



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Office of the
General
Counsel

Washington,
D.C.
20250-1400

April 26th, 2022

TO: ALL OGC

FROM: Janie S. Hipp
General Counsel

SUBJECT: Message on Records Management

Dear OGC Colleagues:

I would like to highlight the importance of the Records Management Program. Records management is the planning, organizing, directing, and other managerial activities related to the creation, maintenance and use, and disposition of records. An effective records management program ensures the preservation of and access to permanently valuable records of the Federal Government. A well-functioning records management program also contributes to proper and adequate documentation of our mission and increases efficiency of agency operations and decision-making. When records are properly managed, litigation risks are reduced, and USDA can respond to emergency situations and produce records for Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests in a timely fashion while maintaining normal government operations. In June 2019, NARA and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued a new government-wide policy memorandum, *Transition to Electronic Records* ([M-19-21](#)). This memorandum established new goals for electronic recordkeeping to support government-wide efforts to transition to a fully electronic Government.

To comply with the transition to electronic recordkeeping, by December 31, 2022, USDA will need to:

1. Re-evaluate and convert analog business processes to electronic form to reduce the burden on citizens that requires them to conduct business in person or by mail, rather than online.
2. Send permanent paper records to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) to make the valuable data in our records accessible to the public, while closing our agency records storage centers.

A recent program assessment uncovered several deficiencies in USDA records management programs, ranging from outdated records schedules, to lack of electronic records management, insufficient physical records disposition, lack of records inventories, lack of necessary

infrastructure, such as stakeholder collaborations, and records liaisons and custodians, and the need to update records policies and procedures to become fully compliant with recordkeeping regulations and standards. These issues can be corrected to help ensure the availability, integrity, and accountability of USDA business processes.

To become compliant, USDA Records Management Programs will need to:

1. Update outdated records schedules;
2. Scan paper records;
3. Create records in electronic versus analog format;
4. Physically dispose of eligible records;
5. Conduct records inventories;
6. Establish agency Records and Information Management Networks comprised of records liaisons, custodians, and their alternates;
7. Update records management regulations and policies; and
8. Adopt use of technology in collaboration with Information Technology (IT) and other partners to manage records electronically in a recordkeeping system.

As we transition back to the office, let's work together to improve our records management programs. If you have questions about managing your records, need to send records to off-site storage, or want to destroy/delete records, please coordinate with your [Agency Records Officer](#). By taking action today, you will assist in the effective management of the Department's records. As USDA's Senior Agency Official on Records Management, I am asking you to renew your commitment to effective and efficient government. Comply with your recordkeeping responsibilities, which include the following:

- Complete annual mandatory USDA records management training;
- Safeguard records by keeping them organized and stored in a way that protects them from inadvertent destruction and access;
- Follow agency policies for maintaining and using records;
- Keep personal files separate from Federal records;
- Separate records and non-records;
- Consult with records management before disposing of records;
- Participate in records management activities; and
- Store records created during telework in an official recordkeeping system.

If you are unfamiliar with records management, I urge you to review the Department's [Records Management Training Module](#) in AgLearn.

USDA takes our role in this important transition to electronic recordkeeping very seriously. I look forward to working with you to realize the vision of a fully digital and open USDA.

Sincerely,

Janie Simms Hipp