



**U.S. Department of Agriculture**  
**2012 Compliance Report**  
**Plain Writing Act**

## USDA's Pledge

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is committed to improving its service to you 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; or,
- explains how to comply with a requirement that we administer or enforce.

We pledge to provide you with information that is clear, understandable, and useful in every paper or electronic letter, publication, form, notice, or instruction.

In October 2011, Secretary Vilsack issued a memorandum to all USDA employees, emphasizing the importance of using plain language to communicate with all of USDA's customers. You can find this memorandum on the last two pages of this report and at USDA's Plain Writing Web site, at [www.usda.gov/plain-writing](http://www.usda.gov/plain-writing).

## This Report

This report documents USDA's progress to date in complying with the Plain Writing Act. The Act requires that USDA "write all new publications, forms, and publicly distributed documents in a 'clear, concise, well-organized' manner." On July 13, 2011, USDA published its first report that detailed our goals for plain writing, and this year's report provides an update on achievements we have made towards those goals. You can read USDA's first Plain Writing Act Compliance Report here: <<http://www.usda.gov/documents/PL-Report-final.pdf>>.

## I. USDA Officials for Plain Writing

### Senior Officials

We are committed at the highest levels to comply fully with the Act. Secretary Vilsack recognizes the importance of using plain language to achieve the goals of President Obama's Open Government initiative, as well as the USDA Cultural Transformation initiative. Our senior officials for plain writing are:

1. Mr. Jerold Mande  
Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services
2. Ms. Beth Gaston  
Special Assistant to the Deputy Administrator, Policy and Program Development:  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

3. Mr. John Padalino  
Acting Principal Deputy General Counsel in the Office of the General Counsel
  
4. Mr. James Gore  
Assistant Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service

**Agency Coordinators**

USDA is comprised of 17 agencies and 120,000 employees who serve the American people at more than 2,300 locations across the country and abroad. To lead implementation of the Act and ensure our compliance with it, we created a working group of agency officials. These officials ensure that their agency or office uses plain language in public documents. For a list of agency coordinators, please [see Section VIII of this report](#).

**II. USDA Communications that Comply with Plain Writing Act Guidelines**

The following table summarizes some of the documents that are available in a format that is consistent with the Plain Writing Act guidelines. In compiling this table, we collected information from across USDA. In the interest of brevity, however, we are including only certain highlights. The table samples our accomplishments in focusing the Department’s employees on the importance of writing in plain language so that we continually improve our communication with the public. Specifically, we are:

- reducing text and using shorter sentences in our documents;
- using more tables and lists rather than lengthy paragraphs; and
- eliminating unnecessary jargon, acronyms, initialisms, and abbreviations.

This renewed effort has resulted in an overall improvement in communication with the public, as well as a greater sense of accomplishment among our employees.

USDA AGENCY COMMUNICATIONS THAT COMPLY WITH PLAIN WRITING ACT GUIDELINES		
Type of document or posting and how it is made available to the public.	The document’s intended audience and the approximate number of people in that audience.	What has changed by using plain writing or the expected impact of using plain language
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)		
Advertisements Distributed through: Magazines	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska	NRCS practice is to always communicate in a manner that adheres to the principles of plain

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	Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	writing. This increases comprehension of how conservation is accomplished and the benefits of conservation.
Annual Reports  Distributed through: Websites	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	NRCS writes and reviews annual reports with principles of plain writing, reducing burden on users, reducing errors, and improving customer satisfaction.
Articles  Distributed through: U. S. Mail, Websites	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	NRCS writes articles so that more people can understand the content. Writing is in more simple language, active tense and has no hanging acronyms. This has increased the number of people who understand conservation.
Banner Stands  Distributed through: Outreach Meetings	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	Clear, concise writing and graphics and no jargon results in better understanding by more citizens of how conservation is achieved and the overall benefits of conservation.
Booklets  Distributed through: Handouts, Field Offices, Outreach Meetings	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: 14,142	Focus is renewed on writing documents that more people can easily understand.
Brochures  Distributed through: Websites, Outreach Meetings, Job Fairs, Newspapers, Trade Shows, Field Offices	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, Job Seekers, Conference Attendees, Program Applicants, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	NRCS practice is to always communicate in a manner that adheres to the principles of plain writing. We have renewed our focus on this practice, increasing comprehension of how conservation is accomplished and the benefits of conservation.
Circulars  Distributed through: e-Directives	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	NRCS maintains focus on basic points of the circular, communicating in a manner that is less cumbersome and easier to understand what is being requested.

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<p>Conservation Planning Applications</p> <p>Distributed through: Websites</p>	<p>Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Applications are written with more clarity. The focus is on making them as easy to understand and complete as possible. Contact information is provided if more information is required. This improves customer satisfaction and helps get more conservation on the land.</p>
<p>Contribution Agreements</p> <p>Distributed through: E-mail, Websites</p>	<p>Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>NRCS writes contribution agreements as directly, concisely and clearly as possible making understanding of what is being agreed to very clear.</p>
<p>Correspondence</p> <p>Distributed through: U. S. Mail</p>	<p>Sent in response to inquiries as appropriate</p> <p>Potential Audience: Dependent</p>	<p>NRCS has renewed focus on shorter responses thus increased clarity of responses and improved customer service.</p>
<p>Direct Mail</p> <p>Distributed through: U. S. Mail</p>	<p>Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>NRCS has made a significant effort to ensure engineering terms are replaced with plain language terminology to the extent possible. This renewed focus on clarity has improved customer service.</p>
<p>Directives</p> <p>Distributed through: Websites</p>	<p>Employees, Partners,</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>NRCS writes and reviews documents for ease of understanding, resulting in documents that are more succinct, clearer and easier to understand.</p>
<p>Displays</p> <p>Distributed through: Outreach Meetings, Job Fairs, Trade Shows</p>	<p>Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Displays are simple and direct with minimal to no technical jargon. Technical terms are only used when displays are used at outreach meetings attended by scientists or technical people.</p>
<p>E-mail Blasts</p> <p>Distributed through: E-mail</p>	<p>Environmental Groups, Producer Groups, Employees, Conservation Partners</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>NRCS is focusing on clearer, more concise and short email messages. We use photos and graphs when possible help convey intended messaging more easily and clearly.</p>
<p>Fact Sheets</p> <p>Distributed through: Outreach</p>	<p>Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska</p>	<p>NRCS has renewed its focus on clear, concise writing using minimal to no technical jargon, increasing</p>

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Meetings, Websites, E-mail, Media, Field Offices, Twitter, Blog	Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	understanding of complex technical information, rules and guidelines. This improved customer satisfaction.
Feature Articles  Distributed through: Websites, Media, Newsletters	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	NRCS feature articles are written so that a wider swath of the population can understand the content. Writing is in more simple language, active tense and has no hanging acronyms. This has increased the number of people who understand conservation.
Feature Stories  Distributed through: Websites, Media	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	NRCS feature stories are written so that a wider swath of the population can understand the content. Writing is in more simple language, active tense and has no hanging acronyms. This has increased the number of people who understand conservation.
Fliers  Distributed through: E-mail, Outreach Meetings	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: more than 8,000	NRCS practice is to always communicate in a manner that adheres to the principles of plain writing. We have renewed our focus on this practice, increasing comprehension of how conservation is accomplished and the benefits of conservation.
Guidance Book for Program Applicants  Distributed through: Websites	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	Guidance for program applicants is written with more clarity. The focus is on making programs as easy to understand and complete as possible. We provide contact information if more information is required. This improves customer satisfaction and helps get more conservation on the land.
Handbooks  Distributed through: Websites	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	We write and review conservation handbooks with the customer's needs and background in mind. The NRCS focus is to make programs easy to understand and information as complete as possible. We provide contact information if more information is required. This improves customer satisfaction and helps get more conservation on the

