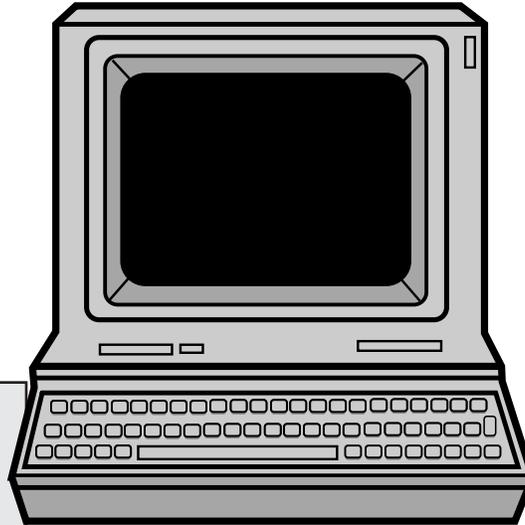


Common Computing Environment Deployment

At the end of Fiscal Year 1998 the Service Center Agencies purchased 15,188 desktop and 1,291 laptop computer systems as part of the Common Computing Environment (CCE) Project. All but a few of these computers have been deployed and are being used to carry out the business of the Service Center agencies. Using the new computers and re-positioning Y2K compliant systems already in the agencies' inventories,



To increase the efficiency of this deployment, all of the systems will be shipped from the factory with common software already loaded. The common software is the same as provided with the initial systems, updated to current versions. Also, the Internet based receiving and reporting systems that were used during the first effort will be updated to support this latest deployment. The National Help Desk and the CCE Deployment Support Team will provide direct support to state IT staffs in resolving problems.

The CCE Project also purchased 6,996 printers at the end of September to augment new computers. Three different printer models were purchased to meet the different needs of the field staffs. Portable color inkjets (2,372) are for use when staff is working remotely from their office. Black and white lasers (1,638) will be installed on the office network for normal printing. Color inkjets (2,986) capable of printing larger format products will also be connected to office networks. Delivery of the

(See Computing Environment, continued on page 4)

Portable Color Inkjet Specifications

Hewlett Packard HP 340CBi Portable Printer: 3 PPM black and 0.5 PPM color graphics, 30-page sheet feeder, NiCAD rechargeable battery with a battery print life of 100 sheets, connection via a parallel cable that is provided, H x W x D = 5.9" x 12.2" x 2.6"

Black and White Laser Specifications

Hewlett Packard HP LaserJet 4050N Workgroup Printer: 1200 dpi resolution, 17 PPM, 2 trays w/ 600 sheet capacity, 16 MB memory, Bidirectional parallel, serial, and HP JetDirect card for Ethernet 10/100Base-T networks, W x D x H: 15 x 19 x 14 in; Weight 43 LB

Color Inkjet Specifications

Hewlett Packard HP 2500CM Workgroup Color InkJet Printer: 600 dpi resolution, photo-quality color, 11 PPM black and 9 PPM color, maximum paper size 13"x22", two media trays, 20 MB memory expandable to 76 MB, built-in HP JetDirect MIO Internal Print Server, W x D x H: with

there is now a Year 2000 compliant computer available in every program delivery office.

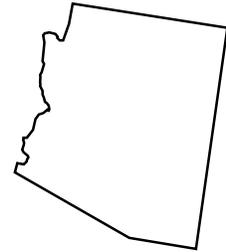
Building on this initial success, an additional 6,578 desktop, 4,946 laptop, and 467 high-end workstations were purchased in Fiscal Year 1999. Shipping of these computers began the week of October 25th and deployment will be completed early next year. When all of these systems are installed, the Service Center agencies will have over 29,000 CCE workstations in operation to help provide services to their customers.

The deployment of the additional computers will use the same team approach across the three agencies that worked so well in the first effort. The State Deployment Plans that were created and approved by each state FAC will continue to provide the framework for this inter-agency endeavor. The Plans have already been amended to include the delivery schedule and shipping destinations for the additional computers. Local, state, and national teams will continue to manage the deployment from a common perspective.

