Gone But Not Forgotten - Pam Folson Retires

By Kathy Marshall, Lead, ITS CommunicationsTeam

On January 10th, after 37 years at the USDA, Pam Folson embarked on another journey. Co-workers, family, and friends showered Pam with special tributes, gifts, and many hugs.

Pam has been a crucial member of OCIO since before ITS convergence, and her warm and helpful spirit will be missed for a very long time. When she informed me she would be retiring in the New Year, I immediately asked who was going to fill her shoes because she was responsible for so many critical areas.

As an ITS senior Management Analyst, Pam's far-ranging duties included coordinating travel and events, managing WebTA and the office credit card, and creating presentations. She also mentored many new USDA employees. Perhaps Pam was not aware of the important

Photo: Rich Roberts presents Pam Folson a letter from Pres. Bush.

role she played, however, I'm sure any member of ITS will gladly remind all of us that Pam was the *go-to* person for everything. She will be hard to replace.

Pam was very happy to retire in such excellent health and we wish her a long and wonderful retirement with many special travels and memories with her family and friends.

Computers for Learning (CFL):
$Millions in Surplus Hardware Goes to Schools

"OCIO and ITS have had two successful years of transferring workstations and IT peripheral equipment to schools through the Computers for Learning Program," reported Kathy Fay, Chief of the Asset Management Branch (AMB)-Administrative Management Division. AMB coordinates the program for ITS and, additionally, reports all transfers made by other OCIO offices to the Department, according to USDA Property Management Regulations.

CFL began in 1996 as Executive Order 12999 which, among other things, streamlines the transfer of excess and surplus Federal computer equipment to our Nation's classrooms and encourages Federal employees to volunteer their time and expertise to assist teachers and to help connect classrooms to the Web.

Kathy says, "My staff and I have been working with all ITS accountable property officers

to identify, collect, process and transfer ITS workstations and IT peripherals for schools. In 2005, our first year, OCIO provided approximately $13 million of IT equipment. In 2006, OCIO transferred 2940 Pentium systems, 305 Pentium CPUS, 250 monitors, 193 printers, plus miscellaneous other items." Altogether, the the items were worth about $6.65 million. The hardware went to 338 different education organizations, including school districts, community colleges, and individual schools.

Questions regarding the CFL program should be directed to the ITS Area Property Management Specialists, either Ray Moreno, at 970-295-5364, or Mary Conner at 816-926-6822. The CFL Website describes how the program works: http://www.computers.fed.gov/public/aboutEO.asp

Note: Before any transfer of IT equipment is made to an eligible institution, it must be made available to other USDA agencies first.

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February Calendar

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ArcGIS Part 2- A Sampling of Data Layers:

Geographic Information System technology is a fundamental tool for the USDA. The Service Center Agencies are major producers of geospatial data, users of GIS for analysis, and innovators in USDA and the federal government. While ITS provides the infrastructure GIS runs on,

FSA, NRCS, and RD have skilled agency staff and ArcGIS teams who define, manage, and operate their GIS programs, business processes, and technology, and provide diverse GIS services directly to farmers, rural communities, and other agencies.

NOTE: Part 1 (in ITS Conections #9) was an overview of how ArcGIS was implemented; Part 2 looks at what GIS is and how the agencies use it; Part 3 will focus on the teamwork between the agencies, ITS, and ESRI that determined what was needed and deployed ArcGIS throughout the Service Center Agencies.

Elements of Orthophotography

Orthophotography – digital representations of an aerial photograph or satellite image that show ground features located in their true positions. Orthophotography corrects the original photographic image so it has the uniform scale required of a map. This forms the base image for other layers of geographic information.

FSA's Aerial Photography Field Office (APFO) in Salt Lake City, and National Agricultural Imagery Program produce or acquire geospatial imagery that can then be accessed for use in the ArcGIS system. NRCS operates the National Cartography and Geospatial Center, and delivers other layers via the Geospatial Data Gateway. Both agencies provide many GIS services.

