



**United States Department of Agriculture
Open Government Plan
Version 4.0**

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Change Log

Version	Date	Comments
Version 1.0	4/7/2010	Initial Release
Version 1.1	6/25/2010	The plan includes updates based on public comments on the plan, self-evaluation, and independent plan assessment. This includes details on congressional requests, declassification management, open standards, dataset calendar, program task schedule and additional editorial updates. Key sections updated include: Addition of New Sections 2.7,6.4, 6.5 Updates to Sections 2.0, 3.0, 6.0, 8.0 Addition of New Appendices C, D
Version 2.0	4/9/2012	Major Revision. Version 2.0 extends Version 1.1 from FY 2012 through FY 2014. The OGP v2.0 replaces the introductory narrative sections in OGP v1.1 with new narrative sections on: What We Learned (1.0); Current OpenGov Culture at USDA (2.0); and OGP 2.0 New Initiatives (3.0). Appendix A: USDA Open Government Program Schedule includes major revisions that show current progress status on work begun in OGP v1.1, and adds significant milestones for new work planned in OGP v2.0.
Version 3.0	7/1/2014	Major Revision. Departs substantially from Plans 1.0 through 2.0. The OGP v 3.0 follows the structure and substance as outlined in White House/OSTP guidance referenced by memorandum (Feb. 24, 2014) and supplemental guidance. Appendix A: USDA Open Government Program Schedule (OGP v2.0 Close) provides final status to all preceding Open Government implementation milestones as seen in Plans 1.0, 1.1 and 2.0. USDA will create a new program schedule and report progress on Plan 3.0 milestones with the first requested progress report.
Version 4.0	9/15/2016	Minor Revision. The OGP V 4.0 follows the structure and substance as outlined in White House/OSTP guidance referenced by memorandum (Feb.24, 2014) and supplemental guidance. This plan introduces the inclusion of four new Expanded Initiatives , which include observations on Open Innovation Methods, Access to Scientific Data and Publications, Open Source Software, and Spending Information.

Introduction

“The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) vision is to provide economic opportunity through innovation, helping rural America thrive; to promote agriculture production that better nourishes Americans while helping feed others throughout the world; and preserve our Nation’s natural resources through conservation, restored forests, improved watersheds, and healthy private working lands.”

USDA is made up of 29 agencies and offices with nearly 100,000 employees who serve the American people at more than 4,500 locations across the country and abroad. These agencies impact the quality of life across America by providing the best available science and effective management of program delivery and resources.

This USDA Open Government Plan 4.0 Update (2016) is the fifth iteration of *Open* planning at the Department. It is preceded by *Open* Plans 1.0 (2010), 1.1 (2010), 2.0 (2012) and 3.0 (2014). Plan 4.0 continues to build from its predecessors; in that Plans 1.0 and 1.1 were primarily foundational in nature and focused on establishing and launching basic *Open* structures and procedures, while Plan 2.0 emphasized the promotion of new *Open* media and *Open* cultural changes. Plan 3.0 reported wide ranging successes and announced progressive future objectives in practicing *Open* as a business norm and accepting *Open* as a strategic organizational value.

Openness and Transparency principles permeate all levels and stages of mission/business delivery at USDA. The 2016 updates in the USDA Open Government Plan 4.0 address operational outcomes achieved since the last Plan update (v3, 2014), along with planned future improvements in specific *Open* subject areas.

To build on the advances in the previous Open Government Plans, Open Government Plan 4.0 continues to align with [USDA's Strategic Plan 2014-2018](#), in particular Strategic Goal 5: Enable Information as a Strategic Asset for Decision Makers and Citizens at Any Level.

I. New and Expanded Initiatives

USDA continues to build on the principles of *Open Government* – transparency, participation and collaboration and have increasingly infused them into the Department’s core mission strategies, operations and culture. In today’s USDA, *Open* is not a separate organizational function. It is not an independent layer of management oversight. In today’s USDA, *Open* is the way we plan ahead, conduct our business and report our results. From the highest levels of departmental planning to the closest farmer, rancher or forester on the ground, USDA is *Open* for business.

In July 2016, the OCIO participated in the science, technology, engineering and math ([STEM](#)) Connector Million Women Mentor Program and hosted the USDA Open Data STEAM (science, technology, engineering, agriculture and math) Summer Camp to further embrace a new era of information **openness and transparency**. USDA also participated in the White House Summit on the United States of Women. The summit covered six topics; economic empowerment, health and wellness, educational opportunity, violence against women, entrepreneurship and innovation and leadership and civic engagement. Women and Girl participants discussed **datasets** collected on these topics at the federal and state/local level and discussed ways of furthering women's roles in corporations, academia, the media and the public sector.

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) provide an excellent example of the creative capabilities USDA is delivering as it embraces the type of transparency that the Open Government initiative promotes. At Fort Valley State University (FVSU) the next generation of leaders in agriculture and life sciences are working with technology that will help them solve the next challenges of understanding diseases and identifying new molecular targets for drug discovery, gene therapy and economic production of health food items for the future. "[Bioinformatics](#) is 'biology *in silico*,' or digital biology,' which is changing biological research into an informational science. The FVSU students majoring in STEM subjects joined with computer science majors to become competent in bioinformatics programming to gain experience writing algorithms and coding for biological problems. Computers are used to store, organize, and analyze vast amounts of data generated by scientific research. They take **big data** and turn it into practical data that researchers can use to compare existing information with new data. The capacity, speed and efficiency of bioinformatics are what make biology *in silico* so exciting.

Lastly, the Agricultural Marketing Service is responsible for enforcing organic regulations, to ensure the integrity to [USDA's Organic Seal](#). Among all the nutrition facts, ingredients and dietary information on food packages, "organic" might appear as one more piece of information to decipher. Understanding the organic label can help shoppers make informed purchases. In order to promote **transparency** and make an organic claim or use the USDA Organic Seal products must follow strict production handling and labeling standards and go through an organic certification process. Becoming familiar with organic labeling enables consumers to make informed choices about the products they purchase.

I.A. Open Data

USDA has developed, implemented, and institutionalized a OneUSDA Digital Strategy that continuously assesses the improvement of digital services and systems that are information and customer centric. To ensure open data, content and web APIs are the new default, we will collaborate among the data, platform, and presentation layers to coordinate Digital Strategy activities across agency and functional lines, including IT, web and communication subject matter experts. As such, the Office of Communications Web Communication Division, the Office of the Chief Information Officer, as well as Agency web, communication and program offices make up the Department's digital strategy ecosystem.

