



**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
CHIEF FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT OFFICER REPORT
March 2026**

We provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues based on public policy, the best available science, and effective management.

We have a vision to provide economic opportunity through innovation, helping rural America to thrive; to promote agriculture production that better nourishes Americans while also helping feed others throughout the world; and to preserve our Nation's natural resources through conservation, restored forests, improved watersheds, and healthy private working lands.



Photo by Luis Sanchez

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When President Lincoln established the United States Department of Agriculture, he called it the "People's Department." At USDA we are working tirelessly to be a model department that serves all people of our great Nation. This video captures the ways USDA touches the lives of everyday Americans—today, tomorrow, and every day—as we take [steps toward a brighter future](#).

The Department's General Counsel provides program oversight for USDA's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) offices at the agency and mission area. These offices interpret records requests, seek clarification from requesters, make fee determinations, redact, and release records, perform referrals and consultations, prepare appeals, consider discretionary releases, contact business submitters, and assist the Office of General Counsel (OGC) with FOIA litigation. Collectively, these offices process tens of thousands of records requests annually.

USDA's FOIA program is led by the General Counsel's, Office of Information Affairs (OIA). The OIA provides day-to-day coordination and ensures statutory compliance with the FOIA. The OIA also processes FOIA requests, consultations, and appeals on behalf of all USDA staff offices except for the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). The OIA also handles the FOIA functions for the Research, Education and Economics (REE) and the Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs (TFAA) mission areas. The Farm Production and Conservation Service (FPAC), Food Nutrition and Conservation Services (FNCS), Food Safety (FS), Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP), Natural Resources and Environment (NRE), and Rural Development (RD) mission areas all continue to process independently but do coordinate with the OIA to ensure standardization in the areas of policy, management, training, and processing.

In Fiscal Year 2025, USDA received a total of 22,523 FOIA requests. Approximately 63% of these incoming FOIA requests were directed to the USDA's FPAC mission area. The OIA received 9%, the NRE mission area about 9%, MRP mission area received about 8%, and RD about 4%. The remaining agencies all collectively received 11% of the incoming requests. As for processing, USDA closed 21,982 initial requests. USDA also closed its ten oldest initial requests.

The following report provides a comprehensive review of the steps taken throughout the Department of Agriculture to improve its FOIA administration since publication of the last Chief FOIA Officer Report in March 2025. This report encompasses the efforts of the following mission areas and staff offices:

Mission Areas:

Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC)¹

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Risk Management Agency (RMA)

Food and Nutrition & Consumer Services (FNCS)

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)

Food Safety

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)

Marketing Regulatory Programs

Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)²

Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

¹ On May 11, 2017, USDA announced the standing up of a newly named Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area to have a customer focus and meet USDA constituents in the field.

² On September 7, 2017, USDA announced the realignment of several offices within the USDA. The Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) and several program areas from the Farm Service Agency (FSA) joined the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to help us better meet the needs of farmers, ranchers, and producers, while providing improved customer service and maximize efficiency.

Natural Resources and Environment (NRE)

Forest Service (FS)

Research, Education and Economics (REE)

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

Economic Research Service (ERS)

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Rural Development (RD)

Rural Business Service

Rural Utilities Service

Rural Housing Service

Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs (TFAA)³

Foreign Agricultural Service

Codex Alimentarius Commission

Staff Offices:

Departmental Administration (DA)

- *Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)*
- *Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)*
- *Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)*
- *Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Coordination (OHSEC)*
- *Office of Human Resource Management (OHRM)*
- *Office of Operations (OO)*
- *Office of Procurement & Property Management (OPPM)*
- *Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU)*
- *Office of Budget & Program Analysis (OBPA)*

Office for the Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights (OASCR)

Office of Hearing and Appeals

- *National Appeals Division (NAD)*
- *Office of the Administrative Law Judge (OALJ)*
- *Office of the Judicial Officer (OJO)*

Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO)

- *National Finance Center (NFC)*

Office of the General Counsel (OGC)

- *Office of Ethics (OE)*
- *Office of Information Affairs (OIA)*

³ In keeping with Congress' directive in the 2014 Farm Bill and to advance agricultural trade, the Department created an Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs (TFAA). While reviewing options for improving coordination on trade and international activities, USDA determined that the Codex Alimentarius program (U.S. Codex Office), currently housed in the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), will be moved to the newly created TFAA mission area. The U.S. Codex Office is an interagency partnership which engages stakeholders in the development of international governmental and non-governmental food standards. The focus of the Codex Office aligns better with the mission of TFAA.

Office of Inspector General (OIG)

Office of the Secretary (OSEC)

Section I: FOIA Leadership and Applying the Presumption of Openness

A. Leadership Support for FOIA

1. FOIA requires each agency to designate a Chief FOIA Officer who is a senior official at the Assistant Secretary or equivalent level. See 5 U.S.C. § 552(j)(1) (2018). Is your agency's Chief FOIA Officer at or above this level?

Yes. USDA's Chief FOIA Officer (CFO) is a senior official at least at the Assistant Secretary or equivalent level in accordance with 5 U.S.C. §552(j)(1).

2. Please provide the name and title of your agency's Chief FOIA Officer.

USDA's General Counsel, Tyler Clarkson also serves as USDA's Chief FOIA Officer.

3. What steps has your agency taken to incorporate FOIA into its core mission? For example, has your agency incorporated FOIA milestones into its strategic plan?

USDA has taken several steps to incorporate FOIA into its core mission and strategic operations. At the Department level, pursuant to [Secretary Memorandum SM 1078-015](#) (USDA Reorganization Plan), FOIA and related information management functions will be consolidated within the Office of General Counsel (OGC). This structural realignment centralizes FOIA policy, oversight, and coordination under a unified legal framework to promote consistency in statutory compliance, reduce duplication, strengthen internal controls, and enhance Department-wide accountability.

B. Presumption of Openness

4. DOJ's 2022 FOIA Guidelines provides that "agencies should confirm in response letters to FOIA requesters that they have considered the foreseeable harm standard when reviewing records and applying FOIA exemptions." Does your agency provide such confirmation in its response letters?

Yes. USDA confirms in its determinations that it has considered the foreseeable harm standard when reviewing records and applying FOIA exemptions.

