



United States Department of Agriculture
Farm Service Agency



UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES OF
SERVICE DELIVERY
TO USDA PRODUCERS AND CUSTOMERS

To the farmers and ranchers we serve and to our employees:

This is a historic and exciting time to be a part of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) have begun a transformation of our business processes, service delivery practices, and the information technology tools we rely upon to carry out our mission so that we can best serve America.

We are committed to helping the 2.2 million producers who provide food, fiber, and fuel to more than 300 million Americans and many millions around the world. FSA employees provide outstanding service to our customers. But, we are challenged with outdated technology, systems that do not share information, and complex and sometimes arcane rules and processes that impede our ability to best carry out our important mission. This frustrates farmers and ranchers and our employees who work within a system not made to handle today's demands and expectations.

We understand this frustration and have developed a comprehensive plan to fundamentally change this environment for the better. Earlier this year, we launched the Modernize and Innovate the Delivery of Agricultural Systems (MIDAS) program. This initiative will improve the delivery of farm programs to our customers by refining our business processes, practices, and policies and updating and modernizing our information technology infrastructure and information systems. MIDAS is more than just upgrading computer hardware and learning new software programs; it is modernizing the entire set of processes that underpin our programs. Ultimately, MIDAS will provide a comprehensive and robust set of policies, processes, and tools that will enable simplified and convenient methods for farmers and ranchers, and our employees to access farm programs. Additionally, it will provide FSA with the flexibility and agility to more rapidly implement new programs or adjust existing programs as changes are dictated by new laws and regulations. For this transformation to be most successful, it is critically important that we clearly listen to and understand the needs and

expectations of Congress, the farmers and ranchers that we serve, and our employees who, on the front line every day, serve them. To this end, we put together a Listening Session tour February through August 2010. Each session provided producers and employees with an opportunity to talk about what is currently working and what needs to be improved.

The feedback we have received is driving our transformational efforts, and we have already made some key short-term improvements. This report communicates what we heard and the changes we are making to improve service delivery today and in the future. We will continue to hold more listening sessions so that we can best align our transformational efforts to customer demands and expectations.

Thank you to the farmers and ranchers and our employees who were able to attend the listening sessions. Thanks also to everyone who dedicated their time, thoughts, and ideas to help set the foundation for the MIDAS project. It is a complex effort, but by working together, we can accomplish great things that will have a lasting impact not only on our farmers, ranchers, and employees, but also on the entire Nation.



Jonathan Coppess
Administrator, Farm Service Agency



Chris Smith
Chief Information Officer

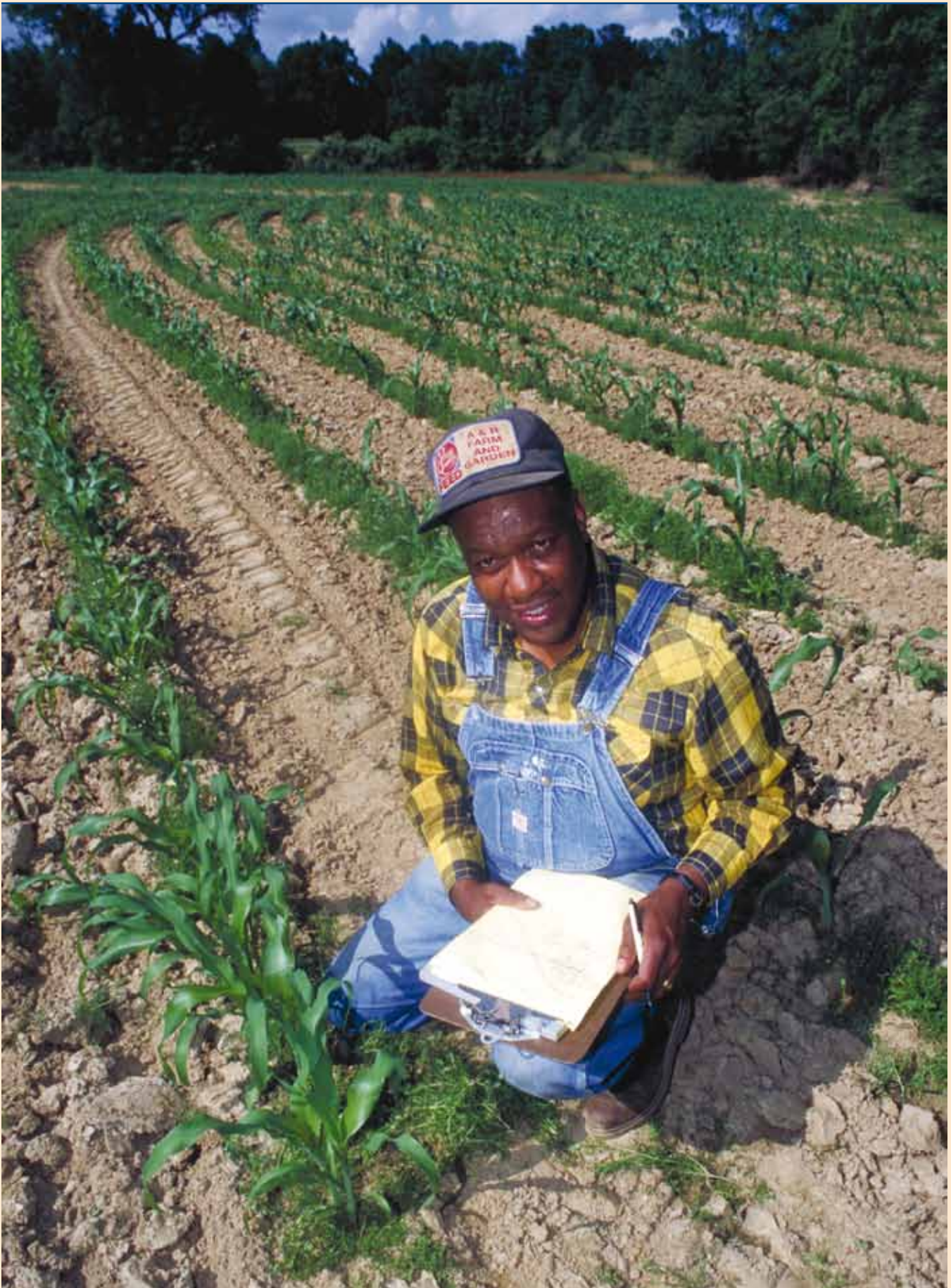


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A producer works with a Service Center employee to complete a farm programs form

List of Terms and Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Term
ACRE	Average Crop Revenue Election
ACRSI	Acreage/Crop Reporting Streamlining Initiative
AGI	Average Adjusted Gross Income
ARS	Activity Reporting System
AS/400	IBM Application System 400
ASOC	Agriculture Security Operations Center
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs
BPMS	Budget and Performance Management System
CCC	Commodity Credit Corporation
CMA	Cooperative Marketing Associations
CRP	Conservation Reserve Program
DCP	Direct and Counter-Cyclical Payment Program
EDC	Enterprise Data Center
EDW	Enterprise Data Warehouse
FLPIDS	Farm Loan Programs Information & Delivery System
FMMI	Financial Management Modernization Initiative
FSA	Farm Service Agency

Abbreviation	Term
GIS	Geographic Information System
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
ITS	Information Technology Services
MIDAS	Modernize and Innovate the Delivery of Agricultural Systems
MILC	Milk Income Loss Compensation
NAIP	National Agriculture Imagery Program
NASCOE	National Association of Farm Service Agency Employees
NAP	Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program
OCE	Optimized Computing Environment
OCIO	Office of the Chief Information Officer
SCA	Service Center Agency
S/36	IBM System 36
SURE	Supplemental Revenue Assistance Payments Program
TSD	Technical Services Division
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WBSCM	Web-Based Supply Chain Management



FSA handbooks contain procedures to administer farm programs

1. USDA 2010 Service Delivery Listening Sessions

1.1. Introduction

From February to August of 2010, members of the USDA Listening Session team gathered informally with producers and field office staff to hear their candid feedback on the current service delivery environment. Producers and employees shared their thoughts with our team in 22 separate meetings in North Carolina, Virginia, Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, Texas, New Mexico, Minnesota, Montana, and Arkansas.

The participating groups, locations, and dates for each of the 22 sessions are shown below.

Figure 1

USDA 2010 Service Delivery Listening Session Map

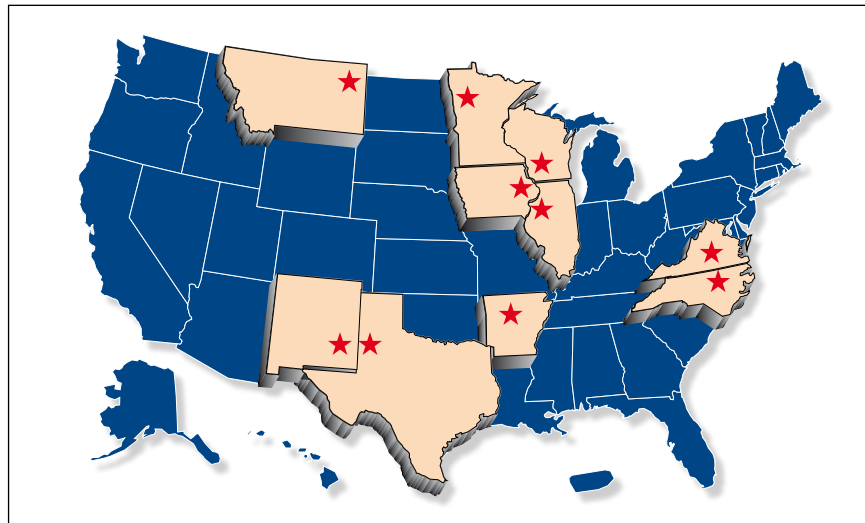


Table 1

2010 USDA Service Delivery Listening Session Groups, Locations, and Dates

Group	Location	Date
Employees	Pasquotank, Camden, Currituck Service Center, Elizabeth City, NC	February 25, 2010
Producers	Franklin, VA	February 25, 2010
Employees	Southampton County Service Center, Courtland, VA	February 26, 2010
Producers	Madison, WI	April 7, 2010
Employees	Rock County FSA Office, Janesville, WI	April 7, 2010
Producers	DeKalb County, IL	April 8, 2010
Producers	Davenport, IA	April 8, 2010
Employees	Rock Island County Service Center Office, Milan, IL	April 9, 2010
Producers	Amarillo, TX	April 20, 2010
Producers	Clovis, NM	April 21, 2010
Employees	Curry County Service Center Office, Clovis, NM	April 21, 2010
Producers	Lubbock, TX	April 22, 2010
Employees	Mahnomen County Service Center Office, Mahnomen, MN	June 2, 2010
Producers	Mahnomen County, MN	June 2, 2010
Employees	Cascade County Service Center Office, Great Falls, MT	June 3, 2010
Employees	Toole County Service Center Office, Shelby, MT	June 3, 2010
Producers	Browning, MT	June 3, 2010
Employees	National Association of Farm Service Agency Employees (NASCOE) Rally - Whitefish, MT	June 4, 2010
Producers	Lonoke, AR	August 4, 2010
Producers	Pine Bluff, AR	August 4, 2010
Producers	Arkadelphia, AR	August 4, 2010
Employees	NASCOE Convention – Hot Springs, AR	August 5, 2010

1. USDA 2010 Service Delivery Listening Sessions

At each session, participants were encouraged to share their issues or pain points” with the current delivery of farm services and benefits and to recommend improvements. Of the total 1,050 comments, a little less than half related to issues with **Information Technology (IT)**. Producers and staff expressed a general frustration with inadequate software, outmoded systems and hardware, and limited online resources. Our team heard concerns about information security and privacy, and the need for access to real-time information and for better integration of geospatial capabilities.

A little more than half of the comments conveyed a call for **Business Improvement**. These comments focused on issues related to current processes, policies, and procedures that slow down the day-to-day business of service delivery. In general, producers and staff alike are frustrated with what they see as the overly complex nature of USDA’s program requirements and policies and are discouraged by repetitious and confusing paper-based forms. Our team heard that the processes and forms associated with service delivery should be simplified and streamlined; information that has been provided once by a producer should not have to be provided again and again. Producers and staff stressed that internal cooperation within USDA is needed to ensure consistent policies across programs. We heard that USDA needs to improve its communications with producers and with field office staff so that information is more accurate, uniform, and timely. We also heard that effective training is essential so that staff can make the best use of USDA resources.

An analysis of the comments from a data perspective is provided below.

Table 2

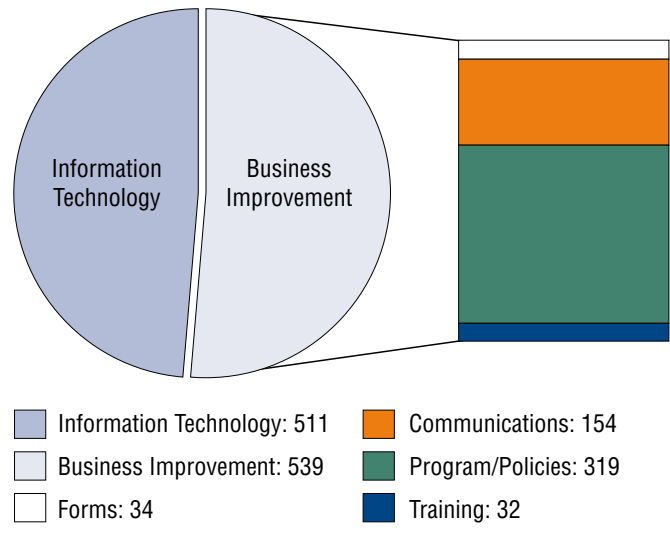
Total Comment Breakdown by Theme

Theme	Number of Comments by Theme	Percentage
Information Technology (IT)	511	49%
Business Improvement	539	51%

Within the Business Improvement category, analysis of the comments received from producers and employees shows a further topical breakdown: Programs/Policies, Communications, Forms, and Training as shown below.

Figure 2

Breakout of Business Improvement Comments



- **Programs/Policies:** 319 comments, representing 30% of Business Improvement comments
- **Communications:** 154 comments, representing 15% of Business Improvement comments
- **Forms:** 34 comments, representing 3% of Business Improvement comments
- **Training:** 32 comments, representing 3% of Business Improvement comments

1.2. Feedback from Producers

The Listening Session Team met with producers representing a wide range of agricultural environments, from the mid-Atlantic to the Texas Panhandle, from westernmost Montana to the foothills of the Ouachita Mountains. Regardless of their locality, producers throughout the country shared remarkably consistent views about USDA’s ability to deliver benefits and services. While they consistently give staff high marks for their customer service and assistance they observed that USDA is not keeping up with producers’ needs for straightforward and timely access to information and benefits.

In 12 different sessions, we heard about aspects of doing business with USDA that are foremost on producers' minds. The comments that we heard most frequently across all sessions have been paraphrased below in Table 3.

While most comments focused on need for improvement there were also many positive comments made. Among producers, there is a consistent expression of appreciation for the work of the staff at their local county offices, as noted by Number 10 on the Top Ten Producer Comments list. This

positive feedback speaks to our employees' dedication to meeting USDA's service delivery goals despite the challenges in their daily business environment. As might be expected, some producers' comments were reflective of local conditions and concerns, and not necessarily related to USDA's service delivery. For example, members of the Blackfeet Nation brought broader policy issues to our attention. All comments, no matter what the content, were recorded by our team as reflections on the state of the relationship between USDA and American producers.

