



United States Department of Agriculture

Plain Writing Act



2013

Compliance Report

Contents

CONTENTS	1
1. INTRODUCTION	2
USDA’s Pledge.....	2
This Report.....	2
USDA Officials for Plain Writing.....	2
2. SAMPLE USDA COMMUNICATIONS	4
Introduction.....	4
Spotlight: Hungry Pests Outreach Materials.....	4
Spotlight: Backyard Conservation Web Pages.....	5
Summary of USDA Agency Communications.....	5
3. PLAIN WRITING OUTREACH TO USDA EMPLOYEES	41
Introduction.....	41
Employee Outreach: Actions to Date.....	41
4. TRAINING	47
Introduction.....	47
Spotlight: AgLearn Class: Introduction to Plain Language.....	47
Spotlight: RMA Trains Every Employee.....	47
Who We’re Training.....	48
How We’re Training Them.....	48
5. ENSURING COMPLIANCE	60
Introduction.....	60
Spotlight: Correspondence Directive and Appendix.....	60
Spotlight: Forest Service Reviews.....	60
Compliance Efforts (By Agency).....	61
6. USDA PLAIN WRITING WEB SITES	68
The Department’s Plain Writing Web Sites.....	68
USDA Agencies’ Web Sites Related to the Plain Writing Act.....	68
7. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	71
Introduction.....	71
Spotlight: Using Employee Suggestions to Revise Documents.....	71
How We Solicit Comments and What People Are Saying.....	71
8. AGENCY COORDINATORS INFORMATION	76
Introduction.....	76

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 that detailed our goals for plain writing, and published an update on April 13, 2012. 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 first Plain Writing Act Compliance Report here: <http://www.usda.gov/documents/PL-Report-final.pdf>. You can read last year's report here: http://www.usda.gov/documents/USDA_Compliance_Report_04-13-2012.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.

Senior Officials

Our senior officials for plain writing are:

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Agency Coordinators

USDA is comprised of 17 agencies and approximately 100,000 employees who serve the American people at more than 7,000 sites around the world. 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 VIII](#) of this report.

2. Sample USDA Communications

INTRODUCTION

In order to provide the clearest communications 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.

SPOTLIGHT: HUNGRY PESTS OUTREACH MATERIALS

The Hungry Pests Campaign is USDA's signature outreach initiative to raise public awareness about the invasive pest threat nationwide. To do so cost effectively, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service created a customizable brochure and suite of pest identification cards. The brochure includes general information about invasive pests nationwide and a customizable section for individual States to describe the most significant pest threats in their local areas. The pest ID cards focus on the top invasive pest threats in the United States today.

We published these materials primarily online to be downloaded by State agencies or other cooperators for printing on demand. In doing so, we were able to create high-quality publications with consistent messaging while conserving USDA funds. The purpose of these materials is to do the following: (1) elevate the issue of invasive pests among the general public; (2) educate the public about the threat invasive species pose; (3) increase awareness about safe and effective solutions to combat them; and (4) encourage people to learn more at the Hungry Pests Web site, <http://www.hungrypests.com>.

The Center for Plain Language recognized the Hungry Pests brochure and pest identification cards with a ClearMark award.

The target audience is the general public, particularly people in the 12 States (California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington) USDA has identified as being at highest risk for invasive pests.

To ensure that our documents were appropriate for the target audience, we worked through a contractor (as part of the overarching campaign) to conduct qualitative research that gauged the public's knowledge on invasive pests and identified the most effective outreach approaches. This research involved focus-group message testing in four regions, and we worked to ensure that participants were diverse in age, race, and income. Feedback showed that people responded best to positive, empowering, actionable language

that evoked a sense of responsibility and community. The result was our campaign tagline “Leave Hungry Pests Behind”—a call to action with concrete steps people can take to leave those hungry pests behind.

SPOTLIGHT: BACKYARD CONSERVATION WEB PAGES

Originally established by Congress in 1935 as the Soil Conservation Service, and renamed the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), NRCS has become a conservation leader for all natural resources ensuring private lands are conserved, restored, and more resilient to environmental challenges, like climate change. Seventy percent of the land in the United States is privately owned, making stewardship by private landowners absolutely critical to the health of our Nation’s environment. NRCS works with landowners through conservation planning and assistance designed to benefit the soil, water, air, plants, and animals that result in productive lands and healthy ecosystems.

Based on these publications, the number of people who can relate to the importance of conservation and how they can participate has increased.

Important conservation practices can be implemented everywhere, even in backyards. The care of privately owned land is in the hands of those who live and work on it. The Backyard Conservation Web page http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/newsroom/features/?&cid=nrcs143_023574 shows the public how conservation practices that help conserve and improve natural resources on agricultural land across the country can be adapted for use right in their own backyard. Whether you have rural acreage, a suburban yard, or a city lot, you can help protect the environment and add beauty and interest to your surroundings.

The overall purpose of the Backyard Conservation Web page is to provide useful information about conservation to as many people as possible. Specifically, its purpose is to do the following: provide quality information and tips about natural resources conservation for homeowners and other private landowners; encourage public officials to practice backyard conservation on parks and encourage community involvement; encourage cooperative conservation among groups and individuals; and encourage overall involvement in planning and caring for private land at the community level.

The number of people who can relate to the importance of conservation and how they can participate has increased. NRCS information is written for a wider swath of the public so more people can understand and implement conservation practices on their property. Since October 2011, “Backyard Conservation” has had 25,000 page views and 18,000 unique visitors. In the last 2.5 years, the public has requested 213,750 Backyard Conservation books in English and more than 11,000 in Spanish.

SUMMARY OF USDA AGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

The following tables summarize some of our documents 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
<p>Press Releases</p> <p>Target Audience: Media, General Public Audience size: unlimited</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Blogs</p> <p>Target Audience: General Public Audience size: unlimited</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Tweets</p> <p>Target Audience: 8,500 people follow AMS on Twitter</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>National Organic Program (NOP) Handbook: Collection of guidance documents, policy memos, and Instructions, updated regularly to communicate USDA organic standards.</p> <p>Target Audience: USDA organic accredited certifying agents (staff at 85 organizations) and certified and candidate organic operations (25,000 currently certified)</p>	<p>Positive feedback from customers about memo clarity; fewer rewrites required over time because policy is clearer.</p>
<p>NOP Integrity Quarterly Newsletter</p> <p>Target Audience: Organic industry stakeholders – Sent to a list of 13,000; with subsequent secondary distribution</p>	<p>Number of operations and individuals subscribing to NOP email notification continues to increase; customers report re-distributing articles to their stakeholders.</p>
<p>USDA Organic Fact Sheets</p> <p>Target Audience: USDA organic accredited certifying agents (staff at 85 organizations) and certified and candidate organic operations (25,000 currently certified)</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Organic Literacy Initiative – Presentations and Brochures</p> <p>Target Audience: Certified and candidate organic operations (25,000 currently certified)</p>	<p>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.</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>AMS' Dairy Research and Promotion Programs Annual Report to Congress and other annual reports</p> <p>Target Audience: U.S. Congress, Dairy Industry, General Public</p> <p>Size: Unlimited</p>	<p>AMS writes and reviews its annual reports with principles of plain writing, reducing the burden on users, reducing errors and improving customer satisfaction.</p>
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>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 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>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>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<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>