5. In some circumstances, agencies may respond to a requester that it can neither confirm nor deny the existence of requested records if acknowledging the existence of records would harm an interest protected by a FOIA exemption. This is commonly referred to as a Glomar response. If your agency tracks Glomar responses, please provide:

- the number of times your agency issued a full or partial Glomar response during Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 (please separate full and partial Glomar responses if possible).
- the number of times a Glomar response was issued by exemption during FY 2025 (e.g., Exemption 7(C) – 20 times, Exemption 1 – 5 times).

This reporting cycle USDA invoked four full Glomar responses in conjunction with FOIA Exemptions 6 and/or 7(c). Glomar was invoked in part in conjunction with FOIA Exemption 6 in another three instances.

Section II: Ensuring Fair and Effective FOIA Administration

A. FOIA Training

1. The FOIA directs agency Chief FOIA Officers to ensure that FOIA training is offered to agency personnel. See 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(j)(2)(F). Please describe the efforts your agency has undertaken to ensure proper FOIA training is made available and used by agency personnel.

Across USDA FOIA programs, training continues to be a core performance requirement and priority. All performance plans for full-time Government Information Specialists include a training requirement. All components hold weekly or monthly meetings, some of which are devoted to training on FOIA procedural issues and exemption application. All components host either individualized or group FOIA training for its professionals. As an example, USDA's largest FOIA component, Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC), hosted more than 80 individualized training sessions for Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) state office FOIA processors and liaisons on FOIA intake issues like scoping, fee waivers, expedited processing, and exemption applications.

2. Did your FOIA professionals, or other personnel at your agency with FOIA responsibilities, attend substantive FOIA training during the reporting period, such as training provided by the Department of Justice?

Yes. USDA's FOIA professionals continued to participate in substantive FOIA training during the reporting period.

3. If yes, please provide a brief description of the type of training attended or conducted and the topics covered.

DOJ-OIP: USDA's FOIA professionals also attended the following training programs provided by the DOJ:

- Virtual Advanced Freedom of Information Act Training
- Virtual Exemptions 1 and 7 Training
- Virtual Exemptions 4 and 5 Training
- Virtual Privacy Considerations Training
- Virtual Administrative Appeals, FOIA Compliance, and Customer Service Training
- Virtual Annual and Quarterly FOIA Report Refresher Training
- Virtual Chief FOIA Officer Report Training
- Virtual FOIA Litigation Seminar
- Virtual Procedural Requirements and Fees Training
- Virtual Processing a Request from Start to Finish Workshop
- DOJ OIP Litigation Training and E-Discovery Tools Training

Other External Training Courses and Conferences: USDA's FOIA professionals also participated in the following external training courses and conferences:

- ASAP National Conference
- ASAP FOIA/Privacy Act Training Workshop
- FOIAXpress (OPEXUS) Collaboration Portal Training
- Everlaw Virtual Gov Forum
- Box Intelligence: Accelerating USDA Appeals and Legal Review
- AWS Database Training
- FPAC-BC Acquisitions Division: How to Discern Contracts
- American Society of Access Professionals – FOIA Court Case Updates
- Mastering Organization & Productivity – Microsoft OneNote Training

4. Please provide an estimate of the percentage of your FOIA professionals and staff with FOIA responsibilities who attended substantive FOIA training during this reporting period.

Approximately 87% of USDA's FOIA professionals participated in either one or more substantive FOIA training courses

5. OIP has directed agencies to “take steps to ensure that all of their FOIA professionals attend substantive FOIA training at least once throughout the year.” If your response to the previous question is that less than 80% of your FOIA professionals attended training, please explain your agency’s plan to ensure that all FOIA professionals receive or attend substantive FOIA training during the next reporting year.

Not applicable. More than 80% of USDA’s FOIA professionals participated in substantive FOIA training courses.

6. Describe any efforts your agency has undertaken to inform non-FOIA professionals of their obligations under FOIA. Please describe how often and in what formats your agency provides FOIA training or briefings to non-FOIA staff, and if senior leaders at your agency received a briefing on your agency’s FOIA resources, obligations and expectations during the FOIA process.

USDA agencies undertook extensive efforts to inform non-FOIA professionals of their obligations under FOIA through targeted training, briefings, and ongoing engagement. The Forest Service (FS) provided multiple sessions to Law Enforcement and Investigations personnel, Recreation and Lands staff, and other program areas covering FOIA and Privacy Act compliance, applicable exemptions, litigation trends, and business submitter processes, while regional offices incorporated FOIA content into new employee and records management training. The Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs (TFAA) conducted situational one-on-one training on FOIA responsibilities, and Research, Education and Economics (REE) delivered presentations emphasizing employees’ roles as records custodians. Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) provided formal training to Fair Trade Practices Program staff, and Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) trained regional offices, senior leadership, and operational units while offering guidance throughout the year. And finally, Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) delivered multiple FOIA and Privacy briefings to program offices, including senior leadership.

B. Outreach

7. As part of the standard request process, do your FOIA professionals proactively contact requesters concerning complex or voluminous requests to clarify or narrow the scope of the request so requesters can receive responses more quickly? Please describe any such outreach or dialogue and, if applicable, any specific examples.

Yes. USDA’s FOIA components frequently contact requesters to clarify complex requests and determine whether the scope can be narrowed. This helps ensure we provide the records of greatest interest in a timely manner to the requester. The nature of these communications depends on the complexity of the request—whether it is unmanageable as written or simply needs clarification to avoid producing an excessive volume of records. In many cases, after consulting with subject matter experts, we continue working with requesters to offer specific suggestions for refining their requests (*e.g.*, identifying appropriate custodians, providing more relevant search terms, adjusting timeframes, etc.) and to set realistic expectations for response times.

8. Outside of the standard request process or routine FOIA Liaison or FOIA Requester Service Center interactions, did your FOIA professionals engage in any outreach or dialogue with the requester community or open government groups regarding your administration of the FOIA? For example, did you proactively contact frequent requesters, host FOIA-related conference calls with open government groups, or provide FOIA training to members of the public? Please describe any such outreach or dialogue and, if applicable, any specific examples of how this dialogue has led to improvements in your agency’s FOIA administration.

USDA Components, including the Forest Service (FS), Rural Development (RD), and the Farm Production and Conservation – Business Center (FPAC-BC), routinely engage its requester community to explain agency organizational structures, emerging initiatives and programs, and proactive releases, amongst other topics.

