

Plain Language Report Card

Plain Language Report Card for: Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Agency Home Page: <http://usda.gov>
Grade: **Basic requirement:**
Other activities:

Part 1: How well does the agency comply with the basic requirements of the Act

Criteria	Notes	Score
Agency plain language page URL	http://usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=PLAIN_WRITING	10
Linked from the homepage?		10
Do they name a senior official?	3, in fact (4 in the compliance report)	10
Do they list other contacts?	In the compliance report, many listed by agency	10
Is there contact info for the other contacts?	In the 2011 report, but not on-line.	5
Do they have an implementation plan?	http://www.usda.gov/documents/PL-Report-final.pdf They call in a compliance report.	10
Do they have a 2012 compliance report?	http://www.usda.gov/documents/USDA_Compliance_Report_04-13-2012.pdf10	10
Does the website provide feedback mechanism?	contact Marjorie Harter, Senior Writer and Editor in the Office of the Executive Secretariat at 202-720-6538 or marjorie.harter@osec.usda.gov .	10
Are they using plain language in all new or substantially revised covered documents?	they list several pages of examples across the department of documents written in pl. FSA's Farm Loan Programs awaits approval on a brochure titled <i>Your Guide to FSA Farm Loans</i> . . But we are confident that there has been a USDA sea-change on plain writing. For example, I have received several requests from our subcabinet for plain writing help on high level documents and regulations. Additionally, some of our agencies and offices have conducted extensive efforts to train their staff members and ensure that the documents they produce comply with the Act.	8
How did they inform employees of requirement	after the Act was signed the Secretary sent a letter to all staff http://www.usda.gov/documents/PLSecretaryltr_10-12-2011.pdf - newsletters - intranet - PLAIN briefed top staff	10

Total score for basic compliance with Act: 93 (out of 100)

Part 2: Agency compliance with the Plain Writing Act – Supporting activities

Criteria	Notes	Score
Implementation Plan		30
Does the plan list objectives	<p>Establish an inter-agency working group to put the Act into practice, develop training to teach its requirements, and stay accountable for its results.</p> <p>identify critical review points that covered documents are subject to prior to publication and institute a plain language verification step.</p> <p>They also list types of covered documents and who needs to be trained in their implementation plan</p>	8,6
Do they identify specific actions to implement objectives	<p>publish a departmental regulation on plain language. Not done yet, but still working on it.</p> <p>Develop on-line training (they did)</p>	8,8
Do they identify time frames	No, except to publish the annual report on time.	0
Compliance Report		30
Does agency list types of covered docs?	Yes, 2011 report lists types of documents that “will be available” in plain language, and intended audiences.	10
Does plan discuss sustaining change?	Yes. 2011 document	10
What docs are focus of pl work pl?	2012 Compliance report starting on page 3 has an extensive list, by agency. . We can’t ensure they all are, but we are confident that there has been a USDA sea-change on plain writing. For example, I have received several requests from our subcabinet for plain writing help on high level documents and regulations. Additionally, some of our agencies and offices have conducted extensive efforts to train their staff members and ensure that the documents they produce comply with the Act.	10
Tracking documents created in or revised into pl?		0
Measurements		8
Testing pl quality of documents	<p>They say they are instituting verification steps and creating a subcommittee of the pl working group to oversee compliance. Has this happened, is it working?</p> <p>Our plain writing working group executive committee is still serving that role as we work to implement the law without a Congressionally approved budget to do so. We triage. We work with the agency and office members of our working group to identify groups or classes of documents where plain writing can help us achieve USDA’s mission and the Secretary’s mandate to better serve the public who use our programs. Each agency does have a clearance process and we have stressed the need for ensuring plain language as part of</p>	

	that process.	
Testing effectiveness of documents?		0
Is agency measuring effectiveness of program?	NRCS -The agency will enforce the Plain Writing Act and will measure compliance through newsletter articles, surveys, and one-on-one discussions and support.	3
What else, if anything does agency measure	Employee evals – employees get extra points on eval for taking a pl course.	
Other Supporting Info		80
Do they list contact info for the lead official on the pl page?	No	
What categories of employees must take training?	loan officers program staff writing regs and forms inspectors	8
How long is the training	Variable. PLAIN training, on-line course, etc.	10
How is training delivered?	webinair in person on-line course	10
Who have they gotten trained so far?	ranges by agency all staff FOIA staff IT staff	
Did they respond to our email?	Yes	10
Did they provide all requested info?	Yes	10
Did they provide sample docs?	Yes	10
How well did docs score	1. APHIS letter 82 bog index (poor) 17 sentence length (excellent) 7 passive index (excellent) 2. Brochure on emergency support 63 (average), 14, 24 (both excellent)	14
Total score for supporting activities		148 (out of 200)