Data Layers. GIS maps are based on geographic data sets, such as soil, climate and watershed boundary data developed by NRCS, Common Land Unit property lines and land use data developed by FSA; and other kinds of mission specific data, as well as roads, elevations, census data, state boundaries, etc., from various sources.
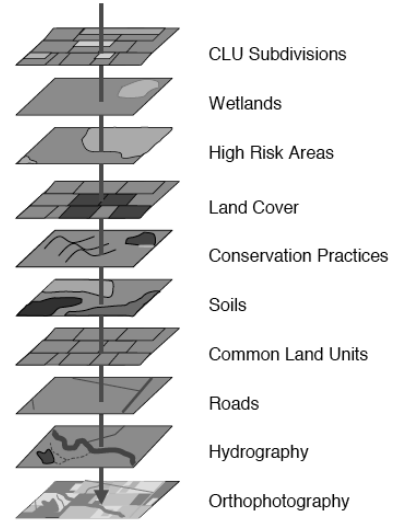
The geographic data sets are translated into graphic layers. These features used to be drawn by hand; now each data layer can be added, removed, and updated as needed. A service center customer can sit with agency staff and build a map in real time within minutes or do it themselves on an agency web site.

For examples of FSA's GIS resources:
http://www.gis.sc.egov.usda.gov/support/fsa.html

For examples of NRCS GIS resources:
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Technical/land/nrcsdata.html

- CLU Subdivisions
- Wetlands
- High Risk Areas
- Land Cover
- Conservation Practices
- Soils
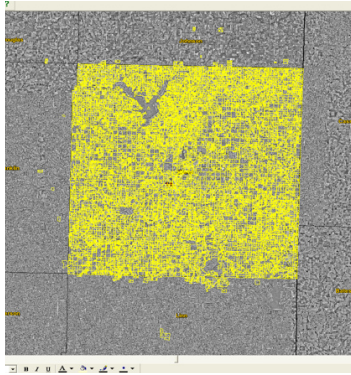- Common Land Units
- Roads
- Hydrography
- Orthophotography

A Sampling of Map Data Layers. Each layer of visual data brings meaning to a map. Image courtesy of USDA.

Zoom with a View

Map 1

Map 2

Map 3
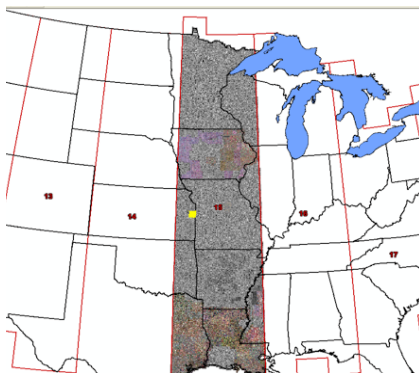
Map 1 shows the north-south band of an orthophotographic satellite image with a Data Vector Layer that shows state lines. The yellow squarish dot is Miami County in eastern Kansas.

Map 2 shows all of Miami County, Kansas. All the yellow areas represent Common Land Units (CLUs). It combines orthophotographic images with property details that are produced collaboratively by FSA and NRCS.
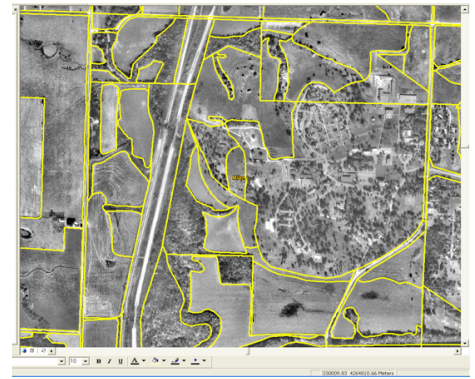
Map 3 shows individual **CLUs** within the Miami County. The CLU is a basic unit of land that has a permanent, contiguous boundary, a common land cover and land management, a common owner, and a common producer in agricultural land associated with FSA farm programs. CLU boundaries include features such as fence lines, roads, and/or waterways.

Maps 1, 2,& 3 were provided by Ted Payne, GIS Office Chief, FSA/ITSD/GIEMSC; NAIP; and APFO.