In this issue...

- More computers purchased for field
- Arizona Outreach Council provides USDA overview for customers
- Mobile office and Kiosk beginning pilot tests
- Preliminary customer survey results

USDA Agencies in Arizona Unite to Create Presentation for FAC and Service Center Outreach



“Over the years, changes and reorganizations at the U.S. Department of Agriculture have made a department that works better and costs less for the American people. Sometimes these changes have made it difficult for our customers to keep track of what services are provided by which USDA agency. This presentation is designed to help our customers get an overview of the USDA agencies most active in Arizona and the services they provide.”

Thus begins an ambitious effort by the State Outreach Council in Arizona to provide a snapshot of USDA programs and services available to local customers.

The information, geared to reach under served communities, is available as a Powerpoint slide presentation and as a printed handout. The Outreach Council received input and photographs from most of the USDA agencies to create the presentation. So that no one agency has to bear all the costs, the presentation will be distributed to all agencies on a diskette. That way each can update the presentation

and make their own slides as needed.

The printed version will be available at each USDA Service Center.

The idea behind the outreach effort was to give each agency a presentation with a thumbnail description of the agencies most active in Arizona. The first one is an overview, then a list of services the agency provides, a list of who can qualify for assistance, and finally how to reach the agencies in Arizona.

“It’s hard for customers to know which USDA agency does what,” said Dianna Jennings, designer of the presentation. “We hope that each time someone goes out to talk to a group,

they’ll take this presentation with them. Then the customers will have an overview of ALL the programs and services available, and staff won’t have to try to describe programs with which they’re not that familiar.”

In addition to the slide presentation and the paper printouts, the Outreach Council has a video with the same information in development. The presentations are seen as a perfect compliment to the Service Center concept. Not only will customers know the various programs available, but they only have to make one stop to access them.”

USDA Service Center Mobile Office

Reaching underserved populations in geographically remote locations is a challenge faced by USDA employees in many states. In response to the challenge, a service center on-wheels has been designed to take programs and services directly to remote areas. The mobile office is a 34 foot reconfigured Recreational Vehicle with two private offices complete with laptops and docking stations. Satellite communications capability will enable employees working remotely to link to their home service centers. The interior of the mobile office is large enough to hold training sessions or educational workshop for 5-6 people.

The mobile office provides the capability to partner with educational, medical, and non-profit groups as well as local governments. For example, a nurse practitioner may come along with USDA to provide vaccinations to children on tribal lands.

The first pilot test of the Mobile Office will take place in North Dakota in Fiscal Year 2000.



USDA's Service Center on Wheels visits St. Louis for a Small Farms Conference.

USDA bringing Lending Info and More to Customers

The USDA Service Center Lending and Outreach Team has designed an electronic kiosk that provides lending program information for use at local malls, libraries, or post offices. The kiosk concept was developed to increase USDA's lending presence in rural America. Currently only 900 of the 2500 service centers directly provide lending services. In some areas of the country a customer may drive 100 miles or more to obtain program information. The kiosk is an effective tool for reaching customers or potential customers that may otherwise have limited access to USDA program information.

The kiosk contains an interactive computer display that informs interested persons of USDA lending programs, provides a means to allow those persons to determine if they are likely eligible for a particular loan program, and provides a contact point for additional information.

"Through the use of touch-screen menus, individuals are prompted to answer questions or supply information that is used to determine pre-qualification for USDA programs," Steve Rubin, Lending and Outreach

Coordinator said. "Customers can get information on farm loan programs (direct & guaranteed), single family housing loan, grant, rental programs (direct & guaranteed), and community loan and grant programs."

Results and specific program information may be printed directly from the kiosk, saving the potential customer a trip to the service center.

