

■ Office of Operations

Mail

Each year, USDA receives over 180 million pieces of mail. At the Washington, DC, headquarters alone, over 21 million pieces of mail are handled each year, for an average of about 84,000 pieces of mail processed each workday. Smokey Bear receives more mail than any other individual in the Department. The Headquarters mail operation is an active employer of those with disabilities. Over one-third of the employees are people with disabilities. Working closely with private and public placement organizations, the division has succeeded in bringing these employees into the work force. In recognition of its success in hiring the disabled, the division has received numerous government and private-sector awards.

The mail office is one of USDA's Reinvention Laboratories supporting Vice President Gore's National Performance Review, in which the Department has taken an active role. One advance is a new multipurpose mail sorter, which will reduce staff by at least five employees. Also, USDA is taking the lead in developing Government-wide mail management initiatives that are projected to save over \$2 million by FY 1996.

Procurement Facts and Figures

In FY 1994, USDA awarded approximately 8,000 new contracts, new delivery orders against existing contracts, and contract modifications. These activities, which encompass both administrative and agricultural commodity acquisitions, totalled \$2.9 billion, which reflects awards of \$25,000 and above, and does not address the hundreds of thousands of small purchases that USDA makes each year.

At the end of FY 1994, over 6,000 commercial credit cards had been issued to USDA employees, and the number of cards continues to increase. Procurement personnel can obligate up to \$25,000 per transaction; nonprocurement personnel, who must receive training before a card can be issued, may receive delegated authority to spend up to \$2,500 (the "micropurchase" level) per transaction using the card. The type of item charged ranges broadly. The Modernization of Administrative Processes project office is leading an effort to streamline the credit card systems and make it even more efficient.

In accordance with the Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act of 1994, Executive Order 12873, and other requirements, USDA has embarked on a program to process administrative procurements electronically. Initial pilot transactions involved electronic transmittal or receipt of Requests for Quotation, vendor quotes, Purchase Orders, and Notices of Award to unsuccessful quoters. USDA was one of a very limited number of executive agencies to successfully accomplish this feat on time. Electronic Commerce represents a new way of doing acquisition which should cut procurement lead time, reduce prices, and give small businesses a better chance to sell goods and services to the Government. The resulting improvements in obtaining goods and services should improve the timeliness and efficiency with which USDA delivers its services to the American public.

Washington Area Strategic Space Plan

The Washington Area Strategic Space plan is a strategy for moving employees from leased space (18 locations) into Government-owned space in a newly constructed building in Beltsville, MD, and a modernized South Building.

The Beltsville Office Facility is designed to house 1,500 employees. The planned facility will be a series of four interconnected two-story buildings on 115 acres in Prince Georges County, MD. A design/build contract was awarded in February 1995. Construction is scheduled to be completed in 1996, when employees will move to the facility and allow construction to begin on the South Building in the downtown complex.

The Department of Agriculture South Building in Washington, DC, was the largest Federal building until the Pentagon was built. The South Building has 1.34 million square feet, over 7 miles of corridors, and 4,300 rooms. The building is over 60 years old and is in need of renovation to create a modern, safe office environment. Renovation will also allow the building to accommodate 8,000 employees, almost 1,500 more than it currently houses. A tunnel runs under Independence Avenue to connect the South Building and the Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building (formerly the Administration Building). Two memorial archways on the third floor also connect the two buildings. The archways were built by private funds in 1936—the west arch in memory of former Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson, and the east arch in memory of Dr. Seaman A. Knapp, known as the father of Extension. Modernization of the South Building is scheduled for 1997-2003.