2018 Plain Writing Compliance Report

July 1, 2019
TO: Employees

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) takes great strides to ensure our programs and services are delivered efficiently, effectively, and with the highest quality of customer service. To achieve those results, we’re dedicated to communicating simply and clearly to our audiences. This year, I want to again emphasize the need to use plain language in all our correspondence, public-facing documents, internal communication, and content featured on digital media. The American public deserves nothing less.

Plain and concise language, along with timely responses, are at the very heart of good customer service. At USDA, we strive to inform the public of all the services and programs we provide to individuals and their families. By presenting understandable and easy to access information, we can be assured of meeting that important promise.

Fulfilling that outcome, however, doesn’t come without challenges. Like all Federal departments, we’re tasked to 1) enhance customer experiences through modern information technology, facilities, and support services; 2) maintain a strong workforce through engagement and empowerment; 3) overcome obstacles by reducing regulatory burdens and streamlining processes; and 4) improve the stewardship of resources and leverage data-driven analysis to maximize the return on investment.

To meet those challenges, we must focus on clarity through any path we connect with the public. Distilling complex, highly-technical language doesn’t always come easy, but it’s what we must do day in and day out for our Nation’s citizens.

Two main criteria are central to Federal departments making the grade: compliance and consistency. In other words, does agency content adhere to the Plain Writing Act of 2010? And do the products we produce consistently make it easier to read, understand, and use?

Here at the “People’s Department,” I think I know the answer. Thanks to the tireless efforts of our agencies, USDA’s 2017 Plain Writing Compliance Report followed up its 2016 success with one of the highest ratings in the Federal Government. In fact, USDA was just one of three Federal agencies that tallied “A” grades in both the Organizational Compliance and Writing Quality categories in 2017.

Together, with OneUSDA as our guiding value, I’m confident we can build on that success.

Sincerely,

Sonny Perdue
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Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA’s TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.
Introduction

Our Pledge

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is committed to improving its service to our internal and external customers by writing in plain language. We use plain language in any new or substantially revised document that:

• Provides information about any of our services and benefits
• Is necessary to obtain any of our benefits or services
• Explains how to comply with a requirement that we administer or enforce.

USDA pledges to provide our customers with information that is clear, understandable, and useful in every paper or electronic letter, publication, form, notice, or instruction produced by the Department. USDA’s commitments and plain language resources can be found on USDA’s Plain Writing Web site.

The Report

This report focuses on the period between January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2018. The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires that USDA write all new publications, forms, and publicly distributed documents in a manner that is “clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.” On July 13, 2011, USDA published its first report, an implementing plan that detailed our goals for plain writing. We published our first compliance report in 2012 and every year thereafter. This year, we report on how we have built on our prior efforts toward meeting the goals in the Plain Writing Act.

Read more on USDA Plain Writing Act implementing report:

USDA’s Plain Writing Act

Agency Accomplishments

USDA strives to convey information to the public, using plain writing principles in a variety of print and electronic media. USDA’s commitment to plain writing principles in its agency communications has resulted in improved performance.

The following pages highlight a sampling of agencies’ print and electronic communications. These documents have been produced in a format consistent with plain writing principles and reflect the many ways the use of plain language assists in effectively conveying information to the public.

Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

Inform agency staff of Plain Language requirements

Information is disseminated in staff meetings and a link to Plain Writing is available at https://www.ascr.usda.gov
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requests
The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR) issues correspondence responding to internal and external customer requests or filed complaints. OASCR staff is expected to write in a way that ensures their audience clearly understands what is communicated. Two days of plain language training were conducted by a University of Texas Law School professor. One course dealt with simple business correspondence, while the other covered drafting final agency decisions using plain non-legal terms. The sample FOIA letter provides instructions to customers seeking information from OASCR under the Freedom of Information Act.

Sample Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request Letter

[Date]
[Return Address]

Director
Center for Civil Rights Enforcement
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear ______:

Under the Freedom of Information Act, I am requesting access to [identify the records as clearly and specifically as possible. Include the time period applicable to the records you seek, i.e., 1 month, 2 years, etc.].

