

More Service Center Reviews Planned

Encouraged by the valuable knowledge gained from on-site service center implementation reviews conducted in Nevada and Colorado during 1996, the Service Center Implementation Team (SCIT) plans to conduct State reviews in seven additional States during FY1997. A review was conducted in Indiana in May and Maine will be conducted this month. Other visits scheduled include Nebraska and Kentucky in July, Montana in August, Tennessee in September, and West Virginia in October.

The reviews are intended to enhance communication between field personnel and the National Food and Agriculture Council (FAC); determine the status of

service center implementation within the State; reinforce the Secretary's vision and stress the importance of aggressively pursuing implementation; identify barriers which require intervention by the National FAC; and identify successes which can be shared.

Bruce Kreller, National Service Center Director and member of the Implementation Team, is responsible for coordinating the visits and reports. The review team normally includes at least two members of the Implementation Team and may also include other interested parties. Don Gearing, Departmental Union Liaison, and Mark Stratton, representative of Assistant Secretary for Administration, participated in the Colorado review.

Using a standard review guide, the review team looks at things such as shared services (administrative services, program operations, space issues, databases, etc.), one-stop/seamless customer service, State and local FAC management, financial management (consolidated budget, expense sharing, accounting systems, etc.), communications, employee development, union issues, partnership issues, and reporting and tracking processes and requirements. The review team meets with members of the State FAC; Rural Development, FSA and NRCS State staffs; service center employees; union officials; and other USDA partners.

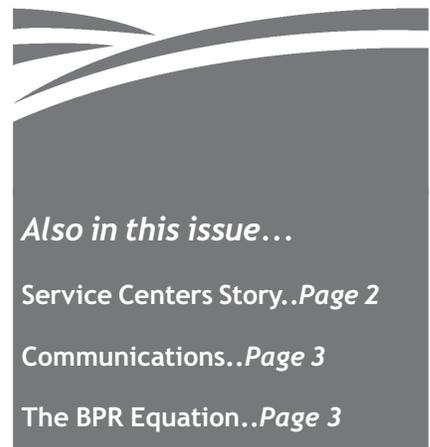
Findings are documented and information compiled in cooperation with the State FAC, resulting in a report that is submitted to the National FAC.

continued on page 2

Moving the Service Center Home Page Forward

The Service Center Home Page Team recently met to move the home page effort forward. Among other activities, they are reviewing USDA guidance in order to establish rules for appearance, positioning, style, and content for the Service Center home page. The team is currently gathering input on what should be included on the home page from all the teams involved with the implementation effort. Members of the team met separately with representatives from the National Information Technology Center's Washington Area Service Center — who will “put-up” the home page — to look at options as to where and on what type of server the home page will reside, links to the Office Information Profile and other Uniform Resource Locators, and

continued on page 2



Reviews...

Continued from page 1

The report highlights progress and successes, as well as barriers that the State is encountering as it strives to implement service centers. It also identifies specific actions the State will take to address concerns included in the report.

USDA Service Centers...Developing Vibrant Sustainable Rural Communities In Partnership With America

Editors note: With USDA Service Center implementation entering its third year, we thought it would be interesting and helpful to take a look at where we've been with the effort and where we eventually hope to wind up. Starting with this issue of the USDA Service Center News, we will cover a different facet of the Service Center story. This month we will feature the background and strategic plan chapters in the Service Center "story."

History

On October 13, 1994, President Clinton signed H.R. 4217, the Federal Crop Insurance Reform and

Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994, Public Law No. 103-354. This Act permitted the Secretary to reorganize USDA, including both headquarters and field structures. The new USDA reorganization reduced the number of agencies from 43 to 29 and established 7 "Mission Areas" to carry out program responsibilities. A 1-year implementation period was established for headquarters and a 3-year implementation for the field restructuring. The consolidation initiative dovetails with the National Performance Review, and the Office of Management and Budget's streamlining efforts.

The National Food and Agriculture Council (FAC) is charged by the Deputy Secretary and the respective Under Secretaries with implementing the reorganization of USDA's county-based field structure. The National FAC is comprised of the Administrator of the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Administrator of the Rural Housing Service (RHS), Administrator of the Risk Management Agency (RMA), Administrator of the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), and Chief of the Forest Service (FS). The Chief of NRCS is the current Chair. The Assistant Secretary for Administration and Chief Information Officer are ex-officio members to provide departmental oversight.

Service Center Strategic Plan

The Service Center Strategic Plan provides a vision of USDA's operational principles, services, and products for the year 2000 and beyond. The plan's purpose is to insure that the Service Center, and its community, customers, suppliers,

and stakeholders share a "common vision" of the future and work toward the same goals and objectives.

Last year, a cross-mission area working team of representatives from the partner agencies collected and analyzed planning material from the Secretary's office, and formulated a Service Center Strategic Plan. The plan has four strategic goals:

1. One-Stop Service,
2. Quality Customer Service,
3. Cost Reduction, and
4. Partnership.

The plan outlines, in broad terms, customer outcome goals and strategic values, discusses the current environment, and summarizes four major strategies for achieving the Service Center strategic goals.

Concept of Operations (CONOPS)

The Service Center Concept of Operations is a logical outgrowth of the Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan establishes a "vision," or what USDA is trying to accomplish in the field offices. The CONOPS -- an interim management document -- provides a "storyboard" of how this vision can be accomplished. The CONOPS describes the transitional phase to a new organizational structure and/or environment.

Based on visits to field offices, and employee-stakeholder workshops, a draft CONOPS Version 1.0 was developed. Using the strategic goals as the guide, Service Center operational attributes were identified. These attributes -- that if implemented, would define a Service Center -- were grouped functionally into six areas:

Homepage...