9. The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 requires additional notification to requesters about the services provided by the agency's FOIA Public Liaison. Please provide an estimate of the number of times requesters sought assistance from your agency's FOIA Public Liaison during Fiscal Year 2025 (please provide a total number or an estimate of the number for the agency overall).

USDA received thirteen requests for assistance from our FOIA Public Liaisons.

C. Other Initiatives

10. Has your agency evaluated the allocation of agency personnel resources needed to respond to current and anticipated FOIA demands? If so, please describe what changes your agency has or will implement.

Historically, the FOIA program has operated in a decentralized structure. However, USDA is currently reorganizing the program to consolidate many FOIA components under a single program within the Office of the General Counsel. This reorganization will streamline USDA's FOIA process to meet the demand of increased FOIA requests year after year. In the interim, to maintain quality work product and stability during this transition, USDA plans to establish a new Blanket Purchase Agreement (BPA) to ensure consistent contract support.

11. How does your agency use data or processing metrics to ensure efficient management of your FOIA workload? For example, case management reports, staff processing statistics, etc. In addition, please specifically highlight any data analysis methods or technologies used.

All USDA FOIA Components utilize the enterprise wide FOIA tracking system to generate weekly, monthly, and quarterly reports that track incoming volume, aging cases (including those over 500 days), appeal closures, interim and final responses, and backlog reduction progress. These metrics inform quarterly backlog goals and have contributed to measurable improvements in triage and processing speed, including the completion of long-pending cases. These metrics also support data-driven decision-making, resource allocation, and backlog management across the Department's FOIA programs.

Section III: Proactive Disclosures

1. Please describe what steps your agency takes to identify, track, and post (a)(2) proactive disclosures.

Steps for identifying, tracking, and posting (a)(2) proactive disclosures vary across USDA components. Generally, program offices review records related to significant policy decisions and consult with public affairs and communications staff to determine whether the information should be proactively disclosed. Once identified, records are tracked through internal systems and workflows to ensure timely posting in accordance with FOIA requirements, allowing the public to access key policy information without submitting a FOIA request.

2. Does your agency post logs of its FOIA requests?

- **If so, what information is contained in the logs?**
- **Are they posted in CSV format? If not, what format are they posted in?**

Yes. Many USDA FOIA components post PDF versions of their request logs. They generally contain the FOIA tracking number associated with the request, the requester's name and organization if known, the date the request was received, and a brief description of the records sought.

- **Please provide a link to the page where any FOIA logs are posted. If applicable, please provide component links.**

Links to the available logs are below:

- [AMS FOIA Reading Room](#)
- [APHIS FOIA Logs](#)

- [FNS Electronic Reading Room](#)
- [FSIS FOIA Reading Room](#)

3. Provide examples of any material (with links) that your agency has proactively disclosed during the past reporting year, including records that have been requested and released three or more times in accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(2)(D).

Links to frequently requested items are in the chart below.

Component	Links
Farm Service Agency (FSA)	<p>The USDA Farm Service Agency is offering low-interest physical loss loans to eligible agricultural producers in New York and nearby counties to help recover from recent natural disasters, with funds available to repair or replace essential damaged farm property. Applications are open through July 25, 2026.</p> <p>https://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-events/news/12-04-2025/usda-announces-availability-low-interest-physical-loss-loans-new-york</p>
Farm Service Agency (FSA)	<p>USDA FSA highlighted how its Farm Storage Facility Loan Program supports multi-generation family farms by providing low-interest financing that improves efficiency, crop quality, and long-term sustainability.</p> <p>https://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-events/news/12-11-2025/farm-storage-facility-loan-program-helping-four-generations-farmers</p>
Risk Management Agency (RMA)	<p>USDA announced disaster assistance for producers impacted by recent natural disasters, including support for crops, livestock, and farm infrastructure.</p> <p>https://www.rma.usda.gov/news-events/news/2025/billings-montana/usda-offers-disaster-assistance-agricultural-producers</p>
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	<p>USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service launched a \$700 million Regenerative Pilot Program to help farmers reduce production costs by adopting regenerative practices that improve soil health, water quality, and long-term productivity. The program uses a single application process funded through Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program, with applications available through local NRCS Service Centers for FY2026.</p> <p>https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/regenerative-pilot-program/news/usda-launches-new-regenerative-pilot-program</p>
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	<p>USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service highlighted how conservation programs in Wisconsin helped a former NRCS volunteer grow a sustainable flower farming business by using Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program support to expand production and improve soil health.</p> <p>https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/state-offices/wisconsin/news/helping-hands-blooming-lands</p>
Rural Utilities Service (RUS)	<p>USDA Rural Development awarded a \$1.24 million grant and \$786,000 loan to the Village of Burnt Prairie through its Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Program to build a 75,000-gallon water storage tank, improving water quality and service for about 230 residents.</p> <p>https://www.rd.usda.gov/newsroom/success-stories/usda-rural-development-provides-funding-construct-new-water-tank-village-burnt-prairie</p>
Rural Utilities Service (RUS)	<p>USDA Rural Development held its 2025 National Lenders of the Year Awards Ceremony to recognize top lending partners supporting rural homeownership through the Single-Family Housing Guaranteed Loan Program, highlighting efforts to expand affordable housing and strengthen rural communities nationwide.</p> <p>https://www.rd.usda.gov/newsroom/news-release/usda-holds-national-lenders-year-award-ceremony</p>

