United States Department of Agriculture
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Policies and Procedures

Title: ARS World Wide Web Sites

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This P&P establishes policy and
guidelines for ARS organizational
WWW sites available for public access
through the Internet.

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1. Introduction

The World Wide Web is the predominant means for the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to disseminate and exchange information with its business partners, stakeholders, customers, and the general public. As a leading agricultural scientific research organization, ARS uses the Web to:

- present mission and program information to the public and to convey the beneficial services that the Agency provides;

- serve as a technology transfer tool to exchange research information with the agricultural and scientific community;

- facilitate the interaction of Agency research management and staff with the world scientific community; and

- foster interest in ARS by prospective employees.

This Policy and Procedure (P&P) document provides direction and guidance on developing and publishing Agency public Web sites.   Its goal is high quality, visually appealing Web sites that offer informative, accurate information and conform to a standard, easily usable structure. It also establishes responsibilities for authoring, maintaining, and releasing content on Agency Web sites.

2. Authorities

- Government Paperwork Elimination Act (44 USC Sec. 3504)
- Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-130 (revised) and Circular A-130, Appendix III, "Security for Federal Automated Information"
- E-Government Act of 2002
- OMB M-03-18 "Implementation Guidance for the E-Government Act of 2002"
- OMB M-03-22 "Implementing the Privacy Provisions of the E-Government Act of 2002"
- Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 USC Sec. 794d)
- Privacy Act (5 USC Sec. 552a)
- OMB M-99-18, "Privacy Policies on Federal Web Sites"
- OMB M-00-13 "Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies"
- Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 USC Chap. 35)
- Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 (Title 13, P.L. 105-277 @ 15 USC Chap. 91)

- President's Memorandum of June 1, 1998, "Plain Language in Government Writing"
- National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) General Records Schedule GRS 24 "Information Technology Operations and Management Records"
- USDA Departmental Regulation (DR) 1410-1 "Publications Review/Clearance Policy"
- DR 3140-1 "USDA Information System Security (ISS) Policy"
- DR 3140-2 "USDA Internet Security Policy"
- DR 3300-1 "Telecommunications and Internet Security Policy"
- DR 3440-002 "Control and Protection of Sensitive Security Information"
- DR 3430-001 (5/19/2004), "Home Page Development and Maintenance"
- DR 3040-001 "Electronic Records Management"
- ARS Policy and Procedure (P&P) 253.3 "Information Systems Security Program"
- ARS P&P 158.1 "Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act Guidelines"
- ARS P&P 151.1 "Publishing (Print & Electronic)"
- ARS P&P 152.1 "Procedures for Publishing Manuscripts and Abstracts with Non-USDA Publishers (Outside Publishing)"
- ARS P&P 251.08 "Records Management"
- ARS Manual 251.8M "Records Management"
- DM 3515-001 "Collection of Web Page Cookies and Privacy Requirements" (08/19/04)
- DM 3525-002 "USDA Internet Use and Copyright Restrictions" (07/15/04)
- OMB M-05-04 "Policies for Federal Agency Public Websites" (12/17/2004)

3. Policy

ARS Web sites are one of the Agency's primary faces to its customers and the general public and must exhibit a positive, professional image combining functional and intuitive organization with the highest quality of visual presentation and consistency. ARS Web sites must be a reliable source of information that describes the programs and accomplishments of the Agency and provides public information that is accurate, relevant, up to date, and easily understood by an informed public. To achieve these objectives, all ARS Web sites must adhere to the following policies:

3-1. Hosting and Security

3-1.1. ARS Web sites may be hosted only on ARS Certified and Accredited Web servers.

3-1.2. Access to Agency Web sites is provided to the public in a manner consistent with prudent operational and security considerations (see DR 3140-2,

"USDA Internet Security Policy," DR 3440-002, *"Control and Protection of 'Sensitive Security Information', "* ARS Policy and Procedure 253.3, "Information Systems Security Program," and "Prohibited Web Page Content" at 3-11 below).

3-1.3. All Agency Web sites (including applications) and servers must be supported by a current and complete security plan and a formal system risk analysis developed in accordance with Agency guidelines.