[Specify if you are a commercial requester, are representing an educational institution or a noncommercial scientific institution, are a member of the news media or a public interest group, or other.] Please supply the records without informing me of the cost if the fees do not exceed [$______], which I agree to pay. [OR, if there are any fees charged for searching for or duplication of records, please let me know before you fill my request. NOTE: This option may delay the processing of your request if the cost exceeds $25. We must receive in writing your willingness to pay fees before we begin processing your request.]

If you deny any part of this request, please cite each specific exemption that you rely on to justify your refusal to release the information and notify me of appeal procedures available under the law.

If you have any questions concerning this request, you may contact me at the following telephone number [number].

Sincerely,

[your signature]

Training provided by OASCR:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Training</th>
<th>Number of employees trained</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective Business Writing</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1st quarter FY 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Legal Writing Seminar – Writing Plainly – How to Do It</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1st quarter FY 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides kids and teens in low-income areas free nutritious meals and snacks during the summer when school is not in session. To highlight a study detailing SFSP operations and characteristics at the State, sponsor, and site levels, the agency created an infographic to inform its many stakeholders.

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) Characteristics Study was the first comprehensive evaluation of the program since 2003. The study was designed to describe SFSP operations and characteristics at the State, sponsor, and site levels. Survey data was collected in the summer of 2015 from a census of all 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico; a nationally representative sample of 307 SFSP sponsors; and a nationally representative sample of 320 SFSP sites.

This infographic conveys the results of the study in a way that is quickly consumed and easily understood, and in lieu of publication of a technical research report.
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children

WIC, or officially the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, serves low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk. To provide a “101” for all those immersed and interested in the program, the agency developed one-pagers not just for WIC, but for all its programs that enable USDA and FNCS to “do right and feed everyone.”
Food Safety

Food Safety Inspection Service

The Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) works to protect the public’s health by ensuring the safety of meat, poultry, and processed egg products. To meet that critical responsibility, it’s imperative that their messages are delivered clearly, concisely, and in a timely manner.

In 2018, the agency launched a comprehensive campaign to notify consumers and consumer educators of FSIS’ first annual observational study on food safety conducted in a test kitchen. This included emphasizing handwashing and many other safety behaviors. To share these healthy practices, agency communicators used press releases, blogs, graphics, social media, and presentations, all developed with accessible, reader-friendly content.

Infographics and posters are key tools to reach FSIS audiences through both traditional and social media platforms. Examples included food safety tips for Thanksgiving, pregnancy, and weddings, as well as for specific foods like chicken livers.

In addition to the infographic, FSIS communicators designed a poster on chicken liver-associated outbreaks and contamination.

Chefs, Cooks, and Caterers:

Cook Chicken Liver Like It’s Chicken (It Is)

Cook Chicken Liver to 165°F

Always Cook Chicken Liver All the Way Through

Use a food thermometer (you can’t tell by looking)

Cook the inside of the liver to 165°F (just like you would for other chicken parts)

Bacteria Inside + Partial Cooking = Recipe for Illness

You might be used to leaving the middle rare when cooking chicken liver for pâté and similar dishes.

But Campylobacter is a type of bacteria that can live inside chicken liver. If the middle isn’t cooked to 165°F, bacteria can survive and cause illness.

Most often:

- Cramps, diarrhea (sometimes bloody), fever

Less often:

- Life-threatening illness, or even death

At higher risk:

Proper Cooking Can Prevent Illnesses

U.S. outbreaks from eating undercooked chicken liver are on the rise. Most are associated with restaurants.

In one outbreak, the restaurant went out of business after customers ate undercooked chicken liver and got sick.

Chefs, cooks, and caterers are key to helping prevent these outbreaks.

