

Plain Writing Act Compliance Report 2016

For the

**United States Department
of Agriculture (USDA)**



December 2016

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1. Introduction

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.

USDA pledges to provide you with information that is clear, understandable, and useful in every paper or electronic letter, publication, form, notice, or instruction produced by the Department.

In October 2011, Secretary Thomas J. 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 in this report's [Appendix](#) and at USDA's Plain Writing Web site, at <http://www.usda.gov/plain-writing>.

THIS REPORT

This report focuses on the period between January 1, 2015, and December 31, 2015. 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 compliance reports in 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015. This year, we report on how we have built on our prior efforts toward meeting the goals in the Plain Writing Act. You can read USDA's Plain Writing Act implementing report here: <http://www.usda.gov/documents/PL-Report-final.pdf>.

Last year's compliance report can be found here: <http://www.usda.gov/documents/usda-plain-writing-act-2015-compliance-report.pdf>.

USDA OFFICIALS FOR PLAIN WRITING

We are committed at the highest levels to complying fully with the Act. Secretary Vilsack recognizes the importance of using plain language to achieve the goals of President Barack Obama's Open Government initiative, and the USDA Cultural Transformation initiative, and to fulfill our commitment to customer service.

Senior Officials

USDA's senior official for plain writing is listed below:

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Agency Coordinators

USDA is comprised of 17 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. For a list of agency coordinators, please see [Chapter 8](#) of this report.

2. Sample USDA Communications

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. Also, adherence to plain writing principles has helped USDA in communicating more clearly and effectively with its customers.

SUMMARY OF USDA AGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

The following tables list USDA agency documents that have been produced in a format consistent with plain writing principles. The tables also show the many ways that the use of plain language has assisted the agencies in conveying information to the public.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)/National Agricultural Library (NAL)

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Magazines, news releases, semi-technical and non-technical publications, brochures, fact sheets, reports, social media content, and other Web content.</p> <p>Target Audience: Audience varies depending on product (developed for specific programs, projects, and events).</p>	<p>More than 200,000 people will visit ARS' home Web site and will read ARS' information online. These communications will help create awareness and increase public understanding about ARS research and related findings.</p> <p>Thousands more will read ARS' materials disseminated at various events, meetings, and programs.</p> <p>The NAL Web site receives approximately 50 million page views and 1.1 million searches each year. The agency's content is reviewed to ensure its audience understands the material and can find the information they are looking for.</p>

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Web pages</p> <p>Target Audience: APHIS stakeholders</p>	<p>APHIS continued to provide information to the public via its Web site in a clear, user-friendly way. In 2015, APHIS launched new Web pages for the Asian longhorned beetle, highly pathogenic avian influenza, feral swine, citrus health, and pet travel. Through these pages, members of the public and others can easily and quickly learn more about important agency activities and regulatory requirements.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Publications</p> <p>Target Audience: APHIS stakeholders</p>	<p>Increased accessibility and comprehension on complex scientific subjects to APHIS target audiences.</p> <p>Legislative and Public Affairs continues to improve editorial quality and increase plain language use in APHIS publications. In particular, APHIS researched readability standards and related tools in Word, and, starting in March 2015, began running readability “checks” on draft text during editorial review to work toward general goals in key areas: active versus passive voice (less than 10% passive voice, ideally), short average sentence and paragraph length, and overall reading ease. Other editorial focuses in publications include increasing use of the following: personal pronouns, strong verbs, and everyday words and phrases (based on the word suggestions list at plainlanguage.gov).</p>
<p>GovDelivery Stakeholder Registry</p> <p>Target Audience: APHIS stakeholders</p>	<p>Immediate access to valuable information about APHIS.</p> <p>Stakeholders select the type of information they would like to receive, how often they would like to receive it, and the medium by which they wish to receive it (e.g., email or SMS text messages).</p>
<p>Responses to customer inquiries made via the Web (“Ask the Expert”)</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>The public now receives succinct, clear responses to inquiries. In 2015, APHIS responded to nearly 2,100 inquiries through the “Ask the Expert” interface—providing members of the public accurate, up-to-date information quickly.</p> <p>People can also search USDA’s “Ask the Expert” site for clear, short answers to their APHIS-related questions, which the agency updates regularly. In 2015, there were more than 66,000 individual hits on APHIS-related questions and answers on the site. Popular topics included pet travel, imports and exports of agricultural products, animal welfare, and pests and diseases.</p>
<p>Social Media</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>APHIS continues to invest time and energy in expanding its social media presence—further promoting interest in agency programs, activities, and accomplishments. APHIS uses a conversational, plain writing style in its blog and Twitter posts and on its Facebook pages to inform and engage the public.</p>

Economic Research Service (ERS)

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Economic research monographs released via the agency's Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Policymakers, academia, informed laypeople</p>	Increased comprehension and customer satisfaction
<p>Market analysis newsletters released via the agency's Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Policymakers and commercial agriculture companies</p>	See above.
<p>Amber Waves magazine, (www.ers.usda.gov) and through a magazine app available on iTunes and GooglePlay</p> <p>Target Audience: Policymakers and informed laypeople</p>	See above.
<p>Tweets: The agency publishes tweets daily</p> <p>Target audience: 23,000 followers, the general public, policymakers, academia, commercial agriculture stakeholders, and media</p>	See above.

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)/Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP)

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Forms, public notices, funding opportunities, regulations, and Web pages (distributed electronically through the Web—in HTML or PDF format; occasionally by paper)</p> <p>Target Audience: State and local nutrition assistance program operators and stakeholders (Thousands)</p>	FNS has long exercised plain writing standards in its documents. Adherence to these standards 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.
<p>Correspondence, press releases, reports, and research publications (distributed in hard copy and electronically)</p>	See above.

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Target Audience: Congress, general public, nutrition assistance program stakeholders, research community</p>	
<p>Nutrition promotion materials</p> <p>Target Audience: Nutrition community, general public</p>	<p>See above.</p>
<p>Question and answer, Frequently asked questions, How to, or any other informal guidance documents (distributed through the Web—in HTML, PDF formats)</p> <p>Target Audience: State and local nutrition assistance program operators (Thousands)</p>	<p>State SNAP Notices Initiative</p> <p>In March 2015, FNS published its guide to “Best Practices for Online SNAP Applications,” which includes a section on plain language, and provides a self-assessment checklist to help State agencies provide clear, easy-to-use online applications and notices.</p> <p>Better applications and notices will help ensure accurate and timely decisions on households’ SNAP applications and on administrative actions requiring notification of SNAP households.</p> <p>Prototype Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals</p> <p>In school year (SY) 2015-2016, FNS published a fully re-designed free and reduced price school meals application. The new prototype application was developed through a year-long, collaborative project between FNS and the Office of Personnel Management’s Innovation Lab. It used plain language and other customer-focused design elements to minimize confusion and make it easy for families that apply for free and reduced price benefits to report accurately. It was also refined through a focus testing process conducted with groups of parents. The new application has been received positively at the State and local level, and an updated version for use in SY 2016-2017 will build upon that success.</p> <p>Income Verification Letter</p> <p>In the fall of 2015, FNS and the White House Social and Behavioral Sciences Team pilot-tested a revised letter to households participating in school meals, requesting verification of their income, an important administrative process. The new letter goal seeks to reduce confusion and encourage timely responses by households with a set of clear action steps for complying with verification</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	requirements. The project also encouraged school districts to make it easier to comply by accepting emailed pictures of verification documents and offering pre-paid envelopes to mail hard copies. These improvements will make requirements clear and easier to meet.

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>FSA has produced 14 new agency program publications that comply with the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>FSA program publications are distributed at agricultural events. There are plans to post these publications on the FSA Intranet and Internet.</p>	<p>The intended users are FSA's internal and external customers who attend the agency's program functions or who go on the agency's Web page for program information.</p> <p>These program publications have the potential to reach nearly 1.5 million online viewers.</p> <p>FSA's recently produced publications are condensed, providing important information in a succinct manner.</p>
<p>Two major FSA farm loan guides are currently in the clearance process and will be distributed and posted online before or by the end of this fiscal year.</p> <p>These guides have been specifically and deliberately written in plain language to help FSA's customers navigate FSA's loan processes.</p> <p>Your Guide to Farm Loan Programs is currently posted online and will be updated once the revised guide is cleared.</p>	<p>The two farm loan guides are intended for people who need assistance starting, expanding, or owning a farm or ranch, and for farmers or ranchers who have an FSA Farm Loan Programs loan.</p> <p>Currently, the guide to FSA Farm Loans is online, but it is being revised.</p> <p>Although these two guides are lengthy, they are clearly written in a way that helps the reader understand the process for getting a loan with FSA.</p>
<p>FSA has created a Plain Writing Handbook adapted from the Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN). The handbook is in the final stages of being completed. Once completed, it will be posted online and used in future plain writing training.</p>	<p>The FSA Plain Writing Handbook is for FSA employees working in the agency's 2,124 offices nationwide.</p> <p>The potential impact from using this guide is to produce simpler and clearer forms and instructions and more precise communications to FSA's external and internal customers.</p>
<p>FSA has incorporated and continues to incorporate plain language into its Web sites, news releases, fact sheets, tweets, and blogs.</p>	<p>The intended users are FSA's external customers—farmers and ranchers, which is approximately 800,000.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>News releases continue to be written in an easy-to-read format that assists in educating non-agricultural audiences on USDA programs.</p> <p>The use of technical terms and acronyms has been limited as much as possible, and acronyms are defined whenever used.</p>
<p>FSA has revamped its main portal to get the user where he or she needs to go by launching redesigned versions of FSA's internal- and external-facing Web sites.</p> <p>Web content is more simple, and engaging so that customers can read and navigate through it within a 10-second window.</p>	<p>The intended users are FSA's 1.5 million online viewers.</p> <p>The goal is to integrate all of FSA online content into the same look and feel as the main page of its Web site and to make sure readers can read content quickly.</p> <p>Site enhancements included the migration to Percussion and planned efforts to resolve already identified customer experience quick hits and synergistic efforts.</p> <p>Content managers and contributors have been identified and assigned the responsibility of maintaining and updating content in their deputy program area.</p>

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) acknowledgment correspondence, fee waiver denied/granted correspondence, determination correspondence, subpoena response correspondence via U.S. mail</p> <p>Target Audiences: FOIA requestors, consumer advocates, industry associations, news media, regulated industry members, and their representatives.</p>	<p>FSIS has revised template letters using more plain language. Examples include using active voice and shorter sentences, explaining technical issues, and eliminating wordiness.</p>
<p>FOIA expedited processing denied/granted correspondence, submitter's notice correspondence, absent fee agreement/over \$250 correspondence, referral correspondence, Privacy Act correspondence via U.S. mail</p> <p>Target Audience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FOIA requestors and other agencies 	<p>As FSIS writes and reviews letters, the specialists and supervisors use plain language.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Privacy Act requestors: External individuals doing business with FSIS 	
<p>Correspondence (General), letter via U.S. Mail or email</p> <p>Target Audience: Members of Congress; consumer and industry groups; Federal, State, and local officials; meat, poultry, and processed egg products establishments; consumers; and members of the public.</p>	<p>As FSIS writes and clears letters, writers and editors use plain language. Examples include using active voice and shorter sentences, explaining technical terms, eliminating wordiness, and writing to the specific audience. Also, FSIS has revised standard language to incorporate plain language.</p>
<p>Campaign Correspondence, letters via U.S. mail or email</p> <p>Target Audience: Members of the public; activists.</p>	<p>When writing responses to campaign letters, FSIS gives extra attention to plain language. These responses are relayed to thousands of constituents who have a wide variety of reading levels and knowledge of the issues.</p>
<p>Constituent Update, newsletter via electronic means</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers, regulated community, public officials</p>	<p>Plain language is an ongoing effort for the Constituent Update. FSIS continues working with subject matter experts on technical content without compromising the message. FSIS rewrites text into plain language, and reviews and rewrites its text in order to ensure that the message is correct.</p>
<p>Approximately 100 fact sheets on individual topics, such as Beef from Farm to Table, and Refrigeration and Food Safety. FSIS revises approximately 20 fact sheets each year via Web, email, and in-person events.</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers (8,153,292)</p>	<p>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 that they contain factual, up-to-date scientific information, and are written in plain language.</p>
<p>Consumer Guides distributed via the Web, email, in-person events, and U.S. mail, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kitchen Companion: Your Safe Food Handbook, booklet Cooking for Groups: A Volunteer's Guide to Food Safety, booklet Food Safe Families Activity Book, booklet Let Me Tell You How Dad Got Sick!, booklet Is It Done Yet?, brochure; Todo Cuenta, brochure 	<p>This is part of a project in which FSIS developed plain language fact sheets, and published those fact sheets by posting them to the applicable agency Web sites so that the public can access information easily.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask Karen, magnet • Panic Button, fact sheet • Protect Yourself and Your Baby From Listeriosis, flyer • Food Safe Families, poster • Is It Done Yet? temperature chart, poster • He's BAC! children's book, booklet <p>Target Audience: Consumers</p>	
<p>The Meat and Poultry Hotline Web page houses valuable information about how to reach the Hotline.</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers (1,810,640)</p>	<p>FSIS uses plain language when it updates its Web site regularly to include information on recalls and food safety-related issues/concerns.</p>
<p>Food Safe Families public service announcements (4); Food Safe Families Behavioral videos (4); Surviving a Power Outage: Don't be in the Dark When it Comes to Food Safety podcast; Food Safety Advice for Tailgating Parties video news releases; Freezing and Food Safety, American Sign Language videos via Web, media</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumers</p>	<p>This is part of a project in which FSIS developed plain language fact sheets, and published those fact sheets by posting them to applicable agency Web sites so that the public can access information easily.</p>
<p>Web content</p> <p>Target Audience: All customers (internal and external)</p>	<p>FSIS Web Managers often work with content contributors on draft documents and share their knowledge of best practices. To introduce new content, FSIS writes descriptive introductory text with a clear call to action. The agency emphasizes using fewer words, active voice, and few acronyms in order to achieve plain language.</p>
<p>Web Content: Limited English Proficiency (LEP)</p> <p>Target Audience: Government employees</p>	<p>FSIS recently added links to the Civil Rights main page to these LEP resources: the FSIS LEP plan, a training Webinar sponsored by USDA's Office of the General Counsel, and "I Speak" cards used by the U.S. Census Bureau.</p>
<p>Intranet Content Contributors Quick Start Guide</p> <p>Target Audience: FSIS Employees</p>	<p>The guide was created as a training aid to help content contributors manage content on InsideFSIS, the employee Intranet. FSIS reviews this guide periodically to include any updates in the system and to ensure its ease of use for its contributors.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Green Initiative (GI), Web (FSIS Notice)	Documents are in bulleted formats, directly to the point (less verbiage), and easy to read. The GI helps in reducing waste by making documents within the agency reader-friendly and clear.
<p>Management control reviews (MCRs), via electronic means</p> <p>Target Audience: FSIS program-area personnel</p>	FSIS reduced the standard MCR from 8 pages to a 2-page summary tabular format. This user-friendly format delivers a clearer message and results in fewer follow-up questions.
<p>Strategic Plan Dashboard</p> <p>Target Audience: Leaders, Managers and Goal Coordinators</p>	Plain language concepts are applied to the dashboard to easily identify which Program Areas are working to achieve specific performance targets. The result is a clearer understanding of how their work relates to the eight strategic goals and of the completion rate of key annual performance results and actions.
<p>Reports Of Investigations (ROIs), via the Freedom Of Information Act (FOIA)</p> <p>Target Audience: FSIS Labor and Employee Relations Division, the Office of Inspector General (OIG), the Office of the General Counsel (OGC), and other stakeholders</p>	ROIs are prepared in accordance with plain writing principles. Previous trainings are posted on the Web site to enable continuous learning. Readers of the ROIs find the reports easier to follow. FSIS has also reduced the number of pages in the reports.
<p>Quarterly Enforcement Report via electronic means and posted on FSIS' Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: FSIS personnel and external stakeholders, including consumer advocates, industry associations, regulated businesses, and Congress</p>	FSIS reviewed the Quarterly Enforcement Report against plain writing principles and updated the report with the Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education, for the Web audience.
<p>Confidential enforcement and legal correspondence, letters via paper; electronic means</p> <p>Target Audience: Individuals and firms engaged in operations involving FSIS-regulated products</p>	FSIS worked with consultant trainers to develop templates and examples and has incorporated plain language into daily writing.
<p>Review of State Meat and Poultry Inspection (MPI) Programs Summary Report; individual state reports, Report via paper; electronic means</p> <p>Target Audience: Consumer advocates, industry associations, regulated businesses,</p>	A clearer message has been delivered, and fewer follow-up questions have been received from all interested parties.

