

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Office of Plant and Operations  
Records Management Division

APPENDIX C.2

# USDA REPORTS MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK



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## FOREWORD

The objectives of reports management are to provide management officials with needed information at times and places, and in the forms most useful to them; and to furnish this information as economically and efficiently as possible.

This Handbook was designed to help USDA agencies reach these objectives.

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CHAPTER 1

## THE ROLE OF REPORTS IN MANAGEMENT

One of the major tasks of every organization is gathering information so that managers at all levels can measure performance, plan future programs, and make sound decisions. The difficulty lies in determining what is needed from the wide range of information available.

Collecting too much information - just because it is available - is as bad as not collecting enough. Besides creating uncertainty as to what actually is needed, this practice:

1. Makes all information appear equally important;
2. Gives the impression of over control;
3. Tends to push decision making to higher levels;
4. Limits managerial freedom at lower levels;
5. Creates unnecessary workloads at all levels;
6. Increases program costs.

All management entails planning, decisions, and controls. The important questions are: What planning, what decisions, and what controls? And where in the organization should these functions be placed?

Sound management requires prompt answers to these questions. Only then can we tell what information is needed and how and when it should be supplied. This is the heart of every reports management program. It is also the beginning of a sound management information system.

The regulated flow of needed information is important in the job of every employee. But it is particularly important to program and activity managers. No matter how general a manager's

interests and responsibilities may be, his informational needs usually are quite specific. Few people realize how much time a manager spends each day searching through information to find what he needs. And although much of it is filtered out on the way to him, the average manager:

1. Gets more information than he needs;
2. Gets more information than he has time to use;
3. Gets some information that would be dangerous to use;
4. Gets a considerable amount of information that he doesn't know how to use, or that he receives too late to use; and he
5. Gets much information that he can't use because of poor presentation, improper emphasis, insufficient or excessive detail.

Nevertheless, employees everywhere go right on generating this kind of information with the mistaken notion that management needs it. Few will challenge the notion because they feel it isn't their responsibility, or they think that "somewhere" "someone" might use the information. Top managers are usually too busy to keep track of all the information that flows through their organizations. Consequently they do nothing about it. The result is considerable waste and inefficiency.

It takes time and effort to manage information. But it is worth it. Information is essential in all managerial actions. If the information or the system that provides it is weak, or if it lacks the positive direction that is accorded other management responsibilities, total programs may suffer.

#### REPORTS AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Reports, in one form or another, represent a major part of an organization's information system. Although more systematized, reports have as many ills as other forms of communication. We continually hear of excessive reporting costs, unnecessary reporting workloads, and reporting systems that are inefficient because they do not provide the kind of information needed at the times and places that it is needed.

It is for these reasons that reports, and instructions for their preparation and use, deserve our attention. It was for these reasons that the Department established a reports management program. (4 AR Chapter 8).

An effective reports management program can make several positive contributions toward improving an organization's information flow:

First, it makes us aware of the many problems created by inadequate information reporting systems and poor reports design.

Second, it provides a means for regulating information that is directed to management's attention by identifying the real informational needs of management.

Third, it helps reduce costly data accumulations.

Fourth, it helps staffs gather meaningful and currently needed information through improved reporting techniques.

Fifth, it provides the machinery for improving needed reports and eliminating unessential ones.

Reports cost money. Reporting systems cost money. But if reporting systems are well designed and well managed, and if they receive the support of management, they can improve the quality of information and reduce overall costs of operation.

Reports management is not an end in itself. If it doesn't produce the desired results, and provide the information managers need, it isn't doing its job. The best reports management programs result from close cooperation between an agency's reports manager and its program specialists. Working together, they are more likely to meet the complex reporting needs of the agency.

CHAPTER 2

## DEVELOPING AND IMPROVING REPORTS

Unfortunately, many reports do not turn out as originally planned. The information is not presented in its most useable form; some information is collected that later proves to be unnecessary; the environment at the reporting level is not as anticipated, and respondents have difficulty collecting and presenting the data properly. Or, the data received does not give the kind of information management needs for decision, planning, or controlling programs. In reality, there are few reports that cannot be improved.

The time to make sure a report will do what it is supposed to do, is when it is first developed. This is seldom easy. It involves a painstaking examination of the report as a whole, each item of information in the report, and the conditions under which the report will be prepared and used.

Responsibility for this rests jointly with program managers and operating officials who need the information, the writer of the directive that establishes the report, the forms designer, and the reports manager or other official that management has made responsible for directing the reports management program. Each member of this group has to know four things.

1. What program or activity the report supports and why the information is needed;
2. How the report will be used and who will use it;
3. What kinds of information are needed to support the program's objective; and
4. Who is best able to supply the information.

Program managers will normally supply the answers to these questions, at least in general terms. The answers provide the basic framework for the report.



## DEVELOPING THE REPORT

As a matter of practice, a program specialist will usually develop the working draft of a proposed report. At this point, he has to take the broad guidelines that were initially given him and put meaning into them. He must explore and get answers to questions regarding basic information-need, supporting data, information sources, reporting frequency, the form or format in which the information is needed, and the distribution and use of the report. Only after this is done can a final decision on the value of the report be made. The person who develops this information:

1. Must be familiar with the program that the report supports;
2. Must know how the report will fit into the total program system;
3. Should be able to develop procedures that will be easily understood by all who will have to use them, and that will produce the desired information efficiently and economically.

## FORMS AND DIRECTIVES

The forms and directives associated with a report are very important. They usually contain the only guidance that reporting activities receive. Make sure these forms and directives fully support each other. For a well designed form can often eliminate the need for detailed instructions in the directive, and a well written directive can simplify completion of a complex form.

The Reporting Form. Most reports, and particularly those that contain statistics, are submitted on preprinted forms. Basically, they have two functions:

1. They provide an efficient vehicle to transmit data; and
2. They provide an orderly method of storing collected data for use sometime later.

