsel to the Senate Agriculture Committee when Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, was the top Democrat on the committee. O'Brien has also worked at the University of Arkansas graduate agricultural law program, Drake University Agricultural Law Center, for former Rep. Leonard Boswell, D-Iowa, and as a clerk for the Iowa Supreme Court.

He is a graduate of Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, the University of Iowa Law School, and the University of Arkansas Graduate Agricultural Law Program. He grew up on a diversified hog farm in Dubuque County, Iowa.

Elanor Starmer is the Administrator of the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). Starmer joined U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 2011, first to support the Deputy Secretary and then as a Senior Advisor to Secretary Tom Vilsack.

Starmer has coordinated the Department's work on local and regional food systems, including running the *Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food* initiative; acted as liaison to U.S. Food Drug Administration (FDA) on the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and developed Department-wide strategy to support industry on FSMA implementation; and handled a variety of other issues, including specialty crops and value-added agriculture. Across this portfolio, Starmer's focus has been the creation of new market opportunities for farmers, ranchers and food business of all sizes. She looks forward to continuing this work at AMS.

Prior to joining USDA, Starmer worked in the non-profit sector on rural development, agriculture and water policy issues in the United States and Latin America, including consulting to the International Institute for Agricultural Cooperation (IICA). She holds an M.S. in Agriculture Science and Policy from Tufts University's Friedman School, an M.A. in Development Economics from the Fletcher School, and a B.A. from Brown. Originally from a rural farming community of 700 in New Hampshire's White Mountains, she lives with her husband and son in northwest Washington, DC, where she serves on the board of her neighborhood civic association.