Chapter 1
Connecting Customers With Information About Agriculture

During 2003, the National Agricultural Library (NAL) improved services and extended its programs to more customers. Due largely to increased use of Web-based information services, customer transactions with NAL increased by 17 percent from 2002, to total more than 50 million. Leading this trend for increased use were NAL's Animal Welfare Information Center (http://www.nal.usda.gov/awic), Food and Nutrition Information Center (http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic), and Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic). Customer transactions with these information centers increased an average of 46 percent over 2002, reflecting added content and functionality.

Measuring Customer Satisfaction

To better plan future services, NAL began using an online survey to measure customer satisfaction. Using ForeSee Results, which employs the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), NAL collected baseline data about website customer usage and satisfaction for comparison with other U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agencies and departments governmentwide. NAL will apply the results to guide website design and Web content development.

Lilyi camellia. J. Horace McFarland Collection. Special Collections, National Agricultural Library.

DigiTop—the Digital Desktop Library for USDA

NAL launched DigiTop (http://www.nal.usda.gov/digitop) for a first pilot year in January 2003. DigiTop provides more than 114,000 USDA employees with online, full-text access to articles published in 1,400 professional and scientific journals available from commercial and society publishers. The resources in DigiTop include hundreds of newspapers from around the world, as well as a number of citation databases and other significant reference resources. In its first pilot year, DigiTop hosted 68,180 Web visits by USDA employees who downloaded 335,373 full-text articles from an array of scientific publications.

NAL established proxy access to DigiTop, permitting USDA employees Internet access to DigiTop from anywhere in the world. Proxy access to DigiTop hosted 513,688 hits in the first year of operation.

Document Delivery Improvements

During 2003, NAL completed 98 percent of document delivery requests in 2 days or less, a significant improvement over prior years. Also, by offering e-mail attachment and post-to-web options, NAL enhanced electronic document delivery services. By increasing efficiency and expanding

114,552
Approximate number of USDA employees authorized access to DigiTop at launch, January 22, 2003.

Hemerocallis flava (Lemon Day Lily). *Les Liliacees*, Volume 1, 1802. Special Collections, National Agricultural Library.

electronic delivery options, NAL focused on productivity improvements for agricultural researchers.

With the concurrence of the Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics (REE), NAL established cost recovery chargeback arrangements with all USDA agencies for document delivery services to employees. Although NAL continues to absorb a significant portion of these costs, the recovered costs funded the acquisition of software and equipment that will speed processing of document requests.

Food Safety Information Center

In order to respond effectively to emerging food safety issues and to minimize duplication, NAL combined the Food Safety Research Information Office (FSRIO), the Foodborne Illness Education Information Center, and the Food Safety Training and Education Alliance (FSTEA) to create the Food Safety Information Center (FSIC). (http://www.nal.usda.gov/foodsafety/). This newest NAL information center consolidates databases and websites into more effective resources. Customers now have a robust search engine with enhanced features that provide more meaningful search and discovery capability. This combined-function information center serves as a model that is capable of quickly and effectively responding to changing priorities.

WIC Learning Online

NAL's Food and Nutrition Information Center (FNIC) (http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/) created a Web-based learning program related to human nutrition that will be used by over 10,000 professionals who work with USDA's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). (http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/WIC_Learning_Online/index.html)

The 12-module course, which is arranged in 4 lessons, offers WIC nutritionists and paraprofessionals at all levels convenient and user-friendly access to development and continuing education courseware available via the Web. The course is approved for four Continuing Professional Education (CPE) credits by the American Dietetic Association's Commission on Dietetic Registration. NAL's work on this project was undertaken in cooperation with USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) (http://www.fns.usda.gov/) and the University of Maryland's Department of Nutrition and Food Science.

The WIC course is publicly available. Students who successfully complete the lesson assessments may print a personalized certificate of completion.

55,247,794 Total hits to NAL websites in FY 2003, 24% more since FY 2002. An average of about 105 hits each minute, 24/7.

Using ARS "Super Slurper" To Dry Library Materials

In August 2003, NAL and its Technology Transfer Information Center entered into a Material Transfer Agreement Cooperative Research and Development Agreement with Artifex Equipment, Inc., to investigate the effectiveness of the ARS Super Slurper and like polymers as a fast, new way to salvage water-damaged materials (http://www.nal.usda.gov/spevents/thirst.htm). The ARS Super Slurper is a starch-based polymer capable of absorbing and retaining up to 2,000 times its weight in moisture.

The agreement with Artifex will help determine whether the absorbent Super Slurper polymer can be used to dry books, papers, photographs, and other materials soaked by water from flooding, leaks, and other disasters. Current methods of drying wet library materials—air-drying, vacuum drying, and freeze-drying—are slower, more expensive, or can cause secondary damage. This technology promises to add an important new tool for librarians, archivists, and conservation specialists in handling water-damaged paper resources and collections.

Test drying of a wet book using the ARS Super Slurper.

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