When designing a reporting form, keep both of these functions in mind. Then ask yourself these questions:

1. How is the form going to be used? Who is going to use it?

2. Is all the needed information asked for? Is more information asked for than is actually needed?
3. Is there a relationship between this reporting form and others in the program reporting system?
4. Is there duplication or overlap of information in these forms? If so, can the forms be combined to eliminate the need for any of them?
5. Is the sequence of items on the form keyed to the way the users will use the information?
6. Are instructions for filling out the form clear?
7. Where is the form prepared? Are environmental conditions a factor? For example, are they prepared outdoors, in meat-packing plants, etc.?
8. What equipment will be used to fill out the form? Has adequate space been provided?
9. How many copies are prepared? What distribution will be made? How will each copy be used? Can the number of copies be reduced?
10. What is the best size form for the user? Should it be a single sheet, padded, or a specialty form? (i.e. carbon interleaved, snap out, pin feed, etc.)
11. Does the total physical make up of the form serve the report's purpose? Is it easy to use?

Source Data Forms. Properly designed, the report form will help the program manager manage his program. Because of this, he will want to be sure it fills all his needs. But what about the fellow who has to submit the report? His needs also have to be met. He has to set up office procedures, train people, establish work files, and collect and record the data to prepare the report. In short, he has to develop work patterns for each report he submits. If 20 offices submit the same report, potentially 20 different work patterns might be set up. This can be reduced - if, when the report is first developed, all source forms and worksheets needed

to gather and record the original data for the report, and instructions for their use, are standardized.

Reporting Directives. Obviously, many of these same principles also apply to the reporting directive. Efficient work patterns call for precise instructions. They make it easier to gather and prepare the information asked for. The directive that establishes the report should not only specify what information is needed and who is to furnish it, but also how it is to be collected, and how it is to be presented. If reporting directives spell out this WHAT, WHO and HOW in easily understood language, you will get the information you want.

Tie each new report to the existing program system. Write instructions so that reporting agencies can use as many existing program records and procedures as possible. If this is done, separate information and new work methods need not be developed to satisfy the report. If it can't be done, see if the original program directives and record requirements can be changed to make them compatible with the new requirement. Compatibility among all directives in a program series reduces workloads and facilitates reporting.

One other thing should be said about reporting instructions. Give them clear identity. Put them in their own separate text units, with headings that will make them easy to find.

Although we primarily have been discussing new reports, these same considerations apply to existing ones. At the end of this chapter is a Reports Evaluation Checklist. It contains many additional suggestions that will help improve the quality of your reports.

Keep in mind that programs and work are in a constant state of change. Some of these changes may not have any effect on reporting. But sometimes even a minor change will obsolete an existing report. Or it may force a change in a reporting directive or form. If so, the time to make the change is now. Don't let procedures and files become cluttered with obsolete information. A report and its directive are worth keeping only if they support a current need.

## REPORTS EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Thoughtful use of Form AD-367, Reports Evaluation Checklist, (See 4 AR, Chapter 8, Exhibit 4 attached as Appendix to this Handbook) will help you create better reports. The checklist highlights points that you should consider. These points are discussed in detail in the following text.

NOTE: For ease of cross-reference, each paragraph is numbered to correspond with the number that appears on the Checklist.

### I. DETERMINE THE NEED

1. Use of the Report as a Whole. Who uses the report, and how? Who established the report? Does he still use it? When was the last time he saw it? Is all the information reported actually and actively used as a basis for actions, plans, or decisions? Who performs these functions? When was the last time specific plans or decisions were made as a result of the report? Was all the reported data needed for these purposes? What would happen if the report were discontinued? Could the control phase of the program be delegated to a lower organizational level?
2. Use of Each Item in the Report. Is each item used? Apply this simple test: Get a completed report. If it is submitted on a form, check the entries that you use regularly. If it is submitted in narrative, underline the key items. Now ask yourself what you do with the information. After you are satisfied that you need this information, identify the items that you don't use. As you question each item, consider whether there are any missing items, columns, instructions, etc. If these were added, would they increase the utility of the report? Careful examination can often eliminate several individual items and cut down preparation and reading time.
3. Use of Each Copy of the Report. How many copies are distributed? How many of these are actually used to good purpose? Should any office be removed from the distribution? Should distribution be broadened to eliminate the need for other reports? Would it be feasible to distinguish between "action" and "information" copies? When was the last time you checked the accuracy of the distribution list?

4. Functional Relationship. Is the report within the scope of each of the receiving offices' functions? Do these offices have the authority to change or recommend a change in the program if such action is needed? What are their interests and responsibilities today? Functions and interests change. What was once a pressing need, may now be passing interest, or worse, no interest.
5. Misapplication. Does the report attempt to solve problems that in fact call for administrative or other action? It may be possible that reports are being required when more direct supervision at other levels would do a better job. Would more specific instructions in the program directives make this report unnecessary?
6. Standby Data. Is any data obtained only for standby or "just-in-case" use? How often has it been used? When was it last used? Was the need at the time critical? When it was used, was the information up to date? Did it answer all the questions, or did you have to get additional information? Is it worth what it costs to receive and maintain this data "just-in-case" the need arises? Would a one-time or situation report serve the purpose?
7. Another Available Source. Is another source of information readily available that will satisfy this reporting requirement? Perhaps in other records or in a report received by another office. If another office has the data available, but in a different form, can you use it as it is? If you can't use it in its existing form, can it be modified to provide mutually acceptable information?
8. By-Product. Can routine office procedures at the source of needed information be modified to provide you with by-product data as a part of their normal work process? Can the information be extracted from an existing work package at your level by modifying existing forms, record-keeping or accounting systems (manual or mechanized)? If this were done, would it eliminate this report?
9. Direct Use of Records. If information is transcribed from a record, could you use the record (or a copy) instead of establishing a separate report? Would using records which can be photographed or otherwise "fast copied" at the source eliminate

transcribing to a report? Some examples of reporting by photographic process are:

Visible record panels  
Production control boards, graphs or charts  
Microform records

10. Sampling. Would a sample of a few offices or persons be sufficient to provide the data? If the sampling method is being used now, are the present respondents representative enough to give accurate data when projected to cover the whole?
11. Exception Reporting. Would exception reporting be adequate? Using this method, reports are made only when conditions are other than normal. The expected norm should be defined, and potential abnormalities (when a report might be submitted) highlighted. Instructions covering exception reports should describe danger signals and events which could require decisions by higher levels. Exception reports can be associated with a project (one time or recurring) that has fairly well defined starting and closing dates, or with a well established program of indefinite duration.
12. Combination. Can the report be combined with another report? When two or more reports with similar subject material or data are combined, it takes less work to do the job. Here is a simple way to determine whether combining reports is feasible: Put a check mark next to items common to each report. Now decide whether the unchecked items are essential or "nice-to-have." Go over the report with other offices directly concerned to get their ideas for additions or deletions. Add the needed items to make the combined report.
13. Non-related Material. Does the report contain non-related information that should be in separate reports? Before changing the report, consider the effect on work patterns at the source of the information.
14. Adequacy and Suitability. Is the scope or content of the report adequate, too broad, or too narrow for its intended purpose? Does the data match the specific needs of the using offices?
15. Value Versus Cost. What is the value of reported data? Is it known? What is the cost? Has it been considered? Does the

cost of the report exceed the value? Can the data be obtained, or the informational needs met, in a less costly manner?