Table 3

Top Ten Producer Comments

<p>1 Current systems lack the ability to share data between USDA agencies.</p> <p><i>Producers want to provide their information just once, such as acreage reporting data, and expect USDA agencies to share the data internally. Without interagency coordination, producers must repeatedly provide the same data. This lack of coordination affects reporting on Supplemental Revenue Assistance Payments Program (SURE), yields, and acreage.</i></p>
<p>2 More online services are needed.</p> <p><i>Producers want the convenience and flexibility to do business with USDA either online or in their local county offices. Sign-ups, acreage reporting, and maps are just some of many features that producers would like to access online.</i></p>
<p>3 Payment statements lack transaction details.</p> <p><i>Producers are not able to see or access the details of their payment transactions, so they don't know what they are getting paid for. There is no breakdown by farm number, crops, or contract.</i></p>
<p>4 The SURE program is slow to deliver payments.</p> <p><i>SURE is slowed down by the lack of coordination between the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) and Farm Service Agency (FSA). County staff is burdened by the paperwork it takes to process SURE, which results in delays for producers.</i></p>
<p>5 Program policies and procedures are complex and cumbersome.</p> <p><i>Programs and policies should be simplified and more flexible. Program instructions should be easy to read and understand.</i></p>
<p>6 The Average Crop Revenue Election (ACRE) program is complex.</p> <p><i>Producers indicate that the requirements of the ACRE program are confusing and very hard to explain to landlords.</i></p>
<p>7 The current forms are not producer-friendly.</p> <p><i>In general, there are too many forms, and the forms are too complicated. Producers are not able to access previously filed forms, forcing them to provide the same information again and again. The same data fields often have to be entered multiple times within and between forms.</i></p>
<p>8 USDA's IT systems are not flexible or easy to use.</p> <p><i>Producers have noted that private industry is way ahead of USDA in terms of flexible, modern, and user-friendly IT tools. For producers, USDA's online services are very cumbersome to use. The FSA website is confusing and hard to navigate.</i></p>
<p>9 Farm Loan programs and policies are restrictive.</p> <p><i>Producers are seeking more loan programs and more flexible loan policies.</i></p>
<p>10 The County Offices provide good service and should stay open.</p> <p><i>Producers want the flexibility of doing business in person.</i></p>

1.3. Feedback from Employees

USDA looks to its county office staff to provide insight into how our service delivery systems are performing in the field. In our travels this year to Service Centers and NASCOE events, we heard directly from employees that a combination of challenges, from outdated computing resources to overly complex processes and procedures, interfere with their ability to deliver services to producers. Employees struggle with outdated hardware, slow computers, and multiple and disparate systems that do not communicate with each other

and cannot deliver the real-time access to all the information that is needed to do their job. Much of the work is still paper-based and manual. Employees explained to our team how producers express to the county staff their frustration for help with overly complicated and redundant forms, with instructions that are too difficult for a “lay person” to understand, and with automated errors on payment statements – all issues that the county office cannot control or correct.

The 10 comments that we heard most frequently from our county office staff are paraphrased in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Top Ten Employee Comments

<p>1 Payment statements lack details.</p> <p><i>County office employees share producers’ dissatisfaction with the lack of detailed information on payment statements. They are also upset that erroneous demand and late payment notices are issued to producers. This reflects on poor data integrity beyond the control of the local Service Centers.</i></p>
<p>2 Acreage reporting is inefficient.</p> <p><i>Since RMA and FSA do not share acreage data, producers have to report acreage multiple times to each USDA agencies that they deal with. The agencies, in turn, have different ways of measuring acreage. Also, some applications record acreage measurements in 10ths whereas other applications record in 100ths. Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, which could be used for acreage reporting, is not currently shared by all agencies, nor integrated effectively into the business process.</i></p>
<p>3 The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) program and policies are complex.</p> <p><i>CRP is administered via three separate systems. As a result, CRP has been determined to be one of the most inefficient services FSA provides.</i></p>
<p>4 The SURE program is hard to administer.</p> <p><i>From the county office perspective, the SURE program suffers from issues with procedures, inconsistent acreage information, lack of clarity, and an overload of manual inputs. Some of these issues stem from the fact that the RMA and FSA do not share acreage data directly resulting inconsistent acreage totals necessary to determine payment amounts and eligibility.</i></p>
<p>5 Programs and policies are complex.</p> <p><i>The complexity is discouraging for producers and Service Center staff members. Program rules are confusing and perceived as unnecessary “red tape.” Additionally, it is difficult to get the most current information, because handbooks and notices are outdated or not updated in a time for program signups.</i></p>
<p>6 Field Office systems require too many passwords.</p> <p><i>Employees must maintain and remember multiple passwords to access separate systems.</i></p>
<p>7 Field Office computers are slow.</p> <p><i>Computing in the Service Center offices is frustratingly slow -- slow start-up time, slow application response time, and slow data uploads and downloads. Producers are negatively affected by the frequency with which USDA servers go down during busy sign-up periods.</i></p>
<p>8 IT applications lack query capability.</p> <p><i>No ad-hoc querying capability on Web-based applications forces county employees to run manual reports.</i></p>
<p>9 Field Office computer hardware is outdated.</p> <p><i>Many components are now beyond the end of life, and spare parts are no longer available.</i></p>
<p>10 IT security policies and procedures are cumbersome.</p> <p><i>Employees are concerned about system access and password policies and procedures.</i></p>

1. USDA 2010 Service Delivery Listening Sessions

The underlying message that comes through from employees is that they need improved and modernized tools and capabilities to provide benefits and services more effectively and more efficiently. Our county office staff goes to work every day committed to carrying out USDA's mission. It is up to USDA to ensure that IT tools and business processes are there to help, and not to hinder, service delivery. Field

office employees are anchors in the farming and ranching communities that they serve, providing guidance and knowledge about USDA's portfolio of benefits to producers. As the USDA's service delivery representatives on the frontline, our employees are doing the vital work of helping to sustain agriculture as a way of life for American producers.



USDA Service Center employees work on Geographic Information System (GIS) maps to assist a county producer

2. USDA’s Strategy for Enhancing Service Delivery

USDA is committed to improving the delivery of services and benefits to producers and providing the best resources and tools available to our field office employees to support the delivery of those services and benefits. Because of this commitment and effort towards business modernization and process improvement, the Department has implemented and embraced continuous process improvements methodologies within several agencies to support the enhancement of service delivery. The strategy for addressing the service delivery challenges captured during the Listening Sessions is consistent with that ongoing approach. More specifically, we identified several “Near-Term” pain points and recommendations to be implemented within a reasonable timeframe and some pain points and recommendations to be included as a part of USDA’s long-range Modernization Initiatives.

The analysis from Listening Sessions feedback shows that 105 comments, or 10% of all comments, reflect service delivery issues that can be addressed as Near-Term projects,

and 917 comments, or 87% of all comments, reflect service delivery issues that will be addressed through longer term Modernization endeavors. The remaining 28 comments, or 3% of all comments, are not related to service delivery. (See Appendix A for a more detailed analysis of the comments.)

2.1. Near-Term Projects

Producers and Service Center employees provided several pain points and recommendations that support fundamental business process improvement opportunities. These points and recommendations were reviewed and analyzed by USDA subject matter experts. Several solutions were identified to correct or improve the captured dissatisfaction or pain point within a reasonable and compressed timeframe.

The table below reflects those pain points and recommendations captured during the Listening Sessions that were resolved as of December 2010.

Table 5

Near-Term Project Pain Points Captured - 2010 Listening Sessions Feedback

Pain Point/Recommendation	Near-Term Project Solution
FSA Service Center employees requested training on Activity Reporting System (ARS).	USDA, FSA provided implementation instructions and a series of Aglearn training videos for the new Activity Reporting System.
Newsletters and fact sheets are not easy to read.	USDA implemented an enhanced review process for all newsletters and fact sheets to ensure they are user-friendly. USDA issued instructions to State Offices and Service Center employees on the use of the Visual Design Standards Guide and newsletter and fact sheet templates. These tools and guides will help USDA employees to develop user-friendly newsletters and other public information materials.
Producers require information about the prompt payment interest policy for Milk Income Loss Compensation (MILC) Program.	The prompt payment interest policy for the Milk Income Loss Compensation Program was communicated to the producers, and the prompt payment interest rate policies are documented within the appropriate policy manuals and handbooks to assist and remind Service Center employees of the policies.
Service Center employees were delayed in issuing MILC payments and/or collecting MILC overpayments or issuing refunds because the offices lack the correction software to support this business action.	USDA released the MILC correction software nationwide in June 2010, and further enhancements to the software were released in October 2010.
The Service Center employees requested that they be included in the end user testing of software before nationwide deployment.	USDA included Service Center employees in recent software testing of FSA programs as a part of the Remote Access Pilot project. USDA plans to continue to utilize this process for future software testing.
Service Center employees requested the capability to access their systems, printers, and files remotely via their Government-issued laptops or other mobile devices.	USDA provided technology and authority to Service Center employees for remote access.

Continued on next page

Table 5 (Continued)

Near-Term Project Pain Points Captured - 2010 Listening Sessions Feedback

Pain Point/Recommendation	Near-Term Project Solution
Software developers are not sufficiently aware of the current business environment in the Service Center.	USDA's FSA Information Technology Services Division staff visited several Service Centers in September 2010 to observe, review, and analyze current business processes and IT-related support tools to gather information that will help identify future IT-related needs and support to provide better delivery of services and benefits to our producers. Subsequent visits to other Service Centers will continue through calendar year 2011.
Producers and Service Center staff suggested USDA consider making more forms and documents acceptable by fax and/or electronic signature to save producers' travel time to Service Centers.	USDA's FSA reviewed existing farm program forms and application policies to determine which forms, documents, and applications are not approved for fax or scanned signatures. Most of the forms, documents, and application were acceptable by fax or electronic signature. Any forms, documents, or applications that cannot be accepted with an electronic signature or by fax are under further review.
Field Office employees expressed their concern and support for including them in the planning and designing of USDA's Modernization projects.	USDA's FSA recently completed a nationwide recruitment initiative to hire 12 FSA Field Office employees to join the MIDAS project office staff. In addition to the newly hired field office employees, the MIDAS Project Office developed a strategy for executing a Change Agent (Champion) Network to support the development and deployment of MIDAS. The Change Agent Network execution is expected to begin in early 2011.
Producers and Service Center employees expressed frustration and concerns with the automatic/electronic mailing of incorrect notification and demand letters.	USDA's FSA reviewed and amended the process for sending demand letters/notification letters to producers in June 2010. Service Center employees have the ability to review or modify demand and notification letters before they are sent to producers. This will decrease the number of inaccurate notification and demand letters that are being sent.
Service Center employees requested clarification of the approval and training to use the chat/live meeting feature within the Microsoft Office suite.	USDA provides Aglearn training for using Microsoft Live Meeting functionality and tools. This training and functionality is available to all USDA employees. The FSA conducted Webinar classroom training for Microsoft Live Meeting training in December 2010.
Service Center employees requested SharePoint training.	USDA provides Aglearn training and instructions for using SharePoint as a collaboration tool. Employees are encouraged to take the Aglearn training. The FSA is planning to conduct additional training to support what is provided within Aglearn.
The USDA's FSA Farm Loan producer payment reminders do not include the county office address.	USDA's FSA has enhanced the farm loan software to include the county office addresses on the reminder letters.
The FSA Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) CCC-770 program checklist form is cumbersome and redundant.	USDA modified the CCC-770 form to reduce redundancy and time to fill out the 770 checklist.
The FSA policy requirement to manually write "By" or "For" on forms is inefficient and increases compliance issues and improper payment findings.	USDA's FSA modified forms to include the "By" or "For" indicator in the signature blocks. This eliminates the requirement to manually enter this information, thus reducing the number of cited errors for not having it included on the form.
FSA Signature Authority policies require Service Center staff to spend many hours interpreting various legal (entity and corporation) documents, which results in major delays, errors, and customer dissatisfaction due to the excessive wait times.	USDA's FSA modified the Signature Authority policy and the CCC-902 form to address this issue.

2. USDA's Strategy for Enhancing Service Delivery

In addition to the completed pain points and recommendations implemented in Table 5 above, there are several other ongoing Near-Term projects. Other Near-Term projects include:

- **Secretary Disaster Designation process.** USDA is reviewing the Secretary Disaster designation process to identify and implement policy changes to reduce the time for the Secretary of Agriculture to declare a disaster by 80%, to standardize the process between States, and to simplify and streamline the process by eliminating non-value-added tasks.
- **Reduction of Number of Web Time-Out Occurrences.** Service Center employees currently deliver programs using multiple systems, including programs involving extensive data entry via the Internet/Web. In many instances, Service Center employees experience loss of data entry due to time-out issues for those programs. Service Center employees are then required to re-enter the data, which is time consuming. USDA is in the process of modifying the current information technology to address this issue. The technology enhancement is expected to be deployed in 2011.



A USDA Service Center employee provides information to a producer at the counter

- **Simplification of USDA Farm Program forms.** In general, producers and Service Center employees expressed general concerns about the complexity of USDA program applications and forms. The top five forms included the *Average Adjusted Gross Income Statement*, CCC-926 form; the *Farm Operating Plan*, CCC-902 form; *The Report of Acreage*, FSA-578 form; *Request for Farm Reconstitution*, CCC-155 form; and *The Request for Cost Shares*, AD-245 form.

USDA is currently reviewing its inventory of forms and has already taken action to modify the Average Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) Statement, CCC-926 form. USDA's FSA formed a team of program experts to review the AGI-CCC-926 form. The team modified the form by simplifying the language, improving the flow of questions and clarified specific policy rules that were listed within a question. It also expanded the instructions for completing the forms. The team recently conducted a pilot project involving approximately 12 different Service Center offices in 12 different States, and 136 producers participated. The goal of the business process improvement effort was to meet a 50% reduction in the time spent by producers and by staff in discussing the form. The pilot project results were analyzed, and results indicated 86% reduction in time and a 91% customer satisfaction rating with the modified form. FSA is planning to deploy the form nationwide in early 2011.

- **Improvement of processing speed of Service Center personal computers during the initial log-on process.** USDA's Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO), Information Technology Services (ITS) is addressing existing IT platform issues that will increase the processing speed to improve the initial log-on process. OCIO-ITS plans to deploy this process improvement in 2011.
- **Implementation of Employee Suggestion system.** USDA's FSA is reviewing the existing employee suggestion program to identify opportunities to improve the program. FSA is planning to modify the program in 2011.

- **Improvement of USDA's FSA Notices process.** USDA's FSA is reviewing the pain points and recommendations that were captured during the Listening Session tour. FSA implemented the recommendation to establish a Task Force comprised of FSA Field Office employees to review Agency Notices before they are release nationwide for execution. However, FSA management is planning to conduct a comprehensive process improvement project to simplify and streamline the process to eliminate redundancy and multiple nationwide releases that lead to a great amount of extra work to be performed by field office employees.
- **Sharing of Acreage Reporting Data Among USDA Agencies (FSA and RMA).** Several comments were also received regarding USDA's inability to share acreage reporting data between agencies, especially FSA and RMA. The issue concerning the Department's inability to share producer acreage data between agencies, as appropriate, was not a new frustration or pain point. Fortunately, USDA has been actively working towards resolving this issue prior to the Listening Sessions. USDA established an interagency team to lead the Acreage/Crop Reporting Streamlining Initiative (ACRSI). This initiative will directly respond to the single-most frequently heard recommendation from the 2010 Listening Session tour, which is to have a common USDA framework for producer commodity (acreage) reporting in support of all USDA programs.

