

eGov@USDA - eAuthentication

A monthly update from the **USDA eGovernment - eAuthentication Team**

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USDA Recognizes eAuthentication Participants

On October 19th, 2003, USDA launched its new enterprise-wide eAuthentication service (<http://www.eauth.egov.usda.gov/>). This centralized eAuthentication tool will help USDA address the Expanding Electronic Government Initiative of the President's Management Agenda and assist USDA and all Federal Agencies in meeting the requirements of the Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA). As USDA seeks to meet the GPEA mandate for providing electronic alternatives to traditional paper-based processes, the eAuthentication service offers authentication solutions for all online USDA agency applications, including the ability to accept electronic rather than manual signatures.

This successful effort relied heavily upon the active cooperation and support of all USDA agencies, especially the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Rural Development (RD). These "Service Center" agencies developed the original Web-based Centralized Authentication and Authorization Facility (WebCAAF) infrastructure, which USDA expanded to create the enterprise-wide eAuthentication service. Additionally, representatives from these agencies were involved in the training development process for the Local Registration Authority (LRA) Training Course.

Throughout the month of October, designated Service Center employees and Help Desk personnel at various USDA locations completed the new eAuthentication service training sessions. To date, over 3,900 USDA employees have completed the LRA training. The primary task for an LRA is to validate a customer's identity - a process often referred to as 'identity proofing'. A registered customer's identity must be verified before allowing him/her access to USDA Agency applications requiring Level 2 credentials. As more agency applications continue to integrate with the eAuthentication service, LRAs and eAuthentication Help Desk personnel become critical support resources. Currently, several USDA agencies, including the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), Forest Service (FS), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), and Rural Development (RD), are integrating new applications with the eAuthentication service.

Identity Management Concepts

A key part of the eAuthentication service is the protection of sensitive agency information. Protecting sensitive information requires the applications to know who is accessing it. As such, the management of user information becomes a critical service.

The Identity Management concept is based on users providing information to receive credentials such as name, address, and phone number, prior to having their identity validated by an LRA.

Previously, this user information was individually designed and administered for each application. Identity Management, as part of the USDA enterprise-wide eAuthentication service, allows user information to be created and stored centrally. This centralized approach will decrease administrative time and effort and most importantly, increase customer satisfaction. A brief description of Identity Management concepts is provided below:

- **Self-Registration:** USDA customers and business partners can register themselves online. Users can create their own UserID and password, but must be identity-proofed to access restricted online services.
- **Identity Proofing:** To obtain a higher credential level to access more secure applications, users must visit an LRA, at the nearest USDA Service Center to have his/her identity validated with government-issued photo identification.
- **Password Services:** Users are allowed to set and change their own passwords, and may access the online 'Forgotten Password' service to help them remember forgotten passwords.
- **Self-Administration:** Users maintain some of their own account information, such as their e-mail addresses. This capability gives the users more control over personal profiles.
- **Help Desk Support:** Help Desk personnel are available to assist users in resolving technical issues related to the new system.
- **Delegated Entitlement Administration:** Agency administrators assign specific roles and manage who can use which applications through the USDA eAuthentication service.

In the Next Issue

- **Government-wide Authentication Update**
- **Credential Levels**

For more information or questions, contact the eGovernment – eAuthentication Team at:

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