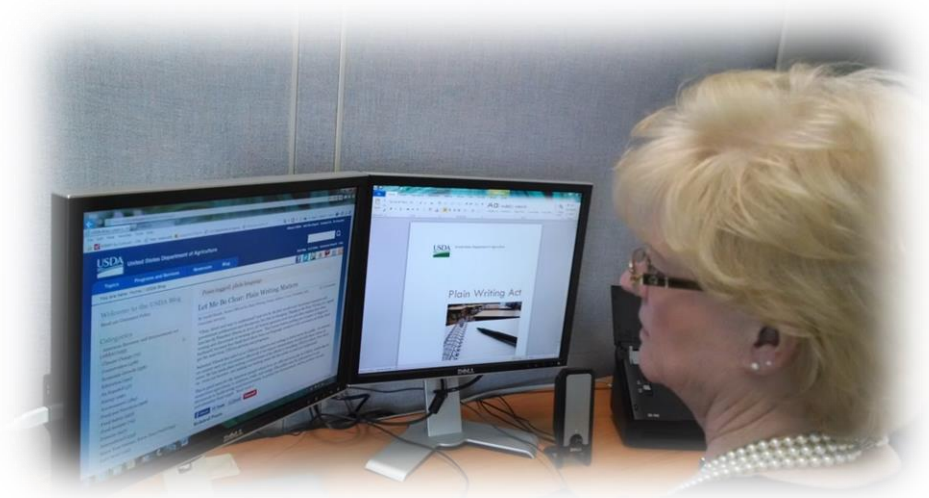




United States Department of Agriculture

Plain Writing Act



2014

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1. Introduction

USDA'S PLEDGE

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is committed to improving its service to you by writing in plain language. We use plain language in any new or substantially revised document that:

- provides information about any of our services and benefits;
- is necessary to obtain any of our benefits or services; or,
- explains how to comply with a requirement that we administer or enforce.

We pledge to provide you with information that is clear, understandable, and useful in every paper or electronic letter, publication, form, notice, or instruction.

In October 2011, Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack issued a memorandum to all USDA employees, emphasizing the importance of using plain language to communicate with all of USDA's customers. You can find this memorandum on the last two pages of this report and at USDA's Plain Writing Web site, at <http://www.usda.gov/plain-writing>.

THIS REPORT

This report documents USDA's progress to date in complying with the Plain Writing Act. The Act requires that USDA "write all new publications, forms, and publicly distributed documents in a 'clear, concise, well-organized' manner." On July 13, 2011, USDA published its first report, an implementing plan that detailed our goals for plain writing. We published compliance reports in April 2012 and 2013. This year, we report on how we have built on our prior efforts towards meeting the goals on the Plain Writing Act. You can read USDA's Plain Writing Act implementing report here: <http://www.usda.gov/documents/PL-Report-final.pdf>. You can read last year's compliance report here: <http://www.usda.gov/documents/usda-plain-writing-act-2013-compliance-report.pdf>.

USDA OFFICIALS FOR PLAIN WRITING

We are committed at the highest levels to complying fully with the Act. Secretary Vilsack recognizes the importance of using plain language to achieve the goals of President Barack Obama's Open Government initiative, as well as the USDA Cultural Transformation initiative, and our commitment to customer service.

Senior Officials

Our senior officials for plain writing are listed below:

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Agency Coordinators

USDA is comprised of 17 agencies and nearly 100,000 employees who serve the American people at more than 4,500 locations across the country and abroad. To lead implementation of the Act and ensure our compliance with it, we created a working group of agency officials. These officials ensure that their agency or office uses plain language in public documents. For a list of agency coordinators, please see [Section 8](#) of this report.

2. Sample USDA Communications

INTRODUCTION

In order to provide more clear outreach to the public, we are making every effort to comply with the Plain Writing Act. In doing so, we are paying particular attention to our audiences – what are their needs and how can we best communicate with them? Additionally, we are using plain language principles in our text. Specifically, we are:

- reducing text and using shorter sentences in our documents;
- using more tables and lists rather than lengthy paragraphs; and
- eliminating unnecessary jargon, acronyms, and abbreviations.

This renewed effort has resulted in an overall improvement in communication with the public, as well as a greater sense of accomplishment among our employees.

SUMMARY OF USDA AGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

The following tables summarize some of the documents that are available in a format that is consistent with the Plain Writing Act guidelines. In compiling this table, we collected information from across USDA. In the interest of brevity, however, we are including only certain highlights. The table samples our accomplishments in focusing the Department's employees on the importance of writing in plain language so that we continually improve our communication with the public.

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Press Releases, Blogs, and Tweets Target Audience: Media, General Public Audience size: unlimited; 8,500 people follow AMS on Twitter	By using plain language, we have ensured that all agency documents are written in a clear, concise, and well organized manner. Our communication materials are easy to understand and written so that all interested parties can comprehend their meaning and impact.
National Organic Program (NOP) Handbook: Collection of guidance documents, policy memos, and Instructions, updated regularly to communicate USDA organic standards. Target Audience: USDA organic accredited certifying agents (staff at 85 organizations) and certified and candidate organic operations (25,000 currently certified)	Positive feedback from customers about memo clarity; fewer rewrites required over time because policy is clearer.
NOP Integrity Quarterly Newsletter	Number of operations and individuals subscribing to NOP email notification continues to increase; customers report

Target Audience: Organic industry stakeholders – Sent to a list of 13,000; with subsequent secondary distribution	redistributing articles to their stakeholders.
USDA Organic Fact Sheets Target Audience: USDA organic accredited certifying agents (staff at 85 organizations) and certified and candidate organic operations (25,000 currently certified)	Fact sheets use plain language to explain requirements; verbal feedback is that this leads to greater interest from operations determining whether to consider the organic option.
Organic Literacy Initiative – Presentations and Brochures Target Audience: Certified and candidate organic operations (25,000 currently certified)	This is a new set of materials inspired by the need to clearly explain in direct terms what the organic option is, and to point people to a range of USDA resources.
AMS' Dairy Research and Promotion Programs Annual Report to Congress and other annual reports Target Audience: U.S. Congress, Dairy Industry, General Public Size: Unlimited	AMS writes and reviews its annual reports with principles of plain writing, reducing the burden on users, reducing errors, and improving customer satisfaction.
AMS' Transportation and Marketing program (TM) Grain Transportation Report (GTR) is a weekly online report that covers developments affecting the transport of grain, both in the domestic and international marketplace. This weekly publication reports on the latest volume and price data for barges, railroads, trucks, and ocean vessels involved in the transport of grain. Target Audience: Agricultural shippers, grain growers, grain elevator operators, and corporations involved in domestic and international grain trade – distribution directly to 1,210 subscribers; secondary and online distribution estimated at several times the direct distribution number. The home page for the GTR received 5,778 hits in the last year.	The feature articles in the GTR, which present analyses of current issues in grain shipping, are routinely reposted in whole by trade newsletters and independent consultant reports, including Bloomberg.com, AgFax.com, and dtnProgressiveFarmer.com. A 2012 survey of GTR subscribers revealed a high degree of satisfaction with the latest format and report language among subscribers.
AMS' Agricultural Refrigerated Truck Quarterly (AgRTQ) is an online report that provides a view of U.S. regional refrigerated truckload movements, in terms of volume and rates, to gauge the vital component of truck transportation applied to fresh fruit and	New format for data and reporting has been well received by the public. Subscription list is growing rapidly as availability is becoming known. Regulatory changes and feature articles are important to trucking sector to keep abreast of factors that affect profit margins.

<p>vegetable markets. Written portions include Market Insights, Regulatory News and Analysis, and Feature Articles.</p> <p>Target Audience: Agricultural shippers, fresh produce wholesalers, jobbers, and packers, and related industries. Approximately 1,360 trucking establishments ship refrigerated agricultural products locally or nationally. Direct mailing service begun in late 2012 has 19 subscribers and growing. The home page for the AgRTQ received 1,585 hits in the last year.</p>	
<p>AMS reports Moving Food Along the Value Chain and Regional Food Hub Resource Guide provide detailed case studies and analyses of strategic business behavior to promote and distribute locally and regionally produced foods, as well as a resource list for practitioners.</p> <p>Target Audience: Practitioners, industry representatives, local government officials, researchers throughout the United States. More than 6,000 hits on the Web pages since August 2012, along with 1,410 hard copies of the documents distributed at trade meetings and through partners.</p>	<p>These documents have been widely circulated and cited by other USDA and Federal agencies as well as nonprofit organizations with outreach programs for economic development.</p>
<p>AMS guidelines, pre-application guides, evaluation measures, and brochures for the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP), the Federal-State Market Improvement Program (FSMIP), and the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program are delivered online, and are made available at outreach events.</p> <p>Target Audience: Potential applicants to the grant programs, approximately 2,000.</p>	<p>Grants materials have been updated to be more user-oriented. The process is continuing in response to helpful comments from users and external reviewers of the materials.</p>
<p>AMS, Fruit and Vegetable Program News is a newsletter published periodically, and is electronically distributed in the United States and internationally. Each issue highlights tools and resources available to assist our stakeholders promote their fruit and vegetable products. We also discuss timely issues impacting our stakeholders, and explain how we are responding to changing</p>	<p>The newsletter is written with plain writing principles to ensure the content is presented in a clear, concise, and easy to understand manner.</p>

<p>industry needs.</p> <p>Target audience: About 20,000 recipients—including small to large produce growers, packers, distributors, processors, retailers, community-based organizations, professional associations, tribal groups, cooperative extension agents, educational groups, and governments at all levels.</p>	
<p>AMS, Fruit and Vegetable Program, Market News Blogs: Custom Averaging Tool (CAT)</p> <p>Target Audience: General Public Audience Size: Unlimited</p>	<p>By using plain language, we have ensured that this public document was written in a clear, concise, and well-organized manner. Our communication materials are easy to understand and written so that all interested parties can comprehend their meaning and impact.</p>
<p>AMS Fruit and Vegetable Specialty Crop Block Grant request for applications, and award terms and conditions are published in the Federal Register, and made available online and at outreach events.</p> <p>Target audience: 56 State Departments of Agriculture</p>	<p>The grant documents are now written in a clear, concise and well-organized manner that makes them easier to understand. The documents help interested parties successfully apply for grant funds, and manage awarded funds.</p>
<p>AMS, Fruit and Vegetable Program, Perishable Agricultural Commodity Act brochures were rewritten and revised.</p> <p>Target Audience: Produce Industry and general public Audience size: unlimited</p>	<p>The brochures were revised using plain writing principles. The revised brochures are now better organized and easier to understand.</p>
<p>AMS, Fruit and Vegetable Program, notices, proposed and final rules are published in the Federal Register. The documents relate to marketing orders, market news, and research and promotion programs.</p> <p>Target Audience: Produce Industry, General Public Audience size: unlimited</p>	<p>By using plain language, we ensure these public documents are written in a clear, concise, and well-organized manner. The Federal Register notices and rules are easy to understand and written so that all interested parties can comprehend their meaning and respond accordingly.</p>

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)/National Agricultural Library (NAL)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Magazines, news releases, semi-technical and non-technical publications, newsletters, brochures, fact sheets, reports, social media content, and Web content.</p> <p>Target Audience: Audience varies depending on product (developed for specific programs, projects and events).</p>	<p>More than 85,000 people will read ARS' information online, which will help increase comprehension and create awareness about ARS and its research findings.</p> <p>Thousands more will read ARS materials disseminated at various events, meetings, and programs.</p> <p>At NAL, approximately 8 million unique visitors each year will find it easier to locate, understand, and act upon the agricultural information the library provides.</p>

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Web pages</p> <p>Target Audience: APHIS stakeholders</p>	<p>In February 2014, APHIS launched a new Web site designed to provide information to the public in a clearer, more user-friendly way.</p>
<p>Publications</p> <p>Target Audience: APHIS stakeholders</p>	<p>Increased accessibility and comprehension on complex scientific subjects to APHIS target audiences.</p>
<p>GovDelivery Stakeholder Registry</p> <p>Target Audience: APHIS stakeholders</p>	<p>Immediate access to valuable information about APHIS. Stakeholders select the type of information they would like to receive, how often they receive and via which medium (email, SMS text messages).</p>
<p>Responses to customer inquiries made via the Web ("Ask the Expert")</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Public now receives succinct, clear responses to inquiries.</p>

Economic Research Service (ERS)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Economic research monographs released via the agency's Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Policymakers, academia, informed laypeople</p>	<p>Increased comprehension and customer satisfaction</p>
<p>Market analysis newsletters released via the</p>	<p>Increased comprehension and customer satisfaction</p>

agency's Web site	
Target Audience: Policymakers and commercial agriculture companies	
Amber Waves magazine, available online (www.ers.usda.gov) and for mobile devices at iTunes and GooglePlay.	Increased comprehension and customer satisfaction
Target Audience: Policymakers and informed laypeople	

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)/Center for Nutrition Policy and Programs (CNPP)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Forms, public notices, funding opportunities, regulations, and Web pages (distributed electronically through the Web – HTML or PDF format; occasionally by paper) Target Audience: State and local nutrition assistance program operators and stakeholders (Thousands)	FNS has long exercised Plain Writing standards in its documents. Adherence to these standards has resulted in more efficient clearance (less rewriting), greater comprehension by audiences, better adherence to rules and guidance due to greater clarity, and better customer satisfaction with written work.
Correspondence, press releases, reports, research publications (distributed in hard copy and electronically) Target Audience: Congress, general public, nutrition assistance program stakeholders, research community	See above.
Nutrition promotion materials Target Audience: Nutrition community, general public	See above.
Question and answer, Frequently asked questions, How to, or any other informal guidance documents (distributed through the Web — HTML, PDF formats) Target Audience: State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)	State SNAP Notices Initiative In March 2014, FNS plans to release a memorandum that provides guidance to States to develop effective notices of denial and terminations for SNAP purposes. Notices of Adverse Action are particularly important as they provide the client critical information about their benefit allotment and appeal rights. The guidance provides recommendations and best practices that may assist States to provide simple and clear notices to SNAP clients. FNS is currently evaluating each State's notices of adverse