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		land.
<p>Handbook Supplements</p> <p>Distributed through: e-Directives</p>	<p>Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>We write and review conservation supplements with the customer's needs and background in mind. The NRCS focus is to make programs easy to understand and information as complete as possible. We provide contact information if more information is required. This improves customer satisfaction and helps get more conservation on the land.</p>
<p>Job Sheets</p> <p>Distributed through: Websites, e-mail</p>	<p>Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>We write job sheets with clarity, focusing on making them as easy to understand and complete as possible by everyone -- not just a few. We provide contact information if more information is required. This improves customer satisfaction and helps get more conservation on the land.</p>
<p>Media Alerts</p> <p>Distributed through: E-mail, Media</p>	<p>Media</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Media alerts are always written with clarity and direct purpose. This helps increase interest and comprehension of conservation through public announcements. NRCS has always been careful to communicate clearly, but we are now even more aware of writing in plain language.</p>
<p>National Bulletins</p> <p>Distributed through: Websites</p>	<p>Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Documents are written and reviewed for ease of understanding resulting in more succinct, clearer and easier to understand National Bulletins. This helps employees understand more directly important employee-related announcements from National Headquarters.</p>
<p>National Headquarters Amendments (General)</p> <p>Distributed through: Directives System</p>	<p>Employees</p> <p>Potential Audience: 11,892</p>	<p>We write and review documents for ease of understanding, resulting in more succinct, clearer and easier-to-understand amendments to the National Directives System. This helps employees understand more directly important employee-related announcements from National</p>

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		Headquarters.
National Instructions Distributed through: Websites	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	We write and review National Instructions for ease of understanding, resulting in more succinct, clearer and easier-to-understand National Instructions. This helps employees understand more directly and quickly important employee-related announcements from National Headquarters.
NRCS Strategic Plan Distributed through: Websites	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	NRCS writes and reviews Strategic Plans with the reader in mind. The NRCS focus is always to make our programs and vision easy to understand and information as clear as possible. We provide contact information if more information is required. This improves customer satisfaction and helps get more conservation on the land.
News Releases Distributed through: Websites, E-mail, Blogs, Twitter	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	Increased comprehension of agency public announcements. NRCS has always been careful to communicate clearly, but we are now even more cognizant of writing in plain language.
Newsletters Distributed through: Outreach Meetings, Newsletters, Newspapers, Websites, E-mail	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	We write newsletters clearly. This helps increase interest and comprehension of the intended audience, whether it's internal or external. NRCS has always been careful to communicate clearly but we are now even more aware of the importance of writing in plain language.
Power Point Presentations Distributed through: Outreach meetings and Websites	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Users: Unlimited	Power Point Presentations have fewer words, common language, more graphics, charts and images. This makes our intended messages more interesting, pleasant and understandable, which helps the agency achieve our mission of natural resources conservation.
Posters	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners,	We use clear, concise writing and graphics and do not use jargon.



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Distributed through: Public Buildings, Field Offices, Outreach Meetings, Direct Mail	American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Limited	This results in better understanding by more citizens of how conservation is achieved and the overall benefits of conservation.
Practice Standards  Distributed through: Websites	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	NRCS writes and reviews Practice Standards for ease of understanding, resulting in more succinct, clearer and easier to understand Conservation Practice Standards. This helps employees and customers understand practice standards more easily and quickly.
Public Service Announcements  Distributed through: Radio, Television	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	NRCS practice is to always communicate in a manner that adheres to the principles of plain writing. This increases comprehension of how conservation is accomplished and the benefits of conservation.
Publications  Distributed through: Websites	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	We write, review and edit all conservation publications with the customer's needs and background in mind. The NRCS focus is to make programs and program information easy to understand. This improves customer satisfaction and helps get more conservation on the land.
Reports  Distributed through: Outreach Meetings, Website	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Users: Unlimited	NRCS writes and reviews reports for ease of understanding, resulting in more clear Reports. This helps everyone more easily understand information about natural resources conservation.
Resource Guides  Distributed through: Outreach Meetings	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	We write, review and edit all conservation publications with the customer's needs and background in mind. The NRCS focus is to make programs and program information easy to understand. This improves customer satisfaction and helps get more conservation on the land.
Soil Survey Reports  Distributed through: Government E-mails	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives	NRCS writes, reviews and edits all conservation publications with the customer's needs and background in mind. The NRCS focus is to make

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	Potential Audience: Unlimited	programs and program information easy to understand. This improves customer satisfaction and helps get more conservation on the land.
Success Stories Distributed through: Internet, Websites, Newsletters, Outreach Meetings	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	NRCS practice is to always communicate in a manner that adheres to the principles of plain writing. Writing conservation success stories plainly in common language increases comprehension of how conservation is accomplished and the benefits of conservation. It also serves as a reward and incentive to people who are interested in conservation.
Technical Notes Distributed through: e-Directives	Employees, Public  Potential Audience: Unlimited	We write, review and edit all conservation publications with the customer's needs and background in mind. The NRCS focus is to make programs and program information easy to understand. This improves customer satisfaction and helps get more conservation on the land.
Tweets Distributed through: Twitter	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives Potential Audience: Unlimited	NRCS always writes media and blogs directly and succinctly. This helps increase interest in and comprehension of conservation NRCS has always been careful to communicate clearly, but we are now even more aware of writing in plain language.
User Guides Distributed through: e-Directives	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	We write, review and edit all conservation publications with the customer's needs and background in mind. The NRCS focus is to make programs and program information as easy to understand as possible. This improves customer satisfaction and helps get more conservation on the land.
Webpage Changes Distributed through: Websites	Public, Agricultural Producers, Employees, Private Landowners, American Indians and Alaska Natives  Potential Audience: Unlimited	NRCS always writes web updates directly and succinctly and in an interesting manner. We use photos and graphics as much as possible. This helps increase interest in and comprehension of conservation.

		NRCS has always been careful to communicate clearly, but we are now even more aware of writing in plain language.
<b>Farm Service Agency (FSA)</b>		
FSA wrote and posted an article in <i>Fence Post</i> in October 2011. The link is < <a href="http://fsa.typepad.com/fsa-fence-post/2011/10/gobbledygook-gone-plain-writing-in.html">http://fsa.typepad.com/fsa-fence-post/2011/10/gobbledygook-gone-plain-writing-in.html</a> >.	FSA employees and external customers.	--
FSA's Farm Loan Programs awaits approval on a brochure titled <i>Your Guide to FSA Farm Loans</i> .	Customers who want an FSA loan or anyone who is interested in learning about FSA loans.	Increase awareness of FSA loans and comprehension of FSA farm loan programs.
<b>Agricultural Research Service (ARS)</b>		
Magazines, news releases, newsletters, brochures, non-technical fact sheets, and reports	Varies by product and audience (developed for specific scientists, programs, projects)  Approximately 85,000 persons.	
<b>Economic Research Service (ERS)</b>		
Economic research monographs released via the agency's website	Policymakers, academia, informed laypeople	--
Market analysis newsletters released via the agency's website	Policymakers and commercial agriculture companies	--
<i>Amber Waves</i> magazine	Policymakers and informed laypeople	--
<b>National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)</b>		
Marketing materials (cover letters and background sheets) to promote census and survey participation. These accompany individual surveys and the census when they are mailed to producers.	Agricultural producers asked to participate in NASS surveys. NASS conducts about 500 such surveys per year—some reach a few hundred, others reach tens of thousands.	Increased comprehension and customer satisfaction. NASS now writes these materials in a direct, clear style with the recipients' concerns in mind: what producers want to know; why they might want to participate; how the surveys or censuses benefit them.

