

OVERVIEW OF MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES

We are working to strengthen USDA's management through vigorous execution of the President's Management Agenda (PMA). Better management will result in more efficient program operations that offer improved customer service and more effective stewardship of taxpayer funds. We expect to:

- Ensure an efficient, high-performing, diverse, competitively sourced workforce, aligned with mission priorities and working cooperatively with USDA partners and the private sector.
- Enhance internal controls, data integrity, management information, and program and policy improvements as reflected by an unqualified audit opinion and a reduction of erroneous payments by USDA programs.
- Implement business processes and information technology needed to make our services available electronically.
- Link budget decisions and program priorities more closely with program performance, and recognize the full cost of programs.

Detailed plans are available for each of the PMAs. Here is a brief summary of our plans.

Improve Human Capital Management

The President has identified strategic management of human capital as a means to making government more citizen-centered and creating a high-performing workforce. We will manage our human capital according to a comprehensive plan that includes implementing initiatives both within the agencies and from a corporate perspective. Our Human Capital Plan focuses on strategic workforce planning and maximizing employee performance. Because automation and process efficiency play a large role in achieving optimal performance of our employees, support systems for human resources, procurement, property management, and finance are critical for us to achieve our performance targets. Other human capital challenges include meeting the demand for cutting edge research talent, ensuring a responsive and effective workforce with technology, customer service and business skills, and supporting a broader scope of program responsibilities with the same or fewer staff.

In managing our human capital and in delivering our services to customers, USDA will continue to focus on ensuring civil rights and equal employment opportunity for everyone, regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability, marital or familial status, or any other factor. We are committed to continuous civil rights progress in the workplace, in program delivery, and in processing complaints in a timely and efficient manner.

Our plans include:

- Linking human capital plans with business plans, and integrating the human capital impacts of Presidential initiatives such as competitive sourcing and eGovernment.
- Using workforce planning and flexible tools to recruit, retain, and reward employees while developing a high-performing and accountable workforce.
- Ensuring employment opportunities for all members of the workforce, while implementing programs targeted at 1) critical occupations with projected skill gaps, and 2) underrepresented groups.
- Increasing the use of competitive sourcing.
- Ensuring timely resolution of program and employment civil rights complaints.

Improve Financial Management

Effectively managing the use of taxpayer dollars is a fundamental Federal responsibility. USDA intends to ensure that all funds we spend are properly accounted for to the taxpayers, the Congress, and the GAO. The Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) works to improve financial management, in partnership with the Chief Financial Officers of USDA agencies, as a core attribute of our operating culture. Owing to our recent efforts to improve financial management, we have received an unqualified opinion on our 2002 financial audit. OCFO is working closely with USDA agencies to eliminate all material weaknesses by 2004.

The OCFO will lead efforts to improve management information by helping USDA's agencies in crafting and accessing useful, timely information, such as monthly financial reports, on-line access to real-time information, and program cost reporting. By enhancing the integrity of financial and administrative data, we will protect corporate assets and conserve scarce resources.

Our plans include:

- Maintaining an unqualified audit opinion on USDA Financial Statements.
- Eliminating all material weaknesses.
- Improving financial reporting procedures and systems.

Expand Electronic Government

USDA's eGovernment Strategic Plan provides a framework for transforming the delivery of information and services through cross-agency business planning and integrated investment approaches that focus on cutting costs by delivering services collaboratively. By relentlessly focusing on customers, working with business partners, and empowering employees, we will use information and communications technologies to conduct our mission-critical business and support functions "better, cheaper, faster." Building on numerous existing successes, the eGovernment Program focuses on leveraging our investments and taking a customer-centric approach. We are underscoring a shift from working in silos to delivering information and services through integrated, enterprise-wide and inter-departmental solutions.

Our plans include:

- Improving citizens' knowledge of and access to USDA to enhance service delivery.
- Enhancing collaboration with public and private organizations to develop and deliver USDA programs.
- Improving internal efficiency by promoting enterprise-wide solutions.
- Ensuring the security of the information provided to USDA by our customers

Establish Budget and Performance Integration

USDA continues to improve how we integrate performance information into our budget decisions. In FY 2002, we began to develop a consistent way to integrate budget and performance at every stage, from the initial agency presentations, to our presentation to OMB, and eventually into the President's budget request to Congress. As part of this integration, USDA planning, evaluation, and budget staff work closely with USDA program managers and policy makers to set budget priorities based on our strategic goals and program performance data. Over the next few years, we will continue to improve our performance information and use program evaluations more effectively. We also will use OMB's Program Assessment Rating Tools (PART) and other tools to judge program performance and management. We are working with OMB to develop common measures for performance in seven cross-cutting areas so as to compare selected programs that have similar goals.

Our plans include:

- Providing a systematic means to review performance information during all stages of the budget process.
- Systematically evaluating programs and integrating the results of those evaluations into the budget decision-making process.
- Creating budget line items and cost accounting systems that align with the Department's goals and encourage effective management.