

## *Upcoming Events*

*Service Center News would like to hear about events of interest to everyone involved in the USDA Service Center implementation effort.*

*see page 6*

## *Paperwork Reduction Report*

*The Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995 required the Federal Departments, including the Department of Agriculture, to reduce their paperwork burden by 25 percent by 1999.*

*story on page 2*

## *Have A Question About How Your Service Center Sign Should Look?*

*Now you can view the USDA Visual Management Guide, Service Center Signs on the Service Center Website at <http://www.usda.gov/servicecenter/> and click on "Information" and then on "Service Center Directives System." If you still have questions, call Fred Jacobs at 202-690-0177.*

## **National Food and Agriculture Council (FAC) Adopts New Slogan and Graphic**

The National FAC recently adopted a new creative concept for its USDA Service Center implementation effort. The concept consists of a slogan, "If It Matters To You, It Matters To Us" printed on a montage backdrop of USDA employee faces. The new slogan and treatment will be adopted for a variety of communications products, including posters, brochures, and other information applications. Once the artwork is completed, *Service Center News* will showcase the new creative concept.

## **Tom Weber Selected As NRCS Acting Chief**

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman recently named Thomas A. Weber, a career conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), to serve as acting chief for the agency. Weber assumes the position following the departure of Paul W. Johnson, who recently returned to private life in Iowa.

Weber began his career with NRCS in Colorado in 1972. Since that time, he has served in a number of technical, administrative, and management positions in North

Carolina, Washington State, Minnesota, California, and New Mexico. He has served as Deputy Chief for Programs and most recently as Deputy Chief for Management for NRCS in Washington, D.C. Weber will serve as Acting Chief until a new chief is appointed.

### *Also in this issue...*

*Next Step Project...Page 3*

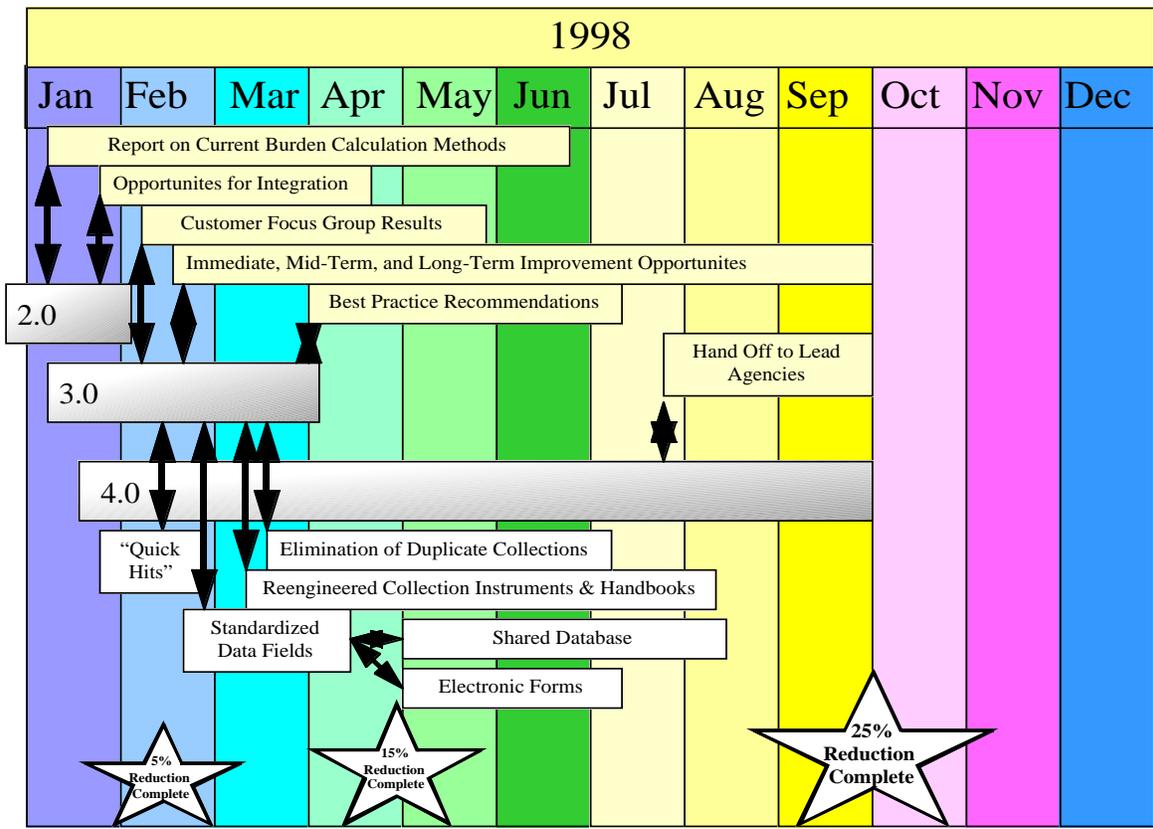
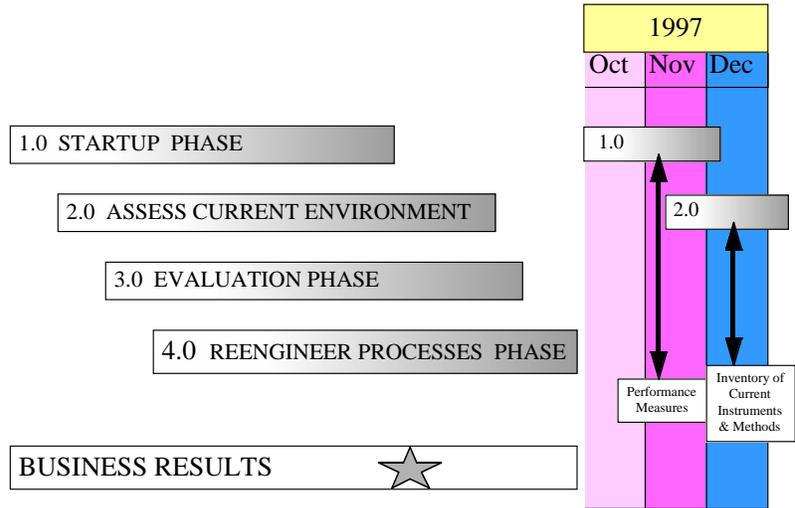
*Hammers '98...Page 4*

