**Plain Language Report Card for: Department of Agriculture (USDA)**

**Agency Home Page: http://usda.gov  
Grade: Basic requirement:   
 Other activities:**

**Part 1: How well does the agency comply with the basic requirements of the Act**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Criteria | Notes | Score |
| Agency plain language page URL | <http://usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=PLAIN_WRITING> | **10** |
| Linked from the homepage? |  | **10** |
| Do they name a senior official? | 3, in fact (4 in the compliance report) | **10** |
| Do they list other contacts? | In the compliance report, many listed by agency | **10** |
| Is there contact info for the other contacts? | In the 2011 report, but not on-line. | **5** |
| Do they have an implementation plan? | <http://www.usda.gov/documents/PL-Report-final.pdf>  They call in a compliance report. | **10** |
| Do they have a 2012 compliance report? | http://www.usda.gov/documents/USDA\_Compliance\_Report\_04-13-2012.pdf10 | **10** |
| Does the website provide feedback mechanism? | contact Marjorie Harter, Senior  Writer and Editor in the Office of the Executive Secretariat at 202-720-6538 or [marjorie.harter@osec.usda.gov](mailto:marjorie.harter@osec.usda.gov). | **10** |
| Are they using plain language in all new or substantially revised covered documents? | they list several pages of examples across the department of documents written in pl.  FSA’s Farm Loan Programs awaits approval on a brochure titled *Your Guide to FSA Farm Loans.*  . But we are confident that there has been a USDA sea-change on plain writing. For example, I have received several requests from our subcabinet for plain writing help on high level documents and regulations. Additionally, some of our agencies and offices have conducted extensive efforts to train their staff members and ensure that the documents they produce comply with the Act. | **8** |
| How did they inform employees of requirement | after the Act was signed the Secretary sent a letter to all staff  http://www.usda.gov/documents/PLSecretaryltr\_10-12-2011.pdf  - newsletters  - intranet  - PLAIN briefed top staff | **10** |

**Total score for basic compliance with Act: 93 (out of 100)**

**Part 2: Agency compliance with the Plain Writing Act – Supporting activities**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Criteria | Notes | Score |
| Implementation Plan |  | **30** |
| Does the plan list objectives | Establish an inter-agency working group to put the Act into practice, develop training to teach its requirements, and stay accountable for its results.  identify critical review points that covered documents are subject to prior to publication and institute a plain language verification step.  They also list types of covered documents and who needs to be trained in their implementation plan | **8,6** |
| Do they identify specific actions to implement objectives | publish a departmental regulation on plain language. Not done yet, but still working on it.  Develop on-line training (they did) | **8,8** |
| Do they identify time frames | No, except to publish the annual report on time. | **0** |
| Compliance Report |  | **30** |
| Does agency list types of covered docs? | Yes, 2011 report lists types of documents that “will be  available” in plain language,  and intended audiences. | **10** |
| Does plan discuss sustaining change? | Yes. 2011 document | **10** |
| What docs are focus of pl work pl? | 2012 Compliance report starting on page 3 has an extensive list, by agency. . We can’t ensure they all are, but we are confident that there has been a USDA sea-change on plain writing. For example, I have received several requests from our subcabinet for plain writing help on high level documents and regulations. Additionally, some of our agencies and offices have conducted extensive efforts to train their staff members and ensure that the documents they produce comply with the Act. | **10** |
| Tracking documents created in or revised into pl? |  | **0** |
| Measurements |  | **8** |
| Testing pl quality of documents | They say they are instituting verification steps and creating a subcommittee of the pl working group to oversee compliance. Has this happened, is it working?  Our plain writing working group executive committee is still serving that role as we work to implement the law without a Congressionally approved budget to do so. We triage. We work with the agency and office members of our working group to identify groups or classes of documents where plain writing can help us achieve USDA’s mission and the Secretary’s mandate to better serve the public who use our programs. Each agency does have a clearance process and we have stressed the need for ensuring plain language as part of that process. |  |
| Testing effectiveness of documents? |  | **0** |
| Is agency measuring effectiveness of program? | NRCS -The agency will enforce the Plain Writing Act and will measure compliance through newsletter articles, surveys, and one-on-one discussions and support. | **3** |
| What else, if anything does agency measure | Employee evals – employees get extra points on eval for taking a pl course. |  |
| Other Supporting Info |  | **80** |
| Do they list contact info for the lead official on the pl page? | No |  |
| What categories of employees must take training? | loan officers  program staff writing regs and forms  inspectors | **8** |
| How long is the training | Variable. PLAIN training, on-line course, etc. | **10** |
| How is training delivered? | webinair  in person  on-line course | **10** |
| Who have they gotten trained so far? | ranges by agency  all staff  FOIA staff  IT staff |  |
| Did they respond to our email? | Yes | **10** |
| Did they provide all requested info? | Yes | **10** |
| Did they provide sample docs? | Yes | **10** |
| How well did docs score | 1. APHIS letter  82 bog index (poor)  17 sentence length (excellent)  7 passive index (excellent)  2. Brochure on emergency support  63 (average), 14, 24 (both excellent) | **14** |

**Total score for supporting activities 148 (out of 200)**