Rural Utilities Service (RUS)	<p>USDA Rural Development highlighted how a \$200,930 Distance Learning and Telemedicine grant helped Avera Health expand virtual healthcare services in South Dakota, improving access to care and strengthening rural healthcare infrastructure.</p> <p>https://www.rd.usda.gov/newsroom/success-stories/rural-doesnt-mean-less</p>
Rural Development (RD)	<p>USDA Rural Development hosted live training for lenders on the Single-Family Housing Guaranteed Loan Program (SFHGLP), covering the latest policy updates, eligibility criteria, technical guidance, and loan origination FAQs to help lenders better navigate program requirements and reduce processing delays.</p> <p>https://youtu.be/VV5DCEyOkzk?si=08HJzXpOETwhaSSn</p>
Rural Business Service (RBS)	<p>Brooke L. Rollins, USDA Secretary, announced \$6 million in grants to help processors expand capacity for invasive blue catfish in Chesapeake Bay, plus a \$2 million pilot to purchase catfish for food banks. Grants are due October 6, 2025.</p> <p>https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/08/06/secretary-rollins-targets-invasive-species-announces-next-steps-clear-chesapeake-harmful-catfish</p>
Rural Development (RD)	<p>USDA Rural Development launched dashboards to increase transparency of its programs, tracking investments in housing, infrastructure, businesses, and community development across rural U.S. areas. Metrics include financing amounts and outreach to communities in need, with data from 2012 to present, filterable by state and fiscal year.</p> <p>https://www.rd.usda.gov/rural-data-gateway/rural-investments</p>
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)	<p>The USDA APHIS webinar focuses on the emerging threat of New World Screwworm, a parasitic fly that can seriously harm livestock. It explains the pest’s biology and lifecycle, surveillance efforts to detect outbreaks, and prevention strategies. APHIS emphasizes vigilance, timely reporting, and diagnostic measures, providing guidance to veterinarians and animal health officials to protect livestock and support rural agriculture.</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxPTfFPxllk</p>
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)	<p>The APHIS FOIA Reading Room provides public access to USDA documents, such as policy statements, staff manuals, enforcement summaries, and FOIA logs without needing a FOIA request. This resource makes frequently requested information easily accessible and supports transparency, accountability, and public understanding of USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service programs and operations.</p> <p>https://www.aphis.usda.gov/freedom-information-act/foia-reading-room?utm_source</p>
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)	<p>On December 14, 2025, USDA APHIS detected highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1, clade 2.3.4.4b D1.1) in a Wisconsin dairy herd, confirmed as a new spillover from wildlife by the National Veterinary Services Laboratory. This case is separate from the 2023 Texas Panhandle outbreak, and no other dairy herds are affected. USDA emphasizes there is no risk to public health or the milk supply due to pasteurization and diversion measures, while urging enhanced biosecurity and prompt reporting to prevent spread.</p> <p>https://www.aphis.usda.gov/news/agency-announcements/update-genetic-sequencing-results-wisconsin-dairy-herd-detection-highly</p>
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)	<p>USDA APHIS clarified common misconceptions about African Swine Fever (ASF), a highly contagious viral disease that affects pigs but does not threaten human health. There is no cure or vaccine, and the virus can survive in pork products, on objects, and even on clothing, making strict biosecurity and prevention measures essential. ASF spreads through infected pigs, pork, contaminated objects, and ticks, and an outbreak in the U.S. could have serious impacts on farmers, the food supply, and the economy.</p> <p>Myth Busters: The Facts About How African Swine Fever (ASF) Spreads USDA</p>
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)	<p>USDA opened a new sterile fly dispersal facility in Tampico, Mexico to combat the New World Screwworm through aerial release of sterile flies. The facility enhances USDA’s efforts to contain the pest near the U.S. border and supports ongoing sterile insect programs and international collaboration to protect livestock and agriculture.</p>

	<p>https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/11/13/usda-announces-opening-sterile-fly-dispersal-facility-tampico-mexico</p>
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)	<p>The USDA APHIS Animal Care program ensures humane treatment of regulated animals nationwide by enforcing the Animal Welfare Act and Horse Protection Act through inspections, licensing, and compliance oversight. Its success is reflected in improved animal welfare standards, higher compliance rates among regulated facilities, and effective emergency guidance that protects animals during crises. Inspection records and compliance information are publicly available through the Animal Care Public Search Tool, increasing transparency and accountability while fostering trust with the public and animal care communities.</p> <p>https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal-care</p>
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)	<p>The APHIS National Animal Disease Preparedness and Response Program (NADPRP) strengthens U.S. animal agriculture by coordinating federal, state, and industry partners. Through joint planning, training, and rapid response, the program improves prevention, detection, and recovery from foreign animal disease outbreaks, protecting livestock and the nation’s food supply.</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-17KH6STpQ</p>
Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)	<p>On July 15, 2025, USDA Secretary Department of Agriculture, Brooke L. Rollins, announced the termination of the Regional Food Business Centers (RFBC) program, a pandemic-era initiative funded by one-time congressional support. USDA will honor existing and pending commitments for over 450 grants to farmers and food businesses, but the program will not continue, and remaining funds will be redirected to support American agriculture. Of the 12 RFBCs, only eight issued Business Builder grants; centers without commitments will close, while those with active subawards may continue managing them through May 2026.</p> <p>https://www.ams.usda.gov/press-release/termination-regional-food-business-centers-programs</p>
Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)	<p>USDA is delaying enforcement of the requirement that hemp be tested only by Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)-registered laboratories, allowing non-DEA labs to operate through December 31, 2026. This extends a previous delay through 2025, following feedback from state and tribal governments and testing facilities. The agency says the extension ensures adequate testing capacity for the growing season while labs must still meet all other regulatory requirements.</p> <p>https://www.ams.usda.gov/content/usda-extends-enforcement-deadline-hemp-be-tested-dea-registered-laboratories-2</p>
Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)	<p>On December 11, FSIS shared updates on workforce vision, food safety strategies, lab changes, labeling, and small processor fees. Earlier webinars guided industry and state officials on the new “Product of USA” labeling standard, effective January 1, 2026. Recordings, transcripts, and updated guidance are available on the FSIS website, with questions accepted via askFSIS.</p> <p>Constituent Update - December 19, 2025, Food Safety and Inspection Service</p>
Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)	<p>The FSIS has released a new video explaining the rules for voluntary “Product of USA” labeling on meat, poultry, and egg products. The video covers eligibility, required documentation, and compliance standards, helping producers and processors correctly label products derived entirely from animals born, raised, slaughtered, and processed in the U.S. It serves as a key educational resource for industry and stakeholders to implement the updated labeling requirements effectively.</p> <p>https://youtu.be/7rTHDTHOYUw?si=rQbvCc-OLLG1rwOG</p>
Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)	<p>The FSIS June 6, 2025, Constituent Update highlights the FY 2024 Foodborne Illness Outbreak Report, updates on residue testing methods, and the National Residue Program Quarterly Report. It also invites public comments on certain collections and provides notices on policy updates, student loan repayment, and export requirements. The update serves as an important resource for stakeholders on FSIS programs and regulatory changes.</p> <p>Constituent Update - June 6, 2025, Food Safety and Inspection Service</p>