The OneUSDA Digital Strategy will:

- Continue to ensure that data is open, accurate, clearly described, structured, machine-readable, and digital services are optimized for mobile use.
- Continue to ensure more agile acquisition and budget processes that support the procurement and management of digital technologies.
- Continue to develop additional guidance through policy to address open data, digital signatures, performance and customer satisfaction measurement, and mobile optimization.
- Continue to refine and expand the use of enterprise data taxonomy to standardize commonly used data for business intelligence purposes.
- Continue to develop open data strategy that addresses the framework for sharing critical information at key decision points throughout the entirety of the enterprise.
- Continue to identify, prioritize, and modernize existing data that are not currently available to the public.
- Continue to maintain a virtual dynamic inventory of open data at [USDA.gov/data](https://www.usda.gov/data), populated by digital agency data inventories.
- Continue to deploy a virtual enterprise geospatial reference repository to promote data quality with metadata best practices, templates, conventions, and other USDA branding standards.
- Continue to provide guidance and training to data SMEs to develop web APIs, structure unstructured content or information, and to incorporate customer feedback for product improvements.

To ensure future information systems and services comply with the Federal Digital Strategy and Open Data Policy (M-13-13, May 9, 2013) and to modernize existing systems to leverage Application Interface Programmable Interface (APIs), USDA will continue to integrate digital strategy and open data requirements and guidance to existing processes and workflows such as Capital Planning and Investment Control reviews, IT Governance Process life-cycle reviews; and is aligning these requirements with the Enterprise Roadmap. USDA will continue to ensure that all new information collection, creation, and system development efforts will be done in a way that supports downstream interoperability between information systems and distribution of information with our customers. This includes using machine-readable and open formats, data standards, information stewardship and common metadata used by the Open Data Working Group (ODWG).

USDA will continue to focus on establishing a framework to enhance, enrich, and open, to the extent practicable, its Enterprise Data Inventory (EDI) and to ensure that the Department and its component Agencies are prepared to identify, document, and submit quarterly a comprehensive EDI to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). In so doing, USDA has already achieved several internal milestones that lay the groundwork for the Department's future Open Data efforts and is positioned to meet OMB's Open Data

requirements. The following milestones are among the Department's recent Open Data achievements:

- **Creation of an Open Data Website and Data Portal:** USDA will improve its open data website and develop a USDA Data Portal to provide a user-friendly website and data portal that provides the capability for users to quickly gain access to various USDA data sources. Thus, providing users with the ability to discover current, on-going and future data events within a common place and having access to a robust set of searchable datasets and APIs. The new website will provide federal, state, local, tribal, industry and academia organizations, as well as, researchers, civic hackers and application developers with the ability to discover and use USDA data more efficiently.
- **Creation of an USDA Enterprise Data Management Policy:** This policy will formalize the United States' approach to a data driven culture and a management paradigm that will support operations, reporting, data sharing, and decision making. It will also promote the adoption of governance standards, and management practices, adherence to data lifecycle principles, and the sharing and use of data to enhance mission performance.
- **Creation of a community-based approach to promoting the meaningful use of open data:** Develop a strategy for public and private partners who seek to generate useful insights that furthers USDA's Program's mission for government programs and civil society.
- **Ensure USDA open data makes a difference in citizen's lives:** Develop a plan to engage citizens to gain insight on how USDA data is being used and, more importantly, how can we improve our practices to provide useful data to the public.
- **Continue to update the Open Data Blog:** Continue to provide subsequent blogs on a quarterly basis on USDA open data success stories and lessons learned.

Improve systematically inventorying non-public, restricted, and public data assets by automating the USDA four-step data publication process. This multi-step dataset review process involves various internal stakeholders such as Data Stewards, Chief Information Officers, Privacy Officers, agency legal staff, and Information Security System Program Managers, Records Managers, and Controlled Unclassified Information managers. The purpose of this multi-perspective approach is to ensure that datasets are adequately reviewed and approved prior to release.

USDA will continue to make public data assets available for download and/or use through an API's. USDA met its requirements to customers to identify High-Value Data and Content to Make Available through Web APIs, including the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Geospatial, and scientific research data.

USDA will continue to take steps to encourage public use of already released datasets, in order to promote public knowledge and foster innovation. To engage with internal and external customers, USDA uses its integrated communications platform to offer various opportunities for input and engagement. Given USDA's broad mission and diverse range of customers, agencies will maintain open lines of communication with stakeholders.

As USDA's Open Data Policy implementation continues, data stakeholders and interested citizens can regularly learn about new opportunities for collaboration through [USDA.gov/open](https://www.usda.gov/open), social media activities like our monthly #AskUSDA chats, and updates from the USDA Blog. USDA will also employ other methods such as GitHub, USDA and Agency Twitter Accounts, Google+, Facebook and Storify and Veterinary, Medical and Urban Entomology Pories IdeaSpace.

To identify data assets not yet publicly available and establish specific timelines for online publication in open formats, USDA is in the process of developing a Dataset Prioritization Process. As part of the process, the ODWG will coordinate with the Whitehouse, USDA Office of the Secretary, OC, FOIA Office, and analyze Customer Feedback to determine high-value datasets not yet publicly available. The ODWG will submit recommendations to the Open Data Council which approves the datasets. A schedule of publishable datasets will then be developed to release pertinent data assets on a quarterly basis. USDA budget and program planning guidance will include emphasis on the critical partnership between the OC and OCIO. In addition, it will include recommendations for agency web, information technology and public affairs professionals who will coordinate activities at the agency level in improving public knowledge about agency products and services.

Continue to improve the Data Publishing Process, which enables USDA to work with its seven Mission Areas and Administrative Offices to make information resources accessible, discoverable, and usable by the public; thus, improving Americans' lives and contributing significantly to mission results.

USDA will continue to create economic opportunity by providing American entrepreneurs and innovators with open and machine readable data. USDA has currently prioritized datasets such as Disaster Relief Data, Scientific Data, Food Safety, Conservation, Animal and Plant Health Data and Food Nutrition Data, all of which will be used to help drive scientific discovery, new and innovative solutions and spark economic activity.