Continued from page 1

software-hardware questions. Additionally members are looking at the options for who will actually build the home page, once the team has decided what information will be included.



continued on page 3

Service Centers Story...

continued from page 2

1. Facility management,
2. Customer service,
3. Management and Operations,
3. Budget,
4. Personnel Policy, and
5. Training.

Validation of the attribute (which describe Service Center operation) has been accomplished by distributing a questionnaire to partner agencies. Senior managers were asked to rank each attribute according to its approval or disapproval. Responses were incorporated into a distribution table, which in turn was analyzed to determine the most and/or least desirable attributes. Based on this analysis, a CONOPS V2.0 will be developed incorporating those attributes -- operational scenarios -- with the highest degree of approval and acceptance.

Next month: Service Center Concept, Customer Service Initiatives, and Change Management

Communication Effort Bolstered

State FAC Chairs recently designated individuals within their States to serve as State communications coordinators to enhance the Service Center communications effort. The communications coordinators will work to ensure the timely flow of information to field offices and the public through a number of means. First, they will make sure that all Service Center agencies and their field offices receive the *Service Center News* and other FAC information items such as brochures, press releases, fact sheets, and posters. Second, they will provide FAC-related information to local news, farm media, and other external outlets. Third, they will coordinate publicity and support for events, such as service center openings and tours. Fourth, they will work with the National and State FAC on various communications projects.

The BPR Equation: Faster + Cheaper = Satisfied Customers

Nathaniel M. Deutsch
Team Leader

Service Center Administrative Management BPR Team

The Administrative Management Business Process Reengineering (BPR) team is redesigning the way we hire, implement directives, process travel, and manage our vehicle fleets.

The goals are simple: design common ways that Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Rural Development employees can perform these everyday tasks, that are faster and cheaper than the ways any of the agencies handle these things now, and increase customer satisfaction with the results.

In order to see how things function right now and establish a base from which to measure improvements, the team surveyed a cross-section of Service Center employees across the Nation and gathered statistical data from the three mission areas. Here are some of the results:

In the hiring area, the team aims to reduce the amount of time it takes from the time a selecting official decides to fill a position until he or she has a list of qualified candidates from which to make a selection. We set a goal of 14 days for positions filled from within the government and 30 days for positions filled from outside. Service Center employees told us that currently, the agencies collectively average at least 40-50 days for internal hires and 50-60 days for external hires.

Currently, 21 percent of Service Center employees can access their own agency's directives through the Internet. FSA employees may have bulletin board access. Eventually, the team hopes all directives will be paperless and accessible electronically in every office. As all offices are wired up to the USDA local- and area-wide networks, electronic accessibility to the directives of all three mission areas should increase to 100 percent. This will ensure that the directives you need are always com-

continued on page 4

How About a Date?

Service Center News is still looking for events of interest to everyone involved in the USDA Service Center implementation effort in order to start a regular Upcoming Events feature.

Don't feel that you have to limit yourself to internal agency meetings. Include partner functions and other professional gatherings which would be useful for anyone involved with the Service Center effort. Be sure to include the name of the event; the sponsoring organization; date(s); location (city and State) -- including the name of the hotel or convention center where the event is being held; and the name, phone, fax, and e-mail of an individual to contact for more information. Send your event information to USDA, National FAC, *SC News*, attn: Fred Jacobs, Stop 0199, room 4422-S, Washington, DC 20250-0199. Phone: 202-690-0177; fax: 202-720-6101; or e-mail: fjacobs@wdc.fsa.usda.gov.

BPR...

continued from page 3

pletely accurate, up to date, and easily accessible; and it will make filing of all kinds of directives a thing of the past!

Last year, NFC processed 126,372 paper travel vouchers from the Service Center agencies; over 49 percent of those had errors. Of the

89,993 electronic vouchers processed, less than 10 percent had errors. Our goal is a totally electronic, paperless travel system with simplified procedures, resulting in savings of at least 25 percent with better, faster service.

Last year, the agencies collectively amassed over 66 million personal vehicle miles on government business. FSA was the mileage champ, with over 48 million of those, as well as 372 rental vehicles. Rural Development uses a combination of personal vehicles and a total of 741 rental vehicles. NRCS owns a fleet of 10,357 vehicles and rents 165 more. As the number of offices has declined, the need for vehicles has increased. Employees have told us that about 21 percent of the time when they need a vehicles for official business, it's not available. The team has calculated that joint ownership of a fleet of vehicles will not only save taxpayers' money, but will improve efficiency and availability of vehicles as well.

The team is now approaching the conclusion of its work. It has torn apart the old systems, proposed new streamlined steps, analyzed what automation is needed to streamline these processes in the Service Centers, and developed business policies for the reengineered processes. It is building a "business case" to show how reengineered processes would improve administrative support and save money.

During April, the team took its ideas on the road to test its concepts with focus groups of Service Center employees and ensure that it really will make these processes better for the people who will use them. We needed to hear employees' thoughts and make sure that what we are doing is responsive to their needs.

The Administrative Management BPR team works within the broader effort to achieve joint administrative

support among NRCS, FSA, and Rural Development (known as "administrative convergence"), which is now in full swing. The four areas that the BPR team is addressing are an integral part of the overall effort. Implementation of the BPR team's recommendations will occur as a part of the overall administrative convergence effort.

The team will be presenting its recommendations to the three agency heads in June. We are excited about the coming improvements, which should make administrative support easier and more responsive to the customers' needs.

Service Center News

is a publication of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Food and Agriculture Council (FAC). Its purpose is to report progress of USDA Service Centers implementation to employees. Mail or fax questions or comments to the Executive Officer.

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