## II. VERIFY THE TIMING

### 16. Frequency

- a. Is the frequency of the report prescribed in the directive and on the form? For example, monthly, quarterly, annually, etc. Does the directive tell when the first report is due?
- b. Does the frequency fit the needs of principal users? Would a different frequency fit the needs better or as well? For example, in a new program, quarterly submission the first year, semiannually the second year and annually thereafter? When actual needs permit lowering the frequency, the cost of a report goes down.

### 17. Reporting Periods. Are reporting periods properly stated? Is the number of work days per month significant? For example, when weekly reports are summarized monthly, do you have to adjust reporting periods to determine actual work days? Does the report consider work days as opposed to calendar days?

### 18. Due Date. Does the directive indicate the date when the report is to be received at its destination? Use a statement such as "The report must be received by      (specific date) , " or "received not later than      workdays after the close of the reporting period." Due dates should take into account the most distant preparing offices and the method of transmission, i.e. airmail, wire communication, etc.

### 19. Preparing Office Workload. Is there adequate preparation time? Remember, reporting workloads are heaviest at mid-month, ends of months, and ends of quarters. Have you considered the preparing office's workload? Are your deadlines realistic? If not, they should be adjusted.

### III. REVIEW STYLE OF PRESENTATION

#### REPORTING DIRECTIVES

20. Report Title. If the directive concerns only the report, is the title of the report the same as the subject of the directive? Make the title as brief and descriptive as possible.
21. Purpose of the Report. Is the purpose clearly stated so that the preparing offices will understand what use is made of the data and can apply the instructions intelligently?
22. Reporting Instructions. Are reporting instructions clear enough to be understood? Do they tell what to do and how to do it? Are complex reports clarified by including a completed sample form or format (John Doe forms) in the directive? This insures uniformity in reporting.
23. Integrated Reporting. Are data needs of other levels tied in? Has the pyramid principle been applied? For instance, detailed data become less significant at higher organizational levels. Reporting instructions should include the data requirements for each organizational level. Be as specific as you can.
24. Feeder Reports. Do procedures for feeder reports assure maximum uniformity and simplicity? What is the extent of feeder reporting? Is it used economically? E.g. when establishing a feeder report to satisfy a report of another agency, just ask for information that is not available in your own office or agency files. Consider all sources in your immediate headquarters. Would there be an advantage to bypass intermediate levels and furnish lower level data directly to the level requiring the report?
25. Reporting Units. Are the units which are required to prepare the report identified? Are the designated reporting units the ones in the best position to furnish the information? Are there more or fewer reporting units than needed? Will the present number of reporting units be sufficient for data comparison?
26. Negative Reports. Are negative reports required? What use is made of them? Should they be stopped? Make your directive explicit concerning the submission or non-submission of



negative reports.

27. Number of Copies. Are the number of copies to be prepared and distributed specified?
28. Routing. Is the correct address of each recipient indicated? Is a desired method of transmission such as regular mail, airmail, telegram, etc., spelled out?

### REPORTING FORMS

#### 29. Narrative or Form

- a. Is the report submitted on a form, in a prescribed format, or in narrative? Is the present format suitable for the way the report is used? Is it easy to prepare? If the report is in narrative style, would a form be better? If the report were changed to a form, would it lose its original effectiveness?
- b. Do users have to hunt through the text of a narrative report to find the information they need? Does the report contain information which is repeated in successive reports? Is this repetitive information of special interest to the users? Could report preparation be simplified by substituting a codeword, symbol, or number (with adequate definition) for repetitive narrative passages. Narrative reports are expensive. They require research, creative writing, and time of high salaried employees. Identify any questionable areas and review them with the forms design staff.

#### 30. Arrangement and Size

- a. Fill-in-Reports. Is the text of questionnaire fill-in-reports arranged to permit easy fill in and use? Arrange text so that fill-ins come at the left margin, or a separate line, or so that all fill-in items are grouped in one area on the form.
- b. Spacing. Is there adequate space for filling in each item? Is the spacing suitable for the type machine used to prepare the report? If handwriting is optional, is enough space provided?

- c. Sequencing. Are items on the report form arranged in the same sequence as the data source? Are items sequenced to the user's needs? Do these parallel each other? Are items sequenced to the next form to which the data will be transcribed? This is especially important when data is transferred from a report to columns on a punch card.
  - d. Preprinting. Are recurring items of data preprinted on the report form wherever possible?
  - e. Captions. Are adequate instructions included on the report form? Are they placed where they will be seen and read first? If instructions are on the back of the form or in a separate document, state this in the heading of the form. Are captions clear and descriptive? Can any of them be misunderstood? Are boxes, lines, signals, type, etc., used effectively to emphasize captions?
  - f. Size. Is the size of the form adequate, practical, and easy to read? Will it fit in standard files or binders?
31. Standardization. Do all offices submitting the report use the same form or standard format?
32. Summary Information. Does the form or format require a complete and time-consuming review by all users to get at essential data? Would selective or summary highlighting of significant elements be better? As a substitute? As a supplement?
33. Cumulative Data. Can statistical data be maintained on a cumulative basis at the source to eliminate last minute workloads? Would a brief journal or daily tally eliminate backtracking over the period when reporting time comes? If so, provide a recording or tally form to aid preparing offices.
34. Comparisons. Can comparisons of data be readily made? Have production or performance goals been set so there is something to compare data against? Are the most meaningful comparative bases used: Established standards? Past performance? Time-span? Trends? Financial or production goals? Correlation with other schedules, programs, and events? Reporting forms that include comparative data are more useful than those that simply provide raw, unrelated

data or statistics.