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, non-technical fact sheets, and reports.</p> <p>Target Audience: Audience varies depending on product(developed for specific scientists, programs, projects)</p>	<p>Approximately 85,000 people will read information, which will help increase comprehension and customer satisfaction.</p>

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Webpages</p> <p>Target Audience: APHIS stakeholders</p>	Webpages continue to be accessible to the public.
<p>Publications</p> <p>Target Audience: APHIS stakeholders</p>	Increased accessibility and comprehension on complex scientific subjects to APHIS target audiences.
<p>GovDelivery Stakeholder Registry</p> <p>Target Audience: APHIS stakeholders</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>Responses to customer inquiries made via the Web (“Ask the Expert”)</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	Public now receives succinct, clear responses to inquiries.

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>	Increased comprehension and customer satisfaction
<p>Market analysis newsletters released via the agency’s Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Policymakers and commercial agriculture companies</p>	Increased comprehension and customer satisfaction
<p>Amber Waves magazine, now an app available for mobile devices as of 3/13.</p> <p>Target Audience: Policymakers and informed laypeople</p>	Increased comprehension and customer satisfaction

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>One-stop shopping Web pages.</p> <p>Target Audience: Farmers and ranchers, the general public, environmental groups, commodity organizations, and the general public.</p> <p>Applicants, borrowers, lenders, employees, and the general public who are interested in FSA's farm loan programs and related topics.</p> <p>American Taxpayers Relief Act (ATRA) of 2012 Web pages at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/fbapp?area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing</p> <p>Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) monitoring and evaluation pages at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ecpa&topic=nra</p> <p>FSA's Farm Loan Programs (FLP) Homepage at http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=fmlp&topic=landing</p>	<p>Interested parties can easily read succinct, easy-to-understand information about the provisions of ATRA and learn about how FSA is implementing those provisions. Interested parties can read about, in lay language, studies evaluating the impact of the CRP.</p> <p>The FLP homepage was customized to display, in clear language, the various types of farm loan programs and provide information on eligibility requirements, loan limits, and interest rates, as well as provide links to forms applicants need to complete to apply for loans.</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<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:</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.

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>More Succinct Fact Sheets</p> <p>Fact sheets are distributed frequently through outreach meetings, the FSA Web site, emails, field offices, and other outlets. Examples from this past year include:</p> <p>With the passage of ATRA, all relevant farm program fact sheets were updated and provided electronically in one location to facilitate the public's understanding of provisions. See: http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/fbapp?area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing</p> <p>Target Audience: Farmers and ranchers, the general public, employees, environmental groups, commodity organizations, beginning farmers, potential FSA borrowers, others.</p> <p>Agricultural Mediation Program fact sheet at: http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/newsReleases?area=newsroom&subject=landing&topic=pfs&newstype=prfactsheet</p> <p>Target Audience: Farmers, agricultural mediation programs, and commercial creditors nationwide. In addition, USDA employees who deliver programs and services such as Forest Service, NRCS, and RD. Microloan, Emergency Loan Program, Loans for Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, Loans for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers, and Farm Loans fact sheets (including several fact sheets in Spanish) at: http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/newsReleases?area=newsroom&subject=landing&topic=pfs&newstype=prfactsheet</p> <p>Target Audience: Small and niche operators; beginning farmers and ranchers; farmers and ranchers who are interested in FSA's farm loan programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the first time that information has been consolidated in such a succinct, easy-to-read format in one Web location. • Clearer language increases awareness of available mediation services and promotes resolution of disputes at an early stage. • Increases awareness of available funding to targeted groups. Provides farmers and ranchers with an overview of FSA farm loan programs.

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<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>Clearer writing and streamlined program administration make it easier to communicate throughout the agency as well as with our customers. For example, a new microloan program was initiated that simplified the operating loan process by reducing application requirements and created forms better suited to gather financial information from smaller types of operations.</p>
<p>Easier-to-Read News Releases</p> <p>Target Audience: General public, media, farmers and ranchers, private landowners, beginning and socially disadvantaged producers, others, trade associations, and commodity/environmental groups.</p>	<p>News releases are increasingly written to communicate to readers who are not familiar with FSA programs. For example, a recent news release explaining that “no wheat marketing quota” is needed for the 2014 crop was rewritten from the prior year’s format so it is much easier to comprehend. Both the 2012-issued and 2013-issued versions can be found from the “news release” section of the FSA Web site at: http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing</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>This “template-based” approach, with clearly communicated content, makes FSA information more interesting and understandable, which helps the agency achieve our mission.</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<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>An increasing focus on plain writing for these announcements increases comprehension of FSA programs and their benefits.</p>
<p>Success Stories</p> <p>FSA's FencePost blog is updated multiple times daily and contains success stories from grateful producers who appreciate FSA assistance. For example, a recent story focuses on 2 producers who greatly benefited from our new microloans program, and can be read at http://fsa.blogs.govdelivery.com/2013/03/20/thanks-mr-president-niche-farmers-send-obama-letter-for-boosting-business/. The FencePost also contains critical program information; the main page is at http://fsa.blogs.govdelivery.com/.</p> <p>Target Audience: Farmers and ranchers, the general public, employees, environmental groups, commodity organizations, beginning farmers, potential FSA borrowers, others. The FencePost has 15,000 subscribers.</p>	<p>FSA writes blogs directly and succinctly, helping increase interest in, and comprehension of, our programs.</p>

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

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Forms (distributed through the Web – PDF format; occasionally by paper)</p> <p>Target Audience: State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)</p>	<p>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.</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Public Notice (distributed through the Web through Federal Register.gov – HTML, PDF formats)</p> <p>Target Audience: State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Notice of funds available, requests for application, and other funding opportunities (distributed through the Web – PDF format)</p> <p>Target Audience: Nutrition assistance program stakeholders, State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Web pages (HTML)</p> <p>Target Audience: General public, State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Regulations (distributed through the Web through Federal Register.gov – HTML, PDF formats)</p> <p>Target Audience: State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Question and answer, Frequently asked questions, How to, or any other informal guidance documents (distributed through the Web -- HTML, PDF formats)</p> <p>Target Audience: State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Correspondence (distributed through mail and email)</p> <p>Target Audience: Congress, general public, nutrition assistance program stakeholders</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Press releases (distributed on paper and through the Web -- HTML, PDF formats)</p> <p>Target Audience: General public</p>	<p>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.</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Publicly available reports (distributed in hard copy to Congress and made available to the public through the Web – PDF format) Target Audience: Congress, general public	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.
Research publications (distributed through the Web – PDF format) Target Audience: Nutrition assistance program stakeholders, research community	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.
Nutrition promotion materials Target Audience: Nutrition community, general public	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)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Acknowledgement correspondence via U.S. mail Target Audience: FOIA requestors: consumer advocates, industry associations, news media, regulated industry members.	We have revised template letters using more plain language. Examples include using active voice and shorter sentences, explaining technical issues, eliminating wordiness.
FOIA Fee waiver denied/granted correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail Target Audience: FOIA requestors	We have revised template letters using more plain language. Examples include using active voice and shorter sentences, explaining technical issues, eliminating wordiness.
FOIA Expedited processing denied/granted correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail Target Audience: FOIA requestors	As we write and review letters, the specialist and supervisor use plain language.
FOIA Referral correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail Target Audience: Other agencies	As we write and review letters, the specialist and supervisor use plain language.
FOIA Absent fee agreement/ over \$250 correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail Target Audience: FOIA requestors	As we write and review letters, the specialist and supervisor use plain language.

