



# 2017 PLAIN WRITING COMPLIANCE REPORT



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
APRIL 2, 2018



THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE  
WASHINGTON, D. C.  
20250-0100

TO: Employees

In line with our goal to ensure the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) program services are delivered efficiently, effectively, and with a focus on good customer service, I want to express our commitment on the importance of communicating simply. In particular, I want to reemphasize using plain language in all our correspondence, public-facing documents, communications with employees, and online social media content.

Plain language, coupled with timely responses, are the foundation upon which good customer service is built. Providing understandable and easy access to information through correspondence online, user-friendly tools, and printed media increases the public's awareness of our program areas and the services we offer. Communicating in a clear, concise manner, along with providing user-friendly technology equates to quality customer support.

Our challenge is to 1) modernize information technology infrastructure, facilities, and support services to improve the customer experience; 2) maintain a high performing workforce through employee engagement and empowerment; 3) remove obstacles in USDA programs by reducing regulatory burdens and streamlining processes; and 4) improve stewardship of resources and utilize data-driven analyses to maximize the return on investment.

If we are to meet this challenge, we must continue to improve our correspondence writing, information media, and online social platforms. We must adequately and clearly address our customers' and the general public's inquiries through using simple and transparent language and offering easy-to-access online services. And we must create policies and processes that are transparent and consistent for the employee, the supervisor, and the American citizen.

The following 2017 Plain Writing Compliance Report highlights our agencies' best practices, trainings, and systems improvements that have resulted in enhanced services, positive feedback, and/or cost savings. I commend each of you for your efforts. In the spirit of OneUSDA, I know we will, together, continue to improve and deliver first-class service to the American people and our employees.

In closing, as you go about your workday writing new policies and publications or developing online visuals and blogs, remember to put yourself in our customers' shoes, provide timely responses, and use plain language.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sonny Perdue".

Sonny Perdue

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# INTRODUCTION

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## Our Pledge

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

- provides information about any of our services and benefits;
- is necessary to obtain any of our benefits or services; or
- explains how to comply with a requirement that we administer or enforce.

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

USDA's commitments and plain language resources can be found on [USDA's Plain Writing Web site](#).

## This Report

This report focuses on the period between January 1, 2017, and December 31, 2017. The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires that USDA write all new publications, forms, and public-facing documents in a manner that is “clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.” On July 13, 2011, USDA published its first report, an implementing plan that detailed our goals for plain writing. We published our first compliance report in 2012 and every year thereafter. This year, we report on how we have built on our prior efforts toward meeting the goals in the Plain Writing Act.

Read more on USDA Plain Writing Act implementing report:

[USDA's Plain Writing Act](#)

[USDA's 2016 Plain Writing Compliance Report](#)

# AGENCY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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

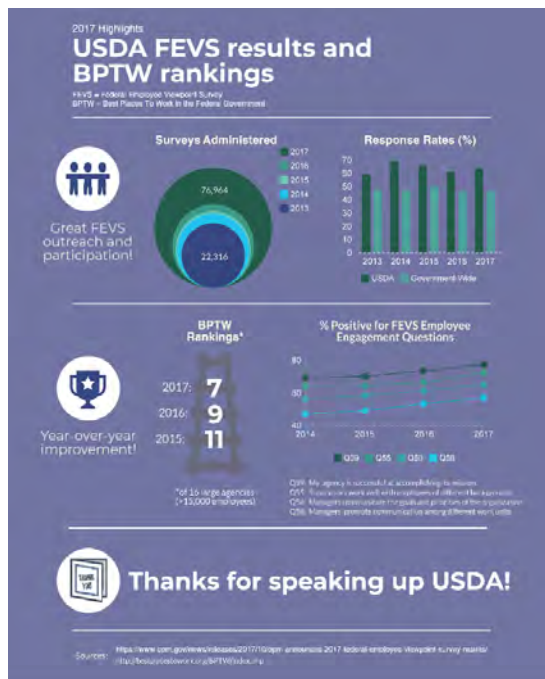
The following highlights a sampling of agencies’ print and electronic communications. These documents have been produced in a format consistent with plain writing principles and reflect the many ways that the use of plain language assist in effectively conveying information to the public.

*(Click on pictures or links to view in larger format.)*

## Departmental Administration

In September 2017, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration formed a work group– representatives from each USDA agency–to assist in providing input for the new Departmental Administration (DA) Web site. The Office of Communications is handling the redesign. The Web site is being built on an open-source site development platform which simplifies the online management of content and users and makes it more efficient and cost effective for DA to respond to current and future business/technology Federal mandates for managing public data. The Web site will also be accessible across mobile devices. The projected date of completion is May 2018. The DA Web site will transition from an agency-focused to a topic-based website that will align with the Secretary’s goal of making USDA the most effective, efficient, and customer-focused Federal Department.

## Office of Human Resources Management



USDA is one of the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government.

The infographic displays the results of the USDA employee responses to the Federal Employee Viewpoint survey and USDA’s ranking in the Best Places to Work category. USDA increased participation in the survey and the levels of employee engagement.



DA's Office of the Chief Information Officer communicates information technology security awareness to its internal customers: "[Focus on Security: Cybercrime for Hire](#)" infographic

**USDA**  
United States Department of Agriculture

**FOCUS ON SECURITY**  
January 2018

presented by: United States Department of Agriculture – Office of the Chief Information Officer

### Cybercrime for Hire

Emerging cybercriminals have discovered a new market for their nefarious skills—people who want to become cybercriminals themselves but lack the technical skills to create their own malware or fraud campaigns. This month we'll take a look at the world of cybercrime as a service.

#### Cybercrime as a Service

By now we all know that cybercrime is a serious threat to businesses, governments, and individuals. Unfortunately, cybercriminals are always looking for ways to expand their operations.

For example, you may have heard of software-as-a-service, where a software provider delivers their software over an internet connection, rather than as an installed application on a device. Familiar companies like Microsoft, Salesforce, and Carbonite deliver automated, internet-based software services that their customers can easily use.

Cybercrime as a service (CaaS) is based on a similar concept: People who wish to carry out cybercrime but lack the technical skills to launch their own attack can now purchase those cybercrime tools as a service.

With the click of a mouse, would-be cybercriminals can purchase services to launch a ransomware attack or create an e-mail phishing campaign to immediately begin stealing money or personal information. CaaS providers also sell services that allow their customers to crash legitimate websites, possibly to harm a competitor or to extract a ransom in exchange for ending the attack.

What does the future of cybercrime hold? CaaS will see more tools and capabilities added, as well as more people interested in employing CaaS to carry out cyberattacks. Also, as more of our devices join the Internet of things (IoT) and connect to the Internet, experts predict that these devices will become cybercriminals' prime targets. Cybercriminals can exploit security systems, doorbell cameras, baby monitors, and even cars to cause havoc in their victims' lives.

As more people become capable of carrying out cyberattacks on others thanks to CaaS, we must be more vigilant than ever with our cybersecurity practices, both at home and at work.

**Did You Know?** Authorities estimate there are 100 to 200 CaaS providers worldwide.

—National Cyber Agency

**FOCUS ON SECURITY**  
January 2018: CYBERCRIME FOR HIRE | OIGFeedback@usda.usda.gov

### Don't Become a Victim

As always, keeping your cybersecurity defenses tight will help you avoid becoming a victim of a cybercriminal, whether they used CaaS or not to carry out their attack.

- **Learn to spot phishing attempts.**
  - Don't open e-mails from senders you don't know. If the e-mail comes from a stranger, it may be unsafe.
  - Don't open unsolicited e-mails. Usually, unsolicited e-mails are at best spam, and at worst an attempt to steal information.
  - Don't click links or open attachments in suspicious e-mails. Links may lead you to a phishing site, and the attachments may install malware on your device.
  - Learn more about phishing in past issues of *Focus on Security*.
- **Protect your personal information.** Make sure you only supply your personal information when it's necessary, and only to trusted websites. Also, keep your passwords private and make sure they're sufficiently complex by using a combination of numbers, symbols, and uppercase and lowercase letters.
- **Apply patches and updates as soon as they're available.** Software patches not only help to keep your programs working well, but they also mitigate security gaps that may be present in those programs. Ignoring patches and updates leaves you vulnerable to attackers who will exploit the security gaps in your software.
- **Don't use public Wi-Fi.** Public Wi-Fi is unsecured, meaning that someone else using that hotspot could intercept the information you send over the connection. That person could potentially see personal or financial information that they could use to steal your money or identity.
- **Enable firewalls on your devices.** Firewalls can block certain malicious programs from accessing your device.
- **Don't download or run files from untrusted sources.** If you aren't familiar with the source of a file or didn't intentionally download the file, don't run programs that your device may prompt you to run.

### Learn More

- <https://www.cso.com/usda/article/3205253/dice-brunch-the-rise-and-fall-of-cybercrime-as-a-service.html>
- <https://www.cso.com/usda/article/3192400/secure-the-office-or-meet-a-remote-force-change-the-forms-for-security.html>
- <https://securityline.ligence.com/dark-web-suppliers-a-10-organized-cybercrime-gang/>

Please send any questions or comments to [OIGFeedback@usda.usda.gov](mailto:OIGFeedback@usda.usda.gov)

Find previous issues of Focus On Security at <https://www.usda.gov/office/of-cto/foia/foia-forms/all-issues.aspx>

DA's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Coordination has been diligent in plainly communicating the importance of security awareness and preparedness through online discussions with and in-office training and scheduled exercises/drills for its a. Additionally, the message of security awareness is enhanced through the use of televised visual displays throughout the USDA facilities for employees and visitors (*in both English and Spanish*).

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## ACTIVE SHOOTER AWARENESS

Are You Prepared?

Active shooter events occur unexpectedly and evolve quickly

**How to Respond**

**RUN**  
Have an escape route and plan in mind. call 911 or law enforcement when it is safe to do so.

**HIDE**  
In an area out of the shooter's view

**FIGHT**  
Only as a last resort, and when your life is in imminent danger.

Complete the AgLearn training course  
Active Shooter: **What You Can Do**

For more information on USDA's Title 40, Part 401, 301 and 302, visit the Emergency Coordination and Security Center at [www.usda.gov/ehsc](http://www.usda.gov/ehsc). Email: [ehsc@usda.gov](mailto:ehsc@usda.gov)

([Spanish version](#))

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United States Department of Agriculture

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([Spanish version](#))

## Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

The Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights is pleased to announce a new employment complaint filing module, “eFile.” The electronic filing system is written in a clear, concise, and well-organized manner so that all interested parties can understand the communication and accurately file their complaint.

### Equal Opportunity efile Module

#### Equal Opportunity efile Module

*WELCOME TO The Equal Opportunity efile Module.  
Here, you can initiate the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) counseling process or the Alternative Dispute Resolution process with an EEO Counselor to resolve your claim of employment discrimination. As an alternative, you may choose another avenue to address your claim so click Alternative Resources to inform your decision.*

#### Login

*First time users [click here](#) to register. (Note: You will need a valid email address in order to create an account and to receive feedback and verification from this system.)*

*Anyone filing a claim through this system needs a valid e-mail address to receive feedback and verification from this system.*

*Please make sure to use a User ID and Password that you can remember. If you forgot your password, [click here](#) to have it emailed to you. You will need to access your email account to retrieve your password.*

User ID:   
Password:  [Forgot Password?](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

## Food, Nutrition & Consumer Services

**Target Audience:** Congress, general public, nutrition assistance program stakeholders, and research community



The **Food & Nutrition Service's "Dietary Guidelines for Americans"** illustrates the impact of Americans' current eating habits and underscores how eating healthier can help reduce risk of diet-related chronic disease and health care costs.

The **National and State-Level Estimates of WIC Eligibles and Program Reach in 2014, and Updated Estimates for 2005-2013** report (2017) presents 2014 national and state estimates of the number of WIC eligibles and the percent of the eligible population covered by the program, including estimates by participant category. For the first time in the series, **interactive graphics** accompanies the publication.

"The **Cost of Raising a Child**" infographic summarizes key findings described in the 2015 Expenditures on Children by Families report.





## Food Safety

The **Food Safety Inspection Service** uses existing information, repackaged in modern, eye-catching infographics that provide consumers with relevant information and specific tips on food safety, while targeting a specific audience's needs.