35. Graphics. Would graphics speed the comprehension of data? Are graphics used to good advantage? Illustrations? Charts? Graphs? Symbols?
36. Authentication. Are the signatures of verifying and approving officials required only when absolutely necessary? Are they at the right level of authority? Do those which are used contribute needed authority? Does each approval add to the information's reliability? Don't collect signatures for prestige.

#### REPORTING RECORDS AND FILES

37. Data Sources. Have you specified the records from which reported data is to be extracted? When source records do not exist, or cannot be specified, does the directive prescribe how to develop the information for the report?
38. Arrangement of Records. Are files or other sources maintained so that data can be easily extracted? Should the records be rearranged in the same data sequence as the report form or format? If there is a good reason why the records are maintained as they are, can the form be adjusted to match the data sequence of the records? Will this arrangement fit the report users needs? Can you match file headings with report headings or vice versa?
39. Report Control Symbol. Is the report control symbol shown in a conspicuous place on the report? Does the agency prescribe a standard location for the symbol? Where the report title is the subject of the directive, consider including the symbol in the directive title. Another good location is in the paragraph heading, or at the end of the paragraph that prescribes the report. Consider placing the report control symbol on forms and records associated with the report. This ties the report, forms, directive, and related files together.
40. Style of Presentation
  - a. Will the report attract and satisfy its intended users? Who are they? Are they executives? Technicians? The general public? The treatment of information is different in each case. Is the tone, and presence or absence of detailed

statistics appropriate to the users' levels of responsibility and knowledge?

- b. Where statistics are used, are they used meaningfully? Do they provide technicians a running account of facts, and, at the same time, provide executives summary information?
- c. Can users interpret the information quickly and easily? Or does the mass of data obscure real meaning? Does the complete report provide maximum simplicity and utility for the intended users?

CHAPTER 3

## COSTING REPORTS

All reports cost money. A true test of the worth of a report compares the value of the information with the expense of collecting and using it. Obviously, certain information is necessary to manage a program, regardless of its cost. But even in these cases, the amount of information needed is a matter of judgment, and costs should be considered.

Often, cost alone determines whether a report is justified. If it is obviously high and the information is of questionable value, costing to prove the point is unnecessary. Costing is desirable when you suspect the costs exceeds the report's value, and the decision of whether or not to continue it rests on that point.

The most effective ways to reduce the cost of an individual report are:

1. Decrease its frequency;
2. Reduce the number of respondents;
3. Keep the distribution of the report down to those who have a real need for the information; or
4. Eliminate "nice-to-have" information from an otherwise valid report.

Time is the common denominator of reporting costs - either employee-time or machine-time. Listed below are the more important time factors that contribute to the cost of a report:

1. Time to design and procure the needed forms;
2. Time to prepare the directive that establishes the report;
3. Time to set up procedures and train personnel at each reporting activity;

4. Time to gather the information;
5. Time to maintain files supporting the report;
6. Time to compute the figures and compile the report;
7. Time to type the report;
8. Time to review the final copy;
9. Time for readers to extract, analyze, recast, use, and file the information; and
10. Time used to process data through electronic computer and related equipment.

### ESTIMATING COSTS

There are several ways to estimate cost. Most are based on the number of machine or man hours used. Whatever method is used, first select those factors from the above list that contribute to the report's cost.

Sampling Method. Identify a number of representative offices that will prepare and use the report. Then, using selected cost factors:

Average the man hours consumed by these offices in one reporting cycle.	X	Total number of offices preparing and using report.	X	Number of times report is submitted each year.	=	Total annual man hour cost. (Estimate)
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Actual Man Hour Costs. You can estimate man hour costs more accurately by obtaining actual man hour figures from each activity that prepares or uses the report during one reporting cycle. Total these figures and multiply them by the number of times the report is submitted annually.

Dollar Costs. Dollar values can also be estimated with reasonable accuracy for these man hour costs. Select the average grade of employees who prepare and use the report, and multiply the total annual man hours by the average hourly wage rate.

Automatic/Electronic Data Processing Costs. Using automatic or electronic equipment to prepare or process data may create additional reporting costs. On the other hand, this may be cheaper than preparing or processing the information manually. These costs are usually expressed (sometimes at established rates) as "machine-time" charges, which are determined by prorating the:

1. Cost of purchase, rental, and maintenance of equipment;
2. Cost of writing the program for the particular job;
3. Cost of board-wiring, or other machine preparation;
4. Cost of transcribing information to tape or punch cards;
5. Cost of material used; and
6. Cost of special space requirements, air conditioning, electrical installation, etc.

Add these charges to the man hour costs of the report.

Two other factors, although often less tangible, fall on the credit side of reports processed by automated equipment. Compare these against the time required to process the same information manually.

1. Value of having the information available earlier;
2. Value of man hour savings realized as a result of machine processing.

Although none of these costing methods are precise, they do provide a reasonably accurate yardstick to compare the value of the report with the cost of collecting and using it. Management can then decide whether to continue, eliminate, or modify the reporting requirement.

CHAPTER 4

## REPORTS CONTROL PROCEDURES

Some people think that reports control procedures intrude upon their areas of responsibility, that they permit outsiders to decide whether or not they need the information they seek. This is not so. Approval of a report is a management decision. Reports control is procedural. It is intended to help, rather than hamper or control the flow of information. These procedures assure management that all those involved in developing a report have fully analyzed and documented their views, and that the report represents their best thinking. Management can then decide whether an actual need for the information exists.

Chapter 8 of Title 4 of the Administrative Regulations (attached as an Appendix to this Handbook) contains basic Departmental guidance concerning reports control procedures. The regulation requires that agencies systematically appraise the value of each of their reports. It requires an initial review and clearance prior to establishing a report; a continuous evaluation to assess the current need for the information; and a periodic review to determine whether each report is fulfilling its purpose, needs to be brought up to date, or whether it should be eliminated. The purpose of these reviews is:

1. To provide management with currently needed information at times and places, and in the forms most useful to it;
2. To combine and simplify reports wherever possible;
3. To reduce the frequency and distribution of reports to the minimum required for sound operation;
4. To eliminate non-essential reports and information; and
5. To provide directives and forms that clearly tell employees how to prepare needed reports.



