OCIO *connections*

Happy
New Year!

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OCIO Calendar
February – March

A Year of Clear Priorities and Initiatives: the CFO/CIO's Perspectives on 2008

Photo: Chuck Christopherson, USDA CFO/CIO.

"OCIO is poised to make USDA one of the top world-class IT enterprises anywhere, public or private," Chuck Christopherson, told us last December, shortly after his return from an international IT summit meeting in Sweden, "and 2008 is full of initiatives that will get us there. The key is how we optimize our IT capabilities to help USDA deliver its programs and accomplish its mission."

Serving as both Chief Information Officer and Chief Financial Officer, Chuck has a broader perspective than usual for a CIO. The vision he laid out for OCIO in 2008 and beyond brings together USDA's financial and technical infrastructure, highlighting their direct relationship in supporting agency missions and business processes. "Based on what I've seen and learned while meeting with OCIO staff in the field and working closely with our customers," he continues, "the priorities are clear. The key is a lean, responsive, and proactive OCIO that can get things done effectively and efficiently."

Priorities include optimizing management and technical capabilities and services to help the Department get its daily work done, control its finances, secure and protect information, advance broader government-wide policies, and prepare OCIO and USDA for the years ahead. There are many moving targets and changing demands: some really matter, others are distractions, and part of our effectiveness is based on telling the difference.

Four Key Initiatives

1) Building a responsive IT management structure so OCIO is proactive and able to focus on change and opportunity: This includes efforts with NRCS to create functional desktops that can manage program operations and synchronize end-user workflow; and with the Forest Service to streamline transaction processes for quick response to emergency services, grants, loans, insurance, and GIS.

2) Security / PII Support for Secretary Connors' mandate to protect the security of our technology and the personal data of all who use our system. This will integrate encryption with USDA hardware, awareness, telework and remote capabilities, and a new department wide messaging system.

3) USDA Green Practices to advance USDA's Green Plan for energy efficiency, include telework, teleconferencing, conservation (see NITC Data Center article in Issue #2).

4) MIDAS/FAST: FSA and OCIO are making significant progress in modernizing FSA's web-based business tools and processes–making them secure and convenient for customers; efficient and stable for staff.

The initiatives above show OCIO acting in concert with its customers and stakeholders, firmly grounding IT with practical purposes. Chuck stated, "These have been and will be years of change affecting technology, how it serves us, how we manage it." There are also the mandates from OMB to fulfill: streamlining telecommunications services and messaging, enhancing security, and protecting PII.

Progress in security also makes the USDA Green Plan possible since telework and remote computing require improved networks and effective security. Meanwhile, NITC has proven how data centers can save energy and we all are getting better at reducing our energy footprint. As Chuck puts it, "Based on what we've put in place over the last few years, this is our year of traction and progress on many fronts."

Cyber Security Initiatives

Federal Desktop Core Configuration (FDCC).
Agencies that have Windows XP and Vista deployed are directed by OMB to adopt the standard security configurations developed by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) by February 1, 2008. NIST, Microsoft, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Homeland Security have established a website hosting virtual machine images which can be found at http://csrc.nist.gov/fdcc.

The Cyber Security Advisory Council (CSAC) and the Information System Security Council (ISSC) held its first combined meeting to communicate and share agency approaches to meet this OMB mandate. A strategic approach to this effort department-wide is currently being discussed and developed.

Encryption. The USDA encryption software project was initiated as a result of OMB Memo 06-16. A PII team was convened in Washington, DC with members from ITS, Cyber Security, and OCIO senior staff. The PII Team prepared the requirements document along with other procurement documents and worked with procurement managers to get the process moving.

The technical evaluation team reviewing the proposals included members from Cyber Security; NITC; Forest Service; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES); and Risk Management Agency (RMA).

Currently, Cyber Security is mainly in an advisory role, providing assistance when possible. They establish the baseline encryption profile and agencies will be allowed to strengthen the encryption profiles if their environment requires it.

LincPass, USDA's new ID Card

From Information & Technology Management, ITM

The new identification card is branded *LincPass* at USDA because it is intended to:

☞ *Link* a person's identity to the new identification card.
☞ *Link* the card to a person's ability to access Federal buildings and computer systems.

The unique spelling of LincPass is a tribute to President Abraham Lincoln who created the People's Department (now USDA) in 1862.

Issuing employees a LincPass is part of USDA's implementation of Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12). President George W. Bush issued HSPD-12 on August 27, 2004. The goal of this Homeland Security initiative is to eliminate widespread variations in the appearance, quality, and security of current forms of identification issued to government employees and contractors and to standardize the process one must go through in order to receive this card.