FARM SERVICE AGENCY AND GIS – FSA is responsible for administering many farm loan, agricultural commodity price support, subsidy, and disaster relief programs, so FSA maps focus on property lines and what farmers do with their land.
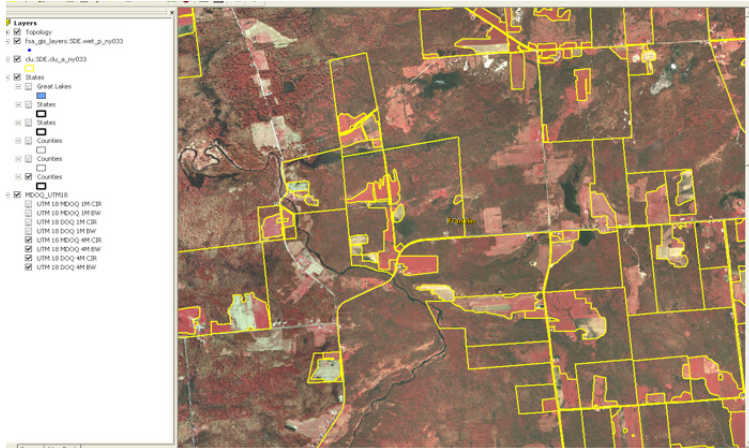
This infrared map highlights land usage to verify that farms are eligible for FSA programs such as farm supports or disaster relief. The yellow boundaries are land units that can be zoomed into for detailed review. Image is courtesy of Ted Payne, Chief, GIS Office, FSA/ITSD/GIEMSC; NAIP; and APFO.

GIS simplifies the FSA process of screening properties to determine their eligibility for different programs. Because payments are a function of acreage, calculation of acreage is a key FSA GIS requirement. Compliance with program requirements (e.g., that land is used as promised on the landowner's program application) is also a key monitoring function for FSA.

Both GIS and remote sensing are key tools for compliance with this requirement. GIS and the CLU allow FSA to geospatially create and track customer land information and land ownership records for use in program administration. To see more about FSA GIS' services, go to: http://www.gis.sc.egov.usda.gov/support/fsa.html

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE AND GIS – NRCS is responsible for providing conservation technical information and tools, and conservation planning technical and financial assistance to landowners and users. This includes soil mapping, water supply, climate and plants data, watershed planning, and assessment of the status, condition and trends of soil, water, and related resources through the National Resources Inventory (NRI).

GIS is used by NRCS as a conservation planning tool, as well as a tool to support various resources mapping and tracking activities (e.g., wetlands, easements, etc.) and analysis tasks. NRCS also uses GIS in the field with the Customer Service Toolkit system (which links to GPS systems) to develop conservation plans.
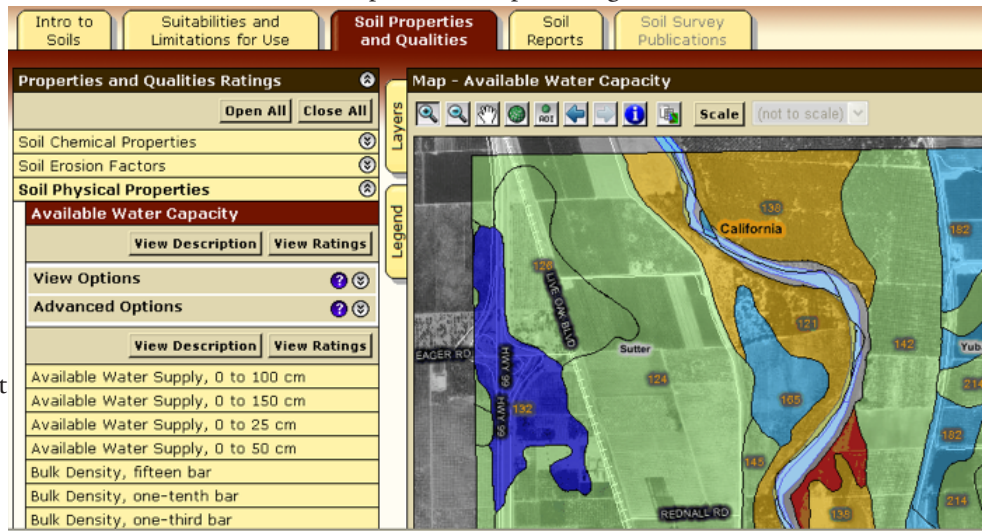
This is an example of an NRCS map that advises farmers about their soil resources. For more examples, go to: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Technical/land/nrcsdata.html .
Image is courtesy of Dennis Lytle, National Leader, Mapping and Information Systems, NRCS.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND GIS – RD programs address Rural America's needs for affordable housing, economic development, alternative fuels, water and electrical utilities, and telecommunications. Economic development aid is targeted in areas with the greatest need for economic development due to low incomes, high unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, etc.