### INITIAL REPORTS CLEARANCE

Chapter 8, AR 4 provides a Reports Clearance Request form, AD Form 368, for optional use by agencies. Probably the most important item on the form is the one entitled "Purpose of the Report." This item tells management the type of information proposed to be collected, why it is needed, and where it fits in with or supplements other reports in a program area. Other items on the form that management should concern itself with are the number and types of preparing and using offices, and the frequency of the report. These represent workload.

The individual responsible for clearing a report will vary from one organization to another. In some cases, approval authority is placed at the Deputy Administrator level. In others, a reports manager may have this authority. Or it may be at some other level in the organization's staff. Regardless of where the authority is placed, with it goes the responsibility for determining:

1. That the proposed report represents a valid need for information;
2. That it requires only that information needed to advance the purpose for which the report was designed;
3. That the report has been thoroughly reviewed, and that the procedures and forms for collecting, reporting, and using the information are efficient and economical; and
4. That the additional workload imposed by the report, and its costs are justified.

### CONTINUOUS EVALUATION

All too often people look at a report only from the standpoint of the end product. Deciding whether or not information is needed is the responsibility of top management. But the degree of detail that goes into the report and how to obtain and process that information can be another matter - one more often than not determined below top management. It is in these details that reports frequently become burdensome, costly, and out of date.

For this reason, a continuous evaluation of all reports is essential to make sure that needed information is being received in its most useable form, and to purge useless or out-of-date information from the system as quickly as possible. These are the areas where people below top management can contribute the most.

The Reports Evaluation Checklist, AD Form 367, used in conjunction with the discussion of each item (See Chapter 2), is intended to stimulate thought on the many potential pitfalls of reporting. Use the checklist when developing a new report or evaluating an old one. It will help assure quality in all of your reports.

### PERIODIC REVIEWS

As indicated earlier, the primary purpose of periodic reviews is to find out:

1. Whether reports are meeting management's information needs;
2. Whether experience indicates these needs can be satisfied in a simpler way; or
3. Whether there is continued need for the same, different, or additional information.

Basically there are two ways to conduct periodic reviews: (1) analysis of total informational requirements as they relate to a program system; (2) procedural review of individual reports. Both types of review are valuable and practical. Periodic review of individual reports is required by 4 AR 816.

Total Information Requirements Analysis. In analyzing the informational requirements of a system, you are actually asking the question, "What information does management need to manage a particular program?" In this context, you are going beyond the mere review of reports. You are analyzing the program and the informational system that supports it. Your objective is to find out what kind of information is needed at each level of management, and how best to provide and use it. Then, after completing this phase of the survey, individual reports are reviewed in

detail to detect voids, make improvements, or to eliminate collection of unnecessary information. To do this:

1. Identify the organization's total program objective or objectives. (Do not include such supporting responsibilities as the management of manpower, money, material, or other resources as part of the objective unless these constitute the prime mission of the organization.)
2. Break the total objective into identifiable operating programs (major functions, subfunctions, etc.) by organizational level. Define the objective(s) of each of these operating programs at each level. Show the relationship of each to the total objective.
3. Analyze the work done at each organization level. Identify organizational elements working in the same or closely related functional areas. Divide each function into small enough units to keep it manageable, but at the same time, make the area inclusive enough to reflect a whole function, or a separately identifiable piece of the whole.
4. Select people for a review panel who are familiar with the objectives of each function. Use program specialists who work directly on the program being analyzed as advisers rather than as regular panel members. See that the services of reports, directives, forms, and other systems analysis staffs are made available to this group.
5. Find out what information the program manager at each level of organization needs and actually uses to manage his program. If possible, have him list the information in order of importance.
6. Find out what information the next higher program manager expects from his subordinate managers.
7. Identify actions that occur within the function at each organization level.

8. Identify decisions within the function that should be made at each organization level.
9. Identify, by function, the planning and operating responsibilities at each organizational level.
10. Identify the functional controls needed and exercised by each level.
11. Identify information, either in form of reports or guidance, needed to carry out decision making, planning, operating and controlling responsibilities.
12. Identify specific reports that support each requirement. (Recognize that lower level officials will probably have to collect data in greater detail to meet higher management's informational needs, or to control the program the way higher management wants it controlled.)
13. Analyze how the information presented in the reports fits into the total program system. Do this by category of information for the entire report (what it is, why it is needed, how it is used, and who uses it) rather than by segments of the report.
14. Then, using sample copies of the reports, the report clearance forms, the checklist, and the information you have gathered to this point, give the operating official an opportunity to validate each report he is responsible for. Start from the top-down.
  - a. Identify, with the operating official, the specific information used to satisfy higher management's needs.
  - b. Separate this from the information that directly supports the operating official's transactions. Find out whether all of these transactions are necessary to fulfill higher management's desires. How do they contribute to the program? How do they contribute to the operating officials' actions, decisions, planning, control, etc.? When was the last time these transactions were used as a basis for a management decision either at this or a higher level? Could lower

organizational levels perform any of these actions, thereby reducing the informational needs at this level?

- c. Now, identify reported data that is used for other purposes. Are these necessary to support the program system? How are they used?
15. After you have determined that the type of information collected is necessary to fulfill the needs of the program at each level, review the specific data for ways to increase its usefulness.
  16. If appropriate, solicit recommendations from lower reporting levels on ways to improve reports that they consider burdensome. Be careful in reviewing their recommendations. Lower levels might not know the full intent of a report or how it is used.
  17. Complete the analysis of all reports in the functional area before recommending improvements. Make sure that all of the information in the reports collectively support the program's total informational needs. Check your conclusions against the requirements the manager said he needed to manage his program.

*Procedural Review.* As the name implies, in a procedural review you look at individual reporting procedures, and at the reports themselves, rather than at the informational system that they are part of. This is a housecleaning type of review that culminates in improving or eliminating individual reports. It is often the only type of review needed, particularly when the program's informational system is known to be sound.