<p>Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)</p>	<p>The FSIS publishes official enforcement actions against establishments violating the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act. The list is organized by publication date and establishment and includes notifications of each action, as well as documentation of restarts once an establishment demonstrates compliance.</p> <p>https://www.fsis.usda.gov/inspection/regulatory-enforcement/humane-handling-enforcement</p>
<p>Forest Service (FS)</p>	<p>USDA Secretary of agriculture, Brooke L. Rollins, has announced a major investment by the USDA Forest Service to strengthen wildfire preparedness in vulnerable communities. Through the Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program, \$200 million will be directed to 58 projects aimed at reducing wildfire risks. The funding, mandated by Congress, supports local planning efforts and initiatives that protect homes, businesses, and critical infrastructure from the increasing threat of wildfires.</p> <p>https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/09/23/usda-invests-58-community-projects-reduce-wildfire-risk</p>
<p>Forest Service (FS)</p>	<p>The USDA Forest Service announced an investment of over \$23 million to support 35 grant recipients across the country. The funding will enable 65 projects to remove and transport an estimated 1.1 million tons of low-value trees and woody debris. These grants aim to reduce wildfire risk by turning hazardous fuels into productive resources, enhancing safety and forest health nationwide.</p> <p>https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/newsroom/releases/usda-forest-service-invests-more-23m-grants-boost-timber-production</p>
<p>Forest Service (FS)</p>	<p>The USDA Forest Service and U.S. Department of the Interior are expanding mental health support for federal wildland firefighters and dispatchers, giving them access to licensed providers through a Congressionally mandated program tailored to the unique stresses of emergency response.</p> <p>https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/newsroom/releases/usda-forest-service-interior-expand-mental-health-support-federal</p>
<p>Forest Service (FS)</p>	<p>The USDA Forest Service’s George Washington and Jefferson National Forest delivered a 32-foot red spruce to Washington, D.C., for the holiday season. Selected on November 15 by the James River and Warm Springs Ranger District from Highland County, Virginia, the tree was transported to the White House in collaboration with the National Park Service.</p> <p>https://www.fs.usda.gov/r08/qwj/newsroom/releases/forest-service-provides-2025-national-christmas-tree</p>
<p>Forest Service (FS)</p>	<p>The USDA Forest Service’s Sierra and Sequoia National Forests released a finding of no significant impact and a final decision notice for a prescribed fire project. The initiative aims to reduce wildfire risk, protect nearby communities, and restore forest health through carefully managed burns.</p> <p>https://www.fs.usda.gov/r05/sierra/newsroom/releases/sequoia-and-sierra-national-forests-release-decision-prescribed-fire</p>
<p>Forest Service (FS)</p>	<p>The USDA Forest Service FOIA Reading Room provides public access to frequently requested or high-interest records, promoting transparency by allowing users to view information without submitting a FOIA request. The Reading Room is updated regularly as new records become available.</p> <p>FOIA Reading Room US Forest Service</p>
<p>Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)/Codex</p>	<p>The Codex Alimentarius Commission met November 10–14, 2025 to adopt food safety and quality standards. The Commission works to protect consumer health and promote fair practices in the food trade and is a joint initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The U.S. participates through the U.S. Codex Office and agencies including the Foreign Agricultural Service, which helps represent U.S. agricultural interests and coordinate U.S. positions in Codex standards-setting</p>

	<p>https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2025/11/10/default-calendar/48th-session-of-the-fao-who-codex-alimentarius-commission-adopts-new-standards</p>
Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)	<p>USDA Foreign Agricultural Service’s Food for Progress Program helps developing countries strengthen agriculture by selling U.S. commodities locally to fund development projects. The program aims to improve agricultural productivity and expand trade, and for FY 2025, FAS planned to award five to seven new agreements, with priority countries including Colombia, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, and Vietnam.</p> <p>https://www.fas.usda.gov/newsroom/usda-identifies-2025-food-progress-priority-countries?utm_source</p>
Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)	<p>USDA Foreign Agricultural Service announced the availability of \$285 million in funding for America First Trade Promotion Program awards on November 20, 2025. Details are outlined in the FY 2026 Notice of Funding Opportunity published on Grants.gov.</p> <p>https://www.fas.usda.gov/newsroom/stakeholder-notice-notice-funding-opportunity-america-first-trade-promotion-program</p>
Agriculture Research Service (ARS)	<p>USDA Agricultural Research Service is using artificial intelligence (AI) to tackle major challenges facing staple crops, focusing on oat quantitative genetics. The program aims to develop high-yielding oat varieties with superior grain quality and stable disease resistance.</p> <p>Using AI to Increase Yield and Disease Resistance in Oats: USDA ARS</p>
Agriculture Research Service (ARS)	<p>The USDA Agricultural Research Service’s Science in Your Shopping Cart YouTube videos explain how agricultural science affects the foods people buy daily. The videos highlight research that improves food quality, safety, nutrition, and affordability, helping consumers understand how USDA science supports informed and healthy food choices.</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqtB1RyWB8GeMspqhkRsopE-xCHWmh3Ok</p>
Agriculture Research Service (ARS)	<p>USDA Agricultural Research Service developed an in-field apple sorting machine that improves picking efficiency by scanning and grading apples during harvest. A related podcast highlights this innovation as a modern, 21st-century solution for apple harvesting.</p> <p>Season 2: Apples: Get Crunchin... - Science in Your Shopping Cart - Apple Podcasts</p>
National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)	<p>Scientists supported by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture identified the genetic region controlling thorn development in blackberry plants. This discovery enables rapid DNA tests to predict thorn lessness in seedlings well before planting, helping breeders save time and resources while improving blackberry varieties for growers and consumers.</p> <p>Search - Content National Institute of Food and Agriculture</p>
National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)	<p>USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture is updating the name of its competitive funding announcement documents from Request for Applications (RFA) to Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). This change aligns NIFA’s terminology with federal-wide grant language and practices and affects only the document name, not the application process or program requirements.</p> <p>https://www.nifa.usda.gov/about-nifa/announcements/new-name-same-opportunity-rfa-now-nofo</p>
Economic Research Service (ERS)	<p>The USDA Economic Research Service is conducting research and analyzing data on nutrition security to understand how food access, affordability, diet quality, and healthy eating influence overall food security. ERS provides resources and insights on food assistance programs, diet quality, and nutrition education to help policymakers, communities, and stakeholders make informed decisions that support healthier, more equitable food systems.</p> <p>Nutrition Security Research and Resources Economic Research Service</p>

