

United States Department of Agriculture

FY 2007 E-Government Act Report

September 21, 2007



USDA FY 2007 E-GOVERNMENT ACT REPORT..... 1

SECTION I: *PARTNERWEB* –A STORY OF BEST PRACTICES 3

- A. AGENCY OPERATIONS TRANSFORMED..... 3
- B. ON-GOING DIALOGUE AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES CRITICAL FOR SUCCESS 4
- C. EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS HELPING USDA TO MEET GOALS 4
- D. COST AVOIDED BY LEVERAGING RESOURCES..... 4
- E. PARTNERWEB ENSURES ACCESSIBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES 5
- F. EFFECTIVE CAPITAL PLANNING AND INVESTMENT CONTROL PROCEDURES 5

SECTION II: USDA’S INFORMATION MANAGEMENT 5

- A. USDA’S INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) STRATEGIC PLAN 5
- B. INFORMATION DISSEMINATION MANAGEMENT 5
- C. USDA’S FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT COMPLIANCE 6
- D. DISSEMINATION OF FEDERAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT FUNDING ACTIVITY. 6
- E. FORMAL AGENCY AGREEMENTS FOR PUBLIC DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION 7
- F. USDA’S NARA-APPROVED RECORDS SCHEDULES AND PROGRESS INVENTORY 9

Section I: *PartnerWeb* –A Story of Best Practices

Japan resumed beef trade with the United States (US) in December 2005 after a nearly two-year ban. In January 2006, however, Japanese government officials discovered three boxes of veal that violated specific terms of the newly crafted trade agreement. The US acknowledged that failure to comply with the stringent trade requirements was unacceptable, but emphasized that the product did not present a health risk to the public.

In February 2006, the United States Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns announced “Twelve Action Steps” to be taken by the Department in response to an extensive investigation into the ineligible shipment. The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) was required to maintain a list of products approved for export to each country by each plant participating in Export Verification (EV) programs on an internal Web site. The site would have to be accessible to trained Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) personnel by March 1, 2006.

As a result, a technology team worked round-the-clock using existing shared technology services to create *PartnerWeb*, a critical component utilized to aid in the resolution of this and future problematic international trade situations. This story of best practices describes how new levels of agency coordination and leveraged enterprise-wide shared services met a seemingly impossible deadline with surprisingly limited funding.

A. Agency Operations Transformed

PartnerWeb substantially changed information sharing between AMS employees who maintain EV program requirements with foreign countries and FSIS inspectors who perform the re-inspections on exports before they are shipped. *PartnerWeb* connects AMS and FSIS to ensure that all EV programs are updated on a daily basis, and that FSIS inspectors have access to the current information while performing export re-inspections on site.

FSIS decided that the best course of action for a satisfactory and swift solution was to modify their Intranet, *InsideFSIS*, which was accessible only by FSIS employees. *InsideFSIS* follows the USDA Web Standards for “look and feel.” The USDA Web Style Guide was created based on industry best practices, usability studies, and input from USDA agency and staff office Webmasters. The team created an isolated section of the site that specified AMS staff could access for the sole purpose of publishing critical EV information. USDA’s identity management service, the eAuthentication Service, ensured that only appropriate personnel could use their credentials to access the newly created *PartnerWeb*. Further, there was no need for extensive user training because *PartnerWeb* utilized USDA’s content management system, which AMS and FSIS were already using. By leveraging these existing resources, two emergency content deployments were made in the time usually allotted for one, and selected AMS and FSIS employees were expediently approved for access.

PartnerWeb was originally designed in response to the pressing “Twelve Action Steps” outlined by Secretary Johanns regarding trade relations with Japan, but has since been expanded. *PartnerWeb* now includes standards for EV Programs with other foreign trade partners. The Non-Hormone Treated Cattle (NHTC) Program uses *PartnerWeb* to maintain a list of farms, ranches, feedlots, and cattle management that are approved by

AMS to supply European countries. *PartnerWeb* helped avert a potential trade disagreement through the inclusion of a list of eligible products approved for export to Korea. Initially seeking to close the communication gaps between the export verification and inspection arms of USDA, *PartnerWeb* has proven to be versatile by allowing for expansions while also serving as a problem-solving tool for USDA export regulation and inspection.

