



Executive Summary

The Service Center Modernization Initiative (SCMI) is the cornerstone of reinvention efforts at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The bottom line for any government agency is service. The ultimate outcome of fully implementing the USDA Service Center Modernization Plan (the Plan) will be one-stop, quality service delivered efficiently and effectively to customers of the Farm Service Agency (FSA), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Rural Development Mission Area.

Modernization Mandate

With about one-third of USDA's workforce, approximately 35,000 employees at the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 1999, these county-based agencies will provide an estimated \$55 billion in farm, conservation and rural development services during FY 2000. This represents almost one-half of the total for the department.

Agency workload has been increasing in recent years, reflecting economic trends in the rural economy and weather-related disasters. FSA commodity and farm credit programs in 1999 were up 39 percent from 1993 and NRCS and Rural Development face comparable increasing demands for assistance.

Agency budgets have been unable to keep pace with inflation and increasing workload. From FY 1993 through FY 1999, total staffing for these agencies has been reduced by 22 percent. FSA was down by 24 percent, Rural Development was down by 27 percent and NRCS was down by 16 percent.

Current business processes and technology are outmoded and disconnected. Customers are faced with redundant requests for basic

information, multiple visits to field offices and a significant paperwork burden.

USDA customers want to communicate and exchange information in person and via modern communications methods, including the Internet. Congress is responding with legislation to require USDA to make more services available to the public electronically.

The Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 requires the Secretary of Agriculture to combine field offices to reduce personnel and duplicate overhead expenses, by joint use of resources. Further, it requires that the Secretary procure and use computer systems in a manner that enhances efficiency, productivity, and client services, and that promotes computer information sharing among agencies of the Department. The Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996 requires USDA to maximize the value of information technology acquisitions to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of USDA programs.

The Plan relies on shared investments to provide reengineered business processes and support the acquisition and management of data within a shared information system. Economies of scale in the procurement and management of information technology systems is driving a shared investment approach to maximize the benefits for each of the partner agencies and our customers.

Service Center Modernization-Cornerstone for Change

Since 1996, SCMI has been streamlining and restructuring county field offices, reengineering and integrating business approaches, replacing the current, aging information systems with a modern Common Computing Environment (CCE), and



expanding partnerships to leverage resources available for modernization and improving outreach to under-served customers.

The Deputy Secretary oversees this major modernization effort and has charged the National Food and Agriculture Council (FAC) responsibility to develop and implement this Plan in order to ensure strategic coordination among the core service center agencies. Under the policy direction of the National FAC, the SCMI manages and coordinates the efforts of inter-agency project teams conducting implementation activities.

Service Center Vision - We will reach out and deliver programs to customers in a manner that is responsive to their needs, treating each with dignity and respect.

Service Center Mission - USDA Service Centers, in partnership with individuals and communities will deliver agricultural, rural development and natural resource programs efficiently and with a quality of service that exceeds customer expectations.

To attain the vision and accomplish the mission, the partner agencies established four strategic goals that provide the conceptual framework for the Service Center concept.

- ▲ **One-Stop Service** - Establish one-stop USDA Service Centers where agricultural, rural development and natural resource conservation programs are provided by employees offering exceptional service seamlessly.
- ▲ **Quality Customer Service** - Exceed the expectations of customers by providing fair, equal, courteous, high-quality, professional, and personalized service in a timely and nondiscriminatory manner.

- ▲ **Cost Reduction** - Reduce program delivery costs by implementing common processes in support of USDA Service Center operations.
- ▲ **Partnership** - Develop partnerships with individuals, conservation districts, other organizations, communities and government agencies to maximize use of limited resources and attain common goals and objectives, while protecting the privacy of customers.

Implementation

Five implementation strategies have been developed to achieve the strategic goals.

Collocation - The primary purpose of collocation is to provide a single USDA presence, which provides efficient, quality, one-stop customer service at approximately 2500 Service Centers nationwide.

One-Stop Service - A Service Center is a full-time office that provides information on and delivers:

*Farm programs and farm credit;
Conservation programs, technical assistance, guidance and planning;
Rural loan and grant programs.*

All partner agencies do not have staff present in every Service Center. Staff with access to written and automated information will be able to provide any customer with basic information and effective service. That service may be provided remotely via telephone or a user-friendly computer, or face-to-face at a follow-up appointment with the appropriate program specialist.

Culture Change - USDA recognized from the outset of the SCMI that human issues surrounding change are paramount and must be actively managed from both an internal perspective and an external/partner perspective.

Business Process Reengineering (BPR) - Current “as is” operations in a Service Center can be described as a series of “stovepipe” units staffed by dedicated employees, delivering important services independently to an overlapping set of customers. Complex and cumbersome processes result in untimely delivery of services based on incomplete or outdated information.