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>FOIA Subpoena response correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Attorneys</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 Determination correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: FOIA requestors</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 Submitter's notice correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: FOIA requestors</p>	<p>As we write and review letters, the specialist and supervisor use plain language.</p>
<p>Privacy Act correspondence, letter via U.S. mail</p> <p>Target Audience: 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, and local officials; meat, poultry and processed egg products establishments; consumers; members of the public.</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>
<p>Campaign Correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail or email</p> <p>Target Audience: Members of the public; activists.</p>	<p>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 issue.</p>
<p>Press Releases, Press Release via Electronic</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers, Regulated Community, Public Officials</p>	<p>We evaluated press release standard language to identify potential Plain Language revisions by the end of fiscal year 2012.</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Constituent Update, Newsletter via Electronic</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers, Regulated Community, Public Officials</p>	<p>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 message is correct.</p>
<p>Recall Releases, Press Release via Electronic</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers, Regulated Community, Public Officials</p>	<p>We evaluated press release standard language to identify potential Plain Language revisions by the end of fiscal year 2012.</p>
<p>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, in-person events</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers (8,153,292)</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Kitchen Companion: Your Safe Food Handbook, booklet via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers (720,972)</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Cooking for Groups: A Volunteer's Guide to Food Safety, booklet via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Food Safe Families Activity Book, booklet via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Children under the age of 10</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Let Me Tell You How Dad Got Sick!, booklet via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: At-risk populations, to include caregivers of older adults, for example, pregnant women and their unborn children</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Is It Done Yet?, brochure via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers</p>	<p>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.</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Todo Cuenta, brochure via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Spanish-speaking consumers</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Ask Karen, magnet via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers (16,300)</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>The Meat & Poultry Hotline web page houses great information about how to reach the Hotline.</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers (1,810,640)</p>	<p>The Web site is updated regularly to include information on recalls and food safety-related issues/concerns.</p>
<p>Panic Button Fact Sheet, Fact Sheets via email, in-person events, U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers (4,785,766)</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Protect Yourself and Your Baby From Listeriosis, Flyer via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: At-risk populations, to include pregnant women and their unborn children</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Be Food Safe , Poster via email, in-person events, U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers schools, extension offices, health departments</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Is It Done Yet? temperature chart, Poster via email, in-person events, U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Hand Washing Decals, Miscellaneous via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>He's BAC! children's book, booklet via email, in-person events, U.S. Mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Children under the age of 10</p>	<p>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.</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Food Safe Families Public Service Announcements (4), Public Service Announcement via web, media</p> <p>Target Audience: Parents with children under the age of 13 and older adults</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Food Safe Families Behavioral videos (4), Video via web</p> <p>Target Audience: Parents with children under the age of 13 and older adults</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Surviving a Power Outage: Don't be in the Dark When it Comes to Food Safety, Podcast via web</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>USDA Food Safety Advice for Tailgating Parties, Video News Releases via Web</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Freezing and Food Safety , American Sign Language Videos (Sign FSIS) via Web</p> <p>Target Audience: Hearing-impaired consumers</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Web content</p> <p>Target Audience: All customers (internal and external)</p>	<p>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.</p>

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

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>	<p>Improved comprehension.</p>
<p>Postings on agency Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Improved comprehension.</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Responses to customer inquiries made via the Web</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Public now receives succinct, clear responses to inquiries</p>

Forest Service (FS)

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>From November 2012 to January 2013, 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. As a result of the emphasis on plain writing, for example, the Pacific Southwest Region (California and the Pacific Islands) reported 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>	<p>See above</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<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> <p>Target Audience: Businesses, contractors; thousands</p>	See above
<p>Brochures, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Service users, national forest visitors; thousands</p>	See above
<p>Interpretive signs, located at facilities and on trails, roads</p> <p>Target Audience: National forest visitors; thousands</p>	See above
<p>Descriptions of services, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Service users; thousands</p>	See above
<p>Instructions, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Service users, contractors, employees; thousands</p>	See above
<p>Rules/regulations, distributed by Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands</p>	See above
<p>Management plans, distributed by Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands</p>	See above

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Project descriptions, distributed by Web sites Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands	See above
Environmental analyses, distributed by Web sites Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands	See above
Decision documents (e.g., on plans, projects), distributed by mail/Web sites/offices Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands	See above
Press releases, distributed by fax/Web sites Target Audience: Journalists, stakeholders, employees; thousands	See above
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

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
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

Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyard Administration (GIPSA)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
GIPSA Website - Equipment Webpage Target Audience: All users and manufacturers of GIPSA Certified Grain Inspection Equipment within and outside the Official inspection system.	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.
GIPSA Website – Test Kit Evaluation Target Audience: All users and manufacturers of GIPSA Certified Mycotoxin Rapid Test Kits	Use of tabular information to identify approved test kits and duration of approval for ease of reference.
Brochure on GIPSA Website – How to File a Bond Claim (in English and Spanish) Target Audience: Livestock sellers	Simplified step-by-step instructions and added a decision table to help sellers understand when their claim must be filed. Translated the brochure to Spanish to reach a wider audience.
Brochure on GIPSA Website – Prompt Payment for Livestock Purchases (in English and Spanish) Target Audience: Livestock buyers and sellers	Increased readability of information by using shorter sentences and headings. Translated to Spanish to reach a wider audience.

