

ARS □ CSREES □ ERS □ NASS
Policies and Procedures

Title: Dissemination of Public Information by ARS

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This P&P establishes policy and procedures to assist ARS employees in handling public information concerning research and other ARS activities.

Table of Content

1.	Introduction and Statement of Policy	3
	Information Objective	3
	Availability of Information	3
	Open Door Policy	3
2.	Authorities	4
3.	Responsibilities and Functions of Information Staff	4
	Office of the Director	4
	Information Products and Services Branch	5
	Current Information Branch	5
4.	Clearance Authorities and Responsibilities for Handling Specific Types of Information	6
5.	Copyright	8
6.	Cooperative Activities	8
	Publications by State Experiment Stations	8
7.	Summary of Responsibilities	9
	Office of the Director	9
	Information Products and Services Branch	9
	Current Information Branch	10
8.	Glossary	10

1. Introduction and Statement of Policy

Information Objective

ARS is responsible for reporting to the public about its research and other activities and for aiding transfer of technology to users. The Information Staff (IS) has the responsibility for translating what ARS scientists are doing into terms the public can understand and appreciate and for communicating this information to farmers and ranchers, consumers, business people, lawmakers, Government officials, the scientific community, educational institutions, and the general public.

Availability of Information

ARS makes the information on its activities available to representatives of the communications media, organizations, individuals, and Members of Congress under an open door policy except where prohibited by legal or other restrictions. ARS seeks wide dissemination of accurate information on its activities and programs to all who might benefit from or be affected by such information.

Open Door Policy

To accomplish this open door policy, ARS employees are encouraged to:

- Cooperate with:
 - Representatives of communications media.
 - Special groups such as agricultural, scientific, technical, and trade organizations.
 - State and local agencies.
 - Other Federal agencies.
 - Civic, educational, and consumer groups.
 - General public.
- Give prompt and careful attention to oral or written requests for information. Every reasonable effort is made to provide complete and accurate responses.

Note: For Freedom of Information Act requests, see REE P&P 158.1, "Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act Guidelines."

- Accept invitations to discuss their work at public meetings of interested groups.

- Publish results of original research in recognized non-USDA publications as well as in-house publications.

IS will implement this open door policy by preparing and issuing news releases and other communications on ARS research and other activities. Frequently, initial releases on research are timed to coincide with publication or presentation at scientific meetings. IS discusses these special circumstances with the Administrator or designated representative.

2. Authorities

OMB Circular 130, Management of Federal Information Resources
Department Regulations 1400-001, Information Policies; 1440-002, News Division; 1470-001, Exhibit Design; and 1480-001, Photography

3. Responsibilities and Functions of Information Staff

IS is responsible for planning, organizing, and carrying out a comprehensive information program. The program aids public understanding of ARS aims and activities. To execute program responsibilities, certain functions are vested with the following units within IS:

Office of the Director
Information Products and Services Branch
Current Information Branch

Office of the Director

- Coordinates the work of IS.
- Serves as primary liaison between IS and the Department's information office.
- Advises the Administrator on public affairs policies and goals and develops programs to carry them out.
- Prepares reports to committees of Congress and to the Office of the Secretary.
- Prepares speeches, briefings, and other reports for delivery to a broad spectrum of agricultural, scientific, industrial, and public groups.
- Plans and produces appropriate materials for the Administrator.

- Implements the Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act.
- Oversees and directs production of informational video products.
- Has oversight for web-based IS information products and electronic dissemination of information.
- Maintains a library of tapes and films for loan to interested organizations and media. Serves as liaison between television broadcasters and ARS scientists.
- Serves as primary liaison between ARS and USDA's broadcast, film, and photography units.

Information Products and Services Branch

- Edits and produces scientific and technical publications written by ARS scientists and writes, edits, and produces semitechnical, special audience, and popular publications in cooperation with scientists, the National Program Staff (NPS), Administrative and Financial Management staff, and the Administrator. Publication production includes illustration, layout, design, and coordination of printing and electronic production.
- Plans exhibits and presentation materials, oversees their production, and coordinates their use at Headquarters, Areas, and locations.
- Directs operations of the ARS National Visitor Center located at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, Beltsville, Maryland. Schedules tours for visitors and arranges meetings between special visitors and scientists.
- Plans and oversees outreach programs to communicate ARS research results to specific audiences, particularly information multipliers other than news media.
- Provide editorial and graphics services to ARS locations and staffs for both print and electronic media.
- Plans, edits, coordinates, and produces the monthly *Agricultural Research* magazine.
- Serves as primary liaison between ARS and the Department's publication, design, and printing units.

Current Information Branch

- Leads and coordinates ARS activities to maintain a flow of information through the Nation's communications media, associations, private organizations, and other communication outlets.
- Prepares, clears, and releases press information, and coordinates timely release of significant information by the Department's information office.
- Writes articles for *Agricultural Research* magazine.
- Maintains liaison between ARS and USDA news dissemination units, as well as other USDA agencies. Coordinates ARS support of USDA news and special program services.
- Maintains liaison with newspaper and magazine editors and reporters, major science writers, and specialized media including the farm and trade press.
- Prepares and produces news items and other materials to support agency activities.
- Responds to inquiries from the media, industry, national organizations, consumers, and others.
- Stays informed about research and other activities at laboratory locations and acts as liaison between scientists and news media.
- Plans and produces a newsletter for the Administrator.
- Coordinates Agency photographic services. Provides technical advice and maintains a library of ARS photos and transparencies.
- Serves as liaison between radio broadcasters and ARS scientists and identifies key spokespersons for recorded interviews.

4. Clearance Authorities and Responsibilities for Handling Specific Types of Information

Information materials issued to the public are cleared in the interest of technical accuracy, significance, and conformance with ARS and USDA policy. The value of information, especially press releases and other current information materials, often depends on timeliness. Many materials have stringent deadlines and must be cleared promptly.

All official information materials originated by ARS must be identified with ARS, USDA. Additional identification will be limited to the one subordinate level of ARS hierarchy that seems most pertinent to the intended use of the material.

- **Publications.** For publications (both print and electronic) published by outside publishers, including refereed journals, see REE P&P 152.1, “Procedures for Publishing Manuscripts and Abstracts with Non-USDA Publishers (Outside Publishing).” For all publications published in house, whether at field locations or through IS, see REE P&P 151.1, “Publishing (Print and Electronic).”
- **Video News Releases (VNRs) Issues From Headquarters for External Audiences.** See REE P&P 153.1, “Videotapes.”
- **Documentary Videotapes Issued From Headquarters for External Audiences.** See REE P&P 153.1, “Videotapes.”
- **Press Releases and Information Materials.** Press releases and information materials are prepared by IS. IS arranges for appropriate clearances, which may include laboratory scientist, Research Leader (RL), Center Director (where appropriate), Area Director (AD), Office of Technology Transfer, NPS, the Associate Deputy Administrator, and the Administrator. Clearance criteria include technical accuracy, relevance to ARS mission, and adherence to ARS and USDA policy. IS is responsible for editorial style.
- **Reuse of Cleared Information.** Information properly cleared and released may later be reused without further clearance, unless there is reason to question its accuracy. ARS employees are free to use released information in answering queries from the public and in informal talks and interviews. For information on manuscript clearance for non-USDA publishers, see REE P&P 152.1, “Procedures for Publishing Manuscripts and Abstracts with Non-USDA Publishers (Outside Publishing).”
- **Reprints or Translations.** Permission to reprint or translate official information is not required.
- **Interviews and Broadcasts.** ARS personnel are encouraged to respond willingly to requests from the media to discuss their research and the constructive contributions this science makes to improving our food and fiber system. When employees accept an invitation to participate in a radio or television broadcast, they should inform the RL and the Director, IS, or Chief, Current Information Branch. IS should be alerted to all media inquiries from major national newspapers, magazines, and broadcast outlets, particularly when the topic is related to sensitive issues or the policies of other government agencies. IS coordinates contacts with the Department when necessary. Consult with IS before scheduling any formal press conferences or granting requests from national TV networks or major TV programs to film activities at ARS facilities. Scientists are expected to factually discuss their own research without speculative extrapolation to larger and sensitive issues. Questions that are directed to eliciting personal opinions about major policy issues should be tactfully referred to the Agency or policy official who has responsibility for that area of work.

- **Informal Talks.** ARS personnel are encouraged to accept invitations to discuss their work and the missions and accomplishments of ARS at public meetings of interested groups.
- **Official Information for Non-USDA Publication.** The AD or the AD's delegate will clear official information materials prepared for publication in scientific, technical, and trade journals, or other non-USDA media. The AD will also clear materials for presentation at meetings. For information on manuscript clearance for non-USDA publishers and for other outside publishing activities, see REE P&P 152.1, "Procedures for Publishing Manuscripts and Abstracts With Non-USDA Publishers (Outside Publishing)."

5. Copyright

See REE P&P 152.1, "Procedures for Publishing Manuscripts and Abstracts With Non-USDA Publishers (Outside Publishing)," Section 8.

6. Cooperative Activities

Much of the research of ARS is conducted in cooperation with other Federal, State, or private organizations. To continue good cooperative relationships, ARS personnel will clearly recognize and give appropriate credit to those who cooperate. The Areas and IS are jointly responsible for carrying out this policy. Subject to the limitations set below, and to established procedures for clearing information, ARS employees are encouraged to cooperate with private organizations in the dissemination of factual information about ARS work.

ARS employees should make every effort to ensure that references to ARS or its employees in information materials issued or sponsored by commercial or other private organizations do not give the impression that ARS endorses a particular commercial product, favors one company or its products over others, or is in any way subservient to industry. When proprietary or brand names are used in a manuscript, add a disclaimer that "Mention of trade names or commercial products in this [article] [publication] is solely for the purpose of providing specific information and does not imply recommendation or endorsement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture."

Publications by State Experiment Stations

Good cooperative relations require that appropriate recognition be given to State-USDA cooperation in State experiment station publications. To maintain such relations, ARS authors will:

- Cooperate in observing deadlines and procedures established by experiment station editors.

- Furnish experiment station editors copies of manuscripts for station publication.
- Have authority to approve editorial adjustments affecting ARS contributions to an experiment station publication. This authority is assigned to the senior author and follows appropriate ARS area clearance procedures. Experiment station editors, in consultation with ARS authors, have authority for final editing.

7. Summary of Responsibilities

Office of the Director

- Coordinates the work of IS.
- Serves as primary liaison between IS and the Department's information office.
- Prepares reports to committees of Congress and to the Office of the Secretary.
- Prepares speeches, briefings, and other reports.
- Plans and produces appropriate materials for the Administrator.
- Implements the Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act.
- Directs production of informational video products.
- Has oversight for web-based IS informational products and electronic dissemination of information.
- Maintains a library of tapes and films for loan.
- Serves as primary liaison between ARS and USDA's broadcast, film, photography, and exhibit units.

Information Products and Services Branch

- Edits and produces scientific and technical publications.
- Writes, edits and produces semitechnical, special audience, and popular publications.

- Plans, edits, coordinates, and produces the monthly *Agricultural Research* magazine.
- Plans exhibits and presentation materials.
- Directs operations of ARS National Visitor Center.
- Plans and oversees outreach programs to communicate ARS research results.
- Provides editorial and graphics services.
- Serves as primary liaison between ARS and USDA's publication and design units.

Current Information Branch

- Leads and coordinates ARS activities to maintain a flow of information.
- Prepares, clears, and releases press information and coordinates release by the Department's information office.
- Writes articles for *Agricultural Research* magazine.
- Maintains liaison between ARS and USDA's news dissemination units.
- Prepares information for the media and other audiences that supports agency activities.
- Stays informed about research and other activities at laboratory locations and acts as liaison between scientists and news media.
- Coordinates agency photographic services.
- Serves as liaison between radio broadcasters and ARS scientists.

8. Glossary

AD. Area Director

CD. Center Director

Electronic publications. Material distributed as a finished product in a digital format, including CD-ROM, magnetic tape, floppy disk, electronically readable/viewable/transmittable files (via the internet or other telecommunications medium) and so on, is considered a publication if it would be considered a publication in print. Software and digital databases (including simulation models and expert systems) distributed as products with user and/or technical documentation or other user aids such as tutorials are regarded as publications. Online databases that are frequently updated are not publications.

External audience. The general public, including various trade organizations, user groups of a nonresearch nature, and non-USDA agencies; news media; and scientists and decisionmakers in private industry and the academic community.

IS. Information Staff

Manuscript. A scientific paper authored or coauthored by ARS scientific personnel that describes or reviews scientific research and is intended for publication as follows:

- In a scientific journal.
- In a semitechnical or trade journal.
- As a scientific literature review or book chapter.
- As a monograph or book.
- As a popular article.
- In a meeting or symposium proceedings or workshop report.

Non-USDA publishing. Print and electronic publications not published by USDA or any of its agencies. Refers mainly to scientific and technical journals, trade publications, and academic and scientific books. Where USDA or any of its agencies is listed as a cooperating publisher, the publication is considered a USDA publication (see REE P&P 151.1, "Publishing [Print and Electronic])."

NPS. National Program Staff

Official information material. Include publications, presentations, press releases, motion pictures, audiovisual aids (photographs, color slides, exhibits, posters, audio and videotapes, and digital images), and other materials prepared for print or electronic media on official time or as part of an employee's job.

Publication. The issuance of information in printed or electronic form or (for patent purposes only) a formal presentation attended by people other than USDA employees or cooperators involved in the research.

RL. Research Leader

EDWARD B. KNIPLING
Acting Administrator
Agricultural Research Service