PartnerWeb represents a cross-agency collaboration created in response to the Secretary's promise to enhance service delivery and use technology to improve internal efficiencies.

B. On-going Dialogue and Performance Measures Critical for Success

FSIS and AMS initially defined requirements for *PartnerWeb* and the users tested, and evaluated the service to determine whether or not it had met the requisite standards. Despite the quick design and implementation, the service averaged a 9 out of 10 satisfaction rating from a subsequent user survey. FSIS and AMS content management personnel can track activity on *PartnerWeb* and receive alerts when there are operative complications with the system. Perhaps the most significant indicator of successful performance is that the United States met the requirements outlined by Secretary Johanns in the "Twelve Action Steps."

Today, through *PartnerWeb*, FSIS and AMS are working in conjunction to set standards and ensure that US goods sent abroad adhere to the standards through constant dialogue between AMS and FSIS. AMS users update the content on *PartnerWeb* daily, and FSIS inspectors use that information on a continual basis in the performance of their jobs.

C. External Partnerships Helping USDA to Meet Goals

PartnerWeb is primarily an inter-agency collaboration between AMS and FSIS, but also involves work with USDA's shared service providers at the National Information Technology Center (NITC) in Kansas City, as well as our trade partners and other Federal agencies.

AMS works with our foreign trade partners to establish the various Export Verification programs. The Foreign Agricultural Service is another important partner for FSIS and AMS, communicating with their posts overseas and informing FSIS and AMS when export concerns are raised in foreign countries.

D. Cost Avoided by Leveraging Resources

The Food Safety and Inspection Service spent approximately \$1 million to build their Intranet site, *InsideFSIS*. The agency incurred no additional costs in creating *PartnerWeb*. Without the existing enterprise services provided by USDA's eAuthentication Service and NITC, as well as the backbone provided by *InsideFSIS*, the cost of production of *PartnerWeb* would have been substantial.

E. PartnerWeb Ensures Accessibility for People with Disabilities

PartnerWeb is an Internet-based system. Only a very select group of people who are required to use the information have access to the information. In fact, the information listed on *PartnerWeb* is accompanied by a disclaimer which states that product lists are no longer valid once they are printed. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that lists and requirements are not altered, saved, and distributed without the agencies' consent. *PartnerWeb* is 508 compliant to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities.

F. Effective Capital Planning and Investment Control Procedures

PartnerWeb was created in alignment with USDA's Enterprise Architecture and Capital Planning and Investment Control (CPIC) policies because it leveraged agency and enterprise shared services which were part of investments that had been approved through USDA's Integrated Information Technology (IT) Governance Process. As a result, there was no need to prepare additional documentation to justify new funding requests.

Section II: USDA's Information Management

A. USDA's Information Technology (IT) Strategic Plan

The Information Technology (IT) Strategic Plan outlines the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) commitment to appropriately gathering, protecting, and disseminating information, and is available at http://www.ocio.usda.gov/n_USDA_IT_Strategic_Plan.pdf. This vehicle serves as a framework for planning and communication that facilitates the partnerships between the IT community and the business leaders at USDA. The increased dialogue promotes more effective decision-making and dissemination of information to the public.

B. Information Dissemination Management

In accordance with Section 207(f)(2) of the E-Government Act of 2002, USDA published a priorities and schedules document for posting Web content on USDA.gov. It lists the different types of content to be published on the Web site and the priority in which they will be posted. The priorities and schedules for posting content on USDA.gov as well as agency and staff office Web sites are available on the Contact Us page of USDA.gov, at <http://w3.usda.gov/comments/contentinventory.html>.

USDA is fulfilling its responsibility under Section 207(d), "Categorizing of Information." USDA's record officer and agency record officers are working together across the Department to develop a classification system for common types of information. This standard plan will streamline the information request process.

