

eGov@USDA - eDeployment

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

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Web Presence Team Conducts Usability Testing

The cross-agency Web Presence Team is redesigning USDA's Web site with an emphasis on customer intentions and service needs rather than the current agency-centric approach. Following the development of the presentation layer and HTML templates, the team tested the new design with a sample user community to help ensure that the new USDA.gov will meet the needs of USDA online users. Customer feedback obtained from usability testing was then incorporated into the final design of USDA.gov and USDA's evolving Web Presence standards for the look, feel and navigation of agency Web sites and applications.

From October 21st to the 24th, 16 individuals representing USDA's vast customer and employee base such as agricultural producers, agribusiness, low-income families, conservationists, members of the press, educators, and researchers participated in the individual usability testing sessions. Each session enabled the participants to explore the site and provide feedback on the features and functionalities of the new USDA.gov. Participants were asked to complete specific tasks using the redesigned USDA.gov Web site during an hour long interview session to evaluate the following elements: Homepage, Site Navigation, Web Content/Terminology, Overall Look and Feel, and Customization Functionality. Following the tests, the team compiled the final data highlighting usability issues and other observations into a results matrix. Design recommendations from these results were discussed with USDA Webmasters and agency representatives and incorporated into the final design of the new USDA.gov Web site. If you are interested in viewing these results along with select video clips from the usability test sessions, please contact the eGovernment team.

USDA Releases First Draft Taxonomy Model

The National Agricultural Library (NAL) Thesaurus Group and the Taxonomy Development Core Team released the first draft version of the USDA Taxonomy Model on November 14th. As detailed in last month's update, representatives from USDA agencies and staff offices have worked since early September to create a consistent framework to classify online content. This organized framework will enhance search capabilities and, most importantly, get users to the content they seek in a quick and intuitive manner via meaningful search results.

Throughout October, participating agencies and staff offices completed taxonomy educational workshops for content experts to create draft models on subject classification. The NAL Thesaurus Group and the Taxonomy Core Team aggregated and revised these individual drafts into a holistic USDA model for approval by the agencies and staff offices.

Any classification model for a large enterprise is challenging and time-consuming, requiring much direct input from content experts and iterative maintenance over time. This model represents the first release of a subject classification taxonomy for USDA online content. USDA will work to define the overall governance and next steps in expanding this model further in future releases.

eDeployment Product Assessment Update

After reviewing Product Questionnaire responses and attending product demonstrations, individual product assessment teams in the areas of portal, Web content management and document/records management evaluated the ability of each product to meet USDA's functional and technical requirements. A USDA technical architecture team reviewed the products that were considered functionally viable for USDA, examining areas such as application architecture design, application development, enterprise architecture and telecommunications.

Upon completion of the technical assessment of products, the technical architecture team provided recommendations to the product assessment teams. The product assessment teams then formulated and submitted their final recommendations around viable combination of products to the eGovernment Executive. This combination includes products that meet the majority of functional and technical USDA requirements and are likely to require the least amount of integration effort and disruption to the current technical environment within USDA and its agencies. These recommendations will be finalized and submitted to USDA's CIO, Scott Charbo for final approval.

Throughout this assessment process, participating agencies have demonstrated the spirit of cooperation that has marked the eGovernment Program since its inception. Representatives from across the Department collaborated to evaluate and select products that are flexible enough to meet the needs that expand beyond what an individual agency may require. Agency representatives closely examined product information and often engaged in intensive discussions to find the "right answer" for the enterprise.

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