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 course of the year, we have revised the materials for each survey to speak more directly to the reader and streamlined the instructions for responding.</p> <p>Target Audience: Agricultural producers asked to participate in NASS 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 about, and promoting participation in, the 2012 Census of Agriculture. Early in 2012, NASS created a user-friendly Census of Agriculture Web site with comprehensive information. Throughout the year, 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>Data collection for the census is still underway, so final response rates are not yet available. However, more producers have responded to the 2012 Census than at this time in the process in previous Censuses.</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.</p>
<p>Target Audience: All U.S. farmers (3.3 million people) and the many state, local, tribal, community, and nongovernmental agencies that partner with NASS to promote participation.</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>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<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, blog entries, internal newsletter, and one-off publications such as agency brochure, program brochures, etc.</p> <p>Target Audience: Press and the general public</p>	<p>NASS has long focused on writing these for a broad audience, but is giving extra attention to key plain language principles.</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>	<p>Improved comprehension.</p>
<p>Postings on agency Web site.</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public.</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Improved comprehension.</p>
<p>Request for Applications (RFA)</p> <p>Target Audience: Scientists applying for funding</p>	<p>Public Affairs plain writing specialist is now revising RFAs for improved comprehension and clarity.</p>

Natural Resources Conservation 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>	<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>
<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>	<p>No acronyms used unless defined, fewer words, more visuals resulting in better understanding of conservation programs.</p>
<p>Booklets and Publications</p> <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>Reduction in use of technical terms when there is an 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>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<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, better understanding in 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 allowing 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>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Clear, concise writing, making it easier for people to understand benefits of soil conservation programs.</p>
<p>Fact Sheets</p> <p>Distributed through: email, direct mail, handed out at events, public Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Using more familiar words allowing for a better understanding of programs, resulting in an increase of applications and a reduction of questions.</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<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>	<p>Shorter, clearer messages enable better comprehension of subject.</p>
<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>	<p>Reduced use of jargon, technical terms, and acronyms without definitions. More clear guidance for program implementation, application process, and program compliance requirements.</p>
<p>Legislative Fact Sheets</p> <p>Distributed through: State Web sites, distributed at an event, email</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, Congress, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Consolidated, concise language about conservation activity and programs provides clear useful information about conservation by State</p>
<p>National Bulletins</p> <p>Distributed through: Employee Intranet, public Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees</p> <p>Potential Audience: 10,379</p>	<p>Employees have a better understanding of organizational decisions, resulting in fewer questions.</p>

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

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Power Point Presentations</p> <p>Distributed through: Employee meetings and events, Public meetings and events</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, Employees, Agricultural Producers, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Shorter and more concise presentations allow for more information sharing.</p>
<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>	<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>
<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>	<p>Using clearer language, we are able to reach broader and more diverse, historically underserved communities with information about conservation and conservation programs.</p>
<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>	<p>Clear language describing practices and procedures allows for a greater understanding of processes and fewer questions.</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Snow Survey Reports</p> <p>Distributed through Employee intranet, public Website, email</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, Public, agricultural producers, Conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Reporting data in a clear, concise manner with less technical jargon makes it easy to understand.</p>
<p>Soil Survey Reports</p> <p>Distributed through: public Web site, intranet, email</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, Public, agricultural producers, Conservationists, private landowners</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Reporting data in a clear, concise manner with less technical jargon makes it easy to understand.</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 used and all acronyms defined. Language is more consistent and easier to understand.</p>

Risk Management Agency (RMA)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>RMA national and regional fact sheets available on the web and handed out at meetings</p> <p>Target Audience: Farmers and ranchers – about 9 million</p>	<p>Agency fact sheets are easier to understand. Farmers and ranchers understand the basics of crop insurance policies and what is expected of them.</p>
<p>Pasture, Rangeland and Forage Basic Provisions</p> <p>Target Audience: Producers, Insurance Companies, and Agents-65,000</p>	<p>Fewer acronyms and improved readability</p>
<p>Area Risk Protection Insurance Basic Provisions</p> <p>Target Audience: Producers, Insurance Companies and Agents-4,000</p>	<p>Fewer acronyms and improved readability</p>
<p>Florida Citrus Crop Provisions</p> <p>Target Audience: Producers, Insurance Companies and Agents-13,000</p>	<p>Fewer acronyms and improved readability</p>
<p>Handbooks Distributed through: Websites</p> <p>Target Audience: Approved Insurance Providers, Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, etc.</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>RMA writes and reviews National Instructions for ease of understanding. This results in more succinct, clearer, and easier-to-understand Instructions. Better understanding helps the crop insurance industry to have better uniform implementation of the crop insurance program.</p>
<p>External Handbook Standards</p> <p>Distributed through: Websites</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, Approved Insurance Providers, Agricultural Producers, Employees, etc.</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>RMA created an External Standards Handbook to provide approved standards for developing, amending and maintaining RMA handbooks. One objective was to produce clear, concise, consistent, complete, and easily understood procedures and instructions</p>
<p>Annual Reports</p> <p>Distributed through: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: EEOC (Unknown)</p>	<p>RMA writes and reviews annual reports with principles of plain writing, reducing burden on users, reducing errors, and improving customer service.</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Compliance Reports</p> <p>Distributed through: Memorandum, Web sites, etc.</p> <p>Target Audience: Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights/RMA Field Office/Loss Adjusters (50 or more recipients)</p>	<p>RMA writes and reviews reports for ease of understanding, resulting in reports that are more succinct, clearer, and easier to understand.</p>
<p>Emails</p> <p>Distributed through: Email</p> <p>Target Audience: RMA Employees (approximately 471 recipients)</p>	<p>RMA is focusing on clearer, more concise and short Email messages. We use photos and graphs to better convey messages.</p>
<p>PowerPoint Presentations</p> <p>Distributed through: Presentation, Email, Memorandum</p> <p>Target Audience: RMA Employees (approximately 471 recipients) and stakeholders</p>	<p>Presentations have fewer words, use common language, and include more graphics, charts, and images. Messages are more interesting and understandable. This helps the staff accomplish the Agency's mission.</p>
<p>Live Streaming</p> <p>Target Audience: RMA Employees (approximately 471 recipients)</p>	<p>This type of visual communication is direct and used to communicate/share information simultaneously and in real time that allows for immediate feedback to questions.</p>
<p>EEO Counselor Reports</p> <p>Distributed to USDA Employees and Contractors</p> <p>Target Audience: USDA, RMA Employees, Contractors, and the EEOC (Number varies by case)</p>	<p>RMA writes and reviews reports for ease of understanding, resulting in reports that are more succinct, clearer, and easier to understand.</p>
<p>Compliance Findings to Approved Insurance Providers</p> <p>Compliance notifications</p> <p>Target Audience: Re-insured companies & Farm Service Agency</p>	<p>Simplified program integrity and quicker timelines</p>
<p>Manager's Bulletins, Claims Advisories and Information Memos</p> <p>Target Audience: Approved Insurance Provider personnel (varies)</p>	<p>Reduce jargon and acronyms, improve readability</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Correspondence</p> <p>Target Audience: All stakeholders</p>	<p>Reduce jargon and acronyms, improve readability</p>

Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)

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 a more effective communication and enhance access to services for the communities we serve.</p>
<p>USDA Directories & Liaison information, through Web site</p> <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>Increased accessibility USDA programs from historically underserved groups. Closing the professional achievement 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 farm workers</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Correspondence, through U.S. mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Sent in response to inquiries as appropriate, this includes Congressional, community-based organization, inquiries from 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 outreach meetings</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 information for fliers that is clear and direct, facilitating information to wide variety of customers.</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</p> <p>Target Audience: All OASCR employees</p>	Increased accessibility of documents.