RD uses demographic, transportation, weather, and program management data to evaluate compliance with applicable laws, assess potential risk to RD loans, and locate possible assets for emergencies; RD has also created innovative approaches to correcting addresses for its programs' borrowers using webservices.

The image above from the Rural Housing Service shows how RD has streamlined the loan qualification process using an internet-based, interactive GIS map for use by the public, banks, and RD staff. You can see it at: http://eligibility.sc.egov.usda.gov/eligibility/welcomeAction.do.
More information about USDA's geospatial activities is available at its GIS Quickplace: http://quickplace.usda.gov/gis.

Image is courtesy of Dennis Crow, USDA GeoSpatial Projects Manager, Rural Development GIS Coordinator.

Admin Notes: FWIW—E-mail *Netiquette :-/*

from Nancy Palmer, AMD-Employee Services Branch

Abbreviations and *Emoticons*

If you thought there were typos in the title of this article, I would definitely encourage you to read on! The purpose of this article is to help you with your e-mail etiquette at work (now a topic that is included in Net etiquette known as *Netiquette*), but we can't ignore a few fun items such as commonly used abbreviations and typewritten pictures known as *emoticons*.

Abbreviations and emoticons are used in e-mail to save keystrokes and to attempt to insert visual cues and tones into the written conversation. The *FWIW* in the title of this article is an abbreviation that means *For What It's Worth*. And, the *face* (:-/) in the article title is an emoticon that means *perplexed*. There are many of these expressions and they often are more fitting for our personal e-mails from home rather than our business e-mails.

Missing cues, misunderstood tones

Visual and auditory cues are important in conversations and often are the only way we can tell if someone is angry, happy, sad, or being sarcastic. Since these cues are missing from our written e-mail, it can often lead to misunderstandings if we are not careful. Following some simple rules of etiquette may help us to avoid potentially embarrassing mistakes or time-wasting efforts when using e-mail.

A nest of *Netiquette* tips

The following etiquette items have been collected from a number of websites on this subject. You might find them very helpful in avoiding some common e-mail problems.

- Acknowledge or answer an e-mail in the same time as if it were a telephone call.
- If you receive an inflammatory e-mail, only respond with an invitation to meet.
- Be brief and concise, and answer all questions when responding to an e-mail.
- Imagine your recipient and don't say anything that you wouldn't say face-to-face.

- Be especially careful when using e-mail to discuss a confidential or sensitive matter.
- Don't say anything that you wouldn't want broadcasted to everyone—it might be (by mistake or on purpose).
- Don't overuse "reply all" and "cc:"—think about who needs/wants to participate.
- Use the automated *return receipt* option sparingly—it implies that you expect recipients to ignore e-mails.
- Use the high priority option sparingly—if it's urgent, pick up the phone.
- Avoid sarcasm; it is too often misunderstood without visual cues and voice tone.
- Use capitalized, bold, or red letters only if you want to be perceived as "yelling."
- Get permission before forwarding or copying someone's message.
- Use clear subject lines for easy prioritization of e-mails by your reader.
- Change the subject line as appropriate if the topic shifts as e-mail strings continue.
- Check the recipient list before you "send," especially when using automated lists.