In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) of 1966, the Electronic Freedom of Information Act (E-FOIA) Amendments of 1996, and specifically, Section 207(e), "Public Access to Electronic Information," USDA provides the means for the public to access the vast majority of agency documents, aside from those protected by legal exemptions and exclusions, such as personal privacy and investigative documents. USDA provides information dissemination product catalogs, directories, and inventories

to improve the dissemination of and access to information by the public through several Web sites with links located on <http://www.usda.gov>.

C. USDA's Freedom of Information Act Compliance

Through an easily navigable Web site, USDA simultaneously adheres to the stipulations of FOIA, while providing transparent access to the public-at-large. The USDA Web site, <http://www.usda.gov/da/foia.htm>, outlines the implementation of Executive Order 13392—Improving Agency Disclosure of Information, and provides links to the following:

- FOIA Guide
- USDA FOIA Fee Schedule
- Agency Mission Areas
- Electronic Reading Room (Reports)
- USDA FOIA Regulations
- FOIA Contacts
- Text of the Freedom of Information Act
- USDA Privacy Policy Statement
- U.S. Department of Justice – Freedom of Information Act Home Page

USDA provides visitors with a reference guide for FOIA, located at http://www.usda.gov/da/foia_guide.htm. This guide provides an overview of the provisions of FOIA which govern Federal agencies' responsibilities and the public's rights. It also outlines how and where inquiring parties should make a FOIA request, required response times, the conditions for expedited processing, fees and fee waivers, initial request determination, appeals for restricted access, and the information regarding judicial review.

In accordance with the E-FOIA Amendments of 1996, USDA has established an electronic reading room, which includes agency policy manuals, opinions made in the adjudication of cases, and an index of records released by FOIA that are subject to subsequent FOIA requests. Information regarding the reading room is available at http://www.usda.gov/da/foia_reading_room.htm. Within the reading room, members of the public can also access the USDA annual reports from 1996 to the present and they may view contracts and purchase orders established between USDA and the private sector.

D. Dissemination of Federal Research and Development Funding Activity

USDA is fulfilling its responsibility under Section 207(g), “Access to Federally Funded Research and Development,” by providing public access to Department research projects at <http://www.usda.gov>. A list of research projects is available in the directories of Science.gov at <http://www.science.gov>, and RaDiUS at <https://radius.rand.org> to provide easy access to all-encompassing government-wide research materials. The guidelines outlined and links provided on http://www.ocio.usda.gov/qi_guide/scientific_research.html regulate the scientific research information used, produced, and published by USDA in order to preserve the

objectivity, utility, quality, and integrity of scientific research disseminated by Federal agencies.

Two particularly noteworthy examples of how USDA agencies have made access to research and development information accessible to the public and employees are the Forest Service and the Agricultural Research Service (ARS).

The Forest Service Research and Development (FSRD) is the largest forestry research organization in the world. The FSRD serves private forest landowners through their investigations into new processes and methods of recycling wood products. The four main areas in which FSRD seeks to disseminate information to the public are:

- Resource Valuation and Use Research;
- Science Policy, Planning, Inventory, and Information;
- Vegetation Management and Protection Research;
- Wildlife, Fish, Water and Air Research.

Available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/research>, the Forest Service Research and Development Web site provides research and policy developments regarding our precious natural resources to both the public and Federal employees.

ARS is USDA's primary scientific research agency that seeks solutions to everyday agricultural problems by frequent collaboration with research partners from universities, companies, organizations, and foreign countries. The mission of ARS is to pursue scientific innovation, as well as to disseminate the discoveries to the public as useful technology and knowledge.

E. Formal Agency Agreements for Public Dissemination of Information

In order to create a high quality and efficient process for the public to access USDA's information and services, and to support the exchange of information when needed, the Department works with a diverse group of external partners and contractors.

The National Agricultural Library (NAL) expands public access to agricultural information and facilitates the successful development of the Library's programs and services through partnerships with external libraries, organizations, and private industry. For a list of NAL's partnerships, please go to [National Agricultural Library Partnerships](#).

The Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) partners with more than one-hundred colleges and universities that comprise the nation's Land-Grant University System. These universities are designated to receive unique Federal support in order to further pursue CSREES' unique mission to advance knowledge for agriculture, the environment, human health and well-being, and communities. Information on the Land-Grant University System and CREES' partnerships is available at http://www.csrees.usda.gov/qlinks/partners/state_partners.html. CSREES promotes Higher Education Challenge Grants for the benefit of 1862, 1890, 1994, and Hispanic-Serving Land-Grant Institutions. These USDA-led Land-Grant Institution programs seek to improve research, extension, and teaching in the food and agricultural sciences by strengthening institutional capacities so that participants may work with

businesses to promote efficient and profitable operations. Information about the respective grants and the application process is available at <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/fundview.cfm?fonum=1082>.

USDA partners with Google to provide an enterprise simple search and location instrument for public visitors to <http://www.usda.gov> and other agency Web sites. A partnership with such a powerful and pervasive information generating system as Google allows those with even the most limited internet experience and skill to easily locate USDA information.

USDA uses the *Stellent* content management system, which provides a single, strong content repository for managing Web content, documents, and digital assets, as well as addresses the long-term retention and disposition of managed content and published sites. This system allows more people to create new, and modify existing, content to provide faster and more efficient information dissemination.

Finally, USDA improves access to and dissemination of government information to the public through its participation in several key Presidential Initiatives. USDA's partnerships with Business Gateway (<http://www.business.gov>), Grants.gov (<http://www.grants.gov>), E-Rulemaking (<http://www.regulations.gov>), and GovBenefits.gov (<http://www.govbenefits.gov>) provides opportunities for efficient exchange of USDA information between the Federal government and the public.

- Business Gateway seeks to improve the service and reduce the burden, financially and otherwise, for business and private citizens interacting with the Federal government through various projects. Serving as a one-stop access point for government services available to the private sector, information and key resources regarding business development are found in the Business Resource Library.
- Grants.gov seeks to reduce current government inefficiencies, meet E-Government objectives, and benefit both citizens and the government by streamlining the process and easing the encumbrance of searching and applying for Federal grants. Through the E-Government Storefront, this initiative helps to remedy the arduous process associated with applications in different agencies with clear instructions for both public and private entities.
- E-Rulemaking is a collaborative, inter-agency initiative tasked with the establishment of an automated, integrated repository for Federal rulemakings, which electronically consolidates and manages the dockets of Departments and agencies to provide easy access across the Federal Government.
- GovBenefits.gov is a partnership between sixteen Federal agencies that seeks to consolidate over 1,000 Federal and Federally-funded, State-administered benefit and assistance programs, and that provides readily available application information, as well as a tool to help users determine their benefit eligibility in both English and Spanish.

F. USDA's NARA-Approved Records Schedules and Progress Inventory

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) provides Federal agencies with guidelines for the improvement of electronic records management, including Web site records, as required by section 207(e).

The Office of the Chief Information Officer manages the USDA's Records Management Program, for which NARA outlines the major responsibilities that Federal agencies currently have for preserving electronic records. The USDA has well-established processes and procedures to ensure the proper management, scheduling, and disbursement of USDA records at <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/records/index.html> (protected by USDA's eAuthentication Service).

Per NARA's request in September 2006, USDA Agencies provided NARA with an inventory describing USDA mission-related electronic records systems and series that were previously scheduled for disbursement, as well as those that will require scheduling over the next year. The total number of mission-related electronic records systems reported to NARA in October 2006 was 363, which serves as the foundation for the current records being scheduled. Of the 363 reported, 52 have been scheduled, 14 are pending NARA's review and approval, and 297 have yet to be scheduled. USDA agencies are actively working with NARA to develop records schedules for all records existing in electronic systems by September 30, 2009. USDA has and will continue to transfer electronic records that have permanent retention to NARA.