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United States Department of Agriculture

**DON'T THROW OUT THE CAKE!**  
SAVE THE DATE  
Wedding Guide  
for Storing Leftovers

Food Item	Freezer	Fridge
CAKE	4-6 MONTHS	3-5 DAYS
PASTRIES	14 MONTHS	5-10 DAYS
CHOCOLATE (UNOPENED)	1-2 YEARS	-
CHICKEN	4-6 MONTHS	3-5 DAYS
SHRIMP	6-18 MONTHS	1-3 DAYS
FILET MIGNON	4-12 MONTHS	3-5 DAYS
FISH	1-2 MONTHS	3-5 DAYS
LAMB	4-12 MONTHS	3-5 DAYS

NOTE: Food lasts in the freezer indefinitely, but quality decreases after the referenced period of time.

Download the FoodKeeper App  
<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/apps>

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**SUPER BOWL PARTY**  
**FOOD SAFETY PLAYBOOK**  
Don't let the end zone become a food safety danger zone!

**CLEAN**  
Wash hands for a full 20 seconds with soap and warm water.

**SEPARATE**  
Keep raw meat and poultry away from ready-to-eat foods.

**COOK**  
Use a food thermometer or a crock pot to ensure that hot food is kept steaming hot, above 140°F.

**CHILL**  
Ensure that cold food stays chilled by refrigerating or placing in a container over ice.

**HALFTIME**  
Refrigerate food within 2 hours of sitting out, after that throw food out.

**TOUCHDOWN**  
Place leftovers in shallow containers to be refrigerated or frozen.

Questions? Call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline  
1-888-MPHotline Mon-Fri 10 am - 6 pm ET  
Email or chat at AskKaren.gov  
Food Safety and Inspection Service  
USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

## Marketing & Regulatory Programs

**Animal & Plant Health Inspection Services' (APHIS) “[2017 Emerald Ash Borer \(EAB\) Survey Fact Sheet](#)”** explains the purpose of the survey and related work in plain terms that a non-scientific audience can easily understand. Using a Q&A format, the factsheet answers the most common questions about the program, offers general background about the survey and other EAB efforts, and lets readers know how they can support this program.

**Target Audience:** General Public (particularly residents in and around the EAB-survey areas)

APHIS's “Protect Your Birds from Avian Influenza” Brochure (2017) explains the disease and describes the steps to proper biosecurity in plain terms. Also, it promotes USDA's toll-free number for reporting sick birds.

**Target Audience:** General Public (specifically poultry producers and bird owners)

The collage consists of several informational panels:

- What Are the Signs of Avian Influenza?**: Lists symptoms such as sudden death, lack of energy, lack of egg production, and respiratory distress.
- What Is Avian Influenza?**: Defines it as a respiratory disease of birds caused by influenza A viruses (IAV).
- How Does Bird Flu Spread?**: Explains transmission through direct contact, contaminated surfaces, and migratory waterfowl.
- Protect Your Birds From Avian Influenza**: A larger panel with the USDA logo and contact information for Veterinary Services.
- Always Report Sick Birds**: Encourages reporting to state veterinarians or the toll-free number 1-800-536-7593.

**“[Plant Protection Today](#)”** Web site

Launched in 2017, through this public-facing Web site, APHIS shares visually-rich, feature-like stories (written in plain language) about our plant protection work. These stories are helping APHIS increase stakeholder awareness and understanding of the mission and the services and programs they deliver.



**Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) infographics** distill complex and often technical information from AMS programs into visualizations that are appealing, clear, and consumer-friendly. Our most popular infographic breaks down what consumers need to know about beef grading, and has generated nearly 100,000 online views. Recently, our Farmers Market Toolkit infographic transformed a confusing bar chart of market improvement ideas into a clean graphic pairing market goals with specific color-coded actions that managers can use to improve their market.

*Target Audience:* AMS managers, customers, general public

**What's Your BEEF?**  
A guide to understanding USDA beef grades

**Marbling** is the amount of fat streaking within the cut of meat.

**USDA PRIME BEEF** is produced from young, well fed beef cattle. It has slightly abundant to abundant marbling, and is generally sold in hotels and restaurants. Prime roasts and steaks are excellent for broiling, roasting or grilling.

**USDA CHOICE BEEF** is high quality, but has less marbling than Prime. Choice roasts and steaks from the loin and rib will be very tender, juicy, and flavorful and are suited for broiling, roasting or grilling. Less tender cuts, such as from the round, are perfect for braising, roasting or simmering on the stovetop with a small amount of liquid.

**USDA SELECT BEEF** is normally leaner than Prime or Choice. It is fairly tender, but because it has less marbling, it may not have as much juiciness or flavor. Select beef can be great on the grill, and is also good for marinating or braising.

**FARMERS MARKET IMPROVEMENT TOOLKIT**

**HEALTH programs**  
• Healthy cooking classes, recipes & tips  
• Health screenings & prevention booths  
• Exercise classes

**special EVENTS**  
• Concerts  
• Festivals  
• Craft fairs  
• Product demonstrations  
• Farmers & Beehives

**VENDOR recruitment**  
• Vendor & producer outreach  
• Target vendor recruiting, promotion, and info at the market  
• Showcase and support for local food vendors

**market STUDIES**  
• Survey customers  
• Count number of customers  
• Survey vendors about needs, interests & sales mix

**BUSINESS incubation**  
• Help new businesses & startups by offering business plan, storage, food safety, graphics, retail space

**COMMUNITY programs**  
• Partner with local community groups to sponsor activities at farmers markets  
• Provide local groups to learn about how to market a new product or service

**GOAL TOOLS**

- Increase sales
- Attract more customers
- Keep customers returning
- Encourage vendor retention
- Grow product diversity
- Grow community support

**MORE INSIGHTS**

**UPGRADING YOUR SPACE**  
• Identify, overcome barriers to the existing space, so everything runs more smoothly  
• Set short-term performance goals, and track them to show progress  
• Improve operational & organizational performance

**SOCIAL MEDIA**  
• Don't directly impact the store's sales  
• Solve everyday dilemmas, customer issues, as standard practice

**MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT IMPROVING YOUR FARMERS MARKET**

**MARKET DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

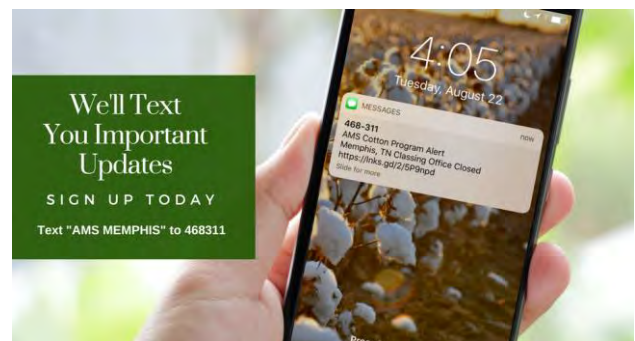
- Marketing and Promotion:** Social media, press, events, sponsorship, health programming
- Business Development:** Co-promote program, marketing, recruitment, info at the market, product demonstrations, and in-store events
- Vendor Engagement:** Vendor recruitment, add local marketing, info at the market, product demonstrations, and in-store events

**WHAT WILL HELP ME ACHIEVE MY GOAL?**

- Increase in sales:** Health programming, social media, events, sponsorship
- Increase in customers:** Health programming, social media, events, sponsorship
- customer retention:** Health programming, social media, events, sponsorship
- product diversity:** Health programming, social media, events, sponsorship
- vendor retention:** Health programming, social media, events, sponsorship
- community support:** Health programming, social media, events, sponsorship

**SURPRISE!** Greater attendance + Greater sales  
The use of social media does not have a direct impact on any of the market's linked needs. What? Every day, 1.5 million customers visit farmers markets.

**BEWARE INITIAL EXPANSION PERFORMANCE BOOST**  
Markets that expand in volume often perform better in the short term, but their long-term performance is often lower than that of markets that have not expanded. High performance also requires increased operational and organizational performance.



AMS offers innovative improvements through digital media!

Target Audience: General Public

**RISE TO THE FUTURE: NATIONAL FISH AND AQUATIC STRATEGY**

**AN OVERVIEW**

Why does the USDA Forest Service need an updated national fish and aquatic strategy?

- The USDA Forest Service is responsible for managing some of the best and, in some cases, only habitat for many valuable and culturally important fish and aquatic resources. In fact, national forests and grasslands provide important habitat for more than half of the country's federally listed fish, mussels, and amphibians.
- Fishing, boating, and other aquatic activities afford economic, social, and cultural benefits to communities across the Nation. The agency's sustainable, long-term approach to managing healthy watersheds and aquatic habitat supports vital recreational and commercial economies, providing many benefits to local communities, downstream cities, and the public.
- The Forest Service increasingly recognizes the importance of working with its many Federal, State, tribal, private, and nongovernmental partners to restore habitat, improve watersheds, conduct research, and serve the public.

Millions of people fish on national forests and grasslands, resulting in more than \$2.2 billion of economic activity each year. National forests in Alaska support a world-renowned, billion-dollar commercial and recreational salmon industry, as well as culturally important subsistence fisheries.

More than 220,000 miles of rivers and streams and more than 10 million acres of lakes, reservoirs, and ponds on national forests and grasslands provide a wide range of fishing opportunities for the American people.

USDA Forest Service FS-1100a November 2017

**2016 Fisheries Accomplishments**

The USDA Forest Service works with partners and communities to monitor, maintain, and restore the waterways that provide a myriad of benefits to the American people.

**3,832** miles of stream habitat restored or enhanced.

**39,067** acres of lake habitat restored or enhanced.

**178** road-stream crossings were enhanced or removed for flood resiliency and for Aquatic Organism Passage.

**406** The removal or replacement of these stream crossings reconnected more than 406 miles of aquatic habitat.

**\$15.8 million** The Forest Service invested \$15.8 million in the road-stream crossing projects. Partner organizations nearly matched that with an investment of \$13.4 million.

USDA Forest Service

“2016 Fisheries Accomplishments” NRE’s Forest Service (FS) Fact Sheet that gives overview about the need for an updated national fish and aquatic strategy.

“2016 Fisheries Accomplishments” Infographic highlighting FS’s fisheries accomplishments.

**Summer Jobs**

For More Info  
Visit our website at [www.fs.usda.gov/okanogan](http://www.fs.usda.gov/okanogan) or contact your office.

**Okanagan District**  
4820 W. Woodfin Ave. • Okanogan, WA 99210  
800-450-4800

**Cle Elum Ranger District**  
502 W. 2nd St. • Cle Elum, WA 99222  
800-950-1920

**Wendat Ranger District**  
2100 Hattala Way • Hattala, WA 99232  
800-754-4700

**Melkoy Valley Ranger District**  
84 West Chawathat Rd • Winthrop, WA 99298  
800-900-4008

**Naches Ranger District**  
20877 U.S. Hwy 12 • Naches, WA 99207  
800-950-5400

**Tonasket Ranger District**  
1 West Winthrop • Tonasket, WA 99252  
800-450-4100

**Wenatchee River Ranger District**  
600 Shattuck Ave • Leavenworth, WA 99224  
800-940-5000

USDA Forest Service Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

**Trabajos de Verano**

Para más información  
Visita nuestro sitio web [www.fs.usda.gov/okanogan](http://www.fs.usda.gov/okanogan) o contáctanos con las oficinas siguientes.