There are strict guidelines for issuing these cards that include being sponsored, getting a background investigation (if one does not already have one), going to an enrollment station to have fingerprints and a digital photo taken, and activating the new card.

Employee information sessions have been hosted in the National Capital Region and in major cities throughout the country to further explain this process. If you have yet to hear about the LincPass, please consider attending an information session and/or view more information on our Web site:

http://lincpass.usda.gov/events.html

The deadline for current employees and contractors to possess a LincPass is October 27, 2008. All agencies are preparing their employees' records and submitting sponsorship records to the General Services Administration (GSA), who is managing the HSPD-12 Shared Service Offering for 70+ Federal departments and agencies. Once your record has been sponsored and transferred to GSA, you will be notified via email that it is your time to go through the enrollment process. Be on the lookout for an email from admin@FedIDCard.gov asking you to schedule an enrollment appointment. There is no action on your part that needs to be taken until you receive that email.

Enrollment stations are opening across the country. To view a list of enrollment stations closest to you, please visit:

http://fedidcard.gov

The LincPass Web site has also been revamped to provide easier access to all LincPass related materials. If you have any questions, please visit:
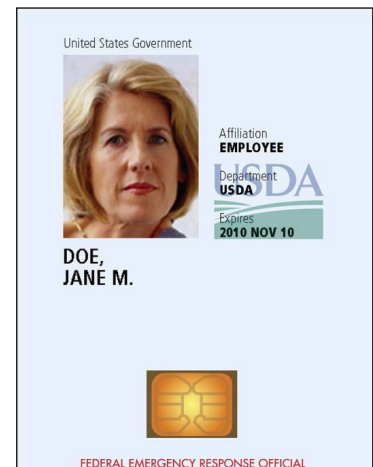
http://lincpass.usda.gov

Image: The new LincPass.

AgLearn: Synchronizing eLearning Across USDA

From Information and Technology Management, ITM

USDA's online learning management system AgLearn provides training management services for all USDA agencies—including employees, contractors, and, as needed, specified partners. AgLearn supports over 140,000 users and in FY 2007 had over 1.1 million course completions. An operational analysis recently completed for AgLearn to assess the efficacy of the program indicates that AgLearn is meeting its original goals and is operating well below original budget projections.

Most of the AgLearn budget is dedicated to direct training services and there is relatively low management overhead. Additionally, AgLearn is widely considered the leading government-wide eLearning provider from both a management and an economical operation standpoint. Stan Gray, AgLearn Program Manager, says, "In spite of the positive performance we still have our challenges. 98% of the time it is due to circumstances beyond our control, such as issues arising from USDA's varying PC configurations, slow network speeds, people forgetting their passwords, etc."

Recently USDA won the Customer Excellence award from Plateau, the developer of the software underlying AgLearn. Plateau corporate and Federal users worldwide submitted their proposals for the award and the competition was strong.

Photo: The 2007 Plateau Insights Award to USDA for best launch by an organization with more than 10,000 employees.

Convenient for employees, efficient for administrators

With AgLearn's convenient features, USDA employees can:

- Use AgLearn to access their training records.
- Register for classroom courses.
- Participate in online training.
- Request external training using an online SF-182 form.
- Manage Individual Development Plans (IDPs).

AgLearn also provides assistance for over 1,600 agency AgLearn administrators who provide local support to AgLearn users. This includes configuring SF-182s, IDPs, competencies, classroom courses, online courses and course exams as well as support for classroom training registration.

As of October 1, 2007, all requests for external training must be made with the online SF-182 in AgLearn. The online SF-182 automates and speeds up the workflow for obtaining approvals for external training, especially for geographically dispersed organizations where employees and approvers/reviewers are located in different locations.

In May 2007, AgLearn acquired an enterprise license for over 2,500 SkillSoft courses. SkillSoft is the industry leader in eLearning and provides comprehensive and current course offerings. The agreement includes access to 800 business courses, 1,600 information technology (IT) courses and over 300 desktop application courses.

In addition, the agreement includes access by USDA senior managers to SkillSoft's Leadership Development Channel of over 750 videos from leading industry experts as well as live leadership events that occur throughout the year.

USDA employees are able to acquire certifications and complete continuing education credits online and at no cost to the employee. In addition, all courses are available any time, and any place where an Internet connection is available. For more information, contact Team AgLearn at:

teamaglearn@usda.gov

AgLearn Highlights

- **SkillSoft** is an acknowledged leader in online certification preparation for IT professionals and currently supports over 50 different professional certifications for leading IT organizations.