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Congress, state MPI program officials, and FSIS personnel.	
Official Annual State MPI Comprehensive Review and Determination Reports, letter via paper; electronic means Target Audience: State MPI programs	The annual report process is being streamlined. The report length has been reduced from 13-15 pages to 3-4 pages, and plain writing concepts have been incorporated—this eliminates wordiness and delivers a clearer message.
State Onsite Audit Checklist, FSIS Form 5720-3, Form via paper; electronic Target Audience: State MPI programs	Language on audit checklists has been simplified to capture the most relevant information and ensure more accurate records are kept.
Official clarification memos to State MPI programs, letters via paper; electronic means Target Audience: State MPI programs	FSIS clarified concepts and adjusted wording to save time due to fewer questions from the programs, resulting in a quicker response from the State programs.
“At Least Equal to” Guidelines for State MPI Cooperative Inspection Programs, via paper; electronic Target Audience: State MPI programs	Revised 2008 document. Includes changes that have occurred since 2008. Plain language has been used to clarify instructions to State MPI Programs and ensure more complete and relevant information, which leads to less confusion and fewer questions from State programs.
FSIS Directive 5720.3 Rev. 2, Methodology for Performing Scheduled and Targeted Reviews of State Meat and Poultry Inspection Programs, via paper; electronic Target Audience: State MPI programs	Plain language has improved readability and comprehension. Policies and procedures have been clarified, and modifications were made to the review methodology and components.
International Audit Report, electronic means Target Audience: General public, external stakeholders, food safety advocates, Members of Congress	Plain language has improved the readability of the audit and establishment report. Eliminating the number of pages and utilizing plain language has resulted in a streamlined report, which delivers a clearer message to the general public.
International Audit Establishment Checklist Target Audience: General public, external stakeholders, food safety advocates, Members of Congress	Language on audit checklists has been simplified to deliver accurate information and ensure a consistent audit process.

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Component Verification Analysis Form, electronic</p> <p>Target Audience: FSIS program-area personnel</p>	<p>Plain language has improved readability and comprehension of plans and results documented in the verification form.</p>
<p>Laboratory Checklist, electronic</p> <p>Target Audience: FSIS program-area personnel</p>	<p>Plain language has improved readability and comprehension of the verification form.</p>
<p>Official responses to appeals, letters via paper; electronic means</p> <p>Target Audience: State MPI programs</p>	<p>Official responses have been streamlined to deliver a clearer message, which results in fewer follow-up questions.</p>
<p>Litigation-related documents</p> <p>Target Audience: Internal stakeholders and external entities. Internal stakeholders include management and program officials. External stakeholders include administrative judges and private attorneys.</p>	<p>Plain language legal writing has improved readability and comprehension.</p>

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>News releases and other postings on agency Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public and media representatives</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Simplified terminology, clear and succinct articles, and normally two clicks to information.</p>
<p>Responses to customer inquiries made via the Web</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>The public continues to receive concise, clear responses to inquiries. The "Contact Us" link is simple and contains eight key contact areas.</p>
<p>Briefing Papers</p> <p>Target Audience: Senior-level Department officials</p>	<p>Improved clarity and brevity, and informative for the targeted viewer.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Potential Audience: 25	
<p>Comments to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and World Trade Organization</p> <p>Target Audience: International trade officials and organizations</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	Prepared clear, results-oriented, and diplomatic comments to encourage countries to understand and/or modify regulations to ensure open trade.

Forest Service

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Documents/communications of all kinds</p> <p>Target Audience: service users, national forest visitors, businesses, contractors, students, landowners, partners, non-governmental organizations, and so forth; millions</p>	<p>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, research papers, and publications.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>In the winter of 2014 and again in the spring of 2015, the Chief's Office contacted Plain Writing Act coordinators across the country to review and reconfirm the kinds of documents covered under the Plain Writing Act. The coordinators also reconfirmed the estimated numbers of covered documents in existence and generated each year. There were no significant changes from the last time an assessment was done in 2011-12.</p> <p>Some units reported positive results from the emphasis on plain language, including improved communications, positive public feedback/response, and a reduction in the number of public questions and need for follow-up.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2015, the Forest Service published the USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan FY 2015-2020 that embodies the agency's commitment to sustain the Nation's forests and grasslands, deliver benefits to the public, apply

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>knowledge globally, and excel as a high-performing agency. Written clearly and concisely, the strategy's reach continues through coordinated monthly communication themes based on the agency's goals. The themes are supported by blogs, updated Web pages, social media, videos, and other communication tools that are replicated or enhanced by agency units. The strategy is continually communicated in ways that are clear, concise, and helpful to the public.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="743 554 1484 827">• The agency continues to make improvements to the Interactive Visitor Map, with a 2.0 version expected to be released in 2016. The online map provides the public with a view of Forest Service roads, trails, and recreation sites and is fully functional with personal computers, mobile phones, and tablets. The online map is one of hundreds of map products available to the public. <li data-bbox="743 869 1484 1163">• Agency program areas are using maps to provide information to employees that is also of interest to the other Federal agencies and the public. Tribal Connections is the Forest Service Indian Land Map Viewer with a visual depiction of which Tribal governments, past or present, have a connection to agency lands. The agency has made this map and others, as well as geodata, readily available to the public. <li data-bbox="743 1205 1484 1457">• All briefing papers produced by the Washington Office, Research and Development are reviewed by the unit's public affairs staff for professional editing that includes a plain language check, or are edited by staff members with a journalism or science writing background. The editors review and revise for plain language, Associated Press style, and logical structure.

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="748 212 1479 516">• All Pacific Southwest Research Station public-facing materials, including the station's Web site content, annual Accomplishments Report, briefing papers, and brochures, undergo a rigorous editorial process by the Communications Director and Station Leadership Team to ensure plain language writing. Manuscripts submitted as station publications or journal articles are reviewed and edited by the author's program manager and the assistant station director, research. Station publications are then submitted to the Pacific Northwest Research Station for further editing, and then, printing. Station editors edit for clarity and adherence to Government Publishing Office style. <li data-bbox="748 730 1463 1073">• In April 2015, the Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS) published the <i>RMRS Strategic Communication Plan 2015-2017</i> to help station employees communicate the unit's science in meaningful ways to those who use and apply the Station's research. Written using plain language concepts, the station also published a 7-page summary that outlines the goals and objectives in an easy-to-read format with supporting visuals—this helps employees to better communicate with the public. <li data-bbox="748 1115 1479 1314">• The Rocky Mountain Research Station bi-monthly Science You Can Use Bulletin reaches nearly 2,500 subscribers and provides the latest science advances for implementation by land managers, to include local, state, and Federal agencies, non-government agencies, and private landowners. <li data-bbox="748 1356 1471 1524">• <i>Explorer</i> is an internal Rocky Mountain Research Station newsletter that targets scientists, professionals, and support staff using clear, concise language. Authors refrain from the use of acronyms and technical jargon. <li data-bbox="748 1566 1471 1797">• Local units, such as the Cherokee National Forest, also reported a heightened awareness and better use of plain language principles to provide simplified information so the public can better understand information in documents, agreements, and other public handouts. A small example of these efforts includes the following:

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The National Forests in Mississippi has a guide for public documents that emphasizes plain language. ○ The Daniel Boone National Forest implements the Plain Writing Act standards in all documents, including emails. ○ The National Forests and Grasslands in Texas writer/editors are part of a review system to ensure that documents are clearly written. ○ The Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center has an interactive online course presenting information about managing Inholdings and Access in Wilderness written in accordance with plain writing principles.
<p>Forms, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Service users, national forest visitors</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Rocky Mountain Research Station provides templates for Science Spotlights, Projects, and other Web content that are written in plain language and directs the user to use plain language in their responses. The station also reviewed and improved all online content as part of its migration to a Drupal content management platform. ● The Northern Region provides employees templates and guidance concerning the National Environmental Policy Act and the Act's Administrative Review and Litigation section. Employees are urged to understand the Plain Writing Act of 2010, the requirement that documents be 508 compliant, plain language principles, effective analytical writing, and writing tips, among other topics. The Northern Region Asset Management Desk Guide gives employees clear and concise details on processes for all aspects of Asset Management. The plain language approach has ensured process clarity, as evidenced by the positive feedback from internal and external customers. ● The Bighorn National Forest uses principles of plain writing when developing desk guides and forms to

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>conduct outreach for prospective employees. Non-government employees are asked to review the documents to ensure ease of understanding and clarity of recommendations and instructions. The forest staff believes the effort has increased interest in working for the Forest Service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Pacific Southwest Region units use plain language principles to ensure clarity in public documents through reviews and the use of templates. Some examples are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Inyo National Forest’s recent review and redesign of the visitors guide simplified language and made the document less text heavy, with recognition that readability is linked to design as well as writing. ○ The Lassen National Forest reviewed and revised the external Web site to facilitate easy navigation and to ensure clear intuitive topic headings and content summaries. The forest is in the process of revamping the internal site for staff. ○ The San Bernardino National Forest is working to ensure that clear and concise language is used in the Sand to Snow National Monument Plan for other documents that provide crucial public information. ○ The Eldorado National Forest ensures public notices submitted to the local newspaper clearly state information about public meetings, vehicle auctions, Resource Advisory Committee requests for project proposals, and employment opportunities.
<p>Grants, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Businesses, students, landowners</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>All grants use plain language where feasible but must abide by the legal technical text in order to remain a binding legal document. Agency units strive to maintain the balance.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest works to reduce technical jargon and acronyms in grant applications and keep them short, thus increasing the chances of applicants' receiving grant funding for needed projects. • The Cherokee National Forest is reducing technical jargon in various grant applications and information in order to help increase the likelihood of receiving grant funding for needed projects. • Grant applications on the Daniel Boone National Forest are written in plain language, with less technical jargon whenever possible.
<p>Agreements, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Community organizations, non-governmental organizations, other agencies, other partners; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>All agreements use plain language where feasible but must abide by the legal technical text in order to remain a binding legal document—agency units strive to maintain the balance.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Pacific Northwest Region and the Pacific Northwest Forest Service Association simplified the reporting language and realigned their budget year to match their financial institutions and systems. • The Cherokee National Forest and Daniel Boone National Forest in the Southern Region use simplified language in Challenge Cost Share and other agreements, resulting in better understanding of the agreements.
<p>Contracts, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Businesses, contractors; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>All contracts use plain language where feasible but must abide by the legal technical text in order to remain a binding legal document. Agency units strive to maintain the balance.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <p>The Cherokee National Forest uses the guidelines under the Plain Writing Act As Standard Operating Procedures in contracts.</p>
<p>Requests for information (RFIs), requests for proposals (RFPs), etc., distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Businesses, contractors; thousands</p>	<p>Contracting Officer Technical Representatives continue working to simplify language in RFIs and RFPs.</p> <p>All RFIs and RFPs use plain language where feasible but must abide by the legal technical text in order to remain a binding legal document. Agency units strive to maintain the balance.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <p>The Los Padres and Cherokee national forests continue to simplify language in RFIs and RFPs, placing emphasis on text that will be easily understood by the public. In some cases, the Public Affairs Office reviews documents before they are finalized.</p>
<p>Brochures, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Service users, national forest visitors; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Office of Communication continues to produce brochures, fact sheets, and posters in accordance with guidelines under the Plain Writing Act. A small example of brochures, fact sheets, and posters produced in 2015 includes the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recreational Drone Tips and a Responsible Use Web page. ○ USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan FY2015-2020 brochure and poster ○ Providing Benefits and Services for the Greater Good • Washington Office Minerals and Geology Management worked to provide clear, concise information so prospective buyers can fully understand unpatented mining claims and the rights of an owner of an unpatented mine.

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="743 212 1484 447">• Budget and Finance has several committees and organizations that distribute information about employee events via flyers, Web sites, and an internal email box used for just these types of events for full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees. Prior to publishing or distributing, the writer-editor reviews and edits these for clarity and plain language. <li data-bbox="743 489 1484 590">• Human Resources Management produces brochures about the Pathways Program, which provide a path to Federal careers for students and recent graduates. <li data-bbox="743 632 1484 867">• The Rocky Mountain Research Station uses clear and concise language on internal guides, including the Media Desk Guide, Social Media Desk Guide, and Legislative Desk Guide. The Station also produced several brochures on Forest Inventory and Analysis and the Experimental Forests and Ranges that adhere to plain writing standards. <li data-bbox="743 909 1484 1045">• The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest develops brochures that are reviewed by the subject matter experts and public affairs staff to ensure that they are written clearly. <li data-bbox="743 1087 1484 1209">• The Arapaho National Forest prepared a brochure on osprey viewing and management, in accordance with the principles of plain writing and good design and layout. <li data-bbox="743 1251 1484 1528">• The Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland revamped brochures using plain language principles—this includes brochures on trails, forest products, recreation sites, and off-highway vehicle regulations. Also, visitor maps for the Pole Mountain, Sierra Madre, and Snowy Range units have been updated and reprinted using plain language. <li data-bbox="743 1570 1484 1707">• The Boise National Forest reviews the narratives, photos, and information in brochures and other publications in order to ensure that it is clear and understandable and that it utilizes clear language. <li data-bbox="743 1749 1484 1843">• The Fishlake National Forest print materials are submitted to the Public Affairs Officer to ensure readability and compliance with the Plan Writing

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>Act—this included flyers, brochures, and news releases.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sawtooth National Forest uses plain language in brochures developed for the three new Wilderness Areas (Hemingway Boulders, White Clouds, and Jerry Peak). • All visitor guides in the Intermountain Region (one per forest) are written using interpretive writing and design techniques that enhance the visitor experience. • The Dixie National Forest prepared the 2015 Annual Accomplishment Report with the public in mind and posted it on the Dixie Web site, used portions for social media posts, and distributed hard copies to stakeholders. In addition, forest brochures are reviewed by a number of specialists, public affairs, and general audience members (public, volunteers) to gain feedback prior to publication. • All Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest brochures and handouts intended for the public go through the proper review process on the Forest, then to the Region publications committee for review and printing approval, which is standard for all forests in the region. • A number of Pacific Southwest Region forests reported redesigning brochures, flyers, and interpretive information to reflect a more readable format based on plain writing guidelines. Numerous forests in the region also reported using routine reviews and templates for the materials. • On the Inyo National Forest, as in other forests, several staff members are concentrating on creating standardized Recreation Opportunity Guides for hiking, camping, and other activities so that the information is consistently presented across the ranger districts. Photos or charts are also chosen to enhance the interpretive message. • The Malheur National Forest offers extended front desk hours during high-traffic times with readily stocked kiosks and front desks with various community/forest information. This combination of in-