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 Communications

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>National Press Releases</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public</p>	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
<p>Media Advisories</p> <p>Target Audience: Selected media</p>	OC alerts media outlets to upcoming USDA events and news announcements in direct language/Media coverage

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Communications like USDA “Results” Fact Sheets</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public</p>	<p>OC conveys facts in plain writing and in succinct format/Increased comprehension and customer satisfaction</p>
<p>Captions on photos posted to USDA Flickr site on homepage</p> <p>Target Audience: Press and general public</p>	<p>OC writes clear captions that concisely convey the event behind the photo/Photos and captions may be reproduced by media and others</p>
<p>Webpages, including USDA homepage, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public</p>	<p>OC presents webpages and social media in plain, conversational language so they are informational and engaging/Increased comprehension, public accessibility and customer satisfaction</p>
<p>Secretary/Deputy Secretary speeches posted to USDA “Transcripts and Speeches” section of USDA website</p> <p>Target Audience: Specific stakeholders, interest groups and general public</p>	<p>OC writes speeches on complex subjects in clear, direct language/Increased comprehension of USDA messages and customer satisfaction</p>
<p>Publications</p> <p>Target Audience: Public stakeholders</p>	<p>OC does final review for plain writing of all agency-written publications released to the public/Increased comprehension and customer satisfaction</p>
<p>Text accompanying radio stories and actualities posted to USDA website and text accompanying videos posted to YouTube</p> <p>Target Audience: Specific stakeholders and the general public</p>	<p>OC writes clear summaries of stories and interviews /Increased comprehension and accessibility for general public and for broadcast media that may pick up stories and actualities</p>
<p>Text accompanying exhibits , displays and signage prepared for agency use in visitor centers, conferences and other outlets</p> <p>Target Audience: Specific stakeholders and the general public</p>	<p>OC captions and summarizes display information in plain language/ Increased comprehension and customer satisfaction</p>

Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Monthly: World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report</p> <p>Target Audience: 11,000 subscribers plus log on access includes producers, investors, academics, press</p>	Continue to refine and use tables, short sentences, brevity and receive expert review.
<p>Weekly Weather report</p> <p>Target Audience: 7,000 subscribers plus log on access from producers, investors, academics, meteorologists</p>	Continue to refine and use charts, short sentences, brevity and perform expert review.

Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>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.</p> <p>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 unlimited</p>	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.
<p>Posted Plain Writing Resources on USDA Departmental Directives Page – this is a public webpage</p> <p>Target Audience: All writers and reviewers of Departmental Directives.</p> <p>Approximately 500 users</p>	The Plain Language checklist is now part of the process to create and review Departmental Directives, resulting in increased comprehension 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

Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Accessible Electronic Documents; review and edits</p> <p>Target Audience: All USDA Agencies and Offices</p> <p>Distributed Through: Electronic Control Management System (ECMM)</p>	<p>OES supports the Plain Writing initiative and continues to ensure that the documents signed by the Secretary are written clearly for their intended audiences.</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.

Leadership is a critical part of our plain writing employee outreach plan. Secretary Vilsack has taken a personal role in USDA's plain writing activities. He believes we cannot carry out our mission effectively if we cannot communicate clearly with those whom we serve. In October 2011, Secretary 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>. In September 2012, Secretary Vilsack gave his highest award, the Secretary's Honor Award for Exceptional Service to USDA's Plain Writing Act implementing team at a public ceremony to highlight the importance of plain writing at USDA.

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, 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

ARS published an article about the Act, USDA resources, and future ARS resources in the February 2012 and March 2013 edition (out this week) of the agency's newsletter. That newsletter reaches about 8,400 employees. ARS has also posted a link to the USDA Plain Writing site on the new ARS Web site and will launch an information campaign between 4/1-6/28/13 to encourage all ARS employees to use the online plain writing training and resources.

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 in all written communication in an "Inside APHIS" (newsletter for all employees) article.

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.

Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)

FSIS promoted and pilot tested a plain language writing checklist which 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 notified employees through our intranet announcements to all employees, emails, and our public Web site.

Forest Service (FS)

- 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 Webpage on the Forest Service's Intranet Website. On the Webpage, the Chief's Office posted a checklist prepared by USDA, tailored to Forest Service needs, to help writers use plain language.
- The Chief's Office also announced 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 Webpage, 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 and another link to writing-related training materials available to Forest Service employees through AgLearn.

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 both for employees and 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 is planning AgLearn training for all Project Managers within its Technology and Science Division on Plain Writing within the third quarter of FY 2013.

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 webpage on the agency intranet that provides information on the Plain Writing Act; directs staff to resources available at <http://www.PlainLanguage.gov> and <http://www.usda.gov/plain-writing> and contains specially created NASS plain writing materials (webpage created October 2011).
- We regularly publish articles in the agency internal newsletter and blog, Round-Up; 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).

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 began editing Requests For Applications 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.
- 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 included Plain Writing Act articles in the April 2012, July 2012, October 2012, and January 2013 editions 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 providing 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.

Risk Management Agency (RMA)

- Email to all employees
- Staff meetings
- Reviewers continue to work with writers to improve writing standards

Rural Development (RD)

- Posted information on the Act on the agency intranet.
- Published an article on the Act and its requirements in the internal agency news bulletin.

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://youtu.be/NN2I1pWXjXI>.

Press and Editorial:

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

Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)

- We posted information on the Act on the agency intranet.
- We distributed information on the Act and Web-based resources to all staff members.
- We distributed signs throughout with availability of the “Federal Plain Language Guidelines.”
- We asked staff 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 Technology Planning, Architecture, and e-Gov (TPA&E) and Policy and Directives (P&D) on specific Plain Writing practices and expectations.
- OCIO has posted documents on the USDA Departmental Directives page, which is accessible to all USDA employees and the public.

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. Many different staff members across USDA craft the kinds of documents we have committed to writing in plain language. In order to ensure that they have the ability to do so, we have offered many different courses throughout the Department.

SPOTLIGHT: AGLEARN CLASS—INTRODUCTION TO PLAIN LANGUAGE

We created this course to give employees a single source that provides information about the Plain Writing Act, explains why plain language is important, and teaches the basics about writing. USDA has many courses about writing, but none that specifically addressed the Act and the guidance materials posted at plainlanguage.gov.

The Center for Plain Language recognized “Introduction to Plain Language” with a ClearMark award.

This 30-minute online course addresses why plain language is important and teaches the major principles of plain language and how to be “plain.” The course is accessible to people with disabilities. The primary audience is USDA employees who develop documents for the public. Additionally, other government agencies have begun to use the course for their employees, and we posted a publicly available version on the USDA Plain Writing page. You can take the course at: https://aglearn.usda.gov/customcontent/OES/OES-PlainWriting-web/startCourse_USDA-PWTR01_1455.html

We had no budget for this project. We used existing Program and Department software, and USDA staff volunteered to create the course in addition to their regular duties.