2.2. Modernization

Modernization of USDA's IT infrastructure and application technology will be accomplished in phases that will incrementally overhaul our outdated systems and business processes and replace them with a unified architecture that knits together mission-focused solutions within a secure computing environment.

While we work toward accomplishing the goals of modernization, USDA is also implementing urgently needed improvements through short projects in the near term. These efforts are focused narrowly on pain points that can be corrected or minimized effectively in a compressed time frame.

In response to deep-seated service delivery challenges, USDA has launched a comprehensive strategic plan to modernize the existing information technology and business framework. As an outcome of modernization, USDA will

create a more customer-focused environment in which our workforce has the modern tools and the business processes it needs to deliver vital services to farmers, ranchers, and producers. This transformation will streamline processes, trim out unnecessary and wasteful practices, and refresh our technology. We recognize that the can-do attitude, local connectedness, and program knowledge of our employees are at the heart of our service delivery tradition.

FSA is undertaking numerous strategic improvement initiatives to upgrade business delivery systems, financial services and the underlying infrastructure, needed to support staff and customers. For example:

- FSA has launched the MIDAS program to meet the needs of our customers, USDA, and stakeholders. The objective of MIDAS is to streamline FSA business processes and to develop an effective long-term IT system and enterprise architecture for Farm Program delivery.
- FSA continues to modernize the delivery of farm loan programs by transforming the IT environment and service capabilities through the Farm Loan Programs Information & Delivery System (FLPIDS).

We are also working with other agencies:

- In partnership with USDA's Food and Nutrition Service and Agricultural Marketing Service, FSA is modernizing processes for commodity sales, bids, and other aspects of Commodity Operations' important work through Web-based Supply Chain Management (WBSCM).



An IBM System/36/AS/400 in a USDA Service Center office

2. USDA's Strategy for Enhancing Service Delivery

- Improvements are being made to budget and financial controls through the Departmentwide Financial Management Modernization Initiative (FMFI), which will increase efficiencies in FSA's finances while reducing errors, and through the Budget and Performance Management System (BPMS), which aims to improve the ability to conduct budget and performance assessments, pushing the agency to become more results driven.
- To further improve data collection and reporting methods, FSA is utilizing enterprise information management for Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data, digitizing and collecting aerial mapping data gathered under the National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP) and creating a single source of integrated data under the Enterprise Data Warehouse (EDW) initiative, a new capital investment that is currently in development.
- Collaboration, communication, and increased productivity are being supported through the United Communication's program, which is an integrated set of user communication services to include Web Conferencing, Audio Conferencing, Unified Messaging, Instant Messaging, Desktop Video, and Tele-presence.
- To further protect customer data, USDA is providing a centralized, common, robust security framework across the Department through the Agriculture Security Operations Center (ASOC).
- IT costs and improved customer system performance are being supported by implementing new services through the Enterprise Data Center (EDC) initiatives.
- To modernize and upgrade the core Service Center computing infrastructure, USDA OCIO is implementing the Optimized Computing Environment (OCE) for end-user support and hosting services to 45,000+ Service Center Agency (SCA) staff.

- And finally, initiation and use of best practice governance and strategic planning processes will help USDA to manage, coordinate, and optimize the business practices essential to modernizing USDA's business process and IT environment.

From a producer's perspective, the overall results of USDA's Modernization Initiatives will yield the benefits outlined in Table 6 below.

Table 6

USDA's Modernization Benefits for Producers

1	Faster Service – Advanced technology provides for faster and more efficient services to help producers get in and out of the county offices quicker.
2	Improved Access and Convenience – Producers will be able to conduct USDA business at any hour of the day using new Web-based systems from any location, including any USDA Service Center location. This will reduce the number of trips made to service centers, saving gas and time.
3	More and Improved Information – Producers will be able to monitor application status, approvals, estimate payment dates and amounts, and receive real-time information and alerts.
4	Reduced Paperwork and Increased Security – New technology will minimize the amount of redundant information that needs to be provided. Personal and financial information will be securely guarded.
5	Faster Implementation – Legislative mandates and farm programs will be implemented on a shorter timeframe. Standardized development practices will make program start-ups smoother, with better information available on day one. New program benefits will be delivered faster.

From the perspective of our employees in the Service Centers, modernization will provide our staff with the tools it needs to continue to provide exceptional service. A short list of targeted improvements for our staff in the field is provided in Table 7.

Table 7

USDA's Modernization Benefits for Service Center Employees

<p>1 State-of-the-art Functionality – Robust commercial software will provide the capability to meet complex business needs 24/7.</p>
<p>2 Effective and Efficient Business Processes – New technology will automate and streamline business processes, reduce manual steps, and provide increased online capabilities. Employees will no longer use different systems to access the applications and information they need to do their work.</p>
<p>3 Access to Reliable, Timely, and Consistent Data – Data sharing among agencies will eliminate redundant data entry. Employees will be able to tap into real-time information when they need it.</p>
<p>4 People + Process + Technology – Modernization links people + process + technology. The “people” part of this equation is honored through better training, better (two-way) communication, and more opportunities for collaboration.</p>
<p>5 More Time to Provide Valuable Service – Better technology and faster processes will free up time to do what Service Center employees do best – provide knowledgeable counsel about services options that fit the local and personal needs of producers.</p>



The equipment room at a USDA Service Center office

3. Conclusion

The 2010 Listening Session tour provided great feedback and information in support of our approach to FSA farm programs modernization efforts. Producers and Service Center staff in 10 States took time to meet personally with our team and to describe the pain points that they experience with USDA's service delivery environment.

Our team heard firsthand about the impacts caused by out-moded technology, poorly integrated programs and applications, complex forms, and inefficient business processes. Producers and staff alike made a number of welcome recommendations for time and dollar-saving improvements.

The insights we receive from the field are critical inputs to our short-, mid- and long-term modernization projects. The more we understand and accommodate the business needs of producers and our staff, the more we increase our ability to deploy policies, programs, systems, and processes that make good business sense in the field.

USDA is committed to making measurable and steady improvements in the service delivery environment, and we have a sound strategy for business transformation and modernization. Our approach is critically dependent upon taking the requirements of our staff, and the producers we serve, and turning those requirements into field-ready results.



Appendix A: Analysis of the 2010 Listening Session Data

The USDA Listening Session team visited with producers and field office employees in 22 separate meetings in North Carolina, Virginia, Wisconsin, Indiana, Iowa, Texas, New Mexico, Minnesota, Montana, and Arkansas.

At each session, participants were encouraged to share their pain points with the current delivery of farm services and to recommend improvements. A total of 1,050 comments were collected by our team.

Employee and producer comments can be categorized into two basic themes.

The first theme is **Information Technology (IT)**. Service delivery is constrained by outdated hardware and software, by systems that can't communicate with each other, and by limited online capability—511 comments, or 49% of all comments, relate to IT.

The second theme is **Business Improvement**. In general, producers and field office staff indicate that current processes, policies, and procedures are burdened by unnecessary and confusing complexity. This level of complexity impedes efficiency and productivity-- 539 comments, or 51% of all comments, are attributed to Business Improvement.

Within the Business Improvement category, an analysis of the comments received from producers and employees shows a further topical breakdown: **Programs/Policies, Communications, Forms, and Training**.

Generally speaking, comments related to **Programs/Policies** relate to cumbersome complexity of program requirements. In this category, a total of 319 comments were collected, representing 30% of all comments.

Problems with **Communications**, both within the USDA, and between USDA and producers, are highlighted in comments relate to the lack of timely and effective communications. Comments related to Communications account for 154 of all comments, or 15 percent.

Comments related to **Forms** generally indicate dissatisfaction with complex and redundant forms, and the lack of online forms. A total of 34 comments relate to Forms, or 3% of all comments.

A total of 32 comments related to the need for timely and effective **Training** were collected, representing 3% of all comments.

An analysis of the data resulted in 10% being categorized as inputs to Near-Term Projects and 87% as inputs to Modernization Initiatives. A total of 28 comments shared with our team has been categorized as **Not Related to Service Delivery**. Representing about 3% of the total, these comments are relevant to Communications, but do not fall within the scope of service delivery and/or cannot be addressed by improvements to service delivery. Comments in this category are valued by USDA as indicators of other concerns or issues that require consideration by experts outside the field of service delivery. Feedback in this category is forwarded to the appropriate authorities and subject matter experts within USDA.

The categorization of the data derived from the 2010 Listening Sessions data is shown in Table A-1 on the following page.

Appendix A: Analysis of the 2010 Listening Session Data

Table A-1

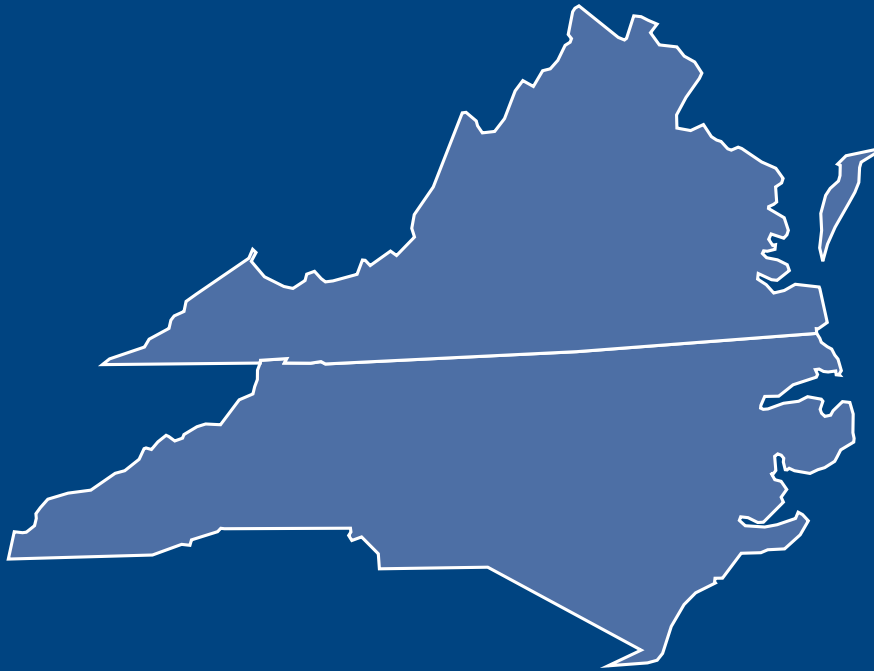
Common Themes Reflected in Listening Session Data

Common Themes Reflected in 2010 Listening Session Comments									
					Near-Term Projects		MODERNIZATION		
Theme		Number of Comments by Theme	Percentage by Theme	Number of Comments Not Related to Service Delivery	Percentage Of Total Comments Not Related to Service Delivery	Number of Comments Logged as Near-Term Requirements for Service Delivery Improvement	Percentage of Total Comments Logged as Near-Term Requirements for Service Delivery Improvement	Number of Comments Logged as Modernization Requirements for Service Delivery Improvement	Percentage of Comments Logged as Modernization Requirements for Service Delivery Improvement
1	Information Technology (IT)	511	49.00%	0	0.00%	32	3.05%	479	45.62%
2	Business Improvement	539	51.00%	28	2.67%	73	6.95%	438	41.71%
	Business Improvement: Programs/Policies	319	30.00%	0	0.00%	34	3.24%	285	27.14%
	Business Improvement: Communications	154	15.00%	28	2.67%	23	2.19%	103	9.81%
	Business Improvement: Forms	34	3.00%	0	0.00%	11	1.05%	23	2.19%
	Business Improvement: Training	32	3.00%	0	0.00%	5	0.48%	27	2.57%
	TOTALS	1050	100.00%	28	3.00%	105	10.00%	917	87.00%

Appendix B: Listening Session Descriptions

Note: In the following sections, a summary of the comments captured at each of the 2010 Listening Sessions is provided by location. The comment details are available upon request. Contact Kim Graham, MIDAS Deputy Director for Change Management and Communication: kimberly.graham@wdc.usda.gov.

1 North Carolina and Virginia



Appendix B: Listening Session Descriptions

1. North Carolina and Virginia

1.1. USDA Service Center Employee Listening Session - Pasquotank, Camden, and Currituck Service Center, NC, February 25, 2010

The USDA CIO and the FSA Administrator heard firsthand from USDA Service Center employees serving Pasquotank, Camden, and Currituck counties about the challenges that they face. Current program policies, handbooks, and procedures are overly complex and cumbersome. Too much required paperwork and too many forms create time-wasting inefficiencies, while outdated technology hampers employees' ability to serve their customers effectively. Employees cited the inconvenience of having to use multiple passwords to access different applications and the fact that the same data fields have to be entered multiple times within and between forms. The inability of the current FSA and RMA systems to share standardized acreage reporting data adds to the manual workload of Service Center employees and results in data discrepancies and inconsistent results. The current technology has limited search, querying, tracking, error-flagging, and reporting capabilities. Employee access to accurate real-time data - for example, eligibility data - is also limited.

The Service Center employees detailed the pain points associated with the way that new programs are currently rolled out to the field. They noted a lack of input from field office staff in the development of policy and IT services. As in the case of the SURE program, when policies are finalized after programs are rolled out, the impact in the field includes additional workload, increase risk for errors, and extra forms. Staff members expressed the need for more timely information on new sign-ups and other policy changes, and training at the district level. They also recommended more effective marketing of programs overall.

Employees shared that many producers still want to come to the county office to interact with staff in person; however, the staff also made clear that the current way of doing business is not keeping pace with producers' needs for business convenience, real-time information, and time-saving efficiency. In general, it was noted that programs, policies, and forms are overly complex, sometimes intimidating – in short, not producer-friendly. The outmoded USDA technology infrastructure does not allow producers to leverage online capabilities (such as uploading farm data directly from automated farm equipment, or accessing acreage reports online), which costs producers extra time and effort.

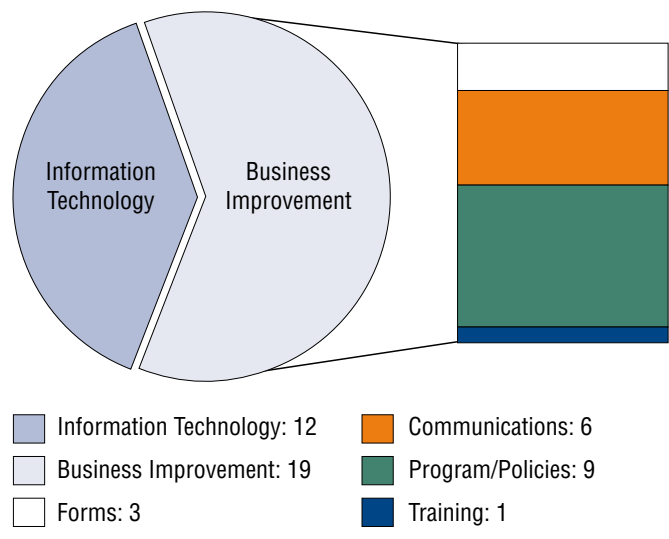
The employees recommended a number of improvements, including providing automated error warnings, enabling the county office to achieve its 100% accuracy goal and eliminating the CCC-927 and CCC-928 forms as requirements for AGI compliance.

1.1.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 31 comments were recorded during the Listening Session. Employees' pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 12 comments (39%), and Business Improvement, 19 comments (61%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers' feedback in the areas of Forms, 3 comments (10%); Communications, 6 comments (19%); Program/Policies, 9 comments (29%); and Training, 1 comment (3%). A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B3 below.