The review usually starts at the specific direction of a higher authority. Everyone is asked to analyze all of the reports they are involved in. To organize this kind of review:

1. Place the responsibility for monitoring it in one office in the agency.
2. Establish focal points in other offices at an appropriate level of organization.

3. Set specific schedules for completing various phases of the program. (Completion dates should extend no longer than necessary; otherwise interest in the effort will deteriorate.)
4. Establish progress reports. Identify the types of information management wants reported during and after the review.
5. If possible, establish special incentives, or relate accomplishments to an existing incentive program.
6. Firm up a method for conducting the review. This is usually done by evaluating reports received by or originated in an office. Identify organizational elements working on the same or closely related functions. Divide the functions into small enough work units to be manageable. Separate the reports by category:
  - a. Functionally Within the Office. This will point up any overlapping or duplicative information in reports.
  - b. Those Required by the Office. These are reports the office has control over. These are the ones that can be changed without difficulty.
  - c. Those Submitted to Other Offices or Agencies. These are reports on which the office may only recommend changes or improvements.
7. Then, using sample copies of the report, and the evaluation checklist, make or recommend changes that will improve the reports. Where possible, eliminate those that contribute little to the program that they were designed to support.

Obviously, there are several ways to combine the desired features of an informational requirements analysis and a procedural review. Recognize the potential benefits provided by each and select the method best suited to your agency's needs.

## CENTRAL REPORTS CONTROL RECORDS

Chapter 8 of Title 4 of the Administrative Regulations requires that each staff office and agency maintain control records for all reports that they receive or are required to submit. Properly maintained, these records are a valuable reference library for the entire organization. They identify:

1. The kinds of information available in the organization and the form in which the information exists.
2. The office that has detailed knowledge of the information in a particular report.

The central control records should include as a minimum:

1. A current inventory of all reports that are received in, and those submitted by the agency.
2. A copy of the report clearance form for each report originated in the agency with a copy of the directive that established the report, and any forms associated with it.
3. A copy of the evaluation made on each report analyzed during the periodic review process.

## REPORTS CONTROL SYMBOLS

Experience has shown that using reports control symbols contributes to efficient reports management. Specifically, they quickly identify approved reports; they provide a means for tying directives, records, and files to the report they are associated with; and they furnish an easy way to refer to a report in conversation or written communication. They also help identify the office that requires the information and aid in its distribution.

*Reports Control Symbol Systems Design.* Design the symbol system around a stable classification base to limit the need for future revision. Use an organizational pattern, the organization's directives or forms numbering system, or an independent subjective classification system that reflects major functional assignments within the organization.

If a subjective classification system is used, each classification must be defined to show the functions it includes. (A sample subjective classification guide is included at the end of this chapter.) For ease of identification, assign a simple alphabetic or numeric symbol to each classification. Sub-numbers or letters (or a combination of these) may be added, to further identify the report with a function it pertains to.

Whichever system is used, precede the symbol with the authorized organization abbreviation; i. e. , USDA, SCS, AMS, etc. Follow this with your approved symbol system.

### EXAMPLES

#### Organizational Pattern.

- USDA . . . . . Symbol prefix indicating reporting requirement originated at the Department level.
- OP . . . . . Symbol for the Office of Personnel.
- C . . . . . Symbol for the Classification and Standards Division. (Can be omitted)
- 2 . . . . . The sub-serial number for the specific report in a series.

(USDA-OP-C2)

#### Subjective Classification System.

- AMS . . . . . Symbol prefix indicating reporting requirement originated in Agricultural Marketing Service.
- CN . . . . . Symbol for a basic commodity classification (Cotton)
- FD . . . . . Symbol for a basic functional classification (Food Distribution).
- 4 . . . . . Sub-serial number for the specific report within the subject class.

(AMS-CN-4) or (AMS-FD-4)



Directives System Pattern.

- ASCS..... Symbol prefix indicating reporting requirement originated in the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.
- 1-DS..... Number of the ASCS handbook which requires the report.
- 5..... The sub-serial number for the specific report in the governing handbook.

(ASCS 1-DS 5)

Any of these methods, or combinations of them, or other methods of reports identification may be used which adequately provides sequencing controls for reporting requirements.

A Word of Caution. Build familiar features into your symbol system. Don't make the system so general that it nullifies the potential benefits of control symbols. Conversely, don't try to be so specific and complex that the system appears unfamiliar and impractical to those who have to use it.

REPORTS INVENTORIES

The reports inventory is a basic reference in the central reports control records. It compiles in one document valuable information concerning the total reporting activity of the organization. It shows program managers and operating officials:

1. The type of information being used to control various programs, why it is needed, and who uses it.
2. The degree of reporting coverage in a given program area, and relationships between reports.
3. The informational interests and relationships of various organizational units in specific programs.

Inventories can be compiled in many different ways. The important thing is that the information be presented in a useful way,

and not as a confusing list of unrelated subjects. A common method is to list reports by their reports control symbols.

1. Organizational Listing. Identify and list each report according to the office or agency that requires or submits it. This type of arrangement is particularly useful where functions are clearly fixed organizationally, or where organization designations depict subjective functions. Reports should be grouped by function (and sub-function if needed) within the office or agency.
2. Subjective Listing. In this type of listing, identify the function or program that the report supports. Be as specific as possible. Arrange the functions in alphabetical sequence (under main function and sub-function headings if needed). List separately, reports the agency receives and those it is required to submit.
3. Directive System Listing. List each report by directive number in the sequence it occurs in the directives file.