3-1.4. Web applications and scripts must be reviewed and secured before posting. As this is a technology-specific consideration, it is the responsibility of the software developer and application administrator to ensure that all appropriate security measures are in place (see DR 3140-2, "USDA Internet Security Policy").

3-2. Quality and Authority

3-2.1. Information may be made available on Agency Web sites only when approved for release in accordance with Agency policies on releasing information to the public (see DR 3440-002, "Control and Protection of Sensitive Security Information").

3-2.2. Web page content may be posted to Agency Web sites only after it has been specifically authorized by the designated Web Content Manager (see Section 4, Summary of Responsibilities).

3-2.3. In general, Agency pages will link to, rather than contain, content maintained by the organization that is officially responsible for it. ARS sites will not create or store duplicate content for which another organization is responsible.

3-2.4. All hyperlinks will be valid and working. ARS sites will not display pages that are empty or pages that contain only phrases such as "under construction" or "coming soon."

3-3. Copyright and Persona

3-3.1. Agency Web sites may not include any copyrighted material, including photographs, music, videos, and graphic objects, without the written consent of the copyright holder. This does not apply to any information authored by ARS personnel and published in any non-Government publication, although the publication itself may be protected by copyright.

3-3.2. Photographs of members of the public in which they are identified by name may not be posted on Agency Web sites without prior written consent, or a parent's or guardian's consent in the case of minors. Non-copyrighted historical photographs are allowed. Photographs of employees must be either formal portraits or pictures of employees engaged in official duties.

3-4. Web Information Architecture

3-4.1. The ARS Web Information Architecture (see Attachment 1) depicts the site organization, page layout, and navigation systems for ARS Web pages. The gray header and footer sections identify specific requirements, while the main white area is designed to provide guidance by identifying regions of the page where general categories of content should go if applicable. To assure consistency and continuity, all ARS Web sites must use the ARS Web Information Architecture.

3-4.2. Creation of new Web pages must follow the USDA Web Style Guide (see Attachment 2) and the ARS Information Architecture. Such pages must also incorporate the ARS public Web site look and feel.

3-5. General Appearance

Sites must maintain a visual consistency between the main page and subpages of Web sites to avoid confusing or disorienting Web visitors. Variation in design from one page to another can cause Web visitors to wonder whether they have inadvertently left the ARS Web site. Visual consistency is defined as common textual and graphical formatting – including use of color and arrangement of elements on the pages – to convey a sense of relationship between the main and subpages.

3-6. Minimum Elements

3-6.1. "Agricultural Research Service" and the USDA and ARS logos must appear in the banner section of all Web pages.

3-6.2. A link to the organizational unit's mission statement (or description of the mission) must appear on the About Us page.

3-6.3. Links to the following policies and disclaimers must appear on all pages:

- Accessibility
- USDA Nondiscrimination Statement
- Government System Use Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Endorsement Disclaimer
- Pesticide Use Disclaimer
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)
- Quality of Information
- Contact information for page content questions and concerns

3-6.4. All pages must include the date the page or file was last updated or reviewed for accuracy.

3-6.5. All pages must have a title (<title>) in the <head> section.

3-6.6. Agency Web pages should include HTML metatags in the <head> section showing owner, author, creation date of page, keywords, and description.

3-7. Navigation and Links

3-7.1. Links to any Government agencies (Federal, State, and local) may be established without authorization.

3-7.2. Some partnerships may be protected by Confidentiality Agreements. Links to these partner organizations need to be carefully reviewed by the site's Content Manager (see section 4-5 "Web Content Managers") before posting. Local ARS Technology Transfer Coordinators or OTT at headquarters serve as authorities for such links and should be consulted as needed for further guidance and interpretation.

3-7.3. Links to non-Government sites must clearly indicate that they are leaving a Government site.

3-7.4. All pages must include the following navigation links:

- Subpages must be linked back to the main page of the organization.
- Main organization page must be linked to the higher organizational levels (for example, laboratories link to Institute, Location, or Area office).
- All pages must include links to the ARS home page and the USDA home page.