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)	<p>The USDA Food and Nutrition Service is updating the SNAP program by removing unhealthy items like soda and candy to help reduce obesity, diabetes, and tooth decay. FNS aids through six new state food choice waivers, which update SNAP rules and amend the statutory definition of foods eligible for purchase under the program starting in 2026.</p> <p>During the Great American Farmers Market, Secretary Rollins Removes Unhealthy Food from SNAP Food and Nutrition Service</p>
Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)	<p>U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Food and Drug Administration announced a joint effort to address the health risks associated with ultra-processed foods. The agencies issued a Request for Information (RFI) to help develop a consistent federal definition, noting that most packaged foods in the U.S. fall into this category. Establishing a clear definition is intended to improve transparency and better inform research and policy aimed at reducing diet-related chronic disease.</p> <p>HHS, FDA and USDA Address the Health Risks of Ultra-Processed Foods Food and Nutrition Service</p>
Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)	<p>USDA Food and Nutrition Service issued a directive urging state agencies to improve the processing of SNAP program applications and recertifications. The guidance warns that unacceptable delays and failure to meet federal timeframes will trigger accountability measures, including escalation steps, corrective action plans, and increased federal oversight to ensure SNAP operates efficiently and with integrity for eligible households and taxpayers.</p> <p>USDA Demands State Accountability in SNAP Food and Nutrition Service</p>
Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)	<p>Through the USDA Food and Nutrition Service SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program, participants receive job-readiness training, paid work experience, and post-incarceration career support. With help from SNAP E&T providers, individuals build résumés, improve interview and computer skills, and often secure employment within a month supporting long-term economic stability.</p> <p>https://www.fns.usda.gov/videos-inspiring-hope-through-fns-programs#:~:text=Read%20more%20Employment%20and%20Training,%2D%20Yolanda's%20Story</p>
Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)	<p>The USDA Food and Nutrition Service maintained a list of frequently requested FOIA records that had already been released and were likely to be requested again. The list included topics such as SNAP ABAWD waivers, retailer data, income verification contracts, and Dietary Guidelines nominations, and was updated periodically, with the most recent update on August 29, 2025.</p> <p>FOIA Popular Requests Food and Nutrition Service</p>

4. Please provide a link where your agency routinely posts its frequently requested records.

Component	Links to Frequently Requested Records
APHIS	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/freedom-information-act/frequently-requested-foia-records
FNS	https://www.fns.usda.gov/foia/popular-requests
FSA	https://www.fsa.usda.gov/tools/informational/freedom-information-act-foia/electronic-reading-room/frequently-requested
FSIS	https://www.fsis.usda.gov/about-fsis/freedom-information-act-foia/frequently-requested-records
FS	https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/foia/reading-room
RD	https://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/freedom-information-act-foia/foia-reading-room

5. Beyond posting new material, is your agency taking steps to make the posted information more useful to the public, especially to the community of individuals who regularly access your agency's

website? If yes, please provide examples of such improvements, such as steps taken to post information in open and machine-readable formats. If your agency is not taking steps to make posted information more useful, please explain why.

Yes. USDA is actively working to make posted information more useful and accessible to the public. The Department continuously updates its websites, data tools, and publications, ensuring that information is current and searchable. Efforts include providing large datasets through secure file-sharing platforms, maintaining machine-readable formats, improving website search functions, and remediating older documents to enhance accessibility and Section 508 compliance. USDA also offers interactive tools, such as data viewers and gateways, that allow users to search, download, and analyze detailed information on programs, research, and investments in rural areas, facilitating ease of use for a wide range of audiences. These initiatives demonstrate a department-wide commitment to making information more accessible, actionable, and responsive to the needs of the public.

6. Does your proactive disclosure process or system involve any collaboration with agency staff outside the FOIA office, such as IT or data personnel? If so, describe this interaction.

Yes. Managing online postings still necessitates collaboration among program offices, Government Information Specialists, USDA's IT service provider, Section 508 Coordinators, the Office of Communications, and, in certain cases, the Office of Congressional Relations.

Section IV: Steps Taken to Make Better Use of Technology

1. Has your agency reviewed its FOIA-related technological capabilities to identify resources needed to respond to current and anticipated FOIA demands? Check Last Year for all

Yes. USDA has assessed its FOIA-related technology to determine the resources required to address both current and anticipated FOIA requests.

2. Please briefly describe any new types of technology your agency uses to support your FOIA program.

The Office of Information Affairs (OIA) continues its efforts to board USDA components into its electronic records management system, AgRecords. This system will integrate with existing USDA systems through application programming interfaces (APIs). The system will operate on top of current platforms, including Email, Shared Drives, SharePoint, Office 365 tools such as Microsoft Teams and OneDrive, as well as legacy files, databases, cases, and forms.

During this reporting cycle, the OGC eDiscovery program was realigned under the OIA. This program provided services to USDA's FOIA professionals utilizing in-house software solutions operated by the Office of the Chief Information Officer and the program's contract eDiscovery team. Several components realized significant decreases in processing times for voluminous requests that were once manually processed.

3. Does your agency currently use any technology to automate request intake, customer service, or record processing? For example, does your agency use artificial intelligence or other tools to conduct research or make redactions? If so, please describe and, if possible, estimate how much time and financial resources are saved since implementing the technology.

Yes. As noted above, USDA is undertaking two initiatives to support record processing. Comprehensive assessments will be conducted in the next reporting cycle to evaluate cost savings.

4. OIP issued guidance in 2017 encouraging agencies to regularly review their FOIA websites to ensure that they contain essential resources and are informative and user-friendly. Has your agency reviewed its FOIA website(s) during the reporting period to ensure it addresses the elements noted in the guidance?

USDA FOIA components are encouraged to regularly review and update their FOIA landing pages to ensure accurate contact information, accessible links, current logs, and availability of key resources,

including machine-readable formats where possible. Several components also reported working with IT staff to enhance FOIA webpages by improving search functionality and naming conventions to help users more easily locate and filter records.

5. Did all four of your agency's quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2025 appear on FOIA.gov?

Yes. All four quarterly reports for Fiscal Year 2025 appear on USDA's website and FOIA.gov.

6. If your agency did not successfully post all quarterly reports on FOIA.gov, please explain why and provide your agency's plan for ensuring that such reporting is successful in Fiscal Year 2026.

Not applicable. All four quarterly reports were posted.