	<p>action and online applications for SNAP, and will update the March 2014 guidance in the Summer of 2014. Webinars for State personnel will follow in late Summer, and will cover guidelines, templates, tools, and best practices for online applications and notices. Better applications and notices will help ensure accurate and timely decisions on households' SNAP applications and on administrative actions requiring notification of SNAP households.</p>
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Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Acknowledgement correspondence, fee waiver denied/granted correspondence, determination correspondence, subpoena response correspondence via U.S. mail</p> <p>Target Audiences: FOIA requestors, consumer advocates, industry associations, news media, regulated industry members, and their representatives.</p>	<p>We have revised template letters using more plain language. Examples include using active voice and shorter sentences, explaining technical issues, and eliminating wordiness.</p>
<p>FOIA Expedited processing denied/granted correspondence, submitter's notice correspondence, absent fee agreement/ over \$250 correspondence, referral correspondence, Privacy Act correspondence via U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: FOIA requestors, other agencies, Privacy Act requestor: external individual doing business with FSIS</p>	<p>As we write and review letters, the specialist and supervisor use plain language.</p>
<p>Red Jackets, which are documents developed by the program areas and reviewed by the correspondence staff</p> <p>Target Audience: FSIS employees, meat, poultry and processed egg products industries, and other stakeholders.</p>	<p>When correspondence staff members review a document prepared by other program areas, issues analysts edit and make suggestions for using plain English. At times, the correspondence unit provides general instructions to the units about how to put documents into plain English.</p>
<p>Correspondence (General), letter via U.S. Mail or email</p> <p>Target Audience: Members of Congress; consumer and industry groups; Federal, state,</p>	<p>As we write and clear letters, writers and editors use plain language. Examples include using active voice and shorter sentences, explaining technical terms, eliminating wordiness, and writing to the specific audience. Also, we have revised standard language to incorporate plain language.</p>

and local officials; meat, poultry and processed egg products establishments; consumers; and members of the public.	
Campaign Correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail or email Target Audience: Members of the public; activists.	When writing responses to campaign letters, we give extra attention to plain language. These responses go to thousands of constituents with a wide variety of reading levels and knowledge of the issues.
Press Releases, Recall Releases, Press Release via Electronic Target Audience: Consumers, Regulated Community, Public Officials	We evaluated press release standard language to identify potential Plain Language revisions by the end of fiscal year 2012.
Constituent Update, Newsletter via Electronic Target Audience: Consumers, Regulated Community, Public Officials	Plain language is an ongoing effort for the Constituent Update. We continue working with subject matter experts on technical content without compromising the message. We rewrite into plain language, and they review and rewrite to ensure that the message is correct.
Approximately 100 fact sheets on individual topics, such as Beef from Farm to Table; Refrigeration and Food Safety. We revise approximately 20 fact sheets each year via Web, email, and in-person events Target Audience: Consumers (8,153,292)	FSIS will continue to produce additional food safety education materials in plain language. It will also continue to review and revise its current stock of materials to ensure they contain factual, up-to-date scientific information, and are written in plain language.
Consumer Guides distributed via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail, including the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kitchen Companion: Your Safe Food Handbook, booklet • Cooking for Groups: A Volunteer's Guide to Food Safety, booklet • Food Safe Families Activity Book, booklet • Let Me Tell You How Dad Got Sick!, booklet • Is It Done Yet?, brochure; Todo Cuenta, brochure • Ask Karen, magnet; Panic Button, fact sheet • Protect Yourself and Your Baby From Listeriosis, flyer • Be Food Safe, poster • Is It Done Yet? temperature chart, poster • He's BAC! children's book, booklet 	This is part of a project in which FSIS developed Plain Language Fact Sheets, and published those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency Web sites so that the public can access information easily.

Target Audience: Consumers	
The Meat & Poultry Hotline Web page houses great information about how to reach the Hotline. Target Audience: Consumers (1,810,640)	We use plain language when we update regularly our Web site to include information on recalls and food safety-related issues/concerns.
Food Safe Families Public Service Announcements (4); Food Safe Families Behavioral videos (4); Surviving a Power Outage: Don't be in the Dark When it Comes to Food Safety, podcast; Food Safety Advice for Tailgating Parties, video news releases; Freezing and Food Safety, American Sign Language videos via Web, media Target Audience: Consumers	This is part of a project in which FSIS developed Plain Language Fact Sheets, and published those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency Web sites so that the public can access information easily.
Web content Target Audience: All customers (internal and external)	FSIS Web Managers emphasize, to content providers, writing descriptive and introductory text with a clear/strong call to action. We emphasize using fewer words, active voice, and few acronyms to achieve plain language.

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
News Releases and other postings on agency Web site Target Audience: The general public and media representatives. Potential Audience: Unlimited	Improved understanding and clarified terminology.
Responses to customer inquiries made via the Web Target Audience: The general public Potential Audience: Unlimited	Public continues to receive concise, clear responses to inquires.

Forest Service

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Forms, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Service users, national forest visitors; thousands</p>	<p>In August 2011, the Forest Service identified the kinds of documents that are covered by the Plain Writing Act. Covered documents fell into 23 categories, including forms, correspondence, forest plans, environmental analyses, and research papers and publications.</p> <p>Next, the Chief's Office issued a data call, asking staffs across the country to estimate the number of covered documents in existence and the number produced or substantially revised each year. Approximately 590,000 documents existed, including more than 30,000 research publications available online, and the Forest Service generated about 64,000 covered documents per year.</p> <p>In the winter of 2014, the Forest Service Chief's Office contacted Plain Writing Act coordinators across the country to review and reconfirm the kinds of documents covered under the Plain Writing Act. The coordinators also reconfirmed the estimated numbers of covered documents in existence and generated each year. There were no significant changes from 2011-12.</p> <p>Some units have reported positive results from the emphasis on plain writing, including improved communications, positive public feedback/response, and a reduction in the number of public questions and need for followup.</p>
<p>Grants, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Businesses, students, landowners</p>	See above
<p>Agreements, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Community organizations, NGOs, other agencies, other partners; thousands</p>	See above
<p>Contracts, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Businesses, contractors; thousands</p>	See above
<p>RFIs, RFPs, etc., distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p>	See above

Target Audience: Businesses, contractors; thousands	
Brochures, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices	See above
Target Audience: Service users, national forest visitors; thousands	
Interpretive signs, located at facilities and on trails, roads	See above
Target Audience: National forest visitors; thousands	
Descriptions of services, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices	See above
Target Audience: Service users; thousands	
Instructions, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices	See above
Target Audience: Service users, contractors, employees; thousands	
Rules/regulations, distributed by Web sites	See above
Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands	
Management plans, distributed by Web sites	See above
Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands	
Project descriptions, distributed by Web sites	See above
Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands	
Environmental analyses, distributed by Web sites	See above
Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands	
Decision documents (e.g., on plans, projects), distributed by mail/Web sites/offices	See above
Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands	
Press releases, distributed by fax/Web sites	See above
Target Audience: Journalists, stakeholders,	

employees; thousands	
Research publications, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices Target Audience: Scientists, managers, employees; thousands	See above
Letters, distributed by mail/email Target Audience: Service users, national forest visitors, partners, stakeholders; thousands	See above
Reports, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices Target Audience: Scientists, managers, employees, other agencies, partners, stakeholders; thousands	See above
Speeches, delivered in person/distributed by Web sites Target Audience: Varies (general public, stakeholders, students, etc.); thousands	See above
Papers/articles, distributed in journals, made available on Web sites Target Audience: Scientists, managers, employees, partners, stakeholders; thousands	See above
Briefs, distributed by Web sites Target Audience: Managers, employees, other agencies, partners, stakeholders; thousands	See above
Testimony, delivered in person/distributed by Web sites Target Audience: Congress, partners, stakeholders; thousands	See above
Legal documents, available on Web sites Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands	See above

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>One-stop shopping Web pages.</p> <p>Target Audience: Farmers and ranchers (both new and existing), the general public, environmental groups, commodity organizations.</p> <p>One-stop 2014 Farm Bill Web Page at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/fbapp?area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing</p> <p>FSA Disaster Assistance Programs at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=diap&topic=landing</p> <p>NEPA documents affecting all FSA programs at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ecrc&topic=nep-cd</p>	<p>Interested parties can locate quickly and read this succinct, easy-to-understand information about the provisions of the 2014 Farm Bill, those changes in FSA programs, and how FSA is implementing those provisions.</p> <p>The Disaster Assistance homepage was customized to display, in clear language, using maps, statistics, and other orderly formats, the various types of financial assistance available to farmers and ranchers or other agricultural producers who have experienced crop or livestock losses in the wake of a natural disaster from 2011 to the present.</p> <p>Interested parties can read about, in lay language, environmental impact studies that evaluate the impact of FSA programs.</p>
<p>Easier-to-Read Brochures</p> <p>FSA has focused increasingly on quick-to-read sources of information, such as electronic brochures. One example is “Your Guide to FSA Farm Loans,” which can be viewed at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/fsa_br_01_web_booklet.pdf</p> <p>The Guide was sent for distribution to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FSA State offices • FSA county offices • Intertribal Agriculture Council • Indian Land Tenure Foundation • Outreach partners • Community-based organizations <p>Target Audience: Designed for individuals and entities who may want to start, expand, sustain, or make changes to their businesses. In addition, outreach partners, community-based organizations, and agricultural groups may use this electronic brochure as an informational resource to provide outreach and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This example provides concise information on how to apply for a loan, different types of loans, applicant and borrower responsibilities, costs of obtaining a loan, and available servicing options. It was made easier to understand and follow compared to prior communications. • FSA has taken this easier-to-read approach for all communications of this type.

<p>More Succinct Fact Sheets</p> <p>With the enactment of the 2014 Farm Bill, simpler fact sheets are under development for use at outreach meetings, the FSA Web site, emails, field offices, and other outlets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All relevant farm program fact sheets are now provided electronically at: http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/newsReleases?area=newsroom&subject=landin g&topic=pfs&newstype=prfactsheet <p>Target Audience: Farmers and ranchers, the general public, employees, environmental groups, commodity organizations, beginning farmers, potential FSA borrowers, others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> FSA Strike Force information is available at: http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=oued&topic=sfc <p>Target Audience: Previously underserved farming and ranching customers located in persistent poverty counties.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farm Loans information available at: http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=fmlp&topic=dflop <p>Target Audience: Small and niche operators; beginning farmers and ranchers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is the first time that FSA statistics have been unified into one location rather than distributed among the individual Web pages authored by FSA “divisions.” This approach is designed to increase the understanding of FSA programs that can provide financial assistance to traditionally underserved farmers and ranchers in key rural areas designated as persistent poverty regions. Increases awareness of available funding to targeted groups. Provides farmers and ranchers with an overview of FSA farm loan programs.
<p>Clearer forms, program directives, handbooks, and related communications</p> <p>Target Audience: Farmers and ranchers, the general public, employees, environmental groups, commodity organizations, beginning farmers, potential FSA borrowers, others.</p>	<p>When plain writing is used, no special training or experience is necessary for new customers to understand if they are eligible for FSA programs, helping to improve access to these services. For example, the new microloan program has celebrated its first anniversary, with its popular demand illustrating the success of reduced application requirements and simplified forms far more suited to smaller types of operations.</p>
<p>Easier-to-Read News Releases</p> <p>Target Audience: General public, media, farmers and ranchers, private landowners,</p>	<p>News releases are now written to communicate to readers who are not familiar with FSA programs. “Agency-speak” terminology that often is used internally to reference processes unique to the agency instead are replaced with plain</p>

<p>beginning and socially disadvantaged producers, others, trade associations, and commodity/environmental groups.</p>	<p>language. This also includes assistance in educating non-agricultural audiences of the importance of USDA programs.</p>
<p>Newsletters that are more focused on farmer and rancher needs.</p> <p>In the past, some FSA county newsletters tended to rely on local information that did not adequately communicate with producers about new programs, signup deadlines, and other important content. HQ public relations staff developed a template and provided counties with information focused on program assistance that could be tailored to county-specific disaster, lending, and other needs.</p> <p>Target Audience: Farmers and ranchers, the general public, employees, environmental groups, commodity organizations, beginning farmers, potential FSA borrowers, others.</p>	<p>Now a “template-based” approach is used, employing universally reviewed content, so that FSA information is more unified, clearer, and reflecting of the perspective of the customer rather than of internal operations.</p>
<p>Public Service Announcements</p> <p>FSA has recently provided information on program signup, county committee elections, and our new microloan program.</p> <p>Target Audience: Distributed through radio and television, these announcements reach farmers and ranchers, the general public, employees, environmental groups, commodity organizations, beginning farmers, potential FSA borrowers, others.</p>	<p>These announcements are now written in brief, succinct, and generalized language so that no specialized pre-existing knowledge of existing programs is necessary to understand and appreciate the importance of the information disseminated through these announcements.</p>

Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyard Administration (GIPSA)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>GIPSA Web site - Equipment Web page</p> <p>Target Audience: All users and manufacturers of GIPSA Certified Grain Inspection Equipment within and outside the Official inspection system.</p>	<p>Increased clarity of information for a broad audience and a balance between highly technical details and policy and procedure by using Frequently Asked Questions, tables, and segmenting information.</p>
<p>GIPSA Web site – Test Kit Evaluation</p> <p>Target Audience: All users and manufacturers of GIPSA Certified Mycotoxin Rapid Test Kits</p>	<p>Use of tabular information to identify approved test kits and duration of approval for ease of reference.</p>
<p>Brochure on GIPSA Web site – Swine Production Contracts</p> <p>Target Audience: Swine contractors, swine production contract growers, and livestock sellers</p>	<p>New brochure explaining what swine production contracts are and discussing the contract requirements added in the 2008 Farm Bill and related regulations. Used headings, subheadings, a question and answer format, and bullets to make the content easier to read.</p>

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Marketing materials (cover letters and background sheets) to promote survey participation. These materials accompany the individual surveys mailed to producers. Over the past 2 years, we have revised the materials for each survey to speak more directly to the reader and streamlined the instructions for responding. As each survey comes up, we continue to make improvements, but all surveys instructions are now much clearer and speak more directly to the producer receiving the survey than they were 2 years ago. Letters speak directly to the producer, asking them to participate and telling how the survey results benefit them. Background sheets describe in simple, clear terms what the survey is, how NASS collects the data, and whom the information benefits.</p> <p>Target Audience: Agricultural producers NASS asks to participate in surveys. NASS conducts more than 400 such surveys per year—some reach a few hundred, others reach hundreds of thousands.</p>	<p>Increased comprehension and customer satisfaction. NASS now writes these materials in a direct, clear style with the recipients' concerns in mind: what producers want to know; why they might want to participate; how the surveys benefit them.</p>
<p>A comprehensive package of materials conveying information, promoting participation, and communicating results of the 2012 Census of Agriculture. NASS has continued to improve and build on the user-friendly Census of Agriculture Web site created early in 2012 with comprehensive information. We made available many usable, accessible materials to support this comprehensive effort, including English and Spanish brochures; news releases; logos, Web buttons, videos, and public service announcements; sample blogs, feature stories, and newsletter articles. In addition, NASS wrote cover letters, background information, and reminder letters and postcards to encourage census recipients to respond.</p> <p>Now in 2014, the focus of the Web site is on</p>	<p>Despite many challenges (reduced budget, agency reorganization, government shutdown), the census reached its target 80 percent response rate. We believe the clarity of the message and the usability of the materials were significant in achieving that goal.</p> <p>The new Census Web site is transparent and easy to navigate, provides useful information from past censuses, and gives easily understood directions on immediate issues related to the census and in response to incoming calls from census recipients requesting information. NASS routinely updated the 2012 Census of Agriculture FAQs based on incoming calls received from farmers for help completing the form and continues to provide new information in preparation for data release. To engage producers and data users, NASS will launch a "Your Census, Your Story" dialog on the Web site in March.</p>