# Paperwork Reduction

On July 22, 1997, the Secretary directed that each USDA agency, working with the Chief Information Officer (CIO) and the Congressional Office of Management and Budget (OMB), develop and implement a “strategy for integrating paperwork reduction into its regulatory and programmatic functions.” In the same memorandum, the Secretary directed the National Food and Agriculture Council to establish a team specifically focused on

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## PRA TIMELINE



The project will proceed in four interdependent and overlapping phases. During each phase, certain clearly identifiable products will result. Some products will be primarily internal to the operation of the Implementation Team, while other will have a “business result.” The phases and their products are outlined in the project plan summaries above.

## Next Step Project

**Shirley Hall**

**BPR Pilot Projects Coordinator**

*Bill Harshaw, who has worked on the design phase of BPR for USDA, feels that the Internet could be one the most powerful instruments for change in the way we do business.*

Earlier this summer an interagency project was started called Next Step. Led by Bill Harshaw, FSA; Sherry McFarlane and Kathleen Jackson of Rural Development; and Paul Aydelott, NRCS, the goal was to learn how to develop integrated business solutions using relational databases and intranet/extranet technology. Commissioned for prototype development, the purpose of this short term project was to help the Service Center Agencies learn how to manage development in this new environment.

Bill, who was a member of the BPR Team 2, Customer Service and Program Delivery, said that the Next Step Project itself evolved from the work done by that team. In the team's recommendations were proposals for:

- A database of customer information shared among the agencies;
- Connectivity to move and share information across agencies, with customers; and deliver programs; and
- Simplification of processes and forms.

Bill comments: "The old saying about a picture being worth a thousand words even applies to BPR reports." The Next Step project tried to provide a partial picture of how the BPR recommen-

dations might be implemented. The picture is in the form of a simulation of a service center Web site, located at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov.bpr>. Under this "what if" concept, both employees and customers could use Internet browsers to access and update the shared data and obtain information across agency lines, linking into existing Web sites.