I.B. Proactive Disclosure

The Department continues to recognize the importance of proactive disclosures. Within USDA, component the FOIA offices at the agency and mission area level identify records for proactive disclosure in a number of different ways. Some of the most common include reviewing incoming FOIA logs, correspondence logs created by the Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES), feedback through customer portals, coordination meetings between various USDA FOIA offices and the Office of Communication, in addition to coordination meetings between various USDA FOIA offices and USDA's Open Government team.

Once records are identified as potential candidates for proactive disclosure, they are often reviewed by an agency FOIA professional and then cleared by a subject matter expert prior to publishing. If the records fall within one or more of the four categories of records to be maintained under 5 U.S.C. §552(a)(2), they are posted in the appropriate [USDA FOIA reading rooms](#). Otherwise they are posted on other portions of USDA's website in various open formats.

I.C. Privacy

The Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. § 552a, [Public Law No. 93-579](#), (Dec. 31, 1974) established a Code of Fair Information Practice that governs the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of personally identifiable information about individuals that is maintained in systems of records by Federal agencies. A system of records is a group of records under the control of an agency from which information is retrieved by the name of the individual or by some identifier assigned to the individual. USDA produces on a quarterly basis Privacy Management Reports, and an annual Senior Agency Official of Privacy (SAOP) report. Both reports are uploaded via the OMB MaxPortal to the Department of Justice's CyberScope tool.

The USDA's Privacy Office, in conjunction with Cyber Security, collects quarterly and annual metrics for Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) reporting to OMB. Metrics are collected for the SAOP report, which summarizes information reviews mandated by the Privacy Act of 1974, e-Government Act of 2002, and the Federal Agency Data Mining Reporting Act of 2007. Quarterly and annual reports are submitted into Cyber Scope by the Cyber Security Audit Liaison. This reporting helps to analyze the current state of the privacy program.

The Department's Privacy Office has not reviewed or participated in the review of any data mining activities. USDA's mission does not include data mining, as defined by the "Federal Agency Data Mining Report Act of 2007, "conducting...queries, searches or other analyses to discover or locate a predictive pattern or anomaly indicative of terrorist or criminal activity..." Therefore, USDA does not report on data mining, nor does it post the reports on a webpage.

Since 2012, the USDA Privacy Office published via AgLearn two privacy training course. In FY 2012, "**Protecting Personally Identifiable Information**" training module was launched. This hour-long course provided Agency Privacy Officers with key training on privacy responsibilities, and requirements. In FY 2013, the USDA Privacy Office launched an abbreviated Protecting Personally Identifiable Information "**PII Lite**" course. This shorter course is designed to provide USDA employees, stakeholders, affiliates, and contractors with the basic, vital information how to protect the personal information entrusted to each of them as they fulfill USDA's mission.

Over the next two years, USDA will increase the frequency of postings of Privacy Threat Assessments (PTAs) and Privacy Impact Assessments (PIAs), and System of Records Notices (SORN) as required by the Privacy Act. A current listing of PIAs can be found:

http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=PRIVACY_POLICY_ES. The current list of SORNs can be found at <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/policy-directives-records-forms/records-management/system-records>.

In accordance with the Open Government Directive, USDA will continue to actively participate in and promote Open Data and transparency. To this end, the Department's Privacy Office implemented a multi-step internal data set review process. In addition, the Department's Privacy Office will also solicit feedback on external privacy policy via such tools as GitHub, and the more formal Federal Register process. The Department anticipates it will conduct a review of the current privacy policy located at http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navtype=FT&navid=PRIVACY_POLICY.

As this policy requires update or revision, USDA plans to use collaborative citizen engagements to enhance and facilitate discussion with stakeholders both internal and external to USDA. As additional tools are implemented at USDA, we will garner greater input on policy at the inception stage, rather than later in the policy execution life-cycle.

I.D. Whistleblower Protection

The USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG) established a Whistleblower Protection Ombudsman (WPO) as required by the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act (WPEA) of 2012. The WPO has established an informative webpage at: <http://www.usda.gov/oig/ombudsman.htm>, which includes educational resources on the rights of potential whistleblowers and the responsibilities of USDA supervisors. Also on this webpage are direct links to both the Merit Systems Protection Board, <http://www.mspb.gov/appeals/whistleblower.htm>, and the Office of Special Counsel (OSC), <http://www.osc.gov/>, who has primary jurisdiction over complaints alleging whistleblower reprisal.

In 2014, the WPO created a training module which was added to the AgLearn Training System as a means of educating all employees (supervisory and non-supervisory) on the WPEA. This training provides an overview of the expanded coverage which the WPEA provides whistleblowers. The training was announced agency wide and will be highly recommended for all employees. This has received 499 ratings from those taking the training since its inception and it has an overall rating of 3.75 on a scale of 5.

The OIG was first certified through OSC's 2302 Certification Program in 2013. As the certification is only valid for 3 years, OIG is now due for recertification and has just submitted its recertification form and will be holding the required training within the next couple of months. As mandated by the Open Government Initiative, all agencies are required to be certified in OSC's 2302 Certification Program. As of the last response to the Open Government Plan, the USDA WPO facilitated the sending of an email to all USDA employees informing them of USDA's participation in OSC's 2302 certification program. This email further explained the role of the WPO and provided links to the WPO page, OSC, and numerous educational OSC resources which are required distribution materials under the 2302 certification program. Additionally, the WPO coordinated with the USDA Office of

Chief Information Officer to get the same educational resources posted on the Policies and Links tab accessible through the USDA homepage, http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navtype=FT&navid=POLICY_LINK. The WPO informed the Director of Strategic Human Resources Planning and Accountability (Allen Hatcher) of the requirement for USDA to apply for participation in the 2302 Certification Program. It appears that USDA applied for participation in April of 2016 and conducted training for it in May of 2016.

I.E. Websites

USDA's Digital Strategy can be found at www.usda.gov/digitalstrategy. USDA.gov uses best practices and common standards for both federal and industry, and has established internal web standards in addition to the Federal-wide standards set by OMB and GSA. USDA.gov's last redesign addressed user-experience issues by taking a task-centric approach to its information architecture and navigation and improving the look and feel and design strategy.

USDA.gov is currently undergoing a major website redesign using newly released Federal Standards, an open-source content management solution, and industry best practices as a model for information delivery. USDA has reevaluated its digital taxonomy, information architecture, usability, accessibility, responsive performance, and user experience. USDA takes a task-centric approach to define our information architecture and improve the user experience. USDA.gov uses analytics tools such as Google Analytics and SiteImprove to identify our top tasks, combining those with metrics from all USDA Agencies and identifying trends. These trends are analyzed and incorporated into the user interface/user experience of the web site. USDA participates fully in the Digital Analytics Program where all major USDA websites are engaged with Google Analytics and real-time monitoring.