- **Access,** through AgLearn, to a comprehensive choice of training available to USDA employees seeking industry-standard accreditation.

- **Certifications and continuing education credits** are available for many business programs including but not limited to ITIL, PMI, and Six Sigma. In addition, IT Professional Certifications are available from top vendors including ISC2, Check Point, Cisco, Comp TIA, IBM, ISEB, Microsoft, Oracle, and others. Certifications include CISSP, ISSEP, CCSA, CCDA, CCNP, LPIC, MCDBA and many more.

Check out AgLearn @ www.aglearn.usda.gov

- eAuth login username and password are required. If you don't remember them, the login gives you the option to get your username and reset your password.

- Once you are signed in you can browse the catalogue and look at course areas.

- Once you select a course, but before you actually take it, use the *system check tool* to see if your computer has all the right settings and software.

- If there is a hard deadline for a course you need to take, try to take it before the final month.

Big USDA Presence at 2007 B.I.G. National Training Conference

By Cheryl Cannon, Administrative Management Division-Employee Services Branch; B.I.G. photo courtesy of Mr. Ken Cowan and Mr Calvin Stevens.

The Challenge of a Changing Workplace

Last August, I attended the 2007 Blacks in Government (BIG) National Training Conference held in Nashville, Tennessee. The event was very dynamic and inspiring. The theme was "Meeting the Challenge of a Changing Workplace." The opening plenary speaker, Dr. Calvin Mackie, was very animated and motivating. He is a professor at Tulane University, speaker, entrepreneur, inventor and author. In my view, to hear him was to love him.

Photo: Dr. Calvin Mackie. Photo courtesy of B.I.G.

Dr. Mackie used an animated style to start his keynote address which urged the audience to become better government employees and to realize that individually, we can and should make a difference.

The rest of the week was filled with a variety of sessions that included career development, EEO, and life improvement topics. The BIG organization also sponsored a Blacks in Government Leadership Showcase, youth forum, and oratorical scholarship competition. There was something for everyone.

A Forum Sponsored by USDA

The Department of Agriculture sponsored an agency forum with updates from various speakers. Presenters were:

- Margo McKay, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, speaking on "Update on Civil Rights Initiatives at USDA".
- Boyd K. Rutherford, Assistant Secretary for Administration, speaking on "Changes taking place in the Federal Worker's Employment Environment".
- Dr. Jerry Ice, Executive Director, Graduate School, USDA, speaking on "Training opportunities at the Grad School leading to upward mobility for employees".
- Jack E. Nelson, Departmental African American Program Manager, moderated.

Future Leaders

On August 13 (Monday), graduates of a pilot Leadership Program named Young Leadership Academy (YLA) were recognized at a formal ceremony. The YLA was initiated by Darlene Young, National President of BIG and was a program geared toward developing the students' leadership and management skills. The program was facilitated by the USDA Graduate School, using Office of Personnel Management (OPM)'s Executive Core Leadership Competencies. Almost 100 BIG members applied, with 71 being selected. From this elite group, a class of 51 participants successfully completed the curriculum. Lawanda Burnette, an ITS employee, was among the graduates. The process took nine months. The curriculum entailed various assignments which included: mentoring, job shadowing, 30 day details, writing reports, and various other projects. Each team made an innovative presentation on topics that impacted the BIG organization.

Fairs & Exhibits

A health fair was held to perform various screenings and to distribute helpful information. There was also a job fair held during the Conference. Presenters from the USDA Graduate School conducted career training for entry-level through senior level employees in human resource management, management, management analysis, acquisition, business, and communications.

The BIG National Training Conference was a worthwhile venture which is ever evolving. It is anticipated that this year's Conference will be bigger and even better than last year's.

For more information about the August 2007 Conference and the upcoming one for 2008: http://www.bignet.org/

In Memorium - Steve Delman, the passing of a colleague

Steve Delman, of the Infrastructure Definition Division–Service Definition Branch, passed away unexpectedly on January 3, 2008. Steve worked for FSA and ITS for more than 20 years. Prior to the ITS convergence, Steve managed the FSA Help Desk in Washington, DC.

Steve was a dedicated USDA employee who earned the respect of his colleagues and the customers he served so well. He was viewed by all those around him not only as a technical expert, but also as a caring friend. Steve's positive attitude and willingness to tackle any assignment made it a pleasure to work with him. He always had a smile and was never too busy to say hello or make time for a colleague. Steve was a great person who will be missed by all of us who were privileged to know him.

Steve is survived by his wife, Tammy Poston and daughter, Morgan Rachael Delman who was born this past Christmas, December 25, 2007.