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2012 Census of Agriculture brochure and other promotional materials	All U.S. farmers  Approximately 3.3 million persons.	Materials written in plain language will be rolled out in coming weeks to explain the census in clear, concise language. We expect this will encourage farmer participation in the survey.
2012 Census of Agriculture Website	Newly created website for the public, including agricultural producers	Increased accessibility. This newly created website is transparent and easy to navigate, provides useful information from past censuses, and gives easily understood directions.
Language telling producers how to participate in surveys	All farmers who receive surveys	NASS has standardized this language to convey instructions in a simpler, more direct style.
Instructions for responding online to surveys and census	Agricultural producers and other recipients of surveys and the census	The agency is reducing the volume of calls from persons needing additional instruction. This will be tested in coming months as new surveys roll out.
Prices Program webpages	All users who would like to know more about the NASS Prices Program or who are looking for price data	These newly written pages are receiving good comments from users. NASS plans to use the same format for program rewrites.
News releases, blog entries, internal newsletter, and one-off publications	Press and the general public	Although these have always been written for a broad audience, the agency is increasing attention to plain, direct writing for all its products.
<b>National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)</b>		
News Releases. Posted on agency website and released to media.	The general public and media representatives.  Potential Audience: Unlimited	Improved comprehension.
Postings on agency website.	The general public.  Potential Audience: Unlimited	Improved comprehension.
<b>Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)</b>		

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Letters of Warning	Violators of APHIS regulations	Letters more clearly reflect what the warning means to the recipient, resulting in substantially fewer calls. Each call costs approximately 30 minutes of staff time.
Letters of Stipulation	Violators of APHIS regulations; allow for partial payment of penalties in lieu of prosecution	Letters more clearly reflect the recipients' options, resulting in informed choices for violators and substantially fewer calls. Each call costs approximately 30 minutes of staff time.
Webpages	APHIS stakeholders	Webpages continue to be accessible to the public.
Publications	APHIS stakeholders	Increased accessibility and comprehension on complex scientific subjects to APHIS target audiences.
Responses to customer inquiries made via the Web ("Ask the Expert")	The general public Potential Audience: Unlimited	Public now receives succinct, clear responses to inquiries.
<b>Forest Service</b>		
Forms, distributed by mail/websites/offices	Service users, national forest visitors; thousands	In August 2011, the Forest Service identified the kinds of documents that are covered by the Plain Writing Act. Covered documents fell into 23 categories, including: forms, correspondence, forest plans, environmental analyses, and research papers and publications. Next, the Chief's Office issued a data call, asking staffs across the country to estimate the number of covered documents in existence and the number produced or substantially revised each year. Approximately 590,000 documents existed, including more than 30,000 research publications available online; and the Forest Service generated about 64,000 covered documents per year.
Grants, distributed by mail/websites/offices	Businesses, students, landowners	
Agreements, distributed by mail/websites/offices	Community organizations, NGOs, other agencies, other partners; thousands	
Contracts, distributed by mail/websites/offices	Businesses, contractors; thousands	
RFIs, RFPs, etc., distributed by mail/websites/offices	Businesses, contractors; thousands	
Brochures, distributed by mail/websites/offices	Service users, national forest visitors; thousands	
Interpretive signs, located at facilities and on trails, roads	National forest visitors; thousands	
Descriptions of services, distributed by mail/websites/offices	Service users; thousands	

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Instructions, distributed by mail/websites/offices	Service users, contractors, employees; thousands
Rules/regulations, distributed by websites	Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands
Management plans, distributed by websites	Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands
Project descriptions, distributed by websites	Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands
Environmental analyses, distributed by websites	Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands
Decision documents (e.g., on plans, projects), distributed by mail/websites/offices	Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands
Press releases, distributed by fax/websites	Journalists, stakeholders, employees; thousands
Research publications, distributed by mail/websites/offices	Scientists, managers, employees; thousands
Letters, distributed by mail/e-mail	Service users, national forest visitors, partners, stakeholders; thousands
Reports, distributed by mail/websites/offices	Scientists, managers, employees, other agencies, partners, stakeholders; thousands
Speeches, delivered in person/distributed by websites	Varies (general public, stakeholders, students, etc.); thousands
Papers/articles, distributed in journals, made available on websites	Scientists, managers, employees, partners, stakeholders; thousands
Briefs, distributed by websites	Managers, employees, other agencies, partners, stakeholders; thousands
Testimony, delivered in person/distributed by websites	Congress, partners, stakeholders; thousands
Legal documents, available on websites	Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)		
Accessible Electronic Documents Policy	All OASCR employees	Increased accessibility of documents.
Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)		
Communication sent to Technology, Privacy, Architecture, and E-Gov group	OCIO policy writers and individuals that manage department-wide functions.  Approximately 30 users.	
Posted Plain Writing Resources on USDA Departmental Directives Page – this is a public webpage.	All writers and reviewers of Departmental Directives.  Approximately 500 users.	The Plain Language checklist is now part of the process to create and review Departmental Directives. Increased comprehension of department policy.
Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)		
Program Summaries, through website	Community organizations, grant writers, farmworker organizations, educational institutions, and state and local agencies.  Approximately 500 groups	Improved access to USDA programs from historically underserved groups through more effective communication.
USDA Directories & Liaison information	Community Based Organizations, grant writers, farmworker organizations, educational institutions, and state and local agencies.  Approximately 500 groups.	Increased accessibility USDA programs from historically underserved groups.
Success Stories, through website	Community organizations, grant writers, farmworker organizations, educational institutions, and state and local agencies.	Improved access to USDA programs from historically underserved groups through more effective communication.
Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS)		
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Acknowledgement correspondence via U.S. Mail	FOIA requestors: consumer advocates, industry associations, news media, regulated industry	We have revised template letters using more plain language. Examples include using active voice

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	members.	and shorter sentences, explaining technical issues, eliminating wordiness.
FOIA Fee waiver denied/granted correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail	FOIA requestors	We have revised template letters using more plain language. Examples include using active voice and shorter sentences, explaining technical issues, eliminating wordiness.
FOIA Expedited processing denied/granted correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail	FOIA requestors	As letters are written and reviewed, specialist and supervisor use plain language
FOIA Referral correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail	Other agencies	As letters are written and reviewed, specialist and supervisor use plain language
FOIA Absent fee agreement/ over \$250 correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail	FOIA requestors	As letters are written and reviewed, specialist and supervisor use plain language
FOIA Subpoena response correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail	Attorneys	We have revised template letters using more plain language. Examples include using active voice and shorter sentences, explaining technical issues, eliminating wordiness.
FOIA Determination correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail	FOIA requestors	We have revised template letters using more plain language. Examples include using active voice and shorter sentences, explaining technical issues, eliminating wordiness.
FOIA Submitter's notice correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail	FOIA requestors	As letters are written and reviewed, specialist and supervisor use plain language
Privacy Act correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail	Privacy Act requestor: external individual doing business with FSIS	As letters are written and reviewed, specialist and supervisor use plain language
Correspondence (General), letter via U.S. Mail or e-mail	Members of Congress; consumer and industry groups; Federal, state and local officials; meat, poultry and processed egg products establishments; consumers;	As letters are written and cleared, writers and editors use plain language. Examples include using active voice and shorter sentences, explaining technical terms,



