

Making a Great Service Center Even Better

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The good news was that the USDA employees in Scottsburg, IN, would be getting a new office. The bad news was that the State Food and Agriculture Committee (FAC) rejected the initial design plans for the service center, which featured a single entrance but separate and divided work space for each agency. It was back to the drawing board, literally, to come up with a design that would satisfy the State FAC and incorporate the desirable attributes of USDA service centers, as defined by the National FAC.

Even though the employees in Scottsburg got along extremely well with one another, they were concerned about noise and customer confidentiality in an open office. Their fears proved to be unfounded. Since the new building opened in April 1996, employees and customers alike have found the open space design has many advantages.

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We Asked Service Center Customers "How Are We Serving You?"...Here's What They Said

Editors Note: The 1997 National Customer Service Survey preliminary results are in. Starting with this issue of the Service Center News, we will highlight many of the interesting results, revealed by this in-depth survey of USDA producers and single family housing loan customers.

The results of the 1997 Service Center customer survey are in and they show an overall positive view of service delivery and several indicators of what matters to them. In early February we sent out surveys to Service Center customers from randomly selected samples of

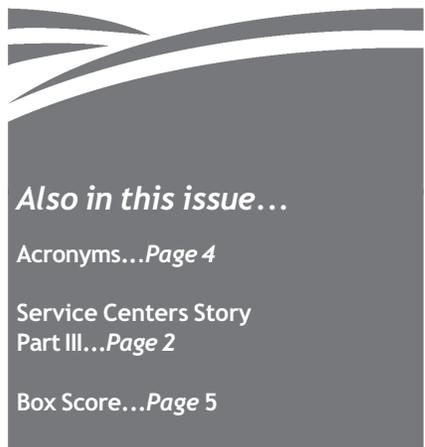
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USDA Joins Forces With HUD to Fight Housing Discrimination

The U.S. Department of Agriculture can now assist rural Americans with housing discrimination complaints more quickly, efficiently, and with more remedies, thanks to a new working arrangement with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Secretary Glickman and Housing Secretary Andrew Cuomo today announced that under a new agreement, USDA will refer all fair housing discrimination claims to HUD. Under this system, HUD attorneys will present complaints

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

Editor's 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 the June issue of the USDA Service Center News, we began covering a different facet of the service centers story with background and strategic plan chapters. This month we will feature the change management training and business process reengineering chapters of the service center "story."

Change Management Training

USDA recognizes that changes of the magnitude being envisioned by the service center concept and the successful deployment of reengineered processes will require a significant change management effort. The Customer Service and Change Management Working Teams of the Implementation Team, in concert with the agency training officers, have developed a three-part training proposal for the field.

The training "USDA Service Center Skills: Working Together for Customers," is designed to accomplish several goals. It provides employees with the skills to deal with current and future organizational changes and respond proactively to changing customer needs as individuals and as a team. It also provides opportunities for service center employees to work together to meet the needs of three sets of customers and it enables employees to foster a relaxed atmosphere for

customers during transition to the USDA service center system. The program will also include identification of internal barriers to working together across agency lines, barriers to providing extraordinary customer service, and referral of barriers that cannot be resolved locally to State and national levels for resolution. Finally, the program will provide for utilizing proven techniques for identifying solutions to internal barriers and collecting transaction-based feedback from customers.

This program will be presented by USDA employees who will be trained to facilitate this training at the service centers. The training will be presented to all employees housed in the service center. Partners will be included in this training, and heavy workload periods will be considered when scheduling the training in order to preclude any impact on service to the customer.

Employees in 14 States have already been trained as coordinators and facilitators. One coordinator, selected by each State Food and Agriculture Council (FAC), will represent all the agencies present in service centers in a particular State, and will ensure all the agencies' needs are taken into consideration when scheduling the training. Facilitators, who will present the training in the service centers, are also selected by members of each State FAC.

Our vision is that a customer can walk into a service center, not sure of the agency needed, and the first person that greets them will assist in solving their problem, or at the very least direct the person to someone who can solve the

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and HUD administrative law judges will hear the cases.

"The American dream of homeownership must not succumb to the nightmare of discrimination," the Secretary said. "Equal access to own or rent rural housing is necessary if we are to complete our mission to help build a better rural America," he said, adding that USDA has "zero-tolerance for discriminatory practices" in any of its programs. "This agreement with HUD is part of USDA's commitment to ensure the civil rights of all customers and employees of USDA, and it's also an important part of the President's race initiative."

The Fair Housing Act provides several rights and remedies that USDA, before this agreement, did not have at its disposal, including the power to impose temporary restraining orders, use subpoenas during investigations, employ testers where appropriate, and impose civil penalties, punitive damages, and damages for pain and suffering.

Through its various rental and homeownership loan programs, USDA is the Nation's largest provider of rural housing. As part of the agreement, USDA and HUD will share information and documents about civil rights claims that allege a violation of the Fair Housing Act. They will also jointly investigate these claims, maintain and share a cumulative list of claims, and participate in joint training on fair housing.