7. The FOIA Improvement Act of 2016 requires all agencies to post the raw statistical data used to compile their Annual FOIA Reports. Please provide the link to this posting for your agency's Fiscal Year 2024 Annual FOIA Report and, if available, for your agency's Fiscal Year 2025 Annual FOIA Report.

Please see <https://www.usda.gov/ogc/office-information-affairs/foia-division>.

8. In February 2019, DOJ and OMB issued joint Guidance establishing interoperability standards to receive requests from the National FOIA Portal on FOIA.gov. Are all components of your agency in compliance with the guidance?

All USDA components are interoperable.

Section V: Steps Taken to Remove Barriers to Access, Improve Timeliness in Responding to Requests, and Reduce Backlogs

A. Remove Barriers to Access

1. Has your agency established alternative means of access for any categories of first-party requested records, outside of the typical FOIA or Privacy Act process?

Yes. USDA established alternative means of access to first-party requested records outside of the FOIA process.

2. If yes, please provide examples. If not, please indicate why not. Please also indicate if you do not know.

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) continues to provide first-party requesters with access to inspection data, compliance verification records, and monitoring information related to the slaughter, processing, import, and export of meat and poultry products. FSIS also grants access to its databases for industry users seeking information about regulated establishments, enabling requesters to obtain information outside of the FOIA process in a timely manner.

The Forest Service (FS) continues to route first-party requests for employment records, including eOPFs, performance appraisals, and training certificates, to the Human Resources Management Customer Help Desk. This referral process allows FS to close pending FOIA requests while providing employees with direct access to their records.

The Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) continues to provide comprehensive access to Attaché and foreign market reports through its public website <https://fas.usda.gov/>, allowing first-party requesters to obtain relevant information without submitting a FOIA request.

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) continues to process first-party requests under the Privacy Act, though it does not maintain additional alternative access mechanisms due to the limited volume of requests received.

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) continues to collaborate with program offices, when applicable, to provide requested records directly to first-party requesters outside of the FOIA process.

Rural Development (RD) continues to redirect first-party mortgage-related requests to the Agency's Servicing Office. Requesters now have a direct point of contact to submit inquiries concerning loan payoffs, payment history, defaults, foreclosure, or other mortgage-related issues. This approach allows RD to prioritize processing and immediately close these requests, contributing to reductions in backlog inventory.

3. Please describe any other steps your agency has taken to remove barriers to accessing government information.

The Office of Information Affairs (OIA) continues to encourage USDA's FOIA professionals to identify record categories that are readily accessible for private use without filing a FOIA or Privacy Act request.

B. Timeliness

4. For Fiscal Year 2025, what was the average number of days your agency reported for adjudicating requests for expedited processing? Please see Section VIII.A. of your agency's Fiscal Year 2025 Annual FOIA Report.

The average number of days to adjudicate requests for expedited processing is 15.76 days.

5. If your agency's average number of days to adjudicate requests for expedited processing was more than ten calendar days, according to Section VIII.A. of your agency's Fiscal Year 2025 Annual FOIA Report, please describe the steps your agency will take to ensure that requests for expedited processing are adjudicated within ten calendar days or less.

Our FOIAXpress program manager created an auto-generated reminder for professionals to adjudicate any pending requests for expedited processing. The reminder highlights those overdue requests in a professional's queue awaiting adjudication.

6. Does your agency utilize a separate track for simple requests?

Yes. USDA utilizes a separate track for simple requests.

7. If your agency uses a separate track for simple requests, according to Annual FOIA Report section VII.A, was the agency overall average number of days to process simple requests twenty working days or fewer in Fiscal Year 2025?

USDA's overall average number of days to process simple requests was not at or below the 20-working day statutory timeframe.

8. If not, did the simple track average processing time decrease compared to the previous Fiscal Year?

The simple track average processing time increased. In FY24, USDA averaged 21 days. In FY25, the average processing time increased to 26.15 days.

9. Please provide the percentage of requests processed by your agency in Fiscal Year 2025 that were placed on your simple track. Please use the following calculation based on the data from your Annual FOIA Report: (processed simple requests from Section VII.C.1) divided by (requests processed from Section V.A.) x 100.

USDA placed 90.71% of its received requests in the simple track.

10. If your agency does not track simple requests separately, is the average number of days to process all non-expedited requests twenty working days or fewer?

Not Applicable. USDA tracks simple requests separately.

A. Backlogs

Backlogged Requests

11. If your agency had a backlog of requests at the close of Fiscal Year 2025, according to Annual FOIA Report Section XII.D.2, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2024?

USDA’s backlog increased. See below.

USDA OVERALL

Number of Backlogged Requests as of End of the Fiscal Year from Previous Annual Report	Number of Backlogged Requests as of End of the Fiscal Year from Current Annual Report
2270	3222

12. If not, according to Annual FOIA Report Section XII.D.1, did your agency process more requests during Fiscal Year 2025 than it did during Fiscal Year 2024?

Yes. USDA processed 21,113 requests in FY24 and 21,982 requests in FY25.

13. If your agency’s request backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2025, please explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to reduce its backlog. When doing so, please also indicate if any of the following were contributing factors:

- An increase in the number of incoming requests
- A loss of staff
- An increase in the complexity of the requests received (if possible, please provide examples or briefly describe the types of complex requests contributing to your backlog increase)
- Litigation
- Any other reasons – please briefly describe or provide examples when possible

In Fiscal Year 2025, USDA experienced an increase in incoming requests. Many of these requests sought access to large volumes of electronic data, including emails. The majority required multiple electronic and manual searches, which often produced records needing deduplication, business submitter reviews, and coordination with other federal agencies.

Additionally, several USDA FOIA offices faced significant staffing losses due to voluntary resignations. Combined with a federal hiring freeze, this required USDA FOIA offices to manage increased workloads with fewer resources.

FY 2025 also saw a rise in litigation, with lawsuits filed against the agency increasing by compared to FY 2024. Litigation often pulls experienced FOIA analysts away from their regular processing queues, further slowing the overall rate at which USDA can respond to requests.

14. If you had a request backlog, please report the percentage of requests that make up the backlog out of the total number of requests received by your agency in Fiscal Year 2025. Please use the following calculation based on data from your Annual FOIA Report: (backlogged requests from Section XII.A) divided by (requests received from Section V.A) x 100. This number can be greater than 100%. If your agency has no request backlog, please answer with “N/A.”