Protect Your Customers and Your Restaurant by Cooking Chicken Liver to 165°F

Chicken Liver-Associated Outbreaks and Contamination, United States, 2000–2017—Opportunities for Outreach and Education

1. US Public Health Service; 2. US Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS); 3. US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Introduction

- Campylobacter jejuni
- Salmonella enterica subsp. enterica serovar Typhimurium
- Listeria monocytogenes
- Mixed pathogen outbreaks

Methods

Outbreak Review, non-2000–2017

- Identifies outbreaks, reviews investigations, and provides recommendations

Results

Outbreak Review, 2000–2017

- Identifies outbreaks, reviews investigations, and provides recommendations

Discussion

Alcohol

- Alcohol inhibits growth and high temperature causes carbonation

Recommendations

- Use whole chicken or chicken livers
- Cook chicken livers to 165°F
- Use a food thermometer to ensure proper cooking

- Campylobacter

- Use a food thermometer to ensure proper cooking

- Campylobacter

- Use a food thermometer to ensure proper cooking

- Campylobacter
Marketing and Regulatory Programs

Agricultural Marketing Service

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) administers programs that create domestic and international marketing opportunities for U.S. producers of food, fiber, and specialty crops. To best reach their targeted contacts, AMS provides employees and leadership with an accessible guide on developing content with plain language. The Plain Language Playbook is a useful ‘takeaway’ that follows formal plain language training, and is used as a vital reference for every member of the agency.

To benefit its customers, The Playbook advises agency employees on how to write their products with the highest level of clarity. The resource also reminds them to write for their audience and provide the information their customers need; use headings and subheadings to help guide the reader; avoid jargon and acronyms; and use the simplest and fewest possible words.

The U.S. food supply is one of the safest in the world, and AMS takes great pride in its role to ensure consumers can trust the foods they buy. Thanks to products like the Pesticide Data Program infographic, millions of Americans are better informed about safety levels for the foods they consume.
To protect agricultural health, APHIS is on the job 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, working to defend America’s animal and plant resources from agricultural pests and diseases. For example, if the Mediterranean fruit fly and Asian Longhorn beetle – two major agricultural pests – were left unchecked, the result would be several billion dollars in production and marketing losses annually.

**African Swine Fever**

African swine fever (ASF) is a highly contagious and deadly viral disease affecting both domestic and wild pigs of all ages. It is not a threat to human health and cannot be transmitted from pigs to humans, nor is it a food safety issue. ASF is found around the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. More recently, it has spread through China, Mongolia, Vietnam, and within parts of the European Union. It has never been found in the United States – and we want to keep it that way.

The Automated Commercial Environment (ACE) is the system the U.S. Government uses to process imports and exports. Importers can now use ACE to submit APHIS-required import data for Agency-regulated products.

If you have questions, please call 1-844-820-2234 or link to us from the information provided at the bottom of this page.
Natural Resources and Environment

Forest Service

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires all Federal agencies to write “clear government communication that the public can understand and use.” Since its inception, the agency has worked to:

• Raise awareness about plain writing requirements and the need to improve writing at all levels of the agency.
• Emphasize the need for clear, concise writing in all materials whether internal or external, such as briefing papers, publications, web content, story maps, speeches, and correspondence.
• Improve the document clearance process to include evaluation of clarity, which also provides employees a real-time learning experience.
• Encourage employees to take advantage of AgLearn and other outlets for plain language-related courses such as grammar, business writing, editing, and rulemaking.
• Incorporate plain language tenets into digital products, such as social media, video, audio, and web content.

The Forest Service is committed to producing agency documents in compliance with the Plain Language Act. We also are working to ensure every employee understands that clear writing is a requirement and an essential tool to ensure that the work we do is readily understood and better connects the public to our work.

Rocky Mountain Research Station

Environmental DNA improves tracking of rare carnivores

An innovative new project has found that animal footprints contain enough DNA to allow for species identification. Scientists have traditionally relied on snow tracks and camera traps to monitor populations of rare carnivores, like Canada lynx, fishers (a small carnivore native to North America), and wolverines. These traditional techniques can tell part of the story; but, validating species’ identification can be difficult. To remedy this, USDA’s Forest Service led a study that collected snow samples within animal tracks from known locations. DNA was taken from the samples and analyzed with the latest technology to identify each species. The Forest Service detected DNA of each species from the various snow samples. The success of this method could greatly reduce or
eliminate wrong or missed detections.