Figure B-3

Comments by Theme – Employees, Pasquotank, Camden, and Currituck, NC



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations, and determined that 2 of the comments (6%) received during our session with the Pasquotank, Camden, and Currituck county office employees may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 29 comments (94%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA's longer term Modernization Initiatives.

1.1.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Employee Listening Session at the Pasquotank, Camden, and Currituck Service Center are listed in Table B-2 below.

Table B-2

USDA and FSA Listening Session Team, Pasquotank, Camden, and Currituck Service Center, NC

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Charles McClam	Deputy Chief Information Officer, USDA
Karis Gutter	Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, FSA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Patrick Hanley	Associate Chief Information Officer, USDA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Wanda Swann	Assistant to the Chief Information Officer, USDA
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

1.2. Producer Listening Session – Franklin, VA, February 25, 2010

Cotton and peanut producers gathered with the Listening Session Team to provide feedback on their experience with USDA service delivery.

The producers spoke to the need for easier access to more timely, accurate, and detailed information about their business transactions with USDA, both from their local county office and online. They observed that the computers in the county offices are outdated and slow, and that sometimes the staff is not able to provide prompt or consistent information. They expressed interest in electronic notifications (via e-mail, PDAs, etc.), telephone reminders, and online access to payment history and to farm records and maps. Broad-band connectivity is limited in rural areas, and the producers recommended that USDA implement a program to provide affordable Internet connectivity.

Producers conveyed their frustration with the number of forms required to obtain farm program benefits and the complex and often confusing questions on the forms. The fact that FSA currently restricts multi-county producers to doing business with the administrative county only was also noted as an inconvenience. Producers urged USDA to make it possible to do business from any county office.

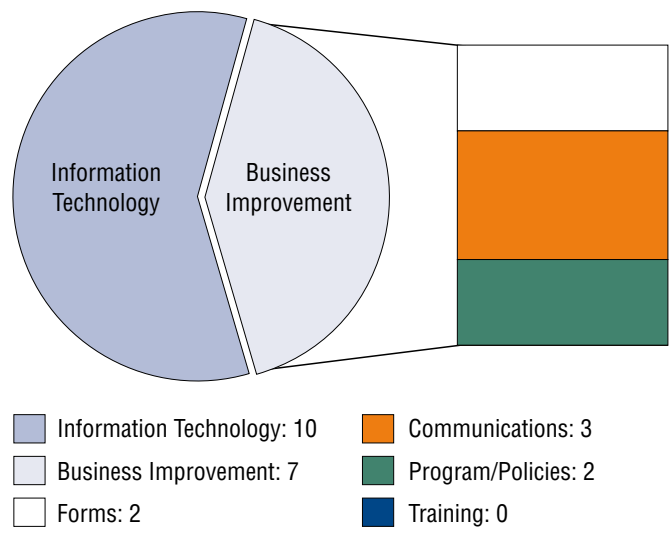
The producers made a number of recommendations for on-line services, including the capability to view fully detailed transaction statements and the ability to access farm maps online. They also suggested providing computer kiosks in the county office for producers to use.

1.2.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 17 comments were recorded during the Franklin, VA, Listening Session. Producers’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 10 comments (59%), and Business Improvement, 7 comments (41%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Forms, 2 comments (12%); Communications, 3 comments (18%); and Program/Policies, 2 comments (12%). No comments were recorded in the area of Training. A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-4 below.

Figure B-4

Comments by Theme – Producers, Franklin, VA



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. We determined that 1 of the comments (6%) received during our session with the producers in Franklin, VA, may be resolved through a Near-Term Project. The remaining 16 comments (94%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

1.2.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Employee Listening Session in Franklin, VA, are listed in Table B-3 below.

Table B-3

USDA Listening Session Team, Franklin, VA	
Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Charles McClam	Deputy Chief Information Officer, USDA
Karis Gutter	Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, FSA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Patrick Hanley	Associate Chief Information Officer, USDA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Wanda Swann	Assistant to the Chief Information Officer, USDA
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

1.3. USDA Service Center Employee Listening Session, Southampton County Service Center, VA, February 26, 2010

The last stop on the North Carolina - Virginia Listening Tour was spent in the Southampton County Service Center in Courtland, VA, where employees communicated their pain points and made recommendations for improving the business environment.

Employees indicated that the functional limitations of the current technology create frustrating bottlenecks in service delivery and have hindered the efficient rollout of the SURE program. The office computers are slow, monitors are inadequately sized for effective GIS work, and the current USDA Web-based programs are not user-friendly. USDA does not currently have the technology available to capture data in the field, for example, by laptop or mobile GPS. The staff stated that it is not possible to get real-time information on the status of Web-based subsidiary files, making it difficult to track multi-county producer pay limits. Some of the current applications are inflexible; for example any change made in the farm records causes Direct and Counter-Cyclical Payment Program (DCP) contracts and other contracts to cancel out, forcing producers to re-sign. Erroneous demand letters are generated and mailed to producers from Kansas City, causing extra work for county staff.

Other challenges stem from current cumbersome programs, policies, business procedures, and forms. Employees reported that handbooks are difficult to navigate, eligibility and compliance requirements are complex, and forms are confusing. The employees also pointed out county office staff lack effective and timely training and often do not have timely access to the program information that their customers need.

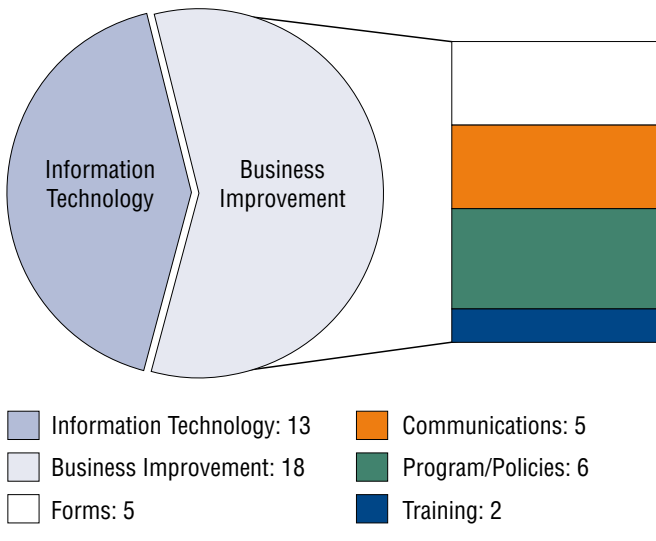
The employees offered insightful recommendations for curing many of these pain points. In particular, they recommended that county staff be consulted in the design and development of software and forms. This would ensure that the end results were more “user-friendly,” both for staff and for producers. This recommendation has already been implemented by the MIDAS modernization initiative. A group of 12 field office staff members has joined the MIDAS project team to help guide the design of smart and streamlined business processes.

1.3.1. Listening Session Analysis

Employees of the Southampton County Service Center made a total of 31 comments. Thirteen comments were related broadly to Information Technology (42%). The remaining 18 pain points and recommendations, or 58% of all comments, were related broadly to Business Improvement. The comments related to Business Improvement reflected on the areas of Forms, 5 comments (16%); Communications, 5 comments (16%); Program/Policies, 6 comments (19%); and Training, 2 comments (6%). A breakdown of the comments is provided in Figure B-5 below.

Figure B-5

Comments by Theme – Employees, Southampton County, VA



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. We determined that 8 of the comments (26%) received during our session with the employees in Southampton County, VA, may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 23 comments (74%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

1.3.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Employee Listening Session at the Southampton County Service Center, VA, are listed in Table B-4 below.

Table B-4

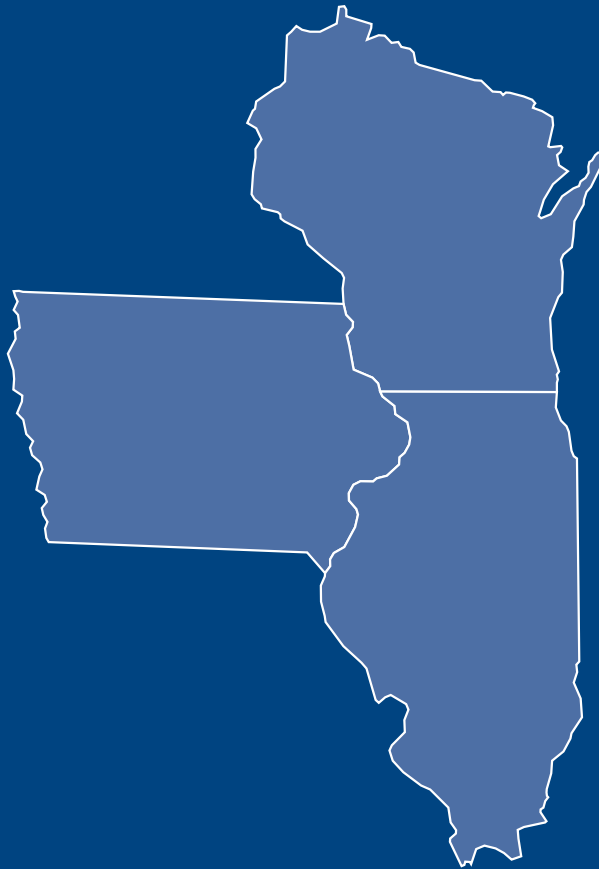
USDA Listening Session Team, Southampton County Service Center, VA

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Charles McClam	Deputy Chief Information Officer, USDA
Karis Gutter	Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, FSA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Patrick Hanley	Associate Chief Information Officer, USDA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Wanda Swann	Assistant to the Chief Information Officer, USDA
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project



A USDA Service Center employee enters data into an IBM System/36/AS/400 at a county office

2 Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa



2. Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa

2.1. Producer Listening Session - Madison, WI, April 7, 2010

In early April, our Listening Session team travelled to Wisconsin, one of the top ten agricultural States in the Nation. We met first with producers in Madison, who shared their views on the USDA’s service delivery environment.

Producers noted that information on farm programs in general is sometimes difficult to understand and to obtain. The county office staff often doesn’t have timely and accurate program information. In particular, new program sign-up information is difficult to come by, either on USDA’s website, which tends to be confusing, or in the county office.

Producers expressed concerns about specific farm programs, including MILC, ACRE, and SURE. For example, numerous revisions to SURE policies have caused problems for producers who cannot be certain of the payment amounts they are eligible to receive. Producers also noted SURE program payment delays. Producers expressed their frustration with the lack of transaction details on payment statements.

From the Wisconsin producers’ perspective, service delays often stem from poorly performing or underused technology. Servers at the county offices often go down during peak sign-up periods. The lack of interagency data sharing (for example, crop insurance data) causes extra and redundant work. USDA doesn’t make the best use of email to notify and inform producers. More online capabilities are needed, for example, online acreage reporting certification capability, the ability to use maps online and automated program sign-ups for landlords.

The current state of service delivery was characterized by the producers as suffering from “too much bureaucracy.” This impression is only reinforced by the complicated paperwork that is required for certification. The need for 14 pages to certify a 4-acre farm is just one example that producers cited of overly complex paperwork.

To improve their access to timely information, the producers recommended better communications, including email, text messaging, and phone reminders. Suggestions also

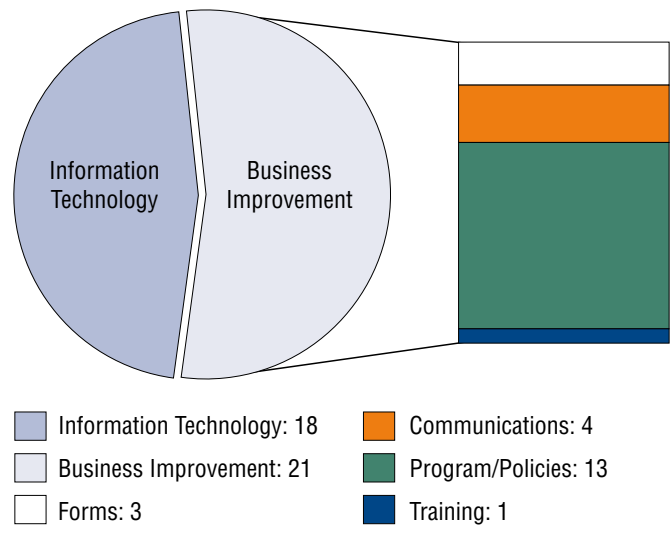
included the ability for one-time lease sign-ups which update automatically, and the online capability for landlords to do program sign-ups.

2.1.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 39 comments were recorded during the Madison, WI, Listening Session. Producers’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 18 comments (46%), and Business Improvement, 21 comments (54%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Forms, 3 comments (8%); Communications, 4 comments (10%); Program/Policies, 13 comments (33%), and Training, 1 comment (3%). A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-6 below.

Figure B-6

Comments by Theme – Producers, Madison, WI



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. We determined that two of the comments (5%) recorded during our session with producers in Madison, WI, may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 37 comments (95%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

2.1.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Producer Listening Session in Madison, WI, are listed in Table B-5 below.

Table B-5

USDA Listening Session Team, Producer Listening Session, Madison WI

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Charles McClam	Deputy Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

2.2. Employee Listening Session – Rock County FSA County Office, WI, April 7, 2010

The Listening Session team was welcomed by field office staff at the Rock County Service Center in Janesville, WI.

In discussing the challenges that they cope with on a daily basis, the staff expressed frustrations with the aging computing resources in the field. Computers are slow to boot up, and applications get slower as the day progresses. Applications time out, forcing employees to start their data entry tasks all over again. Staff must use multiple passwords to log into different applications. A lack of integration between financial and program applications forces staff to go in and out of applications to access and reference the information they need. Computer uptime and reliability are very real problems.

Being on the front line of service delivery, the Wisconsin field office employees noted that USDA IT improvements need to be designed with a hands-on understanding of how

programs are administered. Many current applications just aren't user-friendly. For example, the majority of applications pull up producer records by farm numbers, but most producers don't keep their farm numbers handy.

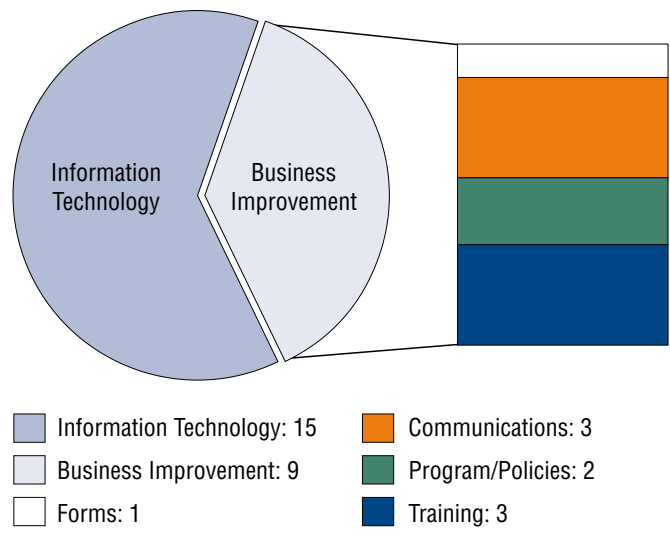
These insights are valuable and will help USDA deploy smart and efficient IT and business improvements. Our MIDAS team has already recruited and detailed 12 State and county office employees as hands-on experts on what works and what doesn't work in the field. We expect that their front-line knowledge will make all the difference in shaping USDA's field office business practices in the future.