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	members of the public	eliminating wordiness, and writing to the specific audience. Also, we have revised standard language to incorporate plain language.
Campaign Correspondence, letter via U.S. Mail or e-mail	Members of the public; activists	When writing responses to campaign letters, we give extra attention to plain language. These responses go to thousands of constituents with a wide variety of reading levels and knowledge of the issue.
Press Releases, Press Release via Electronic	Consumers, Regulated Community, Public Officials	We will evaluate press release standard language to identify potential Plain Language revisions by the end of fiscal year 2012.
Constituent Update, Newsletter via Electronic	Consumers, Regulated Community, Public Officials	Plain language is an ongoing effort for the Constituent Update. We continue working with subject matter experts on technical content without compromising the message. We rewrite into plain language and they review and rewrite to ensure message is correct.
Recall Releases, Press Release via Electronic	Consumers, Regulated Community, Public Officials	We will evaluate press release standard language to identify potential Plain Language revisions by the end of fiscal year 2012.
Online federal job application, form via electronic, Web	Job applicants	Reduced length of standing registers by 90%.
Form letter for soliciting interest in a vacancy (OF-5 Inquiry of Availability), form via U.S. Mail	Applicants interested in a vacancy with FSIS	Used Plain Language guidance to reduce length and clarify verbiage.
Form letter for selected applicants, letter via U.S. Mail	Applicants not selected for a position with FSIS	Used Plain Language guidance to reduce length and clarify verbiage.
Notification to Non-Selected applicants, letter via e-mail	Applicants not selected for a position with FSIS	Used Plain Language guidance to reduce length and clarify verbiage.
Quarterly Enforcement Report via electronic; Web	External stakeholders and FSIS personnel. External includes consumer advocates, industry associations; regulated businesses; Congressional	We reviewed the Quarterly Enforcement Report against plain language principles and updated the report with the Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education for

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		the web audience.
Approximately 100 fact sheets on individual topics, such as: Beef from Farm to Table; Refrigeration and Food Safety. We revise approximately 20 fact sheets each year via Web, email, in-person events	Consumers (8,153,292)	FSIS will continue to produce additional food safety education materials in plain language. It will also continue to review and revise its current stock of materials to ensure they contain factual, up-to-date scientific information, and written in plain language.
Kitchen Companion: Your Safe Food Handbook, booklet via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail	Consumers (720,972)	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Cooking for Groups: A Volunteer's Guide to Food Safety, booklet via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail	Consumers	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Food Safe Families Activity Book, booklet via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail	Children under the age of 10	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Let Me Tell You How Dad Got Sick!, booklet via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail	At-risk populations, to include caregivers of older adults, for example, pregnant women and their unborn children	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.

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At-risk booklet series - Food Safety for People with Cancer; Food Safety for People with HIV/AIDS; Food Safety for People with Diabetes; Food Safety for Older Adults; Food Safety for Transplant Recipients; and Food Safety and Pregnant Women, booklets via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail		This series has been revised. The new booklets will be available April 2012.
Is It Done Yet?, brochure via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail	Consumers	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Todo Cuenta, brochure via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail	Spanish-speaking consumers	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Ask Karen, magnet via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail	Consumers (16,300)	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Meat & Poultry Hotline Website, Website via Web	Consumers (1,810,640)	The website is updated regularly to include information on recalls and food safety-related issues/concerns.
Panic Button Fact Sheet, Fact Sheets via email, in-person events, U.S. Mail	Consumers (4,785,766)	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and

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		publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Protect Yourself and Your Baby From Listeriosis, Flyer via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail	At-risk populations, to include pregnant women and their unborn children	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Be Food Safe , Poster via email, in-person events, U.S. Mail	Consumers schools, extension offices, health departments	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Is It Done Yet? temperature chart , Poster via email, in-person events, U.S. Mail	Consumers	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Hand Washing Decals, Miscellaneous via Web, email, in-person events, U.S. Mail	Consumers	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
He's BAC! children's book, booklet via email, in-person events, U.S. Mail	Children under the age of 10	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and

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		publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Food Safe Families Public Service Announcements (4), Public Service Announcement via web, media	Parents with children under the age of 13 and older adults	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Food Safe Families Behavioral videos (4), Video via web	Parents with children under the age of 13 and older adults	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Surviving a Power Outage: Don't be in the Dark When it Comes to Food Safety, Podcast via web	Consumers	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
USDA Food Safety Advice for Tailgating Parties, Video News Releases via Web	Consumers	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Freezing and Food Safety , American Sign Language Videos (Sign FSIS) via Web	Hearing-impaired consumers	This is part of a Fact Sheet project in which FSIS will develop standard operating procedures to identify Fact Sheet topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and

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		publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites so that the public can access information easily.
Confidential enforcement and legal correspondence, Letter via paper; electronic	Individuals and firms engaged in operations involving FSIS-regulated products	We worked with consultant trainers to develop templates and examples and have incorporated plain language into daily writing.
Review of State Meat and Poultry Inspection (MPI) Programs Summary Report; individual state reports, Report via paper; electronic	External stakeholders and FSIS personnel. External includes consumer advocates, industry associations; regulated businesses; Congressional; state MPI programs	We received fewer follow-up questions from all interested parties.
Official Annual State MPI Final Determinations, letter via paper; electronic	State MPI programs	State MPI programs responded less.
Domestic Audit Checklist, FSIS Form 5000-9, Form via paper; electronic	State MPI programs	State MPI programs responded less.
Official clarification memos to State MPI programs, Letter via paper; electronic	State MPI programs	We changed how we explained concepts, saving time due fewer questions from the programs and their quicker responses.
Official responses to appeals, Letter via paper; electronic	State MPI programs	State MPI programs responded less.
Management control reviews (MCRs)	Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement and Review (OPEER) Organizational branches	We reduced the standard MCR from eight pages to a two page summary tabular format. This new user-friendly format resulted in fewer questions from FSIS divisional branches.
Report Of Investigations (ROIs)	FSIS personnel, the Office of Inspector General (OIG), and other external stakeholders	We document ROIs in accordance with plain writing principles We have posted previous training to enhance continual learning. Readers of this year's reports will find them easier to follow.
Evaluation reports of existing and proposed programs	FSIS personnel, OIG, Government Accountability Office, and other external stakeholders	Staff revised its evaluation reports to apply plain writing principles. The results are easier to understand.
Newly issued FSIS Directives and Notices. (These are available on the Agency's website.)	FSIS Personnel	Readability of documents is improving. FSIS' Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD)

		evaluates the documents using readability tools in Microsoft Word.
During fiscal year 2012, the Office of International Affairs will be working with a contractor to support the initiative to rewrite information in the export library in plain language. The current export library has requirements for over 100 countries. The export library is used by exporters and FSIS employees to ensure that product exported meet the requirements of the foreign country.	The public is the intended user. Specifically, members of the regulated industry, particularly exporters, are using this information and will be using the improved export library.	There are instances when a requirement is not easily understood. It is vital that everyone involved with exports easily understand the requirements. The Office of International Affairs will work with contractors to rewrite information in the library in plain language and provide training to the staff.
Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD) Plain Language Fact Sheets effort is a new project in OPPD for Under Secretary Hagen. The purpose of the Fact Sheets is to provide the consuming public with easily understandable information related to processes, technology, or substances approved for use in regulated establishments.	These Fact Sheets are intended for the consuming public, not industry.	The first Fact Sheet being developed is on the priority topic of Ammonium Hydroxide. This Fact Sheet project will also result in development of an SOP on how to identify Fact Sheet topics, prioritize those topics, develop and clear Plain Language Fact Sheets, and publish those Fact Sheets by posting to applicable Agency websites (e.g., AskKaren, etc.) - thereby tying the Fact sheets to emerging policy issues.
OPPD will be issuing brief "FSIS Compliance Guidance" information in a new format. The guidance information will be continually updated to reflect the most current information available to FSIS and stakeholders. Pilot guidance documents for FY 2012 include Veal Slaughter, Allergens, and Lebanon bologna.	The new format will enable rapid sharing of information with industry on lessons learned from Food Safety Assessments, recalls, outbreak investigations, and other events and activities.	Another purpose of the compliance guidance is to break up topics into manageable pieces for clearance and readability. The compliance guidance also improves timeliness and messaging effectiveness.
FSIS Notice Verification of Veal Slaughter and Beef Fabrication Operations. Electronic & paper.	Livestock slaughter inspection personnel	The language became easy to understand.
<b>Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)</b>		
Forms (distributed through the web – PDF format; occasionally by paper)	State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)	FNS has long exercised Plain Writing standards in its documents.