Approximately 500 USDA employees have taken this course. The Pentagon Force Protection Agency will use the course to train 8,500 more. Roughly 80% of the USDA course participants were satisfied with the course and would recommend it. Two typical comments: “I was very impressed with the content of this training course. It was very easy to understand and it did not become weighted down with too much information. I am confident that my plain language writing skills, which were adequate, will significantly improve.” And: “I’ve been a writer/editor for 30 years, and still found this course to be an excellent refresher.”

SPOTLIGHT: RMA TRAINS EVERY EMPLOYEE

USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA) helps producers manage their business risks and helps stabilize rural economies. RMA’s mission is serving America’s agricultural producers through effective, market-based risk management tools and solutions to strengthen the economic stability of agricultural producers and rural communities.

To fulfill this mission, RMA manages the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC) which operates the Federal Crop Insurance Program. Managing an insurance program makes it especially important that RMA documents are

USDA’s Risk Management Agency trained every employee -- in a classroom setting -- on how to use plain language principles in their writing.

understandable. Therefore, the Agency committed to provide classroom training on plain language to every employee.

RMA's 470 employees are found in fourteen locations around the country. RMA provided customized training at each location. The certified trainer used actual RMA documents in the training. The six-hour sessions were personalized to each RMA location. Maximum class size was 30 people, and each course included one-on-one feedback on in-class writing assignments.

To reinforce the knowledge gained, one regional office had enhanced plain writing training with an expert. This office now is the model for the Agency. Twenty regional office writers had one-on-one training as they send publications and news releases through clearance. This taught them how plain writing applies to them and their communication with their audiences. The Agency's public affairs specialist is writing a new style manual specific to RMA's plain writing needs.

"We believe over time that plain language crop insurance documents will help producers better understand their responsibilities and duties. This will help improve compliance and reduce costs due to errors," stated Michael Hand, Deputy Administrator for Compliance.

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 webpages 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 13,500 people in USDA have taken one or more writing courses on our on-line 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 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>	20
<p>Aglearn Module on Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely</p> <p>Date: April 2012-March 2013</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

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

Training / Date	Employees Trained
<p>In-house training</p> <p>Date: September 2011</p>	<p>FOIA staff, editorial staff, IS writing staff, outreach staff, technical support staff (approximately 12 persons)</p>
<p>Promoting awareness about online training module</p> <p>Date: Periodic communication through agency newsletter and various other means</p> <p>Will launch information campaign in April 2013 to encourage employees to use online plain writing training and resources.</p>	<p>AgLearn module (PowerPoint) for use by field locations is in development.</p>

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 in-class time and 6 hours homework. Of these, approximately half 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. More than 150 people have taken a half-day course 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 has recommended sets of online training (AgLearn) – 1,368 of these courses have been taken by APHIS employees.</p>
<p>Writing coaching</p> <p>Date: Ongoing</p>	<p>APHIS is pilot testing a Virtual Writing Center where trained volunteers are available to staff members who want one-on-one coaching and feedback on their writing.</p>

Economic Research Service (ERS)

Training / Date	Employees Trained
Plain writing training at presentation, media and writing trainings Date: January 2013	Approximately 122 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: Fall 2011	2 FNS coordinators and correspondence liaison
PLAIN training workshops and posting of plain writing resources online Date: 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: March 2012	Agency supervisors

Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)

Training / Date	Employees Trained
In house (agency Staff or contractor)	All Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement, and Review. Evaluation and Enforcement Division, Federal State Audit Branch Office of Management (All Minneapolis offices)
PLAIN provided training – live	379
Training document for intranet content contributors written in plain words to assist users. Date: November 4, 2011 - Present	
Webinars and online training	

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

Training	Employees Trained
Classroom Date: 11/26/12	24

Forest Service (FS)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
<p>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.</p> <p>Date: Various</p>	1,500 employees
<p>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 AgLearn program, which includes at least two relevant online modules: "Introduction to the Plain Writing Act" and "Business Writing: How To Write Clearly and Concisely." Forest Service staffs committed about 1,200 employees to take one or both modules, covering all those in need of training under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>AgLearn training materials are subject to change. In December 2012, the Forest Service coordinator for Plain Writing Act implementation reviewed 13 AgLearn training materials related to writing, including 11 hour-long training modules (such as "Business Writing: How To Write Clearly and Concisely"). The coordinator briefly described each training material reviewed and posted the descriptions through a link on the Forest Service's Plain Writing Act Webpage.</p> <p>Date: Various</p>	1,200 employees

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: 8/10	10 (Policy Analysis staff)
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: 6/11	84 (Business Correspondence staff)
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: 8/11	90 (Business Correspondence staff)
Online training Date: 10/11–3/12	1,168 (various staffs)
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: July 2012	Approximately 40 (Washington Office staffs)—course in plain writing for Website design and formulation
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Planned for spring 2013	Approximately 80 (Washington Office staffs)—a Plain Writing Act coordinator took a train-the-trainer course in summer 2012 and is preparing to offer training in plain writing
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Planned for April 2013	Approximately 20 (International Programs staff)—a writing workshop to ensure that program managers who write reports for partners and collaborators know what is expected and are getting the facts right
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: 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 17-18, 21-22, 2012	Approximately 80 (HR/ER Specialists)—Congressional Briefing Seminars, including how to create draft responses to congressional inquiries
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: Ongoing	ca. 90 (Controlled Correspondence staff)—periodic informal training by professional writer/editors

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: May 16-18, 2012	1 (Conservation Education staff)— “Fundamentals in Writing”

Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyard Administration (GIPSA)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
Leadership Development Program: Writing Skills Training Webinar	Offered to all GIPSA employees – 41 participated and completed November 14, 2012
AgLearn	41 employees have completed 35 web- based writing courses. ongoing

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In-house training Date: July 2012	2
Online training Date: Fall/Winter 2011/2012 and continuing	Required of public affairs staff (8 persons); promoted as available to all staff
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. Date: The first session was held in February 2013. Additional sessions are planned for working groups within Divisions.	Teams with similar writing needs take the workshop in small group settings.
Regular communication with staff through tip sheets, internal newsletter, and inserts in weekly leadership memo to field offices. Date: Periodic communication through various means	All staff

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In-house training Date: 2012	80

Natural Resources Conservations Service (NRCS)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In-house Forums for Supervisory Employees Date: Forums held on September 11 & 13, 2012	70
In-house training for Administrative Staff Members Date: Training held on April 24, 2012, May 16, 2012 and May 17, 2012	33
NRCS Plain Writing Webinar Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 11, 2012 and February 11, 2013	200 (this webinar was originally viewed by all 11,700 NRCS employees)
Business Writing: Know Your Readers and Your Purpose Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 25, 2012 and January 18, 2013	17
Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely (AgLearn) Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 5, 2012 and February 1, 2013	413
Business Writing: Editing and Proofreading Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 23, 2012 and January 20, 2013	17
Business Grammar: Parts of Speech Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 3, 2012 and December 27, 2012	14
Business Grammar: Working with Words Date: Completed in AgLearn between 3, 2012 and December 27, 2012	13