#### INFORMATION EXEMPTED FROM MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Not all information collected by an agency should be brought under the reports management program. Reports managers, working with program managers and operating officials, should analyze the organization's informational needs, and identify the types of information that should be exempted. Normally the following are exempt:

1. Correspondence or other written communication between two organizations conducted in the course of daily business when the problem can be satisfied through reference to information immediately available in either organization's records. NOTE: If the office furnishing the information must collect it from the public, subordinate organizational elements, or through research of files not immediately available, the request constitutes a report and is not exempt;

2. Supply and procurement transactions that relate to:  
individual shipping and receiving actions, requisitions,  
vouchers, inspection, maintenance and reclamation or  
disposal of materials;
3. Personnel documents of an individual employee that relate  
to: recruiting, placement, performance, welfare, train-  
ing, pay, promotion, demotion, transfer, separation,  
retirement, etc.
4. Annual and supplemental budget estimates, justifications,  
and supporting information;
5. Formal reports, findings, or observations resulting from  
surveys, studies, or investigations. This exemption  
would include reports made by auditors, investigators,  
management analysis units, etc. Reports requested from  
others to support their findings would not be exempt;
6. Recurring compliance reports that are required in con-  
nection with research administration under cooperative  
agreements, contracts, and grants. This exemption does  
not apply to Multi-use Project Reports.
7. Narrative reports relating wholly to Departmental or  
agency public information programs;
8. Reports required for fund raising or similar promotional  
campaigns; and
9. Reports determined by a responsible official to be exempt  
in the interest of administrative efficiency, economy,  
propriety, or practicality.

## SUBJECTIVE CLASSIFICATION GUIDE

### ESTABLISHING THE SUBJECTIVE CLASSIFICATION GUIDE

Probably the most stable base for a subjective classification guide is the organization's functional responsibilities as expressed in Title 1 of the Administrative Regulations. As a matter of practice these have been translated into functional statements in the internal directives of the office or agency. Select a generic term for each functional statement and define the term by relating specific homogeneous tasks to it. This term represents a subjective class.

In selecting the term to be used, consider the volume and complexity of business that normally goes on in each of the tasks. If the volume in one task is large or complex, you might well subdivide it into two subjective classes. Remember, each term selected should be broad enough to reflect a specifically identifiable function.

### DEFINITIONS FOR SUBJECTIVE CLASSIFICATION

Administrative Management (Services). Reports relating to administrative systems and procedures which are used by all or most all offices in an organization. It includes such elements as: directives systems; printing, reproduction, and related activities; forms management and design; written communication practices (correspondence, telegraphic messages, etc.); records management and files; internal mail and messenger service; postal operations; office space allocation and utilization; security matters (excluding personnel security); reports management including data systems and statistics, and other administrative practices not covered in other series.

Budget. Reports relating to the preparation, analysis, justification, and control of the budget for appropriated funds; funding of approved programs and projects within applicable appropriations; analysis of appropriations and expenditures in comparison with budgetary estimates and objectives; and furnishing of budgetary advice and guidance.

Commodities. Reports relating to agricultural products, dairy products, manufactured products, natural resources and their by-products, when such commodities constitute an important and

basic element of agency's activities.

Fiscal. Reports relating to fiscal operations and activities of the agency, apart from those incident to budgetary activities. Includes disbursements, collections, fund management, losses, acquisitions, sales, donations and similar activities under fiscal control.

Inspection and Auditing. Reports relating to policies and procedures for inspection and audit of functions and accounts, including the conduct of internal audits of accounts and records covering sales, appropriated funds, real property, industrial audits and surveys of accounts and records of contractors.

Legal. Reports relating to decisions, opinions, and policies concerning the substantive and procedural laws and directives; legal requirements, policies and procedures involved in administering the Department and its activities in Washington and field offices.

Personnel. Reports relating to the administration of the civilian personnel program, including recruitment, placement, position classification, career development, employee-management relations, disciplinary actions and grievances, leave, performance evaluation, and incentive awards, legal and regulatory basis for civilian pay entitlement; payroll procedures, including time and attendance reporting.

Real Property Management. Reports relating to the acquisition, utilization, retention, management, and disposal of real property, other than contractor-operated facilities. The design and construction of real property facilities, including the modification and minor construction of buildings, pavements, and grounds; preparation and use of definitive drawings and outline specifications; and the implementation and management of construction programs.

Research. Reports relating to the production of scientific and technical studies and data to seek new basic knowledge from which techniques can be devised; studies to establish the technical adequacy and the qualitative characteristics of material based on results of scientific studies; the furnishing of engineering services and advice.

Supply. Reports relating to the general policies and procedures for the procurement, management, and control of supply operations, including requisitioning, receiving, storage, warehousing,

issuing, inventory management, property accounting, stock control and related matters; redistribution of local excess and redistribution or other disposition of excess personal property.

Transportation and Traffic Management. Reports relating to the transportation planning, programming, and staff supervision of transportation components; movement of personal property via rail, highway transport, waterways, ship, and air transport; operation and control of equipment; administration, operation, and management of motor vehicles and motor pools; selection, training, and licensing of motor vehicle operators; hiring of motor vehicles; inventory control and reporting, and maintenance cost reporting.

This sampling is obviously incomplete. Also the items are not intended to represent standard definitions. Each general term selected must reflect a function and the definition reflect the function as it exists in the work patterns of the staff office or agency.

CHAPTER 5

PUBLIC REPORTING

So far in this handbook, we have dealt primarily with the Department's internal management reports--those prepared by USDA agencies for administrative purposes. Because of its importance to the Nation, there is another area of reporting which we should discuss briefly: that involving information obtained by USDA agencies from the public. By "public" we mean the 3.5 million farm operators, the suppliers of farm equipment and materials, and the various handlers, dealers, and processors of agricultural commodities.

The valuable information supplied by these sources is used in many ways. A great deal of it goes into statistical and economic analyses, which are published for public as well as Government use. Some of it provides data which guides agencies in carrying out their program responsibilities. Special summaries of public reported information are often released as a service to the broad economic interests in the Nation.

Because of the volume and complexity of the public reporting engaged in by the Department of Agriculture, we cannot describe it all in this Handbook. However, we will describe the program of the principal statistical agency of the Department, the Statistical Reporting Service, and mention briefly some of the public reporting activities of other agencies of the Department. Anyone seeking a more comprehensive treatment of public reporting activities of the Department as well as other Federal agencies, should obtain the Bureau of the Budget booklet "Statistical Services of the United States Government."

ACTIVITIES OF STATISTICAL REPORTING SERVICE

The primary function of the Statistical Reporting Service is to collect, compile, and publish for public and Governmental use basic statistics on crop and livestock production.

The information is collected through mailed questionnaires distributed to farmers, handlers, and processors throughout the Nation, and through enumerative surveys conducted by field representatives of SRS. Most of the information is first tabulated and analyzed at State offices. These preliminary analyses are then forwarded to the Crop Reporting Board of the Statistical Reporting Service, in Washington, D. C., where State information is assembled and projected into National estimates.