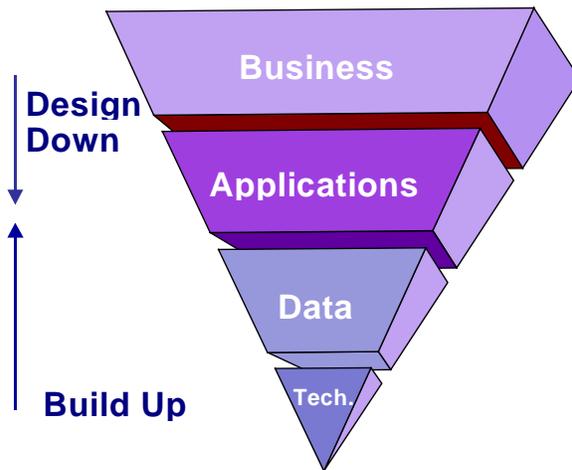
A fundamental assessment of the entire portfolio of business delivered through Service Centers has resulted in focusing BPR projects within core business areas (Lending, Managing Risk, Conservation and Environment, Community Development and Outreach, Administration, and Common Business Processes). Reengineered business then drives the shared enabling technology solutions required for the new business processes.

Consolidated Administrative Support - USDA is committed to consolidating the three separate administrative organizations of FSA, NRCS and Rural Development into a single Support Services Bureau (SSB). Common administrative policies and procedures delivered by a single support organization across all Service Center partner agencies will reduce the proportion of staff required to provide administrative services. These staff savings can be redirected to basic program delivery and customer service.

Integrated Technology - The legacy technical and communications “stovepipes” cannot support something as simple as sharing

a customer’s address and phone number electronically. The agencies are migrating to a shared platform, including a common telecommunications voice and data infrastructure and shared data management, built within the context of an enterprise business and technical architecture.

The Implementation Plan within the overall Plan provides the roadmap –or approach—to take us from the “as is” environment to our vision of the “to be” target environment. It focuses implementation activities in four phases that result in business optimization in a virtual service center environment that delivers one-stop service anytime-anywhere. This phased or iterative approach allows continual feedback, testing and validation before we fully deploy a final solution.



Enterprise Architecture Blueprint

Enterprise architecture is vital to the successful implementation of a reengineering effort of this size and scope. The architecture describes the relationship between business and technology -- within the SCMI business drives technology. Technology enables the business to deliver its products and services in new and improved ways. However, business



and technology have a push-pull relationship. New business processes often require new technology and new technology enables new methods of service delivery.

Progress-to-Date

Collocation – Since the County Office Streamlining Plan was announced in December of 1994, USDA has reduced the total number of field office locations from over 3700, many of which represented multiple locations within a single county, to 2676 USDA Service Centers at the end of FY 1999. The Plan targets a goal of 2567 one-stop service centers throughout the country. State Offices of the service center partner agencies are also collocating, with one half of the States currently collocated and all State Offices targeted for collocation by the end of FY 2002.

Culture Change – Change Management and Customer Service Training has been delivered to more than 24,000 Rural Development, FSA and NRCS Service Center personnel, including collocated conservation district and extension staff. The training is designed to help employees adapt to their changing work environment, build teams across agencies and with local partners, and respond proactively to customer needs. Similar training is being delivered to all program and administrative personnel at State Offices and headquarters.

Customer focus groups and surveys are a critical component of the SCMI. During FY 1999 we completed our second annual survey of Service Center customers. Customer satisfaction remains high despite declining staff levels, a tribute to the dedication of the frontline workforce. A customer feedback system has been tested in six states and is ready for deployment in FY 2000.

Through the establishment of a Union Coordination Council of state-based unions, a National Labor Coordination Council of headquarters unions and an Association Coordination Council of employee associations, the National FAC has developed a strong coalition of partners providing valuable input to and support for the SCMI. The National, State and Local FAC also work closely with external partners like the local conservation districts and farmer-elected committees to jointly pursue the mutually beneficial goals and objectives of the SCMI.

Identification and outreach to under-served communities is a high priority for USDA. The National and State FAC have implemented the Secretary's outreach policies and directives, establishing Outreach Councils and developing short and long-term outreach plans in each of the States.

BPR – The fundamental reengineering of business processes is what will ultimately deliver programs conveniently and efficiently. To that end the partner agencies comprehensively assessed all business processes at the Service Center level from a customer life cycle perspective. An initial business case indicated a very favorable return on investment in the reengineering and the enabling technology.

The SCMI has established a Business Integration Center at the George Washington Carver Center in Beltsville, MD. The center, in concert with the partner agencies' development centers, ensures that individual BPR projects are integrated into an end-to-end approach within core business areas. The center also provides technical guidance and support for projects within the common technical and business architectures of the future shared information system, including the CCE.