Training/Date	Employees Trained
Business Grammar: The Mechanics of Writing Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 10, 2012 and January 2, 2013	25
Business Grammar: Punctuation Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 5, 2012 and December 27, 2012	11
Business Grammar: Sentence Construction Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 17, 2012 and January 8, 2013	13
Business Grammar Common Usage Errors Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 10, 2012 and February 1, 2013	27
Writing Under Pressure: The Writing Process Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 16, 2012 and January 18, 2013	10
Writing at Work: How to Write Clearly, Effectively and Professionally Date: Completed in AgLearn between April 5, 2012 and October 5, 2012	8
Plain Writing Resources on my.NRCS intranet. Date: NRCS leadership will continue to provide employees regular plain writing updates and direction to maintain plain writing as a priority with customer service and program implementation.	All agency employees (10,379)

Risk Management Agency (RMA)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
One on one training with regional writers as they send publications and news releases through clearance so they can learn how plain writing applies to them and how they communicate with their audience Date: Ongoing	20

Training/Date	Employees Trained
Springfield regional office had extended plain writing training with a plain writing expert and now is the model for the agency. Date: Summer 2012	10
All RMA employees were trained on Plain Writing Act and implementation. Date: Summer 2012	470 (all employees)
Additional training to staff in 2013/14 as budgetary resources allow Date: Additional training to staff in 2013/14 as budgetary resources allow	Additional training to staff in 2013/14 as budgetary resources allow
Online Courses in AgLearn <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the Plain Writing Act • Introduction to Plain Language • Business Writing: Know Your Readers and Your Purpose • Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely Date: Ongoing	37 employees 49 employees 8 employees 59 employees

Rural Development (RD)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
Webinar on Plain Language training Date: April/May 2013	All RD Employees (National Office and Field)

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

Training/Date	Employees Trained
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 the Chief Economist (OCE)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In house (agency Staff or contractor) – live	

Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In-house training, provided as a component of a Professional Development Series, on the Use of Plain Writing: Active vs. Passive Voice Date: September 19, 2012. This training will be offered on a recurring basis, either as a refresher for current staff or as part of the orientation process for new OCIO employees	33

Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
Online training – AgLearn Date: Ongoing	6

Office of the Inspector General (OIG)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
Each year, as part of OIG’s professional development training, employees are given instruction in writing plainly and simply. In 2012, that instruction included a discussion of the Plain Writing Act and specific training in how to write clearly, plainly, and directly. Date: Summer 2012 (seven sessions at each field office)	270 auditors

5. Ensuring Compliance

INTRODUCTION

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

SPOTLIGHT: CORRESPONDENCE DIRECTIVE AND APPENDIX

USDA's Correspondence Directive addresses letters, emails, reports and other official written Department communication, whether distributed by mail, fax or electronically. A team of employees updated the directive to mandate that all correspondence be written using clear, concise language.

The directive will include an Appendix that describes methods of document testing that may be used for routine documents and for high-profile, high-consequence documents to validate and improve reader understanding.

Additionally, the team has rewritten the accompanying Correspondence Manual to ensure that the manual is in plain language, and provides appropriate examples and resources for writers and employees who approve documents.

The Directive and Manual are currently in Departmental clearance.

A revised USDA correspondence directive and manual require the use of plain language and further aligns the Department with the Act. An appendix also references types of testing writers can use to ensure their documents are clear and understandable to the reader.

SPOTLIGHT: FOREST SERVICE REVIEWS

Reviews of Forest Service documents are increasingly focused on plain language with regional offices, research stations and many individual forests and grasslands implementing systems to ensure compliance with the law.

Forest Service focuses on Plain Language while reviewing documents.

For example, in 2012, the Office of Regulatory and Management Services, when responding to Freedom of Information Act requests, is required to use technical and legal language. However, those technical and legal sentences are followed with a plain language explanation.

Perhaps one of the more aggressive changes will be seen in the first phase of the agency's website redesign, which debuts in 2013 and is centered on providing users with information they can use and easily understand.

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 nontechnical 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 in plain language for a general, non-technical audience. Our editors have been trained in and incorporate this element into their work. ARS plain writing staff has trained photo caption editors to ensure that they are written plainly. National Ag Library (NAL) staff has also trained FOIA, Editorial, Public Affairs and other staff, including interns, on plain writing.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

APHIS has a staff of expert writers who craft most of the 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 new employees.

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

The Foreign Agricultural Service has put new systems in place to ensure publicly available materials are plainly written. For example, the FAS Public Affairs staff plays a greater role in reviewing documents for the agency website to ensure that the economic analysis can be understood by non-economists. In preparation for the launch of the new FAS website, the agency will provide training in how to write for the web. That training includes an emphasis on clear, easy-to-understand writing.

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) 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 have also 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 put new systems in place to ensure publicly available materials are plainly written. For example, the FAS Public Affairs staff plays a greater role in reviewing documents for the agency website to ensure that the economic analysis can be understood by non-economists. In preparation for the launch of the new FAS website, the agency will provide training in how to write for the web. That training includes an emphasis on clear, easy-to-understand writing.

Forest Service (FS)

- 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, he 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 Website to meet the needs of users, partly by ensuring that Web content is in plain language. The first phase of the redesign is expected to be launched in 2013.
- 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.
- 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 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.
- Key public document review: 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 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: For the Chief's Office management reviews of Forest Service regional performance (about two reviews per year), the Chief's Office tasks a professional writer/editor with writing the subsequent reports in accordance with plain writing principles.

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, and providing an ongoing stream of refresher materials (tip sheets, internal newsletter, and inserts in leadership memos to field offices).
- 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 ten 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 is editing grant writing templates to ensure they comply with the Act.

Natural Resources Conservations Service (NRCS)

- Agency designated three national headquarters contacts for plain writing.
- Plain Writing icon and link posted to NRCS Web site
- Plain Writing resources posted to agency intranet 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 and training courses for all national headquarters staff including senior management.
- Reviewing and approving public communications for accuracy, timeliness, usability, and clarity.

Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)

- Documenting and reporting use of plain writing in agency communications. Continuing discussing 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.

Office of Communications (OC)

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 reviews all publications released to the public for clarity and consistency according to the GPO Style Manual. OC coordinators further 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.

Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)

- OCE Rewrote and redesigned our Web site.
- Reviewed actions with World Agricultural Outlook Board Chair Gerald Bange

Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)

- As part of a Lean Six Sigma process improvement effort in OCIO, the Departmental Directives process has been altered. We are training OCIO on the new Department Directives process and the Plain Language Act, as the two overlap significantly. Part of the Lean Six Sigma effort includes periodic retraining that includes the course on the Plain Writing Act that is described above
- OCIO leadership is committed to continual process improvements using two-way sharing of information, data, success stories, and maintaining dialogue regarding the importance of the Plain Writing Act with Departmental employees nationwide

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 <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 <http://www.plainlanguage.gov>.

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)

New ARS Web site will be launched this spring. Links to the department's plain writing Web site is part of the new design/content.