<p>data release. As during the data collection phase, NASS is preparing materials with the end user in mind. These include national and state news releases, feature stories, Web updates, and other products – all written in a plain, clear style to expand the reach of Census findings beyond regular data users.</p> <p>New this year is an infographic series. The first items, released in February 2014 (http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Partners/Infographics/) are hugely popular. In the coming months, we plan to release at least one infographic per week. NASS will also conduct an intensive social media campaign using Twitter and the USDA Blog, and prepare a series of easy-to-digest Highlights.</p> <p>Target Audience: Policymakers, stakeholders, community organizations, academics, farmers and ranchers, and the general public. Each of these groups contains some experienced data users, but for many, the materials that help make the data understandable and accessible are the primary source of information.</p>	
<p>Language telling survey recipients how to respond, including clearer, simpler instructions for responding online rather than by mail.</p> <p>Target Audience: All farmers and others concerned with agriculture who receive surveys</p>	<p>NASS has standardized this language to convey instructions in a simpler, more direct style.</p> <p>Providing clearer messaging on the online response option in the 2012 promotion materials, along with simpler instructions, helped to more than triple share of farmers and ranchers who responded this way, from 4 percent in the 2007 Census to 13.3 percent in the 2012 Census.</p>
<p>Web pages of individual programs.</p> <p>Target Audience: All users. We have rewritten some of our more complex program Web pages specifically to be more accessible to a wider range of users.</p>	<p>NASS plans to do more of this as the opportunity arises in addition to the overall Web revamp currently in process.</p>
<p>News releases, internal newsletter, a new series of short publications (http://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Highlights/index.asp), and one-off publications such as agency brochure, program brochures, etc.</p>	<p>NASS has long focused on writing these for a broad audience but is giving extra attention to key plain language principles. We write all such publications using plain, direct language.</p>

<p>Target Audience: Press and the general public</p>	
<p>Tweets and blog posts.</p> <p>Target Audience: Social media users, including more than 16,000 people who currently follow NASS on Twitter.</p>	<p>NASS adopted clear and direct writing principles for our social media communications. As a result, in the past 12 months, our tweets surpassed 6 million impressions and have been retweeted more than 1,500 times. Throughout 2013, we also ran a series of blog posts celebrating the International Year of Statistics, which helped NASS educate the public about agricultural statistics and their use.</p>
<p>Tools to help support public understanding of statistical data. NASS is developing several products to help its nonstatistical audiences better understand and use the data.</p> <p>The Quick Stats database contains the results of NASS surveys and the agricultural census but can be hard to decipher. A tutorial video will help new users access the information. It will be launched in April and be available on YouTube. NASS also plans to post a glossary explaining some of the more difficult terms and will add more items over time.</p> <p>The Census of Agriculture data include detailed information for statisticians about data reliability and census methodology. We include plain, clear language about this in our general publications, conveying the concept without the detail. An entire section on census methodology was added to the census FAQ page of the Web site to provide the public with easy-to-understand answers to their questions regarding census data methodology and reliability http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Help/FAQs/General_FAQs/#3). A blog http://blogs.usda.gov/2014/02/06/how-does-ag-census-work) also addressed census methodology prior to the preliminary release.</p>	<p>The Census of Agriculture Web site, infographic, Highlights, and other materials created for general use all convey in accessible terms the complex methodology that is part of the Census report.</p> <p>Similarly, we expect the new tools to help frequent, occasional, and first-time users to understand and use both census and survey statistical data.</p>

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>News Releases. Posted on agency Web site and released to media.</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public and media representatives.</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	Improved comprehension.
<p>Postings on agency Web site.</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public.</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	Improved comprehension.
<p>Request for Applications (RFA)</p> <p>Target Audience: Scientists applying for funding</p>	Public Affairs plain writing specialist has revised RFAs for improved comprehension and clarity.

Natural Resources Conservations Service (NRCS)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Annual Reports</p> <p>Distributed through: Direct Mail, displayed in office, distributed at an event, employee Intranet, public Web site, Email</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, Public, Agricultural Producers</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	No acronyms are used unless they are spelled out. Use of simplified sentences, reduction in use of technical terms when there is an alternate (easier) word, will result in better understanding of conservation programs.
<p>Banner Stands/Displays/Exhibits</p> <p>Distributed through: displayed at events, meetings, conferences, and expos</p> <p>Target Audience: Agricultural Producers, Employees, Potential Employees, Agriculture Producers, Conservationists, Private Landowners</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	No acronyms used unless defined, fewer words, more visuals resulting in better understanding of conservation programs.
<p>Booklets and Publications</p>	Reduction in use of technical terms when there is an

<p>Distributed through: made available in offices, distributed at an event, public Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, Employees, Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, Private Landowners</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>alternate (easier) word, more visuals, updated examples and better instructions. Publications are easier to read, resulting in fewer questions about programs and policies.</p>
<p>Conservation Initiative Reports</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, Employees, Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p>	<p>Clear, concise writing, making it easier for people to understand our programs and benefits of soil conservation to ecosystems, water supply, air and water quality, and wildlife habitat.</p>
<p>Correspondence</p> <p>Distributed through: Direct Mail, Email</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, Employees, Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Letters are more direct and clear, common language is used more, and there is better understanding of the content, resulting in fewer questions and a better comprehension of our programs and policies.</p>
<p>Direct Mail</p> <p>Distributed through: Direct Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, Employees, Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, private landowners</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Using more familiar words, which allows for a better understanding of programs, resulting in an increase in program participation and a reduction of questions.</p>
<p>Directives</p> <p>Distributed through: Email, employee Intranet, Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees</p> <p>Potential Audience: 10,379</p>	<p>Clarity of message, better understanding of procedures, fewer questions, overall savings due to greater efficiency.</p>
<p>Emails, Tweets, Blogs and other Social Media</p> <p>Distributed through: Emails</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, Public, Agricultural Producers, Partners</p>	<p>Clear, concise writing, making it easier for people to understand benefits of soil conservation programs.</p>

Potential Audience: Unlimited	
<p>Fact Sheets</p> <p>Distributed through: email, direct mail, handed out at events, public Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Unlimited</p>	Using more familiar words allowing for a better understanding of programs, resulting in an increase of applications and a reduction of questions.
<p>Feature Articles/Success Stories</p> <p>Distributed through: public Web site, blogs, Email, Media</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, private landowners,</p> <p>Target Audience: Unlimited</p>	Shorter, clearer messages enable better comprehension of subject.
<p>Guidance/Handbooks for Program Applicants</p> <p>Distributed through: public Web site, email, distributed at public events, Employee Intranet, Direct Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, Employees, Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	Reduced use of jargon, technical terms, and acronyms without definitions. More clear guidance for program implementation, application process, and program compliance requirements.
<p>Legislative Fact Sheets</p> <p>Distributed through: State Web sites, an event, email</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, Congress, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	Consolidated, concise language about conservation activity and programs provides clear useful information about conservation by State
<p>National Bulletins</p> <p>Distributed through: Employee Intranet, public Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees</p>	Employees have a better understanding of organizational decisions, resulting in fewer questions.

Potential Audience: 10,379	
National Instructions Distributed through: Employee Intranet, public Web site Target Audience: 10,379	Clear instructions and information provide employees with better understanding of processes and expectations for effective and efficient program management
News Releases and Media Advisories Distributed through: traditional media, social media, public Web site, email, events, State and National Web sites, partner Web sites Target Audience: Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, Private Landowners, General Public Potential Audience: Unlimited	Clear writing provides better understanding by the public and employees alike of the importance of conservation generally and NRCS conservation programs in particular.
Newsletters Distributed through: Email, public Web site, Employee intranet Target Audience: Employees, Public, Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials Potential Audience: Unlimited	Articles written in plain language communicating our success partnering with landowners implementing conservation practices. Text is easy to read, clear, and concise.
Posters Distributed through: Displayed in Offices, Public events, Employee meetings, and events Target Audience: Public, Employees, Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials Potential Audience: Unlimited	Clear message displayed through design and graphics for ease of reading and comprehension of conservation programs and accomplishments.
PowerPoint® Presentations Distributed through: employee meetings and events; public meetings and events Target Audience: Public, Employees, Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials	Shorter and more concise presentations allow for more information sharing.

Potential Audience: Unlimited	
<p>Practice Standards</p> <p>Distributed through: Employee intranet, public Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, Employees, Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	Using less scientific and more direct and simplified language to help program participants and applicants to better understand the requirement standards for program implementation.
<p>Public Service Announcements</p> <p>Distributed through: Radio, TV, YouTube, partner Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	Using clearer language, we are able to reach broader and more diverse, historically underserved communities with information about conservation and conservation programs.
<p>Resource and User Guides</p> <p>Distributed through: Employee Intranet, public Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, Public, Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials Agricultural Producers</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	Clear language describing practices and procedures allows for a greater understanding of processes and fewer questions.
<p>Snow Survey Reports</p> <p>Distributed through Employee intranet, public Web site, email</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, Public, agricultural producers, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	Reporting data in a clear, concise manner with less technical jargon makes it easy to understand.
<p>Soil Survey Reports</p> <p>Distributed through: public Web site, intranet, email</p>	Reporting data in a clear, concise manner with less technical jargon makes it easy to understand.

<p>Target Audience: Employees, Public, agricultural producers, Conservationists, private landowners</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	
<p>Speeches and Talking Points</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, Public, agricultural producers, Conservationists, private landowners</p>	<p>Communicating data and information in a clear and concise manner using less technical jargon so the audience can understand the topics.</p>
<p>Technical Notes and Reports</p> <p>Distributed through: public Web site, employee Intranet, direct mail</p> <p>Target Audience: public, employees, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Less technical jargon is used, and all acronyms are defined. Language is more consistent and easier to understand.</p>

Rural Development (RD)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
RHS Customer Satisfaction Survey for Single Family Housing Direct Loan Servicing	This survey allowed staff an opportunity to determine that communication with the public is effective.

Office of Advocacy and Outreach

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Program Summaries, through Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Community-based organizations, farmworker organizations, grant writers, educational institutions, including colleges, land grant universities, and state and local agencies.</p> <p>Approximately 1,000 groups.</p> <p>Potential audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Improved access to USDA programs and services from historically underserved groups through writing that is simple and in a direct format to achieve more effective communication and enhance access to services for the communities we serve.</p>
USDA Directories and Liaison information, through Web site	Increased accessibility USDA programs from historically underserved groups. Closing the professional achievement

<p>Target Audience: Community-based organizations, grant writers, farmworker organizations, educational institutions, and state and local agencies.</p> <p>Approximately 500 groups.</p> <p>Potential audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>gap by providing opportunities to talented and diverse young people to support the agricultural industry in the 21st century.</p>
<p>Success Stories, through Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Community-based organizations, grant writers, farmworker organizations, educational institutions, and state and local agencies.</p> <p>Approximately 1,000 groups.</p> <p>Potential audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Improved access to USDA programs and services from historically underserved groups through more effective communication. Improving the viability and profitability of small and beginning farmers and ranchers; and improving agricultural opportunities for farmworkers</p>
<p>Correspondence, through U.S. mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Sent in response to inquiries as appropriate, from the following, which include Congress, community-based organizations, small and beginning farmers, and academic institutions.</p> <p>Potential audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>OAO has worked on preparing and writing responses that are clearer, more succinct, and responsive to inquiries and in an effort to improve customer service. We ensure use of plain writing language as letters are written, edited, and finalized.</p>
<p>Email blasts, distributed through OAO general email account</p> <p>Target Audience: Community-based organizations, farmworker organizations, grant writers, educational institutions, including colleges, land grant universities, and state and local agencies; and internal USDA staff.</p> <p>Approximately 1,000 groups.</p> <p>Potential audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>OAO is focused on preparing and writing email messages that are short and concise. Images, videos, and graphs are used to convey messages more easily and clearly.</p>
<p>Fliers, distributed through email, hard copies, and outreach meetings</p> <p>Target Audience: Community-based organizations, farmworker organizations, grant writers, educational institutions, including colleges, land grant universities, and state and</p>	<p>OAO is focused on preparing and writing information for fliers that is clear and direct, facilitating information to a wide variety of customers.</p>

<p>local agencies; and internal USDA staff.</p> <p>Approximately 1,000 groups.</p> <p>Potential audience: Unlimited</p>	
<p>Newsletter, distributed through email, hard copies</p> <p>Target Audience: Community-based organizations, farmworker organizations, grant writers, educational institutions, including colleges, land grant universities, and state and local agencies; and internal USDA staff.</p> <p>Approximately 1,000 groups.</p> <p>Potential audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>OAO has prepared a newsletter that is written in a clear and concise manner to increase interest in USDA programs and services.</p>

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Accessible Electronic Documents Policy Target Audience: All OASCR employees</p>	<p>Increased accessibility of documents.</p>

Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Departmental Regulation 1512 – Regulatory Decision Making Requirements (USDA internal guidance for the drafting, requirements, and clearance of departmental rulemakings proposed for publication).</p> <p>Target Audience: All USDA agency regulatory writing and coordination offices. Ultimately this could be useful and beneficial to the public (and USDA) by improving the clarity of USDA’s published rulemakings, particularly with rulemaking preambles that are to be written in a manner that is “simple and easy to understand” as required in OMB’s “Final Guidance on Implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010.”</p>	<p>The 1512 regulation is currently being revised. The current draft revision incorporates the Plain Writing Act as a requirement for USDA reviewers when reviewing all departmental significant regulations for programmatic accuracy and completeness. In addition, the current draft revision incorporates the Office of Management and Budget’s Final Guidance on Implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010, requiring that rulemaking preambles be written in a manner that is “simple and easy to understand.”</p>

Office of Communication (OC)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
National Press Releases Target Audience: The general public	OC does final review for plain writing of agency-written releases that convey information of national importance to consumers, agricultural industry, academia, press, and other stakeholders
Media Advisories Target Audience: Selected media	OC alerts media outlets to upcoming USDA events and news announcements in direct language/Media coverage
Communications like USDA “Results” Fact Sheets/ Farm Bill Fact Sheets/ Farm Bill materials and information Target Audience: The general public	OC conveys facts in plain writing and in succinct format, resulting in increased comprehension and customer satisfaction
Captions on photos posted to USDA Flickr site on homepage Target Audience: Press and general public	OC writes clear captions that concisely convey the event behind the photo/photos and captions that may be reproduced by media and others
Web pages, including USDA homepage, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs Target Audience: The general public	OC presents Web pages and social media in plain, conversational language so they are informational and engaging, resulting in increased comprehension, public accessibility, and customer satisfaction
Secretary/Deputy Secretary speeches posted to USDA “Transcripts and Speeches” section of USDA Web site Target Audience: Specific stakeholders, interest groups, and general public	OC writes speeches on complex subjects in clear, direct language, resulting in increased comprehension of USDA messages and customer satisfaction
Publications Target Audience: Public stakeholders and policymakers	OC does final review for plain writing of all agency-written publications released to the public, resulting in increased comprehension and customer satisfaction

Text accompanying radio stories and actualities posted to USDA Web site and text accompanying videos posted to YouTube Target Audience: Specific stakeholders and the general public	OC writes clear summaries of stories and interviews, resulting in increased comprehension and accessibility for general public and for broadcast media that may pick up stories and actualities
Text accompanying exhibits, displays and signage prepared for agency use in visitor centers, conferences, and other outlets Target Audience: Specific stakeholders and the general public	OC captions and summarizes display information in plain language, resulting in increased comprehension and customer satisfaction

Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Monthly: World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report. There are 13,000 subscribers plus logon access includes producers, investors, academics, press	OCE will continue to refine and use tables, short sentences, brevity, and receive expert review.
Weekly Weather report. There are 7,000 subscribers plus logon access from producers, investors, academics, meteorologists	OCE will continue to refine and use charts, short sentences, brevity, and perform expert review

OCIO (Office of the Chief Information Officer)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Communication materials, publications, forms, and correspondence sent to OCIO offices, including Information Technology Planning, Privacy, Enterprise Architecture, and the E-Gov group are available and accessible to the public through OCIO's public-facing Web sites. Target Audience: OCIO policy writers and individuals that manage departmentwide functions. Serves approximately 30 internal users, the general public, and media representatives. The potential audience is	OCIO's practice is to always communicate in a manner that adheres to the principles of plain language in written materials. This increases comprehension of how IT programs and policies benefit our employees and the public we serve, and reduces errors and the burden on users.

unlimited.	
<p>Posted Plain Writing Resources on USDA Departmental Directives Page – this is a public Web page.</p> <p>Target Audience: All writers and reviewers of Departmental Directives.</p> <p>Approximately 500 users.</p>	<p>The Plain Language checklist is now part of the process to create and review Departmental Directives, resulting in increased knowledge of Departmental policy and guidance. Clear, concise writing and the use of graphics without the use of jargon results in better understanding of OCIO's mission, objectives, and goals.</p>

Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Correspondence</p> <p>Target Audience: Assists USDA Agencies in preparing responses to inquiries as appropriate, including those from Congress, state and local governments, community-based organizations, small and beginning farmers, academic institutions, e-mail from the public sector, and internal USDA staff.</p> <p>Potential audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>OES assists USDA Agencies in the preparation and writing of responses that are clear, more succinct, and responsive to inquiries in an effort to improve customer service. We ensure use of plain writing language as letters are written, edited, and finalized.</p>

Office of the Inspector General (OIG)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>OIG produces documents that we make available to the public on our Web site (http://www.usda.gov/oig/index.htm). Our written products include audit reports, our semiannual reports to Congress, as well as our management challenges, annual plans, testimonies for Congress, and other documents.</p> <p>Target Audience: USDA, agencies, Congress, and the general public</p>	<p>OIG has always strived to communicate plainly, clearly, and directly. The Plain Writing Act provides resources and a means to formalize those efforts, and also reinforces the necessity of clear communication.</p>

3. Plain Writing Outreach to USDA Employees

INTRODUCTION

Successful implementation of the Act requires an aware workforce. We have made a point to inform and to remind employees about the importance of complying with the Plain Writing Act – and furthermore to comply with the *intent* of the law to ensure transparency and an informed citizenry.

EMPLOYEE OUTREACH: ACTIONS TO DATE

The following lists highlight some of the awareness strategies we have employed since the Act took full effect on October 13, 2011.

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

- AMS organized a Plain Language Team consisting of the Agency’s Senior Plain Writing Official and Plain Writing Coordinators from each of the Agency’s Program areas that produce the most covered documents, including regulations.
- AMS developed and deployed its own Plain Language Intranet site to raise employee awareness about the Plain Writing Act and its requirements. The site also contains resources that employees can refer to when preparing and reviewing documents for public distribution and use.
- The AMS Administrator sent an email to all employees informing them about the Plain Writing Act of 2010, and the Agency’s commitment to communicate with our stakeholders, partners, and the public using the principles of Plain Language.
- We included a message in AMS’ Electronic Newsletter, “The AMS Voice,” reminding employees that they must comply with the Plain Writing Act of 2010 in all written communications to the public; reminding employees about the AMS Plain Language Intranet site; and informing employees about upcoming Agency Plain Writing workshops.
- AMS has developed a list of core writers who would benefit from Plain Language training. These employees write AMS programs and services-related documents, guidelines, letters, fact-sheets, and regulations, and prepare research products. AMS has already begun holding Plain Writing Training sessions and will continue holding them during Fiscal Year 2013 until all its core writers have been trained.
- AMS’ Transportation and Marketing (TM) Program has developed plans to institute regular meetings for managers of cooperative research agreements to develop a consistent format for progress reports and to increase the number of research outputs that are written in Plain Language. The TM Writer-Editor conducts reviews of materials and provides immediate feedback to authors on the Plain Language requirements.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)/National Agricultural Library

The ARS Plain Writing Coordinator initiated and implemented a 3-month Plain Writing Campaign, which ran from April 1, 2013-June 30, 2013. ARS worked with its AgLearn staff to incorporate the Plain Writing Training Module into all ARS employees' learning plans to ensure that employees take the training. In addition, the agency promoted the campaign in its *ARS & You* newsletter each month during the campaign to remind and encourage employees to take the training. Prior to the campaign, 23 people had taken the training. After the campaign, 3,248 people had taken the training. This number may be slightly higher, because some people did the training together, so only the person that logged in would have been counted. Note, the core PowerPoint® presentation and content for USDA's Plain Writing AgLearn training was developed by ARS' Plain Writing Coordinator for use in training agency employees.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

- APHIS provides intranet writing guides for all staff members, including information about the Act, guidelines, checklists, online courses, and tools to achieve the Act's requirements.
- We emphasized the importance of Plain Language by sharing the results of USDA/APHIS's 2013 Plain Language report card with all APHIS employees on the Agency intranet via a recorded audio message. The message talked about the importance of Plain Language to an informed electorate and the Agency's ability to successfully accomplish its work.

Economic Research Service (ERS)

ERS discussed the Act with the agencies trained and professional editors who review every item before it is released. ERS has also included plain writing training in their presentation training, media training, and writing training sessions for employees.

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)/Center for Nutrition Policy and Programs (CNPP)

- In October 2011, FNS' Plain Writing Senior Official sent an email to FNS/CNPP supervisors providing a plain writing tip sheet and Web-based information links for their use with employees.
- In December 2011, FNS' Human Resources Division sent a similar email to all (about 1,350) FNS and CNPP employees.
- In January 2014, the SNAP Analysis Branch Chief in the Office of Policy Support sent an email to branch staff promoting use of a plain language online training developed by the National Institutes of Health.

Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)

FSIS promoted and pilot tested a plain language writing checklist that was targeted towards FSIS' Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement and Review. The list was distributed and used to write, review, and enhance written communications office-wide. FSIS posted information on plain language and requirements of the Plain Writing Act on the Office of Program and Policy Development SharePoint® site.

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

FAS has notified USDA employees through FAS intranet announcements, all-employee emails, and the FAS public Web site <http://www.fas.usda.gov/>

Forest Service (FS)

- The Chief of Staff, acting on behalf of the Forest Service Chief, appointed a national coordinator for Plain Writing Act implementation. The coordinator is a professional writer/editor who works for the Chief's Office, drafting speeches and other documents for the Forest Service Chief. Two more national coordinators volunteered to help, both professional writer/editors—one in the Forest Service's national Office of Communication and the other in the agency's national office for Research and Development.
- The Chief of Staff, acting on behalf of the Forest Service Chief, sent a memo directing the Forest Service's top executives nationwide to designate field coordinators for implementing the Plain Writing Act. The executives chose public affairs directors at the regional office and research station level, who in turn coordinated with local field offices.
- The Chief's Office works directly with the public affairs directors and with staff directors in the Washington Office, regularly sending out information on the Plain Writing Act and requesting information on Plain Writing Act implementation.
- To help spread the word about the Plain Writing Act and to make related resources available, the Chief's Office set up a Plain Writing Act Web page on the Forest Service's Intranet Web site. On the Web page, the Chief's Office has posted a checklist prepared by USDA, tailored to Forest Service needs, to help writers use plain language.
- The Chief's Office also announces progress in implementing the Plain Writing Act through "People, Places, and Things," a monthly newsletter for all employees, and through the Forest Service's online blog for the general public.
- In updating the Forest Service's Plain Writing Act Web page, the Chief's Office added a link to the kinds of Forest Service documents and other materials that are covered by the Plain Writing Act.
- USDA's online training program, called AgLearn, has more than a dozen writing-related training courses that employees can take, most of them 1 hour long. The Forest Service's coordinator for Plain Writing Act implementation personally took 13 writing-related AgLearn courses and briefly described each one in a summary page linked to the Forest Service's Plain Writing Act Web page.
- The Forest Service's local and regional coordinators for Plain Writing Act implementation have been notifying employees of the Plain Writing Act and its requirements, for example:
 - The Northern Region (Montana, the Dakotas, and northern Idaho) held a workshop for Public Affairs Officers on how to communicate Plain Writing Act requirements to seasonal and field employees. The regional office regularly reminds staffs about guidance available for Plain Writing Act implementation, with links to the guidance on the Region's internal Web sites.
 - The Pacific Southwest Region (California and the Pacific Islands) sent notification of Plain Writing Act requirements to all Regional Leadership Team members and Public Affairs Officers, along with a link to writing-related AgLearn courses.
 - The Alaska Region emphasized plain writing and Plain Writing Act requirements in two job outreach brochures and in an outreach storyboard for its Web site.

- The Los Padres National Forest in California emphasizes plain writing in all of its messages, both internal and external, and encourages writing-related educational development for employees through the AgLearn program.

Farm Service Agency

FSA is starting immediately with reviews of updated 2014 Farm Bill external communications to staff and customers. Beginning at approximately mid-year 2014, FSA will be working to enact a plain language standard for all FSA documents and communications so that more producers, both new and existing, as well as the general public, can improve their understanding of USDA and FSA program opportunities that are available. Tentatively scheduled to commence in May 2014, an internal team shall be formalized to review, create, and maintain the plain language 2014 farm bill documents, including fact sheets, notices, Web-based communications, and associated materials, and to provide ongoing monitoring of these materials to ensure that updated information is provided on a periodic and systematic basis. By mid-summer 2014, it is anticipated that applications for FSA programs will be inspected, reviewed, and revised accordingly with the plain language approach so that the draft products can be provided and tested as pilots among select reviewers or groups for feedback. Close coordination will be conducted with sister USDA agencies to review new and existing language in documents in the effort to provide a more universal approach to language on similar programs across the board. Efforts also will be directed to unify any multiple variations of descriptions on identical or related topics and programs. Careful attention will be paid to regional differences in language, and to avoid oversimplification of technical terms where such efforts may change the accuracy of the meaning of such terms or the interpretation of such terms by specialized audiences.

Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyard Administration (GIPSA)

- In late fall of 2012, GIPSA published an article in its monthly employee newsletter that outlined the plain language requirements and listed writing courses in AgLearn.
- GIPSA has ongoing plans to encourage communication improvement both in writing and oral communications as both these areas continue to be one of the most requested skill development areas on Individual Development Plans in GIPSA for employees, supervisors, and managers.
- GIPSA plans on conducting another Webinar in May on plain language or writing basics as identified by management and will continue to publicize the AgLearn communication courses. There are plans to also set up an “out of the box thinking” list of writing resources including Web sites and tips on how to improve oral and written communication skills using online and local resources with several supporting Webinars.
- GIPSA held leader facilitated AgLearn training for all Project Managers within its Technology and Science Division on Plain Writing during the third quarter of FY 2013. GIPSA plans to offer this session again during the third quarter of FY 2014 for all employees located at the National Grain Center.
- GIPSA will review and update its Web site materials related to its Mycotoxin Test Kit Evaluation Program and Biotechnology Test Kit Evaluation programs in FY 2014 to ensure plain language concepts are applied.

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

- NASS distributed a memo from the Administrator, along with direction to use the NASS Plain Writing Checklist (issued October 2011).
- We created a Web page on the agency intranet that provides information on the Plain Writing Act and directs staff to resources available at <http://www.PlainLanguage.gov> and <http://www.usda.gov/plain-writing>, which contains specially created NASS plain writing materials (Web page created October 2011).
- We regularly publish articles in the agency internal newsletter and blog, Round-Up; and plain writing tips in the weekly leadership memo to field staff; and periodic emails from the plain language coordinator. These provide tips on plainer writing and remind staff about the Plain Writing mandate.
- We created a series of one-page quick tips on key aspects of the Plain Writing Act expanding on elements in the Plain Writing Checklist (distributed periodically to all staff and available on the intranet).
- We provided guidance to Headquarters and field staff on how to write Highlights, fact sheets, and other outreach materials about the 2012 Census of Agriculture in clear, direct language. As states create customized census products, this helps to expand the emphasis on plain writing from national publications to state publications as well.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

- We worked with senior leaders to require all NIFA employees who work with grants to complete plain writing training via AgLearn.
- We edited Requests For Applications templates to ensure compliance with the Act.

Natural Resources Conservations Service (NRCS)

- NRCS distributed a National Bulletin (NB 130-13-1) to all employees on February 15, 2013, outlining the provisions of the Act and requesting data from each state to complete the agency's 2013 Plain Writing Compliance Report.
- NRCS offers plain writing resources continually on their Executive Correspondence Management community in USDA Connect.
- Presented information about the upcoming compliance report at a National Public Affairs meeting held via video teleconference.
- NRCS updated our Correspondence Manual and included a section, with resources, on Plain Writing.
- NRCS includes Plain Writing Act articles in each edition of NRCS' Executive Correspondence Management Team Newsletter. In addition to articles about Plain Writing and compliance with the Act, we provided Plain Writing tips and resources for our employees to use in their daily writing.
- NRCS Plain Writing team communicates regularly about Plain Writing Act implementation with Public Affairs Specialists, administrative staff, and agency leadership. The purpose is to maintain an ongoing dialogue about the importance of Plain Writing and provide plain writing resources for them.
- Maintaining ongoing dialogue within NRCS about the importance of plain writing to conservation and providing plain writing resources for employees.

Rural Development (RD)

The new RHS Administrator sent an e-mail to all RHS employees reminding them of the importance of using plain language in all of their communications and the impact it can have on our programs. Information about plain language resources was also circulated.

Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)

- Assigned a contact for Plain Writing.
- Provided information on the Plain Writing Act to more than 25 staff members.
- Provided an information sheet on the Plain Writing Act and its requirements.
- Provided information on Plain Writing Act training.
- Initiated discussion and plans to post information on the OAO Web site.

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)

OASCR distributes information about the Act in staff meetings and via email blast.

Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)

OBPA sent out several links to share information to help our users find training and learn more about Plain Language last year.

Office of Communications (OC)

- *Web Communications*

As the manager of the USDA.gov portal, OC provides guidance to USDA's 17 agencies, plus offices, through the Webmaster and Social Media communities. OC provides guidance for optimized use of various Web and social media channels, which includes using plain language and a conversational tone through popular social media tools, including Facebook and Twitter.

OC also maintains a centralized USDA Blog featuring stories and updates from each mission, agency, and office. Through the New Media Strategic Plan, OC provides guidance to USDA communicators writing blog posts to use plain language and to avoid bureaucratic jargon, legalese, and overuse of acronyms. OC provides a link to Blogging in Plain English from Common Craft:

<http://youtube.com/NN211pWXjXI>.

- *Press and Editorial*

OC works closely with agencies in the final review of news releases and publications.

Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)

Informed agency staff of the Plain Writing Act's requirements:

- Information on the Act is posted on the agency intranet.
- Information on the Act and Web-based resources was distributed to all staff members.
- Signs were distributed throughout with availability of the "Federal Plain Language Guidelines"
- Staff was asked to take optional AgLearn course: Introduction to Plain Writing Act

Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)

- OCIO regularly informs employees via email and other bulletins, and has subsequently trained employees in the Offices of Policy & Planning and IT Operations on specific Plain Writing practices and expectations.
- OCIO developed and deployed its own Plain Language intranet site to raise employee awareness about the Plain Writing Act and its requirements. The Web site also contains resources that employees can refer to when preparing and reviewing documents for public distribution and use, such as the Plain Language Writer's Checklists and Plain Language Reviewer's Checklists.

Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)

- Provided information on the Plain Writing Act to USDA Agencies and Offices.
- Provided URL Web site information on the Plain Writing Act and its requirements.
- Provides information on Plain Writing Act training through AgLearn.
- Coordinates, formats, and prepares the Department Plain Language Writing Report annually, which is on the USDA Web site.
- Monitored the inbox, plainlanguage@osec.usda.gov for inquiries from the general public regarding the Plain Writing Act and its language.

Office of the Inspector General (OIG)

We informed OIG's entire workforce about the Plain Writing Act via email. On reference material that employees use when writing, we have also incorporated links to the Act's resources.

4. Training

INTRODUCTION

Successful implementation of the Act requires a trained workforce. The documents we have committed to writing in plain language come from across USDA, and many different staff members write them.

WHO WE'RE TRAINING

Here is a sample of the people who write plainly in USDA:

- loan officers who provide guidance to potential applicants;
- program staff who develop forms and regulations;
- inspectors who send notices to plants that USDA inspects;
- contract officers who prepare notices of contract opportunities;
- foresters who develop land management plans;
- communications specialists and writers who produce news releases, external correspondence and stakeholder communications products; and,
- IT specialists who develop Web pages for our programs.

HOW WE'RE TRAINING THEM

To train these writers, USDA Agencies and Offices have used in-house training staff, trainers from the Federal PLAIN network, contractors, and online training. More than 20,000 people in USDA have taken one or more writing courses on our online training system, AgLearn.

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

Training / Date	Employees Trained
<p>AMS initiated a Plain Language workshop starting with our National Organic Program (NOP) employees. We also frequently discuss the importance of clear writing at our NOP staff meetings, and distribute positive feedback received from customers to the full team to reinforce the benefits of the Plain language writing approach.</p> <p>Date: January 23, 2013</p>	18
<p>A six-module writing class designed to focus AMS-NOP writers on audience analysis; to improve writing structure, language clarity, grammar, and use of active</p>	20

<p>voice; and to teach writers how to write effective procedure documents.</p> <p>Date: Six half-day modules were held between July 2012 and November 2012</p>	
<p>AgLearn Module on Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely</p> <p>Date: Continuously since April 2012</p>	21
<p>Plain Network “Train-the-Trainer” Boot camp</p> <p>Date: Employees started attending the boot camp in 2012 and are still completing the boot camp requirements.</p>	3
<p>Aglearn Plain Writing and Business Writing Training Courses: AMS required all agency writers and reviewers to complete Plain Language training. Fruit and Vegetable Program employees completed the required training with the following courses: Introduction to Plain Language; Plain Writing Act; and Business Writing courses: Know your Readers and Your Purpose; Editing and Proofreading; How to Write Clearly and Concisely; Business Writing Basics, etc.</p> <p>Date: June 2013 and March 2014</p>	110

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)/National Agricultural Library (NAL)

Training / Date	Employees Trained
<p>AgLearn Training</p> <p>Date: April – June 2013</p> <p>Implemented a 3-month campaign to encourage employees to use online plain writing training and resources, which included promoting awareness about online training module through agency newsletter and various other means.</p>	3,248 ARS employees took the <i>Plain Writing</i> AgLearn Training
<p>In-house training on Writing for the Web at NAL (provided by Ginny Redish)</p> <p>Date: December 2013</p>	Web content developers (25 staff)

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

Training / Date	Employees Trained
<p>In-house face-to-face training</p> <p>Date: Ongoing</p>	<p>Approximately 140 employees have taken and passed intensive courses with 9 hours of in-class time and 6 hours of homework. Of these, more than three quarters have taken two additional courses with 7 hours of in-class time and 4 hours of homework. Each of these classes includes extensive exercises and feedback on in-class and homework.</p> <p>Almost 120 people took a one-day, and more than 325 people have taken one of several half-day courses highlighting plain language principles.</p>
<p>PLAIN provided training – live</p> <p>Date: Ongoing</p>	<p>Nearly 50 employees have taken PLAIN-provided training.</p>
<p>Online training</p> <p>Date: Ongoing</p>	<p>APHIS recommended sets of online training (AgLearn) – APHIS employees have taken 2,620 of these courses.</p>
<p>Face-to-face training from outside sources</p> <p>Date: Ongoing</p>	<p>More than 30 employees have taken face-to-face training from a variety of outside sources.</p>
<p>Writing coaching</p> <p>Date: Ongoing</p>	<p>APHIS is pilot testing a Virtual Writing Center where trained volunteers coach staff members who want one-on-one feedback on their writing.</p>

Economic Research Service (ERS)

Training / Date	Employees Trained
<p>Plain Writing Training</p> <p>Date: July 17, 2013</p>	<p>10 employees</p>
<p>Plain writing segment at Writing for Economists training</p> <p>Date: September 30 and December 3, 2013</p>	<p>32 employees</p>
<p>Plain writing segment at Writing for the Non-Economist training</p> <p>Date: December 18, 2013</p>	<p>7 employees</p>

Plain writing segment at Presentation Training Date October 30 and 31, 2013	17 employees
Plain writing segment at Media Training November 4 and December 19, 2013	12 employees

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)/Center for Nutrition Policy and Programs (CNPP)

Training / Date	Employees Trained
PLAIN training—this resulted in the creation of a tipsheet on plain writing that we subsequently distributed to all FNS employees Date: Updated since Fall 2011	2 FNS coordinators and correspondence liaison
PLAIN training workshops and posting of plain writing resources online Date: Continually since December 2011	FNS' Supplemental Nutrition and Benefit Redemption Division staff
Email to supervisors in FNS from the FNS Human Resources Division, identifying online training modules for their use with employees who might need additional plain writing help. (As of January 2013, 26 employees have taken the training modules identified in the email.) Date: Continually March 2012	Agency supervisors
The FNS Western Regional Office provided two opportunities for plain writing training. Date: December 2012	Western Regional Office staff
The FNS Southeastern Regional Office provided plain writing training. Date: December 2013	Southeastern Regional Office staff
FNS Headquarters offered two 1-day Executive Competency Qualification writing seminars. Date: December, 2013 and February, 2014	12 GS-14 and GS-15 managers

Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)

Training / Date	Employees Trained
In house (agency Staff or contractor)	All Office of Investigation, Enforcement, and Audit, Enforcement and Litigation Division, Federal State Audit Branch Office of Management (All Minneapolis offices)
Training document for intranet content contributors written in plain words to assist users. Date: November 4, 2011 to Present	
Webinars and online training	

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

Training	Employees Trained
Classroom 10/22/13 -Writing in Plain Language	11
On line-Introduction to Plain Language	5

Forest Service (FS)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In September 2011, in response to a data call, Forest Service staffs across the country identified employees involved in writing documents covered by the Plain Writing Act. The Forest Service estimated that about 1,500 employees, as a major part of their jobs, wrote or edited documents covered by the act. Of these, about 1,200 employees were believed to need further training. Forest Service staffs responded by offering training in various forms. Date: Various, 2011-12-13	1,500 employees
The Chief's Office recommended that all Forest Service employees consider adding at least one plain writing course to their individual development plans. Employees could take advantage of training opportunities through USDA's online AgLearn program, which includes more than a dozen online modules, such as "Introduction to the Plain Writing Act" (30 minutes); "Business Writing: How To Write Clearly and Concisely" (1 hour); and "Business Grammar:	1,200 employees

Common Usage Errors.” Forest Service staffs committed about 1,200 employees to take at least one writing-related training course. Date: Various, 2012-13	
<i>Forest Service staffs routinely offer writing-related training to their employees, including the following:</i>	
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Since 8/2010	10 (Policy Analysis staff)—an hour-long seminar in plain writing
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Since 6/2011	84 (Business Correspondence staff)
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Since 8/2011	90 (Business Correspondence staff)
Online training Date: 10/11–12/13	2,000 (various staffs)
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Since January 2012	Approximately 40 (Employee Relations Specialists)—How to draft charge/penalties writing
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Spring 2012	Approximately 50 (Human Resources Specialists)—Policy-writing class
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: May 16-18, 2012	1 (Conservation Education staff)—“Fundamentals in Writing”
In house (agency staff or contractor) Dates: May 17-18, 21-22, 2012	Approximately 80 (Human Resources Specialists)—Congressional Briefing Seminars, including how to create draft responses to congressional inquiries
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: July 2012	Approximately 40 (Washington Office staffs)—course in plain writing for Web site design and formulation
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: 8/2012	10 (Policy Analysis staff)—an hour-long seminar in plain writing
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Winter 2012-13	1 (NEPA writer/editor for the Pacific Southwest Region)—a one-on-one TEAMS Enterprise Unit training course (40 hours) covering plain writing of NEPA documents
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: January 16-17, 2013	20-30 (Modoc National Forest staff)—a NEPA 101 course
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: April 2013	Approximately 25 (International Programs staff)—a daylong writing workshop to ensure that program managers who communicate in writing with colleagues, partners, and

	collaborators write plainly and effectively. The workshop reviewed the essentials of plain writing, the planning process for effective writing, and tips for writing and editing documents.
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: April 2013	30-40 (Northern Region employees)—Half-day course on Writing for Federal Employees, designed to promote concise, clear, and comprehensive internal and external written communication
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: May 2013	20-30 (Northern Region Public Affairs Officers)—Workshop on (1) training seasonal and field employees in techniques for plain writing, and (2) designing Web sites for compliance with the Plain Writing Act
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Spring 2013	Approximately 80 (Washington Office staffs)—a Plain Writing Act coordinator took a train-the-trainer course in summer 2012, then offered training in plain writing
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Fall 2013	30-40 (Eastern Region public affairs professionals)—Regional meeting with training on plain writing for the Web, including features and blogs
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: March 2014	2 (the Pacific Southwest Region's Deputy Director for Public Affairs and Communications and its Legislative Affairs Specialist)—training in Plain Writing Act requirements and plain writing techniques
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Ongoing	ca. 90 (Controlled Correspondence staff)—periodic informal training by professional writer/editors
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Ongoing	ca. 200 (Northern Research Station scientists)—Regular CSD Alerts to all NRS employees about communication procedures and issues, including topics related to grammar and plain writing
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: 2013	4 (Pacific Northwest Research Station employees)—One science writer (GS-12) took a refresher "Writing Skills" course developed by the Harvard Business School, available online through the Defense Acquisitions University; two editors (GS-12) reviewed bimonthly issues of <i>Copy Editor</i> ; one proofreader (GS-7) took a script writing class through Lynda.com.

Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyard Administration (GIPSA)

Training	Employees Trained
<p>Over the last year there have been about 50 completions of writing classes in GIPSA. Also an article will be published on writing and plain language in the coming months.</p> <p>GIPSA continues to have ongoing plans to encourage communication improvement both in writing and oral communications as both these areas are some of the most requested skill development areas on IDPs in GIPSA for employees, supervisors, and managers.</p> <p>GIPSA plans on conducting one or two Webinars in plain language or writing basics as identified by management. We will continue to publicize the AgLearn writing courses.</p>	50

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
<p>In-house training</p> <p>Date: Ongoing since July 2012</p>	2
<p>Online training</p> <p>Date: Fall/Winter 2011/2012/2013 and continuing</p>	Required of public affairs staff (8 persons); promoted as available to all staff
<p>We created a 2-hour plain writing workshop, "Writing Plainly and Effectively: Ten Tips to Clearer Writing," for working groups within NASS to take together. The course summarizes key Plain Writing principles in ten tips (lessons), using NASS-relevant examples.</p> <p>Date: The first session was held in February 2013. A second session was held April 2013, and a third session was held for state directors in the Northeast Regional Field Office in September 2013.</p>	Teams with similar writing needs take the workshop in small group settings. We will continue to conduct sessions as opportunities allow.
<p>Regular communication with staff through tip sheets, internal newsletter, and inserts in weekly leadership memo to field offices.</p> <p>Date: Periodic communication through various means</p>	All staff
<p>Plain writing guidance for outreach publications related</p>	Headquarters and state staff.

to the Census of Agriculture.	
We conducted a training session held for Northeast Regional State Statisticians and other invited staff in 2013. Similar training is available to other state and regional staff.	12

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In-house training for Web Development Team Date: December 4, 2013	8

Natural Resources Conservations Service (NRCS)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In-house training for Administrative Staff Members Date: Training held on May 1, 2013	8
Business Writing: Know Your Readers and Your Purpose Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 25, 2012 and January 18, 2013	59
Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely (AgLearn) Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 5, 2012 and February 1, 2013	147
Business Writing: Editing and Proofreading Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 23, 2012 and January 20, 2013	69
Business Grammar: Parts of Speech Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 3, 2012 and December 27, 2012	59
Business Grammar: Working with Words Date: Completed in AgLearn between 3, 2012 and December 27, 2012	8
Business Grammar: The Mechanics of Writing Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 10, 2012 and January 2, 2013	87

<p>Business Grammar: Punctuation</p> <p>Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 5, 2012 and December 27, 2012</p>	11
<p>Business Grammar: Sentence Construction</p> <p>Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 17, 2012 and January 8, 2013</p>	15
<p>Business Grammar Common Usage Errors</p> <p>Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 10, 2012 and February 1, 2013</p>	23
<p>Writing Under Pressure: The Writing Process</p> <p>Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 16, 2012 and January 18, 2013</p>	55
<p>Writing at Work: How to Write Clearly, Effectively and Professionally</p> <p>Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 5, 2012 and October 5, 2012</p>	15
<p>Plain Writing Resources on USDA Connect NRCS' Executive Correspondence Management site</p> <p>Date: NRCS leadership will continue to provide employees with regular plain writing updates and direction to maintain plain writing as a priority with customer service and program implementation.</p>	All agency employees (10,379)

RMA (Risk Management Agency)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
Risk Management Agency Plain Writing Training - January, 2013 through March, 2014: RMA Product Management employees received refresher training on the Plain Writing Act and implementation in January 2014	120 employees
Online Courses in AgLearn <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Plain Language • Business Writing: Know Your Readers and Your Purpose • Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely • Ongoing 	4 employees 18 employees 14 employees

Rural Development (RD)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
AGLearn Plain Writing; On-Site RHS-Single Family Housing Plain Language Training Date: Jan/Feb/Mar	64 RHS employees completed either the AgLearn Plain Language Course or the Single Family Housing On-Site Plain Language Course.

Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
PLAIN provided training – live Date: February 29, 2012	
Online training AgLearn Plain Writing course 101 Date: February 29, 2012	27
Plain Language: Improving Communication from the Federal Government to the Public http://www.plainlanguage.gov .	27

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In-house training	
PLAIN provided training – live Date: March 20, 2013	21
Online training – AgLearn Date: January 31, 2012	46

Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In house (agency Staff or contractor)	
PLAIN provided training – live	
Webinars	
Online training Date: September 2011 to Present	10 users through AgLearn

Office of Communication (OC)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
The Director of OC sent a message encouraging all employees to take advantage of the online “Introduction to Plain Language” course in AgLearn. OC has pushed the course to everyone’s To Do list in AgLearn to highlight this training and make it easily accessible.	

Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
Agency provided the following trainings: In house (agency Staff or contractor) – live	

Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
<p>In-house Plain Writing training is provided as a component of our Professional Development Series, including a course entitled "Use of Plain Writing: Active vs. Passive Voice."</p> <p>Date: March 2013. This training was offered on a recurring basis, as a refresher for current staff and as part of the orientation process for new OCIO employees.</p> <p>OCIO has also recommended that all employees assigned to each of the eight (8) Divisions consider adding at least one Plain Writing course to their Individual Development Plans (IDPs), to be selected from the following list:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the Plain Writing Act • Introduction to Plain Writing • Business Writing: Know Your Readers and Your Purpose • Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely 	35

Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
<p>Provides information on the Online training AgLearn Plain Writing course 101</p> <p>Date: Ongoing</p>	

Office of the General Counsel

Training/Date	Employees Trained
<p>OGC attorneys enrolled in seven courses in "Legal Writing and Research," in the West Legal Ed Center. The West Legal Ed Center has 146 courses available on this subject.</p>	
<p>OGC support staff took a four-hour "Tools for Effective Writing" course offered on September 18, 2013.</p>	22

5. Ensuring Compliance

INTRODUCTION

USDA's agencies have established various processes to oversee their compliance with the Act's requirements.

SPOTLIGHT: FNS' STATE SNAP NOTICES INITIATIVE

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service works with partner agencies across the nation to get food to people who need it through the Federal nutrition assistance programs. The largest of these programs, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, provides over 46 million low-income people each month with benefits that can be used to buy food in retail stores.

State SNAP agencies must communicate well with SNAP applicants and participants in order to serve these customers effectively – even in those circumstances when benefits are denied or terminated. If clients do not understand how to respond to such “adverse actions” with additional information, they may lose benefits they need, and should receive, because of procedural errors.

Plainly written applications and notices can improve customer service for SNAP clients, reduce errors, and advance the program's nutrition mission.

To help prevent these problems, FNS launched an initiative to encourage State agencies to write Notices of Adverse Action – which provide the client critical information about their benefit allotment and appeal rights – and other SNAP notices plainly. FNS is developing guidance to help States write effective notices of SNAP denial and terminations for SNAP purposes, which will include recommendations and best practices to support simple and clear notices to SNAP clients. The agency hired a contractor to review and analyze existing SNAP notices of adverse action and online applications, and to develop plain language templates that States can use. Webinars for State personnel will follow in late Summer to cover guidelines, templates, tools, and best practices for online applications and notices.

Better applications and notices will help ensure accurate and timely decisions on households' SNAP applications and other administrative actions – ultimately serving SNAP customers, and the program's nutrition mission, more effectively.

COMPLIANCE EFFORTS (BY AGENCY)

The following list summarizes many of the agency-specific processes:

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

- AMS-National Organic Program has implemented a formal internal review process that includes peer review, subject matter expert review, manager review, and a review by our in-house communications specialist, who is an expert in Plain Language. All materials go through a communications specialist prior to posting.

- AMS' Transportation and Marketing Program has a formal internal review process that includes peer review and supervisor review within USDA and with subject matter specialists. A writer-editor (who is an expert in Plain Language) and Web Design Specialist (who is expert in formatting documents for maximum online readability and impact) review periodicals. Reports go through the Associate Deputy Administrator, who has 20 years' experience in writing for non-technical audiences and has edited journals and newsletters. Reports are reviewed by subject experts in academics and industry as needed. All materials go through a communications specialist prior to posting.
- The AMS Public Affairs Office has included in its strategic plan a goal to initiate a comprehensive content and language review of all agency materials, including the AMS Web site. This review will enable AMS to develop, coordinate, and assist in the development of resources and activities that clearly communicate agency programs and services to target audiences. To meet this goal, AMS intends to tailor our messaging through the use of plain language.
- Currently, the agency is establishing a comprehensive library of all AMS products and messaging. AMS Public Affairs is creating updated agency templates for priority products and materials to ensure all materials meet plain language requirements.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)/National Agricultural Library (NAL)

The agency will continue to write publications and other documents and materials in plain language for a general, non-technical audience. ARS Public Affairs Specialists, Editors, staff photographers, and others have been trained in and incorporate this element into their work, and work with ARS employees to ensure written products are understandable by appropriate target audiences. The ARS Information Staff is responsible for reviewing agency scientific publications, and for developing and providing guidance to ARS scientists and other employees on many of the information products developed for the public.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

APHIS has a staff of expert writers and editors who craft most of the key documents presented to the public and a review system to ensure documents are plainly written. Additionally, the Administrator's office reviews the majority of correspondence for clarity. Each program unit has staff members trained in Plain Language, and the Agency emphasizes the need for clear, direct, and straightforward communications with our stakeholders.

Economic Research Service (ERS)

Agency and Department editors will continue to review every manuscript and other documents. Plain writing training is included in presentation, media, and writing training for all employees.

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)/Center for Nutrition Policy and Programs (CNPP)

- FNS will continue to use a tipsheet and Web-based resources to promote the use of plain writing during the drafting and clearance process for covered documents.

- We have distributed and will continue to encourage supervisors whose staff may have difficulty with writing plainly to use the online training modules that are available to USDA employees, perhaps by including them in individual development plans as appropriate.

Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)

- In October, 2011, FSIS' Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement, and Review (OPEER – now known as OIEA – the Office of Investigation, Enforcement, and Audit) added a plain-language component to the Personal Contacts – Equal Opportunity/Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights performance elements. The new component allows all of this office's employees to count plain language training as one of the measures to submit to supervisors in consideration for earning a rating of "exceeds." We have also encouraged supervisors to request that employees attend plain writing training, as needed.
- Since 1985, the Food Safety Education Staff (FSES) has provided food safety educational products written in language that is clear for consumers to understand. FSES' end goal, then and now, is to produce materials that are free of organizational jargon, government speak, and technical prattle, so the consumer is able to obtain the information presented.
- FSES creates food safety factsheets, publications, magnets, flyers, posters, videos, and American Sign Language videos in plain, age-appropriate, and nationality-specific language to meet the needs of its many constituents. It also produces products for the hearing impaired and visually impaired and for those who read below the national reading level of 6th grade.

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

The Foreign Agricultural Service has upgraded systems in place to ensure publicly available materials are accurately and plainly written. The FAS Public Affairs Office serves a primary role in reviewing and editing documents for the agency Web site. For instance, this step ensures that economic analyses can be comprehended by non-economists and the general public. During the launch of the new FAS Web site format, the agency provided training regarding the format and how to write for the Web. This training and orientation included an emphasis on clear, easy-to-understand writing.

Forest Service

- The Forest Service has review systems in place to ensure that its documents are plainly written. For example, all publications by the Forest Service's Washington Office are reviewed by the Forest Service Office of Communication, followed by another review by the USDA Office of Communication. Both offices have professional writer/editors who oversee the reviews, ensuring that Forest Service documents are understandable and usable by the intended readers.
- Forest Service regional offices and research stations typically have similar review systems in place, as do many individual forests and staffs. For example, a professional writer/editor on the Policy Analysis Staff in the Washington Office reviews every Policy Analysis report before it is released to readers. Among other things, the Forest Service ensures that it is plainly written. Periodically, during staff meetings, he conducts a training session in plain writing ("Ten Tips for Writing and Editing").
- In 2011, the Forest Service's Office of Communication began upgrading the agency's Web site to meet the needs of users, partly by ensuring that Web content is in plain language. The first phase of the redesign was launched in 2013.

- In 2012, the Office of Regulatory and Management Services revised its review systems to ensure plain writing. For example:
 - Before issuing new directives and regulations, the Directives and Regulations team works with program managers to ensure that the writing is clear, concise, simple, and easy to understand by all readers.
 - The Controlled Correspondence team has professional writer/editors who work with program staff to ensure that letters in reply to public inquiries are short, to the point, and clearly written.
 - The Freedom of Information Act team is required to use technical and legal language in responding to requests for information, but following that language we insert a plain language sentence that explains clearly and concisely the types of records being released and the types of information or records being withheld.
- In December 2012, the Forest Service's Human Resources Staff reviewed its system for ensuring compliance with the Plain Writing Act. The Human Resources Staff now has the following system in place:
 - Three branch chiefs for the Employee Relations Staff do extensive review of employee relations actions to ensure that they are drafted correctly.
 - Employee Relations is working to implement templates for most of the agency's Employee Relations actions to ensure consistency.
 - The Human Resources Contact Center has a writer/editor who reviews all correspondence going to the field as well as all products in the database.
 - All congressional responses are reviewed and edited by the Human Resources Public Affairs Staff prior to Director signature.
 - All newsletter articles are reviewed and edited by the Human Resources Public Affairs Staff.
- The Forest Health Protection program established an internal review system for documents and an internal/external peer-review system for reports, partly to review them for plain writing.
- The International Programs staff implemented a new method of eliciting and reviewing more than 50 program fact sheets posted online to ensure consistency and accuracy. All correspondence and all Web site materials are reviewed by the Director for content and by a writer/editor for plain writing.
- The Fire and Aviation Management staff has public affairs specialists who work closely with technical staff to respond in plain writing to inquiries from news media, elected officials, and other interested parties about a range of topics, such as airtankers, firefighter fatalities, and the use of fire retardant. In 2013, our staff began revising the Forest Service's wildfire-related Web site to better communicate with the general public. The new Web page will include clear non-technical language as well as compelling photos and graphics to better communicate the challenges associated with wildland fire management in an era of longer and more severe wildfire seasons.
- In the Pacific Southwest Region (California and the Pacific Islands), units have identified document reviewers who review all covered documents to ensure that they are plainly written. For example:
 - Public Affairs and planning staffs review media releases, articles, brochures, flyers, interpretive information, briefing papers, or testimonies for PWA compliance.
 - Forest planners review and edit scoping documents and all major planning documents for NEPA compliance and readability. NEPA documents are regularly reviewed for plain writing and ease of reading.
- In the Northern Region (Montana, northern Idaho, and the Dakotas), the Regional Forester and line officers have emphasized meeting the requirements of the Plain Writing Act in all internal and external documents. Professional writer/editors review documents for plain writing, scrutinizing the

language and intent based upon intended audience and kind of information—the same goes for materials posted on the regional Web site. In March 2013, the Region began measuring the accessibility of posted materials through a public survey. On a scale of 1 to 10, our regional Web pages scored 7.8 in terms of “readability,” 7.9 in terms of “accuracy of information,” and 8.0 in terms of “ability to load pages without getting an error message.”

- In the Eastern Region (the Northeast and Upper Midwest), the Public and Government Relations staff in the regional office does an editorial review of all responses to Department-level requests for briefings, responses to Congress by the Regional Forester, and regional Web site content. In 2013, in order to improve its Web site’s readability, the Region reduced the number of authorized contributors. Regional staff also used Web analytics to redesign its Web site for compliance with the Plain Writing Act.
- In 2013, the Forest Products Laboratory (responsible for Forest Service research and development of new forest products nationwide) created Lab Notes, a blog that translates the complex research and development done by Forest Service scientists into plain language that people can easily understand. The Lab is also tailoring its Web site to the theme of “News You Can Use,” explaining the benefits of Forest Service research to the taxpayer in plain terms (for example, What’s the best way to stack firewood?). Lab staff is dedicated to communicating on a level that is as inclusive as possible rather than letting Forest Service science sail over people’s heads.
- All material published by the Pacific Northwest Research Station (responsible for Forest Service research in Alaska, Oregon, and Washington) goes through a rigorous quality-control process. The Station has two GS-12 editors who edit all printed material and Web content published by the Station for clarity and adherence to GPO style. A GS-7 proofreader proofs each document to verify that all edits have been accurately made. The station’s publication control officer reviews every document before it is sent to the printer or published online.
- The Southern Research Station (responsible for Forest Service research across the South) conducts extensive editorial review of all research manuscripts for the intended audiences. A professional writer/editor provides feedback to employees and contractors through independent reviews of their editorial work. During the editorial review process, the reviewer routinely suggests changes to the tone and presentation of scientific information so that a more general audience can understand and use the information provided. The Station publishes CompassLive, an online periodical that translates scientific manuscripts into concise, clearly understandable language, with links to additional information. The Station’s marketing and mass/social media materials for its research products are simple, informative, and easy to understand.
- Key public document development: For the fiscal year 2014 Forest Service budget justification overview (designed, in part, for the general public), the Chief’s Office tasked a professional writer/editor with drafting the overview in accordance with plain writing principles.
- Key public document review: For documents such as the Forest Service Strategic Plan and the annual Agency Financial Report, the Chief’s Office tasks a professional writer/editor with reviewing and rewriting summary statements by the Chief in accordance with plain writing principles.
- Key public document development: The Forest Service Chief is in a position to reach large and influential external audiences through speeches, appearing at dozens of public speaking events per year. To facilitate public access to speeches, a professional writer/editor drafts every major speech. The written speeches, edited for readability in accordance with the principles of plain writing, are posted on the Forest Service Web site.
- Key public document development: Restoration of degraded forest and grassland ecosystems is one of the highest priorities for the Forest Service. To help communicate the need for ecological

restoration, the Pacific Southwest Region has posted a series of 14 short videos on its Web site. The videos cover a range of restoration efforts, from aspen restoration, to chaparral restoration, to the Urban Releaf initiative in urban areas, to restoration efforts by the Veterans Green Corps, to reforestation following the 1992 Cleveland Fire. The regional office reviews every episode for plain language.

- Key public document development: In 2013, the Northern Research Station (responsible for Forest Service research in the Northeast and Upper Midwest) edited its submissions for the Forest Service’s annual Research Highlights publication for plain language. The material is routinely used for briefing papers prepared for USDA and Congress. The Station deliberately chooses plain words and familiar slogans in describing the results of its scientific research.
- Key operational document development: Every year, the Executive Leadership Team in the Washington Office travels to two or three Forest Service regional offices for a series of high-level meetings and strategic dialogues called Chief’s Reviews. A professional writer/editor captures the proceedings in writing and condenses them into key messages, in accordance with the principles of plain writing. The Chief’s Review reports are posted on the internal Forest Service Web site.
- Key operational document review: In implementing the Plain Writing Act, the Forest Health Protection program revised an internal form to clarify intent (FS-2100, Pesticide Use Proposal).
- Key operational document review: Every 12 months, the Human Resources Staff reviews the Human Resources Standard Operation Procedures for plain writing, among other things.
- Key operational document review: In 2013, the Eastern Region used the principles of plain writing in revising its processes for posting materials on its Web site. The revision supplements regulatory requirements in the Forest Service Manual.
- Key operational document development: In 2013, the Eastern Region created external Web pages for hiring temporary employees and student interns, using the principles of plain writing to make its recruitment needs and efforts easier for people to find and understand. These parts of the Region’s Web site are now among the most popular.
- Key public/operational document review: In the Alaska Region, professional writer/editors reviewed a series of key documents for plain writing, including *Leaders’ Intent: Recreation, Wilderness and Heritage Program Management in the Alaska Region*; 10 formal letters from the Regional Forester; 25 Alaska Region roadmaps and Alaska Region niche documents; 62 briefing papers posted on the regional Web site; the quarterly USDA Newsletter; two reports on forest conditions (State of the Tongass and State of the Chugach); 40 news releases; and a briefing book for the Executive Leadership Team from the Washington Office for a Chief’s Review.

