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## New USDA Technology and eGovernment Advisory Council Appointed by Secretary Veneman

The USDA Technology and eGovernment Advisory Council had its kick-off meeting on June 9-10, 2004. The Advisory Council, chartered in October 2003, is the first of its kind in the Federal government and will advise Secretary Ann M. Veneman and Chief Information Officer (CIO) Scott Charbo in planning and developing strategies for technology and eGovernment Initiatives.

Secretary Veneman stated that “The input of the Advisory Council members will be important as we set priorities for our information technology initiatives and investments at USDA.” The Council members come from a variety of backgrounds related to USDA’s mission areas.

The Advisory Council has nine members with two-year terms, including: Carol Coren, Community Program Specialist, Food Innovation Center, Oregon State University, Portland, Ore.; Warren Hammerbeck, Agricultural Producer, and President, Reliance Enterprises, Greeley, Colo.; Kevin Gamble, Chief Technology Officer, American Distance Education Consortium, Cary, N.C.; Mark Johnson, Executive Director, North Dakota Association of Counties, Bismarck, N.D.; Sally Mancini, Program Director, End Hunger Connecticut! Inc., Hartford, Conn.; Jennie Meeker, Consultant, C&M Capitolink, LLC, Wash. D.C.; Umesh Narendra Sanjanwala, Director, Information Management, MS Department of Agriculture and Commerce, Jackson, Miss; Erasmo Trevino, District Director, USDA Farm Service Agency, Franklin, Texas.; Christopher Werner, Owner/Chief Executive Officer, eSummits, Inc., Long Beach, Calif. Secretary Veneman designated Jennie Meeker as the first chair of the Council.

The initial meeting convened on June 9-10, 2004, and members were briefed by various USDA representatives on the state of technology and eGovernment at USDA. Advisory Council members will produce an advisory report for Secretary Veneman and CIO Charbo by May 2005. The Advisory Council is chartered until October 2005.



Left to right: Terry Traynor, Ken Hipple, Kevin Gamble, Eddie Trevino, Christopher Werner, Jennie Meeker, Secretary Ann M. Veneman, Carol Coren, Warren Hammerbeck, CIO Scott Charbo, and Sally Mancini.

For additional information about the USDA Technology and eGovernment Advisory Council, please contact Sandy Facinoli at 202-720-2786 or [Sandy.facinoli2@usda.gov](mailto:Sandy.facinoli2@usda.gov).

## eAuthentication Employee Registration Expands

In July 2004, USDA’s eAuthentication service will expand to include all USDA employees. The centralization of eAuthentication across USDA will result in more secure and cost effective access to Web-based applications. In the future, eAuthentication users will benefit from single sign on applications across the government that are integrated with the eAuthentication Service – only one UserID and password to remember. With a single username and a single password, employees can currently access numerous Web-based resources across USDA, including AgLearn.

Obtaining an eAuthentication credential is a simple process for employees. Many meetings have been held across the Department to brief Agency representatives and leadership on this process. Agencies will share registration instructions with employees when they determine their roll out timelines. Each Agency can tailor the instructions to meet the needs of their employees. A job aid to assist employees in gathering the requisite information will be sent out by each Agency along with the instructions.

The registration process will require little to no training for employees. Once employees enter the requested data for their registration, their information will be compared against information from the National Finance Center payroll system. Centralized eAuthentication Help Desk personnel will assist those unable to register through the automated process (<10%).

The USDA eAuthentication Employee Registration pages were designed to meet the USDA Web Style Guide standards, as well as the Section 508 compliance. The process was approved by National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and General Services Administration (GSA) as compliant with Government-wide data security standards.

For more information on the eAuthentication Employee Registration, please contact the eGovernment Team.

## FSIS Launches New Web Site

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) launched its newly designed, customer-focused Web site on April 20, 2004. FSIS's redesigned Web site, <http://www.fsis.usda.gov>, makes finding information about food safety easier and faster. The new FSIS Web site is the first Agency Web site to conform to the USDA Web Style Guide standards.

The redesigned site emphasizes the Agency's priorities and provides Web pages that present content in a customer-friendly manner. "As a public health agency, it is our goal to empower consumers with knowledge as we continue to drive down the incidence of food-borne illness in America," said FSIS Acting Administrator Dr. Barbara Masters. "This Web site will give consumers immediate access to the information that will help them protect themselves and their families."

The Agency completed many steps including, but not limited to:

- Conducting an audience analysis;
- Developing a user-centric information architecture; and,
- Conducting usability testing and updating design based on usability recommendations.

The re-designed FSIS Web site has a new feature: "Ask Karen," the FSIS online customer representative. "Karen" can answer questions about safely storing, preparing, and handling meat, poultry, and egg products. "Karen" instantly responds to questions any time, any place from across the globe.

The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline and Education staff are making Karen "smarter" by building a database of questions and answers from the many inquiries received by the Hotline and from FSIS educational and technical materials.

For more information, please visit the FSIS Web site, <http://www.fsis.usda.gov>.

## Application Spotlight: FAS DAIRIES

The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) Dairy Accelerated Importer Retrieval and Information Exchange System (DAIRIES) is one of the 75 applications that have completed their integration with USDA's eAuthentication service. The DAIRIES application supports the operations of the FAS Dairy Import Licensing Program, which issues import licenses to administer the Tariff-Rate Quota (TRQ) system for U.S. imports of dairy products.

The DAIRIES Web-based application allows applicants to electronically submit entry forms that verify license qualifications

have been met, rank license preferences by commodity and country, surrender and request additional license amounts, and view and verify daily license usage to ensure that minimum entry qualifications are satisfied by year-end. Working throughout February with the USDA eAuthentication Service Integration Team, the FAS DAIRIES team completed the entire integration process from completing the Application Integration forms to designing the changes to the application and designing the integration plan.

## eFiling Reaches Record Levels

In May 2004, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) reported that electronic filing (eFiling) of taxes increased to almost 60 million users, or up by 15.4 percent compared to last year at the same time. The largest increase was in home computer use, which was up by 21.7 percent with over 14 million users. The eFiling system has the advantage of saving time on trips to the post office, and the system also verifies the math of tax forms. Individuals or companies that use the eFiling system can also submit both state and federal taxes at the same time. The IRS's Web site has detailed instructions on how to use the service.

eFiling is not limited to just individual tax payers; the service is also available for businesses and self-employed individuals. Companies that assist individuals in completing their tax forms can also submit those forms online for the individual. Over 41 million tax professionals filed electronically this year, an increase of 15.8 percent.

The IRS saw increased usage in other related electronic applications such as their "Where's my Refund" service, which hit a record high with over 19 million inquiries. The service can be used within 72 hours for online submissions and in three to four weeks for taxes submitted by mail. "Where's My Refund" is a convenient way to check refunds, and the link for the service can be found on the IRS.gov home page. Once a filer fills out the information on the "Where's My Refund," the service notifies the taxpayer whether the refund was received, the processing status, expected mailing date or direct-deposit date, or if the refund was returned to the IRS as undeliverable. The service will also notify users if there is a delay in their refund due to mathematical or other errors.

By early March, the IRS also saw an 11 percent increase in the number of tax payers (47 million) requesting direct deposit returns. The IRS expects these trends to continue as tax payers with extensions continue to make their submissions.

For more information on the IRS's eFiling system, please visit [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

**For more information on any of these topics, or for general comments or questions, contact the eGovernment Team at:**

- Phone: (202) 720-6144
- eMail: [egov@usda.gov](mailto:egov@usda.gov)
- Web: [www.egov.usda.gov](http://www.egov.usda.gov)