The process of developing the site was very educational, according to Bill. The Management Review Board, composed of the Deputy Administrators for Management and Deputy Administrators of the various program areas are in the process of prioritizing and staffing the projects that will implement BPR recommendations. Experience gained in Next Step will ease the way of the teams that will be charged with implementing the BPR recommendations.

## Paperwork Reduction...

*continued from page 2*

*reducing paperwork for farmers.  
A Paperwork Reduction Planning*



*Team was formed to build an integrated plan to reduce the paperwork burden on the end customer.*

The Paperwork Reduction Team Project plan was delivered to the Deputy Secretary and the Chief Information Officer. The report is organized around a plan of operations detailing customer expectations, roles, and focus; an analysis of current burden; an assessment of on-going activities in each agency to address paperwork reduction; and an overall paperwork plan of action that seeks a minimum of 25 percent reduction in the paperwork burden on USDA customers by September 30, 1999.

The project will proceed in four interdependent and overlapping phases: start-up, an assessment of the current environment, an evaluation phase, and improved business processes.



**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](mailto:fjacobs@wdc.fsa.usda.gov). Or, give Fred a call with your story idea at 202-690-0177.

## NRCS Employee Finishes Marine Corps Marathon

Despite an injured knee, Debra Wardle, NRCS IRM specialist, finished her first Marine Corps Marathon. Considering, too, that she's a first-time marathoner and the cold and rainy conditions — which slowed down runners in all categories — Debra's time of a little over five hours to finish Washington's premier running event wasn't bad at all. Ask anyone who's ever run the Marine Corps. From front-runner to first-timer, it's a personal best effort every time you finish the 26.2-mile course which winds through Arlington, Georgetown, and the District of Columbia.



Debra, who is currently on detail as deputy project manager for the USDA Service Center LAN/WAN/Voice Project, hasn't committed to running another Marine Corps Marathon, but when we asked her if she thinks she'll be out there again next year, she quipped, "I plan to run until I die, then I'll stop."

## Hammer Awards '98

If your service center is doing something to be more efficient to help save tax payer dollars, why not stand up and be recognized for your efforts?

By nominating your service center or State office for a Hammer Award, you will be honoring teams of Federal employees who have made significant contributions in support of reinventing government principles.

**The award is the Vice President's answer to yesterday's government and its \$400 hammer.**

Fittingly, the award consists of a gold hammer, a ribbon, and a note from Vice President Gore, all in an aluminum frame. More than 900 Hammer Awards have been presented to teams comprised of Federal employees, State and local employees, and citizens who are working to build a better government.

**You may nominate your Federal team for a Hammer Award. Here's how:**

Send your nomination directly to Fred Jacobs, USDA, National FAC, Service Center News, Stop 0199, Room 4422-S, Washington, DC 20250-0199, fax: 202-720-6101 or e-mail: [fjacobs@wdc.fsa.usda.gov](mailto:fjacobs@wdc.fsa.usda.gov). If you have any questions, give Fred a call at 202-690-0177.

If you are with a State or local government, a private sector company, or another organization, you may also nominate Federal teams and agencies with whom you are in partnership.

**Who decides?**

While each organization may structure the nomination and review process as it deems fit, the final approval of all Hammer Awards is made by the National Performance Review staff, taking into account any comments and recommendations from the agency.

**Award ceremonies**

If your team is selected for a Hammer Award, your agency will sponsor an award ceremony. Presentations are made by Vice President Gore or people who represent him. These representatives can be the head of your Federal organization, an NPR staff member, or others. At these ceremonies, the team receives the Hammer Award plaque. Individual team members receive a certificate signed by the Vice President and a Hammer lapel pin.

**Tell everybody**

If your team wins, let the whole world know. Work with your newsletter editors (print and electronic) in advance so they can tell your coworkers. Work with your public affairs office to notify the media and outside organizations. Put your story on your agency's web page.

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## Hammer Awards...

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### For more information

If you have specific questions about the merits of your nomination, or what specifically to include in it, you may also contact the NPR directly. Contact Jerry Nikolaus at (202) 632-0391 or Denise Clyburn at (202) 632-0181. Their e-mail addresses are:

jerry.nikolaus@npr.gsa.gov and denise.clyburn@npr.gsa.gov. NPR's fax number is (202) 632-0390.

### Hammer Award nomination form

(This is really a format, not a form.) You may adjust the space as needed to tell your story.

Name of Office/Group/Team:  
Government Agency/Department

ment

Mailing Address:

Team Leader or Manager's

Name

Telephone Number

Fax Number:

e-mail address:

What process, function, or service has been reinvented?

How has this group cut red tape or empowered employees to improve service to your customers?

Are there tangible benefits to your customers and/or the government?

What has this group done that makes them truly outstanding?  
We are looking for those Federal employees who have done extraordinary things to help build

a government that costs less and works better. Please add any additional comments that you feel will support this nomination.

Please provide a short, one page, plain English narrative that would tell any taxpayer why your reinvention is a success. The narrative should be relatively free of acronyms and written in easily understood layman's terms. This summary will serve as the basis for a news release if your nomination is approved.

Name of person submitting this nomination:

Title of that person:

Telephone number:

Fax number:

E-mail address:

Name of Agency/Department submitting this nomination:

Date of nomination:

**Spread The Word: <http://www.usda.gov/servicecenter/>**

Now that you can read *Service Center News* -- hot off the press -- via the new Service Center web site, why not share the information with your customers? Just click on the "Information" button and you can choose to download the *Service Center News* and other information as a .PDF file or as text. Then, just choose the articles you want to share with customers and "paste" them into your newsletter.

## USDA Completes Massive Automation Project For Home Loan Program

Secretary Dan Glickman recently announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has completed a massive conversion effort which has modernized the system it uses to service \$18 billion in home loans held by rural Americans. "The result of this effort will be greatly improved service to the 565,000 rural Americans who depend on USDA for direct, single-family home loans," the Secretary said. "This project will reduce operating costs for USDA's Rural Housing Service, saving taxpayers some \$250 million over a five-year period, and \$100 million annually thereafter. I am proud that this effort -- one of the most ambitious modernization projects ever undertaken by USDA -- was completed on schedule." The loan conversion effort was launched with two states in October, 1996, then expanded in phases until all 50 states had been converted to the new system in September 1997. In the past, USDA's single family home loans were serviced by Rural Development field offices. Now all loan servicing is being conducted through USDA's newly created Centralized Servicing Center in St.



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# Upcoming Events

## Agricultural Outlook Forum '98

February 23-24, 1998,  
Omni Shoreham Hotel,  
Washington, D.C.

Registration details 202-720-  
3050.

email: [agforum@oce.usda.gov](mailto:agforum@oce.usda.gov)  
or write to Outlook Forum  
98, 5143 South Building,  
USDA, Washington, D.C.  
20250-3812

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Send your event information  
to Service Center 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](mailto:fjacobs@wdc.fsa.usda.gov).

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.

*The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in  
its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age,  
disability, political beliefs, and marital or familial status. (Not all  
prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who  
require alternative means for communication of program information  
(braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET  
Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).*

*To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department  
of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250, or call (800) 245-6340 (voice) or  
(202) 720-1127 (TDD). USDA is an equal employment opportunity  
employer.*

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Editor: Fred Jacobs  
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## Loan Automation...

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Louis. Field offices still handle the loan application process. Antiquated office equipment — such as card files and typewriters — which field offices relied on in the past have now been replaced with computers.

“The centralized servicing system provides swifter processing of loan applications and enhanced customer services, such as a toll-free telephone number and extended hours of operation, said Under Secretary for Rural Development Jill Long Thompson. One major benefit of the modernization

program is that USDA can, for the first time, now offer escrow accounts for property taxes and insurance to its home loan borrowers, as was directed by Congress. These escrow accounts enhance borrowers' success in meeting their housing costs and retaining their homes.



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