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Public Notice (distributed through the web through Federal Register.gov – HTML, PDF formats)	State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)	This has resulted in more efficient clearance (less rewriting), greater comprehension by audiences, better adherence to rules and guidance due to greater clarity, and better customer satisfaction with written work.
Notice of funds available, requests for application, and other funding opportunities (distributed through the web – PDF format)	Nutrition assistance program stakeholders, State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)	
Web page (HTML)	General public, State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)	
Regulations (distributed through the web through Federal Register.gov – HTML, PDF formats)	State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)	
Question and answer, Frequently asked questions, How to, or any other informal guidance documents (distributed through the web -- HTML, PDF formats)	State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)	
Correspondence (distributed through mail and e-mail)	Congress, general public, nutrition assistance program stakeholders	
Press releases (distributed on paper and through the web -- HTML, PDF formats)	General public	
Publicly available reports (distributed in hard copy to Congress and made available to the public through the web – PDF format)	Congress, general public	
Research publications (distributed through the web – PDF format)	Nutrition assistance program stakeholders, research community	
<b>Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)</b>		
Departmental Regulation 1512 – Regulatory Decision Making Requirements (USDA internal guidance for the drafting, requirements, and clearance of departmental rulemakings proposed for publication). This document is available online ( <a href="http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/">http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/</a> ),	All USDA agency regulatory writing and coordination offices. Ultimately this could be useful and beneficial to the public (and USDA) by improving the clarity of USDA's published rulemakings.	The 1512 regulation is currently being revised. The revision will incorporate the Plain Writing Act of 2010.



but the revised version that includes the Plain Language text remains in development.		
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### III. Inform USDA Staff of Plain Writing Act Requirements

#### Actions to Date

Successful implementation of the Act requires an aware workforce. The following table highlights some of the awareness strategies we have employed since the Act took full effect on October 13, 2011.

HOW USDA AGENCIES INFORM STAFF OF PLAIN WRITING ACT REQUIREMENTS	
<b>Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)</b>	
1	NRCS regularly posts -information, resources, and updates on the agency's internal site.
2	We included Plain Writing Act feature articles in the September 2011 and January 2012 editions of NRCS' Executive Correspondence Management Team Newsletter.
3	We distributed a National Bulletin to all employees on October 15, 2011 announcing the Plain Writing Act and assigning the Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely course to NRCS employees who write and edit most NRCS public documents. Three hundred fifty-six employees were assigned and have completed the training.
4	We distributed a National Bulletin to all employees on March 9, 2012, assigning the NRCS Plain Writing Webinar to all employees of NRCS. As of April 9, the deadline for completing the training more than 11,700 NRCS employees and others have completed the AgLearn NRCS Plain Writing Webinar or Business Writing course.
5	We have placed posters have around NRCS Headquarters showing the progress toward achieving 100 percent compliance with the Plain Writing Act, using awareness of the Act and resources made available through NRCS Plain Writing Webinar.
6	We sent various Plain Writing Act e-mails to public affairs specialists, administrative staff, and agency leadership.
<b>Farm Service Agency (FSA)</b>	
1	FSA posted information on the Act on the agency intranet. FSA wrote and posted an article in FSA's electronic newsletter, the <i>Fence Post</i> , in October 2011. The link is < <a href="http://fsa.typepad.com/fsa-fence-post/2011/10/gobbledygook-gone-plain-writing-in.html">http://fsa.typepad.com/fsa-fence-post/2011/10/gobbledygook-gone-plain-writing-in.html</a> >

2	We published an article on the Act and its requirements in the internal agency news bulletin. FSA wrote and posted an article in FSA's electronic newsletter the <i>Fence Post</i> in October 2011. The link is < <a href="http://fsa.typepad.com/fsa-fence-post/2011/10/gobbledygook-gone-plain-writing-in.html">http://fsa.typepad.com/fsa-fence-post/2011/10/gobbledygook-gone-plain-writing-in.html</a> >.
<b>Rural Development (RD)</b>	
1	RD posted information on the Act on the agency intranet.
2	We published an article on the Act and its requirements in the internal agency news bulletin.
<b>Agricultural Research Service (ARS)</b>	
ARS published an article about the Act, USDA resources, and future ARS resources in the March 2012 edition of the agency's newsletter. That newsletter reaches about 8,400 employees.	
<b>Economic Research Service (ERS)</b>	
ERS discussed the Act with the agencies trained and professional editors who review every item before it is released.	
<b>National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)</b>	
1	NASS distributed a memo from the Administrator, along with direction to use the NASS Plain Writing Checklist (issued October 2011).
2	We created a webpage on the agency intranet that provides information on the Plain Writing Act; directs staff to resources available at < <a href="http://www.PlainLanguage.gov">www.PlainLanguage.gov</a> > and < <a href="http://www.usda.gov/plain-writing">www.usda.gov/plain-writing</a> > and contains specially created NASS plain writing materials (webpage created October 2011).
3	We published an article in the agency internal newsletter, <i>Round-Up</i> , on the Plain Writing Act and featuring key tips (winter issue).
4	We distributed periodic e-mails from the plain language coordinator reminding employees of the mandate to write plainly along with tips on how to do so.
5	We created a series of one-page quick tips on key aspects of the Plain Writing Act expanding on elements in the Plain Writing Checklist (distributed periodically to all staff and available on the intranet).
6	We include regular communications and plain writing tips in the weekly memo from headquarters to field staff, reminding staff of the plain language mandate, highlighting available resources, and providing focused tips.
<b>National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)</b>	
1	NIFA briefed our Executive Council about the Act.

2	We conducted plain language training sessions with agency program staff.
<b>Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)</b>	
APHIS provides intranet writing guides for all staff members, including information about the Act, guidelines, checklists, online courses, and tools to achieve the Act's requirements.	
<b>Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)</b>	
OASCR distributes information about the Act in staff meetings.	
<b>Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)</b>	
1	OCIO informed one group via e-mail.
2	We have posted documents on the USDA Departmental Directives page.
<b>Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)</b>	
1	OAO provided information on the Plain Writing Act to more than 25 staff members.
2	We provided an information sheet on the Plain Writing Act and its requirements.
3	We have initiated discussion and plans to post information on the agency intranet.
<b>Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)</b>	
1	In March 2012, FSIS is currently promoting and pilot testing a plain language writing checklist targeted towards FSIS' Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement and Review. In April 2012, the office will distribute the checklist and use it to write, review, and enhance written communications, office-wide.
2	We posted information on plain language and requirements of the Plain Writing Act on the Office of Program and Policy Development SharePoint site.
<b>Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)</b>	
1	In October 2011, FNS's Plain Writing Senior Official sent an e-mail to Agency supervisors providing a plain-writing tip sheet and web-based information links for their use with employees.
2	In December 2011, FNS's Human Resources Division sent a similar e-mail to all Agency employees.
<b>Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)</b>	

<p>OBPA provided the Plain Language Checklist for Writers and Reviewers to staff on September 23, 2011. A list of Plain Language Training Resources was also provided to the staff at this time, along with a summary of the Act's requirements.</p>	
<p><b>Forest Service</b></p>	
1	<p>The Chief of Staff, acting on behalf of the Forest Service Chief, sent a memo directing the Forest Service's top executives nationwide to designate field coordinators for implementing the Plain Writing Act. The executives chose public affairs directors at the regional office and research station level, who in turn coordinated with local field offices.</p>
2	<p>The Chief's Office worked directly with the public affairs directors and with staff directors in the Washington Office, sending out information on the Plain Writing Act and issuing data calls.</p>
3	<p>To help spread the word about the Plain Writing Act and to make related resources available, the Chief's Office set up a Plain Writing Act Webpage on the Forest Service's Intranet Website. On the Webpage, the Chief's Office posted a checklist prepared by USDA, tailored to Forest Service needs, to help writers use plain language.</p>
4	<p>The Chief's Office also announced progress in implementing the Plain Writing Act through "People, Places, and Things," a monthly newsletter for all employees, and through the Forest Service's online blog for the general public.</p>

## IV. Training

### The Employees We Are Training

Successful implementation of the Act requires a trained workforce. The documents we have committed to writing in plain language come from across USDA, and many different staff members write them. Here is a sample of the people who write plainly:

- loan officers who provide guidance to potential applicants;
- program staff who develop forms and regulations;
- inspectors who send notices to plants that USDA inspects;
- contract officers who prepare notices of contract opportunities;
- foresters who develop land management plans;
- communications specialists who write news releases; and
- IT specialists who develop webpages for our programs.