2.2.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 24 comments were recorded during the Rock County, Wisconsin, Listening Session. Employees' pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 15 comments (63%), and Business Improvement, 9 comments (38%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers' feedback in the areas of Forms, 1 comment (4%); Communications, 3 comments (13%); Program/Policies, 2 comments (8%), and Training, 3 comments (13%). A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-7 below.

Figure B-7

Comments by Theme – Employees, Rock County, WI



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. We determined that 10 of the comments (42%) recorded during our session with employees in Rock County, WI, may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 14 comments (58%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

2.2.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Employee Listening Session in Rock County, WI, are listed in Table B-6 below.

Table B-6

USDA Listening Session Team, Employee Listening Session, Janesville, WI

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Charles McClam	Deputy Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

2.3. Producer Listening Session – DeKalb County Farm Bureau, IL, April 8, 2010

Producers met with the USDA Chief Information Office and the FSA Administrator and other members of the Listening Session Team to share their pain points and recommendations for improved service delivery in DeKalb County, Illinois.

Producers are frustrated with the lack of detail on payment statements and the fact that they cannot check the status of payments online. They cannot see the breakdown by crops or by farms on the statement or online and therefore are unable to keep track of what they owe or what they expect to receive. In addition to payment information, producers indicated a desire to access a range of services and information online, for example, online crop reporting and certification capability; this is especially important since producers can’t get the information and assistance they need from the county office during non-business hours. They also expressed dissatisfaction with the online services that are currently offered; when doing online business, producers are not able to see the historical information they have already provided. Producers are too busy to keep track of old records and redundant paperwork.

The lack of uniform policies and data standards across agencies creates inefficiencies for producers. It is time consuming to have to provide the same data to each agency separately, and since the county office databases are not integrated, multi-county producers have to provide the same data repeatedly among the various offices. It is duplicative to have to provide the same information each year at the county office for sign-ups.

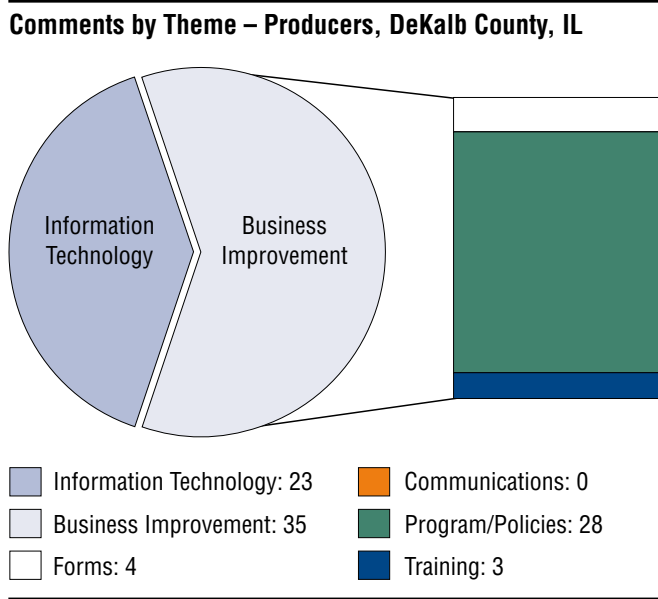
The producers indicated that ACRE and SURE programs are complex; it is hard on producers when programs, like SURE and ACRE, are implemented before the policies are finalized. They recommended training or education for producers on farm programs. They also advised the Listening Session Team that farm reconstitutions will become more common in the next 10-15 years as baby boomers retire, so USDA should consider simplifying and streamlining the farm reconstitution process.

Other areas for concern for the producers were information accuracy and information security. Information needs to be correct and needs to be safeguarded online and within the four walls of the county office.

2.3.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 58 comments were recorded during the DeKalb County, IL, Listening Session. Producers’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 23 comments (40%), and Business Improvement, 35 comments (60%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Forms, 4 comment (7%); Program/Policies, 28 comments (48%); and Training, 3 comments (5%). No comments were recorded in the area of Communications. A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-8 below.

Figure B-8



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. We determined that 8 of the comments (14%) recorded during our session with producers in DeKalb County, IL, may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 50 comments (86%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

2.3.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Producer Listening Session in DeKalb County, IL are listed in Table B-7 below.

Table B-7

USDA Listening Session Team, Producer Listening Session, DeKalb County, IL

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Charles McClam	Deputy Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

2.4. Producer Listening Session – Davenport, IA, April 8, 2010

A group of producers from the Davenport, IA, area shared their thoughts on a range of issues, including the need for more and better information resources. Producers indicated that obtaining information online is very difficult. Producers indicated that county staff lack up-to-date information on programs and producers don’t have access to all the information they need to make sound decisions about signing up for new programs. It is also frustrating that information is not always consistent between county offices.

The need to make multiple visits to county offices in multiple counties takes valuable time. Producers are obliged to provide the same data each year, without online access to their previous information. In general, required forms are too complicated and confusing.

The producers indicated that programs are sometimes rolled out before the software is complete or training is in place. They indicated that disaster programs are often rolled out too late to be effective. From the producers’ perspective, new programs should be rolled out quickly and should have full capability on day one.

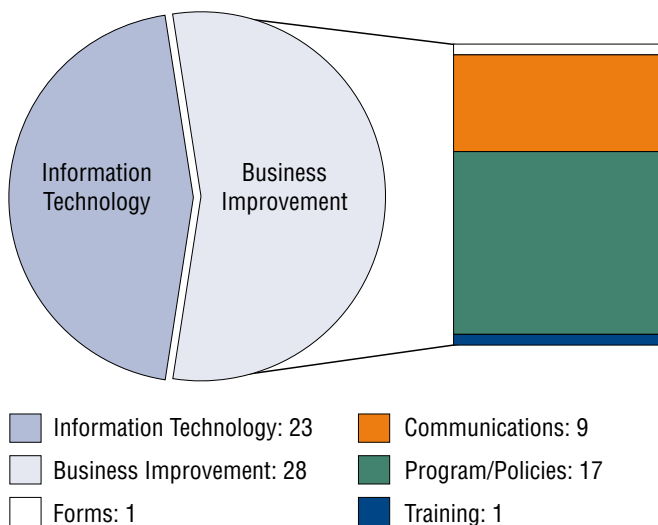
The Davenport producers made several other recommendations that can be summed up as “keep it simple” and “improve convenience.” In short, simplify forms and policies so that they are easier to understand; provide online help (24/7 real-time support) to assist producers through their transactions; provide timely, accurate, and up-to-date information.

2.4.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 51 comments were recorded during the Davenport, IA, Listening Session. Producers’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 23 comments (45%), and Business Improvement, 28 comments (55%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Forms, 1 comment (2%); Communications, 9 comments (18%); Program/Policies, 17 comments (33%), and Training, 1 comment (2%). A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-9 below.

Figure B-9

Comments by Theme – Producers, Davenport, IA



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. Two of the comments (4%) recorded during our session with producers in Davenport, IA, are not related to service delivery. These comments have been forwarded to the appropriate authorities within USDA for further consideration. Of the remaining 49 comments, we determined that 3 of the comments (6%) may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 46 comments (90%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

2.4.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Producer Listening Session in Davenport, IA, are listed in Table B-8 below.

Table B-8

USDA Listening Session Team, Producer Listening Session, Davenport, IA

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Charles McClam	Deputy Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

2.5. Employee Listening Session – Rock Island County Service Center, IL, April 9, 2010

The Listening Session team recognized many of the pain points expressed by the staff at the Rock Island County office. The employees at the Milan, IL, field office are dealing with the same challenges faced by their counterparts across the Nation.

Outdated computer resources force the staff to go back and forth between payment systems and application systems. Systems require multiple passwords, which are easy to forget. Password resets take a long time, which means a delay in getting back to work. Application timeouts are an issue when a staff member steps away from his or her computer for a just short time to help other customers – all the data is lost, and data entry must start all over again. Web applications are difficult to navigate; it is difficult to find forms and information in general.

The staff indicated that getting timely information is another pain point. Handbooks are not updated to keep up with the program/policies changes. They recommended better training for county staff, especially on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The staff recommended better marketing and education about CRP for landowners and producers.

From the standpoint of new program rollouts, the staff shared that implementation of the 2008 Farm Bill programs, in general, has not been a smooth process. Program rules have been slow to be released and then have been changed several times after release. The county staff are concerned that software is pushed out before the final policy is fully developed. Pain points currently associated with new program rollouts should be corrected with the implementation of the MIDAS initiative, since the end-to-end process for rolling out new programs will be standardized.

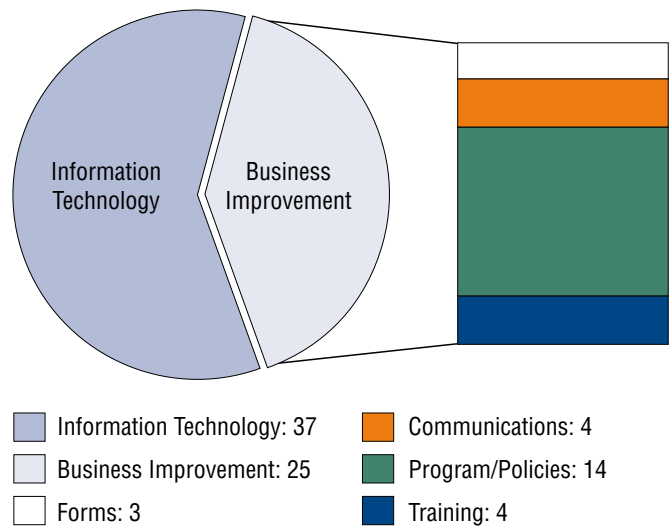
The staff also observed that there is no coordination between Washington, DC, and the county offices. The staff recommended that Washington, DC, Headquarters staff come to the field during peak program times to experience firsthand the issues that county staff faces with administering the programs. The MIDAS project has recognized the value of front-line experience and has already included 12 State and county office employees as hands-on advisors in the design and implementation of business processes.

2.5.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 62 comments were recorded during the Rock Island County, IL, Listening Session. Employees’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 37 comments (60%), and Business Improvement, 25 comments (40%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Forms, 3 comments (5%); Communications, 4 comments (6%); Program/Policies, 14 comments (23%), and Training, 4 comments (6%). A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-10 below.

Figure B-10

Comments by Theme – Employees, Rock Island County, IL



Appendix B: Listening Session Descriptions

Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. One of the comments (2%) recorded during our session with employees in Rock Island County, IL, is not related to service delivery. This comment has been forwarded to the appropriate authorities within USDA for further consideration. Of the remaining 61 comments, we determined that 13 of the comments (21%) may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 48 comments (77%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA's longer term Modernization Initiatives.

2.5.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Employee Listening Session in Rock Island County, IL, are listed in Table B-9 below.

Table B-9

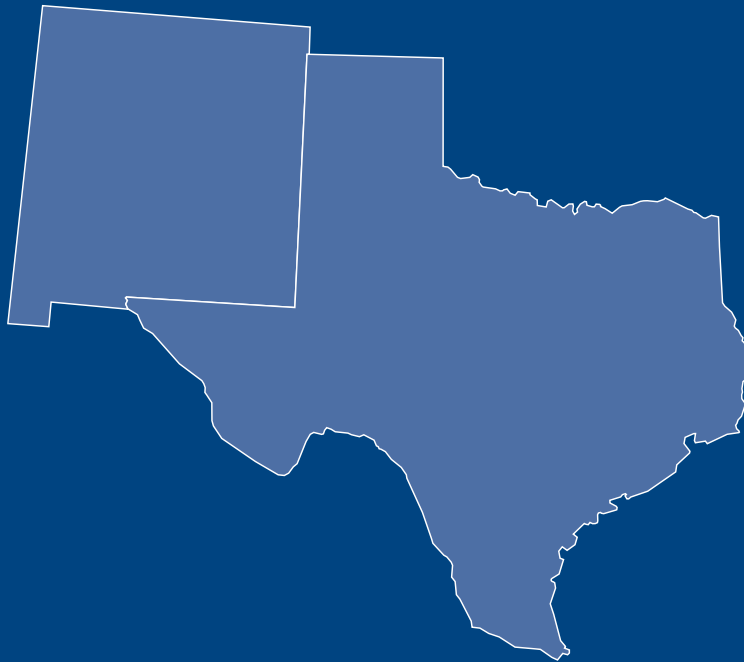
USDA Listening Session Team, Employee Listening Session, Rock Island County, IL

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Charles McClam	Deputy Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project



Boxes of paper files at a Service Center office

3 Texas and New Mexico



3. Texas and New Mexico

3.1. Producer Listening Session – Agrilife Extension Center, Amarillo, TX, April 20, 2010

Producers from the High Plains gathered at Texas A&M’s Agrilife Extension Center to share recommendations to cure the pain points that are currently hurting USDA’s service delivery model.

First and foremost, they recommended that we simplify the rules, forms, and policies. There is too much paperwork and too many hoops to jump through to sign up for programs. This includes too much paperwork for county office staff, especially when it comes to administering the SURE program.

Communications should be improved. The Amarillo producers advised that Washington, DC, staff should communicate better with the county offices about new program rollouts before producers come in for sign-up. Newsletters should be simpler, to the point, and easier to read. Producers would like to receive email notifications, with the ability to access the same information online. They also recommended that USDA send notifications to landlords providing them with frequent status updates, for example sign-ups, applications, and payment status.

To further improve efficiency, the producers recommended that USDA’s agencies integrate their policies and their data so that the same producer is not obliged to provide the same data to multiple agencies.

Producers strongly recommended that current online resources be improved and that online services be greatly expanded. The FSA Website is not user-friendly. Producers are not confident about submitting information online since forms and information requested are currently so confusing and complex. The website should be improved so that it is easier to use, with localized sites to cater to local needs. Terminology on forms should be made simpler to understand, allowing producers to complete forms online without having to go into the county office for assistance. In fact, the producers recommended that USDA make it possible to do a full range of transactions online, including online acreage reporting, crop certification, sign-up, automatic enrollment, and renewal for

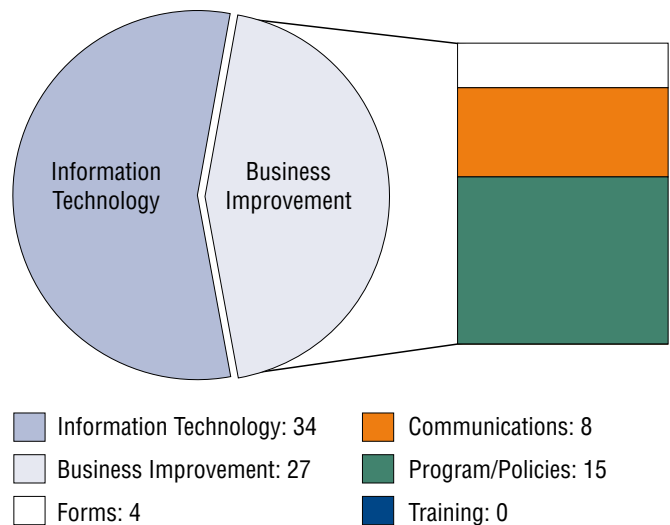
the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), DCP payments, and AGI forms. As much as they would like to have the ability to do more online, however, the producers recommended that the county offices stay open.

3.1.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 61 comments were recorded during the Amarillo, TX, Listening Session. Producers’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 34 comments (56%), and Business Improvement, 27 comments (44%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Forms, 4 comments (7%); Communications, 8 comments (13%); and Program/Policies, 15 comments (25%). No comments were recorded in the area of Training. A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-11 below.