The **Natural Enquirer**, a science magazine, is a collaboration among USDA’s Forest Service, the Cradle of Forestry in America Interpretive Association, and other cooperators and partners. The online publication has a mix of content that reaches pre-kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school students. Within the Natural Enquirer is a Where There’s Smoke, There’s Fire monograph series based on peer-reviewed journal articles that examine research on large wildland fires and their connection to climate and weather.

**Land and Water Conservation Fund**

Created by Congress in 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) provides money to Federal, State and local governments to purchase land, water, and wetlands for the benefit of all Americans. From majestic forests and snowcapped mountains, to wild rivers and stunning beaches, these acquisitions become part of your national forests.

Water is one of the most important natural resources flowing from forests. The Forest Service manages the largest single source of water in the U.S., with about one-fifth originating from 193 million acres of land.

A network of water and watershed resource specialists support stewardship efforts at all levels of the organization to promote healthy, sustainable watersheds fundamental to ecosystems and people.
Research, Education and Economics

The Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Mission Area is dedicated to the creation of a safe, sustainable, competitive U.S. food and fiber system and building vibrant, healthy communities, families, and youth programs through integrated research, analysis, and education.

Agricultural Research Service

REE’s Agricultural Research Service (ARS) launched “TellUS,” a new online communications platform that replaced its legacy AgResearch online magazine. The conversion took months of reimagining and development to bring a fresh source of agricultural information to clients worldwide. In addition to informative stories about ARS research, TellUS includes new products like featured photos, infographics, photo essays, and videos. The site’s content covers a variety of topics from field to fork, ranging from human nutrition and food safety, to crop and animal production.

ARS By the Numbers

- 8,000 ARS Employees
- 90+ ARS Locations
- 67 Projects $98 Million Animal Production and Protection
- 144 Projects $246 Million Natural Resources and Sustainable Agricultural Systems
- 227 Projects $411 Million Crop Production and Protection
- 146 Projects $279 Million Nutrition, Food Safety and Quality
- 61 New patents issued
- 40 New licenses
- 4,138 Peer-reviewed publications
- >2,100 Students and interns
- >450 Postdocs
- >76,050 Total number of students reached
- >33,500 School and community presentations
- >11,000 ARS location visits
- >15,000 Science fairs
- >14,000 Courses and demos
Economic Research Service

This recent infographic by REE’s Economic Research Service (ERS) illustrates trends in food product recalls in the United States over a 10-year period.

Other ERS plain writing efforts to increase comprehension and customer satisfaction include:

• Economic research monographs released via the agency’s website, drawing more than 2.4 million unique visitors in 2018. Target Audience: Policymakers, academia, and informed laypeople.

• Market outlook newsletters released monthly via ERS’ website. Target Audience: Policymakers and commercial agriculture companies.

• Amber Waves e-zine and infographics released monthly via the agency’s website. Target Audience: Policymakers and informed laypeople.


• Tweets and Charts of Note: To date, ERS posts tweets to more than 30,000 Twitter followers each day, and publishes Charts of Note. See “Charting the Essentials” (lower right) at https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/, an annual compendium of these charts. Target audience: General public, policymakers, academia, and commercial agriculture stakeholders.

For more information, visit the USDA’s Economic Research Service at https://www.ers.usda.gov.
ERS’ National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) continues to speak with data providers and users, the general public, and staff in clear, easy-to-understand, and engaging ways.

As USDA’s statistical agency, NASS’ mission is to collect timely, accurate, and useful data about the U.S. agriculture sector from producers and others in agriculture. Communicating clearly with those who provide the data on why their participation matters – to the Nation, the agriculture sector, their communities, and their own operations – is essential.

Census Products: Simple, Direct Messaging Key to Successful Data Collection

The Issue. In addition to its regular survey work, NASS conducted the 2017 Census of Agriculture in 2018, a once-every-five-year effort to reach every producer in the Nation with operations that sell or normally sell at least $1,000 in agricultural product. This involved an initial mailing to 3 million potential producers, including many with whom NASS does not have regular contact.