USDA has established an open-source enterprise framework to allow for coordinated content delivery and sharing. Through this framework, all USDA digital assets can take advantage of a shared strategy to increase efficiency, share costs, and in the future, share content through separate mission areas.

I.F. Open Innovation Methods

Innovations in Food and Agricultural Science and Technology (I-FAST) Prize Competition
The aim of the NIFA I-FAST prize competition (the "I-FAST Competition" or the "Competition") is to develop and implement the [Innovations in Food and Agricultural Science and Technology](#) (I-FAST) Pilot Program. USDA NIFA will partner with the National Science Foundation (NSF) Innovation Corps (I-Corps) to provide entrepreneurship training to USDA NIFA grantees under this I-FAST pilot program. The goal is to identify valuable product opportunities that can emerge from NIFA supported academic research. Selected USDA NIFA I-FAST project teams will have the opportunity to concurrently participate in the educational programs with NSF I-Corps awardees.

Ideation Solutions Planning, Accountability, and Reporting Staff, ESG, and Office of Information Technology are working on developing a concept of operations for the use of Ideation Software. This effort will gather NIFA's requirements for stakeholder feedback at all levels of NIFA (program, division, institute, and possibly agency), including what is currently being done, what feedback we would like to be getting and from whom, and how often we would want this stakeholder feedback. This requirement will then be used to assess if the use of idea engine software is appropriate. Requirements definition is scheduled to start October 2016. We expect a recommendation by the Second Quarter of FY17.

I.G. Access to Scientific Data and Publications

On February 22, 2013, the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) at the Executive Office of the President issued a memorandum to all agencies to develop guidelines to increase access to the results of publicly-funded scientific research:

http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/ostp_public_access_memo_2013.pdf. As a result, the Department of Agriculture recently posted its plan to implement the directives called for in the memorandum:

<http://www.usda.gov/documents/USDA-Public-Access-Implementation-Plan.pdf>. One implementation milestone is to pilot required Data Management Plans (DMPs) as a part of many of its competitive research and integrated programs. This document informs potential applicants of proposal submission requirements associated with of these pilot programs in 2015.

NIFA's mission is to *Invest in and advance agricultural research, education, and extension to solve societal challenges*. To achieve its goal, NIFA provides scientific leadership and funding to various partners. Increased access to scientific research results (e.g., scholarly publications, digital data sets) from NIFA-funded projects is critical to achieving NIFA's vision to *catalyze transformative discoveries, education, and engagement to address agricultural challenges*. Therefore, an appropriate data management plan (DMP) should be a core component of research planning for proposals submitted to NIFA.

I.H. Open Source Software

USDA submitted an [Implementation Plan to Increase Public Access to Results of USDA-funded Scientific Research](#), to the OSTP in early 2014. The plan was approved by OSTP in November 2014. The approach is to increase access to scholarly publications and digitally formatted scientific data resulting from unclassified research results supported wholly or in part by USDA funds, to the extent feasible and consistent with law; agency mission; resource constraints; and U.S. national, homeland, and economic security. The plan is consistent with all policies and requirements set forth in the OSTP Public Access memorandum (February 22, 2013), and makes provisions to ensure that implementation of the plan:

- Contributes, in the long run, to raising the profile and reputation of the food, agricultural, and natural resources as providers of significant contributions to many areas of scientific innovation and value to society;
- Proceeds in close coordination with other science agencies and partnering organizations;
- Maintains the highest level of effective funding for science that resource constraints, agency mission, and consistency with the law allow;
- Minimizes the burden on the scientific community, including researchers, professional societies, and publishers;
- Allows flexibility in pursuit of disparate agency missions, operating models, stakeholder needs, and meeting the evolving expectations in the scientific community regarding access to scientific results;
- Provides public access to scientific results, without charge;
- Supports governance of and best practices for managing scientific results across USDA;
- Ensures effective access to and reliable preservation of scholarly publications resulting from USDA funds for research, development, and education; and
- Preserves and increases the use of research results to enhance scientific discovery.

Four categories of tasks will be carried out in a logical and practical manner:

- Policy
- Business processes, procedures, and resources
- Information systems and automation
- Outreach, education and training

Some of the above tasks are incremental extensions to programs already in place at USDA. Each category of tasks will be implemented in three phases: Phase I (2015), Phase II (2016), Phase III (2017 and beyond).

The development of a departmental policy on public access to scholarly publications is USDA's first step to ensure compliance with federal laws, executive orders, directives, and policies. The policy enhances innovation and competitiveness by maximizing the potential to create new business opportunities. It will accelerate scientific breakthroughs and innovation as well as enhance economic growth and job creation. The policy serves as a roadmap for mission area and/or individual USDA agency compliance, and sometimes serves as a charge for mission areas and/or USDA agencies to undertake their own implementation.

The USDA public access policy for scholarly publications will require that authors submit to the USDA public access archive system all final peer-reviewed journal manuscripts that

meet the above criteria *once the manuscript is accepted for publication*. In lieu of the final peer-reviewed manuscript, USDA will accept the final published article, provided the author has the right to submit the published version. The USDA will ensure easy search and download of scholarly publications resulting from USDA funds without charge no later than 12 months following publication.

I.I. Spending Information

On May 9, 2014 the Digital Accountability and transparency Act (DATA) Act was signed into law. This Act furthers the requirements of the Federal Financial Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 and imposes new reporting requirements. The Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) is a government leader on DATA Act implementation and is has been central to the DATA Act's initial implementation plans, sitting on multiple committees and advising Federal partners. The Department CFO is a member of the Interagency Advisory Committee.

To date, USDA has worked diligently towards developing a solution to collect, and store the DATA required by the DATA Act. USDA has:

- Conducted review of government-wide reporting requirements;
- Met with USDA agencies to determine quality and consistency of data contained in key systems,
- Created "As Is" process maps of key systems,
- Established practical definitions of data elements for USDA programs and administrative expenditures for proprietary and budgetary data elements and
- Created a data extract with data quality checks needed to ensure the accuracy of the data.
- Developed a Data repository to collect and store the data required by the DATA Act
- Developed reporting and analytics tools
- Developed error handling processes to ensure that data validations take place and that data submitters address any resulting errors.