**Okanagan Distrito**  
4820 W. Woodfin Ave. • Okanogan, WA 99210  
800-450-4800

**Cle Elum Distrito**  
502 W. 2nd St. • Cle Elum, WA 99222  
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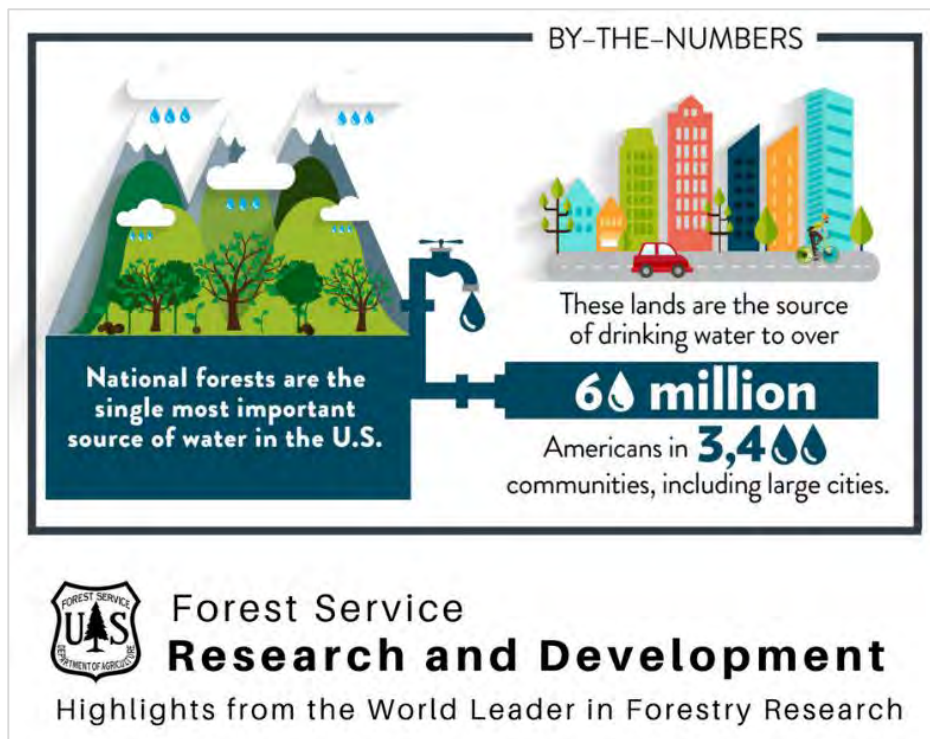
**Tonasket Distrito**  
1 West Winthrop • Tonasket, WA 99252  
800-450-4100

**Wenatchee River Distrito**  
600 Shattuck Ave • Leavenworth, WA 99224  
800-940-5000

USDA Forest Service Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

FS’s Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest summer jobs brochure (in English and Spanish) to aid potential employees find summer jobs.





FS's Research & Developments infographic explains how National Forests are the single most important source of water in the U.S., as part of a series of by-the-numbers graphics.

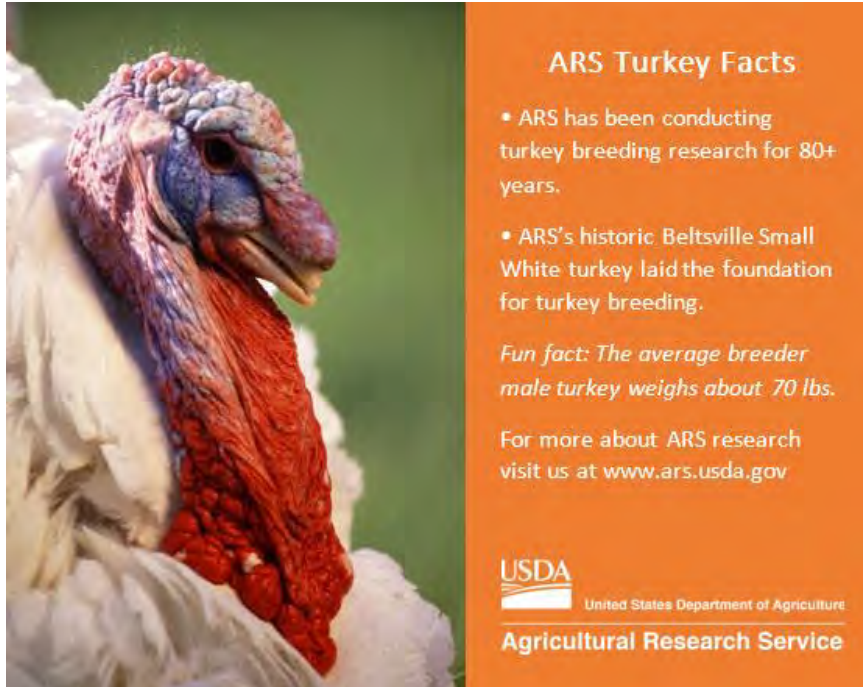
Additional Forest Service accomplishments:

- Published the [USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan FY 2015–2020](#) using the tools and techniques for plain writing, including supporting visual media.
- Built an [interactive visitor map](#). This map is part of an improved website for agency headquarters redesigned and written with users in mind.
- Offered employees, through the Office of Civil Rights, on-demand phone interpretation service to enhance public service to non-native English speakers and a translation service that covers 170 languages for printed materials.
- Rebuilt the Chief's internal communication portal for employees to a web-based site that categorizes entries and offers employees daily updates.
- Offered online information about [employment opportunities](#) with the agency, including information about what types of jobs we offer and where they are available.
- Published online story maps to visually present information as stand-alone web-based resources that lead a viewer through a narrative using GIS-based maps, text, videos, photos and other media that takes a linear story and adds layers– [Southern Research Station's maps](#).
- [Pacific Northwest Annual Report 2017](#), which includes vibrant photographs, maps, infographics, and narrative.
- [The Citizen Science Edition of the Natural Enquirer](#) (Vol. 19), critiqued by students.

## Research, Education & Economics

Research, Education & Economics' (REE) **Agricultural Research Service** continues to fine-tune its *AgResearch* online magazine product showcasing feature stories on scientific research outcomes and success stories. Examples include:

- Pre-2015 product launch example article: "[Yeast and Sugar Lure Pest to Beneficial Virus](#)"
- 2017 Article highlighting new plain language features: "[Broccoli That Can Take the Heat](#)"



### ARS Turkey Facts

- ARS has been conducting turkey breeding research for 80+ years.
- ARS's historic, Beltsville Small White turkey laid the foundation for turkey breeding.

*Fun fact: The average breeder male turkey weighs about 70 lbs.*

For more about ARS research visit us at [www.ars.usda.gov](http://www.ars.usda.gov)

**USDA**  
United States Department of Agriculture  
**Agricultural Research Service**



### ARS's Living Plant Genetics Museum Preserves Our Nation's Crops

Germplasm repositories exist to preserve genetic diversity. ARS maintains its living apple, tart cherry, cold-hardy grape plant germplasm collection on a 50-acre site in Geneva, NY. Many apples and tart cherries are also cryogenically stored. Our current collection includes about 6,800 apple, 1,400 grape and 130 tart cherry types.

**USDA**  
United States Department of Agriculture  
**Agricultural Research Service**



## Know Your MICROGREENS

**Microgreens pack a nutritional punch!**  
Here's a few that are high in calcium, magnesium, potassium and vitamins. Explore a new veggie on your next food journey.

Radish microgreens

Sunflower microgreens

Daikon radish microgreens

Red cabbage microgreens

Find specific nutrient data in our National Nutrient Database: <https://ndb.nal.usda.gov/ndb/>

**USDA**  
United States Department of Agriculture



# REE's National Institute of Food & Agriculture (NIFA) 2016 Annual Report (January 2017)



## NIFA Infographics

**Strengthening the Land-Grant University Mission through Capacity Funding**

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is committed to supporting the research, education, and extension efforts of its land-grant institution partners. An important source of support for these institutions are highway authorized capacity funds. Several types of capacity funds are available annually on a non-competitive basis and are matched at the state and local levels. The amounts allocated to each state depend on variables such as rural population, farm population, forest acreage, and poverty rates.

**Benefits of Capacity Funding**

- Promotes multiple and multi-institutional collaborations for forming the national research and extension "system" needed for addressing complex, multi-dimensional, and regional challenges.
- Provides institutions the flexibility to address local and regional emergencies while sustaining long-term research programs and longitudinal studies.
- Strengthens the infrastructure and capabilities of land-grant institutions.

**Learn more about the value of NIFA's Capacity Program**

<https://go.usa.gov/nyGN>

**The Wide Reach of Capacity Funding**

- 19,971** Number of projects supported by capacity funds from 2008-2015.
- \$1.85** Amount of non-federal funding leveraged for every \$1 spent on federal capacity funding.
- 6 Million+** Number of youth empowered by 4-H, Smith-Lever (S) & (C) is the federal source of funding for 4-H.
- 1 in 8** Number of agriculture students influenced by innovations at land-grant institutions.
- 28,400+** Number of full-time equivalent jobs supported by capacity funds in 2015.

**The Big 8**

These capacity programs comprise 89 percent of NIFA's Total Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations.

- HATCH** supports research and training of students at state agricultural experiment stations.
- EVANS-ALLEN** supports research at the 180 historically black colleges and land-grant institutions.
- MCINTIRE-STENNES** supports forestry research and training at state agricultural experiment stations, forestry schools, and land-grant forestry research programs.
- ANIMAL HEALTH AND DISEASE RESEARCH** enhances the capacity of veterinary schools and state agricultural experiment stations to conduct research to improve the health of poultry, livestock, equines, and other income-producing animals.
- 1800S EXTENSION** provides primary support for extension programs at the 180 land-grant institutions.
- RENEWABLE RESOURCES EXTENSION ACT** supports forest and rangeland education programs that benefit landowners and land managers, communities, and the environment.
- EXPANDED FOOD NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM** provides nutrition education programming to low-income families to help them develop healthy habits in eating, physical activity, food handling, and food storage.
- SMITH-LEVER (S) & (C)** established the Cooperative Extension System, which translates knowledge into solutions that help improve people's lives.

**NIFA's partnership with the Land-Grant University and Cooperative Extension Systems:**

- Strategical leading
- Administration of federal funds to state
- Land-grant activities and federal jobs state and local funds to manage a diverse program
- Extension professionals translate knowledge to meet the unique needs of communities across America

Extension professionals are integrated with more than 2,000 counties and county equivalents across all U.S. states, districts, and territories. These professionals translate science into opportunities to help improve people's lives.

**DISCOVER** Step, Share, and Grow. Available and Available. Division of NIFA Capacity Funding. (2016) Program. U.S. Department of Agriculture.

NIFA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

“Strengthening the Land-Grant University Mission through Capacity Funding” (June 2017)

**Diversifying the Next Generation of Agricultural STEM Leaders**

NIFA is committed to developing an agricultural science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforce representative of current and projected demographics in America. A diversified workforce is critical for developing the innovations that will drive the continued success of the agricultural sector and U.S. economy while serving respective communities in culturally-relevant ways. NIFA supports this future workforce through specialized partnerships and programs that build institutional capacity, facilitate access to higher education, and provide experiential learning opportunities in the community.

**STEM Demographic Gaps**

The demographics of degree holders in the U.S. agricultural science workforce do not match the demographics of the U.S. population.

**Opening Doors to Opportunities**

NIFA increases diversity within agricultural STEM through partnerships and programs that support:

- 180 land-grant universities
- 1600 non-land-grant universities, which represent a portion of America's historically black colleges and universities
- Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), with an annual capacity of at least 25% Hispanic students
- 1000 non-land-grant universities, which support the educational needs of tribal students
- Alabama Native- and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions (ANNIS), with an annual capacity of at least 20% Alaska Native students and 50% Native Hawaiian students, respectively

**A small number of the HSI, ANNIS and feeder area institutions are also land-grant universities.**

**Diversifying Student Enrollment in Ag STEM 2004 - 2013**

- 12.7% to 20%** Increase in minority student enrollment as a percent of total enrollment.
- 7.3%** Total Hispanic student enrollment increased the greatest of any racial or ethnic group, more than doubling since 2003.

**DID YOU KNOW?** The top 10 highest paying majors with terminal bachelor's degrees are in STEM.

"The HSI Education Grants Program helped me see opportunities beyond the boundaries of south Texas. The program opened a path that helped me further develop my scientific expertise in plant pathology as well as an interest in STEM education and equity. Without the financial support and mentorship that I had, I would not be here today."

**Dr. Carlos Ortiz**  
2005-2007 HSI Education Grant project participant, Texas A&M University at Kingsville

NIFA's programs foster community vitality and family well-being through education and community partnerships.

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“Diversifying the Next Generation of Agricultural STEM Leaders” (May 2017)

**USDA** United States Department of Agriculture | **National Institute of Food and Agriculture**

NIFA invests in and advances agricultural research, education, and extension and catalyzes transformative discoveries that solve societal challenges. | [www.nifa.usda.gov](http://www.nifa.usda.gov)

## Fueling Discovery and Engagement in Agriculture through Competitive Grants Programs

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) envisions a future in which all people, at all times, have sufficient access to safe and nutritious foods that meet the needs and preferences for active and healthy lifestyles. Depressed agricultural production and farm incomes need a boost from evidence-based agricultural sciences, driven by research and extension supported via a competitive peer-review process. NIFA is the largest source of competitive agricultural research funding in the United States and supports the research, education, and extension activities needed to fuel discoveries and innovations in agriculture.