The Tools. NASS created a suite of tools to encourage participation. The Census of Agriculture rack cards, for instance, provide enumerators with talking points during field visits and serve as reader-friendly, engaging reminder notices for producers.

An email footer keeps the data collection message front and center as NASS conducts census follow-on studies and highlights the release of the data (continued on page 14).
**Results.** The Census of Agriculture had a 72 percent response rate, with nearly one-fourth of producers responding online.

**Improved Online Access**

**The Issue.** In terms of data collection and preparing for release of census data, NASS took steps to make the online experience easier, faster, and more engaging.

**Online Response Form.** A new, state-of-the-art NASS online response form was distributed in 2018. The Census of Agriculture questionnaire was sent to approximately 3 million agriculture contacts, requesting detailed information on their farm or ranch operation, output, and 2017 income. The modern form is accessible on any device, calculates automatically, and skips questions that do not apply.

The proportion of those who responded online was more than 10 percent higher in 2017 than in 2012. The form is being expanded for use in all NASS national surveys and is expected to grow the proportion of producers who respond online.

**Merging the Ag Census and NASS Websites.** In advance of releasing 2017 Census of Agriculture Data (bottom right), NASS fully integrated the Census of Agriculture website [https://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus/](https://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus/) into its primary website to provide a consistent look and feel. Merging the websites was a response to feedback from customers, stakeholders, and partners, who prefer to access all NASS data in the same visit, including on mobile devices.

**Making the Data Fun**

Most of NASS’ work involves producing data critical for a detailed, reliable picture of U.S. agriculture. That data contains the story of what Americans eat, grow, wear, and treasure. Sometimes NASS likes to present the numbers in fun ways that relate directly to Americans’ homes and daily choices. This “Statistically Delicious Peach Pie” infographic, for example, shows how much of the dessert’s ingredients were produced by American farmers.
Office of the Chief Scientist

The Office of the Chief Scientist (OCS) provides leadership and coordination to ensure that scientific research supported by USDA and presented to external stakeholders is held to the highest standards of intellectual rigor and scientific integrity.

OCS strives to inform policy and programmatic decisions within the Department by providing the best available scientific advice and input; establish appropriate linkages between USDA and other science-performing organizations in government (U.S. and abroad), academia, and industry; and ensure the dissemination of USDA science to stakeholders across the spectrum of policy making nationally and internationally.

On June 27 and 28, 2018, the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Energy co-hosted a workshop in Washington, D.C., that engaged stakeholders, experts, and researchers nationwide on the potential for indoor agriculture to address global environmental challenges. Participants collaborated to identify research and development challenges, opportunities, and needs relating to six major areas: Community Services, Plant Breeding, Economics, Pest Management, Ecosystem Services, and Systems Engineering (Click below to read the full report).
Rural Development

Rural Housing Service

Nearly 60 million Americans live in rural areas. The Rural Housing Service (RHS), an element of USDA’s Rural Development, offers a variety of programs to build or improve housing and essential community facilities in those areas. The Agency offers loans, grants, and loan guarantees for single- and multi-family housing (MFH), child care centers, fire and police stations, hospitals, libraries, nursing homes, schools, first responder vehicles and equipment, housing for farm laborers, and much more.

RHS provides technical assistance loans and grants in partnership with non-profit organizations, Indian tribes, State and Federal Government agencies, and local communities. (Loan Packaging Express infographic bottom right)

In September 2018, RHS announced funding to address opioid misuse. RHS reserved $5 million in the Community Facilities Grant Program and gives priority to Distance Learning and Telemedicine Grant Program applications proposing innovative projects to address the epidemic in rural communities.

Via GovDelivery, stakeholders of multi-family housing can keep up to date on new policy guidance by signing up for program updates at https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDARD/signup/10420.

Once you enter your email address on this link, you will automatically be enrolled to receive all general announcements.

How can USDA help address the opioid epidemic?