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problem, regardless of agency. That kind of teamwork is what customers appreciate, and what enhances the value of all of our agencies to the public.

Business Process Reengineering

Representatives from the partner agencies, supported by a contractor, with expertise in proven reengineering methodology, completed the development of a list of business processes that are common to the partner agencies. This project team gathered information from previous USDA initiatives, conducted working sessions with field personnel, and met with customers to hear their views first hand. The team identified and recorded over 150 processes, activities, and tasks during the project's data collection phase. During the assessment phase, the team sorted and reordered the list into a hierarchy of 14 processes that are common to the service center partner agencies. These fall into three main project areas:

- Information and Outreach
- Deliver and Service Customer Benefits
- Management and Support.

Each of the groups is being managed by a Deputy Administrator/Chief representing each mission area, and is staffed by partner agency personnel, with support from consulting services. Specific project plans, including resource needs, timetables, and milestones have been developed.

Business Process Reengineering (BPR) will provide the basis for justifying any future investment in information technology.

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The supervisor of each agency has an individual office, but the majority of the support staff is in the open work space and within eye contact of the front door. Depending on who is busy at any given time, a customer who walks through the front door might be greeted by someone from any of the three agencies -- and sometimes by someone from all three agencies.

Enough cross training has been done that employees of one agency can cover for those of another, if necessary, to provide a customer with basic information. The Scottsburg office was nominated by the Indiana State FAC as a Leading Edge service center in August 1996 because the new office made the already excellent working relationships between the agencies there even better.

Scott County is one of the first in Indiana to have digitized soils data. This capability gives Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) a set of accurately scaled maps and allows it to determine acreage very accurately for filter strips and sod waterways enrolled in the continuous CRP contract file. As a result, Farm Services Agency (FSA) is requesting a waiver from the requirement to charge a paid measurement service for many Scott County producers because the NRCS system is as accurate a measurement as any that FSA can determine in the field.

FSA also plans to follow the lead of another Leading Edge office, in Rolla, ND, and ask for a

waiver to use the NRCS highly erodible lands compliance/wetlands compliance (HEL/C/WC) determination files rather than maintaining duplicate files.

FSA and Rural Development personnel are also working together to give out loan applications for both rural housing and farm loans, as well as in accepting and reviewing the applications for completeness.

Another partnership that is working well for everyone in Scott County is with the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). The District produces a joint newsletter with FSA and NRCS, with the SWCD paying the printing costs and FSA paying the postage. The newsletter is produced on a computer provided by the SWCD Board that has many capabilities that none of the USDA computers have.

Scott County is one of the service centers visited recently by two reviewers from the Service Center Implementation Team as part of a review of service center implementation in Indiana. The reviewers credit the agency leaders in Indiana, who insisted on following the guidelines for USDA Service Centers, and the employees themselves, who overcame initial fears about the open space concept and who made a good office even better.



Layperson's Guide to Federal Government Acronyms

Editor's Note: Despite all the pleas for mercy from the public and the media, the Federal Government's passionate love affair with the acronym doesn't seem to be fading. In fact, hardly a day goes by when we're not confronted with a new acronym for some organizational entity or process. We've gotten requests from the partner agencies to help them understand each other's acronyms. To help you navigate through this sea of letters and cushion the culture shock of collocation, we have provided this partial list. Please don't hesitate to call or e-mail us with any acronyms (that we can print) that we might have overlooked.

ABC Activity Based Costing
 AMB Activity Based Management
 ACM AgCredit Manager
 AMS Agricultural Marketing Service
 AMTA Agricultural Market Transition Act
 APFO Aerial Photography Field Office
 ASCS Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service
 B&I Business and Industry
 BBS Bulletin Board System
 BIA Bureau of Indian Affairs
 BLM Bureau of Land Management

BPR Business Process Reengineering
 CBT Computer Based Training
 CCC Commodity Credit Corporation
 CCE Common Computing Environment
 CF Community Facilities
 CFR Code of Federal Regulations
 CI&OS Customer Information and Outreach Specialist
 CIC Customer Information Coordinator
 CIP Customer Information Profile
 CLU Common Land Unit
 CO Credit Office
 COC County Office Committee
 CONOPS Concept of Operations
 COR County Office Reviewer
 COTS Commercial-Off-the-Shelf
 CPN Colored Petri Net
 CPO Conservation Plan of Operations
 CRADA Common Research and Development Agreement
 CRAT Civil Rights Action Team
 CRIT Civil Rights Implementation Team
 CRP Conservation Reserve Program
 CSREES Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service
 DEM Digital Elevation Model
 DFD Data Flow Diagram
 DLOS Dedicated Loan Origination System
 DoD Department of Defense
 DOI Department of Interior
 DOT Department of Transportation
 DSG Decision Support Groupware
 EBI Environment Benefits Index
 EDI Electronic Data Exchange
 EENDS Educational, Environmental/Natural, & Developmental Services
 EI Erosion Index
 EMS Electronic Meeting Systems
 EQIP Environmental Quality Incentives Program
 EPA Environmental Protection Agency
 FAC Food and Agriculture Council
 FAIR Act Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act
 FCA Farm Credit Agency
 FEA Functional Economic Analysis
 FEDSIM Federal Systems Integration and Management
 FEMA Federal Emergency Management Agency
 FGDC Federal Geographic Data Committee
 FmHA Farmers Home Administration
 FOCS Field Office Computing System
 FOIA Freedom of Information Act
 FSA Farm Service Agency
 FSC Field Service Center
 FTP File Transfer Protocol
 GIS Geospatial Information System
 GPRA Government Performance and Results Act
 GPS Global Positioning System
 GUI Graphical User Interface
 HELC Highly Erodible Land Compliance
 ICOC County Office Committee