USDA plans on having the DATA Act fully implemented by November 30, 2016 and Meet the OMB and Department of Treasury (Treasury) reporting requirements. When the data is reported, USDA will be able to gain insights into spending at both the Treasury Account Fund Symbol level. Users of the data will be able to see spending broken out by Budget Object Classification (BOC) codes and Program Activity as found in the President's Budget. Users of this data will also be able to link obligations and spending on procurements and financial assistance. This has not been available to the public before. The Department is working on reports for USDA Agency users to view the data and address any data errors. Once the data is posted on the Treasury USAspending.gov website in May, 2017, the public will have access to an unprecedented amount of open data.

USDA is also one of the initial groups of Federal Departments posting foreign assistance information to the Foreignassistance.gov website as required by OMB Bulletin 12-01. This data is also an open data set. The data on this website captures obligations and spending and shows foreign assistance by program and location. The data is used by people all across the world from foreign governments to interested individuals. The data conforms to international data standards described in the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Treaty, to which the United States is a signatory.

II. Ongoing Initiatives

II.A. Participation in Transparency Initiatives

The Department is entering a new era of information openness and transparency. Open data has the potential to spur economic innovation and social transformation. Focusing just on economic impacts, in 2013, for example, the consulting firm McKinsey estimated the possible global value of open data to be over \$3 trillion per year. A study commissioned by Omidyar Network has likewise calculated that open data could result in an extra \$13 trillion over five years in the output of G20 nations.

These impacts illustrate why it is important that we encourage people of every age to invest in STEM education. For example, the White House initiative on Equal Futures Partnership, aims to open more doors to high-quality education and high-paying career opportunities for women and girls in the STEM disciplines, fields in which they are currently underrepresented. To support this effort, Federal science and technology agencies, private corporations, and academic institutions are taking steps to collect better data on women and girls in STEM fields, expand STEM mentoring opportunities, encourage research-driven teaching practices, and increase access to online STEM-skill training.

Digital Strategy: USDA is working to develop, implement, and institutionalize a OneUSDA Digital Strategy that will continuously assess the improvement of digital services and systems that are information- and customer-centric. To ensure open data, content and web APIs are the new default, we will collaborate among the data, platform, and presentation layers to coordinate Digital Strategy activities across agency and functional lines, including IT, web and communication subject matter experts.

USDA has developed a [USDA FITARA Common Baseline Implementation Plan](#) that incorporates an Integrated Governance Framework and provides the executive teams with a process for reviewing investments and providing guidance to investment managers throughout a project's life cycle. Projects will be reviewed to ensure alignment with digital strategy guidelines.

As a member of the Executive Information Technology Investment Review Board (E-Board), the OC and Digital Strategy Lead will ensure Major IT capital investments follow digital service guidelines through the entire lifecycle process, and ensure that the investment goal and strategy are optimal for achieving USDA's mission.

USDA is fully embracing this new mobile paradigm shift, and is mobilizing our business, transforming our organizations, and modernizing our technical infrastructures to meet the significant opportunities as well as challenges that mobility brings to the work place. As the adoption and use of mobile devices are accelerating within our department and customer base, USDA is staying on the forefront of both the business requirements as well as technical trends with a well thought out Mobile Computing Implementation Plan that takes advantage of the transformational opportunities in mobile business delivery for our agencies and customers.

USDA-OCIO will be leading this effort with oversight from the Chief Information Officer (CIO). The implementation will be governed through the Mobile Computing steering committee in coordination with the CIO council.

Responding to today's mobile opportunities, architecting for tomorrow's cloud environments, and integrating them with USDA's legacy infrastructures are all daunting challenges. The USDA Mobile Computing Program is focused on the following three key objectives:

- Procuring and managing heterogeneous commercial devices, applications, and data in smart, secure and affordable ways;
- Leveraging existing enterprise systems in an integrated manner with new mobile solutions to minimize capital expenditures and maximize our return on investments;
- Implementing end-to-end mobile services that streamline procurement, management and operational processes while improving IT management and visibility, gaining control, and cutting costs

At the end of the day, everything must appear "seamless" to end-users while delivering significant business value in a secure manner.

The following key objectives for USDA for fiscal year 2013 will ensure foundational capabilities to allow our mobile customers access to our information and services, and to secure, manage and support mobile devices enabling our workforce to conduct business anytime, anywhere, on any device:

- Establish a Mobile Program Management Office
- Establish a Mobile Computing Steering Committee
- Publish a Mobile Computing PMO Website
- Develop and publish a USDA Mobile Computing policy and research and develop a BYOD policy
- Deploy Mobile infrastructure solutions, including a 2nd generation Mobile Device Management, a Mobile Acquisition Management, and Pilot BYOD solutions

Publish a Manual component in DR 1496-001 Digital Strategy Governance regarding Mobile Application Management and Development process, standards and marketing approach.

Data.Gov: USDA agencies and staff offices are responsible for developing, managing, reviewing, and subsequent posting of their datasets to [USDA.gov/data](https://www.usda.gov/data) and subsequently to [Data.Gov](https://www.data.gov). The Department has two groups assisting the agencies in publishing their datasets.

The Office of the Chief Information Officer Enterprise Architecture (EA) Division provides technical direction and assistance to the Agencies and Staff Offices on the use of the General Services Administration (GSA) dataset catalog tool, CKAN. Additionally, the EA group chairs the Data Architect / Data Steward Working Group(s) to facilitate the exchange of information and consensus among the Agencies and Staff Offices. The OC provides technical direction and assistance to the Agencies and Staff Offices on the actual process of publishing datasets to Data.Gov.

The Agency and Staff Office Data Stewards will use the designated CKAN tool to manage their dataset metadata. From the CKAN tool, the data stewards will generate the EDI files (containing all datasets, both public and private) and the Public Data Listing (PDL) files generated from the agencies and staff offices' metadata. Data stewards will also correct any errors during the file generation process.

The EDI files that are generated will be sent to the OMB Max.gov site (not accessible to the public). While the PDL files that are generated will be sent to OC for further publishing to [USDA.gov/data](https://www.usda.gov/data). Using a "harvester" data retrieval tool to automatically extract the information from a PDL file, GSA "pulls" the metadata file provided by OC and posted on the USDA Digital Strategy page. The GSA "harvester" tool runs nightly to populate changes in USDA datasets posted to Data.Gov.

e-Rulemaking: The e-Rulemaking Presidential Initiative has greatly simplified the public's participation in USDA's rulemaking process by making regulatory information more accessible on [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov). USDA has also benefited from this initiative through cost savings associated with forgoing the need to develop and operate a duplicative agency-specific electronic system.