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>person assistance and printed information ensures a high level of customer service and user understanding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Southern Region has a formal publication review process in place to ensure that all region handouts are edited for clarity, tone, style, grammar, and absence of jargon and technical language prior to publishing. • Cherokee National Forest Web pages and public handouts are written in plain language—in many cases, less text is used to say more with fewer words. Writers pay close attention to avoid the use of jargon and acronyms. • The Daniel Boone National Forest Public Affairs staff reviews and edits publications to ensure compliance with plain language guidelines, and that external content is edited for brevity and clear, concise language. • The Eastern Region’s print materials intended for public use are reviewed at the unit level, followed by a regional review prior to submitting for printing approval. Reviews include Plain Writing Act requirements and visual standards. • The Alaska Region office reviews Web page postings for compliance with plain language guidelines.
<p>Interpretive signs, located at facilities and on trails, roads</p> <p>Target Audience: National forest visitors; thousands</p>	<p>Ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>All interpretive signs and displays located at RMRS facilities abide by the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland, the Laramie Ranger Districts post signs in the office windows for after-hours public information; the Yampa Ranger District, Routt National Forest will install new information boards at all campgrounds, with more graphics and photos, and concise text with fewer words. • As new interpretive signs are developed, Boise National Forest Public Affairs reviews the narratives, pictures, and information to ensure that it is clear, understandable, and uses clear language. The Boise

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>National Forest also developed seven interpretive signs for the Becker Project to display at a local yurt system to alert the public of upcoming changes. These signs incorporate plain language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All new Fishlake National Forest interpretive signs are reviewed by Public Affairs and the Regional Office for compliance with the Plain Writing Act. • All interpretive signs within the Intermountain Region are written or reviewed by trained interpretive writing professionals using Plain Writing Act principles, along with graphics to tell compelling stories. The Region installed hundreds of interpretive signs in the past 5 years (400 in Spring Mountains alone) that are seen by thousands of visitors each year. All interpretive signs are reviewed by the Regional Office, Interpretation, Conservation Education, Tourism Program Manager and follow Plain Writing Act guidelines. • The Angeles National Forest staff are encouraged to follow agency standards and use templates when available. Interpretive information is reviewed by the Forest Public Affairs staff or Forest leadership for plain language compliance. Recently, in partnership with various local organizations, interpretive signs were updated at the Oaks Picnic Area in the newly created San Gabriel Mountains National Monument. The signs were created in multiple languages with an emphasis on universal messaging. • The Eldorado National Forest completed a series of new Desolation Wilderness interpretive signs that clearly show the different permitting zones to facilitate compliance with the wilderness permit system. The updated forest map and the Mokelumne Wilderness map included easy-to-understand trip planning information. • The Stanislaus National Forest interpretive signs and announcements were designed using Plain Writing Act principles and are typically reviewed by the Forest Public Affairs Office and occasionally the regional office if there are additional concerns. Informational products designed for external use are designed with adherence to USDA Visual Standards and Guidelines.

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>Forest interpretive information is enhanced with photos or charts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New signs on the Cherokee and Daniel Boone National Forests show fewer words with more impact; signs are being designed to fit their location; and trail information depicts what the visitors are interested in and need to know. • New interpretive trail signs in the El Yunque National Forest in Puerto Rico were designed with fewer words, clearer maps that were designed to fit specific locations, and trail information that provides what the audience wants and needs to know. Photos help convey important features along the trails. The bi-lingual signs include directional and interpretive information in English and Spanish.
<p>Descriptions of services, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Service users, stakeholders, local citizens; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Budget and Finance branches have their own subsites from the main internal Budget and Finance home page. These Web sites provide descriptions of services, how-to guides, procedures, frequently asked questions, and other up-to-date, current information that users need to know. The writer-editor assists with these Web pages to ensure that they are written in plain language. • Human Resources Management delivers regular internal system updates about various systems—eSafety, Electronic Performance Management, and USAJobs—to keep employees informed. • The Rocky Mountain Research Station Web site is search-based with a user-friendly keyword search. This function helps to narrow a wide range of products with a filtering system. • The Angeles National Forest Web pages are updated multiple times a week, and information content is consistently reviewed for plain language and 508 compliance. The Angeles and San Gabriel Mountains National Monument team views the public-facing Web site as a continual work in progress and

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>seeks feedback for ways to improve information and services within the existing template.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the Pacific Southwest Region, forest Web sites have been standardized, and content management is limited to four employees that use the Plain Writing Act to ensure content is easy to read, use, and comprehend. The public-facing Web site has a “pop-up” feedback feature to measure effectiveness. • The Stanislaus National Forest revamped the internal and external Web sites to use icons to help users quickly find information they are seeking. • The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests deliver regular forest alerts, updates, general recreation, and in-depth trail information via forest mobile applications for smart phones and tablets. These applications make critical forest information and visitor services instantly available in plain language to thousands of forest users in English and Spanish. • The Eastern Region is using Web analytics to look at where the public is clicking on external Web sites and is using that data to direct time and resources to re-designing and writing Plain Writing Act-compliant content for those sections first. The Region implemented regional Web governance internal and external Web sites as supplemental Forest Service Manual requirements. Web governance makes approval processes for internal and external Web content clearer. The Region also continues to work to improve external Web content by deleting or improving outdated content that does not adhere to plain language standards. The ongoing work is a follow-up to an initial step in FY 2013 when the Region significantly reduced the number of Web contributors to improve quality control.
<p>Instructions, distributed by mail/Web sites/offices</p> <p>Target Audience: Service users, contractors, employees; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Resources Management helped to update the Jobs page on the Forest Service National Web pages. The information includes how to apply detailed, easy-to-understand instructions.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Resources Management maintains a Black Board account and informs employees how to receive updates on the Center’s operating status. The instructions are edited for plain language. • The Washington Office Research and Development staff recently created two Sharepoint® sites, one for Web content requests and one for travel management information in order to capture relevant information from staff members that is concise as well as comprehensive. The Sharepoint sites clarified, streamlined, and simplified the information-gathering process for both the giver and receiver of information. Due to its success, the travel management site is currently being reviewed by top leadership for agencywide deployment. • On the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland, special-use permit letters and recreation residence letters are simplified, and use clear text.
<p>Rules/regulations, distributed via Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Washington Office of Communication strives to present Web content that is useful and presented in clear, concise language. Analytics have shown that most people use the Web site to get information about recreational opportunities. The Web content was built specifically to provide information about rules and regulations in a friendly, helpful tone and includes the Know Before You Go section of Visit Us. Simple words and a clear layout provide useful tips on how people can enjoy the outdoors, stay safe, brave the elements, and respect wildlife. The pages are designed with the idea that some users may want to print out the information and take it with them. • The Washington Office of Communication provides easily assessable links to the Forest Service directive system and an overview of pertinent laws and regulations.

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Resources Management updates guidance from USDA and the Office of Personnel Management on an internal Web site. • Lengthy mailed letters for compliance issues with oil and gas operators on the Thunder Basin National Grassland have been replaced by personal phone calls, face-to-face field visits, or emails from Douglas Ranger District staff. • The National Forests and Grasslands in Texas use plain language for Supervisor Orders, public notices, job announcements, and Schedule of Proposed Action reports.
<p>Management plans, distributed by Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest hired a writer-editor for the Forest Planning Interdisciplinary Team to set consistent formats for documents and to edit the management plan, environmental impact statement, and accompanying documents. All forest plan revision documents are scrutinized for clarity. • The work on the National Forests of North Carolina to revise the land management plan for the Pisgah and Nantahala National Forests included review to ensure compliance with plain language principles. The Deputy Forest Supervisor was featured in a video describing the plan revision process in plain language. • The Cherokee, Daniel Boone, and El Yunque national forests reported management plans and communication plans that are organized in sections with appropriate headings, making information easier to find and written to ensure reader understanding. El Yunque also reported that handouts and materials that were developed to help engage the public in the Forest Planning process used visuals and text to communicate important conservation principles. These were developed in Spanish for local communities. • The <i>2020 Vision Implementation Plan</i>, an interagency plan for wilderness developed by the Forest Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and U.S. Geological Survey was written emphasizing the use of plain writing for both employee and public consumption.
<p>Project descriptions, distributed by Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project pages on the Rocky Mountain Research Station Web site are structured to provide a brief, succinct, and concise description along with hyperlinked keywords for the relevant Research Topics, National Strategic Program Areas, National Priority Research Areas, and Geography. The use of hyperlinks throughout the content provides easy access that includes author profile(s), publications, and collaborators. • In the Rocky Mountain Region, the scoping document for Brush Creek-Hayden Ranger District's North Savery Project on the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland uses plain language to explain what is proposed and why. The document includes an appendix with the rationale for each road that is proposed to decommission. • The Boise National Forest project analyses are posted on the Web site, along with applicable documents. News releases announcing projects/decisions are written in clear language for the general audience and highlight the basic decisions in clear language. • The Fishlake National Forest Environmental Coordinators review documents prior to posting to the Forest external site through the Planning, Appeals and Litigation System. • The Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest develops a one-page flyer pertaining to prescribed fires on each Ranger District, notifying stakeholders and local citizens of upcoming prescribed burns. The flyers are written in plain language and delivered to all target audiences by mail and e-mail and are posted in community gathering places and on forest Web sites. The Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest also

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	<p>ensures all scoping letters and public correspondence are written in plain language and delivered in a similar manner to all target audiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Intermountain Region posted state fact sheets so users in four states know current issues based on where they live. The Region also produced a regional fact sheet. • Forests in the Pacific Southwest Region work to provide information to the public in a clear, concise way. Some reported they consult with resources, enterprise teams, and regional staff to make sure that project descriptions adhere to plain language standards for public distribution. Projects are announced on Project and Plans Web pages and are short, easy to read and understand, and to the point. Additional information is provided through a link. • The National Forests in North Carolina uses Facebook to post short descriptions and videos that feature employees clearly describing projects and accomplishments. • Many forests reported reviews of National Environmental Protection Act documents for legal compliance and readability. Forests work with resource specialists to produce clear documents that describe scientific principles and legal framework using common terms and plain language. • The Southern Region revised Web pages using plain language Web content principles: easily scanned by the human eye; written concisely and objectively; simple sentences used; jargon avoided; segmented into easy-to-read “chunks”; and using meaningful Web links.
<p>Environmental analyses, distributed via Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Angeles National Forest, San Gabriel Mountains National Monument and other units reported efforts to consult with subject matter experts, resources, enterprise teams, and regional staff to ensure Environmental Analyses information adheres to plain

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>language standards. Many units reported seeking feedback from partners and other members of the public to improve on ways to convey technical information in ways that will appeal to the various user groups.</p>
<p>Decision documents (e.g., on plans, projects), distributed by mail/offices and posted on Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Rio Grande National Forest produced 15 assessments grouped into topics for the assessment phase of the forest plan revision beginning with a 2-5 page executive summary. The Forests Need for Change document is only 7 pages and is organized into just four categories—changes required by law; broad changes needed throughout the plan; specific changes needed to the plan; and desired changes. This has received positive feedback from the public.
<p>Press releases, distributed by fax and posted on Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Journalists, stakeholders, employees; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Washington Office of Communication has 16 years' worth of national news releases posted online that can be searched by year, unit name, tags, or topics. Releases are reviewed by program areas, communication leaders, Forest Service top leadership, and by Natural Resources and Environment and the USDA Office of Communication for clarity, content, and readability. • Agency public affairs staffs issue press releases in clear and concise language and which is reviewed at several levels. Press releases are posted on specific unit Web pages with the option of providing additional links for more information. Most emphasize short, easy-to-read paragraphs and the use of Associated Press style. • Forest Service units use social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, to amplify releases distributed to news media but which are written clearly and concisely in a format fitting the application. For example, Twitter posts are 140 characters or fewer, so clarity is important. Some forests also reported posting press

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>releases at district offices to ensure forest users see the information. Other areas, such as the Pacific Northwest Region, distribute news releases in PDF format via direct email.</p>
<p>Research publications, distributed by mail/offices and posted on Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Scientists, managers, employees; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act, as appropriate for the purpose of the publication and the intended audience.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Office of Communication continues to produce research publications in accordance with guidelines under the Plain Writing Act. Examples of research publications produced in 2015 include: Forest Service Research and Development: 2015 Overview and the Forest Service Research and Development Tribal Engagement Roadmap • The Washington Office Research and Development produces an extensive amount of information for the public: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A monthly electronic newsletter about new science and technologies for internal and external partners and customers adheres to Associated Press Style, the plain language “bible” for journalists. The newsletter uses strong images, newsy headlines, plain language blurbs, and links to the larger articles, which are written in plain language for a general audience. ○ The annual overview includes background, research goals, and accomplishments, and current budget information. The overview is written in plain language for a lay audience and produced in hard copy for distribution at conferences and other meetings. It is also presented as a PDF online. The 2015 Overview acknowledged Research and Development’s centennial. ○ The Tribal Engagement Roadmap uses plain language to outline an agenda regarding services to, and engagement with, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Pacific Islanders, and other indigenous peoples. The roadmap supports and implements the