Pilot testing of the kiosk will begin in December of 1999.



Kiosks are to be Pilot Tested in Nine States Beginning in December of 1999.

Survey Says . . . Customers Satisfied, Drive Times Good

A customer service survey by the Service Center Modernization Initiative again shows that 9 out of 10 USDA Service Center customers—specifically housing borrowers and producers—are happy with the quality of service they receive from USDA Service Centers. About the same percentage, or about 9 out of 10, are pleased with how USDA delivers programs.

"This is really a fairly high level of satisfaction with what we're doing, and how we're doing it," said Len Covello, Quality Customer Service Team Leader. "While these are

preliminary results, the message is a good one."

The survey was taken to meet the requirements of a continuing directive from President Clinton and for the Government Performance and Results Act, specifically providing a measurement of the Service Center Modernization Initiative's efforts in meeting established performance goals. The measurements indicate that the performance goals were met.

"One of the better numbers that came out of this particular survey was the indication that customers may be seeing an improvement in their travel

times to our Service Centers," Covello said. "Our performance target set in the strategic plan was for about 8 out of 10 to travel an hour or less. The results of the survey indicate that 9 of 10 are already at this mark. We also have an indication that the travel times, in general, are what customers define as 'reasonable time.' We still have some more results to review before we can be certain but that's the way it looks right now."

A complete analysis of the survey is underway. Results will be made available when the analysis is complete.

Computing Environment continued from page 1

Desktop Specifications

Gateway E-4200: 450 MHZ Pentium III w/Ethernet NIC, 64 MB RAM, 13.6 GB IDE HDD, 17" monitor, AGP graphics controller w/ 16 MB video memory, 17/40x CD-ROM, sound card, speakers

Laptops with Docking Stations

Dell Latitude CpiR400GT: 400 MHZ Pentium II, 128 MB RAM, 14.1" active matrix LCD, 10/24X CD-ROM, 4.8 GB HDD, 56 KBS modem, 10/100 Ethernet PCMCIA card, docking station with Ethernet NIC, serial, parallel, video, keyboard, and mouse ports, and monitor stand; 17" monitor, keyboard, and mouse

High End Workstations

Dell Precision Workstation 610: 500 MHZ Xeon Pentium III w/Ethernet NIC, 256 MB RAM, 18 GB SCSI HDD, 17/40X CD-ROM, SCSI Tape Backup, 21" monitor, AGP graphics controller w/ 32 MB video memory, sound card, speakers

printers will begin in mid-November with deployment scheduled for early next year. The same deployment process will be used, relying on the state IT teams to complete the installation of these printers. Tracking of delivery and final installation will also be accomplished using the Internet based system that is being used for the computers.

The purchase of the CCE computers and printers was done through consolidated procurements that resulted in considerable savings. One estimate of the savings indicates that consolidated purchasing saved over \$11 million, compared to single unit pricing. Through these savings, many more computers and printers were

purchased than would have otherwise been possible.

The workstations and printers provide the initial capabilities for the Service Center Common Computing Environment and serve as the building blocks for future components. Planning for additional capabilities including network/communications servers, application servers, Geographic Information Systems software, and additional portable computing equipment are among the items that are being planned as part of the CCE. These will be acquired and deployed to the field over the next few years as funding allows.

National FAC Executive Officer:

Gregory L. Carnill

Director of Service Center Operations:

Pandor Hadjy

Mail or fax questions or comments to:

Editor, *Service Center News*,
USDA, National FAC
Stop 0199, Room 4416-S
Washington, DC 20250-0199
Phone: (202) 720-5238
FAX: (202) 720-6101

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family 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 of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Comments or suggestions?

Have newsletter article for submission?

Is there something your USDA Service Center does particularly well?

Contact:

USDA
National Food and Agriculture Council
Service Center News
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Mail Stop 0199
4416 South Building
Washington, D.C. 20250-0199

"If it matters to you, it matters to us"