In FY15, USDA posted 275 rules and proposed rules, 728 Federal Register notices, and 34,251 public submissions via [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov). Overall, USDA has provided the public access to 384,710 documents in [Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov). The e-Rulemaking Program also offers a streamlined internal rulemaking business process through agency access to [FDMS.gov](https://www.fdms.gov). USDA had 249 staff using [FDMS.gov](https://www.fdms.gov) in FY15, and created 451 regulatory dockets in [FDMS](https://www.fdms.gov) for regulatory actions published in FY15.

In 2016, e-Rulemaking and USDA will be identifying ways to improve the comment analysis and review process, implementing new search and reporting tools to help both agency users and the public identify information, and encouraging all agency users to continue to remain involved in their appropriate level of governance within e-Rulemaking. Along with these efforts, e-Rulemaking will identify hardware and software improvements for the system which can help advance the functionality of the agency and public participation in the regulatory process.

II.B. Public Notice

USDA.gov provides the majority of its public meetings on [USDA.gov/live](https://www.usda.gov/live) our Department YouTube channel ([youtube.com/usda](https://www.youtube.com/usda)), and blog (www.blog.usda.gov). An archive of our live streams is available to the public and includes symposiums, town hall meetings, Google Hangouts, and other live events. USDA leverages a wide variety of digital broadcast tools and new technologies such as Google + Hangouts, and we house our own TV and Radio studios.

[USDA.gov/newsroom](https://www.usda.gov/newsroom) has links to resources such as our radio and TV programming, and Streaming Media Archives. The Secretary's public schedule is also available on USDA.gov. USDA also uses the IdeaJam platform for public ideation sessions and feedback. USDA.gov utilizes our existing broadcast services through our Creative Media and Broadcast Center to share public events through TV and Radio programming. [USDA.gov/live](https://www.usda.gov/live) is the center of all of our streaming events including Google + Hangouts and national symposiums.

II.C. Records Management

The Office of the Chief Information Officer manages USDA's Records Management Program, for which the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) outlines the major responsibilities that Federal agencies currently have for preserving electronic records. USDA has well-established processes and procedures to ensure the proper management, scheduling, and disposition of USDA records at <https://www.ocio.usda.gov/policy-directives-records-forms/records-management>. The USDA's Records Management Officer leads the department-wide effort to comply with the detailed requirements of the OMB M-12-18, *Managing Government Records Directive (MGRD)*.

OMB M-12-18, Part I, Goal 1.2 of the MGRD, manage both permanent and temporary email records in an accessible electronic format by December 31, 2016.

- USDA formalized a Chartered Strategy for Digital Information Management Working Group to define near-term and long-term strategies, requirements and agency needs to manage permanent and temporary email records by December 31, 2016. This working group consisted of subject matter experts from stakeholders units, records officers, legal counsel, information technology, litigation support, civil rights, enterprise architecture, privacy officers and freedom of information officers, all of which documented the requirements of each functional area. The Working Group provided a recommendation to the USDA Chief Information Officer (CIO) to implement the Capstone approach within USDA.
- Under the Capstone approach, USDA will manage all email records based on the role of the email account user and/or office, rather than on the content of each email.

- USDA will manage all email records in an appropriate electronic system that supports records management and litigation hold requirements, including the capability to identify, retrieve, and retain the records for as long as they are needed.
- Capstone Officials have been identified, NARA form *NA-1005, Verification for Implementing General Records Schedule (GRS) 6.1 Form* has been submitted to USDA's Senior Agency Official for signature. Once finalized, USDA Agency Records Officers will submit *NA-1005* to NARA for approval.
- The Departmental Records Management Directive/Policy has been revised to incorporate managing email via the Capstone approach. This policy implements the OMB M-12-18, Part I, Goal 1.2, and NARA Bulletin 2013-02, *Guidance on a New Approach to Managing Email Records*.
- USDA is developing a strategy to maintain an on-going updated list of Capstone Officials.

OMB M-12-18, Part I, Goal 1.1 of the MGRD, manage permanent electronic records in an electronic format by December 31, 2019.

- USDA has developed guidelines and procedures that increase instructions for electronic records and better integrated management of electronic records into information technology (IT) governance. USDA has also revised its policy to emphasize that records management requirements must be considered during the business process design, enterprise architecture, and system development processes. USDA Agency Record Officers will work with program/staff offices to ensure records management functionality, and to ensure that the capture, retrieval, and retention of permanent records are incorporated into the design and development of electronic information systems.
- USDA is in the process of identifying a possible enterprise-wide solution to manage permanent electronic records by December 31, 2019. USDA will continue working with stakeholders to develop functional requirements for a cost-effective enterprise solution and provide recommendations on associated pilot programs.
- USDA has identified requirements, met with USDA stakeholders, and conducted a market analysis to identify an end-to-end records management suite (Records, E-mail Archiving, and eDiscovery) that will assist in automating the management of electronic records for improving compliance and consistency, and to reduce the record keeping burden on individual agency staff. The vendors USDA met with have DoD 5015.2 STD certified records management applications compliant with the FRA, OMB Circular A-130, as well as NARA requirements. USDA developed and conducted past

performance questionnaires and past performance reviews; the past performance analyses for these vendors will assist USDA in determining which vendor will be chosen to pilot an electronic records management application.

- USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) and Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) are in various stages of supporting and managing their permanent electronic records electronically within the SharePoint Records Center electronic records management application. The SharePoint Records Center allows employees to submit permanent electronic records directly into SharePoint, at which point, the record is preserved until the end of the retention period.
- The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) are conducting a records management application pilot to test the capability to capture, retrieve, access and dispose of electronic records. This pilot includes both temporary and permanent records, as well as email records.
- USDA will continue to explore ways to improve the Department's records management capability based on programmatic needs and identify systems that require electronic records management.