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 organized resources by problem area (excessive acronyms, active/passive voice, English as a second language assistance, etc.)

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 added a link on FAS's public Web site to the department's plain language site: http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=PLAIN_WRITING

Forest Service (FS)

- The Forest Service has developed an Intranet Web page 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.
- For the general public, the Forest Service relies on USDA's Plain Writing Website.

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.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Links to the Office of Management and Budget and PLAIN

Natural Resources Conservations Service (NRCS)

- my.NRCS.gov intranet site
- My.NRCS.gov NRCS Correspondence Manual
- Quarterly NRCS Correspondence Newsletter

Risk Management Agency (RMA)

The RMA intranet has a plain language web page on the Cultural Transformation site. The Web site is transparent and easy to navigate and provides useful information to employees and agency partners.

Rural Development (RD)

Links to OMB and PLAIN

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 webpage

Office of Communications (OC)

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

Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)

OCE Contact us page: http://www.usda.gov/oce/contact_OCE/index.htm

Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)

All of OCIO's information can be reviewed at <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/policy-directives-records-forms>

Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)

Links to OMB and PLAIN

Office of the Inspector General (OIG)

OIG is in the process of developing a style guide that provides comprehensive writing guidance instructing employees on how to write plainly. This guide provides links to Plain Writing Act resources, and is the basis for training provided to employees.

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.

SPOTLIGHT: USING EMPLOYEE SUGGESTIONS TO REVISE DOCUMENTS

Packers and Stockyards Program of the Grain Inspection Packers and Stockyards Agency established an internal Change Control Working Group several years ago. This group receives proposed change requests from employees, reviews them, and recommends those warranting change to the management team for approval and implementation.

Grain Inspection Packers and Stockyards uses employee suggestions to identify documents that need to be written in Plain Language.

The proposed changes include changes to web content, forms, brochures, or other materials for the public. Employees submitted change requests prompted by conversations they had with members of the livestock and poultry industries who asked for clarification of information they read on the GIPSA Web site or in a program brochure. Employees also submitted change requests based on trends they saw in how industry members seem to not understand certain instructions in program forms.

Both types of change requests have resulted in the management team assigning employees to make necessary revisions to improve the writing in program materials.

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.

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)

To date, we have not received any complaints.

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, Websites, 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 ...”

Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyard Administration (GIPSA)

- Use of ForeSee survey to determine customer satisfaction and Web site usability
- Visible Thread, a company that...
- Packers and Stockyards Program established an internal Change Control Working Group several years ago. Based on employee suggestions, this group has recommended changing and clarifying documents – which were subsequently revised -- based on customer questions and industry trends.

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 website to be more inviting and engaging.
- The year-long emphasis on direct, plain communication with all U.S. farmers on the importance of the Census of Agriculture to their operations and to agencies and institutions that make decisions affecting them has resulted in slightly higher response rates than at the same time during the previous census 5 years ago. This higher return is despite the agency's reduced budget for follow-up activities.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service wrote and designed census materials with careful attention to plain language principles. However, since the materials were prepared months before they were mailed, one item – a postcard encouraging farmers who have not yet responded – got through the process without a plain language review. In tone and content, its message was different from other Census materials, harsher, less explanatory, less reader friendly.

The impact was immediate and striking: as the errant post card reached farmers' homes, the number per hour of calls spiked to 4,800 – at this level, NASS would need 578 enumerators to deal with customer inquiries. Instead NASS has functioned well with 160. The experience highlighted how effective the rest of the materials were in telling why the Census matters and encouraging recipients to respond.

- In late spring 2013, NASS will conduct an internal and external evaluation of its Census communications materials and messaging. For the first time, NASS will include questions in the post-Census evaluation to measure the readability of the materials to help gauge the effectiveness of the plain language effort.

Natural Resources Conservations Service (NRCS)

- Use of ForeSee survey to determine customer satisfaction and Web site usability
- Direct customer feedback
- Surveys
<https://my.nrcs.usda.gov/PortalStatic/publicaffairs/ECM/Plain%20Language%20Survey%20Questions%20for%20my.NRCS.docx>

Risk Management Agency (RMA)

RMA has not received any formal comments but we are receiving positive feedback when we talk to customers.

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)

OASCR is currently developing an employee skills assessment tool which will include a plain language component.

Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)

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

Office of Communications (OC)

Agencies periodically express feedback/ appreciation for positive customer response to publications reviewed by OC. As an example, last year an OC writer/editor was included in an FSA Administrator's Award for Service to Agriculture for her review of the publication *Your Guide to FSA Farm Loans*. The publication "led to increased awareness of program availability for socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers and ranchers."

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 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.

Communicating with USDA about Plain Writing

We want to hear your comments about the clarity of our writing. Public comments are critical to help us succeed in writing documents that are clear to anyone who uses them. Your comments also help us identify older documents we should consider revising. Please e-mail us at plainlanguage@osec.usda.gov, call 202-720-7100, or mail a letter to us at:

Maureen Wood
USDA Plain Language Coordinator
Office of the Executive Secretariat
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW Washington, D.C. 20250

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	Mary Conley
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)	Beth Gaston	Beth Gaston
Economic Research Service (ERS)	John Weber Dale Simms	Mary Conley
Farm Service Agency (FSA)	Leigh Allen	Rebecca Shively
Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Center for Nutrition Policy and Programs (CNPP)	Richard Lucas	Richard Lucas
Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)	Chuck Williams Linda Russell	Vince Fayne Linda Russell, Laura Reiser Sandie Burrell/Karen Jackson Andreas Keller
Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)	Sally Klusaritz	Joseph Migyanka

Agency/Office	Senior Agency Official Responsible for Plain Writing	Plain Writing Coordinator(s)
Forest Service (FS)	Tim DeCoster	Hutch Brown Kathryn Sosbe
Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyard Administration (GIPSA)	Mike Schmidt	Mike Schmidt
National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)	Sue King, NASS Scott Elliott, NIFA	Mary Conley
Natural Resources Conservations Service (NRCS)	Terry Bish	Suzanne Austin-Kashawlic
Risk Management Agency (RMA)	Barbara Leach	Michelle Bouchard Bill Crews Velerie Eddleman
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)	Marilou Flores	Marilou Flores
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)	Winona Lake Scott	Marshella Hines
Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)	Andrew Perry	Andrew Perry
Office of Communications (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	Matthew Patrick David Simpson
Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)	Maureen Wood	Ann Marie Gogniat
Office of the General Counsel (OGC)	Peter McHare	Peter McHare
Office of the Inspector General (OIG)	Michael Martin	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.

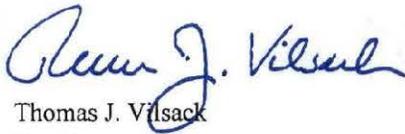
This past summer USDA published our [Plain Writing Compliance Report](#) to ensure compliance once the Act comes into full effect October 13, 2011. Through the USDA Plain Language working group, each agency has begun identifying covered documents and providing training and resources to employees. I encourage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