I&O Field Perspectives: ITS/TSD Minnesota
From Tom Radermacher, Group Manager & the Minnesota TSD team

Photo:ITS/TSD-MN Group: from left to right, Cathy McCormack, Jody Wilde, Lori Quinnell, Rosemary Wondra (recently retired), Brian Sandberg, Barb Fyffe, Karen Bakke, Rick Killmer, Rich Dougherty, Lori Moore, Dan Lindquist, Janice Douville, Tom Radermacher (Group Manager), and Robby Westrom; not in picture: Pat Bay; (photo by: Pam Howard, ITS/TSD-South Dakota Group Manager).

The Minnesota ITS/TSD staff consists of 13 technical staff members and one group manager. They support 1470 users in 103 customer offices in Minnesota. Five technical staff members and the group manager are located at the state office in St. Paul; eight technical staff members are at eight different offices throughout the state.

TSD - Minnesota has 5 teams that cover 87 counties. These are organized into 14 state service zones.

Each technical staff member provides primary support to customers in a defined group of counties and is also a member of a three-person team (the map shows their zones of coverage). The members of the team provide backup support to each other whenever one is on leave or unavailable. Each team has a GS-12 who facilitates discussions on how to improve the implementation of projects.
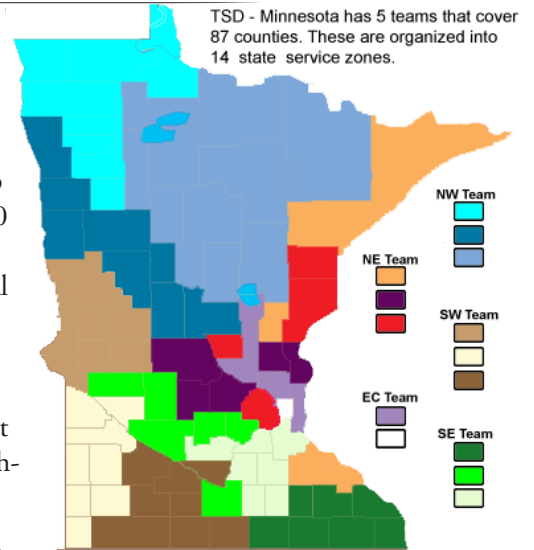

Photo: TSD-Mn Team member Pat Bay updating data records, (photo by: Phillis Brey, NRCS).

Minnesota: Interesting facts

Photo: Dairy cows in the pasture, (photo by: Stephanie McLain, NRCS).

Minnesota Service Center Agency Statistics

79,300 farms on 27.5 million acres (ERS 2006); about 80,839 farmers (ERS 2002); and about 1,413,512 rural residents (ERS 2006).
Below are agency allocations for their program and service areas (in millions of dollars).

RD Programs (FY 2006)	FSA Programs (FY2006)	NRCS Programs (FY 2006)
Rural Housing - $ 249.6	Farm Loans - $ 222.3	Environmental Quality Incentives Program - $31.6
Rural Business & Cooperatives - $ 28.5	Farm Support - $ 1,178.6	Farm & Ranch Lands Protection Program - $ .56
Rural Utilities - $ 392.8	Disaster Loans - $ 6.3 Disaster Assistance - $ 2.3	Wetlands Reserve Program - $ 18.5
	Conservation - $ 102.9	Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program - $ 0.2
		Conservation Security Program - $ 7.5
		Combined Discretionary Technical Assistance - $ 17.4

1. Minnesota ranks 7th in agricultural exporting states.
2. Minnesota's waters flow outward in three directions: north to Canada's Hudson Bay, east to the Atlantic Ocean, and south to the Gulf of Mexico.
3. Minnesota ranks first in the number of turkeys raised in the USA, with 45 million in 2006, and produces over 5% of the world's soybeans.
4. Rochester, Minnesota is home of the world famous Mayo Clinic, known for its doctors' expertise and advanced medical treatments.
5. The Mall of America in Bloomington is the size of 78 football fields --- 9.5 million square feet.
6. Minnesota is home to the first automatic pop-up toaster, canned ham, and bus line (Greyhound Lines); it also is home to Spam, Tonka Trucks, masking and Scotch tape, Wheaties cereal, Bisquick, HMOs, the bundt pan, Aveda beauty products, and Green Giant vegetables.
7. Downtown Minneapolis is connected via an eight mile skyway system that includes 77 enclosed bridges connecting buildings on the second level, hundreds of stores, dozens of restaurants and cafes, 1,500+ apartments and almost 200 million square feet of office space.
8. With well over 10,000 lakes, Minnesota has 90,000 miles of shoreline, more than California, Florida and Hawaii combined. It also has the nation's highest number of bicyclists, sport fishermen, and snow skiers per capita.
9. The 1.1 million acre Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in northern Minnesota is the most visited wilderness in the United States.