Key public/operational document review: In the Northern Region, professional writer/editors reviewed internal materials for the regional office, Washington Office, and USDA; congressional correspondence and communications; “Hot Topic” papers and other briefing materials for internal and external audiences; materials posted on the regional Web sites; and media releases as well as responses to public inquiries about programs, projects, and issues.

Farm Service Agency

FSA is starting immediately with reviews of updated 2014 Farm Bill external communications to staff and customers. Beginning at approximately mid-year 2014, FSA will be working to enact a plain language standard for all FSA documents and communications so that more producers, both new and existing, as well as the general public, can improve their understanding of USDA and FSA program opportunities that are available. Tentatively scheduled to commence in May 2014, an internal team shall be formalized to review,

create, and maintain the plain language 2014 farm bill documents, including fact sheets, notices, Web-based communications, and associated materials, and to provide ongoing monitoring of these materials to ensure that updated information is provided on a periodic and systematic basis. By mid-summer 2014, it is anticipated that applications for FSA programs will be inspected, reviewed, and revised accordingly with the plain language approach so that the draft products can be provided and tested as pilots among select reviewers or groups for feedback. Close coordination will be conducted with sister USDA agencies to review new and existing language in documents in the effort to provide a more universal approach to language on similar programs across the board. Efforts also will be directed to unify any multiple variations of descriptions on identical or related topics and programs. Careful attention will be paid to regional differences in language, and to avoid oversimplification of technical terms where such efforts may change the accuracy of the meaning of such terms or the interpretation of such terms by specialized audiences.

Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyard Administration (GIPSA)

Before publication of new or revised Packers and Stockyards Program brochures, the Policy and Litigation Division analyzes the text using readability statistics available in Microsoft Word. The analysis helps identify writing that is not plain and easy to read. To improve these statistics, writers must use short sentences, active voice, limit the use of legal terms, and incorporate lists and tables to present the information.

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

- NASS named an employee for compliance issues.
- NASS is expanding the number of people formally trained (through the 2-hour workshop focused on NASS examples and writing needs and through online courses), continuing informal training, providing an ongoing stream of refresher materials (tip sheets, internal newsletter, and inserts in leadership memos to field offices, and providing specific writing guidance on general-audience materials about the 2012 Census of Agriculture in connection with the preliminary release in February 2014 as well as the final release in May 2014.
- NASS is incorporating the principles in the plain writing checklist in review processes for various publications.
- NASS is offering a voluntary 2-hour training workshop to working groups on 10 key plain language actions that, when implemented, will quickly improve their individual and joint communications.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

NIFA has a senior agency official who is responsible for plain writing and an agency coordinator who revise RFAs so that they comply with the Act. The plain writing coordinator worked with Grants Management personnel and NIFA senior leaders to require that all NIFA personnel who work with grants receive Plain Writing training via AgLearn. The plain writing coordinator has edited grant writing templates to ensure they comply with the Act.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Agency designated three national headquarters contacts for plain writing.
- There is a Plain Writing icon and link posted to NRCS Web site.
- Plain Writing resources are posted to agency Executive Correspondence Management community in USDA Connect for employees
- NRCS Leadership is committed to continual process improvements using two-way sharing of information, data, and success stories, and maintaining dialogue regarding the importance of the Act with all agency employees nationwide.
- The agency will maintain focus on the importance of writing in plain language and measure Plain Writing Act compliance through newsletter articles, surveys, training, and one-on-one discussions.
- Regular reminders are sent about training courses for all national headquarters staff, including senior management.
- NRCS Reviews and approves public communications for accuracy, timeliness, usability, and clarity.

Rural Development (RD)

Managers were reminded of the importance of using plain language for all communications and work to ensure that prepared documents strive to meet these requirements.

Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)

- OAO Documents and reports on the use of plain writing in agency communications. In addition, OAO continues to discuss plain writing in staff meetings and in the development of program area fact sheets and correspondence.
- Clearance process being developed in conjunction with correspondence protocol.
- OAO will enforce the Plain Writing Act and will measure compliance through staff meetings, one-on-one discussions, and feedback.
- OAO will provide information on Plain Writing online training to its staff.

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)

- OASCR assigned an employee to serve as the agency contact for compliance issues, including compliance with the Plain Writing Act.
- All documents are cleared through the Public Information Officer for OASCR.

Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)

- OBPA's regulatory review staff has added the Plain Writing Act of 2010 as a requirement when reviewing all departmental significant regulations for programmatic accuracy and completeness. In addition to this, the Office of Management and Budget issued a final guidance document related to the Plain Writing Act of 2010, on April 13, 2011. Although the final document is not specific to regulations it does state, on page 5: "While the Act exempts regulations from covered documents, rulemaking preambles are not exempted, and long-standing policies currently in effect require

regulations to be written in a manner that is ‘simple and easy to understand.’ ”

Footnote 5 in the document references Executive Order 12866, sec. 6(a)(3)(F), which states that “All information provided to the public by the agency shall be in plain, understandable language.” This reference carries over to Executive Order 13563, which states that “(a) Our regulatory system must... ensure that regulations are accessible, consistent, written in plain language, and easy to understand. It must measure, and seek to improve, the actual results of regulatory requirements.”

- Consequently, OBPA’s regulatory review staff is required to employ the lens of plain writing when reviewing all departmental significant regulations for programmatic accuracy and completeness.
- The eRulemaking Program also issued a “Best Practices Document” at the end of last year. This document also included general information about plain writing and eRulemaking’s role in informing Federal agencies on to how to comply with the OMB guidance.
- The Federal Register Document Drafting Handbook and PlainLanguage.gov contain general information regarding plain language, which OBPA’s regulatory review staff has also added as a requirement when reviewing all departmental significant regulations for programmatic accuracy and completeness.

OC (Office of Communication)

- One of OC’s primary functions is editorial review of news releases, publications, op-eds and other materials prepared by USDA agencies. OC hires communications experts based, in part, on their writing ability and experience. Because this staff reviews the materials prepared by agency writers, professionalism and adherence to plain writing are built into the process.
- OC writer/editors review and clear all publications released to the public for clarity, appropriateness, quality, and compliance with Federal publishing policies. OC coordinators review publications for accuracy and consistency with departmental programs and policies.
- OC coordinators (and sometimes speechwriters) review press releases for clear delivery of messages to intended audiences.
- OC speechwriters are also hired based on experience and ability. Because USDA speeches often break down highly technical subjects for non-technical audiences, compliance with plain writing is inherent to the process. Speeches are often posted to the Web.

OCE (Office of the Chief Economist)

OCE continuously updates their Web site.

OCIO (Office of the Chief Information Officer)

- OCIO distributed Plain Writing materials and checklists to staff, and will continue to encourage supervisors whose staff may have difficulty with writing plainly and concisely to use the on-line training modules that are available in AgLearn. Employees are also encouraged to include plain writing training in individual development plans, as appropriate. OCIO leadership is committed to continual process improvements using two-way sharing of information; data; newsletters, and success

stories such as “Did You Knows”; and maintaining dialogue regarding the importance of the Plain Writing Act for employees OCIO-wide.

- In late 2012, OCIO staff began upgrading the offices’ Web site to better meet the needs of users, partly by ensuring that Web content is written in plain language. The first phase of the Web re-design was launched in 2013.

Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)

- The clearance process includes correspondence protocol in using Plain Language.
- OES is available to assist agencies/offices in achieving compliance with the Plain Writing Act in their Secretarial correspondence responses (reports, memo, letters, proclamations, etc.).
- When contacted, OES provides information on Plain Writing online training to its staff and all agencies within USDA.

Office of the Inspector General (OIG)

Improving the clarity of OIG’s writing is fundamental to the review process that all of our documents undergo, from inception to publication. Each reviewer who reads documents comments on how readable they are for the general public, and those comments are integrated into the text.

6. USDA Plain Writing Web Sites

THE DEPARTMENT'S PLAIN WRITING WEB SITES

The USDA Plain Language Web site is at [/www.usda.gov/Plain Writing](http://www.usda.gov/Plain_Writing). The page includes tools and resources for writing plainly, information on how citizens can contact USDA if they have any comments, concerns, or issues related to our compliance with the Act, and links to the Plain Language Action and Information Network's Web site.

The text of the Plain Language Act of 2010 is available at:

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ274/pdf/PLAW-111publ274.pdf>

The final guidance that the Office of Management and Budget provided to agencies about the Act is available at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2011/m11-15.pdf>

For additional information on plain writing you may also visit www.plainlanguage.gov.

SPOTLIGHT: FSA REDESIGNS THEIR WEB SITE

The Foreign Agricultural Service's (FAS) Web site is the public face of the agency and is their primary vehicle for disseminating information. However, since the site was created in 1996, it had undergone only minor technical and cosmetic upgrades. The site was obsolete in terms of its programming/infrastructure, design, and much of its content. To keep pace with technology and changing communications practices, the Web site needed to be upgraded and redesigned.

The old FAS Web site followed the once-common "organizational chart" approach, using structure and terminology geared to an internal audience rather than the needs and interests our customers. It was time to move to an "audience-centric" approach, striking a better balance between the users' needs and the agency's goals.

FAS launched its new site, www.fas.usda.gov in December 2013, and it is the result of more than 2 years of work. The project began with detailed research and analysis, including a top to bottom review of the content. The review found that the Web site consisted of more than 700,000 pages, tens of thousands of PDF files, dozens of databases and services, and a slew of historical information. More than 97 percent of the content was more than a year old.

The agency surveyed its key stakeholders and site visitors – including cooperators, private voluntary organizations, financial institutions and other program participants, as well as media, government officials, analysts, and others who rely on FAS for the latest data and intelligence on U.S. agricultural trade and related issues.

FAS's Web site was entirely rewritten to meet the requirements of the Plain Writing Act of 2010 in order to serve the many people who rely on FAS for the latest data and intelligence on U.S. agricultural trade and related issues.

The new FAS Web site is organized along the functional pillars of FAS, rather than the structure of the agency, in order to ensure that the public can find the information they need without having to know how the agency is organized. The content was entirely rewritten to meet the requirements of the Plain Writing Act of 2010. Work continues to refine the design and add new content and features.

USDA AGENCIES' WEB SITES RELATED TO THE PLAIN WRITING ACT

The following provides information on plain writing Web sites that various USDA agencies have launched.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and National Agricultural Library (NAL)

ARS launched its new Website in October 2013. ARS' Plain Writing Coordinator and ARS Web staff worked with ARS Web content managers to ensure Web content is written for a general audience. The Website is designed to help the general public to find, access and understand information more quickly and easily. The Team continues to work with field locations to ensure content is understandable to a general audience. The new site has links to USDA's Plain Writing Information.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

We have an intranet site and a Sharepoint® site (both for internal agency use) that have Plain Language resources for employees, including links, courses, checklists and templates. We have also developed a "Virtual Writing Center" and organized resources by problem area (excessive acronyms, active/passive voice, English as a second language assistance, etc.)

Economic Research Service (ERS)

Content of the ERS Web site (www.ers.usda.gov) goes through our professional editors before it is posted. We also have guidelines for Web writing.

Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)

Since early 2012, we have had a plain language, plain writing folder on the Office of Policy and Program Development SharePoint site.

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

FAS/Public Affairs Office maintains a link on FAS' public Web site to the USDA plain language site, which includes the updated Plain Writing Training course.

Forest Service (FS)

The Forest Service has developed an Intranet Webpage to help employees understand the need for plain writing and to provide tools for improving their writing skills. The Webpage has links to the kinds of Forest Service documents and other materials that are covered by the Plain Writing Act. It also has links to public-facing plain writing Websites, a checklist for writers, and a list of 13 writing-related AgLearn training modules, along with brief descriptions.

The Pacific Northwest Research Station and other field units have links on their internal Websites to the Forest Service Webpage on the Plain Writing Act.

For the general public, the Forest Service relies on USDA's Plain Writing Website.

- Farm Service Agency
www.fsa.usda.gov/
- One-stop 2014 Farm Bill Web Page at
www.fsa.usda.gov/farmbill
- FSA Disaster Assistance Programs
<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=diap&topic=landing>
- NEPA documents affecting all FSA programs
<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ecrc&topic=nep-cd>
- FSA Strike Force information
<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=oued&topic=sfc>
- FSA Farm Loans
<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=fmlp&topic=dflop>
- FSA Aerial Mapping
<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/apfoapp?area=apfohome&subject=landing&topic=landing>

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

- NASS has an internal Web site with plain writing resources, including agency-produced material and links to USDA, Plain, and other Web sites.
- For the general public, NASS relies on USDA's Plain Writing Website.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Links to OMB (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2011/m11-05.pdf>) and PLAIN (<http://centerforplainlanguage.org/>).

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Quarterly NRCS Correspondence Newsletter
- NRCS Executive Correspondence Management Team community in USDA Connect
- NRCS Correspondence Manual

Rural Development (RD)

RHS uses available information on government and public Web sites. Available information was circulated to staff.

Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)

- Office of Advocacy and Outreach Website address: <http://www.outreach.usda.gov/index.htm>
- Email: AdvocacyandOutreach@osec.usda.gov
- Links to OMB and PLAIN

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)

- Website address: <http://www.ascr.usda.gov/>
- Documents covered by the Act – all documents issued by the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights.
- Links to OMB and PLAIN on Web page

OBPA (Office of Budget and Program Analysis)

Plain Writing link on OBPA's Web site at <http://www.obpa.usda.gov/>

Office of Communication (OC)

OC maintains the Department's centralized Plain Writing Web page at: http://usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=PLAIN_WRITING

Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)

USDA -OCE plain writing Web sites

- OCE Web site address: http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=PLAIN_WRITING
- OCE Contact us page: http://www.usda.gov/oce/contact_OCE/index.htm
- Implementation of the Act: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/index.cfm>
- Documents covered by the Act: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/index.cfm>
- Links to Compliance reports: <http://www.usda.gov/documents/PL-Report-final.pdf>
- Links to OMB and PLAIN LANGUAGE: <http://centerforplainlanguage.org/>

Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)

The OCIO's Plain Language resources can be accessed by clicking the following link:

http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=PLAIN_WRITING

Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)

- The Office of the Executive Secretariat's Web site address is as follows:
<http://www.dm.usda.gov/oes/index.htm>
- Links to OMB (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2011/m11-05.pdf>) and PLAIN (<http://centerforplainlanguage.org/>)

7. Customer Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction is the true measure of how well we are achieving compliance with the Plain Writing Act – both the letter of the law and its intent.