USDA has tools to help rural America respond to the opioid epidemic including:

- Resources for prevention, treatment and recovery
- Programs to build upstream resilience and prosperity for the future

In partnership with non-profit organizations, Indian tribes, State and Federal Government agencies, and local communities, USDA has tools to help rural America respond to the opioid epidemic. (Infographic bottom right)

Inside this issue:

- Rural Development
- Program Highlights
- Loan Packages Express
- Realize Dreams

By participating in programs, co-op members can help prevent opioid misuse. The National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research, in collaboration with the National Institute on Drug Abuse at the National Institutes of Health, conducted a study exploring the value of outreach and educational activities to young rural men and women. Please visit the USDA Rural Development website at rd.usda.gov.

Tammy Repine
Services and Loan Analyst USDA Rural Development
Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs

Foreign Agricultural Service

Representing the Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs, the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) continues to deliver the most candid communications and concise information to the public and its business customers/stakeholders via its website, https://www.fas.usda.gov/. From inviting visitors to “stay connected,” providing access to the latest reports, or presenting up-to-date agency news, our customers are no more than a click away to accessing vital information. FAS persistently restricts lengthy text and articles; eliminates unnecessary acronyms, abbreviations, and jargon; and utilizes more tables, infographics, and photographs to improve communication with the public and ensure all researchers are aware of FAS’s collective accomplishments.

The volume of information available on the FAS website is the result of many hours of editing and collaboration between public affairs staff and subject matter experts from various program offices. This assures a product that is informative and useful to industry experts, FAS employees, interrelated Government Agencies, and novice readers worldwide. FAS’ public affairs team also edit and/or enhance the graphs, tables, and charts in each report to verify readability, interpretation, and adherence to proper data visualization standards. By applying plain writing best practices, the public affairs staff provides a cohesive story and valuable information on the success of our programs and the benefits to U.S. agriculture.

Through the use of imagery, infographics are an effective means to provide context to our programs. The Philly Cheesesteak is a favorite of ours in the social media space during National Sandwich Month. The recent U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement has been expanded to provide up-to-the-minute information to interested parties.
Office of Communications

One of the Office of Communications’ (OC) primary functions is editorial review of news releases, publications, op-eds and other materials prepared by USDA agencies. OC hires communications experts based, in part, on their writing and editing ability and experience. USDA policy and procedure require OC staff to review public materials, ensuring adherence to plain writing is built into the process before public release.

OC writers and editors review and clear all publications released to the public for clarity, appropriateness, quality, and compliance with Federal publishing policies. OC press coordinators review publications for accuracy and consistency with departmental programs and policies.

OC coordinators review press releases for clear delivery of messages to intended audiences.

OC speechwriters are also hired for their ability to break down highly technical subjects for non-technical audiences, and plain writing is integral to the process.

OC’s digital communications team uses plain language for user interface, allowing users to easily understand content navigation. The site is designed with clarity to ensure users can easily complete tasks. Web communications are organized logically for readers in manageable segments, with carefully considered use of space, alignment, and fonts.

OC’s photographers tag and enter meta-data for each image descriptively and in plain language.

OC’s 508 compliance coordinator works to ensure posted content is clear, concise, and accessible.

OC’s social media manager writes clear, concise sentences using an active voice. Camel case is used for multi-word hashtags, making it easier for readers and screen readers to understand content. The use of hashtags, abbreviations, and acronyms are avoided for accessibility.

Office of Budget and Program Analysis

The Office of Budget and Program Analysis is updating USDA’s Departmental Regulation (DR-1512) on Regulatory Review and Clearance. The DR will use simple, easy-to-follow infographics for our internal USDA customers. With this update, new and existing USDA regulatory officers and rule writers will quickly get the information they need without having to decipher wordy, often lengthy requirements. The DR was last updated in 1997.

Office of the General Counsel

Attorney and non-attorney staff participated in a Legal Writing training workshop taught by an outside provider. Non-Attorney staff participated in a web-based training for Business and Legal writing.
Office of the Inspector General

As part of our continuing effort to communicate better with the public, USDA’s Office of the Inspector General (OIG) continues to improve its design of the Semiannual Report to Congress, one of our most important publications. This document was redesigned according to the principles of plainlanguage.gov.