And always remember, even if you are sure that everything is correct.... and *especially* when you don't think you have the time to do it...***Re-read your message before you send it!***

Field Perspectives: Technical Support Division Profiles

Starting now, in each issue of ITS Connections we will profile Technical Support Division (TSD) teams around the country to introduce and recognize team members and their significant contributions to the success of USDA Service Center Agency missions. FSA, NRCS, and RD provide an estimated $50 billion dollars of programs, financial support, and technical assistance to America's farmers and rural communities each year.

Just as the highway system is a shared infrastructure that transports our nation's people and products across the country, the ITS infrastructure is key to delivering SCA programs. But, ours is a superhighway to every agency service center office, no matter how small or remote, because every agency office requires the same access to applications, services, databases, bandwidth and speed.

Where ITS meets our customers on a daily basis is in those offices - large and small. The Technical Support Division, ITS' largest section of about 600 people, provides that ongoing stream of support to our customer base of 60,000 agency personnel and agency partners.

To add context for each state we cover, a box outlines some agricultural facts and funding levels of agency programs. This information is from:

- ERS State Fact Sheets - http://www.ers.usda.gov/StateFacts/
- FSA State Accomplishment Fact Sheets - (from state offices)
- NRCS' FY06 Program Allocations - http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ (scroll to page bottom)
- RD 2005-2006 Progress Report - http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rd/pubs/2005_06_Prog_Report.pdf

Mississippi Technical Support Division Team

The Mississippi ITS-TSD staff is comprised of twelve technical staff members and one Group Manager. They support approximately 1070 users in 103 sites across the state. Nine of the technical staff members are located in service centers or area offices across the state and support a defined area of counties know as ITS zones. The three remaining technical staff members are located in and support the service center agencies' state offices. The Mississippi ITS-TSD staff includes Charles Stursz, Gail Mills, Clovis "Bubba" Caldwell, Nancy Crenshaw, Olivia "Libby" Jones, Bessie Carter, Eva Dear, Carolyn Fountain, William "Dave" Thomas, Ruth Patrick, Anna Skinner, Ashley "Ash" Miller, and Tom Powe, Group Manager.

Photo: Anna Skinner takes a customer call.

• The Natchez Trace Parkway, named the "All American Road", extends from Natchez, MS to just south of Nashville, TN. The Trace began as an Indian trail more than 8,000 years ago.

• Belzoni, MS is the Catfish Capital of the World. Approximately 70 percent of the nation's farm-raised catfish come from Mississippi.

• Greenwood, MS is the home of Cotton Row, which is the largest cotton exchange in the nation and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The goal of the Mississippi ITS-TSD team is to provide the best customer service and IT operational environment possible by efficiently and effectively utilizing available IT resources and staff. One of the ways we address this goal is by locating each ITS staff member within two hours travel distance from the sites and users they support. Another way the staff is addressing this goal is by functioning as a team.

Since August 29, 2005, Mississippi has been recovering from the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina. Initially, after the storm, the ITS staff was very busy assessing the storm's impact to the IT environment and restoring operations.

Photo: Libby Jones activates a BlackBerry.

Once initial recovery was complete, ITS became very busy deploying laptops, cell phone, Blackberry's, and associated equipment to FSA, NRCS, and RD, for use in their disaster recovery efforts, including the implementation of new disaster recovery assistance programs.

The Mississippi ITS-TSD staff members work together as a team by constantly sharing information with one another concerning problems, solutions, projects, and customer communications. The

Photo: Ashley Miller and Nancy Crenshaw check inventory.

staff members are free to provide or request assistance from each other as their workloads allow or require. When staff members are on leave or unavailable, their fellow staff members cover for them by assuming support responsibility for the absent staff members' users.
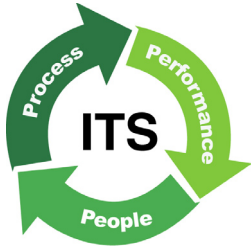
Over the past year, the Katrina-related workload for ITS-TSD staff in Mississippi has declined to the point where it is included as routine customer service.

Some interesting facts about Mississippi:

• The world's only cactus plantation is located in Edwards, MS with more than 3,000 varieties of cacti.

• Mississippi has more tree farms than any other state.