Nine live pilot sites have been established in working Service Centers across the country. Actual measurement of customer and employee time spent doing business before and after new processes and technology validates the estimated return on investment and customer benefits in the initial business case. Nine BPR projects have entered the pilot test phase of development. The first shared personnel processes were pilot tested in five states and are now being deployed nationally. Twelve pilot sites are testing processes for digitizing land data.

Consolidated Administrative Support –The Secretary has directed that the redundant administrative support organizations of the Service Center partner agencies be consolidated into a single administrative support organization that would provide financial, administrative, personnel, civil rights and information technology services. The SSB was scheduled for implementation in FY 2000. Congressional action prohibited use of the FY 2000 appropriation to establish the SSB. The Secretary has asked the congress to remove the language, and allow the implementation of the SSB to proceed.

Integrated Technology - A shared telecommunications network that provides voice and electronic communications within offices and with other offices nationwide has been deployed. Customers can now call a single number for a service center and reach any of the agencies, including collocated conservation districts. The network also provides the local and wide area network for the CCE – the electronic highway to move information to and from other offices and the Internet.

During FY 1998 and 1999 the partner agencies acquired and deployed 29,000 modern, Year 2000 (Y2K) compliant

workstations with common operating systems and software, and 7,000 printers.

- **FY 2000 - 2002**

The direct appropriation of \$12.6 million for the CCE plus additional funding from the partner agencies will provide a total of \$75 million to fund the SCMI in FY 2000. The President's FY 2001 Budget requests a direct appropriation of \$75 million plus additional funding from the partner agencies for a total of \$137.6 million. A similar level of funding will be required in FY 2002.

This level of investment in the future of the county-based agencies will support a fully deployed and functional CCE in support of the reengineered and future business processes to deliver farm, conservation and rural development programs.

Collocation – During FY 2000 we will complete the remaining Service Center collocations. We will conduct a strategic analysis of Service Center locations to determine if core Service Centers can be targeted for technology infrastructure investments and still provide full service and functionality at all Service Centers.

We will finish collocating our State Offices – twelve (12) are targeted for FY 2000, five (5) for FY 2001 and eight (8) for FY 2002.

Culture Change – During FY 2000 we will complete the Change Management and Customer Service Training for program and administrative staff in State and headquarters offices. We will deploy the Service Center Quick Reference Guide to USDA Program Information, as well as the customer service feedback system.



We will continue to work with internal partners such as employee unions and associations, and external partners like the local conservation districts and county committees to examine opportunities to optimize USDA Service Centers.

BPR – We will continue development of shared data management policies and standards, data warehousing, data architecture, and data management tools. We will continue to acquire base data for orthoimagery, soils, climate, hydrologic boundaries, Common Land Unit (CLU) and demographic data to support new business applications utilizing geospatial data.

We will complete development and testing of key common infrastructure projects, and initiate planning, analysis and design of a Service Center Performance Measurement System. We will continue development and testing to achieve end-to-end reengineering of the core business areas. Priorities will be determined by the business requirements and resource availability of the partner agencies. Deployment of new applications will begin only after pilot testing and validation of the cost benefit analysis assures a return on investment.

Consolidated Administrative Services – We will continue to reengineer administrative processes in support of common streamlined policies and procedures applicable across the partner agencies and consistent with enterprise architectures for the Department. These common policies, procedures and reengineered processes are vital to the successful implementation of the SSB.

Integrated Technology – In FY 2000 we will provide connectivity for the FSA legacy system to the CCE workstations and

telecommunications network, begin to acquire network servers needed to provide remote administration, business quality e-mail and support initial reengineered business applications, and acquire hardware and software to support public electronic access. In FY 2001 we will complete the acquisition of network servers, begin acquisition of application servers needed to host program applications, acquire GIS software, and acquire shareable peripherals such as printers, plotters and other components. In FY 2002 we will complete the acquisition of application servers, GIS servers and software, public access servers and workstations.

The Business Integration Center will continue to provide support for testing prototype applications, configuration management and CCE deployment.

Conclusion

George Washington Carver said it best, “It is simply service that measures success.” The county-based agencies of USDA have asked their customers what they want and need. We understand our current deficiencies and what must be done to modernize and streamline program delivery in order to not only meet, but to exceed our customers’ expectations.

Given the resources to invest in the future, ingenuity and perseverance of our employees, and involvement and support of our partners and customers – this Plan will deliver the “anytime anywhere” service our customers seek. The Service Center of the future will possess the people, information, processes and technology necessary to meet the diverse needs of rural residents and agricultural customers well into the 21st century.