II.D. FOIA

The Department of Agriculture's FOIA program includes twenty component FOIA offices all varying in size and scope at the mission area and agency level. Each year, these twenty offices collaborate to process the approximate 22,000 FOIA requests received annually at the Department. Central to the Department's FOIA program is the FOIA Service Center (FSC). The FSC is under the purview of the OCIO, Policy, E-Government and Fair Information Practices (PE&F). The FSC provides day-to-day coordination and oversight and ensures statutory compliance with the FOIA. The FSC also processes FOIA requests, consultations, and appeals on behalf of the Office of the Secretary (OSEC), the Departmental Management agencies, Office of Communications (OC), and the Office of Ethics (OE).

To raise awareness regarding FOIA's statutory requirements, the Secretary via his April 2015 First Friday Message, encouraged all Department employees to renew their commitment to open government and transparency. With that, the Secretary asked all Department employees receiving a request for records under the FOIA to timely return those records to their assigned FOIA professional. The Secretary also encouraged all Department employees to learn more about their role and responsibilities in the Department's FOIA process by reviewing the Department's FOIA lite training module title *FOIA for USDA Employees*.

The FSC also continued to streamline the Department's FOIA process to promote the OpenGov principles of collaboration, participation and transparency. In January 2016, the

FSC in coordination with the Department's FOIA Training Subcommittee and the Office of General Counsel General Law and Research Division completed work on the first module of the Department's extended online FOIA training titled *FOIA for FOIA professionals*. The first module includes six lessons aimed at providing a detailed introduction to the FOIA, the Department's FOIA team, and procedural items related to intake. At the end of each lesson, FOIA professionals have an opportunity to test their knowledge with a ten question quiz. The anticipated release date for the second module emphasizing FOIA exemption application is Fiscal Year 2017.

The FSC also launched a variety of other training tools to increase substantive FOIA knowledge amongst the Department's FOIA professionals and record custodians. In May 2015, the Department began circulating an internal advice column featuring a beloved character from *FOIA for FOIA Professionals* providing guidance on commonly asked questions from the Department's FOIA Community. The FSC also hosted multiple interactive tailored FOIA training sessions for record custodians to emphasize the presumption of openness, search requirements, commonly cited FOIA exemptions, and statutory deadlines.

As for the FOIA backlog, the Department is pleased to report a 12.6% decrease in the overall request backlog. Rural Development (RD) contributed significantly with its 91% reduction. Other notable reductions included Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), and the FSC. The Office for the Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights (OASCR), Office of Budget & Program Analysis (OPBA) and Research, Education and Economics (REE) successfully closed the Fiscal Year with no backlogged requests.

The FSC is also pleased to report that the overall average number of days to process simple requests in Fiscal Year 2015 was 9.76 days, which is a 40.12% decrease from the previous fiscal year. The overall average number of days to process complex requests is 81.03 days, which marks a 2.47% decrease from Fiscal Year 2015. As for the 10 oldest consultations, the Department closed all ten. The 10 oldest pending perfected FOIAs, the Department was able to close seven of the ten listed.

The FSC continues to provide monthly backlog reports for the Department's FOIA Officers. These reports are accompanied by strategies/tips for reducing their agency's backlog. It is FSC's expectation that the training, continuous monitoring, and e-discovery tools recently purchased will result in a further reduction in the backlog and processing times and assist with closing all ten of the oldest pending perfected FOIAs.

II.E. Congressional Requests

Office of Congressional Relations (OCR) serves as the Department's liaison with Members of Congress and their staffs. OCR works closely with members and staffs of various House and Senate Committees including the House Agriculture Committee and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to communicate USDA's legislative agenda and budget proposals.

Within OCR is the Office of External and Intergovernmental Affairs (EIA) which serves as the liaison to elected and appointed officials of State, county, local, and Tribal governments. The office also serves as a liaison to USDA stakeholders.

Members of Congress and their staff can find help from OCR by calling the main phone line, faxing correspondence, or emailing requests for information directly to OCR staff. Conversely, OCR primarily communicates with Members of Congress and their staff through phone calls, email, and in-person meetings.

II.F. Declassification

When classified information loses sensitivity over time, the restrictions on access to it - and the costs of protecting it - may be reduced or eliminated. Declassification is a determination that classified information no longer requires protection in the interest of national security. When information no longer requires protection in the interest of national security, it no longer needs to be classified. Classification is *eliminated*.

Declassification is the removal of classification.

- TOP SECRET information becomes UNCLASSIFIED.
- SECRET information becomes UNCLASSIFIED.
- CONFIDENTIAL information becomes UNCLASSIFIED.

Standards: At USDA, the review and declassification of Classified National Security Information (CNSI) is guided by (1) Executive Order 13526, "Classified National Security Information," (2) 32 Code of Federal Regulations Part 2001, subparts A-I, (3) Departmental Regulation (DR) 3440-001 "Classified National Security Information Regulation," and (4) Departmental Manual (DM) 3440-001, "Classified National Security Information Manual."

Structure: The Secretary of Agriculture has sole classification authority and is the responsible official for all CNIS across the department. To administer the CNIS program the Assistant Secretary for Administration (ASA) is delegated the responsibility as the Senior Agency Official (SAO). As such, the ASA has re-delegated the responsibility for the regular management and oversight of the Department's CNSI program to the Director, Office Of Homeland Security and Emergency Coordination (OHSEC). This delegation includes the declassification decision authority and the review processes. The Director of OHSEC has identified the Personnel and Document Security Division (PDSO) as the responsible Division for the implementation and oversight of these declassification processes.

II.G. Public Participation

Through the USDA Open Data Working Group, USDA is actively pursuing technologies to support the implementation of robust feedback mechanisms through USDA.gov. Currently, USDA supports feedback through various methods including commenting and feedback through our USDA Blog *Wordpress* platform, social media networks, ideation tools, feedback through our *AskTheExpert* knowledgebase, and through our Contact Us page

which houses an Information Hotline and organization directories. Many USDA agency websites leverage the *ForeSee* platform as well.

USDA maintains numerous websites or platforms where the public can engage in existing participatory processes:

USDA Blog – comments can be submitted and reviewed for posting through a *Wordpress* platform. [Blogs.usda.gov](https://blogs.usda.gov)

AsktheExpert – A Knowledgebase and Customer Relationship Management tool that allows for users to provide feedback so that we can augment and improve the knowledgebase over time. [Usda.gov/expert](https://usda.gov/expert)

IdeaJam– An ideation platform used to gather feedback and perform ranking on ideas on certain initiatives. [Usda.gov/open](https://usda.gov/open)

GitHub - Developers can provide feedback to USDA using the Issue Tracker to ask questions or make suggestions for improvement. When comments are submitted, USDA distributes the query to the relevant agency or program for response or action. [Issue Tracker](#)

USDA and agency Twitter accounts often share digital and open data related content, which remains an open platform to monitor and solicit customer feedback. Other social media channels are available for outreach, conversation, and feedback, including [Google+](#), [Facebook](#), and [Storify](#).