Figure B-11

Comments by Theme – Producers, Amarillo, TX



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. We determined that five of the comments (8%) recorded during our session with producers in Amarillo, TX, may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 56 comments (92%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

3.1.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Producer Listening Session in Amarillo, TX, are listed in Table B-10 below.

Table B-10

USDA Listening Session Team, Producer Listening Session, Amarillo, TX

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Brandon Willis	Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, FSA
Patrick Hanley	Associate Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

3.2. Producer Listening Session – Clovis, NM, April 21, 2010

Our team traveled to the Clovis area of eastern New Mexico, home to farming, ranching, and dairy operations, to meet with local producers.

In addition to specific problems with the NAP, DCP, and MILC programs, producers expressed their general dissatisfaction with the complexity and inefficiencies associated with farm programs in general. They indicated that the amount of paperwork is excessive and that forms are too lengthy and difficult to understand. Acreage reporting is overly complicated because USDA’s agencies do

not coordinate data internally. Programs are rolled out to producers before the software and policies are finalized, and often disaster programs don’t take effect when they are truly needed. The producers recommended that USDA implement informed, consistent, clear policies, along with simplified program requirements, streamlined reporting, and minimized signature requirements.

The producers indicated that USDA’s current online resources are not easy to use and that they are pleased to have the knowledgeable, face-to-face support of the county office staff. A number of concerns were raised about the MIDAS project. There was some skepticism about the service delivery technology that will be deployed with the MIDAS implementation, and some fear that Government employees would lose their jobs as a result. The producers advised that there should be some clear objectives for MIDAS, with checkpoints along the way to ensure that the project’s objectives are being met.

The MIDAS Team is aware of these concerns and has built in a series of project checkpoints to ensure that the software will indeed provide the kind of functionality that is required, and to measure how well the project is moving toward its stated objectives. By including 12 field office staff members on the MIDAS team as hands-on participants in the design of the new product, USDA is infusing the project with an awareness of the true challenges on the front line of service delivery; as the project progresses, more field office staff members will be asked to participate. The advice from the field will help MIDAS deliver the kind of technology and business processes that the county offices and producers need.

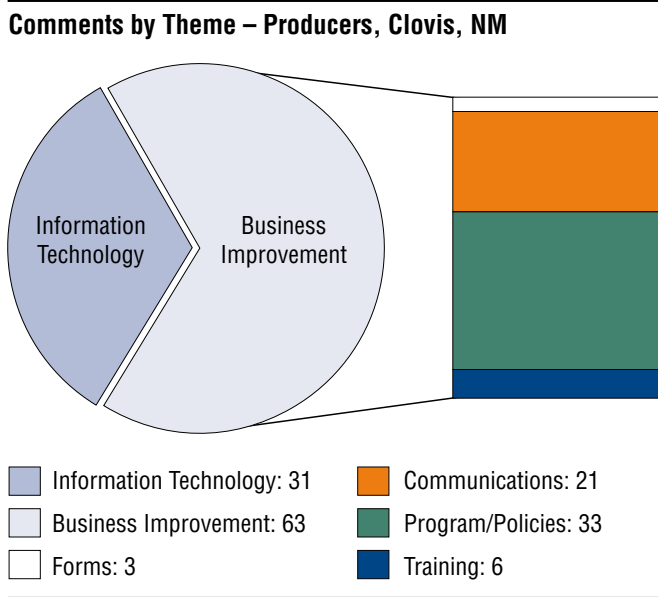


FSA handbooks

3.2.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 94 comments were recorded during the Producer Listening Session in Clovis, NM. Producers’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 31 comments (33%), and Business Improvement, 63 comments (67%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Forms, 3 comments (3%); Communications, 21 comments (22%); Program/Policies, 33 comments (35%), and Training, 6 comments (6%). A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-12 below.

Figure B-12



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. Six of the comments (6%) recorded during our session with producers in Clovis, NM, are not related to service delivery. These comments have been forwarded to the appropriate authorities within USDA for further consideration. Of the remaining 88 comments, we determined that 5 of the comments (5%) may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 83 comments (88%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

3.2.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Producer Listening Session in Clovis, NM, are listed in Table B-11 below.

Table B-11

USDA Listening Session Team, Producer Listening Session, Clovis, NM

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Brandon Willis	Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, FSA
Patrick Hanley	Associate Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

3.3. Employee Listening Session – Clovis, NM, April 21, 2010

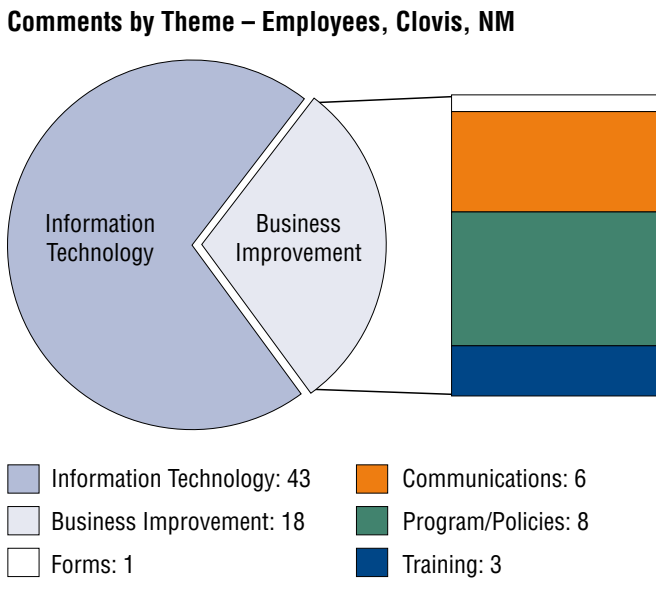
The staff of the Clovis Service Center gathered with our Listening Session Team to share their pain points and recommendations for improved service delivery in Curry County, NM. They cited a number of information technology issues. Multiple log-ins to multiple systems with different passwords, slow computers, and limited query capability are all factors that slow down the work day. They noted with frustration that making a change in farm records cancels out contracts, generates receivables and sends out erroneous demand letters to producers. Discrepancies between FSA and RMA data make acreage reporting problematic. The lack of detailed information on payment statements makes tracking payments by crop and by farm very difficult.

The employees’ recommendations included providing statements with detailed payment transaction by crop, by farm, and by county; providing the capability to run NAP reports by crop and by year; and providing the ability to bring eligibility history forward. They also recommended providing the capability to send CCC-927/928 forms to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) electronically. The employees would like to see more space and flexibility on the States’ Websites to include more local information by districts and counties. They also requested more SharePoint training so that they can maximize SharePoint resources.

3.3.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 61 comments were recorded during the Employee Listening Session in Clovis, NM. Employees’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 43 comments (70%), and Business Improvement, 18 comments (30%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Forms, 1 comment (2%); Communications, 6 comments (10%); Program/Policies, 8 comments (13%), and Training, 3 comments (5%). A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-13 below.

Figure B-13



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. One of the comments (2%) recorded during our session with employees in Clovis, NM, is not related to service delivery. This comment has been forwarded to the appropriate authorities within USDA for further consideration. Of the remaining 60 comments, we determined that 13 of the comments (21%) may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 47 comments (77%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

3.3.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Employee Listening Session in Clovis, NM, are listed in Table B-12 below.

Table B-12

USDA Listening Session Team, Employee Listening Session, Clovis, NM

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Brandon Willis	Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, FSA
Patrick Hanley	Associate Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

3.4. Producer Listening Session – Lubbock, TX, April 22, 2010

Producers from the Lubbock, TX, area joined our Listening Session team at the Agricultural Research Center to discuss their experience with USDA’s service delivery. Issues surrounding payments are a significant pain point. The current payment statements do not provide detailed transaction information, so it is difficult for producers to track their payment status. The producers recommended that USDA provide the ability to see payment transaction history online and have the option of downloading transaction information to accounting software or spreadsheets. Other online services would be beneficial, such as online Power of Attorney, and the ability to upload acreage reporting data captured using farm equipment.

Another area for concern is the development of new programs. USDA needs to roll out programs to producers in a timely fashion and to ensure that regulations and policies are implemented quickly. It is detrimental to producers when programs are rolled out before the policies are finalized. USDA is aware of this concern. One of the objectives of the MIDAS project is to standardize program roll out so that the end-to-end process is quicker and more effective.

With regard to existing programs, producers recommended more proactive data sharing and better standardization of policies between USDA’s internal agencies, including reporting and Power of Attorney policies. Also, it should be possible

Appendix B: Listening Session Descriptions

for producers to authorize county offices to release information to the Cooperative Marketing Associations (CMAs). CMAs need real-time eligibility information and access to acreage reporting to better serve the producers.

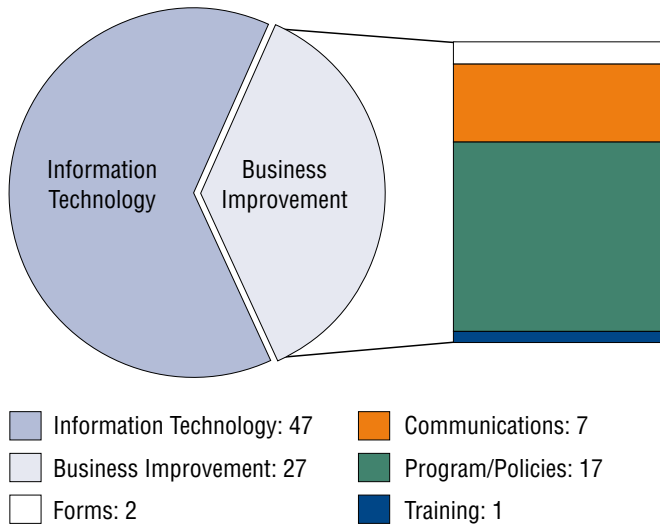
Producers indicated that while they are in favor on online convenience, the county staff should remain in place as the “go to” resource.

3.4.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 74 comments were recorded during the Lubbock, TX, Listening Session. Producers’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 47 comments (64%), and Business Improvement, 27 comments (36%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Forms, 2 comments (3%); Communications, 7 comments (9%); Program/Policies, 17 comments (23%); and Training, 1 comment (1%). A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-14 below.

Figure B-14

Comments by Theme – Producers, Lubbock, TX



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. Two of the comments (3%) recorded during our session with producers in Lubbock, TX, are not related to service delivery. These comments have been forwarded to the appropriate authorities within USDA for further consideration. Of the remaining 72 comments, we determined that 9 of the comments (12%) may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 63 comments (85%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

3.4.2. USDA Listening Session Team

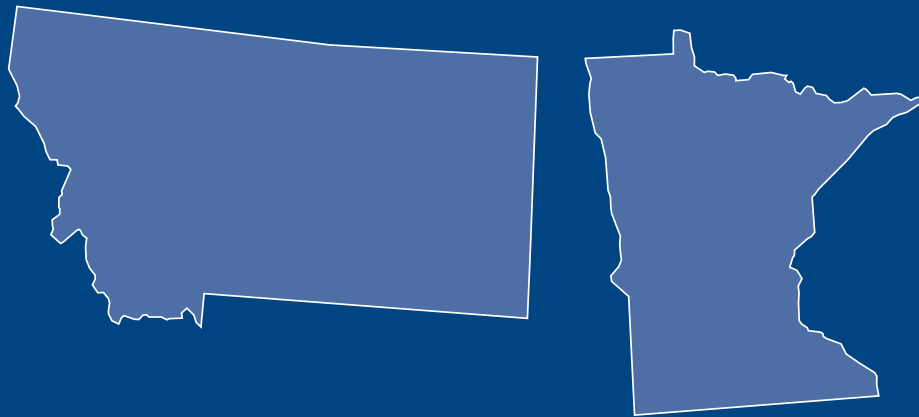
The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Producer Listening Session in Lubbock, TX are listed in Table B-13 below.

Table B-13

USDA Listening Session Team, Producer Listening Session, Lubbock, TX

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Brandon Willis	Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, FSA
Patrick Hanley	Associate Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

4 Minnesota and Montana



4. Minnesota and Montana

4.1. Employee Listening Session – Mahnomen County Service Center Office, MN, June 2, 2010

The Listening Session Team spent a morning in Mahnomen’s Red Apple Café to hear about the current service delivery environment from Mahnomen County Service Center Office employees. The SURE program generates a number of pain points, including a lot of manual data entry and repetitious work. Other complex and cumbersome programs, such as CRP and ACRE, are difficult to administer efficiently. Different acreage data standards between RMA and FSA lead to data records that don’t match. The employees recommended that USDA’s internal agencies coordinate across the board to establish uniform policies and standards that are easy to understand.

Employees expressed their frustration that they currently have no insight into the creation of receivables, and that erroneous demand letters are sent to producers without the county staff’s knowledge. They recommended online access to the National Payment System so that real-time financial data can be verified.

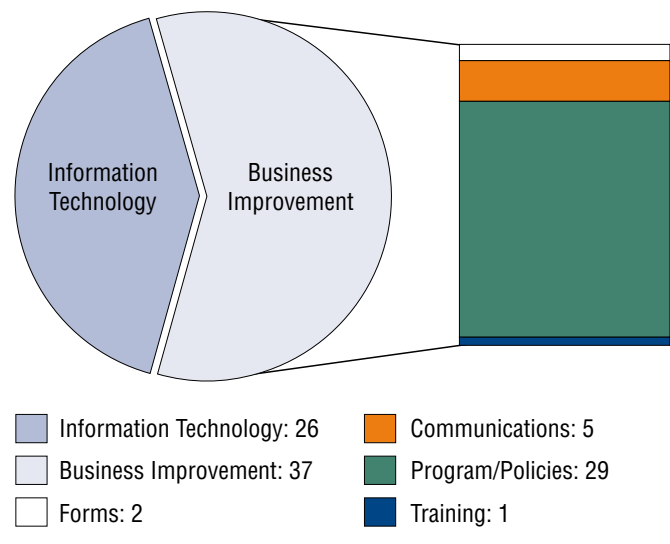
The staff indicated that their workload has increased 3 to 4 times in the last 20 years, while the staffing level is more or less the same. The employees suggested that USDA break down the internal silos that create inefficiencies and redundant paperwork that get in the way of delivering customer service efficiently and effectively. The modernization initiatives that are currently underway are in synch with the Mahnomen employees’ recommendation. Our project teams are working to build more streamlined processes and procedures and to provide better access to information.

4.1.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 63 comments were recorded during the Employee Listening Session in Mahnomen, MN. Employees’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 26 comments (41%), and Business Improvement, 37 comments (59%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Forms, 2 comments (3%); Communications, 5 comments (8%); Program/Policies, 29 comments (46%), and Training, 1 comment (2%). A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-15 below.

Figure B-15

Comments by Theme – Employees, Mahnomen, MN



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. One of the comments (2%) recorded during our session with employees in Mahnomen County, MN, is not related to service delivery. This comment has been forwarded to the appropriate authorities within USDA for further consideration. Of the remaining 62 comments, we determined that 3 of the comments (5%) may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 59 comments (94%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

4.1.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Employee Listening Session at Mahnomen County, MN, are listed in Table B-14, below.

Table B-14

USDA Listening Session Team, Employee Listening Session, Mahnomen, MN

Name	Title
Hon. Collin Peterson	Congressman, U.S. House of Representatives, Minnesota 7 th Congressional District
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Karis Gutter	Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, FSA
Wanda Swann	Assistant to the Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Larry Brooks	Director, Director, Information Technology Services (ITS)/Technical Services Division (TSD), USDA
Debbie Sanders	Deputy Director, ITS/TSD, USDA
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
John Ludecke	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Barry Grant	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS

4.2. Producer Listening Session –Mahnomen County, MN, June 2, 2010

Producers from the Mahnomen County area came by the Red Apple Café on the afternoon of June 2 to describe their pain points with USDA’s service delivery model. Many of the issues result from complicated and redundant requirements, an overabundance of manual data entry, and non-standardized processes and procedures across USDA. They recommended that agencies share producer data internally so that producers only have to provide their data once. Deadline dates should be consistent and in sync with producers’ business and tax reporting needs. Payment information should be detailed and accurate. Signature requirements should be made more convenient for landlords. The producers recommended that USDA provide education on its programs to landlords.

Another area of concern cited by the Mahnomen County producers relates broadly to communications. Notices are confusing and difficult to track. There should be better communication between Washington, DC, and the field offices on program sign-ups, software release dates, and other administrative matters. Coordination on policy and procedure should be improved so that interpretation between the county offices is always consistent.

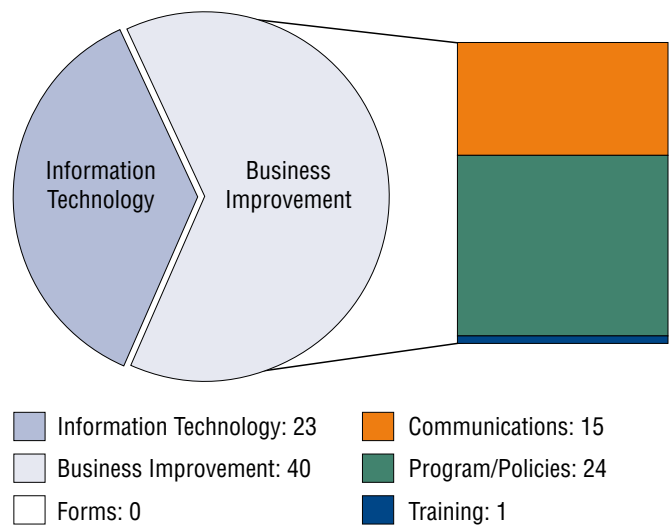
More online resources are necessary, such as online maps, online acreage reporting, and online signups. Clear instructions and easy navigation are just as necessary so that online data entry is easy. The producers made it clear, however, that online resources could not replace the local knowledge and personable support of their county office staff.

4.2.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 63 comments were recorded during the Producer Listening Session in Mahnomen, Minnesota. Producers’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 23 comments (37%); and Business Improvement, 40 comments (63%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Communications, 15 comments (24%); Program/Policies, 24 comments (38%), and Training, 1 comment (2%). No comments were recorded in the area of Forms. A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-16 below.

Figure B-16

Comments by Theme – Producers, Mahnomen, MN



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. One of the comments (2%) recorded during our session with producers in Mahnomen County, MN, is not related to service delivery. This comment has been forwarded to the appropriate authorities within USDA for further consideration. Of the remaining 62 comments, we determined that none of the comments (0%) may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 62 comments (98%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

4.2.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Producer Listening Session in Mahnomen County, MN, are listed in Table B-15 below.

Table B-15

USDA Listening Session Team, Producer Listening Session, Mahnomen County, MN

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Karis Gutter	Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, FSA
Wanda Swann	Assistant to the Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, FSA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Larry Brooks	Director, Information Technology Services (ITS)/ Technical Services Division (TSD), USDA
Debbie Sanders	Deputy Director, ITS/TSD, USDA
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
John Ludecke	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Barry Grant	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

4.3. Employee Listening Session – Cascade County Service Center Office, MT, June 3, 2010

The employees of the Cascade County Service Center Office in Great Falls, MT, provided great insights to the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis. Technology causes numerous pain points, beginning with the fact that employees must go back and forth between the Web-based applications and the IBM System 36 (S/36)/IBM Application System 400 (AS400). Systems and applications require multiple passwords. The staff reported that online forms are slow to open and that the GIS server capacity is inadequate. The county office does not have access to receivables information, which is especially frustrating when erroneous demand letters are sent to producers without the county staff’s knowledge.

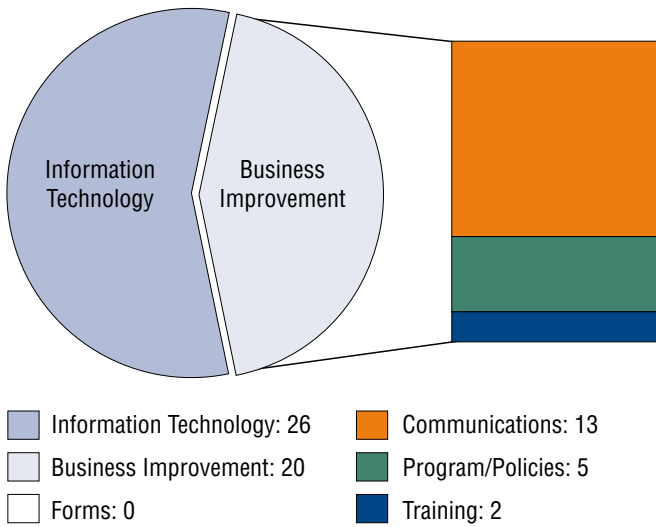
Among other recommendations to our Listening Session team, the field office staff advised that USDA should focus on a few, important things versus everything at once. The staff suggested a prioritized, phased approach. This advice is consistent with USDA’s overall approach to service delivery improvement. We are prioritizing our improvement activities relative to their complexity and urgency, and by implementing Near-Term Projects and longer term Modernization Initiatives, we are making focused and steady improvement to the overall service delivery environment.

4.3.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 46 comments were recorded during the Employee Listening Session in Cascade County, Montana. Employees’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 26 comments (57%), and Business Improvement, 20 comments (43%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Communications, 13 comments (28%); Program/Policies, 5 comments (11%); and Training, 2 comments (4%). No comments were recorded in the area of Forms. A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-17.

Figure B-17

Comments by Theme – Employees, Cascade County, MT



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. Five of the comments (11%) recorded during our session with employees in Cascade County, MT, are not related to service delivery. These comments have been forwarded to the appropriate authorities within USDA for further consideration. Of the remaining 41 comments, we determined that 3 of the comments (7%) may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 38 comments (83%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

4.3.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Employee Listening Session in Cascade County, MT, are listed in Table B-16 above.

Table B-16

USDA Listening Session Team, Employee Listening Session, Cascade County, MT

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Karis Gutter	Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, FSA
Wanda Swann	Assistant to the Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, FSA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Larry Brooks	Director, Information Technology Services (ITS)/ Technical Services Division (TSD), USDA
Debbie Sanders	Deputy Director, ITS/TSD, USDA
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
John Ludecke	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Barry Grant	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

4.4. Employee Listening Session – Toole County Service Center Office, MT, June 3, 2010

Employees gathered at the Toole County Elks Lodge in Shelby, MT, to discuss their pain points and to provide their recommendations for improving USDA’s service delivery environment.

The staff described some of its frustrations with technology. For example, different data requirements in different applications make it difficult to search for information. Data rounding issues cause problems with DCP and CRP payments. Server downtime, slow computers, and systems that don’t interface with each other are all factors that decrease staff productivity.

With regard to programs, the staff indicated that SURE requires manual, repetitious data entry, which has been a universal comment along the 2010 Listening Session tour.

The staff in Shelby also noted that nationwide programs need to work well locally. For example, in the employees’ experience, livestock programs and policies do not align with local producers’ livestock operations.

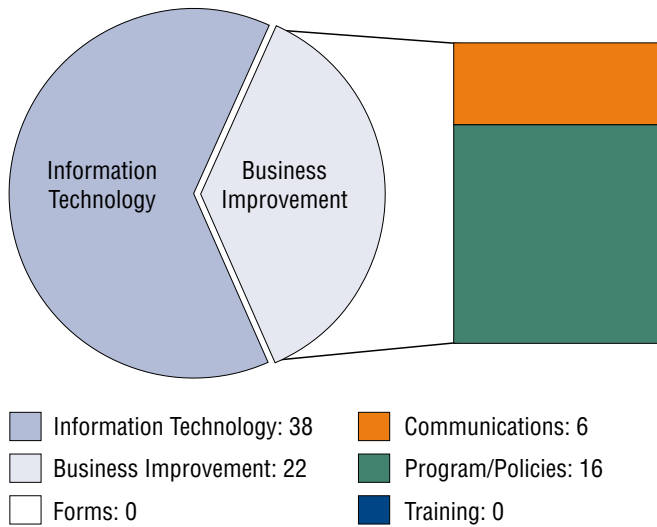
The Toole County employees advised that program and policies need to be well formulated before they are pushed out to the field and that the county offices should have access to all the supporting information, forms, software in advance of new program launches.

4.4.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 60 comments were recorded during the Employee Listening Session in Toole County, Montana. Employees’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 38 comments (63%) and Business Improvement, 22 comments (37%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Communications, 6 comments (10%) and Program/Policies, 16 comments (46%). No comments were recorded in the areas of Forms or Training. A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-18 below.

Figure B-18

Comments by Theme – Employees, Toole County, MT



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. One of the comments (2%) recorded during our session with employees in Toole County, MT, is not related to service delivery. This comment has been forwarded to the appropriate authorities within USDA for further consideration. Of the remaining 59 comments, we determined that 9 of the comments (15%) may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 50 comments (83%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

4.4.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Employee Listening Session in Toole County, MT, are listed in Table B-17, below.

Table B-17

USDA Listening Session Team, Employee Listening Session, Toole County, MT

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Karis Gutter	Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, FSA
Wanda Swann	Assistant to the Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, FSA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Larry Brooks	Director, Information Technology Services (ITS)/ Technical Services Division (TSD), USDA
Debbie Sanders	Deputy Director, ITS/TSD, USDA
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
John Ludecke	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Barry Grant	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

4.5. Producer Listening Session – Browning, MT, June 3, 2010

The Listening Session Team met with members of the Blackfeet Nation to hear how USDA’s service delivery model is working for ranchers, farmers, and producers who operate on the Blackfeet Reservation.

Several clear recommendations were shared. For example, when dealing with multiple counties within a reservation, USDA should count the reservation as one county for disaster programs. This would enable the disaster declaration process to work for tribal boundaries, in addition to counties. Similarly, it was recommended that USDA establish the whole reservation as a single conservation district.

The producers indicated that FSA and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) each maintain their own rules and regulations which are not aligned. They recommended that the two

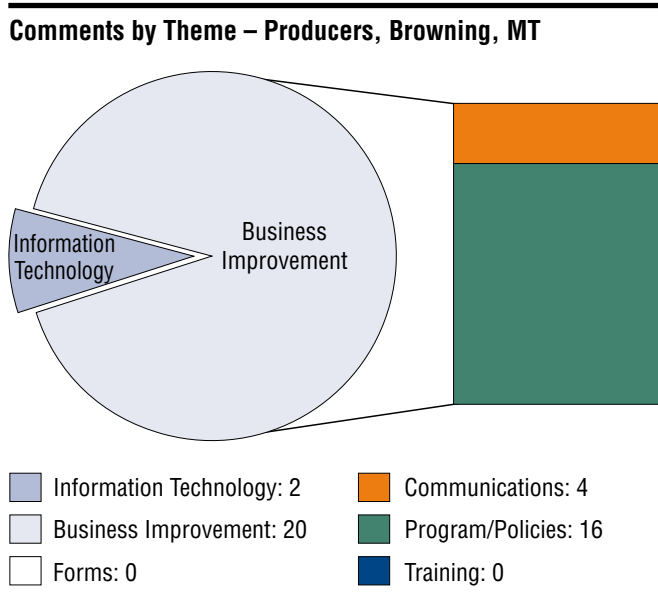
agencies coordinate and establish standardized rules, especially with regard to allotments/tracts. It would be helpful to have FSA/BIA services centralized in one easily accessible office in the Reservation.

With respect to programs, flexibility is required to adjust for local conditions. For example, CRP policies need to work better for reservations. Precipitation/moisture calculations need to take into account the nature of the land. Precipitation measurement varies broadly across reservation areas. Disaster consideration and eligibility criteria need to be reviewed accordingly.

4.5.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 22 comments were recorded during the Producer Listening Session in Browning, MT. Producers’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 2 comments (2%) and Business Improvement, 20 comments (91%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Communications, 4 comments (18%) and Program/Policies, 16 comments (73%). No comments were recorded in the areas of Forms or Training. A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-19 below.

Figure B-19



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. Two of the comments (10%) recorded during our session with producers in Browning, MT, are not related to service delivery. This comment has been forwarded to the appropriate authorities within USDA for further consideration. Of the remaining 20 comments, we determined that 1 of the comments (5%) may be resolved through a Near-Term Project. The remaining 19 comments (95%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

4.5.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Producer Listening Session in Browning, MT, are listed in Table B-18 below.

Table B-18

USDA Listening Session Team, Producer Listening Session, Browning, MT

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Karis Gutter	Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, FSA
Wanda Swann	Assistant to the Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, FSA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Larry Brooks	Director, Information Technology Services (ITS)/ Technical Services Division (TSD), USDA
Debbie Sanders	Deputy Director, ITS/TSD, USDA
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
John Ludecke	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Barry Grant	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

4.6. Employee Listening Session – NASCOE Rally, Whitefish, MT, June 4, 2010

The Listening Session team traveled to Whitefish, Montana, in the Northern Rockies to attend the National Association of State and County Employees (NASCOE) Rally. This provided a great opportunity to engage with members of NASCOE, a union representing employees of the FSA. NASCOE members from Montana and neighboring States described many of their pain points with USDA’s service delivery environment in the field and offered a number of recommendations for improvement.

Echoing the comments we have heard from employees around the country, the NASCOE members articulated the challenges that stem from outdated technology in the State and county offices, including multiple passwords, multiple systems that do not interface directly, aging servers, and faulty parts that are difficult to replace. Web-based applications lack query capability and time out too quickly. These issues result in time-consuming stumbling blocks to efficient service delivery.

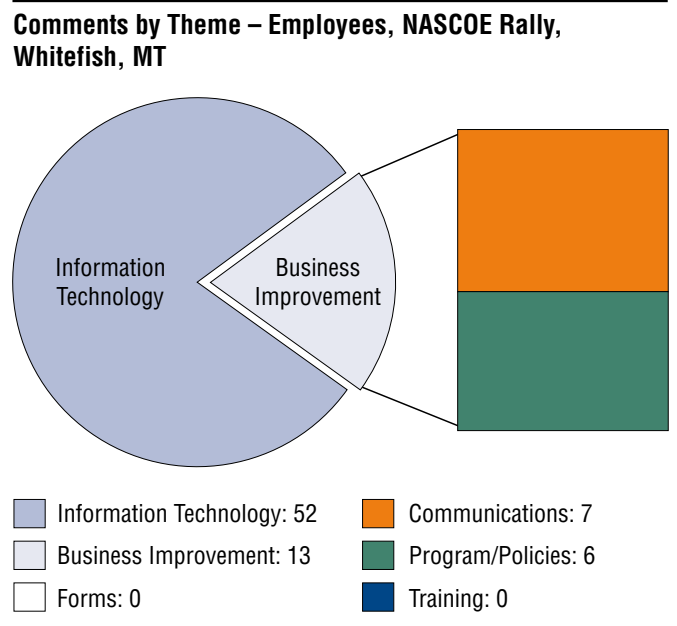
Employees recommend standardization across applications and programs. For example, the standard use of the last four digits of the social security number would improve the ability to search for producer-related information. Employees want greater access and control over payment and receivable data. It would be beneficial to have access to transaction details so that county staff could answer producers’ questions.