### How We Are Training Our Employees

The following is a list of our training efforts.

How USDA AGENCIES TRAIN EMPLOYEES IN THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE PLAIN WRITING ACT		
Type of training	Number of employees trained	Date
<b>Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)</b>		
Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely (AgLearn)	471 employees	Completion Date: November 15, 2011
NRCS Plain Writing Webinar	NRCS assigned this webinar to all employees. Employees had until April 9, 2012 to view the webinar. More than 11,300 NRCS employees and others have viewed the Webinar to date. .	Assigned: March 9, 2012
In-house training	46 employees	Scheduled for: April 24 and May 16 - 17, 2012
Plain Writing Resources on my.NRCS the agency internal webpage. <a href="https://my.nrca.usda.gov/nrcs.aspx">https://my.nrca.usda.gov/nrcs.aspx</a>	All agency employees	NRCS will continue to provide regular updates as more resources become available.
<b>Farm Service Agency (FSA)</b>		
In-house training	2	July 2011 – Department of Interior Plain Language Training by John Strylowski
Webinars	2	February 2011 – general training via Web Manager Forum
Online training	1	October 2010 – Graduate School USA (Using Plain Language when Writing for Government)
<b>Rural Development (RD)</b>		
Plain Language Training focused on regulations and NOFAs	50	December 15, 2011

<b>Agricultural Research Service (ARS)</b>		
In-house training	FOIA staff, editorial staff, IS writing staff, outreach staff, technical support staff (approximately 12 persons)	September 2011
Online training	AgLearn module (PowerPoint) for use by field locations is in development.	Tentative launch date May or June 2012
<b>National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)</b>		
In-house training	2	July 2012
Online training	Public affairs staff (8 persons)	Fall/Winter 2011/2012
Continuing communication and how-to tips	All staff	Periodic communication through various means
<b>National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)</b>		
In-house training	2 17 15 30 Total: 64	July 7, 2011 October 4, 2011 November 17, 2011 December 8, 2011
<b>Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)</b>		
In-house training	One hundred twenty-three employees have taken and passed intensive course with 9 hours in-class time and 6 hours homework. Of these approximately half have taken two additional courses with 7 hours of in-class time and 4 hours of homework. Each of these classes includes intensive exercises and feedback on in-class and homework. 126 have taken a half-day course highlighting plain language principles.	--
PLAIN provided training – live	Twenty-two employees have taken PLAIN-provided training.	--

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Online training	APHIS has recommended sets of on-line training (AgLearn) but does not track employee participation.	--
<b>Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)</b>		
In-house training	60	Third quarter of fiscal year 2012.
PLAIN provided training – live	2	
Online training – AgLearn	46	January 31, 2012
<b>Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)</b>		
In-house training	15	January 31, 2012
<b>Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)</b>		
PLAIN provided training – live	27	February 29, 2012
Online training AgLearn Plain Writing course 101	27	February 29, 2012
Plain Language: Improving Communication from the Federal Government to the Public < <a href="http://www.plainlanguage.gov">http://www.plainlanguage.gov</a> >.	27	
<b>Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)</b>		
In house (agency Staff or contractor)	All Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement, and Review. Evaluation and Enforcement Division, Federal State Audit Branch Office of Management (All Minneapolis offices)	December 2011 Fiscal year 2012, quarter 1 March 2012
PLAIN provided training – live	33 Office of International Affairs staff 35 Office of International Affairs staff	August 9, 2011 August 16, 2011
Webinars		
Online training		

<b>Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)</b>		
PLAIN training—this resulted in the creation of a tipsheet on plain writing that was subsequently distributed to all FNS employees	2 FNS coordinators and correspondence liaison	Fall 2011
PLAIN training workshops and posting of plain writing resources online	FNS' Supplemental Nutrition and Benefit Redemption Division staff	December 2011
Email to supervisors in FNS from the FNS Human Resources Division, identifying online training modules for their use with employees who might need additional plain writing help.	Agency supervisors	March 2012
<b>Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)</b>		
In house (agency Staff or contractor)		
PLAIN provided training – live		
Webinars		
Online training	52 staff members	September 23, 2011; February 2, 2012
<b>Forest Service</b>		
In September 2011, in response to a data call, Forest Service staffs across the country identified employees involved in writing documents covered by the Plain Writing Act. The Forest Service estimated that about 1,500 employees, as a major part of their jobs, wrote or edited documents covered by the act. Of these, about 1,200 employees were believed to need further training.	1,500 employees	
The Chief's Office recommended that all Forest Service employees consider adding at least one plain	1,200 employees	



writing course to their individual development plans. Employees could take advantage of training opportunities through USDA's AgLearn program, which includes at least two relevant online modules: "Introduction to the Plain Writing Act" and "Business Writing: How To Write Clearly and Concisely." Forest Service staffs committed about 1,200 employees to take one or both modules, covering all those in need of training under the Plain Writing Act.		
In house (agency Staff or contractor)	10 (Policy Analysis staff)	8/10
In house (agency Staff or contractor)	84 (Business Correspondence staff)	6/11
In house (agency Staff or contractor)	90 (Business Correspondence staff)	8/11
Online training	1,168 (various staffs)	10/11–3/12

## V. Ensuring Compliance with the Act

USDA's agencies have established various processes to oversee their compliance with the Act's requirements. The following table summarizes many of those processes.

HOW USDA AGENCIES ENSURE COMPLIANCE WITH THE PLAIN WRITING ACT	
<b>Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)</b>	
1	Agency designated four national headquarters contacts for plain writing.
2	NRCS Leadership is committed to continual process improvements using two-way sharing of information, data, success stories, and maintaining dialogue regarding the importance of the Act with agency employees nationwide.
3	The agency will enforce the Plain Writing Act and will measure compliance through newsletter articles, surveys, and one-on-one discussions and support.
4	Periodic reminders and training courses for all national headquarters staff including senior management.
5	Reviewing and approving public communications for accuracy, timeliness, usability, and clarity.

<b>Farm Service Agency (FSA)</b>	
1	Documenting and reporting use of plain writing in agency communications
2	Most documents go through a clearance process before they are released.
<b>Agricultural Research Service (ARS)</b>	
The agency will continue to write publications in plain language for a general, non-technical audience. Our editors have been trained in and incorporate this element into their work.	
<b>Economic Research Service (ERS)</b>	
Agency and Department editors will continue to review every manuscript and other document.	
<b>National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)</b>	
1	NASS named an employee for compliance issues.
2	Expanding the number of persons formally trained, continuing informal training, and providing refresher materials
3	Incorporating the plain writing check list in review processes for various publications
<b>National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)</b>	
1	NIFA has a senior agency official who is responsible for plain writing and an agency coordinator.
2	The writer and the writer's supervisor.
<b>Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)</b>	
1	APHIS named an employee to act as the senior agency official who is responsible for plain writing.
2	Senior agency officials clear web posts and correspondence that trained staff members write.
<b>Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)</b>	
1	OASCR assigned an employee to serve as the agency contact for compliance issues, including compliance with the Plain Writing Act.