Through USDA Results, USDA serves as a key model for the Public Participation Playbook. USDA Results is a progressive, year-long, multimedia storytelling effort that showcases how USDA has invested in and achieved results for farmers, ranchers, rural communities and every American. Throughout 2016, USDA released a new “chapter” of the story each month—focused on our investments in Americans, rural and urban alike—which helped to inform and engage the public around progress made in rural America over the past eight years through projects in affordable housing, energy efficiency and availability, clean and reliable drinking water and wastewater systems, internet access, and loans and grants for rural businesses, while helping to attract and retain a talented rural labor force. Citizens are able to engage and follow along on usda.gov, on the USDA blog, on our Medium site, on our Facebook page, and by using #USDAResults on Twitter. Through engagement, the Department is able to connect with citizens through our public-facing channels, gather feedback to inform continued progress, identify and focus on critical topic areas, strengthen the impact of USDA Results and increase transparency across the Department, and highlight collaboration with our stakeholders and partners. We can provide metrics to demonstrate engagement efforts and to show how USDA Results has performed across different mediums throughout our year-long effort, including data from the USDA blog, GovDelivery, and USDA’s Medium, Twitter, Bit.ly, Soundcloud, and Facebook channels.

II.H. Collaboration

USDA is actively seeking ways to engage with Federal and non-Federal partners, the public, and non-profit and private entities in alignment with the visions of our core mission. USDA institutionalized a OneUSDA Digital Strategy that continuously assesses the improvement of digital services and systems that are information- and customer-centric. To ensure open data, content and web, we collaborate among the data, platform, and presentation layers to coordinate Digital Strategy activities across agency and functional lines, including IT, web and communication subject matter experts. As such, the Office of Communications Digital Communication Division, the Office of the Chief Information Officer, as well as Agency web, communication and program offices make up the Departments digital strategy ecosystem.

Changes to internal management and administrative policies happen at many levels. USDA, through the Open Data Policy Working Group, is looking at ways to improve collaboration and the technologies that can be leveraged to assist.

USDA has developed a comprehensive IT governance process that incorporates an Integrated Governance Framework and provides the executive teams with a process for reviewing investments and providing guidance to investment managers throughout a project's life cycle. Projects will be reviewed to ensure alignment with digital strategy guidelines.

To engage with internal and external customers, we will use our integrated communications platform to offer various opportunities for input and engagement. Given USDA's broad mission and diverse range of customers, agencies will maintain open lines of communication with stakeholders.

USDA utilizes IBM's Connections and Microsoft's Sharepoint platforms to promote internal collaboration. IBM Connections is an internal social platform that allows for workflow collaboration, file sharing and document revisions history, as well as a social communication tool. For the public, USDA seeks to engage ideation technologies and social engagement tools to bolster our public engagement effort.

The public can learn about our existing collaboration efforts through our Open Government, Digital Strategy and our New Media pages:

Open Government: [usda.gov/open](https://www.usda.gov/open)

Digital Strategy: [usda.gov/digitalstrategy](https://www.usda.gov/digitalstrategy)

New Media: [usda.gov/new media](https://www.usda.gov/newmedia)

USDA uses open innovation methods such as prize-based challenges using Challenge.gov and collaboration platforms such as the developer community GitHub. USDA was one of the first Federal entities to establish a prize competition with Challenge.gov, paving the way for the now Federal-wide Challenge platform.

II.I. Flagship Initiative:

Engagement and Support of the Next Generation of American Agriculture

The USDA Flagship initiative is the engagement and support of the next generation of American agriculture, which will include participation and collaboration from customers, stakeholders, and members of the public.

In 2009, we recognized that the rapid aging of the American farmer was an emerging challenge. The average age of the American farmer now exceeds 58 years, and 2014 data shows that almost 10 percent of farmland in the continental United States will change hands in the five years that follow. That recognition has evolved into a robust, transparent, tech-based strategy to recruit the farmers of the future.

The next generation of farmers and ranchers will reflect the diversity of the nation. They may come from farming backgrounds or be new to agriculture; they may be college graduates coming home to farm with their families; or they may be veterans, second career seekers, immigrants and people from all ethnic backgrounds.

We at USDA have engaged our resources to inspire a strong, productive next generation of farmers and ranchers by improving access to land, capital and risk management tools, including most recently prioritizing \$5.6 billion over the next two years within USDA programs and services that serve new and beginning farmers and ranchers, both through the support of initial opportunity and for the longevity of the farms that begin.

As a specific example of our work, in 2015, USDA launched the first comprehensive, interactive online tool for new and beginning farmers, aimed at connecting agricultural entrepreneurs with programs and resources available across the government. This site serves to both educate and empower our stakeholders – including by creating a new type of customer experience focused on a producers’ goals, and by making metrics and performance information available alongside the information about the programs.

Instead of focusing on individual programs, and relying on customers to build their own package of programs and advocate for the ways that the program should fit them, we are focusing on providing the broadest, most inclusive customer experience focus. By restructuring the way we talk about our programs, and increasing the visibility of not only how to apply, but how they actually work globally, we are empowering the next generation to advocate robustly for themselves.

USDA has also worked to support the “big tent” of agriculture – providing tailored resources for women in agriculture, veterans looking for new opportunity, existing farmers who are looking to transition their lands and businesses and want to support the next generation of American agriculture, and youth who are looking for connections to the exciting new frontier of science and agriculture.

To build on the work that we have done, and help provide a roadmap for work to follow, USDA is engaging in a significant dialogue with our stakeholders and customers. Throughout 2016 and 2017, USDA will be gathering significant stakeholder and customer feedback, including by holding listening sessions to gather input from stakeholders and the public regarding potential USDA priorities for the next generation of farmers and ranchers. The listening sessions will offer an opportunity for individuals and organizations to provide comments that will help evaluate the work done to date, and where priorities for the future may lay.

Through these efforts, together with interactive social media tools and paired customer surveys, we will fulfill the transparency, public participation and collaboration principles.

This Flagship Initiative will become part of how we do business within the USDA and part of our continuous improvement process.