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>goals and objectives outlined in the agency-wide Tribal Relations Strategic Plan and will help highlight and prioritize Research and Development’s contributions to the agency’s broader Tribal Relations Program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ More than 700 annual research highlights are posted on the Web, with 230 currently in final review. They are edited for plain language, with special attention given to removing acronyms and jargon and presenting scientific units in both metric and American format. They are also edited for excessive use of passive voice. Although mainly used by people with a scientific or technical background, they should be accessible to a non-technical audience, and the agency is making progress in that direction. ○ Exhibits are built for scientific conferences and other purposes on an as-needed basis. The writing on the exhibits is similar to advertising copy: the messages are conveyed in a few words, using plain language and catchy phrasing. Research and Development recently helped to build a new water exhibit using the Smithsonian’s “Do it Yourself” program. ○ The USDA National Agroforestry Center in Lincoln, Nebraska, which is managed by the Washington Office Research and Development, provides many publications for farmers, land managers, conservationists, and others on the relevance of agroforestry to climate change, communities, pollinators, water, and wildlife. The Center’s regular mailing list reaches about 5,700 natural resource professionals, who ordered an additional 65,000 publications in FY 2015 to distribute to farmers, land managers, and others across the country. By adding the right trees in the right places, landowners can make their farms and ranches more productive and sustainable. That is the popular and highly effective <i>Working</i>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p><i>Trees</i> message found in a series of handouts and other publications, as well as on the center's Web site, that helps natural resource professionals, community leaders, and landowners identify with the concept of agroforestry. The Center also produces a quarterly electronic newsletter for its partners and customer base with updates about new research results and new communication products.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Pacific Southwest Research Station made a concerted effort to ensure that all text was written in plain language geared toward a general, as opposed to a scientific, audience when developing its new <u>Fire Science Web site</u>. The site provides fire management tools for land managers and user-friendly summaries and key findings from relevant fire research to inform effective forest fire management. Information is based on research from the Sierra Nevada, Southern Cascades, and Klamath-Siskiyou ecoregions but can be applied in similar areas throughout the western United States. The Web site discusses the importance of the ecological function of fire and the social, cultural, and economic values pertaining to wildland fire management.
<p>Letters, distributed by mail/email</p> <p>Target Audience: Service users, national forest visitors, partners, stakeholders; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Forest Service uses software called Mercury to sign and distribute formal letters. Writer-editors help write, edit, and proofread letters to make sure they are in plain language before being released. In FY 2015, more than 53,000 letters were processed through the new system. That number is expected to be higher in FY 2016. • Human Resources Management staff updates employees on all aspects of human resources including the following: benefits, pay, systems, hiring, and processing. The updates are edited for plain language.
<p>Reports, distributed by mail/offices and posted on Web sites</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Target Audience: Scientists, managers, employees, other agencies, partners, stakeholders; thousands</p>	<p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Office of Communication produces publications and reports in accordance with guidelines under the Plain Writing Act. Examples of publications and reports produced in 2015 include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan: FY 2015-2020 ○ Attracting Hummingbirds to Your Garden Using Native Plants ○ Fire Management Today ○ Conservation and Management of Monarch Butterflies: A Strategic Framework ○ Joint Strategic Framework on the Conservation and Use of Native Crop Wild Relatives in the United States ○ Natural Inquirer Reader Series: Meet Dr. Ford! ○ Woodsy Owl Activity Guide
<p>Speeches, delivered in person/posted on Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Varies (general public, stakeholders, students, etc.); thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the Washington Office, speeches written for leadership use conversational tone and follow plain writing guidelines. Speeches are reviewed and later posted on the Web. • Local units reported developing slideshow presentations for public meetings that are easy to understand and visually compelling, which is especially useful on complex land-management issues.
<p>Papers/articles, distributed in journals, made available on Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Scientists, managers, employees, partners, stakeholders; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial drafts of articles written by Washington Office Research and Development staff that do not fall into the peer-review category are reviewed by on-staff

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
	<p>editors and communications professionals for readability and plain language guidelines. The unit uses Google Analytics to keep tabs on how customers are using its Web offerings. The unit monitors significant jumps in online traffic and uses of search engines such as Google Scholar to ensure that a seamless collection of Forest Service articles is available to the public.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rocky Mountain Research Station papers and articles are published in journals targeted at a peer-level audience, so content is technical in nature. However, papers featured in news releases, briefing papers, or direct inquiries from the media are discussed in writing and verbally using Plain Writing Act guidelines to ensure that the value of the research is conveyed in a manner that relates why it should matter to the target audience in the public sector.
<p>Briefs, posted on Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Managers, employees, other agencies, partners, stakeholders; thousands</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act.</p> <p>Forest Service highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Washington Office Research and Development posted new Web content on several topics in 2015: a page posting new and archived information for the Forestry Research Advisory Council committee; a Web page on international Forest Service research; a Web page on restoration research; and a Web page for the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee for Wildlife Research. All of the new information is written in plain language and follows Associated Press Style guidelines. The Eldorado National Forest provides a summary of Travel Management accomplishments and a chronology for this complex planning effort on the Forest Web site. The Alaska Region’s issues/briefing papers that are shared with the public are edited for clarity and ease of reading. Acronyms, technical terms, and agency jargon are avoided in order to achieve clarity.
<p>Testimony, delivered in person/posted on Web sites</p>	<p>There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act, as appropriate for the purpose of the publication and the intended audience.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Target Audience: Congress, partners, stakeholders; thousands	Forest Service highlights: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Washington Office posts all national leadership testimony before Congress on the national Web site that includes the day of the testimony, the session, who provided the testimony, and the committee or bill for which the testimony is provided. Users can search for testimony based on varying factors, including witness name and topics.
Legal documents, available on Web sites Target Audience: Partners, contractors, stakeholders, employees; thousands	There is ongoing use of guidelines under the Plain Writing Act, as appropriate for the purpose of the publication and the intended audience.

Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
GIPSA Web site - Equipment Web page Target Audience: All users and manufacturers of GIPSA-Certified Grain Inspection Equipment within and outside the Official inspection system.	Increased clarity of information for a broad audience and a balance between highly technical details and policy and procedure by using Frequently Asked Questions, tables, and segmenting information.
GIPSA Web site – Test Kit Evaluation Target Audience: All users and manufacturers of GIPSA-Certified Mycotoxin Rapid Test Kits	Use of tabular information to identify approved test kits and duration of approval for ease of reference.
GIPSA Web site – Swine Contract Library page and Frequently Asked Questions document Target Audience: Packers and swine producers	Page content and related Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document reviewed and edited to increase the clarity of information for a broad audience.
Brochure on GIPSA Web site – Packers and Stockyards Act Target Audience: Regulated livestock and poultry industry and the general public	Brochure updated to reflect changes to the Act. In order to make the content easier to read, GIPSA used headings and bullets; shortened sentences and paragraphs; and used “we” when referring to the agency.
GIPSA Web site – Packers and Stockyards Program (PSP) Press Releases	GIPSA’s PSP strives to eliminate as much legalese as possible. Sometimes the agency cannot eliminate it entirely and still retain the appropriate

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Target Audience: All regulated businesses and the public	meaning. However, in general, GIPSA works to make sure the public fully understands its releases.
<p>GIPSA Web site – PSP Forms</p> <p>Target Audience: All regulated livestock and poultry businesses</p>	<p>GIPSA's PSP created a Forms Team to review and update all of PSP's official forms, and related instructions that were used to collect information from the businesses subject to the Packers and Stockyards Act (the Act). The Forms Team's goal is to create forms to capture the pertinent information needed to enforce the Act. The Forms Team works to make the forms and the initial information that GIPSA requests consistent, readable, and user friendly to the public. The agency strives to maintain the forms in a manner that is easily understood by the users. Most of GIPSA's PSP forms are now PDF-fillable documents in order to make it easier for regulated businesses to input their information. GIPSA's PSP also implemented a process allowing regulated businesses to submit their annual reports to PSP electronically, rather than completing a form, printing it, and mailing it in to PSP.</p>

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>News releases, Agricultural Statistics Board Notices, and one-off publications such as agency brochures, program brochures, etc.</p> <p>Target audience: Press and the general public</p>	<p>NASS has long focused on writing these core products for a broad audience but is giving extra attention to key plain writing principles. The agency writes all such publications using plain, direct language.</p>
<p>Census of Agriculture – Communicating 2012 (including additional special studies) results. In 2015, NASS continued a focused outreach effort to communicate the results of the 2012 Census and its special studies, producing and disseminating a comprehensive package of materials aimed at heavy-data users, farmers, and the general public. Throughout 2015, NASS promoted new and previously released Census products that included a transparent and easy-to-navigate Census Web site, Quick Stats (the searchable database on</p>	<p>The Census of Agriculture materials created for media and general public use (Web site, infographics, Highlights, etc.) all aim to discuss precise statistical data in popular, readable terms. As a statistical agency concerned with precision but wanting to communicate census findings to a broad audience, NASS works constantly at conveying complex nuanced information in ways that have broad appeal and interest. Increases in audience size, number of news stories using and citing NASS data, Web hits to the data, and re-use of infographics and other materials demonstrate effective outreach.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2015, more than 5,000 media stories cited NASS or Census data.

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>which anyone can retrieve NASS data), and ancillary products featuring top findings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over the course of a year (mid 2014-mid 2015), 50 state blogs (one per week) and accompanying infographics featured key state agriculture data • More than 30 Ag Census Highlights discussing topical issues using Census of Agriculture and related data. • More than 250 static Ag Atlas maps and more than 100 interactive maps that help users visualize, download, and analyze Census of Agriculture data in a geospatial context. The instructions for using these Ag Census Web Maps are written in clear, plain language. • Blogs, FAQs, and other tools to help non-specialist audiences learn how to access the data, understand key terms, and frame data searches. • “Where Does the Food on MyPlate Come From?”—a poster, blog, and campaign featuring Census data, maps, information from the USDA MyPlate program, and plain writing principles. Teachers and students use the poster to understand where food items in the five food groups are produced in the United States. • “Top 5 Facts to Know about Family Farms”—distilled the 700-page <i>2012 Census of Agriculture Farm Typology</i> report into an interesting and digestible feature picked up by a wide audience. The story was accompanied by an infographic campaign to also reach audiences on Facebook and Twitter. • “Sales from U.S. Organic Farms Up 72 Percent”—provided the key data points and trends from the 600-page <i>2014 Organic Survey</i> report in a concise and interesting way. The feature used plain language principles to display the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two wire service features NASS wrote on local foods and renewable energy were picked up and published by a combined 5,000-plus local outlets. • In one week of distribution, the top facts about family farms information resulted in approximately 110 media stories discussing farm typology. To complement the story, NASS posted 38 tweets, which received 392 retweets and “favorites” on Twitter. NASS also posted five messages on Facebook that were viewed by more than 83,000 users, earned 877 likes, and were shared and commented on more than 1,200 times. In one week of distribution, the organic materials resulted in more than 216 media stories reaching a potential audience of 1.8 billion. This new information on organic agriculture production was presented in a concise and colorful way to appeal to readers and data users of all types interested in food and farming. <p>The various tools and documents, individually and together, help to give a broad range of users easy access to the more than six million data items in the Census and Census-special studies.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>data in easy-to-digest formats, including a map and bulleted data lists to highlight top states and commodities of interest to the general public.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media—NASS used social media to make the information more broadly accessible through clearly written blogs posted on Facebook and clear, frequent Twitter posts. <p>Target audience: Policymakers, stakeholders, community-based organizations, academics, media, farmers and ranchers, and the general public. Members of these groups have varying levels of experience with Census and NASS data, but, for many, the collateral materials that help make the data understandable and accessible are the primary source of information.</p>	
<p>Census of Agriculture – Promoting the 2017 Census. While still actively engaged in producing and releasing a series of special Census studies, NASS began in 2015 to research and develop materials to promote the 2017 Census to increase awareness among farmers and ranchers. NASS conducted market research to test multiple communications messages, taglines, and visuals for use during the 2017 Census communications. The research involved gathering input from 10 diverse focus groups based on how well they understood the message, how well it would translate to their community (especially vital for English as a Second Language (ESL) audiences), and how well they could visually see and read the information.</p> <p>Target audience: Every farmer and rancher in the United States with \$1,000 or more in actual or potential annual agriculture sales.</p>	<p>NASS will use the research results to shape the communications message, materials, and tools for the 2017 Census of Agriculture campaign.</p>
<p>Marketing materials (cover letters and background sheets) to promote survey participation. These materials accompany the individual surveys mailed to producers.</p>	<p>Increased comprehension and customer satisfaction. NASS now writes these materials in a clear, direct style with the recipients’ concerns in mind: what producers want</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>In the last couple of years, NASS has revised the materials for each survey to speak more directly to farmers expected to respond, requesting their participation and telling how the survey results directly benefit them. Background sheets describe in simple, clear terms what the survey is, how to respond, and whom the information benefits. In 2015, NASS incorporated cognitive research into some survey planning activities to test the messaging of its marketing materials.</p> <p>In launching USDA's first-ever local foods survey, NASS developed a set of products and tools to let producers, advocacy groups, and the general public know how the survey will benefit farmers, consumers, and local communities. Communication products included the initial news release, web page, handout, and FAQs—all of these were written in a clear, direct style.</p> <p>Target audience: Respondents (most often agricultural producers or businesses) that NASS asks to participate in surveys. NASS conducts more than 400 such surveys per year—some reach a few hundred; others reach hundreds of thousands.</p>	<p>and need to know. Many of the language changes were based on findings from the cognitive research.</p> <p>In one week, the Local Foods Survey campaign resulted in more than 260 media stories, reaching a potential audience of more than 240 million people. The new information has helped expand the agency's audiences, targeting the general public and stakeholders interested in local and regional food systems.</p>
<p>NASS Web site revamp. The NASS Web site is the primary avenue for the public to access official Federal statistics on agriculture. In customer satisfaction surveys, NASS heard that the Web site was not user friendly. Improving it would quickly raise satisfaction levels among those seeking and using information on the site. The agency is undertaking a usability- and analytics-based approach to overhauling and simplifying the Web site organization, terminology, and overall content.</p> <p>Target audience: Data users looking for specific information. and the general public.</p>	<p>After an extensive look at how individuals use NASS' Web site, what pages they access, and how they move from page to page, NASS is working with an outside contractor to reorganize the site to make it more accessible and more reader- and user-friendly. Already, individual pages are being rewritten, and the site is now usable on any device, including smart phones. By the end of 2016, NASS intends to launch a newly organized Web interface that will be more intuitive and simple so that visitors can more readily find, understand, and use the data they are seeking.</p>
<p>Tweets, Facebook, and blog posts. NASS began a year-long series of weekly blogs in May 2014, featuring Census of</p>	<p>NASS uses clear and direct writing principles for all of its social media communications. In 2015, NASS added an additional 6,000 followers, for a total of 26,000. The</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Agriculture data on the 50 U.S. States. Focusing on one State per week, the series ended in May 2015, having highlighted both large-scale agriculture and interesting snippets about lesser known specialty commodities, thereby lending color and character to the U.S. Census agriculture data. The series was posted on the USDA Blog and USDA Facebook page for maximum reach and sharing.</p> <p>NASS also continually tweeted out data and information on Twitter using the #AgCensus hashtag. The tweets increased engagement with followers and provided data to many new and expanded audiences in a quick and easy-to-digest manner. In September 2015, NASS launched a monthly chat series using the #StatChat hashtag on Twitter to bring current agriculture statistics to a wider audience.</p> <p>Target audience: Social media users, including more than 26,000 people who currently follow NASS on Twitter.</p>	<p>monthly #StatChats are viewed an average of 100,000 times, potentially reaching more than a million people each month. Total potential reach for the year was 37.7 million views (more than triple the number in 2014).</p>
<p>Infographics. NASS is increasingly using infographics to help communicate complicated or detailed statistical information in an easily understandable manner. NASS produces infographics for Census of Agriculture materials, as well as topical infographics featuring NASS survey data around holidays and other targets of opportunity. In 2015, NASS created infographics for several Census special study releases spotlighting data on farm typology, organic agriculture, horticulture, and land ownership.</p> <p>Target audience: A broader public than NASS usually reaches with its agriculture and farm data.</p>	<p>NASS uses plain language writing principles for its infographics, focusing on short, simple text, and creative graphics and illustrations to display the data. The infographics are primarily designed for use on social media, including Twitter, Facebook, and the USDA blog. This year, NASS also started to incorporate the infographics into press releases to provide maps and interesting data visualizations to accompany the stories. Infographics help NASS tell a data story in more compelling ways for a broader audience. NASS data are no longer limited to statistical publications and databases for heavy-data users but are now more accessible to the general public.</p> <p>NASS' infographics proved to be some of the more popular posts on USDA's Facebook page, viewed by several hundred thousand users and liked or shared hundreds of times.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Career/recruitment materials. In late 2015, NASS reviewed its existing materials and messages for recruiting new young and mid-career staff. As a result, in early 2016, NASS revamped its career Web page and principal recruitment brochure, and will create and improve other products throughout the year.</p> <p>Target audience: Students and professionals looking to NASS for a possible career.</p>	<p>The new materials are written in plain, direct, first-person style. Their effectiveness will be tested as they are put to use at 2016 career fairs and other recruiting efforts.</p>
<p>Data visualizations. In a continuing effort to develop new tools to show statistical information in dynamic, usable formats, NASS is developing a series of data visualization tools. The goal is to translate complex, table-based, static data into interactive tools that allow custom inquiries. The visualizations will be more easily digestible and reusable visual representations of the data products NASS releases. The visuals will be reusable in many ways both internally and externally.</p> <p>Target audience. Regular users of NASS data looking for more dynamic presentation of current data as well as a broader public than NASS usually reaches with its agriculture and farm data.</p>	<p>NASS is currently providing a beta version of the tool on its Web site. Data users are letting the agency know that they like the visualizations and that they want NASS to expand its offerings, and make them even more customizable. The agency has seen growth in the online use of the visuals. Next, NASS plans to expand the type of visualizations and make them more easily shareable via a broad range of media.</p>