2	All documents are cleared through OASCR.
<b>Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)</b>	
As part of a Lean Six Sigma process improvement effort in OCIO, the Departmental Directives process has been altered. We are training OCIO on the new Department Directives process and the Plain Language Act as the two overlap significantly. Part of the Lean Six Sigma effort includes periodic retraining that includes the Plain Writing Act.	
<b>Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)</b>	
1	Documenting and reporting use of plain writing in agency communications. Continuing discussing in staff meetings and in the development of program area fact sheets and correspondence.
2	Clearance process being developed in conjunction with correspondence protocol.
<b>Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)</b>	
1	In October, 2011, FSIS' Office of Program Evaluation, Enforcement, and Review (OPEER) added a plain language component to the Personal Contacts – Equal Opportunity/Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights performance elements. The new component allows all of this office's employees to count plain language training as one of the measures to submit to supervisors in consideration for earning a rating of "exceeds." Supervisors have also been encouraged to request that employees attend plain writing training, as needed.
2	For more than 26 years, the Food Safety Education Staff (FSES) has provided food safety educational products written in language that is clear for consumers to understand. FSES's end goal, then and now, is to produce materials that are free of organizational jargon, government speak, and technical prattle, so the consumer is able to obtain the information presented.
3	FSES creates food safety factsheets, publications, magnets, flyers, posters, videos, and American Sign Language video-casts in plain, age-appropriate, and nationality-specific language to meet the needs of its many constituents. It also produces products for the hearing- and visually impaired and for those who read below the national reading level of 6th grade.
<b>Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)</b>	
1	FNS will continue to use a tipsheet and web-based resources to promote the use of plain writing during the drafting and clearance process for covered documents.
2	We have distributed and will continue to encourage supervisors whose staff may have difficulty with writing plainly to use the online training modules that are available to USDA employees, perhaps by including them in individual development plans as appropriate.

Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)	
1	<p>OBPA's regulatory review staff has added the Plain Writing Act of 2010 as a requirement when reviewing all departmental significant regulations for programmatic accuracy and completeness.</p> <p>In addition to this, OMB issued a final guidance document related to the Plain Writing Act of 2010, on April 13, 2011. Although the final document is not specific to regulations it does state, on page 5: "While the Act exempts regulations from covered documents, rulemaking preambles are not exempted, and long-standing policies currently in effect require regulations to be written in a manner that is "simple and easy to understand.' "</p> <p>Footnote 5 in the document references Executive Order 12866, sec. 6(a)(3)(F), which states that "All information provided to the public by the agency shall be in plain, understandable language." This reference carries over to Executive Order 13563, which states that "(a) Our regulatory system must... ensure that regulations are accessible, consistent, written in plain language, and easy to understand. It must measure, and seek to improve, the actual results of regulatory requirements."</p> <p>Consequently, OBPA's regulatory review staff is required to employ the lens of plain writing when reviewing all departmental significant regulations for programmatic accuracy and completeness.</p>
2	<p>Consequently, OBPA's regulatory review staff is required to employ the lens of plain writing when reviewing all departmental significant regulations for programmatic accuracy and completeness.</p>
3	<p>The eRulemaking Program also issued a "Best Practices Document" at the end of last year. This document also included general information about plain writing and eRulemaking's role in informing Federal agencies on to how to comply with the OMB guidance.</p>
4	<p>The Federal Register Document Drafting Handbook and PlainLanguage.gov contain general information regarding plain language, which OBPA's regulatory review staff has also added as a requirement when reviewing all departmental significant regulations for programmatic accuracy and completeness.</p>
Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)	
1	<p>The Forest Service has review systems in place to ensure that its documents are plainly written. For example, all publications by the Forest Service's Washington Office are reviewed by the Forest Service Office of Communication, followed by another review by the USDA Office of Communication. Both offices have professional writer/editors who oversee the reviews, ensuring that Forest Service documents are understandable and usable by the intended readers.</p>
2	<p>Forest Service regional offices and research stations typically have similar review systems in place, as do many individual forests and staffs. For example, a professional writer/editor on the Policy Analysis staff in the Washington Office reviews every report before it is released to readers. Among other things, he ensures that it is plainly written. Periodically, during staff retreats, he conducts a training session in plain writing (Ten Tips for Writing and Editing).</p>

## VI. USDA’s Plain Writing Websites

### The Department’s Plain Writing Websites

The USDA Plain Language website is at <[www.usda.gov/plain-writing](http://www.usda.gov/plain-writing)>. The page includes tools and resources for writing plainly, information on how citizens can contact USDA if they have any comments, concerns, or issues related to our compliance with the Act, and links to the Plain Language Action and Information Network’s website.

The text of the Plain Language Act of 2010 is available at:

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ274/pdf/PLAW-111publ274.pdf>

The final guidance that the Office of Management and Budget provided to agencies about the Act is available at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2011/m11-15.pdf>

For additional information on plain writing you may also visit <[www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov)>.

### USDA Agency Websites Related to the Plain Writing Act

The following table provides information on plain writing websites that various USDA agencies have launched.

USDA Agency Website Related to the Plain Writing Act	
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	
1	my.NRCS.gov intranet site
2	my.NRCS.gov Public Affairs Division ECMT Plain Writing Section
3	A Plain Writing Act webpage is under development for the NRCS public website. The site will invite comments from the public.
Rural Development (RD)	
Links to OMB and PLAIN	
Economic Research Service (ERS)	
Links to the department’s plain writing website which contains all of the required information.	

<b>National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)</b>	
NASS has an internal website with plain writing resources, including agency-produced material and links to USDA, Plain, and other websites.	
<b>National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)</b>	
Links to OMB and PLAIN	
<b>Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)</b>	
1	Website address: <a href="http://www.ascr.usda.gov/">http://www.ascr.usda.gov/</a>
2	Contact us page: <a href="http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/">http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/</a>
3	Documents covered by the Act – all documents issued by the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights.
4	Links to OMB and PLAIN – on webpage.
<b>Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)</b>	
All of OCIO's information can be reviewed at < <a href="http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/">http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/</a> >.	
<b>Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)</b>	
1	Office of Advocacy and Outreach Website address: <a href="http://www.outreach.usda.gov/index.htm">http://www.outreach.usda.gov/index.htm</a>
2	E-mail: <a href="mailto:AdvocacyandOutreach@osec.usda.gov">AdvocacyandOutreach@osec.usda.gov</a>
3	Links to OMB and PLAIN
<b>Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)</b>	
Since early 2012, there has been a plain language, plain writing folder on the Office of Policy and Program Development SharePoint site at: <a href="http://dcvm4sps1/sites/OPPEDPC/Plain%20Writing/Forms/AllItems.aspx">http://dcvm4sps1/sites/OPPEDPC/Plain%20Writing/Forms/AllItems.aspx</a>	

## VII. Customer Satisfaction with USDA’s Plain Writing

### How USDA’s Agencies Solicit Comments and What People Are Saying

The following table highlights some of the ways USDA agencies are receiving feedback about their writing. Some agencies are also receiving comments about how Plain Writing training has improved the way USDA communicates with its customers.

Comments on USDA Agency Writing	
<b>Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)</b>	
1	Use of ForeSee survey to determine customer satisfaction and website usability.
2	Visible Thread, a company that ranks federal websites for clarity and plain writing, ranked NRCS as 12 out of 30 websites.
3	Word of mouth
4	Surveys <a href="https://my.nrsc.usda.gov/PortalStatic/publicaffairs/ECM/Plain%20Language%20Survey%20Questions%20for%20my.NRCS.docx">https://my.nrsc.usda.gov/PortalStatic/publicaffairs/ECM/Plain%20Language%20Survey%20Questions%20for%20my.NRCS.docx</a>
<b>Farm Service Agency (FSA)</b>	
Once <i>Your Guide to FSA Farm Loans</i> has been released, FSA will review reports that monitor the number of applications received, as well as application and participation rates based on race, ethnicity and gender; the agency will use that information to measure effectiveness. FSA state offices, tribal leaders, tribal organizations, and community organizations will also provide comments on the effectiveness of the guide.	
<b>Rural Development (RD)</b>	
On December 15, 2011, Rural Development held a plain language training session at the Department. Approximately 50 employees participate in the training.  Kathryn Catania, who co-chairs the interagency taskforce on plain language, was the instructor. The program staff found the training to be useful, and it helped them determine how to make regulations more customer-friendly.  Rural Development will soon organize a webinar regarding plain language. The webinar will focus on Congressional correspondence and news releases.	
<b>Economic Research Service (ERS)</b>	
The ERS website receives nearly a million visitors every year; two-thirds of those visitors are repeat visitors. ERS receives consistently high marks in the ASCI surveys.	