### Meeting Global Food Demands

**\$1 Trillion**  
Value of the U.S. food system, which supports 21 million jobs.

**\$20.3 Billion**  
U.S. agricultural trade surplus in 2016.

**9.7 Billion**  
Projected global population by the year 2050, which is more than double the population of the world in 1980. Continuing to meet the world's food needs will require decreasing food losses, increasing food production, using less land and water resources, and overcoming increasingly variable environmental constraints.

### Did You Know?

NIFA administers the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), America's flagship agricultural competitive grants program.

NIFA's Total Fiscal Year 2017 Competitive Grants Appropriations: \$654 million

Program Area	Percentage
AFRI - Agriculture and Food Research Initiative	57.2%
AFRI - Specialty Crops Research Initiative	15.0%
AFRI - Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education	8.2%
AFRI - Emergency Ceres Research and Extension Program	2.8%
AFRI - Crop Protection and Pest Management	2.8%
AFRI - Emerging Ag Research and Extension Program	3.1%
AFRI - Organic Ag Research and Extension Initiative	3.8%
AFRI - Food Security Nutrition Incentive	4.1%
AFRI - Food Systems Nutrition Incentive	7.8%
All Others	7.8%

### A "Systems Approach"

NIFA supports projects that address biophysical, social, environmental, and economic challenges across the food supply and distribution chain. These projects require multiple disciplines to work together to achieve the following goals:

- Enhance Agricultural Productivity and Profitability by improving local, regional, and national agriculture with minimal ecological footprint and environmental impact.
- Strengthen the Sustainable Livelihoods by promoting the use of renewable biological resources and improving supply chain logistics to create new value added income streams for farmers and rural communities.
- Improve the Safety and Nutrition of Food for Healthy Lifestyles by ensuring that the food produced, packaged, processed, prepared, and consumed is nutritious, safe to eat, and sustainably produced.
- Conserve and protect land and water resources from a variable and changing climate, extreme weather events, pollution, and pest and disease threats.
- Develop a diverse workforce with the requisite knowledge, skills, and training to advance food and agriculture.

**Take a Closer Look at NIFA**

Learn more about the outcomes and successes of NIFA-funded projects.

<https://nifa.usda.gov/projects>

NIFA's partnership with the Land-Grant University and Cooperative Extension System:

Organizational funding | Administration of federal funds by NIFA | Institutions use federal plus state and local funds to manage community programs | University-based professionals translate knowledge to meet the unique needs of nonacademic sectors

Extension professionals are integrated within more than 3,000 counties and county equivalents across all U.S. states, districts, and territories. These professionals translate science into opportunities to help improve people's lives.

**IMPACTS:** Ag and Food Science and the Economy, Economic Research Service, [www.ers.usda.gov](http://www.ers.usda.gov); U.S. Agricultural Exports, Economic Research Service, [www.ers.usda.gov](http://www.ers.usda.gov); World Bank Open Data, Population, [data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP50?locations=US](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP50?locations=US)

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## “Fueling Discovery and Engagement in Agriculture through Competitive Grants Programs” (September 2017)

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## Biosecurity to Protect America's Food and Agricultural System

Tactical science programs protect the integrity, reliability, sustainability, and profitability of the U.S. food and agricultural system against threats from pests, diseases, contaminants, and disaster. It is necessary to mitigate the threats posed by these foreign and emerging constraints to our nation's economy and food supply. NIFA is committed to supporting programs that provide readily available, science-based tactics to help prevent, prepare for, detect, respond to, and recover from known and emerging threats.

### Ag Grows the Economy

**\$992B**  
The amount of money the agriculture industry contributed to the U.S. GDP in 2016.

**21M**  
Jobs tied to the agriculture industry in 2016.

**EXPORTS GENERATE A SURPLUS IN U.S. AGRICULTURAL TRADE**

### Examples of Threats to our Food Supply

- PORCINE EPIDEMIC DIARRHEA VIRUS**  
\$20M to \$100 million estimated cost to the pork industry
- CITRUS GREENING DISEASE**  
\$45B cost to the citrus industry from 2009-2010
- HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA**  
\$2.2B cost to the poultry industry in 2015
- SPOTTED WING DROSOPHILA**  
Up to \$19M in costs due to strawberry, raspberry, blackberry, and blueberry losses annually

**CAUTION**  
PESTS, DISEASES, AND CONTAMINANTS  
All threaten food safety, food supply, and the overall ag-based economy.

### Tactical Science Programs

Programs that Enable America to Act with Immediacy in the Face of Disaster

- Crop Protection/Pest Management Program (CPPM)
- Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN)
- Food Animal Residue Analysis Database (FARAD)
- National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN)
- National Plant Diagnostic Network (NPDN)
- Minor Crop Pest Management Program (R-4)
- Minor Use Animal Drug Program (NRSP-7)

Prevents | Prepares | Detects | Responds | Recovers

### RECENT EXAMPLES OF SCIENCE-BASED TACTICS TO PROTECT OUR FOOD SUPPLY

Development and deployment of the biopesticide HopGuard II to manage Varroa mite to protect honey bees

Integrated pest management methods have increased the safety of pest management strategies while protecting our food supply

Development of novel approaches to manage livestock diseases and thus protect availability of antimicrobials for public health

NIFA's Partnership with the Land-grant University and Cooperative Extension System: Boots on the ground translating research to protect our food supply

Organizational funding | Administration of federal funds by NIFA | Institutions use federal plus state and local funds to manage community programs | Extension professionals translate knowledge to meet the unique needs of nonacademic sectors

Extension professionals are integrated within more than 3,000 counties and county equivalents across all U.S. states, districts, and territories. These professionals are often the first line of defense in reporting new pest and disease threats and implementing solutions.

**IMPACTS:** Ag and Food Science and the Economy, Economic Research Service, [www.ers.usda.gov](http://www.ers.usda.gov); U.S. Agricultural Exports, Economic Research Service, [www.ers.usda.gov](http://www.ers.usda.gov); World Bank Open Data, Population, [data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP50?locations=US](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP50?locations=US)

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## “Biosecurity to Protect America's Food and Agricultural System” (June 2017)



In 2017, REE's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) continued its effort to bring clearer, more direct communication to its data collection and data release messaging as well as to its internal communications. In 2017, NASS undertook several efforts to make responding to surveys easier for producers and to explain why responding is important. Two are featured here:

### 1) An Improved Online Survey Response Tool



Like the population census, the agriculture census represents a complete count of its target population. As part of its overall concern about declining response rates, NASS set out to revamp its online tool to offer producers an easier, more efficient, interactive experience. Quite an improvement from the original tool (which was basically an electronic copy of the paper questionnaire and relatively slow), NASS's new online response form provides a modern, state-of-the-art experience for respondents. The new tool is dynamic and user friendly. And because it

calculates totals automatically and skips questions that do not pertain to the respondent's operation, it is faster and easier to use than the paper questionnaire. Readily accessible on mobile phone, tablet, and PC, the new online questionnaire provides improved data quality, efficiencies, and cost savings.

The demonstration version of the tool was launched in March 2017. NASS released both instructional videos on how to use the tool and promotional videos on the benefits:

[USDA NASS Census of Agriculture Online Response](#)

[USDA Census of Agriculture – Your Voice, Your Future, Your Opportunity](#)  
(includes YouTube response message)

[Census of Agriculture Public Service Announcement – Every Five Years](#)  
(includes YouTube response message from the Secretary)

### 2) Explaining the Importance of Surveys to Respondents

NASS created new materials that directly address the question of “why does this survey matter to me” for the 80,000 farmers who receive one or more of the quarterly “Acreage, Production, and Stocks” surveys and the 70,000 farmers who receive one or more livestock inventory surveys.

These surveys provide important information that producers, USDA and other Federal and state agencies, ag-related industries, analysts, commodities markets and many others use in making decisions that directly impact farmers and their operations, communities, and industries. Producers' understanding of why these surveys matter is crucial to their participation.

**In their words . . .**

"The data collected by NASS is critical for monitoring a major part of our industry and helps us get a look at the trends we are seeing in the cattle business. Filling out these livestock surveys is extremely important!"  
**- Colin Woodell, National Cattleman's Beef Association**

"As a New York sheep producer, wool breeder, owner and processor of wool, I know our industry - producers, buyers, and processors - rely on the data that NASS reports provide for business planning and forecasting."  
**- Mike Corn, American Sheep Industry Association**

"Strong production and market statistics are widely important to monitoring industry health and trends. The National Pork Producers Council encourages producers to take the time to complete these important surveys."  
**- Dwight Baker, National Pork Producers Council**

"The NASS National Health Monitoring System has a long history of collaboration with NASS. . . . Producers participation provides key data to improve animal health and production of better made for U.S. animal products."  
**- Bruce Wagner, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service**

"NASS data presents a very comprehensive picture of feed supplies, adult placements and production, with a reliability and timeliness the industry needs to track the progress of our flock to market."  
**- Jack Brandenberger, National Turkey Producers**



**Livestock Surveys:  
Why They Matter**

**Confidentiality**

Our mission is to provide timely, accurate, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture. In doing so, we are fully committed to protecting your privacy and your data.

The information you provide will be used for statistical purposes only. Your responses will be kept confidential and any person who willfully discloses any identifying information about you or your operation is subject to a jail term, a fine, or both. This survey is conducted in accordance with the Confidential Information Protection provisions of Title V, Section A, Public Law 107-347, and other applicable Federal laws. For more information on how we protect your information, please visit [www.usda.gov/confidentiality](http://www.usda.gov/confidentiality).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and leader.

If USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service asks you to fill out a livestock inventory survey - about your cattle, hog, sheep and goat, or turkey operation - you might wonder whether it matters that you take time to respond. It does!

Your information matters. Other farmers and ranchers, USDA, businesses, exporters, researchers, economists, policymakers, and others use the survey information to make decisions that affect you and your industry.

Take a look at how you and others use the data.

**For more information**

For help in filling out the survey, call or email NASS Customer Service:  
 800-269-3060 | [nass@nass.usda.gov](mailto:nass@nass.usda.gov)

For more about any NASS survey, see [www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys/Guides\\_to\\_NASS\\_Surveys](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Surveys/Guides_to_NASS_Surveys)



United States Department of Agriculture  
National Agricultural Statistics Service

**About 70,000 farmers and ranchers receive Cattle, Hog and Pig, Sheep and Goat, or Turkey inventory surveys during the year. Depending on where you live and the livestock you raise, you may receive one or more of the surveys. By responding, you help USDA provide reliable, up-to-date data that you and others use in decisions that affect you, your operation, and your industry.**

The Survey	What We Ask	Who Uses the Data?
<p><b>Cattle</b></p> <p>January July</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Year beef and dairy cattle inventory</li> <li>• Calf crop (calves born, sold, and lost)</li> <li>• Cattle and calves on feed</li> <li>• Cattle and calves slaughtered</li> <li>• Inventory value</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Farmers and ranchers</b> - to develop production and marketing strategies and plan purchases and capital investments.</li> <li> <b>USDA agencies</b> - to evaluate and administer farm programs such as the Farm Service Agency (FSA) Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) and Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish (ELAP).</li> <li> <b>USDA and producer organizations</b> - to prepare for and respond to credit shortages (e.g., loans) associated with accurate inventory and production data.</li> <li> <b>Producers, warehouses, storage and transportation companies</b> - to anticipate future volume and manage an orderly flow of goods and services.</li> <li> <b>Agriculture traders</b> - to evaluate U.S. export potential and international customers - to determine whether the United States remains a reliable supplier of intake commodities.</li> <li> <b>Industry and market analysts</b> - to forecast production and supply expansion and contraction.</li> <li> <b>Commodity markets</b> - to establish futures and commodity prices.</li> <li> <b>Federal and state agencies</b> - to administer agricultural programs as well as programs related to trade, education, research, and consumer protection.</li> <li> <b>Researchers, economists, extension agents, farm media, and others</b> - to identify and analyze emerging issues, trends, and their implications.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hogs and Pigs</b></p> <p>March June September December</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Year hog and pig inventory by weight</li> <li>• Expected farrowings</li> <li>• Hogs owned or raised under contract</li> <li>• Layer pig crop (number of pigs per litter, average size)</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Sheep and Goats</b></p> <p>January</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Year sheep/lamb and goat/kid inventory</li> <li>• Births, deaths, and losses in previous year</li> <li>• Wool and mohair production and average prices received per pound</li> <li>• Inventory value</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Turkeys</b></p> <p>February September</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turkeys raised (awards and combined)</li> <li>• Routes placed</li> <li>• (In February) Pounds of turkey produced and average price received</li> <li>• Inventory value</li> </ul>	



In 2017, NASS continued its recent efforts to expand the kinds of audiences and number of people who have access to and use NASS data. “Highlights” products provide a quick overview for the casual reader and an entry point for data users looking for more detailed information.