3-8. Editorial Style

Agency Web sites must reflect the principles outlined in the President's Memorandum of June 1, 1998, "Plain Language in Government Writing."

3-9. Accessibility

Agency Web sites must comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which requires Web sites to be broadly accessible.

3-10. Forms

To comply with Federal E-Government initiatives, ARS encourages use of Web forms to provide services and interact with users of Agency Web sites, including authentication and electronic approval when required.

3-10.1. Forms on ARS Web sites that require collection of personal information must have received prior approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and must display the OMB number and expiration date,

instructions, and privacy and Paperwork Reduction Act statements, as required by the Paperwork Elimination Act.

3-10.2.   Forms on ARS Web sites that collect personal information must be supported by Privacy Impact Assessments for online information collections as required by OMB M-03-18, "Implementation Guidance for the E-Government Act of 2002." ARS sites will ensure that privacy of form users is protected by secure transmission, storage, and disposal of data.

3-10.3.   ARS sites must comply with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act with respect to the collection of personal information online at Web sites directed to minors.

3-11. Prohibited Web Page Content

Information designated Sensitive Security Information (SSI) under USDA DR 3440-002 will not be posted on Agency Web sites.

3-12. "Cookies"

Persistent "cookies" shall not be used on ARS Web sites except in accordance with USDA policy DM3515-001, "Collection of Web Page Cookies and Privacy Requirements" (08/19/04).

3-13. Individual Personnel Web Pages

Individual Personnel home pages are permitted for individual employees in their official capacities if the information provided relates to and supports the mission of ARS. ARS employees who establish home pages accessible by the public must follow the guidelines outlined in this policy and in USDA Departmental Regulation 3430-001.

3-14. Support Group and Collaborative Web Pages

ARS may host Web sites of groups that directly support the Agency, such as a "Friends" group. It may host collaborative sites when the Agency or an Agency unit is one of several sponsors (for example, of a conference, working group, or research project directly related to the Agency mission).

3-14.1.   Hosting of support group and collaborative sites is subject to approval by the appropriate Web Content Manager and his/her supervisor. Approval decisions will be guided by ARS policies for use of Government technology, acceptance of non-appropriated funds, dissemination of information, and others as appropriate. (See also ARS P&Ps 150.1, 253.4, 321.1, 324.)

3-14.2. Collaborative sites hosted on ARS servers must comply with all usability and security requirements of this policy but will not be required to use the ARS Web Information Architecture. However, these sites must contain, at a minimum, reference to ARS's role in the collaboration and a link to both the ARS and the USDA home pages.

3-14.3. Sites are not defined as collaborative under this policy when ARS is designated as the responsible party by charter or legislation or is the primary funder or sponsor.

3-15. Web Records Management

Web management and Web content records will be maintained in accordance with ARS and National Archives and Records Administration Guidelines and in compliance with OMB Circular A-130.

4. Summary of Responsibilities

4-1. Administrator, Associate Administrators

4-1.1. Champion and promote maximum use of Agency Web sites to disseminate and exchange mission and research information with customers, stakeholders, business partners, the agricultural and research community, and the general public.

4-2. Deputy Administrators, Area Directors, Office Directors, Assistant Administrators, Program Officers, and Coordinators

4-2.1. Designate a Web Content Manager and backup within each Area Office and each Headquarters Office who will be responsible for ensuring that all proposed Web content has been reviewed, edited, and authorized for release before posting on the Web site. The Web Content Managers for an Area may be established at the Area Office for more centralized management and control or at a research location for more decentralized management.

4-2.2. Designate Site Webmasters who will work with the OCIO Web Branch to provide overall technical leadership, oversight, and support for each Headquarters Office, Area, and Location Web site and to host Web servers.

4-2.3. Allocate resources to or budget sufficient funds for support of Web activities within their area of responsibility.

4-2.4. Ensure that all Web content, administration, and management activities are in compliance with the requirements of this policy.

4-2.5. Ensure that a current and complete security plan is in place for all Web sites and servers in accordance with the requirements of ARS P&P 253.3, "Information Systems Security Program."