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Annual Reports</p> <p>Distributed through: Direct mail, employee Intranet, public Web site, email; displayed in office; distributed at events.</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, public, agricultural producers</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>No acronyms are used unless they are spelled out in first use. Use of simplified sentences, reduction in use of technical terms when there is an alternate (easier-to-understand) word, will result in better understanding of conservation programs.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Banner Stands/Displays/Exhibits</p> <p>Displayed at events, meetings, conferences, and expos</p> <p>Target Audience: Agricultural producers, employees, potential employees, agriculture producers, conservationists, private landowners</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>No acronyms were used unless defined; fewer words and more visuals are used, resulting in better understanding of conservation programs.</p>
<p>Booklets and Publications</p> <p>Made available in offices, distributed at an event, and on a public Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, employees, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Reduction in use of technical terms when there is an alternate (easier-to-understand) word, more visuals, updated examples, and better instructions. Publications are easier to read, resulting in fewer questions about programs and policies.</p>
<p>Conservation Initiative Reports</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, employees, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p>	<p>Clear, concise writing, making it easier for people to understand NRCS' programs and benefits of soil conservation to ecosystems, the water supply, air and water quality, and wildlife habitat. Use of images and charts.</p>
<p>Correspondence</p> <p>Distributed through: Direct mail, email</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, employees, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Letters are more direct and clear; common language is used more. There is better understanding of content, resulting in fewer questions and better comprehension of NRCS' programs and policies.</p>
<p>Direct Mail</p> <p>Distributed through: Direct mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, employees, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Using more familiar words, which allows for a better understanding of programs, resulting in an increase in program participation and a reduction in questions.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Directives</p> <p>Distributed through: Email, employee Intranet, Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees</p> <p>Potential Audience: 10,379</p>	<p>Clarity of message, better understanding of procedures, fewer questions, overall savings due to greater efficiency.</p>
<p>Emails, tweets, blogs, and other social media</p> <p>Distributed through: Emails</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, public, agricultural producers, partners</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Clear, concise writing, making it easier for people to understand benefits of soil conservation programs.</p>
<p>Fact Sheets</p> <p>Distributed through: Email, direct mail, public Web site, and handed out at events</p> <p>Target Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Using more familiar words, allowing for a better understanding of programs, resulting in an increase of applications and a reduction of questions.</p>
<p>Feature Articles/Success Stories</p> <p>Distributed through: Public Web site, blogs, email, media</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, agricultural producers, employees, conservationists, private landowners</p> <p>Target Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Shorter, clearer messages enable better comprehension of subject.</p>
<p>Guidance/Handbooks for Program Applicants</p> <p>Distributed through: Public Web site, email, public events, employee Intranet, and direct mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, employees, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Reduced use of jargon, technical terms, and acronyms without definitions. Clearer guidance for program implementation, application process, and program compliance requirements.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Legislative Fact Sheets</p> <p>Distributed through: State Web sites, events, email</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, Congress, agricultural producers, employees, conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Consolidated, concise language about conservation activity and programs provides clear, useful information about conservation by State.</p>
<p>National Bulletins</p> <p>Distributed through: Employee Intranet, public Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees</p> <p>Potential Audience: 10,379</p>	<p>Employees have a better understanding of organizational decisions, resulting in fewer questions.</p>
<p>National Instructions</p> <p>Distributed through: Employee Intranet, public Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: 10,379</p>	<p>Clear instructions and information provide employees with a better understanding of processes and expectations in order to achieve effective and efficient program management.</p>
<p>News Releases and Media Advisories</p> <p>Distributed through: Traditional media, social media, public Web site, email, events, State and National Web sites, partner Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners, the general public</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Clear writing provides better understanding by the public and employees alike of the importance of conservation generally and NRCS conservation programs in particular.</p>
<p>Newsletters</p> <p>Distributed through: Email, public Web site, employee Intranet</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, public, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p>	<p>Articles are written in plain language, communicating NRCS' success partnering with landowners to implement conservation practices. Text is easy to read, clear, and concise.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Potential Audience: Unlimited	
<p>Posters</p> <p>Displayed in offices, public events, and employee meetings</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, employees, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Clear messages are displayed through design and graphics for ease of reading and comprehension of conservation programs and accomplishments.</p>
<p>PowerPoint® Presentations</p> <p>Distributed through: Employee meetings and events; public meetings and events</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, employees, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Shorter and more concise presentations allow for more information sharing.</p>
<p>Practice Standards</p> <p>Distributed through: Employee Intranet, public Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, employees, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Using less scientific and more direct and simplified language to help program participants and applicants to better understand the requirement standards for program implementation.</p>
<p>Public Service Announcements</p> <p>Distributed through: Radio, TV, YouTube, partner Web sites</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Using clearer language, NRCS is able to reach broader and more diverse, historically underserved communities with information about conservation and conservation programs.</p>
<p>Resource and User Guides</p>	<p>Clear language describing practices and procedures promotes a greater understanding of processes and fewer questions.</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Distributed through: Employee Intranet, public Web site</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, public, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	
<p>Snow Survey Reports</p> <p>Distributed through: Employee Intranet, public Web site, email</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, public, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Reporting data in a clear, concise manner with less technical jargon makes it easy to understand.</p>
<p>Soil Survey Reports</p> <p>Distributed through: public Web site, Intranet, email</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, public, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Reporting data in a clear, concise manner with less technical jargon makes it easy to understand.</p>
<p>Speeches and Talking Points</p> <p>Target Audience: Employees, public, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners</p>	<p>Communicating data and information in a clear and concise manner using less technical jargon so the audience can understand the topics.</p>
<p>Technical Notes and Reports</p> <p>Distributed through: Public Web site, employee Intranet, direct mail</p> <p>Target Audience: Public, employees, agricultural producers, conservationists, private landowners, government officials</p> <p>Potential Audience: Unlimited</p>	<p>Less technical jargon is used, and all acronyms are defined. Language is more consistent and easier to understand.</p>

Office of Communications (OC)

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>National Press Releases</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public</p>	<p>OC does final review for plain language of agency-written releases that convey information of national importance to consumers, those in agricultural industry, academia, the press, and other stakeholders.</p>
<p>Media Advisories</p> <p>Target Audience: Selected media</p>	<p>OC alerts media outlets to upcoming USDA events and news announcements in direct language/media coverage.</p>
<p>Communications like USDA “Results” Fact Sheets/ Farm Bill Fact Sheets/ Farm Bill materials and information</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public</p>	<p>OC conveys facts in plain language and in a succinct format, resulting in increased comprehension and customer satisfaction.</p>
<p>Captions on photos posted to USDA’s Flickr site on the homepage</p> <p>Target Audience: Press and general public</p>	<p>OC writes clear captions that concisely convey the event behind the photo/photos and captions that may be reproduced by media and others.</p>
<p>Web pages, including USDA’s homepage, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs</p> <p>Target Audience: The general public</p>	<p>OC presents Web pages and social media in plain, conversational language so that these communications are informational and engaging, resulting in increased comprehension, public accessibility, and customer satisfaction.</p>
<p>Secretary/Deputy Secretary speeches posted to “Transcripts and Speeches” section of the USDA Web site.</p> <p>Target Audience: Specific stakeholders, interest groups, and general public</p>	<p>OC writes speeches on complex subjects in clear, direct language, resulting in increased comprehension of USDA messages and customer satisfaction.</p>
<p>Publications</p> <p>Target Audience: Public stakeholders and policymakers</p>	<p>OC does final review for plain language of all agency-written publications released to the public, resulting in increased comprehension and customer satisfaction</p>
<p>Text accompanying radio stories and audio and video content posted to the USDA Web site and text accompanying videos posted to YouTube</p> <p>Target Audience: Specific stakeholders and the general public</p>	<p>OC writes clear summaries of story topics and interviews, resulting in increased comprehension and accessibility for the general public and for broadcast media that may redistribute stories and audio content.</p>

Document	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Text accompanying exhibits, displays, and signage prepared for agency use in visitor centers, conferences, and other outlets</p> <p>Target Audience: Specific stakeholders and the general public</p>	<p>OC captions and summarizes display information in plain language, resulting in increased comprehension and customer satisfaction.</p>

Rural Development (RD)

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Rural Housing Service (RHS) Infographics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of flyers for RD's programs can be found at the links below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ http://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RDHMBorrowersInfoG.pdf ○ http://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RDHMBuildersInfoG.pdf ○ http://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RDHMCommunitiesInfoG.pdf ○ http://www.rd.usda.gov/files/RDHMLendersInfoG.pdf <p>Rural Housing Service Single Family Housing Sections 502 and 504 Program Videos (http://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/all-programs/single-family-housing-programs)</p>	<p>Program information was made available in easy-to-understand formats comparable to private sector presentation. Program resources are expected to increase customer participation.</p>
<p>General Correspondence, Agency Documents and Customer Service</p>	<p>RHS is working to incorporate plain language principles into its everyday work processes and outputs. By creating an environment where clear communication comes naturally, RHS aims to improve overall customer service and satisfaction.</p>

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
<p>Uniform Complaint Form</p>	<p>OASCR has ensured that all agency documents are written in a clear, concise, and well-organized manner. The agency's communication materials are easy to</p>

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Target Audience: USDA employees and the public	understand and written so that all interested parties can comprehend their meaning and impact.
One Page How-to Guide on How to File a Program Complaint Target Audience: Public	This was created to clearly explain in direct terms the process by which a USDA customer who feels they have been discriminated against can file a program complaint.
Correspondence (General), letter, via U.S. mail or email Target Audience: Members of Congress and members of the public	As OASCR writes and clears letters, writers and editors use plain language. Examples include using active voice and shorter sentences, explaining technical terms, eliminating wordiness, and writing to the specific audience.
Postings on Agency Web site Target Audience: General public	Improved understanding and clarified terminology.
OASCR Strategic Plan Target Audience: USDA and the public	This was created to clearly explain, in direct terms, OASCR's strategic goals for 2016-2020.
OASCR Office Procedures Manual Target Audience: OASCR employees	The manual contains clearly delineated policies and procedures, which will serve as a ready reference source for current staff, and assist in the orientation of new employees to OASCR.

Office of the General Counsel (OGC)

Documents	Plain Writing Improvements/Expected Impact
Accessible Electronic Documents Target Audience: All OGC employees	Increased a bccessibility of documents
OGC Highlights and OGC Training Newsletter, distributed through email Target Audience: OGC employees and USDA staff	OGC distributes two newsletters written in a clear and concise manner for OGC employees. One newsletter highlights significant legal issues, programs, and events; introduces new employees; and recognizes employee involvement. The other newsletter publicizes upcoming training opportunities for all OGC employees to increase awareness and attendance.
Correspondence	OGC assists USDA agencies in the reviewing and editing of responses/letters that they will be clear and more succinct.

3. Plain Writing Outreach to USDA Employees

Successful implementation of the Plain Writing Act requires a workforce that is well-informed about the principles of the Act. USDA's agencies have made considerable efforts to convey the importance of plain writing to their employees.

EMPLOYEE OUTREACH: ACTIONS TO DATE

The following lists show examples of awareness strategies within agencies regarding the importance of plain writing.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)/National Agricultural Library

- ARS has initiated a pilot Story Circle writing exercise (10 weeks, 1 hour/week) with some of its scientists to aid researchers in honing their writing skills (of plans, reports, etc.). If successful, an internal campaign will be developed to spread the word and make this training available to other agency scientists.
- From September through December 2015, NAL staff developed Web plans for updating Web content and moving into a new content management platform—this ensures that revised Web pages are written based on plain language guidelines.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

- APHIS provides Intranet writing guides for all staff members, including information about the Plain Writing Act, guidelines, checklists, online courses, and tools to achieve the Act's requirements.
- On several occasions, APHIS plain language advocates have discussed plain language at staff meetings with agency scientists.
- In 2015, APHIS Public Affairs required new employees to take the "Introduction to Plain Language" AgLearn course.

Economic Research Service (ERS)

ERS editing staff met with all 14 branches of the agency to distribute the new, streamlined writing guide for the agency's authors, *Writing Research Reports @ ERS*. The meetings introduced the economists to the concept of plain writing, its purpose, and the authors' needs to simplify economic language for an educated lay audience. This guide is also available on ERS' agency Intranet.

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

FAS has consistently communicated with USDA employees through FAS Intranet announcements, all-employee emails, and the FAS public Web site at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/>.

Forest Service (FS)

- AgLearn has more than 14 writing-related training courses that employees can access. Human Resources Management contact center agents provide callers with information in plain language. Human Resources Specialists provide plain language guidance to hiring managers regarding the hiring process. Scripts have been developed for both contact center agents and specialists to assist in communicating clearly. Human Resources Management public affairs staff regularly consults with program managers to assist in communicating tasks in plain language.
- The agency has an employee who is a member of the Federal Government Plain Language Action and Information Network. This employee is trained to provide instruction on the use of clear and concise language in government documents and how to update Web pages so they are easy for the public to understand and navigate. This employee has consulted with program offices, field units, and individuals on issues pertaining to plain language and has provided classroom training upon request.
- The Rocky Mountain Research Station incorporated descriptions and information regarding the importance of plain language principles into its Media and Legislative Affairs Training curriculum, reaching more than 100 employees. The Station's Science Application and Communication staff moderates all content for posting on Web pages, and Goal 3 of the Station's 2015-2017 Strategic Communication Plan includes a provision for Plain Writing Act training.
- The Pacific Southwest Region created "Valuing People and Places"—a journey aimed at strengthening connections among employees and with communities, and building a shared sense of who they are. The ideas and imagery can help the Region do the following: 1) stay connected to the history, mission, unique purpose, and core values, and 2) be consistent and authentic in how they engage with people and communicate their work. One primary tool for implementing a consistent look and feel to all written and Web communications is a style guide for all letters, memos, briefing papers, Web pages, and news releases.
- The Southern Region units, such as the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest, reported early integration of plain language into the National Environmental Policy Act process. That forest uses an interdisciplinary team that has helped to bring about a heightened awareness of plain language requirements and implementation strategies.

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)

- The FSIS Office of Investigation, Enforcement, and Audit (OIEA) uses a plain language writing checklist that is aimed at enhancing the writing and review quality of the Office's written communications. FSIS also posts information on plain language and requirements of the Plain Writing Act on the Office of Program and Policy Development SharePoint site.
- FSIS has incorporated the use of plain language writing concepts into its performance standards. FSIS also promotes the use OIEA's plain language writing checklist in its other programs.

Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)

- From December 2014 to January 2015, GIPSA conducted training for 20 employees and 20 supervisors and managers who regularly use writing for their jobs. The training covered standard grammar and writing issues that are common concerns of both groups. The agency also discussed writing for your audience. As an outcome, GIPSA identified writing resources such as the Government Printing Office and the Plain Language writing Web site, which participants were encouraged to use.

- During calendar year (CY) 2015, 61 students attended plain language courses offered by USDA and other agencies.
- In the April newsletter for agency employees, the agency provided an announcement to all employees about writing resources, including the Plain Language writing Web site.
- Where appropriate, GIPSA encourages employees to complete classroom writing classes; three employees took regulatory writing with the Regulatory Group.

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

- NASS distributed a memo from the Administrator, along with direction to use the NASS Plain Writing Checklist (issued October 2011).
- NASS created a Web page on the agency Intranet that provides information on the Plain Writing Act and directs staff to resources available at <http://www.PlainLanguage.gov> and <http://www.usda.gov/plain-writing>. (Now on SharePoint, the internal Web page was created October 2011.)
- The NASS internal Web page contains a series of one-page quick tips on key aspects of the Plain Writing Act, expanding on elements in the Plain Writing Checklist. These were distributed periodically to all staff via email. Additional tips were distributed through the weekly leadership memo to field staff and published in Round-Up, the agency internal newsletter and blog, and were distributed through email and the weekly leadership memo to field staff.
- Throughout the year, statisticians from across the agency had the opportunity and need to write information in a more general style (in the form of Highlights, infographic vignettes, articles, PowerPoint presentations, and summaries). Working with the Public Affairs Office staff, they learned to consider what the reader is looking for and how to report on the data using fewer, less technical words.
- In 2015, NASS involved statisticians in producing some of the same kinds of materials and language in reports about its regular agricultural surveys as were used in reporting about the Census. NASS developed a data visualization project to communicate survey results more clearly, infographics for various statistical reports, and online and printed Highlights for some surveys. NASS made its Web site more accessible, and it rewrote and streamlined many Web pages (and continues to do so), and plans to convert the entire site to a more accessible, user-friendly format by the end of 2016. NASS also made its tools for responding to NASS surveys online easier to understand and use.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

- The agency requires all NIFA employees who work with grants to complete plain writing training via AgLearn.
- NIFA edited Requests For Applications templates and keys to ensure compliance with the Act.
- NIFA provided plain writing training to eight agency members who have additional duties as Communications Liaisons.
- Also, NIFA trained four new members of the Communications Staff (CS), one CS intern, and one CS contractor, in plain writing.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- The agency distributed a National Bulletin (NB 130-13-1) to all employees, outlining the requirements of the Act and requesting data and updates nationwide.
- NRCS provides plain writing resources and training to writers.

- The agency updated its Correspondence Manual to include a section, with resources, dedicated to plain writing.
- The NRCS Plain Writing team communicates regularly with Executive Correspondence Management Team members, administrative staff, and agency leadership, maintaining ongoing dialogue about the importance of plain writing and providing plain writing resources.
- Added a Plain Writing Coordinator for the Web to the agency's Plain Writing team.
- A Plain Writing link is on the NRCS home page.

Rural Development (RD)

- Employees are encouraged to take Aglearn or other language and writing courses, and managers encourage the use plain language during editorial reviews.
- RHS' Customer Service Center initiated a Lean Six Sigma initiative called the Enhanced Correspondence (EnCorr) project. This two-phase project will implement a permanent strategy and process for managing existing and new written customer correspondence. Phase I of the project includes a complete rewrite of all automated documents to comply with the newly established guidelines and is expected to be completed on November 30, 2016. Thus far, CSC has established well-defined Letter Writing Guidelines incorporating the Federal Plain Language Guidelines, specific document formatting requirements, and formal approval procedures, designed to meet requirements set forth in the Plain Writing Act of 2010. Phase II includes conversion of the revised documents to an enhanced letter writing production system. The new production system will provide vastly increased document development capabilities, and allow staff to create document formats designed to increase borrower readability and comprehension. Phase II is underway and is expected to be completed in late 2017.

Office of the General Counsel (OGC)

OGC employees were surveyed in October 2015 about their training interests and needs, including writing training, in order to facilitate planning for future training. Immediate action was taken on employee interest in writing training.

4. Training

In order to implement the Plain Writing Act successfully, USDA's workforce must be trained. USDA's agencies have provided many opportunities for employees to become educated about plain writing principles

WHO WE'RE TRAINING

Training in plain writing principles is available to USDA employees; thousands have been trained.

HOW WE'RE TRAINING THEM

Both online and in-person training have been provided.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)/National Agricultural Library (NAL)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
AgLearn <i>Plain Writing</i> Training Module Date: Ongoing since 2013	2,526 ARS employees
In-house training sessions provided to new content developers. Date: Ongoing since 2014 In-house refresher training provided to existing content developers. Date: Ongoing since 2014	All NAL employees involved in Web content development.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In-house face-to-face training Date: Ongoing	Approximately 185 employees have taken and passed intensive courses with 9 hours of in-class time and 6 hours of homework. Of these employees, approximately half have taken two additional courses with 7 hours of in-class time and 4 hours of homework. Each of these classes includes extensive exercises and feedback on in-class work and homework. The American Council on Education reviewed the courses, and students who have taken and passed

Training/Date	Employees Trained
	<p>all three are eligible for two undergraduate semester credits</p> <p>In FY 15, approximately 100 people took face-to-face writing courses that highlighted plain writing principles, bringing APHIS' cumulative total to more than 1,000.</p>
<p>Online training</p> <p>Date: Ongoing</p>	<p>APHIS recommended sets of online training (AgLearn)—APHIS employees have taken 3,475 of these courses.</p>

Economic Research Service (ERS)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
<p>Plain writing segment at Writing for Economists training</p> <p>Date: January 2015</p>	<p>13</p>
<p>Plain writing introduction to all 14 branches within the agency divisions</p> <p>October – December 2015</p>	<p>Approximately 140</p>

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
<p>In-house (agency, staff, or contractor)</p>	<p>All Office of Investigation, Enforcement, and Audit, Enforcement and Litigation Division, Federal State Audit Branch</p> <p>Office of Management (All Minneapolis offices), Office of Policy and Program Development, and other Agency offices</p>
<p>Training document for Intranet content contributors written in plain language to assist users.</p> <p>Date: November 4, 2011 to Present</p>	
<p>Webinars and online training</p>	

Training/Date	Employees Trained
The Plain Writing Act (online course via AgLearn)	
Introduction to Plain Language (Online Course)	
Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely (Online Course)	
Investigation Report Writing Best Practices: Effective Reports (Writing Clear Reports) (Instructor-led Course) OIEA	

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
New Desk Officers Writing Briefing Papers	~20
New Employees Writing Clear Comments to the World Trade Organization/TPP	~30
Junior Employees Participating in Year-long Training Submit Weekly Papers That are Critiqued for Substance and Style	~40

Forest Service (FS)

Plain language program leads for the Forest Service and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service provide professional training in writing, editing, and Web content development as part of their additional duties. In 2 years, nearly 350 people in the Washington Office attended a 3.5-hour instructor-led training that focused on how content can be made clear and concise. The program leads also were instrumental in the revamp of the training module used by the Plain Language and Information Network cadre of 30-plus trainers.

Training/Date	Employees Trained
AgLearn	618
Introduction to Plain Language	
Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely	
Writing under Pressure: The Writing Process	
Business Grammar Common Usage Errors	

Training/Date	Employees Trained
Communicating with Professionalism and Etiquette Business Writing: Editing and Proofreading Business Grammar: Parts of Speech Business Grammar: The Mechanics of Writing Business Grammar: Working with Words Date: 2015	
External Training How to Become a Better Communicator seminar Date: March 26, 2015	1
In-House 508 Compliance Webinar and classes Date: 2015 (recurring)	65
In-House Web content writing and design Date: September 2015	15
Media/Legislative Affairs Workshop – Flagstaff, AZ September 14-16, 2015	10
Media/Legislative Affairs Workshop – Ogden, UT September 28-30, 2015	13
Media/Legislative Affairs Workshop – Provo, UT October 1-2, 2015	6
Media/Legislative Affairs Workshop – Boise, ID October 20-22, 2015	6
Media/Legislative Affairs Workshop – Missoula, MT November 1-6, 2015	11
Public Relations Society of America courses: Reducing Wordiness: Concise and Direct	11

Training/Date	Employees Trained
Cutting Redundancies and Useless Words Shorten Sentences Tight, Bright and Scannable Date: 2015	
National Environmental Policy Act w/plain language component Date: Spring 2015; Fall 2015	56
The Chief's Office recommended that all Forest Service employees consider adding at least one plain writing course to their individual development plans. Employees could take advantage of training opportunities through USDA's online AgLearn program, which includes more than a dozen online modules, such as "Introduction to the Plain Writing Act" (30 minutes); "Business Writing: How To Write Clearly and Concisely" (1 hour); and "Business Grammar: Common Usage Errors." Forest Service staffs committed about 1,200 employees to take at least one writing-related training course. Date: Various, 2012-15	1,500
Forest Service staffs routinely offer writing-related training to their employees, including the following:	
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Ongoing	ca. 90 (Controlled Correspondence staff, Washington Office)—periodic informal training by professional writer/editors.
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Ongoing	ca. 200 (Northern Research)—Regular CSD Alerts to employees about communication procedures and issues, including topics related to grammar and plain writing.
Plain Language instructor Date: 2015	28 (Washington Office staffs)—half-day training in the principles of plain writing.
External training Date: March 26, 2015	1 (Human Resources Management)—How to Become a Better Communicator, seminar.

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Since January 2012	Approximately 40 (Employee Relations Specialists, Washington Office)—How to draft charge/penalties writing HRM Public Affairs provides internal staff periodic informal training.
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Since 8/2011	90 (Business Correspondence staff, Washington Office)
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Since 6/2011	84 (Business Correspondence staff, Washington, Office)
In house (agency staff or contractor) Date: Since 8/2010	10 (Policy Analysis staff, Washington Office)—an hour-long seminar in plain writing

Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
<p>Over the last year, approximately 40 GIPSA employees completed writing classes. GIPSA published an article on writing and plain language in the GIPSA newsletter in April 2015.</p> <p>GIPSA continues to have ongoing plans to encourage communication improvement both in writing and oral communications, as both these areas are some of the most requested skill development areas on individual development plans (IDPs) in GIPSA for employees, supervisors, and managers.</p> <p>GIPSA supported several classes in plain language or writing basics as identified by management. The agency will continue to publicize the AgLearn writing courses.</p>	<p>104-Classroom Attendees for writing classes and plain language courses</p> <p>59-Online writing class completions on business writing.</p>

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In-house training	2

Training/Date	Employees Trained
Date: Ongoing since July 2012	
Online training Date: Fall/Winter 2011/2012/2013 and continuing	Required of public affairs staff (8 people); promoted as available to all staff
NASS created a 2-hour plain writing workshop, "Writing Plainly and Effectively: Ten Tips to Clearer Writing," for working groups within NASS to take together. The course summarizes key Plain Writing principles in ten tips (lessons), using NASS-relevant examples. Date: The first session was held in February 2013. A second session was held April 2013, and a third session was held for state directors in the Northeast Regional Field Office in September 2013.	Teams with similar writing needs take the workshop in small group settings. NASS will continue to conduct sessions as opportunities allow.
Regular communication with staff through tip sheets, an internal newsletter, and inserts in weekly leadership memos to field offices. Date: Periodic communication through various means	All staff
Plain writing guidance for outreach publications related to the Census of Agriculture. Throughout the year, statisticians who normally write only for technical audiences were involved in producing simpler documents (highlights, infographics, PowerPoint presentations, articles, and other summaries) for more general audiences.	Headquarters, regional, and state staff.
In 2015, NASS expanded many of the tools and opportunities used in Census of Agriculture dissemination to selected aspects of the survey program.	Headquarters, regional, and state staff.

National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In-house training for Communications Liaisons, new Communications Staff (CS) members, CS interns, and CS contractors	14

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Training	Number of Employees Trained or Impacted
Updated NRCS Plain Writing Contacts to include a Plain Writing Web Coordinator, bringing the number of NRCS Plain Writing Coordinators to 4.	All agency employees (10,379)
Training, continuing dialogue, one-on-one information sharing and direction for executive and administrative staff, subject matter experts. Training to be conducted quarterly or more frequently if needed. Trained senior leadership and subject matter experts in each Deputy Area.	Headquarters wide (approximately 400)
NRCS Plain Writing Webinar, Business Grammar: How to Write Clearly and Concisely; Know Your Readers; Parts of Speech; Working with Words; Punctuation; Sentence Structure; Sentence Construction; Mechanics of Writing; Common Usage Errors; the Writing Process; How to Write Clearly, Effectively and Professionally; Editing and Proofreading.	All agency employees (some taking more than one course), conservation partners, partners, and students (11,270)
Plain Writing resources and training made available to NRCS employees through the agency's Executive Correspondence Management Team. NRCS leadership provides employees with regular plain writing updates and direction to maintain plain writing as a priority with customer service and program implementation.	All agency employees (10,379)

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
In-house training	
PLAIN provided training – live Date: March 2013 to present	21
Online training – AgLearn Date: Ongoing	54 users through AgLearn. OASCR continues to encourage employees to complete writing training via AgLearn.

Office of Communications (OC)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
All employees are encouraged to take advantage of the online “Introduction to Plain Language” course in AgLearn. OC has pushed the course to everyone’s To Do list in AgLearn to highlight this training and make it easily accessible.	In the past year, one OC employee completed the course. OC will continue to emphasize the importance of this training for all employees.

Office of the General Counsel (OGC)

Training/Date	Employees Trained
<p>OGC employees took the following courses on Legal Writing at West LegalEd Center:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About Writing: How to Create Clear, Concise and Direct Legal Writings • 21st Century Persuasive Writing: Short Writing • Fluff Is For Pillows, Not Legal Writing • Advanced Legal Writing • Seven Steps to Stronger Legal Writing • 10 Basic Steps to Better Writing for Paralegals 	5
OGC Training Coordinator coordinated with writing instructor from PLAIN (Plain Language Action and Information Network) to create a custom Plain Language writing training.	Will be offered to all OGC employees, including professional staff.
Procurement was initiated for an outside Legal Writing Instructor to provide a workshop on improving legal writing skills with a focus on clarity and brevity in May 2016.	Training will be available to 200 attorneys.

Rural Development

Training/Date	Employees Trained
The Centralized Servicing Center’s Enhanced Correspondence Team took the AgLearn Plain Writing course and reviewed the Plain Language Guidelines.	19

5. ENSURING COMPLIANCE

Various processes are used across USDA in order to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Plain Writing Act.

SPOTLIGHT: THE FOREST SERVICE

The Forest Service has review systems in place to ensure that its documents are plainly written. For example, all national publications by the Forest Service's Washington Office are reviewed by their Office of Communication, followed by another review by the USDA Office of Communications. Both offices have professional writer/editors who edit and review the publications, ensuring that Forest Service publications are understandable and usable by the intended readers. This type of review process is used in the Regions and Research Stations.

- In addition, individual staffs at the national level have their own controls for plain writing.
- Policy Analysis has a professional writer/editor who reviews each report before it is released, for style, logic, accuracy, and plain writing. The staff writes reports and other documents for top leaders in the Washington Office and wants to be sure that the writing is plain and easy to read.
- The Office of Regulatory and Management Services in the Washington Office revised its review systems to ensure plain writing.
- The Directives and Regulations team works with program managers to ensure that the writing is clear, concise, simple, and easy to understand by all readers.
- The Controlled Correspondence team has professional writer/editors who work with program staff to ensure that letters in reply to public inquiries are short, to the point, and clearly written.
- The Freedom of Information Act team is required to use technical and legal language in responding to requests for information; but, following that language, the Forest Service inserts a plain language sentence that explains clearly and concisely the types of records being released and the types of information or records being withheld.
- Human Resources Management staff requires review panels for various products, including Forest Service-wide emails and responses to congressional inquiries.
- The Fire and Aviation Management staff in the Washington Office has public affairs specialists who work closely with technical staff to develop communication plans (including statements and talking points) to help staff respond in plain language to inquiries about technical topics from the public, news media, elected officials, and other interested parties.
- Minerals and Geology Management consciously used plain language when drafting the Paleontological Resources Preservation regulations ([36 CFR 291](#)), published in the Federal Register on April 17, 2015. The program area also emphasized the use of plain language in production of the paleontology brochure ([FS-1058](#)), designed for use by the general public and published in October 2015. The unit consulted the Forest Service Center for Design and Interpretation during drafting of the paleontology brochure for later review by the Washington Office of Communications.

Forest Service regional offices and research stations typically have similar review systems in place, as do many individual forests and staffs.

- The *Natural Inquirer*, a journal targeted at middle school students, uses the Forest Service Office of Communication for editing and editorial review. Often, the Office of Communication will send documents to a contractor for editing. The *Natural Inquirer* Program uses a continuous improvement model that is reviewed by a student editorial review board for middle school comprehension. The Forest Service reads current journals in reading education to stay current on how to present information to students. In addition to the Forest Service's target audience, it has a Readers series for K-2 readers. Its scientist card series is written at the middle and high school level. All of its documents are written plainly, and glossaries are provided for middle school readers to enhance comprehension of Tier 2 words.
- Forest Health Protection publications are reviewed by writers and editors and by the Office of Communication. The program area established an internal review system for documents and an internal/external peer-review system for reports, partly to review them for plain writing. In 2015, Forest Health Protection began an effort to revamp external Web pages in the effort to better connect with the public. The updated content includes clear, nontechnical language, as well as compelling photos to better communicate with the public. Forest Health Protection also works to ensure technical data is presented in a user-friendly way, including description of the maps and how they can be used. Examples are [Explore Forests Vulnerable to Attack from Major Insects and Diseases](#) and [Destructive Southern Pine Beetle Begins Invading Northeastern Forests](#).
- The Bighorn National Forest has two professional staff members with a combined 35 years of experience in writing and editing to review information written for the public. Materials that do not comply are rewritten to ensure that the content is understandable, useful, and appropriate for the intended audience.
- Rocky Mountain Research Station used a team of trained employees to review all content for grammar, punctuation, and readability for the launch of its Drupal-based Internet site. The goal is to communicate understandable science to a public audience. In addition, the Web site search function returns small, easy-to-read summaries of each Web page for users to view before clicking forward to the page that best suits their needs. The Station also has a rigorous manuscript review process for all incoming manuscripts. Trained technical editors ensure readability and compliance.
- Pacific Southwest Region Public Affairs and Communication staff reviews social media postings, Web postings, and news releases to ensure that documents and posts are plainly written. The Region's forests use document review processes before information is posted to the Web site or released. Training and introductory expectations regarding plain writing are provided to project members prior to projects being drafted.
- Eastern Region Office of Communication staff work closely with technical specialists to develop communication plans, key messages, and briefing papers that are written in plain language. These documents are used to respond to public, news media, elected officials, and other inquiries about technical or science-based topics. The Region also communicates with nearby communities in plain language about a range of topics like prescribed fires, smoke warnings, recreation area closures, hazardous conditions, and weather alerts. The region has a review process in place for articles, brochures, flyers, tabloids, and other publications to ensure that all messages published for external audiences are in compliance with the Plain Writing Act.

Service Standards

- Key public document development (ongoing): For the Forest Service budget justification overview (designed, in part, for the general public), the Chief's Office tasked a professional writer/editor with drafting the overview in accordance with plain writing principles.

- Key public document review (ongoing): For documents such as the Forest Service Strategic Plan and the annual Agency Financial Report, the Chief's Office tasks a professional writer/editor with reviewing and rewriting summary statements by the Chief in accordance with plain writing principles.
- Key public document development (ongoing): The Forest Service Chief is in a position to reach large and influential external audiences through speeches, appearing at dozens of public speaking events per year. To facilitate public access to speeches, a professional writer/editor drafts every major speech. The written speeches, edited for readability in accordance with the principles of plain writing, are posted on the Forest Service Web site.
- Key operational document development (ongoing): Every year, the Executive Leadership Team in the Washington Office travels to two or three Forest Service regional offices for a series of high-level meetings and strategic dialogues called Chief's Reviews. A professional writer/editor captures the proceedings in writing and condenses them into key messages, in accordance with the principles of plain writing. The Chief's Review reports are posted on the internal Forest Service Web site.
- Key operational document review (ongoing): Every 12 months, the Human Resources Management staff reviews the Human Resources Standard Operation Procedures for plain writing, among other things.
- Key operational document development (2013): In 2013, the Eastern Region created external Web pages for hiring temporary employees and student interns, using the principles of plain writing to make its recruitment needs and efforts easier for people to find and understand. These parts of the Region's Web site are now among the most popular.

OTHER AGENCIES' COMPLIANCE EFFORTS

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)/National Agricultural Library (NAL)

- ARS will continue to write content intended for general public distribution in plain language. ARS' Office of Communications and others have been trained in incorporating this element into their work, and will continue to work with ARS employees to ensure written products are understandable by appropriate target audiences. ARS' Office of Communication reviews and provides guidance on many of the non-technical publications, materials, and information products intended for general public use.
- NAL has a Content Review Committee that reviews all new print and Web publications for compliance with NAL guidelines, including plain language. Individual teams are also responsible for implementing plain language reviews on existing content as needed.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

APHIS has a staff of expert writers and editors who craft most of the key documents presented to the public and a review system to ensure that documents are plainly written. Additionally, the Administrator personally reviews the majority of correspondence for clarity. Each program unit has staff members trained in plain language, and the agency emphasizes the need for clear, direct, and straightforward communications with APHIS' stakeholders.

Economic Research Service (ERS)

Agency and Department editors will continue to review every manuscript and other documents. Plain writing training is included in presentation, media, and writing training for all employees.

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)/Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP)

- FNS will continue to use a tip sheet and Web-based resources to promote the use of plain language during the drafting and clearance process for covered documents.
- The agency has 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. Six FNCS employees completed such training in 2015.

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)

- FSIS' Office of Investigation, Enforcement, and Audit (OIEA) and other program staffs have a plain language component in the Communications performance element. OIEA's employees may have plain language training as one of the measures to submit to supervisors in consideration for earning a rating of "Fully Successful." Supervisors have encouraged employees to attend plain writing training, as needed. OIEA has encouraged the use of a guidance chart to remind and assist employees to apply plain language concepts in their written and oral communications. The guidance covers six areas: audience identification, document purpose, document organization, word choice, sentence structure, and paragraph composition.
- Since 1985, the Food Safety Education Staff (FSES) has provided food safety educational products written in language that is clear for consumers to understand. FSES' end goal, then and now, is to produce materials that are free of organizational jargon, government speak, and technical prattle, so that the consumer is able to obtain the information presented.
- FSES creates food safety fact sheets, publications, magnets, flyers, posters, videos, and American Sign Language videos in plain, age-appropriate, and nationality-specific language to meet the needs of its many constituents. It also produces products for the hearing impaired and visually impaired and for those who read below the national reading level of 6th grade.

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

FAS has upgraded systems in place to ensure that publicly available materials are written accurately and plainly. The FAS Public Affairs and Executive Correspondence Office serves a primary role in reviewing and editing documents for the agency Web site. For instance, this step ensures that economic analyses can be understood by non-economists and the general public. The agency continued to launch several actions this year to train new and junior employees on drafting briefing papers, official correspondence, and other written materials. This training and orientation included an emphasis on clear, easy-to-understand writing, oftentimes incorporating illustrations, lists, and tables.

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

- FSA continues to monitor material and makes efforts to adhere to the Plain Writing Act of 2010, as well as to ensure that updated information is in plain writing. Twenty-one additional key employees, who draft, edit, and write internal and external documents, were trained in plain writing. Four employees have been identified to continue in-house plain writing training on a regular basis or as the need occurs.
- The FSA Web site has undergone a major migration and update in order to adhere to the Plain Writing Act. Site enhancements included the migration to Percussion and planned efforts to resolve already identified customer experience quick hits and synergistic efforts. The FSA Web

Advisory Group provided editing and oversight of content as it was, and continues to be, developed.

- FSA emphasized stronger use of plain language in all news releases, op-eds, talking points, fact sheets, stories, tweets, and blogs.

Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)

- Before publication of new or revised Packers and Stockyards Program brochures, the Litigation and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) analyzes the text using readability statistics available in Microsoft Word. The analysis helps identify writing that is not plain and easy to read. To improve these statistics, writers must use short sentences and active voice, limit the use of legal terms, and incorporate lists and tables to present the information.
- The Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS) has initiated a process improvement project to improve, among other things, the readability of documents used to transmit official grain inspection policy and procedures. Staff devoted to producing these documents were trained in effective policy and procedure writing and standard terms, formats, and document organization which was developed for use with every document prepared. The new process was fully implemented in February 2016.

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

- NASS named an employee for compliance issues.
- Since 2012, NASS has pursued a variety of formal and informal channels to train staff in plain, clear writing. These include a 2-hour workshop focused on NASS examples and writing needs, promotion of the AgLearn courses, and a variety of refresher materials such as tip sheets, an internal newsletter, and inserts in leadership memos to field offices.
- In 2013, NASS created plain writing guidance for producing a variety of general-audience materials about the 2012 Census of Agriculture, and for 2 years, statisticians from across the agency were involved in producing such materials. The audience was not just experienced data users and agriculture media but also state and Federal Government policymakers, association leaders, farmers, researchers, and students.
- In 2015, with the intensive Census year completed, NASS brought those same general-audience tools and products to the agency's ongoing survey reports, expanding their reach and accessibility.
- As NASS develops new information products, the focus is on clear, direct communication about the agency's data. NASS continues to develop a variety of products that feature accurate statistical data in formats that are easy to understand and access.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

- NRCS designated a national plain writing team, including a coordinator for plain writing on the Web.
- Plain writing resources and training are available through the Public Affairs Division's Executive Correspondence Management Team and USDA's AgLearn online training site.
- Leadership is committed to continual plain writing process improvements using two-way sharing of information, data, and success stories, as well as maintaining a dialogue regarding the importance of plain writing, with all agency employees.

- The agency maintains focus on the importance of writing in plain language and monitors Plain Writing Act compliance through review of articles, surveys, correspondence, and executive documents; training; and one-on-one interaction with writers.
- NRCS provides consistent review and approval of all public communications for accuracy, timeliness, usability, and plain writing.

Office of Communications (OC)

- One of OC's 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 ability and experience. Because this staff reviews the materials prepared by agency writers, professionalism and adherence to plain writing are built into the process.
- OC writer/editors review and clear all publications released to the public for clarity, appropriateness, quality, and compliance with Federal publishing policies. OC coordinators review publications for public affairs accuracy and consistency with departmental programs and policies.
- OC coordinators (and sometimes speechwriters) review press releases for clear delivery of messages to intended audiences.
- OC speechwriters are also hired based on experience and ability. Because USDA speeches often break down highly technical subjects for non-technical audiences, compliance with plain writing is inherent to the process. Speeches and speech transcripts are often posted to the Web.

Rural Development (RD)

- The Customer Service Center established letter writing guidelines in 2016, which include the Plain Language Guidelines. A formal review and audit process was developed to ensure compliance.
- Rural Development managers and staff are reminded of the importance of using plain language for all communications, and work to ensure that prepared documents strive to meet these requirements. Compliance is checked through standard review processes.

Office of the General Counsel (OGC)

One of OGC's functions is to review, edit, and clear executive correspondence and other material prepared by USDA agencies.

6. USDA Plain Writing Web Sites

USDA AGENCIES' WEB SITES RELATED TO THE PLAIN WRITING ACT

The following provides information on plain writing Web sites that various USDA agencies have launched.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and National Agricultural Library (NAL)

- ARS launched its new online science magazine, AgResearch (www.agresearchmag.ars.usda.gov), in April 2015. The magazine features stories on scientific research discoveries occurring at ARS research laboratories across the Nation and abroad. The magazine offers consumers a way to access ARS scientific information in a way that is easy to use and understand. It provides an informative, engaging, and enhanced digital experience. Stories are short (average 500 words) and incorporate key findings to help readers gain an overview of ARS research outcomes.
- NAL launched a new Agricultural Law section in July 2015. The site content was written in accordance with plain writing principles. The entire NAL Web site continues linking to USDA's Plain Language information. NAL is in the process of working with its Information Centers to incorporate their individual sites into the core site, with an emphasis on plain language and writing for the Web.

Economic Research Service (ERS)

The content of the ERS Web site (www.ers.usda.gov) goes through ERS' professional editors before it is posted, and the agency has guidelines for Web writing.

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)

Since early 2012, FSIS has had an internal plain language, plain writing folder on the Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD) SharePoint site. In 2014, OPPD added a template for Compliance Guideline development that includes plain language writing tips. In 2015, the Program added Compliance Guidelines on poultry inspection modernization and validation of hazard analysis critical control point systems to the agency's Web site. OPPD also added to its SharePoint site presentation materials designed with plain language principles in mind.

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

FAS/ Public Affairs and Executive Correspondence Office maintains a link on FAS' public Web site to the USDA plain language site, which includes the updated Plain Writing Training course ([PLAIN WRITING](#)).

Forest Service (FS)

- For the general public, the Forest Service relies on USDA's Plain Writing Web site with links directing users to that information.
- For employees, there is widespread use of internal Web sites to promote plain language information. The following is a small example of how employees are connecting with plain language information:

- The Forest Service has developed an Intranet Web page to help employees understand the need for plain writing and to provide tools for improving their writing skills. The Web page has links to the kinds of Forest Service documents and other materials that are covered by the Plain Writing Act. The page also has links to public-facing plain writing Web sites, a checklist for writers, and a list of writing-related AgLearn training modules, along with brief descriptions.
- All Human Resources Management Forest Service-wide email messages solicit agency-wide feedback through a survey at the end of each email. Overall, the program office has received 92.4-percent positive feedback on providing understandable information.
- The Pacific Southwest Research Station lists links to Federal plain writing and plain language Web sites on its internal Web site to help employees quickly find resources. Online AgLearn courses on plain language also are listed for interested users.
- The Northeastern Area provides a link to the plain language guidelines and resources on the internal Web site and continues to improve the Challenge Cost Share processes by simplifying language and having the Request for Proposal documents edited each year. No information is posted on the site without review, which includes compliance with Plain Writing Act guidelines.
- The Northern Region has a heavily used internal plain language Web page for employees that includes resources on clear writing and plain language.
- The White River National Forest has a link to the Plain Writing Act language information on its Internet site and uses University of Colorado students not familiar with the agency to review the Web site to ensure the information is clear and concise. Their review led to the re-vamp of the target shooting and map page to help visitors more clearly understand the rules and how they can get the maps they need.