<b>National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)</b>	
1	In fall 2011, the NASS Prices Program created a new web presence, paying close attention to what data users identified as important; the agency wrote the web content in plain, clear style. Since the launch of the new webpages in October, the number of visitors to the program site has increased, and users are providing good comments on the site’s usability and clarity. NASS plans to adopt the same approach and formatting as other programs revise their webpages.
2	As cover letters, instructions, fact sheets and other materials roll out for surveys and the upcoming census, NASS expects to find higher compliance and fewer inquiries from producers about how to participate.
<b>Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)</b>	
The “Ask the Expert” web-based interface allows users to rate the usefulness of responses they receive from APHIS. The agency uses comments received through “Ask the Expert” to improve its answers to questions.	
<b>Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)</b>	
OCIO will conduct evaluations as more of its staff members are trained. The current training schedule should result in training of OCIO policy writers and approvers before the end of May 2012.	
<b>Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)</b>	
OAO is currently developing a customer survey for each of its programs to assess user experience in comprehension of program information and delivery of service.	
<b>Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)</b>	
1	The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline (Hotline) converses with personnel from FSIS District Offices and consumers on a daily basis about FSES’s educational products. The Hotline has never received negligible feedback from any individual or group of people regarding the products FSES produces.
2	State Meat and Poultry Inspection programs staff changed how they explained concepts, decreasing questions from the programs and more quickly receiving their responses. Other areas have also reported a decrease in the number of follow-ups and clarifications to items revised to use plain language. This information is anecdotal; no specific measures are yet in place.
<b>Food Nutrition Service (FNS)</b>	
1	We have not conducted any formal assessments of customer satisfaction to evaluate differences since the implementation of the Act. However, FNS has long exercised Plain Writing standards in its documents. This has resulted in more efficient clearance (less rewriting), greater comprehension by audiences, better adherence to rules and guidance due to greater clarity, and better customer satisfaction with written work.



## Communicating with USDA about Plain Writing

We want to hear your comments about the clarity of our writing. Public comments are critical to help us succeed in writing documents that are clear to anyone who uses them. Your comments also help us identify older documents we should consider revising. Please e-mail us at <[plain@usda.gov](mailto:plain@usda.gov)>, or mail a letter to us at:

Marjorie Harter  
 USDA Plain Language Coordinator  
 Office of the Executive Secretariat  
 U.S. Department of Agriculture  
 1400 Independence Avenue SW Washington, D.C. 20250

## VIII. Agency Coordinator Information

As noted in Section I, USDA created a working group of agency officials who lead the Department’s implementation of the Plain Writing Act and ensure the Department complies with the Act. The following officials, listed in the order shown in the [USDA organizational chart](#), ensure that their agency or office produces public documents in plain language.

USDA AGENCY COORDINATORS FOR THE PLAIN WRITING ACT		
Agency	Senior Agency Official Responsible for Plain Writing	Plain Writing Coordinator(s)
<b>Natural Resources and Environment (NRCS)</b>		
Natural Resources Conservation Service	James Gore Gayle Norman	Terry Bish Suzanne Austin-Kashawlic
<b>Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services (FFAS)</b>		
Farm Service Agency	Todd Atkinson	Latawny Dia Tony Jackson
Foreign Agricultural Service	Lisa Twedt	Lisa Twedt
Risk Management Agency	Patricia Engel	Patricia Engel
<b>Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNCS)</b>		
Food and Nutrition Service	Richard Lucas	David Burr

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Center for Nutrition Policy and Programs	Richard Lucas	Richard Lucas
<b>Food Safety (OFS)</b>		
Food Safety Inspection Service	Charles Williams	Rene Cardwell
<b>Research, Education, and Economics (REE)</b>		
Agricultural Research Service	Mary Conley	Tara T. Weaver-Massick
Economic Research Service	Adrie Custer	John Weber Dale Simms
National Agricultural Library	Mary Conley	Mary Conley
National Agricultural Statistics Service	Suzanna L. DuPont	Rosemarie Philips
National Institute of Food and Agriculture	Ellen Frank	Scott Elliott
<b>Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP)</b>		
Agricultural Marketing Service	Karen Comfort	Karen Comfort
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service	Beth Gaston	Beth Gaston
Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyard Administration	Mike Schmidt	Mike Schmidt
<b>Other USDA Offices</b>		
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights	Winona Lake Scott	Marshella Hines
Office of Budget and Program Analysis	Andrew Perry	Andrew Perry
Office of the Chief Information Officer		Matthew Patrick
Office of the Executive Secretariat	Sally Liska	Marjorie Harter
Office of the Chief Economist	Brenda Chapin	Brenda Chapin
Office of Communications	Carrie Mitchell	Carrie Mitchell

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Office of the General Counsel	John Padalino	Michael Knipe
Office of the Inspector General	Darryl Stephens	Darryl Stephens
Office of Advocacy and Outreach	Marilou Flores	Marilou Flores
<b>Forest Service</b>		
Forest Service	Tim DeCoster	Hutch Brown



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear USDA Employees,

I am writing to ask each of you for your help with plain writing at USDA. Writing in plain, easy to understand language is an important way for us to help better serve the American people. Plain language makes it easier for the public to get the most from our many critical programs and will save us money too.

On President Obama's first day in office he signed a memorandum emphasizing the importance of establishing "a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration." I am proud of the hard work that all of you have been doing to implement that vision and transform USDA into a more open and accessible organization.

In further support of these goals, last fall the President signed the Plain Writing Act of 2010. The Act requires that, beginning October 13, all Federal Agencies—including USDA—use plain language in new or substantially revised documents that are needed to obtain USDA services or benefits or provide information about them or that explain how to comply with requirements we administer or enforce.

Using plain writing is indispensable to achieving our goals of providing first-class customer service and ensuring access to our programs. When we avoid jargon and excessive acronyms, customers that are new to USDA are more likely to have a positive experience. And when we avoid obscurity and ambiguity, we demonstrate our commitment to serving all Americans, including those who have had trouble accessing our programs in the past.

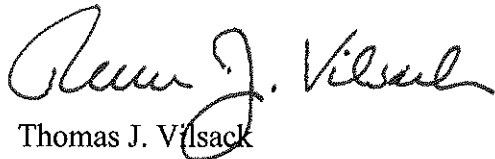
Plain writing is also an important tool for improving efficiency and saving time and money at USDA. Logically organizing your thoughts, using clear tables and graphics, and approaching a document from the perspective of your audience can reduce the number of calls you receive asking to explain a document or form and the number of hours spent on enforcement because a farmer did not understand a regulation.

This past summer USDA published our [Plain Writing Compliance Report](#) to ensure compliance once the Act comes into full effect October 13, 2011. Through the USDA Plain Language working group, each agency has begun identifying covered documents and providing training and resources to employees. I encourage each of you to visit our [Plain Language web page](#) to learn more about the Act.

Included in the newly updated Plain Language web page you will find resources that will help you write and review documents for the public covered by the Act, as well as help you inform our colleagues in order to comply with the Act. I urge you to explore the USDA website, AgLearn courses, and [plainlanguage.gov](http://plainlanguage.gov) website to learn about and get training regarding writing and reviewing documents for plain language so that we can serve our country best.

As part of our efforts to strengthen our service at USDA, it is important that we communicate clearly and simply with the American people. I know I can count on you to do your best to make it happen in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom J. Vilsack". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" and last name "Vilsack" clearly legible.

Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary