

Howard participates in national hiring discussion

By Roger RyDell Daniels, NRCS public affairs



NRCS' Eston Williams, 1890 agricultural liaison officer, and Dexter Howard, West Tennessee - Area 1 area resource conservationist for programs, participated in the three-day, 20th annual Ag and Food HR Roundtable, a premier North American event for HR and educational professionals hosted at Tennessee State University, held last month, and attended by more than 160 people from across the United States and Canada.

Howard joined the four-person rural recruiting and retention panel to discuss national hiring practices. Howard joined NRCS in 2012. As an area resource conservationist, he is responsible for maintaining all NRCS Western area programs, in accordance with agency goals, to include a portfolio of more than 1.3 million acres. During his NRCS career, he has served in roles including soil conservationist in the Arkansas Delta, a district conservationist in Fayette County, Tennessee and acting state conservation stewardship program coordinator in Kansas.

"Having a plan and having everyone on the same accord with that plan is very important," Howard said during the discussion.

The panel covered many topics, received questions from the audience and offered valuable information. Among the topics of discussion included benefit packages and rethinking how it should be distributed, transportation challenges in rural areas, retention bonuses, remote

working, the increase of broadband in rural communities, recruiting more engineers, tuition reimbursement, short-term housing for interns, and mentorship,

“NRCS, we are a boots-on-the ground organization,” Howard said. “How we approach short-term housing, we must flexible and think outside of the box. [As far as mentorship], knowing that employee and placing that employee where they will succeed is important.”

The Ag and Food HR Roundtable is the premier North American event for HR and educational professionals that provides relevant content, examining recruitment and retention specifically within the agriculture and food industry. The combination of HR and educational professionals provides a unique and rewarding networking experience found nowhere else.

The AgCareers.com Roundtable is the only industry-specific event of its kind. While there are other events dedicated to HR, education, or association professionals, there is nothing else specific to the agriculture and food industry that focuses on high-interest recruitment and retention issues.

“This event was awesome,” Williams said. “I was happy to see so many agriculture companies are willing to accommodate and make a hard effort to diversify their workforce through utilizing 1890 Land Grant Institutions.”