Photo: Minnesota lake & wildflowers, (photo by: Gregg Thompson, SWCD).

California Wildfires Assistance

The California Disaster Season began with the *2007 October wildfires*. The fires scorched about 518,021 acres (809.4 square miles) from Santa Barbara down through San Diego County to the border with Mexico. Robert Spurgeon, I&O/ITS/TSD California, came down from Davis to be on the scene and provide any needed support. He reported that our NRCS and FSA customers were fully prepared for this disaster and had all the needed equipment. ITS was still busy behind the scenes helping NRCS and FSA stay connected to their customers and with disaster contingency support in case the wind turned.

Photo: The smoky view at the NRCS Running Springs, California Field Office ,across a ridge from the wildfire. Photo from NRCS California Fire Response Newsletter, Oct. 25, 2007, (www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov).

ITS backed the NRCS and FSA teams by:
- Expediting orders for additional blackberries
- Setting up communications resources and special email distribution lists for NRCS staff and others detailed to the emergency response.
- Keeping OCIO management informed through morning and afternoon status reports.
- Working closely with Southern California USDA employees to obtain status of affected offices and personnel. Although no field offices were damaged, some were closed due to fires. IT staff worked with the employees who were relocated to alternative worksites.
- Reviewing what telephone systems were in threatened area offices, in case possible replacements were required.
- After the fires, advising the NRCS Emergency Watershed Program team on best methods for communications and networking.

Delivered! October/November Deployment Highlights from the IO Lab.

Below are a few of the major I&O/ITS/SCA projects out of 74 projects deployed in October/November 2007. These include numerous security patches and software upgrades.

Project Name	Agency/Initiator and ITS Release Manager	Deployment Description
WinMerge 2.6.8 is a Microsoft utility used to verify changes in files. It will be used by the FSA development group in Kansas City.	FSA- Debra Perkins Release Manager - David Hyde	WinMerge 2.6.8 was a COTS (commercial, off-the-shelf) deployment. The change was deployed as a non-mandatory SMS push to individual workstations.
ArcGIS CLU Maintenance Tool v4.2.4 allows county offices to maintain the line work history layer for Common Land Unit (CLU) attributes–the property line information on GIS maps. It fixes a problem in the previous version: editing tools were not capturing changes in the history layer consistently. Now FSA can align the CLU database and the history database of the CLU for deploying the data to the centralized database at the Aerial Photography Field Office (APFO) from 2,350+ sites across the country. This has initiated the CLU centralization process.	FSA & NRCS Initiator: Ted Payne Release Manager: David Hyde	CLU Maintenance Tool 4.2.4 was deployed originally to all FSA workstations with CLU Maintenance Tool 4.1.13 as an upgrade. It was later deployed to Land Use sites once those sites were upgraded to Land Use version 5.0.2.
JRE 1.6.0_02 is part of the XP Core image, allowing web support to Java enabled applications.	IDB Initiator: David Pfaffenberger Release Manager- David Pfaffenberger	This was deployed through SMS to all XP Workstations. SMS was also used to uninstall previous versions of JRE automatically. This has saved TSD many hours of manual installations of Core applications on over 50,000 workstations nationwide.
WinXP Build 14 CD and USB Build Device is a combined method for installing the Workstation Build image for all enterprise XP workstations as well as new drivers and support for recently released BPA equipment, including the following platforms: HP 6910p Notebook; Outdoor Soils Tablet-Panasonic Toughbook C19; Outdoor Soils Tablet-Fujitsu Stylistic ST511; & Indoor and Outdoor Tablets-HP 2710P.	IDB Initiator: Dan Snyder Release Manager: David Pfaffenberger	This new image is installed by ITS on all new XP work-stations entering the Common Computing Environment. First the CD is used to build any workstation with Windows XP from 2003 through the current version. The USB Build Device contains additional supplementary files and recent updates.
Live Meeting 2005 V7.9.2419.0 is used for accessing Live Meeting Online Web conferences. Live Meeting has become a standard throughout the enterprise for Online Conferencing.	IDB Initiator: David Pfaffenberger Release Manager: David Pfaffenberger	ITS used SMS to update the version of Live Meeting on all workstations quickly and easily.

USDA **NITC** **TSO** Telecommunications Services & Operations **ITS** **ITM** E·GOV **USDA** CYBER SECURITY **UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**