### Prices Data in Plain Language

*The Issue.* The prices program and the [data that result](#) are generally difficult to understand for audiences not familiar with them. Yet there is much in the prices reports that has broader interest and appeal.

*The Product.* In 2017, NASS used its Highlights series to write a general-audience [ten-year summary](#) of the prices farmers paid and received and the impact of these data on their purchasing power. The two-pager translated the data about price indexes into easy-to-understand words and images that illustrate that farmers’ purchasing power has declined over the last decade.

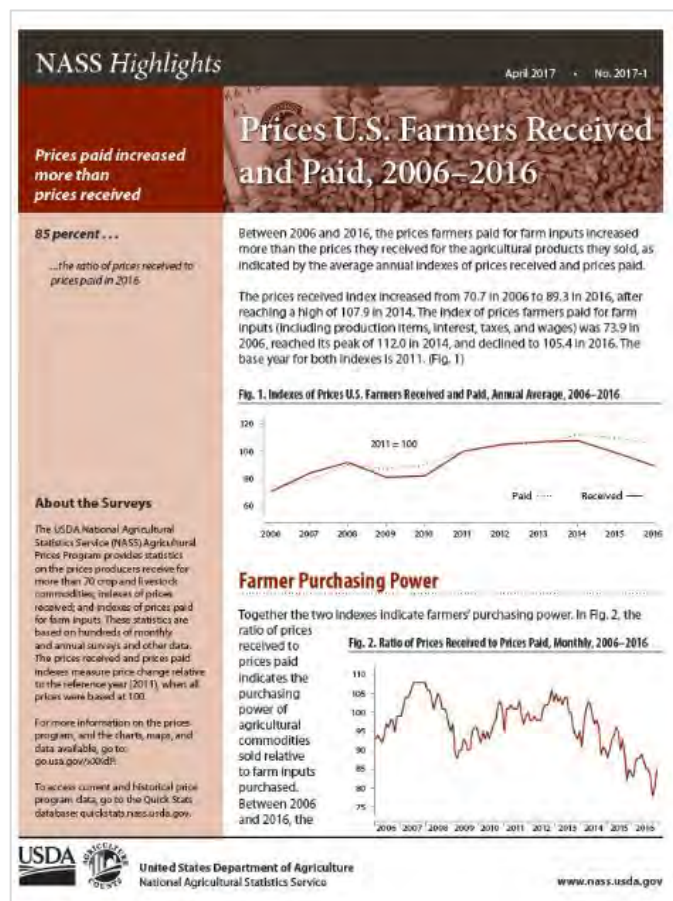
*Results.* Translating the price index into easily understandable language and discussing its impact on farmer purchasing power helped make a difficult concept more accessible.

NASS continues to develop and test additional formats for getting out accurate and useful agricultural data that a wide range of audiences can understand and use, and has most recently published a day-of-release “Highlights” summarizing [key crop data](#).

### Career Path Guides

NASS is also making efforts in its internal communications to convey important staff resources and information in clear, direct language. The recent cross-agency effort to develop career path guides for all job series in NASS provides an excellent example.

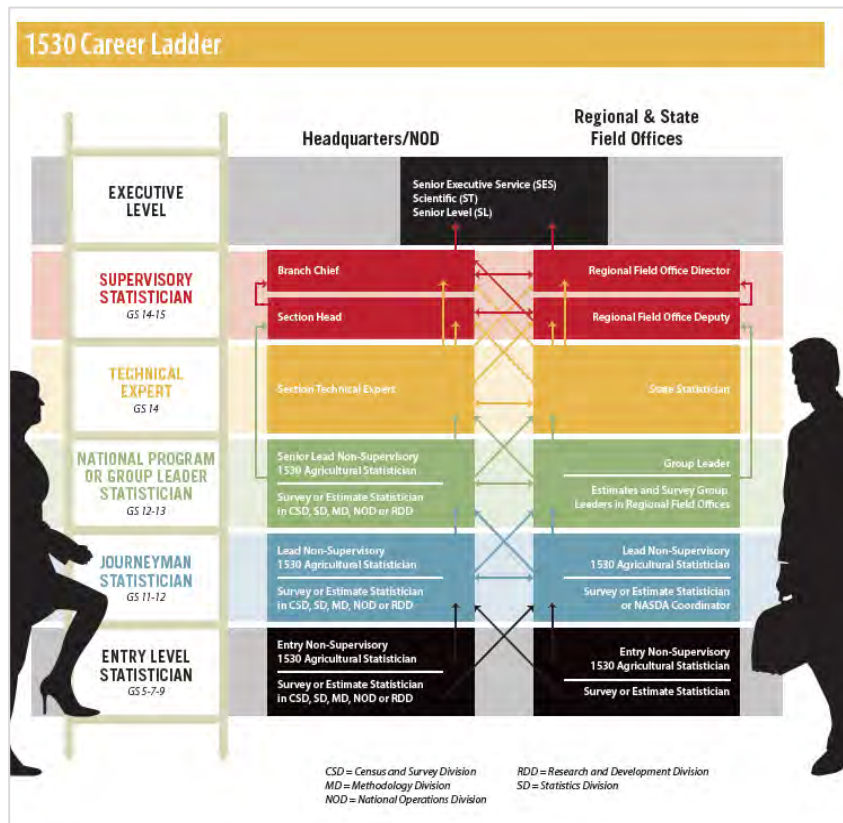
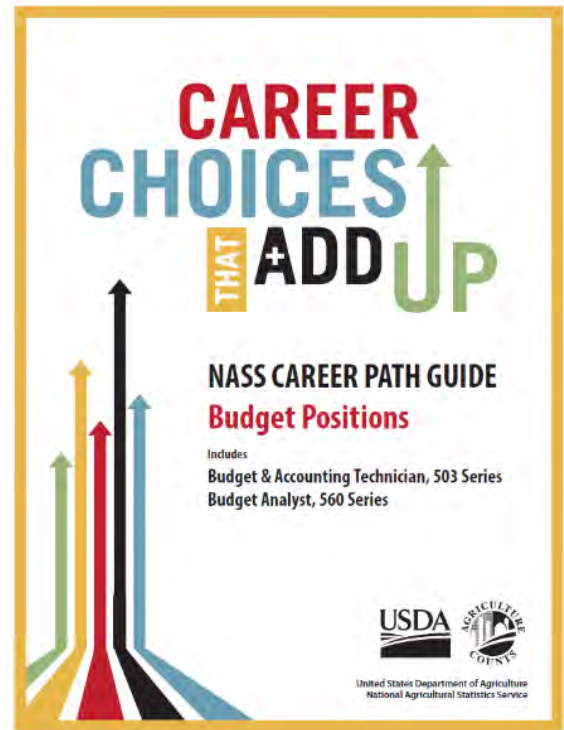
*The Issue.* In the last few years, NASS has reorganized in a way that significantly changed how the agency works and has also implemented new processes, developed new tools, and adopted new technologies. Feedback from NASS employees and agency planning documents has emphasized the need for more clearly defined career paths and broader career opportunities, including in managerial and technical career tracks. Staff needed clear information about the variety of career paths open to them in the new agency structure and in light of new ways of doing the agency’s work.



To address these issues NASS, created a cross-agency team to identify and create career path information that addresses both opportunities within job series as well as opportunities across job series to be published as guides that together cover all NASS employees.

*The Guides.* The team developed a series of nine guides covering the range of job functions in the agency. The guides detail a set of core competencies that every staff member must develop as his or her career progresses, and the set of technical competencies that are particular to individual job series and functions.

This was a massive amount of information that needed to be conveyed in a consistent format that holds up across all job functions, from entry level to senior management and in all specialized fields. The format is the same across the guides, but each guide details the level of expected competency at each stage in the particular series as well as the options for transitioning to other series.



*Results.* Employees now have clear information about the skills and competencies they need to be successful in their job series or to create opportunities for transitioning to something else. They also have information about how to develop those skills and a tool for discussing with their managers what training and experiences they need or want.

Managers, in turn, have an easy-to-understand and useful resource for setting and discussing expectations and opportunities. The guides are not checklists for performance evaluations (there are other tools for that) but have a much broader purpose.

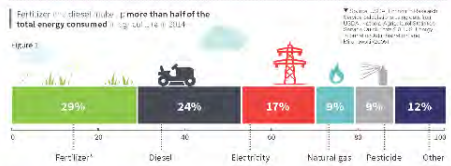
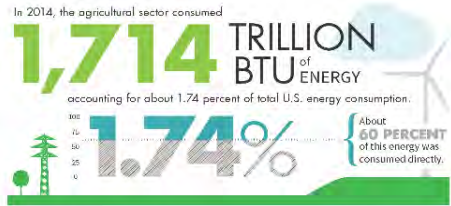
They can provide guidance to

both the employee and the manager for career development, training and detail goals, and creative planning.

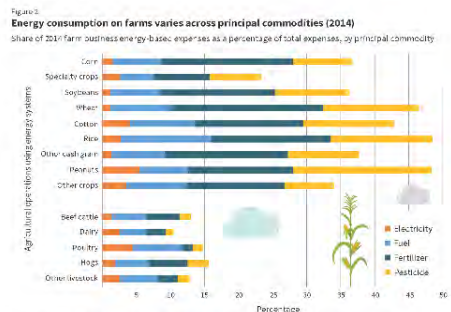


# Energy PRODUCTION and CONSUMPTION in Agriculture

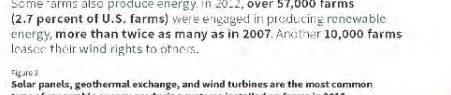
Farms consume energy directly in the form of gasoline, diesel, electricity, and natural gas. They also consume energy indirectly through agricultural inputs like fertilizer and pesticides. Some farms produce renewable energy or lease out land for wind turbine, oil, or gas development.



In 2014, among farms producing rice, soybeans, wheat, and cotton, rice has the highest shares of energy expenses at 45-49 percent of total costs. Soybeans, corn, and cotton are next highest at 17-22 percent. Rice, cotton, and corn producers also have the highest share of fuel expenses, while 100 percent of electricity expenses are for rice producers.



Some farms also produce energy. In 2012, over 57,000 farms (2.7 percent of U.S. farms) were engaged in producing renewable energy, more than twice as many as in 2007. Another 10,000 farms lease their wind rights to others.



For more information, see the USDA's Economic Research Service report, *Trends in U.S. Agricultural Consumption and Production of Energy: Renewable Power, State Energy, and Geologic Resources* at [www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-reports/?pubid=74661](http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-reports/?pubid=74661)

This recent infographic by REE's **Economic Research Service (ERS)** illustrates U.S. farms' annual consumption of energy by type and the share accounted for by various commodities.

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

Economic research monographs released via the agency's Web site with 2,396,811 unique visitors in 2017.

Target Audience: policymakers, academia, informed laypeople

Market analysis newsletters released via ERS's Web site  
Target Audience: Policymakers and commercial agriculture companies

Amber Waves magazine and infographics and through a magazine app available on iTunes and Google Play  
Target Audience: Policymakers and informed laypeople

ERS Publishing Guide and ERS Writing Guide, revised in 2017.

Target audience: Agency editors

Tweets and Charts of Note: ERS publishes tweets and CoN daily ("Charting the Essentials", a compendium of these charts) with 26,885 Twitter followers to date.