Beginning in fiscal year 2017, we transitioned to a much more visual look that relied on infographics to convey the same complex material. As you’ll see with the Activities Summary/Audit infographic below, OIG has built upon the progress established last year and further streamlined our infographics to provide quick and easy access to vital statistics from the past year.

**OIG Training**

Every year, we instruct staff on how to plainly and clearly communicate OIG’s work internally to USDA, and externally to the public, shareholders, and Congress. This past year, we presented to approximately 300 employees at three regional professional development conferences. Presentations focused on streamlining business writing (including emails); providing appropriate context to technical reports; offering plain language best practices; and drafting concise summaries on complex audit report content.
Summary

Plain writing is an essential method of ensuring that our customers understand our programs and services and are able to easily retrieve information. In keeping with our commitment, USDA will continue to raise awareness about requirements of plain writing at all levels of the Department. We will ensure processes are in place so that information is clear and concise and readily available for our customers.

Adherence to plain writing principles has helped USDA communicate more clearly and effectively with the customers we serve—the American people. USDA has enjoyed consistent and positive reception for its thoroughness in conveying its programs, services, and public-facing communications in an organized, visually appealing, and understandable format.

USDA maintains this standard of excellence by

1) Continuing improvements in technology

2) Staying on the cutting edge of web design and using various social mediums to keep our presence “fresh” and to ensure a pleasant and informative online experience for our customers

3) Trading wordy, technical and/or legal jargon for simple, clear, and concise language; and, most importantly

4) Welcoming feedback from our internal employees and external customers

USDA, again, commits to adhering to the Plain Language Act and providing first class service.
# Appendix A: Plain Language Training Compiled by Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Number of employees trained</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drupal Training Content Strategy, Plain Language, Section 508, and Using Drupal</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>Introduction to Plain Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Plain Writing Act</td>
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Appendix B: USDA Officials for Plain Writing

USDA is comprised of 17 governing agencies and nearly 100,000 employees who serve the American people at more than 4,500 locations across the country and abroad. To lead implementation of the Act and to ensure USDA’s compliance with it, a working group of agency representatives was created. These officials ensure that their agency or office uses plain language in public documents.

We are committed at the highest levels to complying fully with the Act. Secretary Perdue recognizes the importance of using plain language to provide high-quality customer service every day for American taxpayers and consumers.

USDA’s Senior Official for Plain Writing:
Ms. Jeanette P. Whitener
Executive Secretariat to the Department
Office: (202) 720-7100
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency/Office</th>
<th>Plain Writing Agency Official</th>
<th>Plain Writing Coordinators</th>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)</td>
<td>Winona Lake Scott</td>
<td>Joelle Bowers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Safety</td>
<td>Charles Williams</td>
<td>Vince Fayne</td>
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<td>Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)</td>
<td>Rich Lucas</td>
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<td>Food, Nutrition &amp; Consumer Services (FNCS)</td>
<td>Karen T. Comfort</td>
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<td>Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)</td>
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<td>Animal &amp; Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)</td>
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<td>Beth Gaston</td>
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<td>Natural Resources &amp; Environment</td>
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<td>Forest Service (FS)</td>
<td>Angela Coleman</td>
<td>Kathryn Sosbe</td>
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<td>Research, Education &amp; Economics</td>
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<td>JD Wyllie</td>
<td>Mina Chung</td>
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<td>Sue King</td>
<td>Rosemarie Phillips</td>
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<td>Dale Simms</td>
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<td>Rural Development</td>
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<td>Curtis Anderson</td>
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<td>Trade &amp; Foreign Agricultural Affairs</td>
<td>Ellen Dougherty</td>
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<td>Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)</td>
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<td>Joseph Migyanka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office of Budget &amp; Program Analysis (OBPA)</td>
<td>Andrew Perry</td>
<td>Sam Barkdull</td>
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<td>Office of Communications (OC)</td>
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<td>Charlene Buckner</td>
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<td>Michael Martin</td>
<td>Melissa Bentley</td>
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