The NASCOE members cited CRP and SURE as examples of programs that generate an overload of paperwork.

4.6.1 Listening Session Analysis

A total of 65 comments were recorded during the Employee Listening Session at the NASCOE Rally in Whitefish, Montana. Employees’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 52 comments (80%), and Business Improvement, 13 comments (20%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Communications, 7 comments (11%) and Program/Policies, 6 comments (9%). No comments were recorded in the areas of Forms or Training. A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-20 below.

Figure B-20



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. One of the comments (2%) recorded during our session with employees at the NASCOE Rally in Whitefish, MT, is not related to service delivery. This comment has been forwarded to the appropriate authorities within USDA for further consideration. Of the remaining 64 comments, we determined that 7 of the comments (11%) may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 57 comments (88%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

4.6.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Employee Listening Session at the NASCOE Rally in Whitefish, MT, are listed in Table B-19 above.

Table B-19

USDA Listening Session Team, Employee Listening Session, NASCOE Rally, Whitefish, MT

Name	Title
Chris Smith	Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Ricky T. Valentine	Director for Office of Budget and Finance, FSA
Karis Gutter	Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, FSA
Wanda Swann	Assistant to the Chief Information Officer, USDA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, FSA
Kimberly Graham	Deputy Director for Communication and Change Management, FSA – MIDAS Project
Larry Brooks	Director, Information Technology Services (ITS)/ Technical Services Division (TSD), USDA
Debbie Sanders	Deputy Director, ITS/TSD, USDA
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
John Ludecke	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Barry Grant	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project



Paper files in storage at a USDA Service Center



A USDA Service Center employee provides guidance to a county producer in completing paperwork

5 Arkansas



5. Arkansas

5.1. Producer Listening Session – Lonoke, AR, August 4, 2010

Producers from central Arkansas gathered at the Arkansas Rural Water Association in Lonoke to describe their experiences with USDA’s service delivery model.

Producers noted that the county offices are burdened with paperwork and that more resources should be made available online, including access to forms and sign-ups. Producers also observed that extra work, such as duplicate acreage reporting, results because USDA agencies do not share data or information.

The county offices often don’t have access to the timely information that producers need about program sign-ups. In general, sign-up dates should be more flexible.

There is a need to simplify processes that involve multiple farms, landlords, and multiple tenants. Payment statements also need to be improved to show transaction details.

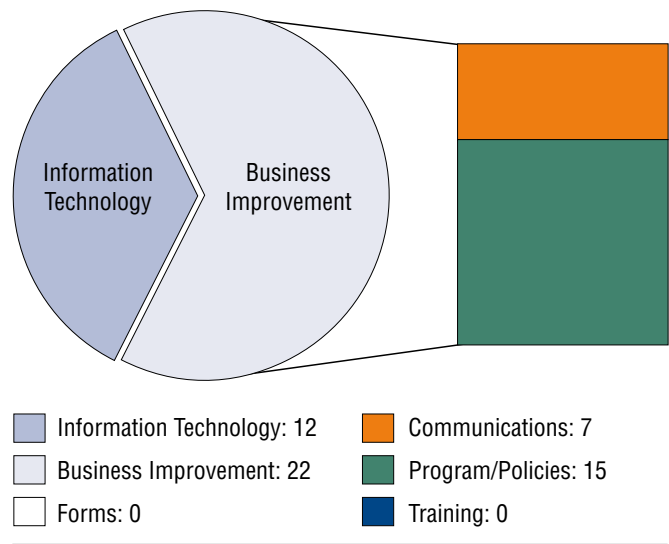
Producers advised that local conditions need to be taken into account when programs and policies are designed. There should be flexibility to accommodate the differences in crops and farming operations between north and south, and they recommended that representation from all 50 States should participate in the design of MIDAS. The MIDAS project team is acting on this advice by including State and county staff members on the project and will widen that participation to include representation from all 50 States as the project matures.

5.1.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 34 comments were recorded during the Lonoke, AR, Producer Listening Session. Producers’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 12 comments (35%) and Business Improvement, 22 comments (65%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Communications, 7 comments (21%) and Program/Policies, 15 comments (44%). No comments were recorded in the areas of Forms or Training. A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-21 below.

Figure B-21

Comments by Theme – Producers, Lonoke, AR



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. We determined that 2 of the comments (6%) may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 32 comments (94%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

5.1.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Producer Listening Session in Lonoke, AR, are listed in Table B-20 below.

Table B-20

USDA Listening Session Team, Producer Listening Session, Lonoke, AR

Name	Title
Charles McClam	Deputy Chief Information Officer, USDA
Yvonne Jackson	Associate Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Jim Gwinn	Chief Information Officer, FSA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Chuck Benjamin	Deputy Director for Information Technology, FSA – MIDAS Project
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Anil Surapaneni	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Barry Grant	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Lazonni Gates	Capgemini, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

5.2. Producer Listening Session – Pine Bluff, AR, August 4, 2010

The Listening Team met with producers at the S.J. Parker Extension facility of the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff, to hear their views on USDA’s service delivery. Like their counterparts throughout the country, the producers expressed their frustration with the amount of redundant paperwork that is required. They also indicated that is often difficult to get timely information about programs and policies. They advised USDA to provide better outreach to minority farmers. Staff in the county offices should be attuned to the needs of the local farming community.

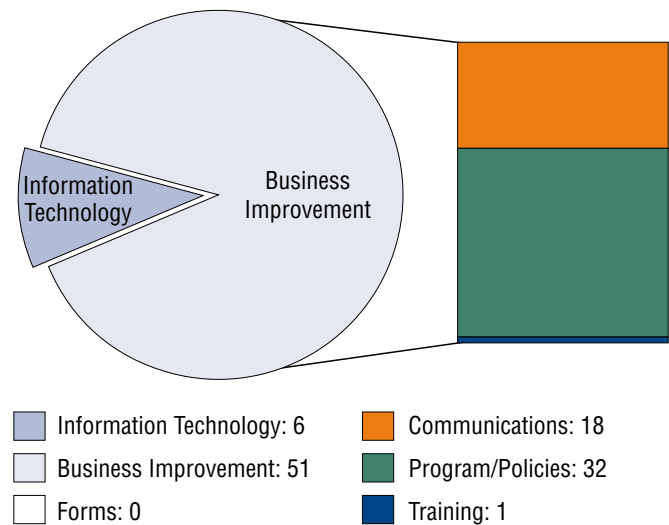
The Pine Bluff producers pointed out that current loan decisions take too long and can be inflexible. They also advised that producers need to get operating loans at the appropriate time to get crops started. The producers recommended that USDA should make more direct payments upfront so that producers don’t need to get loans. Timing of DCP payments should be moved ahead to provide relief to producers. In the case of disasters, producers need assistance right away. They suggested that USDA make yield policies more flexible for disaster programs.

5.2.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 57 comments were recorded during the Pine Bluff, AR, Listening Session. Producers’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 6 comments (11%) and Business Improvement, 51 comments (89%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Communications, 18 comments (32%); Program/Policies, 32 comments (56%); and Training, 1 comment (2%). No comments were recorded in the areas of Forms. A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-22 below.

Figure B-22

Comments by Theme – Producers, Pine Bluff, AR



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. Four of the comments (7%) recorded during our session with producers in Pine Bluff, AR, are not related to service delivery. These comments have been forwarded to the appropriate authorities within USDA for further consideration. Of the remaining 53 comments, we determined that 1 of the comments (2%) may be resolved through a Near-Term Project. The remaining 52 comments (91%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

5.2.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Producer Listening Session in Pine Bluff, AR, are listed in Table B-21 below.

Table B-21

USDA Listening Session Team, Producer Listening Session, Pine Bluff, AR

Name	Title
Charles McClam	Deputy Chief Information Officer, USDA
Yvonne Jackson	Associate Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Jim Gwinn	Chief Information Officer, FSA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Chuck Benjamin	Deputy Director for Information Technology, FSA – MIDAS Project
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Anil Surapaneni	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Barry Grant	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Lazonni Gates	Capgemini, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

5.3. Producer Listening Session – Arkadelphia AR, August 4, 2010

Producers gathered at Henderson State University to share their thoughts about USDA’s service delivery environment. They indicated to the Listening Team that the current model isn’t working very well. The county offices are overloaded with paperwork. RMA and FSA do not share data internally, making acreage reporting more difficult than it should be. Loan policies are inflexible, especially for young farmers. The county yields policy is not aligned with local producers’ needs.

The Arkadelphia producers recommended a complete overhaul of farm programs. Washington, DC, should work with the States to build programs and software that are more in sync with local conditions and producers’ business needs.

We have clearly heard and understand the need for a complete overhaul of programs, technology, and processes. The goal of MIDAS and other Modernization Initiatives is to transform the entire service delivery environment for the benefit of producers and our employees.

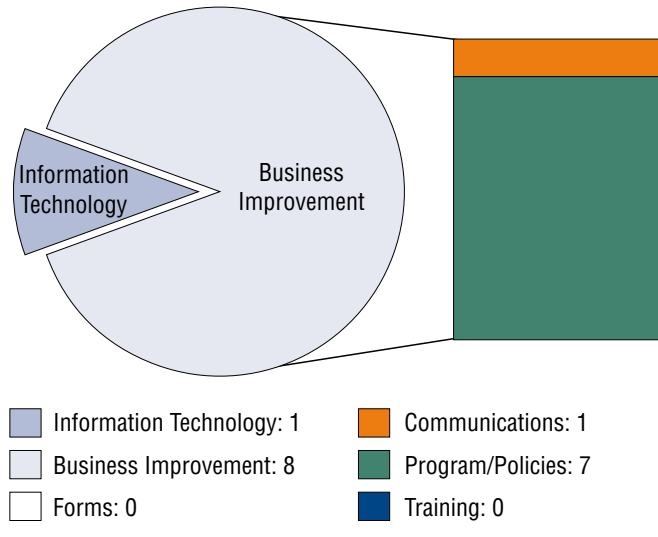
5.3.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 9 comments were recorded during the Arkadelphia, AR, Listening Session. Producers’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 1 comment (11%) and Business Improvement, 8 comments (89%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the area of Program/Policies, 7 comments (78%) and Communications, 1 comment (11%). No comments were recorded in

the areas of Forms, Communications, or Training. A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-23 below.

Figure B-23

Comments by Theme – Producers, Arkadelphia, AR



Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. We determined that none of the comments (0%) may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. All nine of the comments (100%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

5.3.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Producer Listening Session in Arkadelphia, AR, are listed in Table B-22 below.

Table B-22

USDA Listening Session, Producer Listening Session, Arkadelphia, AR

Name	Title
Charles McClam	Deputy Chief Information Officer, USDA
Yvonne Jackson	Associate Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Jim Gwinn	Chief Information Officer, FSA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Chuck Benjamin	Deputy Director for Information Technology, FSA – MIDAS Project
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Anil Surapaneni	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Barry Grant	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Lazonni Gates	Capgemini, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project

5.4. Employee Listening Session – NASCOE Convention, Hot Springs, AR, August 5, 2010

The NASCOE Convention in Hot Spring, Arkansas, provided an ideal setting for our Listening Session Team to hear from field office employees hailing from field offices nationwide. Issues with outmoded technology topped the list of their concerns, including slow computers, applications and systems that are not integrated or that interface poorly, and too many passwords. They also expressed frustration with applications that aren’t user-friendly, and that lack the query capability that the staff need to do their jobs effectively. They indicated that help desk support is inconsistent across the country, and that field staff are in need of training on computers and on new applications.

The lack of modern, networked equipment also creates bottlenecks. The employees voiced a need for scanners and photocopiers in the county offices. They also need more

resources, like laptops and projectors, to provide producer education sessions.

The staff listed some of the problems that are associated with the program implementation process. Programs are often rolled out before the supporting software is ready, resulting in redundant paperwork. Timely program information is not always available, causing confusion for the staff and producers alike.

The employees also indicated that a lot of effort is currently dedicated to validating eligibility criteria. Since only 1% of producers are not eligible, they advised that the current eligibility process should be redesigned so that resources can be re-focused on more urgent needs.

Modernization is aimed at addressing many of the issues cited by the employees attending NASCOE. USDA is dedicating significant resources to upgrading the technology infrastructure and revamping the application and business processes connected with service delivery. The business changes associated with MIDAS will be implemented with active participation from State and county staff to ensure that the results are field-ready. Processes that underpin service delivery, such as new program rollout, will be overhauled as well, so that the entire business environment will be integrated in a way that truly supports effective and efficient customer service.

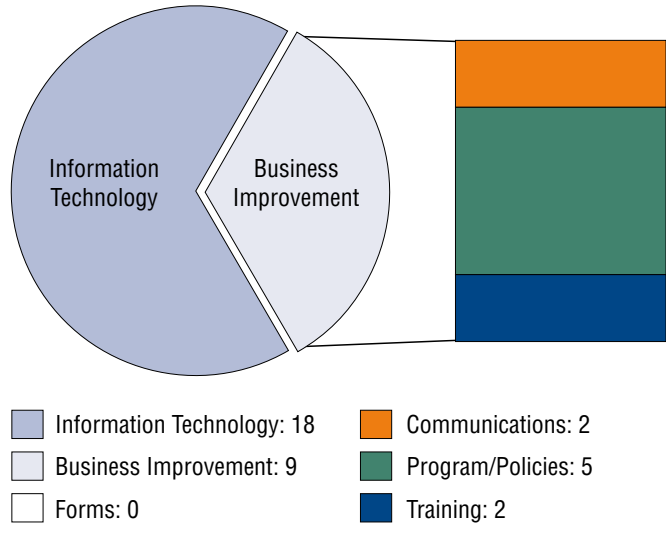
5.4.1. Listening Session Analysis

A total of 27 comments were recorded during the Employee Listening Session at the NASCOE Convention in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Employees’ pain points and recommendations reflected concerns in two broad themes: IT (Information Technology), 18 comments (67%) and Business Improvement, 9 comments (33%). The comments related to Business Improvement reflect producers’ feedback in the areas of Communications, 2 comments (7%); Program/Policies, 5 comments (19%); and Training, 2 comments (7%). No comments were recorded in the areas of Forms. A breakdown of the comments is shown in Figure B-24 above.

Our team analyzed the content of the comments to determine the best approach for addressing the underlying pain points and recommendations. We determined that two of the comments (7%) may be resolved through Near-Term Projects. The remaining 25 comments (93%) have been recorded as inputs to USDA’s longer term Modernization Initiatives.

Figure B-24

Comments by Theme - Employees, NASCOE Convention, Hot Springs, AR



5.4.2. USDA Listening Session Team

The members of the USDA Listening Session Team who participated in the Employee Listening Session at the NASCOE Convention in Hot Springs, AR, are listed in Table B-23 below.

Table B-23

USDA Listening Session Team, Employee Listening Session, NASCOE Convention, AR

Name	Title
Charles McClam	Deputy Chief Information Officer, USDA
Yvonne Jackson	Associate Chief Information Officer, USDA
Jonathan Coppess	Administrator, FSA
Jim Gwinn	Chief Information Officer, FSA
Toby Osherson	Special Assistant, Office of the Administrator, FSA
Chuck Benjamin	Deputy Director for Information Technology, FSA – MIDAS Project
Harvinder Singh	Torres Advanced Enterprise Solutions, LLC, Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Anil Surapaneni	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Barry Grant	SRA International, Inc., Contract Representative, MIDAS Project
Lazonni Gates	Cappgemini, Contract Representative, MIDAS





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