Target audience: General public, policymakers, academia, commercial agriculture stakeholders. See chart below.

Selected Charts from *Ag and Food Statistics: Charting the Essentials, 2017*

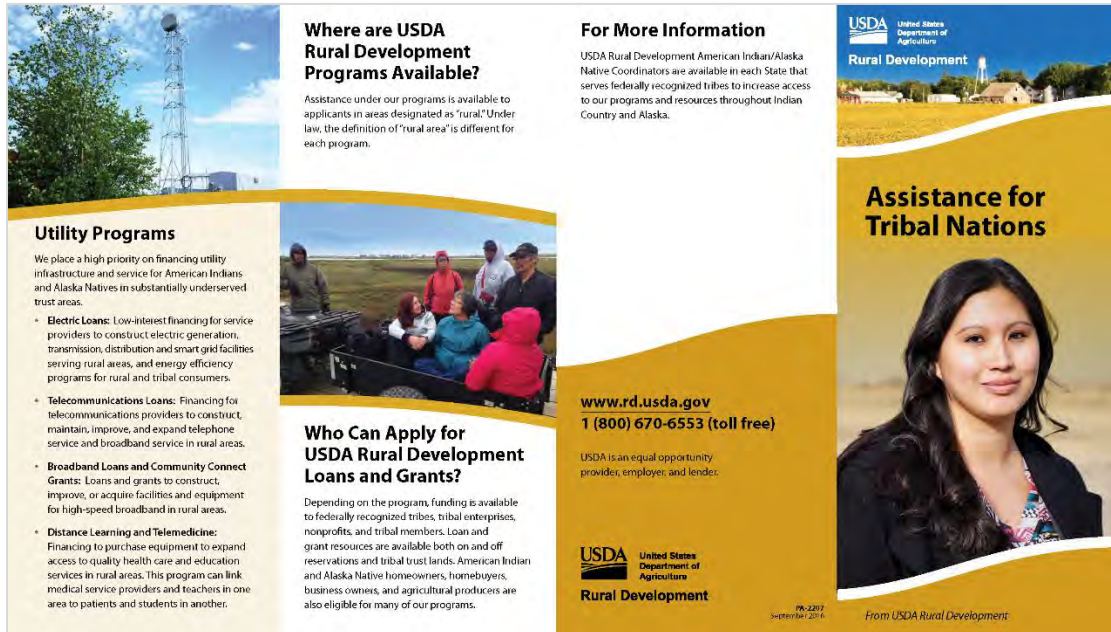
...as much of Americans' retail food dollar pays for more stable processing, retailing, and foodservice costs.



Note: "Other" includes two industry groups: Agribusiness plus Legal & Accounting.  
 Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, Food Dollar Series.

## Rural Development

Rural Development's (RD) **Office of External Affairs** worked with the RD Native American Coordinator and the RD Publications Advisory Committee to update the "Assistance for Tribal Nations" brochure and re-focus its content. The new brochure now uses headers, sub-headers and white space more effectively to improve readability and contains stronger branding and agency identifiers to help point Tribal customers to their local RD office for personalized assistance. The brochure was specifically written for a general, Tribal audience anticipated to be unfamiliar with RD financing programs. It was written to avoid jargon or technical terms that could be a barrier to understanding our programs or accessing those programs.




**Where are USDA Rural Development Programs Available?**

Assistance under our programs is available to applicants in areas designated as "rural." Under law, the definition of "rural area" is different for each program.

**For More Information**


USDA Rural Development American Indian/Alaska Native Coordinators are available in each State that serves federally recognized tribes to increase access to our programs and resources throughout Indian Country and Alaska.



**Utility Programs**

We place a high priority on financing utility infrastructure and service for American Indians and Alaska Natives in substantially underserved trust areas.

- **Electric Loans:** Low-interest financing for service providers to construct electric generation, transmission, distribution and smart grid facilities serving rural areas, and energy efficiency programs for rural and tribal consumers.
- **Telecommunications Loans:** Financing for telecommunications providers to construct, maintain, improve, and expand telephone service and broadband service in rural areas.
- **Broadband Loans and Community Connect Grants:** Loans and grants to construct, improve, or acquire facilities and equipment for high-speed broadband in rural areas.
- **Distance Learning and Telemedicine:** Financing to purchase equipment to expand access to quality health care and education services in rural areas. This program can link medical service providers and teachers in one area to patients and students in another.




**Who Can Apply for USDA Rural Development Loans and Grants?**


Depending on the program, funding is available to federally recognized tribes, tribal enterprises, nonprofits, and tribal members. Loan and grant resources are available both on and off reservations and tribal trust lands. American Indian and Alaska Native homeowners, homebuyers, business owners, and agricultural producers are also eligible for many of our programs.

[www.rd.usda.gov](http://www.rd.usda.gov)  
1 (800) 670-6553 (toll free)

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**Assistance for Tribal Nations**




From USDA Rural Development

**USDA Rural Development Support for Tribal Nations**

At USDA Rural Development we are committed to helping improve the economy and quality of life for tribes, tribal communities, tribal members, and native peoples in rural America and remote rural Alaska villages. We have a variety of financial support and technical assistance programs to foster growth and development in the areas of homeownership, business development, critical community facilities, technological advances and utilities infrastructure, and more. USDA Rural Development has State and local offices across rural America, with staff dedicated to the needs of Tribal Nations. Talk to the American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) Coordinator in your area to learn more about our programs and to get started.

**What Kind of Assistance Does USDA Rural Development Provide?**

We provide many different types of assistance to tribes, including direct loans, loan guarantees, grants, technical assistance, and research and educational materials. Many programs have funding set-aside exclusively for use by federally recognized tribes, tribal entities, and tribal members. We work in partnership with tribal governments, stakeholders, rural businesses, cooperatives, and nonprofits to help bring additional resources and assistance to Tribal Nations.




**USDA Rural Development delivers assistance in four key program areas:**

**Housing Programs**

- **Single-Family Housing Loans:** Direct loans and loan guarantees to buy an existing home, to build a new home, or to buy and prepare a lot for new construction. Funds are also available to refinance an existing home. We partner with lenders to provide the most affordable mortgage options for homeownership by providing loan guarantees.
- **Home Repair Program:** Affordable loans for home repairs or to improve or modernize a home for families and individuals with limited income. For seniors age 62 and over who cannot afford a loan, grant funds are available to remove health and safety hazards.
- **Multi-Family Housing Loans:** Direct loans and loan guarantees to finance rental housing complexes for rural families, seniors, and people with disabilities at affordable rents. Some tenants may receive rental assistance to help with monthly rent payments. USDA partners with participating local private-sector lenders to develop rental housing through loan guarantees.


**Business Programs**

- **Business and Industry Loan Guarantees:** Provides financial backing to start or expand rural small businesses. Loans are made by participating local lenders and guaranteed by USDA Rural Development.
- **Intermediary Relending Program:** Offers loans to local intermediaries such as nonprofits and Native Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) that re-lend to businesses and community development projects.
- **Rural Businesses Development Grants:** Competitive grants that encourage development or expansion of rural businesses. The grants may be used for targeted technical assistance, training, and other activities that create or retain jobs.
- **Rural Energy for America Program:** Provides loan guarantees and grants to agricultural producers, rural small businesses, and tribal utility enterprises to buy or install renewable energy systems or make energy efficiency improvements. Grants are available for intermediaries, such as federally recognized tribes, for energy audits and renewable energy development assistance.
- **Value-Added Producer Grants:** Helps farmers and ranchers add value to their products, and can be used to develop new products, create and expand marketing opportunities, and increase income.
- **Cooperative Grants:** Grants are available to support the development of cooperatives, including assistance to socially disadvantaged groups.



**Community Programs**

- **Community Facilities Loans and Grants:** Offers direct loans, loan guarantees, and small grants to develop or improve a wide range of essential public services and facilities.
- **Water and Waste Disposal Loans and Grants:** Provides funding to build, expand, or improve facilities and services for safe, clean, and reliable water and sewer systems in rural areas.

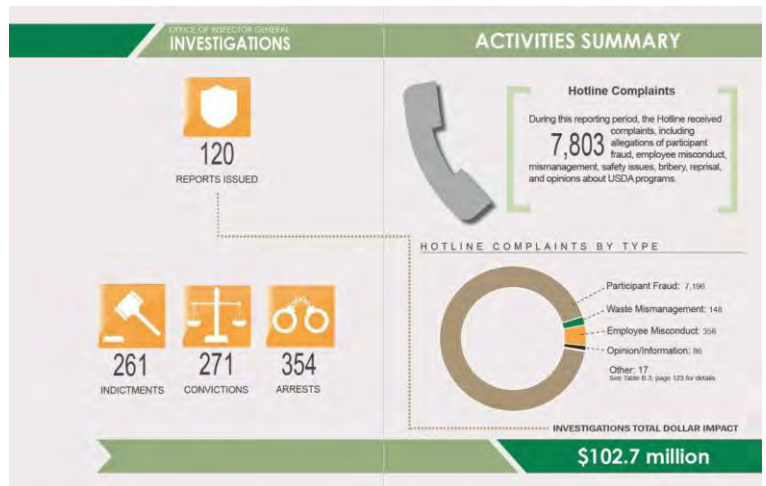
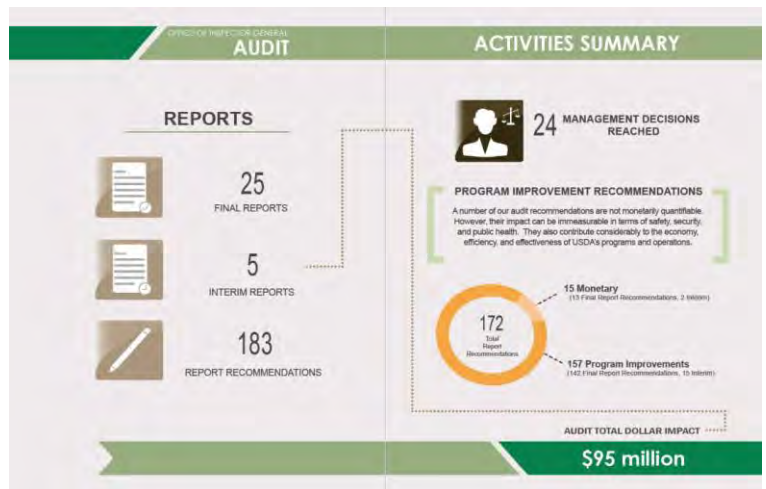




## Office of the Inspector General

As part of a continuing effort to communicate better with the public, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) has completed a thorough redesign of their *Semiannual Report to Congress*, one of their most important publications. This document was redesigned according to the principles of plainlanguage.gov. The goal was to create a more visually appealing and more immediate style that would better communicate sometimes complicated and textually dense results to readers.

Even when producing relatively dry information, OIG has found that they can devise structures that help readers make sense of outcomes more directly. Some of which include more white space, the use of iconography instead of text to convey ideas, and more rational and deliberate information arrangement. We have also worked to improve the information architecture by developing headers and footers that convey meaning.



## Office of Tribal Relations

In 2017, the [USDA Resource Guide for American Indians & Alaska Native](#) (AI/AN) was published to provide tribal leaders and tribal citizens, 1994-Land-Grant Tribal Colleges and universities, AI/AN businesses, and non-governmental organizations serving AI/AN communities with a tool for navigating USDA resources. There also was a notecard (shown below, front and back) developed as a complementary piece to minimize printing and encourage individuals to access the Guide electronically.



**To learn more about how USDA  
programs can serve you,  
contact the Office of Tribal Relations  
at (202) 205-2249.**

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## Trade & Foreign Agricultural Affairs

The **Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)** has strived to provide the most straightforward communications to its business customers and the public regarding the Agency, mission, and accomplishments. Below represents examples of one of FAS's International Agricultural Trade Reports. Reports of this type tend to be very technical in nature, employing jargon which would only be relevant to industry professionals or other analysts. The Agency's Public Affairs staff heavily edits these documents in order to make them accessible to the general public by employing various plain language best practices. One click from the [FAS Home Page](#) brings interested readers to the FAS Data and Analysis section where the report ([Korea Trade Agreement](#)) can be easily accessed. The entire Data and Analysis section is the product of many hours of editing and collaboration between the FAS Public Affairs staff and the Office of Global Affairs staff in order to produce a product that is informative to industry experts, FAS employees, interrelated Government Agencies and novice readers worldwide.