• The 4-H club began in Holmes County in 1907.

Mississippi Service Center Agency Statistics

42,186 farms on 30 million acres (2005); about 44,265 farmers (2002); 256,460 people employed in the ag sector (2004); about 1,644,523 rural residents (2005) (from -ERS Data Sheet).

Below are agency allocations for their program and service areas (in millions of dollars).

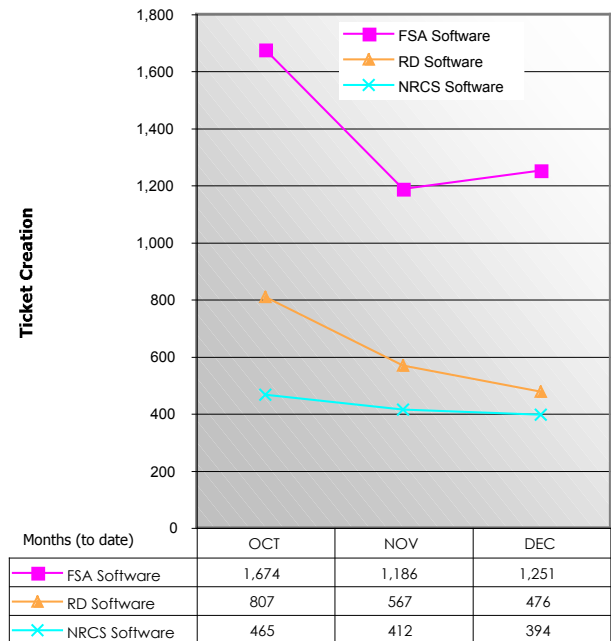| FSA (FY2005)	NRCS Programs (FY 2006)	RD Programs (FY 2006)
Farm Loans - $ 70.2	Environmental Quality Incentives - $20.6	Rural Housing - $ 158.8
Farm Support - $ 340.4	Farm & Ranch Lands Protection - $ 161.8	Rural Business & Cooperatives - $ 8.1
Disaster Relief - $ 16.8	Wetlands Reserve - $ 12.5	Rural Utilities - $ 102.2
Conservation - $ 41.4	Wildlife Habitat Incentives - $ 0.78	
	Combined Technical Assistance Programs - $ 34.2	

ITS Magic Merlin Ticket Analysis - FY07 1st Quarter

Data courtesy of Rick Sabo, Customer Support Branch Chief

Ticket Request Subjects	OCT	NOV	DEC	Totals 1st Quarter
Agency Software Subjects	2,946	2,165	2,121	7,232
FSA Software*	1,674	1,186	1,251	4,111
RD Software*	807	567	476	1,850
NRCS Software*	465	412	394	1,271
Agency SAAR Tickets	1,723	1,131	1,193	4,047
ITS SAAR Tickets	56	41	45	142
eAuthentication Tickets	964	1,216	1,493	3,673
COTS Subjects	2,041	1,832	1,695	5,568
Network/Telecom Services	752	491	496	1,739
Phone Services - SCA	890	651	536	2,077
Local System Administration	970	1,494	1,249	3,713
All Others	10,013	8,639	7,569	26,221
Total (ALL Tickets)	**20,355**	**17,660**	**16397**	**54,412**

* Note: These are counted within the total number for Agency Software Subjects.

1st Quarter FY 2007 - Open & Closed Tickets

		Ratio Open/Closed
Total Tickets Created	54,412	
Total Tickets Closed	48,000	88.2%
First Call Resolution (Closed <= 1 Day)	25,496	53.1%
Ticket Closed > 1 <= 5 Days	8,472	17.7%
Ticket Closed > 5 <= 10 Days	6,497	13.5%
Ticket Closed > 10 <= 30 Days	6,094	12.7%
Ticket Closed > 30 Days	1,441	3.0%
Total Tickets Still Open	**6,412**	

FY07 - 1st Quarter Magic Merlin Ticket Analysis Chart

Months (to date)	OCT	NOV	DEC
FSA Software	1,674	1,186	1,251
RD Software	807	567	476
NRCS Software	465	412	394