HOW WE SOLICIT COMMENTS AND WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

The following list highlights some of the ways USDA agencies are receiving feedback about their writing. Some agencies are also receiving comments about how Plain Writing training has improved the way USDA communicates with its customers.

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

AMS does not have a formal system for customer feedback, but has received the following comments:

- “During our first day of the audit, the staff shared high praise for the NOP guidance documents. They said the guidance is very clear, easy to understand, and helps them to apply the standards.”
- “Just a note to let you and others how good and useful I found the Organic Literacy Program. The Resource Guide was particularly well done, and should be extremely helpful as a first stop for information.”
- “I just wanted to write/commend NOP for a clear explanation of the distinction between different forms of cell fusion. This memo is a good tool for clarifying these kinds of policy questions.”

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

- The “Ask the Expert” Web-based interface allows users to rate the usefulness of responses they receive from APHIS. The agency uses comments received through “Ask the Expert” to improve its answers to questions.
- APHIS has received positive feedback from the public on its redesigned Web site.

Economic Research Service (ERS)

The ERS Web site receives nearly a million visitors every year; two-thirds of those visitors are repeat visitors. ERS receives consistently high marks in the ASCI surveys.

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)/Center for Nutrition Policy and Programs (CNPP)

We have not conducted any formal assessments of customer satisfaction to evaluate differences since the implementation of the Act. However, FNS has long exercised Plain Writing standards in its

documents. This has resulted in more efficient clearance (less rewriting), greater comprehension by audiences, better adherence to rules and guidance due to greater clarity, and better customer satisfaction with written work.

Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)

- The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline (Hotline) converses with personnel from FSIS District Offices and consumers on a daily basis about the Food Safety Education Staff's educational products. The Hotline has never received negative feedback from any individual or group of people regarding the products FSES produces.
- State Meat and Poultry Inspection programs staff changed how they explained concepts, decreasing questions from the programs and more quickly receiving their responses. Other areas have also reported a decrease in the number of follow-ups and clarifications to items revised to use plain language. This information is anecdotal; no specific measures are yet in place.

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

The Public Affairs Office routinely monitors the comments provided by the public through the "Contact Us" tab/link on the FAS Web site and any emails directed to the staff concerning the information available on the FAS Web site. To date, FAS/Public Affairs has not received any complaints concerning difficult interpretation of information.

Forest Service (FS)

- In March 2013, the Chief's Office launched an effort to solicit public feedback on the clarity of Forest Service documents and other written materials by adding to the standard nondiscrimination statement in all publications. The Forest Service proposed that USDA identify an appropriate office for responding to comments on agency writing and add the following statement to its standard disclaimer: "In accordance with the Plain Writing Act of 2010, USDA is committed to writing forms, letters, brochures, Web sites, and other materials in a way that the public can clearly understand. We appreciate your feedback. To comment on USDA written materials, write to USDA, ... or call ..."
- Indirect measures abound of customer satisfaction with Forest Service materials prepared in accordance with requirements under the Plain Writing Act. For example:
 - The Alaska Region got public compliments from the Forest Service's Executive Leadership Team on the briefing book it prepared for the Chief's Review in August 2013. Forty of the Region's news releases led to stories in the media, and the Region has received favorable e-mails and personal comments in response to its 62 briefing papers on the regional Web site and its USDA newsletter.
 - In 2013, the Eastern Region (the Northeast and Upper Midwest) adopted SharePoint for internal communications and has received excellent employee feedback. The Region will soon implement a paperless review process for Human Resources packages using SharePoint that should significantly reduce redundancies in how hiring packages are written and presented to decisionmakers. Moreover, increased visitor traffic on parts of the Web site that the Region redesigned indicates that the public is seeking the new information provided.
 - The Pacific Northwest Research Station (responsible for Forest Service research in Alaska, Oregon, and Washington) solicits public feedback on publications developed for general audiences. Forest

Service scientists consider them useful tools for communicating their research findings, and readers write to tell us that they appreciate the accessible format and usefulness of the information.

- In 2013, the Pacific Northwest Research Station's *Science Findings* publication—written to communicate new research to land managers and decisionmakers—received an “Award of Excellence” from the National Association of Government Communicators.

Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyard Administration (GIPSA)

- The Packers and Stockyards Program established an internal Change Control Working Group (“CCWG”) in 2009. Based on more than 200 employee suggestions, this group has recommended creating, changing and clarifying documents – which were subsequently created or revised — based on customer questions and industry trends. Documents that have been revised or clarified include regulations, Work Instructions, subprocess modules used to perform regulatory reviews, subpoena templates, and forms used by regulated entities (such as Annual Reports) to comply with the Packers and Stockyards Program. The CCWG is presently working on the creation of a new Bond pamphlet to provide more clarity for registrants and packers who are required to obtain bonds under the Packers and Stockyards Act. If approved, the new Bond pamphlet will be available on the agency's Web site and in print.
- In 2000, GIPSA's Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS) was approved by OMB to issue a voluntary customer survey concerning the delivery of official inspection, grading, and weighing services authorized under the United States Grain Standards Act and the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946. Until 2013, the survey was conducted by post card via U.S. mail. In the summer of 2013, however, the survey was posted to GIPSA's Web site and is not conducted totally electronically through the use of Survey Monkey. This voluntary survey gives customers that are primarily in the grain, oilseed, rice, lentil, dry pea, edible bean, and related agricultural commodity markets an opportunity to provide feedback on the quality of services they receive and provides GIPSA with information on new services that customers wish to receive. Customer feedback assists FGIS with enhancing the value of services and service delivery provided by the official inspection, grading, and weighing system.

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

- NASS is gradually rewriting some of its Web pages with a specific emphasis on writing the content and links in plain language. In addition, NASS is updating its Web site to be more inviting and engaging.
- The year-long emphasis on direct, plain communication with all U.S. farmers and ranchers on the importance of the Census of Agriculture to their operations and to agencies and institutions that make decisions affecting them helped NASS achieve its target 80 percent response rate despite reductions in the agency budget (including fewer resources for follow up) and internal reorganizations.

At the end of the Census of Agriculture data collection period in mid-2013, NASS conducted an evaluation of its Census communications materials and messaging. External respondents included farm organizations, state departments of agriculture, commodity groups, and community-based organizations (CBOs). In response to questions, 81 percent said they used the provided materials to promote the census, and 71 percent said they found the materials easier to understand than in previous censuses and surveys. Individual items were rated very or somewhat useful by even larger percentages, including: frequently asked questions or FAQs (94 percent) the Census Web site

(<http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/index.php>) (88 percent), USDA news releases (88 percent) and news release templates for states to use (87 percent).

Another aspect of our Census messaging in which plain writing made a difference is in our communications about the option to respond to the Census online. The first Census of Agriculture was conducted in 1840 and for more than 165 years, farmers and ranchers responded by mail, in-person, or telephone interviews. In 2007, they had the option to fill out the Census form online for the first time. In that year, 4 percent of respondents used the online option. For the 2012 Census, we focused more strongly on promoting the online response option, conveying that it is convenient, secure, and saves time and taxpayer dollars. In addition, we rewrote the instructions for how respond online to make them simpler and more user friendly. In the 2012 Census, 13.3 percent of respondents used the online option – more than triple the share that did so in 2007. (See a write-up in the USDA blog series, Then and Now: <http://blogs.usda.gov/2014/02/27/usda-then-and-now-part-iv/#more-50326>).

In planning the 2014 release of the data (preliminary release in February 2014 and final release beginning May 2014 and ongoing throughout the year with various products), NASS focuses again on providing a range of audience-appropriate materials that are written in plain, clear style.

Natural Resources Conservations Service (NRCS)

- Use of ForeSee survey to determine customer satisfaction and Web site usability
- Direct customer feedback

Rural Development (RD)

Rural Housing Service:

- The Centralized Servicing Center (CSC) in St. Louis, Missouri, surveyed Rural Development (RD), Single Family Housing Direct program borrowers (hereafter referred to as customers) in 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2012. The questionnaire was developed with input from partners in the field offices and other RD organizations.
- The purpose of the survey is to measure the movement of overall customer satisfaction as well as identify areas that require focused attention for improvement. The measurement of these components must be achieved using a consistent, reliable method that reveals action items that can be initiated to increase overall satisfaction.
- 6,000 customers were randomly surveyed in 2012 containing 7% Spanish speaking preference customers, and 10.9% customers identified as living in a persistent poverty area that reflects the demographics of the portfolio. The response rate was exceptional—with 2,954 respondents or 49.2% which is consistent with past surveys.
- Sections of the survey were measured either by a level of satisfaction or level of agreement using a 1 to 7 rating scale. The scale was then converted to equate to a 100% scale.
- By over a 3 to 1 margin, customers were highly satisfied with the ongoing servicing of their RD loan by CSC. These scores remained statistically stable since the 2008 survey.
- In terms of standard written customer communications, a large percentage of customers agreed that the communications they receive from CSC are clearly explained, easy to understand and contain all the information needed. Specifically on average:

- Monthly Billing Statement: 91.7% found it easy to understand
92.4% found it had all the information needed
86% found payment changes are clearly explained
- Escrow Statement: 88.4% are satisfied with information received
- Payment Assistance Process: 86.3% found it easy to understand
85.1% found changes were clearly communicated

Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)

OAO is currently developing a customer survey for each of its programs to assess user experience in comprehension of program information and delivery of service.

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)

For employees responsible for writing documents, a performance element was added to their FY 2014 performance plan for rating.

Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)

OBPA will conduct evaluations as more of its staff members are trained. The current training schedule should result in training of OBPA policy writers and approvers before the end of May 2012.

Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)

The Office of the Chief Economist produces the monthly *World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates* (WASDE) report, which is edited by 10-15 analysts and experts every month. It is directed at a highly technical audience. The WASDE report is continually refined and improved. The *Weekly Weather and Crop Bulletin* is the second publication OCE publishes. This publication is continually undergoing refinement, is edited by several meteorologists, and receives a final editorial review before publication.

Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)

As a component of its Professional Development Series, the OCIO Plain Language Coordinators developed and presented a course on Active vs. Passive Writing, to assist staff in recognizing problematic writing habits, as well as effective ways to improve their communication with interested parties. This course was presented in March 2013, and was very well received as indicated by the positive feedback in the employee course evaluations.

Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)

The Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES) currently strives to provide superior customer service to the Office of the Secretary, USDA Agencies and Offices, and the public.

Office of Inspector General (OIG)

OIG's public-facing Web site (<http://www.usda.gov/oig/>) includes all of OIG's published products as well as information on how to contact the agency regarding its writing. OIG also operates a hotline number that the public can use to directly contact the agency.

8. Agency Coordinators Information

INTRODUCTION

As noted in Section I, USDA created a working group of agency officials who lead the Department's implementation of the Plain Writing Act and ensure the Department complies with the Act. The following officials, listed in the order shown in the [USDA organizational chart](#), ensure that their agency or office produces public documents in plain language.

Agency/Office	Senior Agency Official Responsible for Plain Writing	Plain Writing Coordinator(s)
Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)	Karen T. Comfort	Lisa Ahramijian Antoinette Carter Michael Smith Dana Stewart Becky Unkenholz
Agricultural Research Service (ARS) National Agricultural Library (NAL)	Tara Weaver-Missick (for ARS and NAL)	Tara Weaver-Missick Mary Ann Leonard (NAL only)
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)	Beth Gaston	Jason Hancock
Economic Research Service (ERS)	John Weber Dale Simms	Vacant (Mary Conley's replacement will take on this assignment)
Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Center for Nutrition Policy and Programs (CNPP)	Richard Lucas	Richard Lucas
Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)	Chuck Williams Mary Conley	Vince Fayne, Jacquelyn Jones, Mary Conley, Laura Reiser Sandie Burrell/Karen Jackson Andreas Keller, Pauline Matthews, Meryl Silverman,

		Neal Westgerdes
Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)	Sally Klusaritz	Joseph Migyanka
Forest Service (FS)	Tim DeCoster	Diane Banegas Hutch Brown Kathryn Sosbe
Farm Service Agency (FSA)	Todd Atkinson (interim)	Todd Atkinson (interim)
Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyard Administration (GIPSA)	Dexter Thomas	Dexter Thomas
National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)	Sue King, NASS	Rosemarie Philips
National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)	Scott Elliott, NIFA	
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	Terry Bish	Suzanne Austin-Kashawlic
Rural Development (RD)	Rural Utilities Service: Rural Housing Service: Rural Business and Cooperative Service:	Michelle Brooks Karen Jacobs Ken Meardon
Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)	Teresa Welch	Teresa Welch
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)	Winona Lake Scott	Kimberly Strickland
Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)	Andrew Perry	Mike Poe and Sam Barkdull
Office of Communication (OC)	Cheryl Normile	Cheryl Normile
Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)	Brenda Chapin	Brenda Chapin
Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)	Cheryl L. Cook, Chief Information Officer	David Simpson Matthew Patrick
Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)	Maureen Wood	Ann Marie Gogniat

Office of the General Counsel (OGC)	Peter MacHare	Peter MacHare
Office of the Inspector General (OIG)	Tracy Lapoint	Michael Martin



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear USDA Employees,

I am writing to ask each of you for your help with plain writing at USDA. Writing in plain, easy to understand language is an important way for us to help better serve the American people. Plain language makes it easier for the public to get the most from our many critical programs and will save us money too.

On President Obama's first day in office he signed a memorandum emphasizing the importance of establishing "a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration." I am proud of the hard work that all of you have been doing to implement that vision and transform USDA into a more open and accessible organization.

In further support of these goals, last fall the President signed the Plain Writing Act of 2010. The Act requires that, beginning October 13, all Federal Agencies—including USDA—use plain language in new or substantially revised documents that are needed to obtain USDA services or benefits or provide information about them or that explain how to comply with requirements we administer or enforce.

Using plain writing is indispensable to achieving our goals of providing first-class customer service and ensuring access to our programs. When we avoid jargon and excessive acronyms, customers that are new to USDA are more likely to have a positive experience. And when we avoid obscurity and ambiguity, we demonstrate our commitment to serving all Americans, including those who have had trouble accessing our programs in the past.

Plain writing is also an important tool for improving efficiency and saving time and money at USDA. Logically organizing your thoughts, using clear tables and graphics, and approaching a document from the perspective of your audience can reduce the number of calls you receive asking to explain a document or form and the number of hours spent on enforcement because a farmer did not understand a regulation.

This past summer USDA published our [Plain Writing Compliance Report](#) to ensure compliance once the Act comes into full effect October 13, 2011. Through the USDA Plain Language working group, each agency has begun identifying covered documents and providing training and resources to employees. I encourage each of you to visit our [Plain Language web page](#) to learn more about the Act.

An Equal Opportunity Employer

Included in the newly updated Plain Language web page you will find resources that will help you write and review documents for the public covered by the Act, as well as help you inform our colleagues in order to comply with the Act. I urge you to explore the USDA website, AgLearn courses, and plainlanguage.gov website to learn about and get training regarding writing and reviewing documents for plain language so that we can serve our country best.

As part of our efforts to strengthen our service at USDA, it is important that we communicate clearly and simply with the American people. I know I can count on you to do your best to make it happen in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary