



**U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Plain Writing Act Compliance Report  
July 13, 2011**

## Our Pledge

We at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) are committed to improving our service to you by writing in plain language. By October 2011, we will use plain language in any new or substantially revised document that:

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

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

## I. USDA Officials for Plain Writing

### Senior Officials

We are committed at the highest levels to ensuring full compliance with the Act. The Secretary recognizes the importance of using plain language to achieving the goals of the President’s Open Government initiative, as well as the USDA Cultural Transformation initiative. Our Senior Officials for Plain Writing are:

Senior Officials		
<p><b>Jerold R. Mande:</b></p> <p>Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services</p> <p>Jerold.Mande@osec.usda.gov</p>	<p><b>James Gore:</b></p> <p>Acting Director for the Office of the Executive Secretariat</p> <p>James.Gore@osec.usda.gov</p>	<p><b>John Padalino:</b></p> <p>Chief of Staff to the Under Secretary for Rural Development</p> <p>John.Padalino@osec.usda.gov</p>

### Agency Coordinators

USDA is made up of 17 agencies and 120,000 employees who serve the American people at over 2,300 locations across the country and abroad. To lead implementation of the Act and ensure our compliance we have created a working group of agency officials. These officials are accountable for making sure their agency or office produces public documents in plain language. For a list of agency officials please see section VIII.

**II. Specific Types of USDA Communications that will be Available in a Format Consistent with the Plain Writing Guidelines**

Type of document or posting	Who is responsible	Impact of using plain language
Form	Program or agency head	Reduce burden on users, reduce errors, reduce compliance and review costs
Public Notice	Signing Official	Increase awareness of agency actions
Question and answer, Frequently asked questions, How to, or any other informal guidance documents	Program or agency head	Increase awareness of programs, increase understanding of program rules and guidelines, reduce compliance and customer service costs
Request for proposal, Request for information, other contract opportunities	Contracting Officer	Increase competition, increase opportunities for small and new businesses
Web page	Webmaster	Increase public comprehension of web content
Correspondence	Signing Official	Improve customer satisfaction
Proposed or final rule	Signing Official	Increase comprehension of rules, improve compliance
Press releases	Communications Director	Increase comprehension of agency public announcements
Publicly available reports	Author	Increase awareness of agency activities and program results
Research publications	Author	Increase accessibility of research findings, increase use of research findings
Notice of funds available, requests for application, and other funding opportunities	Signing Official	Increase awareness and accessibility of opportunities

### **III. Inform agency staff of Plain Writing Act's requirements:**

Successful implementation of the Act requires an aware workforce. This is a sample of the awareness strategies we have or will employ prior to the Act taking full effect on October 13, 2011.

- We had the Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN) co-chairs Amy Bunk and Kathryn Catania briefed more than 100 agency officials including, Under, Deputy, and Assistant Secretaries, other senior officials, and political appointees. The briefings included a summary of the Act, plain writing basics, and case studies to demonstrate how writing clearly can improve program delivery, increase customer satisfaction, and save money.
- The Secretary sent an email to all employees to emphasize his commitment to plain language, publicized the launch of the USDA plain language web page, and asked each employee to read the USDA Plain Language Implementation Plan.
- The Senior Officials for Plain Writing presented about the Plain Writing Act to key Department-wide working groups, including the Deputy Administrators for Management, Training Officers, Outreach Coordinators, and Correspondence Control Officers and work with leadership to identify opportunities for each group to support implementation.
- Publish articles in the MyUSDA newsletter and agency employee publications, such as the NRCS Executive Correspondence Management Team newsletter.
- Develop a plain language awareness kit with posters, tip sheets, and other tools that managers across USDA can use to educate their staffs.
- Establish a plain language community of practice on the USDA Connect online collaboration tool that any employee can join, post resources to, or ask questions about plain language.

### **IV. Training**

Successful implementation of the Act requires a trained workforce. The documents that we have committed to producing in plain language come from across USDA and involve many different types of staff, including the following (and many more):

- Loan officers that provide guidance to potential applicants;
- Program staff that develop forms and regulations;
- Inspectors that send notices to plants that USDA checks for compliance;
- Contract officers that prepare notices of contract opportunities;
- Foresters that develop land management plans;
- Communications specialists that write press releases; and,
- IT specialists that help our programs develop web pages.

This is a sample of the training strategies we have or will employ prior to the Act taking full effect on October 13, 2011.

- Provide plain language training to political appointees, agency coordinators, and other critical staff from across the Department (approx. 175 total).

<b>Type of Training</b>	<b>Approx. Number of Employees Trained</b>	<b>Date</b>
Various agency staff trainings, including the Forest Service, Food and Nutrition Service, and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service		1998 - present
Secretary, Under and Assistant Secretaries, and other senior officials received preliminary training from PLAIN	20	May 2011
Political appointees received preliminary training from PLAIN	60	May 2011
Agency correspondence staff received comprehensive training from PLAIN	40	June 2011
Agency working group members received comprehensive training from PLAIN	55	July 2011

- Work with agency training officers to identify candidates for the Plain Language Action and Information Network’s (PLAIN) boot camp. The boot camp equips graduates to be plain language trainers for their agency.
- Publish virtual training materials and other tools for employees to the USDA plain language web page.
- Establish an inter-agency working group to put the Act into practice, develop training to teach its requirements, and stay accountable for its results.
- Post information on the Act to the USDA and agency intranet sites. This includes how to guides, frequently asked questions, examples of how plain language techniques can be used to improve products, and more.

- Develop a course for the USDA Aglearn online training platform that is available to all employees.

## **V. Ensuring Compliance with the Act**

USDA will establish a process for overseeing our ongoing compliance with the requirements set forth in the Act. To ensure that USDA meets our statutory obligations we commit to the following process and mechanisms:

- As required by the Act, no later than April 13 of each year, USDA will publish an Annual Compliance Report to our plain language web page.
- We will identify critical review points that covered documents are subject to prior to publication and institute a plain language verification step. For example, all USDA forms are reviewed by a Departmental forms manager in OCIO. The addition of a plain language compliance step to their business process will enable us to ensure compliance without establishing a new, complex bureaucratic process.
- We will establish a subcommittee to the agency's plain writing working group to oversee compliance and make recommendations to the working group to address deficiencies. The Senior Officials for Plain Writing will co-chair the subcommittee which will also include representatives from each mission area. The subcommittee will meet quarterly.
- Each USDA agency will create an individual implementation plan. The subcommittee will review the plan. Once finalized, the agency representative will regularly report on their progress to the subcommittee.
- Public feedback is critical to helping us identify and resolve compliance issues. We will establish an online tool to enable the public to let us know if they see a new covered document that does not comply with the Act.
- Prior to the date that the Act goes into full effect we will publish a departmental regulation on plain language. The regulation will establish a compliance oversight function and provide more detailed requirements related to critical review points, training, and responding to public feedback in order to improve compliance.

## **VI. Agency's Plain Writing Webpage**

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

The text of the Plain Language Act of 2010 is available [here](#), and the final guidance on the Act provided to agencies by the Office of Management and Budget is available [here](#). For additional information on plain writing you can also visit [www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov).

**VII. Customer Satisfaction Evaluation after Experiencing Plain Writing Communications**

We want your input. Public feedback is critical to help us know when we have been unsuccessful and when we have been successful in producing documents that are clear and understandable for everyone that uses them. Your comments will also help us identify older documents that we should consider revising into plain language.

You may send comments by email to [plain@usda.gov](mailto:plain@usda.gov) or by postal mail to:

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

**VIII. Agency Coordinator Information**

Farm And Foreign Agricultural Service		
<b>Farm Service Agency:</b>  Todd Atkinson atkinson@usda.gov	<b>Foreign Agricultural Service:</b>  Lisa Twedt Lisa.Twedt@usda.gov	<b>Risk Management Agency:</b>  Pat Engel Patricia.Engel@usda.gov

Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services	
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<b>Marketing and Regulatory Programs</b>		
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<b>Natural Resources and Environment</b>	
<p><b>Forest Service:</b></p> <p>Hutch Brown Hutch.Brown@usda.gov</p>	<p><b>Natural Resources Conservation Service:</b></p> <p>Sarah Scanlon Sarah.Scanlon@osec.usda.gov</p>

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<p><b>Food Safety Inspection Service:</b></p> <p>Chuck Williams charles.williams2@usda.gov</p> <p>Rene Cardwell rene.cardwell@usda.gov</p>

<b>Research, Education, and Economics</b>		
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<p><b>National Agricultural Statistics Service:</b></p> <p>Sue DuPont SUZANNA.L.DUPONT@usda.gov</p>	<p><b>National Institute of Food and Agriculture:</b></p> <p>Scott Elliott Scott.Elliott2@usda.gov</p>	



Rural Development
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