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In addition, USDA is reviewing all programs and activities to investigate any past discrimination in the sale or rental of rural housing it finances. Any discrimination uncovered by the investigation will be aggressively prosecuted, Glickman said.

Service Center and Office Closing Goals and Progress Box Score

Currently, 2,545 service centers have been established, although not all actions to fully staff the service centers have been completed. Number of actions needed to complete implementation include the closure of 142 agency offices and 164 moves to achieve consolidation.

Acronyms...

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ICOMs Inputs, controls, outputs and mechanisms
 IDP Individual Development Plan
 IE Information Engineering
 IPR In-Progress Review
 IRM Information Resource Management
 IT Information Technology
 ITMRA Information Technology Management Reform Act
 KCMO Kansas City, Missouri
 LAN/WAN Local Area Network/Wide Area Network
 LT Loan Technician
 MFH Multi-Family Housing
 MOU Memorandum of Understanding
 MRB Management Review Board
 NAPP National Aerial Photography Program
 NARA National Archives and Records Administration
 NDOP National Digital Orthophoto Program

NFAC National Food and Agriculture Council
 NPR National Performance Review
 NPS National Park Service
 NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service
 NRWA National Rural Water Association
 OFR Office of Federal Register
 OIG Office of Inspector General
 OMB Office of Management and Budget
 RADCF Risk Adjusted Discounted Cash Flow
 RBS Rural Business-Cooperative Service
 RDBMS Relational Data Base Management System
 RHS Rural Housing Service
 RMA Risk Management Agency
 ROI Return on Investment
 RUS Rural Utilities Service
 SC Service Center
 SCIT Service Center Implementation Team
 SCS Soil Conservation Service
 SCTG Service Center Training Ground
 SDR Standard Data Repository
 SFH Single Family Housing
 SIRM Senior IRM Officer
 SME Subject Matter Expert
 STO State Office
 SWCD Soil and Water Conservation District
 TDD Telecommunications Device for the Deaf
 TQM Total Quality Management
 USDA United States Department of Agriculture
 USF&WS United States Fish and Wildlife Service
 USGS United States Geological Survey
 USLE Universal Soil Loss Equation

Customer Survey...

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producers and Single Family Housing (SFH) borrowers. This included separate randomly selected samples of minority program recipients.

What matters to our customers? Apparently, "face to face" service delivery does; 9 out of 10 said they are satisfied with the overall service and they experience local staff as people who are responsive, reliable, and show empathy towards them when conducting business. Customer report that they don't mind coming to the local offices; when asked, no more than 6% of our customers thought service center staff should come to their home or farm to do some business.

Producers and SFH borrowers as well as minorities and non-minorities have some different experiences and opinions about what matters to them. Based on the survey results, our minority customers report similar levels of satisfaction as non-minorities on many of the same measures (service delivery, quality, treatment by staff, etc.). From a nationwide perspective, the survey data showed no glaring differences in perceptions of service delivery be it timeliness of information or staff assistance in participating in USDA programs. This is not to say that there are not areas which we could "target for improvement", there are. However, it is in the national context of 9 out of 10 minority respondents satisfied with overall service.

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Welcome Aboard State FAC Communications Coordinators!

In the June Service Centers News, we noted that communications coordinators were being identified by the State FAC Chairs. The following lists communications coordinators for each State. The communications coordinators will work to ensure the timely flow of information to field offices and the public. 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. And fourth, they will work with the National and State FAC on various communications projects.

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Acronyms...

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UTM Universal Trans-metrical
WAN Wide Area Network
WC Wetlands Compliance
WDC Washington, D.C.
WHIP Wildlife Habitat Incentives
Program
WRP Wetlands Reserve Program
WWW World Wide Web

Is there something that you feel *your* service center does particularly well?

Drop us a line and let us know about it. Send your story to: Fred Jacobs, USDA, National FAC, *Service Center News*, Stop 0199, Room 4422-S, Washington, DC 20250-0199, or e-mail: fjacobs@wdc.fsa.usda.gov. Or, give us a call with your story idea at 202-690-0177.

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