4-3. Chief Information Officer (CIO)

4-3.1. Budget and allocate Agency OCIO resources in support of OCIO Web activities.

4-3.2. Establish and issue policies and guidance governing use and management of ARS Web sites.

4-3.3. Direct the OCIO Web Branch to work with Site Webmasters to provide overall technical leadership, oversight, and support for Agency Web sites and Web servers.

4-4. OCIO Council

Serve in an advisory capacity to assist the OCIO Web Branch and the webmastering community with Web-related operations and activities.

4-5. Web Content Managers

4-5.1. Communicate as needed with OCIO Web Branch or Site Webmasters about needs and issues affecting Web content.

4-5.2. Ensure that all proposed Web content has been reviewed, edited, and authorized for public release and complies with this policy before posting on the Web site.

4-5.3. Authorize the Webmaster to post updated content to the Web.

4-5.4. Maintain Web management records, including copyright permissions and consents for use of personal photographs, in compliance with ARS and USDA policies.

4-5.5. Update or review Web content at least every 90 days.

4-6. OCIO Web Branch

4-6.1. Serve as the primary policy and technical consultant group on Web-related technologies for ARS.

4-6.2. Assist the CIO with writing Web-related policies.

4-6.3. Provide Agency-level oversight, technical, and operational leadership for ARS Web activities.

4-6.4. Provide support, guidance, and assistance to Web Content Managers and Site Webmasters.

4-6.5. Promotes awareness and communication among Site Webmasters and Web Content Managers regarding Agency Web policies, issues, practices, and needs. Notify Web Content Managers and Site Webmasters of major updates to the Agency's Web site.

4-6.6. Work with the Web Content Managers in ensuring that all Web content is in compliance with the requirements of this policy.

4-6.7. Evaluate new Web technologies and determines the potential benefit to ARS.

4-6.8. Administer and support the main ARS Web site including but not limited to the following activities:

- post Web content updates that have been authorized by the Web Content manager;
- design, author content, and support sites with special needs;
- ensure all page links are valid and working;
- generate daily backups of Web site content; and
- provide technical support and assistance for creation of Agency Web pages.

4-6.9. Ensure all support groups or other collaborative Web pages hosted under their purview comply with this policy.

4-7. Site Webmasters

4-7.1. Serve as the primary technical consultant on Web-related technologies for each Web site.

4-7.2. Foster awareness among sub-Site Webmasters and Web Content Managers of Agency Web policies and practices. Notify the OCIO Web Branch of major updates to Agency Web sites and communicate generally with OCIO Web Branch about local needs and issues affecting Agency sites.

4-7.3. Work with the Web Content Managers to ensure that all Web content is in compliance with the requirements of this policy, including security requirements.

4-7.4. Ensure that security plans are in place for servers under their control and that Web applications comply with Agency security requirements and policies.

4-7.5. Administer and support the unit's Web site including but not limited to:

- posting Web content updates that have been authorized by Web Content Managers;
- ensuring all page links are valid and working;
- generating daily backups of Web site content (see also 4-7.7, "Maintain Web content records" below); and
- providing technical support and assistance for creation of Agency Web pages.

4-7.6. Evaluate new technologies and determine the potential benefit to ARS.

4-7.7. Maintain Web content records, including copyright permissions and consents for use of personal photographs, in compliance with ARS and USDA policies.

4-7.8. Ensure that Web servers hosting ARS content comply with Agency security requirements and policies and with generally acknowledged best practices.

4-7.9. Ensure that ARS Web applications comply with Agency security requirements and polices.

4-8. OCIO Cybersecurity Staff

4-8.1. Serve as the primary authority on ARS Information Technology security issues.

4-8.2. Work with the OCIO Web Branch to periodically review and update security policies for Web systems and promote security awareness among the user community.

4-8.3. Coordinate with Agency and USDA security officers in cases of intrusion to an ARS Web system.

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5. Exhibits

- **Attachment 1 – "ARS Web Information Architecture"**
- **Attachment 2 – "USDA Web Style Guide"**