### U.S. Agriculture Reaps Benefits of Free Trade Agreement with Korea

December 18, 2017    International Agricultural Trade Reports

**Topics:**  
Trade Policy, Trade Agreements, Korea Trade Agreement

**Locations:**  
East Asia and the Pacific, Korea, South

[Printer-Friendly PDF](#)

U.S. agricultural exports to South Korea have grown in recent years, largely due to tariff reductions and the lifting of non-tariff barriers. The U.S.-Korea Trade Agreement (KORUS) entered into force in 2012, immediately removing tariffs on two-thirds of U.S. farm and food exports to South Korea. Already, the United States' average exports to South Korea have increased from \$5.4 billion in the three-year period before KORUS implementation (2009-2011) to \$6.37 billion in the three years following (2014-2016). As additional tariffs are phased out, U.S. agricultural exports to South Korea will grow further.

With a population of 51 million and a growing middle class, South Korea continues to be one of the top destinations for U.S. agricultural goods, ranking as the United States' sixth-largest market in 2016. The United States is South Korea's top agricultural supplier, providing 28 percent of the country's farm imports.

U.S. Agricultural Trade with South Korea			
Agricultural Total	3-Year Average (million US)		Change
	2009-11	2014-16	
<b>U.S. Exports to South Korea</b>	\$5,404	\$6,371	+ 18%
<b>U.S. Imports from South Korea</b>	\$290	\$486	+ 68%
<b>Trade Balance</b>	\$5,114	\$5,884	+ 15%

*Source: USDA FAS Global Agricultural Trade System (GATS) – BICO-HS6*  
*Note: Total, averages, and percentages may differ due to rounding.*

Extracting the significant data from the complexity of FAS's numerous and diverse programs, infographics have been used to demonstrate FAS program results and convey complex material in a very public-friendly, public-first manner.



# PUBLIC FEEDBACK

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## USDA

- ❖ In 2017, USDA was the **only Federal agency** to earn an **A rating** from the Center for Plain Language in both categories!

## Office of Communications

- ❖ 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 supports feedback through a multitude of channels and methods, including the following:
  - Comments and feedback through OC's USDA's Blog;
  - Monitoring and engagement on social media networks;
  - Ideation (a platform used to generate ideas) tools;
  - Feedback through OC's AskTheExpert knowledgebase, a 24/7 virtual representative populated with answers to questions about USDA programs and policies. AskTheExpert provides answers to consumers via an automated response system.
  - Feedback through the agency's Contact Us page, which houses an Information hotline and organization directories. Inquiries are forwarded to a team of more than 50 experts throughout USDA who are able to provide information on a wide-range of topics.
  - 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 directly with 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. Such engagement is typically the result of a positive user experience due to the work of the OC Digital team in designing compelling content.

## Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service:

- ❖ Use and feedback on the [APHIS Pet Travel Web site/FAQ](#) has been tremendous. This Web site guides travelers and their veterinarians through each step needed to meet animal health requirements when traveling with pets. On average, 50–70 percent of callers to the APHIS Customer Service Call Center ask about international pet travel. Having an online FAQ page that explains the process clearly is an important way to serve customers. To date, the site has had close to 4 million unique page views. (Note: USDA submitted this FAQ to the Center for Plain Language as part of their annual report card and received an "A.")

## Forest Service:

- ❖ All Human Resources Management -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.

### **National Institute of Food and Agriculture:**

- ❖ A survey from Siteimprove shows that 46.4% of our Web content is written at the college sophomore level. The next highest levels are high school senior (12.4%) and college freshmen (4.2%). Although 28.7% did not receive a readability score, those levels are too high. Using customer feedback data from tools like this, NIFA is actively working to improve its Web content.

### **National Agricultural Statistics Service**

- ❖ NASS sent the 2017 Census of Agriculture form to approximately three million people engaged (or potentially engaged) in agriculture, requesting detailed information on their farm or ranch operation, output, and income for calendar year 2017. Data collection will continue through spring 2018. During the initial mailing, NASS encouraged all respondents to use the online form. Throughout data collection, NASS is reinforcing that message through its partner communications and targeted print and digital ads. NASS is monitoring online response on a daily basis and, once data collection is complete, will look closely at how much the modernized and streamlined tool correlates with increased online response. But already it is clear that the tool is technically performing up to expectations and feedback from producers is positive. Over the course of the coming year, NASS will open the tool for its ongoing surveys and fully expects that the easier-to-use and understand tool will contribute to increased survey participation, more efficient data collection, and improved data.

### **Office of the Inspector General**

- ❖ In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, our *Semiannual Report to Congress* was based much more on text and tables. Beginning in FY 2017, we transitioned to a much more visual look that relied on infographics to convey the same complex material. This redesign has been well received by our readers and indicates that we can do more to convey our results graphically.



# OVERSIGHT

## Office of Communications

At the forefront of USDA's plain language initiative (and, thus, given significant presence in this report) is the agency tasked with ensuring that the Department conveys information clearly and concisely to the general public and our stakeholders—the USDA's Office of Communications (OC). Established in several USDA Department Directives, 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 and editing ability and experience. USDA policy and procedure require that in reviewing public materials, adherence to plain writing is built into the process before release.

OC's writers and editors review and clear all publications for clarity, quality, appropriateness, and compliance with Federal publishing policies. OC press coordinators review publications for accuracy and consistency with departmental programs and policies and review press releases for clear delivery of messages to intended audiences. OC speechwriters are hired also for their experience and ability to break down highly technical subjects for non-technical audiences, and plain writing is integral to the process. Below is an outline of OC's oversight responsibilities.

Documents	Audience	What we do!
National Press Releases	General Public	OC reviews all USDA press releases, both at the agency and departmental level to ensure they minimize jargon and use plain language to clearly convey information of national importance to consumers, the agricultural industry, academia, the press, and other stakeholders.
Media Advisories	Selected Media	Media alerts to upcoming USDA events and news announcements are written in direct language.
USDA "Results" Fact Sheets/ <a href="#">Farm Bill Fact Sheets</a> , materials, and information	General Public	OC succinctly conveys facts in plain language to increase knowledge about and use of USDA programs and customer satisfaction.
Captions on photos posted to USDA's Flickr site on the homepage	General Public and Press	OC writes clear captions that concisely convey the event behind the photo/photos to inform the public, both directly and through the media.
Web Pages, including USDA's homepage, and Social Media Sites	General Public	OC Web pages and social media activities use plain, conversational language that is informational and engaging, resulting in increased comprehension, public accessibility, and customer satisfaction.
Secretary/Deputy	Stakeholders,	OC writes speeches on complex subjects in clear,

Documents	Audience	What we do!
Secretary speeches	Interest Groups, and General Public	direct language, resulting in increased comprehension of USDA messages and customer satisfaction. Posted to " <a href="#">Transcripts and Speeches</a> " section of USDA Web site.
Text accompanying radio stories and audio and video content posted to USDA Web site and text accompanying videos posted to YouTube	General Public and Stakeholders	OC writes clear summaries of story topics and interviews, resulting in increased comprehension by and customer satisfaction of the public and broadcast media that may redistribute stories and audio content. All USDA Radio stories are written and reviewed to reduce the use of jargon and use clear, plain language.
Text accompanying exhibits, displays, and signage in Visitor Centers, Conferences, and other outlets	General Public and Stakeholders	OC captions and summarizes display information in plain language, resulting in increased comprehension and customer satisfaction.
Publications	Stakeholders and Policymakers	OC does final review of all agency-written publications released to the public, checking to ensure it conforms to accepted style and uses plain language, resulting in increased comprehension and customer satisfaction.

[ June 2017 front page article from "Women in AG" Newsletter ]

**USDA**  
United States Department of Agriculture

**WOMEN in AGRICULTURE**

**Dear Women in Agriculture:**

Thank you for choosing agriculture as your life's work and for assuming leadership roles. As a whole, American agriculture could use a lot more people like you. But from what I have seen around this nation, there are great things to come for women in leadership roles in the various industries in our field.

USDA's Women in Agriculture Initiative is aimed at supporting and increasing the participation of women in agriculture in roles in our federal department,

across the United States, and throughout the world. We want women to feel empowered to enter the worlds of farming, ranching, forestry, and producing. But we also want women to succeed in related businesses and in boardrooms from coast to coast. If American agriculture is to be truly representative of our country, then it is only natural for women to ascend to its leadership heights.

Here at USDA we are already benefitting from the counsel of wise women every day. My Chief of Staff is a woman and many of my most senior advisors are as well. Their advice and input are valuable additions to our decision-making process, and we are a stronger USDA because of them. I hope our department can serve as an example to other organizations in agriculture.

I have traveled this country quite a bit and interacted

with the people of American agriculture in every state. And each place I visit, I am encouraged by the young people of Future Farmers of America that I encounter. They stand out in their trademark blue jackets, of course, and they are many in number. But what I have noticed about them is also an indicator of where U.S. agriculture is headed. When I am introduced to their elected officers – placed in positions of responsibility by their peers – their leaders tend to be overwhelmingly female. If this is the future of agriculture, it is bright indeed.

Thank you again for your hard work. And I wish you the best of luck as you – in the words of my new motto for USDA – "Do right and feed everyone."

Sincerely,  
**Sonny Perdue**  
Secretary of Agriculture

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## **Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights**

ASCR is in the process of revising its Civil Rights Regulations, as part of the implementation of Executive Order 13771, “Reducing Regulation and Controlling regulatory Costs,” issued by the President on January 30, 2017.

## **Food Safety**

- The Food Safety & Inspection Service’s (FSIS) Office of Investigation, Enforcement, and Audit (OIEA) uses a plain writing language checklist that is aimed at enhancing the writing and review quality of written communications. This checklist is also used in its other programs. FSIS also posts, information on plain language and requirements of the Plain Writing Act on the Office of Program and Procurement Development’s Sharepoint site. FSIS has, further, incorporated the use of plain language writing concepts into its performance standards. There is a plain language component in the Communications element.
- OIES 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.

## **Natural Resources & Environment**

NRE’s Forest Service:

- established ongoing clearance processes to check for factual information as well as adherence to grammar rules and plain writing.
- organized a team at national headquarters to review all forest plans and forest plan communication products for clarity and plain writing.
- established a multi-year effort to enhance access to lands managed by the agency by clearly defining when a special use permit is needed and when one is not.
- started an agency-wide effort to evaluate its environmental analysis and decision-making process, which includes ensuring the information presented to employees and the public is clear and concise.

## **Office of the Executive Secretariat**

The Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES) serves the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture in managing the executive correspondence and official records. OES writer-editors provide editorial assistance to agencies to ensure adherence to the use of plain language, as outlined in the Plain Language Act of 2010, “to improve the effectiveness and accountability of Federal agencies to the public by promoting clear Government communication that the public can understand and use”. With that in mind, OES writer-editors review and clear, for the Secretary’s signature, all correspondence to the general public, USDA stakeholders, Congress, and inter-agency memorandums and abide by a strict protocol to ensure responses are understandable, addresses the incoming inquiry, and in compliance with plain language policy.



## Marketing & Regulatory Programs

MRP's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) uses social media channels to increase public awareness and engagement with agency and Department goals through targeted social media campaigns that break down complicated details into easily understandable pieces. A recent example of innovative use of technology and plain language is the implementation of a new text option for cotton farmers. When a cotton classing office's grading machine breaks down, AMS is unable to accept or process cotton from producers. If they find out before they load up, time and transportation expenses are saved. In order to quickly communicate when an issue arises, AMS implemented text messaging (replacing staff-intensive phone calls) to quickly get the word out and avoid a poor customer experience. The option has proven to be very popular, demonstrating customer satisfaction with 600-700 farmers signed up for notices regarding each of the 11 classing offices.