A total of 14.31% requests make up the backlog.

Backlogged Appeals

15. If your agency had a backlog of appeals at the close of Fiscal Year 2025, according to Section XII.E.2 of the Annual FOIA Report, did that backlog decrease as compared with the backlog reported at the end of Fiscal Year 2024?

No. See below.

USDA OVERALL

Number of Backlogged Appeals as of End of the Fiscal Year from Previous Annual Report	Number of Backlogged Appeals as of End of the Fiscal Year from Current Annual Report
148	148

16. If not, according to section XII.E.1 of the Annual FOIA Report, did your agency process more appeals during Fiscal Year 2025 than it did during Fiscal Year 2024?

No. USDA processed 132 appeals in FY24 and 110 in FY25.

17. If your agency’s appeal backlog increased during Fiscal Year 2025, please explain why and describe the causes that contributed to your agency not being able to reduce its backlog. When doing so, please also indicate if any of the following were contributing factors:

- An increase in the number of incoming appeals
- A loss of staff
- An increase in the complexity of the requests received (if possible, please provide examples or briefly describe the types of complex requests contributing to your backlog increase)
- Litigation
- Any other reasons – please briefly describe or provide examples when possible

Not applicable. USDA’s appeal backlog remained at 148.

18. If you had an appeal backlog, please report the percentage of appeals that make up the backlog out of the total number of appeals received by your agency in Fiscal Year 2025. Please use the following calculation based on data from your Annual FOIA Report: (backlogged appeals from Section XII.A) divided by (appeals received from Section VI.A) x 100. This number can be greater than 100%. If your agency did not receive any appeals in Fiscal Year 2025 and/or has no appeal backlog, please answer with "N/A."

A total of 134.55% appeals make up the backlog.

D. Backlog Reduction Plans

19. In the 2025 guidelines for Chief FOIA Officer Reports, any agency with a backlog of over 1000 requests in Fiscal Year 2024 were asked to provide a plan for achieving backlog reduction in the year ahead. Did your agency implement a backlog reduction plan last year? If so, describe your agency’s efforts in implementing this plan and note if your agency was able to achieve backlog reduction in Fiscal Year 2025?

Yes. USDA implemented a backlog reduction plan. While USDA did not meet every goal, it was able to increase its initial closures by 5% despite an approximate 20% reduction in staffing. The OIA will continue

to require each FOIA component to set quarterly backlog goals until the FOIA centralization effort is complete and encourage usage of the tools available in the OIA's eDiscovery program.

20. If your agency had a backlog of more than 1,000 requests in Fiscal Year 2025, please explain your agency's plan to reduce this backlog during Fiscal Year 2026.

In FY26, USDA will focus on (1) reallocating resources and personnel; (2) enhancing communication with requesters; (3) better usage of the available technology; and (4) training for professionals on scoping high-volume requests.

E. Reducing the Age of Requests, Appeals, and Consultations

Ten Oldest Requests

21. In Fiscal Year 2025, did your agency close the ten oldest pending perfected requests that were reported in Section VII.E. of your Fiscal Year 2024 Annual FOIA Report?

Yes. USDA closed its ten oldest pending perfected requests.

22. If no, please provide the number of these requests your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section VII.E of your Fiscal Year 2025 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest requests to close, please indicate that.

Not Applicable. USDA was able to close its ten oldest pending perfected requests.

23. Beyond working on the ten oldest requests, please describe any steps your agency took to reduce the overall age of your pending requests.

USDA's FOIA professionals worked with requesters to better scope their requests and in turn that reduced the number of high-volume requests. Those requests likely to be high volume even after scoping, were processed utilizing the OIA's eDiscovery contract team.

Ten Oldest Appeals

24. In Fiscal Year 2025, did your agency close the ten oldest appeals that were reported pending in Section VI.C.5 of your Fiscal Year 2024 Annual FOIA Report?

No. USDA did not close its ten oldest appeals.

25. If no, please provide the number of these appeals your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section VII.C.(5) of your Fiscal Year 2024 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten total oldest appeals to close, please indicate that.

USDA was able to close 7 of its 10 oldest appeals.

26. Beyond working on the ten oldest appeals, please describe any steps your agency took to reduce the overall age of your pending appeals.

Per USDA FOIA regulations, any appeal with an adverse determination is required to undergo a legal sufficiency review by USDA's General Law and Research Division (GLRD). The attorney team at GLRD prioritized its legal sufficiency reviews for those appeals on the "ten oldest" list.

Ten Oldest Consultations

27. In Fiscal Year 2025, did your agency close the ten oldest consultations that were reported pending in Section XII.C. of your Fiscal Year 2024 Annual FOIA Report?

USDA did not close its ten oldest consultations.

28. If not, please provide the number of these consultations your agency was able to close by the end of the fiscal year, as listed in Section XII.C. of your Fiscal Year 2024 Annual FOIA Report. If you had less than ten of the total consultations to close, please indicate that.

USDA closed 7 of its 10 oldest consultations.

Additional Information Regarding Ten Oldest

29. If your agency did not close its ten oldest pending requests, appeals, or consultations, please explain why and provide a plan describing how your agency intends to close those “ten oldest” requests, appeals, and consultations during Fiscal Year 2026.

The OIA sent recurring reminders to FOIA components with items on any of the “ten oldest” lists and emphasized the importance of prioritizing these requests. Progress will continue to be monitored by the OIA through quarterly goals reports and tiger team efforts.

F. Additional Information about FOIA Processing

30. Were there any requests at your agency the subject of FOIA litigation during the reporting period? If so, please describe the impact on your agency’s overall FOIA request processing and backlog. If possible, please indicate:

- **The number and nature of requests subject to litigation**
- **Common causes leading to litigation**
- **Any other information to illustrate the impact of litigation on your overall FOIA administration.**

During this reporting cycle, USDA received a total of 26 FOIA lawsuits. The bulk of the suits come from non-profits alleging either constructive denial or improper application of FOIA Exemptions 4 and/or 5. Many of these suits implicate one or more FOIA components, involve the review of thousands of potentially responsive records, require external consultations, and/or require engagement with business submitters pursuant to EO 12600. No USDA FOIA component has personnel devoted exclusively to managing and resolving FOIA lawsuits. Typically, FOIA professionals will be pulled from other matters to address production schedules which in turn diminishes their ability to timely process initial requests and administrative appeals.