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

- NASS has an internal Web site with plain writing resources, including agency-produced material and links to USDA, Plain, and other Web sites.
- For the general public, NASS relies on USDA's Plain Writing Web site to convey plain writing priorities and principles.
- In 2012, NASS revamped the Census of Agriculture section of its Web site to create a user-friendly, interactive site at which farmers that were expected to respond to the Census could come for information. In 2013, NASS further developed the site to be an accessible source of information on Census results.
- In 2015, NASS undertook a review of the entire agency Web site in preparation for a redesign. By the end of 2016, NASS intends to launch a newly organized Web interface that is more intuitive and more effectively meets user needs.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

NRCS' National and state Web sites are written in conformance with plain writing principles. A designated Web plain writing coordinator reviews content to ensure that posted text is written in plain language. In addition, NRCS has information on plain writing in its correspondence manual. Also, a link to the Plain Writing Web site is available on the NRCS homepage.

Rural Development (RD)

- Rural Development continues to improve Web site features utilizing plain language formats.
- RHS continues to utilize the plain language Web site offered on the USDA Web site, as well as the plainlanguage.gov Web site.

Office of the General Counsel (OGC)

- The OGC Library page on SharePoint links to USDA Plain Writing Resources.
- The OGC Training page on SharePoint has a folder of documents related to plain language and plain writing training.

7. Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is the true measure of how well we are achieving compliance with the Plain Writing Act—both the letter of the law and its intent. Highlights of some of the ways USDA agencies are receiving feedback about their writing are below.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

ARS and the National Agricultural Library (NAL) will continue to evaluate new feedback methods. ARS and NAL currently use the following feedback methods:

- General feedback mechanism on the ARS Home Page.
- Contact Us links on ARS and NAL Web sites.
- Ask The Expert (ARS) and Ask A Question (NAL) features on the Web.
- Directories and contact information for program area/subject matter experts on ARS and NAL Web sites.
- Direct phone numbers to program area service desks (NAL).
- Easy-to-search contact information for all ARS employees, research units, and offices.
- ARS Web content publishing schedule, which is posted online and open for public comment.
- Any feedback received from other USDA offices or via direct emails from the public.

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)

- 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.
- APHIS has received positive feedback from the public on its redesigned Web site.

Economic Research Service (ERS)

The ERS Web site receives nearly two-and-a-half million visitors every year; nearly one-third of those visitors are repeat visitors. ERS receives consistently high marks in the ASCI surveys.

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

The Public Affairs and Executive Correspondence Office routinely monitors the comments provided by the public through the “Contact Us” tab/link on the FAS Web site, as well as any emails directed to the staff concerning the information available on the FAS Web site.

Forest Service (FS)

- Forest Service regions typically invite the public to comment on all aspects of Forest Service activities online, including the quality of its written and online materials. The invitations come in varying forms, including a link for the site’s Webmaster, online email forms, and/or detailed information about how to contact staff. The Pacific Southwest Region provides all the information on their [Contact Us](#) page.

- The Forest Service *Natural Inquirer* Program receives teacher, homeschool leader, and national education association feedback that commends, recommends, and recognizes its products for student reading comprehension. Several organizations and publications cited the journal, including a National Science Teacher’s Association listserve that [recommended the *Natural Inquirer*](#) as a way to connect current science with the scientists who do research.
- The Pacific Northwest Region piloted an “on demand” phone interpretation service for the agency to enhance public service to non-native English speakers, and extended that service to printed materials. The service covers 170 languages. The news release about the pilot program was distributed in ten different languages.
- Forest Service Research and Development contracts with a consulting group to conduct a Customer Satisfaction Survey every 3 years. This survey uses the American Customer Satisfaction Index, which is the national indicator of customer evaluations of the quality of goods and services available to U.S. residents. Survey results have been used by Research and Development to show where it excels and how it can improve. Also, this survey is required to meet agency and Department goals. Invitations to take the survey were sent to nearly 10,000 customers of the units’ research results, communication products, and services. The unit has received high marks for quality of scientific products and services (greater than 90 percent satisfaction), but the 2015 survey reported customers want Research and Development to do a much better job of informing them about new research results and technologies. As a result, the Deputy Chief’s Office launched a new electronic newsletter for its more than 9,000 customers with just such information. Subscription is trending up due to newsletters getting forwarded on to new readers who hit the “Subscribe” button. Research and Development employees also have expressed eagerness to the editors to see their work highlighted in the newsletter.
- The Eastern Region has not completed an official external customer satisfaction survey. However, in gauging the use of the Web, in FY 2012, the Regional Office’s external Web site ranked second to last in the region. After a redesign in FY 2014, the Regional Office site is now the most visited Web site in the region. Web analytics indicate increased visitor traffic in sections that have been redesigned, and click totals indicate that the public is seeking the new information being provided. The Region also increased internal customer satisfaction after moving the internal site to a SharePoint-based team site.
- The Rio Grande National Forest Public Affairs specialist writes a bi-weekly column for a couple of local papers using a much more freestyle writing approach than typical press releases. The column, well received by the public, covers everything from fun topics such as personal recreation trips on the forest to easy-to-understand stories about specific forest topics.
- Forest Service regions typically invite the public to comment on all aspects of Forest Service activities online, including the quality of its written and online materials. The Intermountain Region, for example, solicits public input at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/contactus/r4/about-region/contactus>.
- The Modoc National Forest created a new central email contact for all customer inquiries where a clear response is given in a timely fashion and written in plain language.
- The Forest Service-Savannah River received accolades at career fairs for its easy-to-read and understand fact sheet.

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)

- The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline (Hotline) converses with personnel from FSIS District Offices and consumers on a daily basis about the Food Safety Education Staff’s (FSES) educational products.
- State Meat and Poultry Inspection programs staff clearly explain concepts, thereby decreasing questions from the programs and allowing those making inquiries to receive their responses more

quickly. Other areas also report a decrease in the number of follow-ups and clarifications to items that have been written in plain language. This information is anecdotal; no specific measures are yet in place.

Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)

- The Packers and Stockyards Program established an internal Change Control Working Group (CCWG) in 2009. Based on more than 200 employee suggestions, this group has recommended creating, changing, and clarifying documents—which were subsequently created or revised—based on customer questions and industry trends. Documents that have been revised or clarified include regulations, Work Instructions, subprocess modules used to perform regulatory reviews, subpoena templates, and forms used by regulated entities (such as Annual Reports) to comply with the Packers and Stockyards Program. In fiscal year 2015, the CCWG Team and Packers and Stockyards Program (PSP) management team approved changes to P&SP-15 Instructions for Weighing Livestock based on information an employee received as she talked to regulated businesses. GIPSA anticipates that the approved revisions, once implemented, will help readers better understand the instructions for weighing livestock. After implementation and publication, GIPSA's PSP plans to distribute these updated instructions to regulated entities.
- In 2000, GIPSA's Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS) was approved by the Office of Management and Budget to issue a voluntary customer survey concerning the delivery of official inspection, grading, and weighing services authorized under the United States Grain Standards Act and the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946. Until 2013, the survey was conducted by postcard via U.S. mail. In the summer of 2013, however, the survey was posted to GIPSA's Web site and is now conducted totally electronically through the use of SurveyMonkey®. This voluntary survey gives customers that are primarily in the grain, oilseed, rice, lentil, dry pea, edible bean, and related agricultural commodity markets an opportunity to provide feedback on the quality of services they receive and provides GIPSA with information on new services that customers wish to receive. Customer feedback assists FGIS with enhancing the value of services and service delivery provided by the official inspection, grading, and weighing system.

National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

- NASS has rewritten some Web pages with a specific emphasis on writing the content and links in plain language. In 2015, NASS began a significant effort to restructure its agency Web site to make all content more directly relevant to users and the language simpler and more direct. By the end of 2016, NASS intends make the Web site more intuitive, enabling all respondents to find, access, and use the information they need. The year-long emphasis on direct, plain communication with all U.S. farmers and ranchers on the importance of the 2012 Census of Agriculture to their operations and to agencies and institutions that make decisions affecting them helped NASS achieve its target 80-percent response rate despite reductions in the agency budget (including fewer resources for follow-up) and internal reorganizations.
- Another aspect of NASS' Census messaging in which plain writing made a difference is in its communications about the option to respond to the Census online. The first Census of Agriculture was conducted in 1840, and for more than 165 years, farmers and ranchers responded by mail, in-person, or telephone interviews. In 2007, they had the option to fill out the Census form online for the first time. In that year, 4 percent of respondents used the online option. For the 2012 Census, NASS focused more strongly on promoting the online response option, conveying that it is convenient, secure, and saves time and taxpayer dollars. In addition, the agency rewrote the instructions for how to respond online to make them simpler and more user friendly. In the 2012 Census, 13.3 percent of respondents used the online option—more than triple the share that did

so in 2007. (See USDA blog, Then and Now, at [http://blogs.usda.gov/2014/02/06/usda-then-and-now-aginnovates/.](http://blogs.usda.gov/2014/02/06/usda-then-and-now-aginnovates/))

- In 2015, NASS built on the increase in online response to the Census by revising the tool for all NASS surveys. NASS launched the revised online reporting tool in January 2016 and further improved the instructions for accessing the site, and expects to see continued growth in farmers responding online to surveys and the next Census.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

NRCS uses ForeSee survey software to determine customer satisfaction and Web site usability. This software enables NRCS to receive direct customer feedback regarding its programs. NRCS also receives customer feedback via training, meetings, and dialogue.

Office of Communications (OC)

- In collaboration with the USDA Open Data Working Group, USDA is pursuing technologies to support the implementation of robust feedback mechanisms through USDA.gov.
- USDA currently supports feedback through various methods that include the following:
 - Comments and feedback through OC's USDA Blog WordPress platform;
 - Social media networks;
 - Ideation tools (ideation is a tech term for a platform used to generate ideas);
 - Feedback through OC's AskTheExpert knowledgebase, and through the agency's Contact Us page, which houses an Information hotline and organization directories.
 - Many USDA agency Web sites leverage the ForeSee platform, as well.
- Throughout the year, USDA evaluated and implemented new feedback mechanisms through its Open Data Policy Working group. USDA maintains numerous Web sites or platforms where the public can engage now in existing participatory processes of USDA.
- Data from "Analytics, usa.gov" shows that the USDA Web site, USDA.gov, is one of the top 20 most active Federal Web sites in the Government. This means that, at any given time, there are more people online at USDA.gov than on the vast majority of Federal Web sites. This strongly reflects a positive user experience, thanks to the OC Digital team and the design of engaging content.

Rural Development (RD)

Rural Housing Service:

- The Customer Service Center surveyed Rural Development (RD), Single Family Housing Direct program borrowers (hereafter referred to as customers) in 2004, 2006, 2008, 2012, and 2015. The questionnaire was developed with input from partners in the field offices and other RD organizations.
- The survey measures the movement of overall customer satisfaction, as well as identifies areas requiring focused attention for improvement. The measurement of these components must be achieved using a consistent, reliable method that reveals action items that can be initiated to increase overall satisfaction.
- 5,320 customers were randomly surveyed in 2015, including 9.5 percent Spanish-speaking preference customers, and 10 percent customers identified as living in a persistent-poverty area,

which reflects the demographics of the portfolio. The response rate was exceptional, with 1,578 respondents or 29.7 percent.

- Sections of the survey were measured either by a level of satisfaction or level of agreement using a 1-to-7 rating scale. The scale was then converted to equate to a 100-percent scale.
- By over a 3-to-1 margin, customers were highly satisfied with the ongoing servicing of their RD loan by CSC with an overall average satisfaction of 87 percent.
- Regarding standard written customer communications, a large percentage of customers agreed that the communications they receive from CSC are clearly explained, easy to understand, and contain all the information needed. On average, the following was found:
 - Monthly Billing Statement: 91.3 percent found documents easy to understand; 91.19 percent found documents had all the information needed; and 86 percent found payment changes are clearly explained;
 - Escrow Statement: 87.7 percent are satisfied with information received; and
 - Payment Assistance Process: 85.2 percent found documents easy to understand; and 84.6 percent found changes were clearly communicated

Office of the General Counsel (OGC)

OGC conducted a survey of employees to assess training interests and needs. There was a strong interest in writing training, and preparations to provide that training in FY 2016 began immediately.

8. Agency Coordinators

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 table below, ensure that their agency or office produces public documents in plain language.

Agency/Office (The Web site for each agency/office can be accessed by clicking on its acronym in parentheses.)	Senior Agency Official Responsible for Plain Writing	Plain Writing Coordinator(s)
Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)	Karen T. Comfort	Dana Stewart
Agricultural Research Service (ARS) National Agricultural Library (NAL)	Christopher Bentley	Tara Weaver-Missick (ARS) Ricardo Romero (NAL only)
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)	Beth Gaston	Beth Gaston
Economic Research Service (ERS)	John Weber Dale Simms	Mary Reardon (Acting)
Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP)	Rich Lucas Rich Lucas	Rich Lucas Rich Lucas
Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)	Chuck Williams Greg DiNapoli	Vince Fayne Jacquelyn Jones Greg DiNapoli Laura Reiser Joe Abbott Karen Jackson Curt Eilers John Paul Antonetti Meryl Silverman Neal Westgerdes
Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)	Ellen Dougherty	Joseph Migyanka
Forest Service (FS)	Angela Coleman	Kathryn Sosbe Diane Banegas
Farm Service Agency (FSA)	Todd Atkinson	Latawnya Dia

Agency/Office (The Web site for each agency/office can be accessed by clicking on its acronym in parentheses.)	Senior Agency Official Responsible for Plain Writing	Plain Writing Coordinator(s)
Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)	Dexter Thomas	Dexter Thomas
National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)	Sue King	Rosemarie Philips
National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)	Scott Elliott	Scott Elliott
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	Terry Bish	Elisa O'Halloran (Web) Catherine Hawkins Mike Giroux
Rural Development (RD)	Andrew Givens	Rural Utilities Service: Michelle Brooks Rural Housing Service: Karen Jacobs Rural Business and Cooperative Service: Matthew Mullen
Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)	Christian Obineme	Teresa Welch
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)	Winona Lake Scott	Kimberly Strickland
Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)	Andrew Perry	Sam Barkdull
Office of Communications (OC)	Carolyn O'Connor	Carrie Mitchell
Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)	Brenda Chapin	Brenda Chapin
Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)	Joyce M. Hunter, (Acting) Chief Information Officer	David Simpson Matthew Patrick
Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)		Ann Marie Gogniat
Office of the General Counsel (OGC)	Sara Gras	Sara Gras

Agency/Office (The Web site for each agency/office can be accessed by clicking on its acronym in parentheses.)	Senior Agency Official Responsible for Plain Writing	Plain Writing Coordinator(s)
Office of the Inspector General (OIG)	Gil Harden	Michael Martin

Appendix

Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack's October 12, 2011 memo regarding the use of plain language is below.



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.

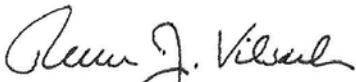
This past summer USDA published our [Plain Writing Compliance Report](#) to ensure compliance once the Act comes into full effect October 13, 2011. Through the USDA Plain Language working group, each agency has begun identifying covered documents and providing training and resources to employees. I encourage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

An Equal Opportunity Employer

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 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 that reads "Thomas J. Vilsack". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "T".

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary