

Farm Service Agency Backlog Reduction Plan

The Farm Service Agency's (FSA) current Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) backlog is fewer than 50 requests. Although this number of overdue FOIA is relatively small, FSA is committed to eliminating it entirely over the course of the next three years.

In support of this aim, FSA performed an analysis of those requests that are currently overdue within the agency. This analysis revealed that:

- a. The majority of overdue FOIA requests seek copies of agency contracts. These requests are processed by the Washington, DC national FOIA office.
- b. Delays in receipt of records responsive to FOIA requests for agency contracts have significantly hampered attempts by staff in the Washington, DC office to respond to them promptly.
- c. The workflow of FOIA processing in the Washington, DC national FOIA office, which predates its transition from a one-person office to a more mature, multi-person operation, remains predominantly manual and is not focused on accountability. Redaction is still performed using correction tape.
- d. The ten oldest perfected requests that are in backlog status within FSA date from fiscal year 2007.

Given these considerations, FSA's backlog reduction plan focuses on providing the support required by the Washington, DC national FOIA office to ensure that requests for agency contracts are processed promptly, enhancing the ability of the Washington, DC national FOIA office to process its requests efficiently, and reducing the age of the agency's ten oldest perfected requests.

Towards this end, FSA plans to take the following steps to eliminate its backlog of overdue FOIA requests:

1. Ensure that the Washington, DC, national FOIA office has the support it needs to process requests for agency contracts, by:
 - a. Educating program officials within the Acquisition Management Division about the importance of conducting searches for records responsive to FOIA requests in a timely manner, by October 1, 2008.

- b. Conducting additional FOIA training within the Acquisition Management Division, if needed, by December 31, 2008.
 - c. Providing additional training to existing staff in the Washington, DC national FOIA office in processing requests for agency contracts, including guidance in applying Exemption 4, by December 1, 2008.
2. Provide additional support to the Washington, DC national FOIA office to improve both the workflow for processing individual FOIA requests and accountability, within the office, for completing requests in a timely manner, by:
- a. Identifying and procuring electronic redaction software to support more efficient processing of FOIA requests, by June 30, 2009.
 - b. Training staff of the Washington, DC national FOIA office in the use of the electronic redaction software and incorporating it into the office's workflow, by September 30, 2009.
 - c. Re-structuring the process by which FOIA requests are assigned and processed within the Washington, DC national FOIA office, by September 31, 2008.
 - d. Improving the management of the FOIA processing workflow by instituting weekly FOIA staff meetings and both individual and office productivity reports, by September 31, 2008.
 - e. Adding accountability for meeting productivity standards to individual performance plans of staff members in the Washington, DC national FOIA office, by November 1, 2008.
- e. Reduce the age of FSA's ten oldest FOIA requests, by:
- a. Adding accountability for ensuring that one of the ten oldest FSA FOIA requests (in the Washington, DC national office) is completed every calendar month to the individual performance plans of staff members in this office, by November 1, 2008.
 - b. Adding monitoring of the completion of FSA's ten oldest FOIA requests to weekly management reports, by September 31, 2008.