## Research, Education & Economics

- REE's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) has hired a Science Communications Advisor, through a PostDoc program, to provide guidance on improving plain writing elements in its public communications products to evaluate how to more effectively bridge the knowledge and understanding gap between science and communications.
- ARS started conducting a "plain language scrub" on all of its news media products to ensure the Agency's scientific outcomes are understandable to and sharable with a broader non-scientific audience and includes writing more engaging headlines that are relatable to the public (ex: *"Exploring a World Without Food Animals"*).
- NASS has, to date, put a lot of emphasis on using plain writing principles in its collateral general audience products, but in 2017 began a rewrite of its Statistical Publications Manual that will now include plain writing principles in these more technical products as well. The team developing the manual will also develop a training plan for the statisticians who will be writing in clearer, plainer style.

# WEB SITES & RESOURCES

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The following are plain writing Web sites and resources provided by various USDA agencies:

## **Office of Communications**

USDA's webpage was refreshed by OC during 2017, resulting in a cleaner design and reducing the amount of steps (clicking) to find relevant information. As part of this process, OC reviewed and edited more than 1000 pages of content to increase understanding and comprehension of USDA programs and policies.

## **Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service**

APHIS's Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program developed a writing reference for its employees. This 10-page booklet contains guidance to help sharpen writing skills and create clear and persuasive documents or Web text. It also includes plain language principles for making communications products brief, concise, and compelling. It focuses, in particular, on writing memos, talking points, correspondence, presentations, and reports and includes guidelines to help minimize style errors.

## **Farm Production and Conservation**

FPAC's Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) National and state Web sites are written in conformance with plain writing principles and a link to the Plain Writing Web site is available on the home page. In addition, there is information on plain writing in its correspondence manual.

## **Foreign Agricultural Service**

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

## **Natural Resources & Environment**

NRE's Forest Service relies on USDA's Plain Writing Web site with links directing users to that information. For employees, there is region-wide use of their Intranet Web pages to promote plain language information through writing tools (i.e. checklists, plain writing sites, and Aglearn training modules).

## **Office of the General Counsel**

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.

## Research, Education & Economics

- [AgResearch](#): An online magazine featuring stories on scientific research discoveries occurring at the Agricultural Research Service's (ARS) research laboratories across the Nation and abroad. The magazine offers easy access to ARS scientific information and provides an informative, engaging, and enhanced digital experience.
- REE's National Agricultural Library is continuing its work on the Web site to incorporate their Information Centers' individual sites into the core site with an emphasis on plain language and writing for the Web.
- The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) has an internal Web site which maintains a plain language page with links to writing courses and other useful web resources, as well as a series of NASS Tip Sheets on key writing issues relevant for NASS statistical and other products.
- The Census of Agriculture portion of NASS's Web site offers a user- friendly, interactive site at which farmers could come for Census instructions and results.
- The Economic Research Service's [\(ERS\) Web site](#) goes through ERS's professional editors before it is posted, with guidelines for Web writing.

## Rural Development

Rural Development continues to improve Web site features utilizing plain language formats. RD's Rural Housing Service continues to utilize the plain language Web site offered on the USDA Web site, as well as the plainlanguage.gov Web site.



# TRAINING

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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 all USDA employees. This training includes related courses in writing and editing, grammar, communications, graphical design, visual reports, etc. Sources include agency-instructed conferences and classroom workshops, outside vendors (i.e. PLAIN (Plain Language Action and Information Network) Instructors, University Professors and educational learning vendors, AgLearn, and other web-based sources.

**Total USDA-wide training: 3600+**

*(See Appendix A for a list of training by agency)*

# MOVING FORWARD

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

## SUMMARY

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

USDA maintains this standard of excellence by

- 1) continuing improvements in technology;
- 2) staying on the cutting edge of web design and using various social mediums to keep our presence “fresh” and to ensure a pleasant and informative online experience for our customers;
- 3) trading wordy, technical and/or legal jargon for simple, clear, and concise language; and, most importantly,
- 4) welcoming feedback from our internal (employees) and external customers.

USDA, again, commits to adhering to the Plain Language Act and providing first class service.





**APPENDIX**

## Training Compiled by Agency

USDA DEPARTMENT-WIDE TRAINING		
Source	Course Title	# Participants
AgLearn (Web-based)	Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely	700
	Introduction to Plain Language	162
	Business Writing: Know Your Readers and Your Purpose	224
	Audience and Purpose in Business Writing	29
	Business Grammar: Sentence Construction	54
	Creating Well-Constructed Sentences	7
	Clarity and Consciousness in Business Writing	32
	Business Grammar: Punctuation	59
	Using Punctuation Marks	6
	Business Writing: Editing and Proofreading	459
	Editing and Proofreading Business Documents	34
	Business Grammar Common Usage Errors	103
	Troublesome Words and Phrases: Common Usage Mistakes in Writing	15
	Writing at Work: How to Write Clearly, Effectively and Professionally	68
	Business Grammar: Parts of Speech	122
	Using Parts of Speech	3
	Business Grammar: Working with Words	134
	Getting the Details Right: Spelling Basics	11
	Business Grammar: The Mechanics of Writing	236
	Abbreviating, Capitalizing, and Using Numbers	45

**ANIMAL & PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b># Participants</b>
AgLearn (Web-based)	Introduction to Plain Language	124
	Business Writing: Know Your Readers and Your Purpose	20
	Audience and Purpose in Business Writing	1
	Business Grammar: Sentence Construction	11
	Creating Well-Constructed Sentences	1
	Business Writing: How to Write Clearly And Concisely	51
	Business Grammar: Punctuation	11
	Business Writing: Editing and Proofreading	45
	Editing and Proofreading Business Documents	4
	Business Grammar Common Usage Errors	13
	Troublesome Words and Phrases: Common Usage Mistakes in Writing	2
	Writing at Work: How to Write Clearly, Effectively and Professionally	6
	Business Grammar: Parts of Speech	11
	Using Parts of Speech	1
	Business Grammar: Working with Words	6
	Business Grammar: The Mechanics of Writing	20
Abbreviating, Capitalizing and Using Numbers	8	
APHIS- sponsored (Classroom)	Briefing Memo Writing	12
	Decision Memo Writing	12
	Writing UP!	54



## AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE

AMS's Public Affairs staff have developed two training options for agency staff and leadership including a traditional lunch/learn style PowerPoint "best practices" presentation and a new Case Study model template to provide real-world examples that staff work through as a group in real time. AMS also maintains a Plain Language Checklist and other guides accessible to all staff via SharePoint.

## FOOD & NUTRITION SERVICE

Source	Course Title	# Participants
Web-based	Introduction to Plain Language	5
	Business Writing: How to Write Clearly and Concisely	2

## FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICE

Source	Course Title	# Participants
Web-based and Classroom	Plain Writing	80+

## FOREST SERVICE

Source	Course Title	# Participants
AgLearn (Web-based)	Business Writing for Results	27
	Writing Performance Work Statements	11
	Report Writing	9
	Introduction to Plain Language	4
	Business Writing: Know Your Readers and Your Purpose	28
	Final Exam: Business Writing Basics	2
	Business Writing: Editing and Proofreading	62
	Business Grammar: Parts of Speech	9
	Final Exam: Business Grammar Basics	1
	Business Grammar: Working with Words	9

### FOREST SERVICE continued

Business Grammar: The Mechanics of Writing	15
Business Grammar: Punctuation	3
Business Grammar: Sentence Construction	5
Business Grammar Common Usage Errors	13

### RESEARCH, EDUCATION & ECONOMICS

National Agricultural Statistics Service presented a 2-hour workshop focused on writing needs and promotion of AgLearn courses.

Four National Institute of Food and Agriculture employees completed the AgLearn Plain Writing Training, while 155 employees—that’s nearly half of all NIFA employees—completed other AgLearn courses that included Plain Writing.

Economic Research Service’s editors conducted a series of in-house seminars announcing and explaining the writing principles for Resource & Rural Economics Division and Market & Trade Economics Division economists, tailoring its message to the needs of individual research branches (4) in July and August 2017. Approximately 60 economists attended.

### OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL

Over 40 attorneys and staff participated in plain writing training (in person or virtually) taught by a PLAIN (Plain Language Action and Information Network) Instructor.

Non-attorney staff participated in a Business Writing training workshop taught by an outside provider.

Georgetown University Law School provided a workshop to managers and senior attorneys on “Improving Subordinate Writing Through Effective Feedback”.

### OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Source	Course Title	# Participants
Regional Conference	Plain Writing and Communications (through graphical design, photography, and visual story reports)	187
OIG-sponsored	Introductory Report Writing	210

## **OFFICE OF TRIBAL RELATIONS**

A small staff of 4, training courses was given in Business Writing and Business Grammar.

## **TRADE & FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS**

In 2017, Foreign Agriculture Service had over 80 employees complete 1 or more of the 17 courses offered in plain writing.



## USDA Officials for Plain Writing

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

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

**USDA’s Senior Official for Plain Writing:**

Ms. Jean Daniel  
 Director, Office of the Executive Secretariat  
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<b>Agency/Office</b> <i>(The Web site for each agency/office can be accessed by clicking on its acronym in parentheses.)</i>	<b>Plain Writing Agency Official</b>	<b>Plain Writing Coordinator(s)</b>
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights ( <a href="#">OASCR</a> )	Winona Lake Scott	Joelle Bowers
Departmental Administration – Office of Human Resources Management ( <a href="#">OHRM</a> ) – Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Coordination ( <a href="#">OHSEC</a> ) – Office of Procurement & Property Management ( <a href="#">OPPM</a> ) – Office of the Chief Information Officer ( <a href="#">OCIO</a> ) – Office of the Executive Secretariat ( <a href="#">OES</a> )	Johanna Briscoe	Karlease Kelly JT Stroud  Chris Corder  Ted Kaouk Melanie Clemons Alexis Doss
Farm Production & Conservation – Farm Service Agency ( <a href="#">FSA</a> )	Katina Hanson	Latawnya Dia
Food Safety – Food Safety and Inspection Service ( <a href="#">FSIS</a> )	Chuck Williams	Vince Fayne Michelle Long Jacquelyn Jones Laura Reiser Joe Abbott Jason Waggoner John Paul Antonetti Meryl Silverman Steve Lombardi

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Food, Nutrition & Consumer Services – Food and Nutrition Service ( <a href="#">FNS</a> ) – Center for Nutrition Policy & Promotion ( <a href="#">CNPP</a> )	Kristin Garcia  Rich Lucas	Kristin Garcia  Rich Lucas
Marketing & Regulatory Programs – Agricultural Marketing Service ( <a href="#">AMS</a> ) – Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service ( <a href="#">APHIS</a> ) – Grain Inspection, Packers & Stockyards Administration ( <a href="#">GIPSA</a> )	Karen T. Comfort  Dexter Thomas	David Glasgow Beth Gaston  Dexter Thomas
Natural Resources & Environment – Forest Service ( <a href="#">FS</a> )	Terry Bish Angela Coleman	Kathryn Sosbe
Research, Education & Economics – Agricultural Research Service ( <a href="#">ARS</a> ) – National Institute of Food & Agriculture ( <a href="#">NIFA</a> ) – National Agricultural Library ( <a href="#">NAL</a> ) – National Agricultural Statistics Service ( <a href="#">NASS</a> ) – Economic Research Service ( <a href="#">ERS</a> )	Christopher Bentley    Sue King Dale Simms	Tara Weaver-Missick Scott Elliot  Ricardo Romero Rosemarie Phillips John Weber
Rural Development ( <a href="#">RD</a> ) – Rural Utilities Service ( <a href="#">RUS</a> ) – Rural Housing Service ( <a href="#">RHS</a> ) – Rural Business and Cooperative Service ( <a href="#">RBCS</a> )	Karen Dawkins	Michelle Brooks Karen Jacobs Matthew Mullen
Trade & Foreign Agricultural Affairs – Foreign Agricultural Service ( <a href="#">FAS</a> )	Ellen Dougherty	Corey Jenkins Joseph Migyanka
Office of Advocacy & Outreach ( <a href="#">OAO</a> )	Christian Obineme	Teresa Welch
Office of Budget & Program Analysis ( <a href="#">OBPA</a> )	Andrew Perry	Sam Barkdull
Office of Communications ( <a href="#">OC</a> )	Brian Mabry	Brian Mabry
Office of the Chief Economist ( <a href="#">OCE</a> )	Brenda Chapin	Brenda Chapin
Office of the General Counsel ( <a href="#">OGC</a> )	Sara Gras	Sara Gras
Office of the Inspector General ( <a href="#">OIG</a> )	Gil Harden	Michael Martin

