

Farm Credit Administration Report
On the Implementation of E-Government Initiatives
October 14, 2008

Executive Summary

The Farm Credit Administration (FCA or Agency) is a Federal agency established under the Farm Credit Act of 1971, as amended (Act). The Agency regulates and examines the Farm Credit System (FCS or System), a nationwide network of banks, associations, and related institutions chartered under the Act, that furnish credit and related services to farmers, ranchers, and producers or harvesters of aquatic products, their cooperatives, and farm-related businesses.

FCA is committed to the Federal initiative to expand electronic government. Of particular importance has been our continuing initiative to use our Web site to collect information from the System and to disseminate information to the System and the public. In the past year, we expanded this initiative in the following ways:

- We began migration to an enhanced information technology (IT) architecture, which provides a more integrated approach to managing Agency information internally and also externally on the Agency Web site. This infrastructure change will streamline delivery of IT products and information to the public.
- We continued our automation of the public comment process. This has allowed quicker review of comments provided by the public on proposed Agency regulations. E-mails submitted to the Agency are automatically reviewed to find the individual's name, zip code, and organization in the body of the e-mail and copy this information into the appropriate fields on the official comment letter form. The process also determines the type of sender and whether the sender supports or opposes the proposed rule based on the letter's content. Automation saved an estimated several months of staff time that would have been required to manually process the letters.
- We created a web application so that anyone can elect to receive an e-mail notification when Inspector General reports and other publications are posted to the Inspector General's site on FCA's Web site. This fulfills a requirement in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008. FCA was among the first federal agencies to provide this capability.

Questions related to this report may be addressed to Doug Valcour, Chief Information Officer. He can be contacted at valcour@fca.gov.

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1. FCA's Implementation of the E-Government Act

The Farm Credit Administration (FCA or Agency) is a Federal agency established under the Farm Credit Act of 1971, as amended (Act). The Agency regulates and examines the Farm Credit System (FCS or System), a nationwide network of banks, associations, and related institutions chartered under the Act, that furnish credit and related services to farmers, ranchers, and producers or harvesters of aquatic products, their cooperatives and farm-related businesses. Their funding is derived primarily from the sale of System-wide debt securities and from the sale of stock that each borrower is required to purchase in order to obtain a loan. Consequently, System institutions meet the unique credit needs of the agricultural community while encouraging borrower control and ownership.

FCA is committed to the federal initiative to expand electronic government. Of particular importance has been our continuing initiative to use our Website to collect information from the System and to disseminate information to the System and the public. In the past year, we expanded on this initiative in the following ways:

- We began migration to an enhanced IT architecture that allows for a more integrated approach to managing Agency information, internally and also externally on the Agency Website. This infrastructure change will streamline delivery of IT products and information to the public.
- We continued our automation of the public comment process. This has allowed quicker review of comments provided by the public on proposed Agency regulations. Emails submitted to the Agency are automatically reviewed to find the individual's name, zip code, and organization in the body of the e-mail and copy this information into the appropriate fields on the official comment letter form. The process also determines the type of sender and whether the sender supports or opposes the proposed rule based on the letter's content. Automation saved an estimated several months of staff time that would have been required to manually process the letters.
- We created a web application so that anyone can elect to receive an e-mail notification when Inspector General reports and other publications are posted to the Inspector General's site on FCA's Web site. This fulfills a requirement in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008. FCA was among the first federal agencies to provide this capability.

A. How this initiative is transforming FCA operations.

Our electronic government initiatives have reduced the time it takes the System to access current procedures and reports, comment on proposed rules, and submit information for examinations. Electronic information exchange with the System institutions has improved customer service and reduced the administrative burden of FCA examinations. To enhance data collection, we set up a secure area on FCA's Website where selected employees of Farm Credit System institutions can convey examination-related information. This approach is an efficient method of providing FCA examiners with pre-examination information, reducing the amount of on-site examination time, and allowing examiners to focus on areas of risk. The institutions have expressed appreciation for the ease of access to FCA's information and data.

B. Dialogues with interested parties to find innovative ways to use information.

The FCA maintains an ongoing dialogue with the Farm Credit System on improving business processes through the use of technology. We also invite comments from the general public. On our Website, the public can read and print public comments received on current proposed rules, notices, requests for comments, or similar items that we publish in the *Federal Register*. We provide a mechanism for users to report inaccurate information on our Website. We also include a substantial amount of information about FCA including information about job and procurement opportunities. Finally, a member of the public can submit a query directly to the Agency through "Info Line" or a FOIA request through an online form.

C. External partners who collaborate with FCA.

As stated above, the FCA maintains an ongoing dialogue with the Farm Credit System on improving business processes through the use of technology. We collect financial information (Call Report data) from the institutions through our Website and make the nonproprietary portions of Call Reports publicly available there. We partner with the institutions on using Virtual Private Network technology and encrypted e-mail to securely exchange information. We publish our examination manual, summaries of our legal opinions, informational memorandum to FCS institutions, and our regulations on the site. Internally, we are leveraging technological changes to the regulatory and examination processes.

D. Performance tracking.

Several performance measures related to E-government are reported to Agency management as part of the Agency performance measurement process. These include a measure pertaining to the implementation of the Agency's IRM plan and a measure for the availability of information technology resources and information to users.

E. Cost savings and cost avoidance.

The FCA is a very small Agency with an overall budget of approximately \$50 million. Our E-Government initiatives have not involved large expenditures on new investments nor the elimination of previous investments.

F. Availability of Government information and services for those without access to the Internet and for those with disabilities.

Although the FCA is proactive in its use of the Internet to disseminate information, we have been careful not to diminish services to those with disabilities or without access to the Internet. The FCA still distributes paper copies of its information to System institutions or members of the public preferring that method of delivery. We allow the public to request information or send comments by telephone, regular mail, fax, or e-mail. We ensure that our electronic information and technology are accessible to people with disabilities in compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. The FCA strives to use technology to improve and increase communication and services, not to limit them.

G. Capital planning and investment control procedures.

As part of our overall information resources management program, we maintain a strong capital planning and investment control process. Our IRM Operations Committee (IRMOC), composed of managers from each Office who are knowledgeable about Agency operations, reviews all proposed investments and makes recommendations to senior management concerning their approval. The IRMOC review process considers cost, risk, anticipated return, and alignment with and impact on FCA's enterprise architecture.

H. Business process used to identify IT initiatives.

During the annual planning call for the Agency's Information Resource Management Plan, we encourage each office to reexamine its practices and suggest technology projects that would improve its business. We consider changes to our policies and the way we work to take full advantage of the opportunities technology provides. We then prioritize our initiatives and establish costs. As we evaluate and implement our plan, we continue to explore ways to leverage our investment in information technology (IT) to support the Agency's Strategic Plan. We look at ways to use technology to promote effective and efficient workflow in our Agency. We evaluate how we do our work and consider and improve our processes, and look at new ways to apply technology to more efficiently support those work processes. The Agency's IRM Operations Committee reviews office project submissions, recommends priorities to IRM initiatives, and communicates its views to Agency management. The CEO approves or adjusts IRMOC recommendations for budget and project approval.

2. Agency Information Management Activities

- A. The Agency Information Resources Management Strategic Plan is located on our Website at:

http://www.fca.gov/Download/Final_IRM_Plan_2008-2013_09_18_07.pdf

Within this document are discussions of planned changes that affect the Agency's Enterprise Architecture.

- B. The process for determining, prioritizing and scheduling information on our public website (Final determinations, priorities and schedules/Information catalogs, directories, and inventories).

As mentioned earlier, the FCA serves a narrow segment of the public (i.e., the System institutions that we examine and regulate). The FCA posts all non-privileged documents on the Agency's Website as soon as the information is made publicly available. This includes all public publications and reports, Board meeting notices, news releases, nonproprietary Call Report information, and proposed regulations. There are no prioritization policies for publishing information on our Website because we make all public information available and do not produce large quantities of public information that would require prioritization. FCA does provide a schedule of when we post information on our Website. It is available at:

http://www.fca.gov/home/schedule_posting.html

FCA does not produce large quantities of information that would require the need of catalogs, directories or inventories to access it. We do provide a search engine on our Website that displays search results in order of relevance to the search criteria. FCA describes the types of publications it produces at the following webpage:

<http://www.fca.gov/reports/index.html>

- C. FOIA Information. Information regarding the Agency FOIA program can be found at:

http://www.fca.gov/home/freedom_info.html

- D. Federal R&D activities. FCA does not fund R&D activities; therefore, we do not have a web link to this information.

- E. Inventory of formal agency agreements with external entities.

FCA does not have any formal agreements with external entities related to access and dissemination of our information to the public. FCA does follow recommended practices for linking to FirstGov and USA Jobs.

F. Records retention schedules.

FCA has records retention schedules in place for all of its records, including its electronic records. The FCA retains its records schedules on an internal database. The National Archives also maintains copies of the FCA's approved schedules.