These estimates are published periodically in statistical summary form. They are distributed to using agencies in the Department, elsewhere in the Government, and to private organizations and individuals concerned with agriculture. The estimates are widely used in making decisions concerning the production, handling, pricing, and disposition of the farm output, and in planning farm programs.

Kinds of Information Collected and Published. The Statistical Reporting Service collects information on approximately 195 different agricultural commodities. The agency publishes over 700 reports annually. These reports include such information as:

1. Farmers' intentions to plant.
2. Acreage, yield, production, and value of field crops, fruits, and vegetables.
3. Livestock and poultry inventories and their value.
4. Production of dairy products.
5. Meat, poultry, and egg production.
6. Prices received and paid by farmers.
7. Farm labor and wage rates.
8. Stocks of agricultural commodities and holdings in cold storage.

#### ACTIVITIES OF OTHER USDA AGENCIES

Among other USDA agencies having major public reporting responsibilities are:



Agricultural Marketing Service. Collects and publishes market news reports on supply, demand, movement, quality, and prices for major agricultural commodities in principal markets and producing areas.

Economic Research Service. Conducts research and statistical studies on farm population, prices and income, food consumption, marketing margins, agricultural finance, farm costs and returns, and agricultural productivity.

Farmer Cooperative Service. Collects and publishes statistics on farmers' cooperatives; Number, memberships, and dollar volume of products handled by marketing, farm supply, and related cooperative ventures.

Forest Service. Collects and publishes statistical information on volume and quality of standing timber, rates of timber growth and mortality, volume of timber cut, costs and returns of growing timber, market information on forest products, and administrative statistics covering the national forests.

Administrative and Regulatory Agencies. Certain other agencies, such as Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, Farmers Home Administration, Commodity Exchange Authority, and Rural Electrification Administration collect data from the public for the internal administration of their programs. Summary statistical information from these reports is also of general interest to various business groups and is published periodically.

#### USE OF USDA AGRICULTURAL REPORTS

The information furnished in the reports described above is used as a basis for action by thousands of governmental and private offices, agencies, commercial organizations, and individuals. To name a few:

1. The President and his Council of Economic Advisers use the information in relation to the several sectors of the National economy (including agriculture) and recommend policies and legislation that effect nearly everyone.
2. Members of Congress use the information to shape nearly all legislation directly affecting agriculture, and much of the legislation affecting the general public.

3. Our agencies in the Department are big users. We use the information to gauge the adequacy of production of food and fiber for the Nation's requirements, to determine income from agriculture, and to measure prices of farm products in relation to prices of other commodities. We also use it to determine parity prices which are basic to virtually all price support and acreage control programs, for the crop insurance program, for planning and operating credit, conservation, educational, and other programs.
4. The Department of State uses the information in negotiating commercial agreements with foreign governments, in overseas information programs, and in programs of economic and technical aid to foreign countries. The Department of Commerce uses it in certain business advisory services and in planning and executing programs that affect the general economy. The Interstate Commerce Commission uses it to establish or revise transportation rates for farm products. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare uses it in programs of vocational education in agriculture, in administration of pure food laws, and in social security and other programs affecting farmers or farm laborers.
5. The information is very important to individual farmers. They use it to work out planting, breeding, feeding, and marketing programs.
6. Farmers' organizations, such as the American Farm Bureau Federation, the Farmers Union, the National Grange, use it to keep abreast of current agricultural problems. Farmers' cooperatives use it to plan their purchasing, sales, and marketing programs.
7. Processors, dealers, and handlers of agricultural products, and operators of warehouses and other storage facilities have vital need for the information.
8. Industrial organizations, manufacturers, banks, merchants, and mail-order houses, particularly those with farm customers, use the information to plan their production, sales, inventories, credit, and advertising programs.

9. Railroads and other transport services use it to determine the number of cars and trucks needed to move the agricultural products to processors and consumer areas.

### THE FEDERAL REPORTS ACT

As you may surmise, there is a constant flow of information between all Federal agencies and the public. The Congress is ever concerned about this reporting burden, its record keeping requirements and attendant costs. It is particularly concerned about duplication in Federal reporting programs and about costs of reporting imposed on the public by Federal agencies. It was to reduce this burden that the Congress passed the Federal Reports Act of 1942.

Bureau of the Budget. The Bureau of the Budget is responsible for implementing the provisions of this Act. They have issued Bureau of the Budget Circular A-40 (Revised May 1962) which contains the policies and clearance procedures for collecting information from the public. They have also issued guidelines for planning and conducting statistical surveys (Circular A-46, March 1952).

The Bureau has adopted a list of "Practices to be Avoided in the Preparation of Federal Reporting Forms." This list, developed by the Bureau's industry advisory group, the Advisory Council on Federal Reports, is quoted here:

1. "Avoid asking for data which are not readily available to the respondent.
2. "Avoid asking for data which cannot be prepared by standard accounting processes.
3. "Avoid reporting requirements which fail to take into account the limitations of the records of 'small business' respondents.
4. "Avoid reporting requirements which fail to allow for the specialization or location of records of very large business respondents.
5. "Avoid making requests for information retroactive to periods too far in the past.

6. "Avoid asking for the listing of individual transactions.
7. "Avoid reports intended to determine whether a respondent is in violation of a regulation or to induce a violator to attest to his own violation.
8. "Avoid questionnaires which convey information to management or which stimulate management to an awareness of a Government agency, its policy or its requirements.
9. "Never let a questionnaire fall below the established standards for physical makeup.
10. "Avoid the issuance of new reporting forms and new reporting and recordkeeping requirements which are not accompanied by a statement as to the intended purposes and uses to which the data will be put.
11. "Avoid making requests for information when Government facilities and staff for processing such requests are not available.
12. "Avoid attempting to meet the Government's need for information by collaborating in the collection of data by a business organization such as a trade association, until, as is required by the Federal Reports Act, the Bureau of the Budget has approved the questionnaire which is being 'sponsored' by a Federal agency."

*Standards for Designing Reporting Forms.* The Bureau of the Budget has also established standards which they consider essential when designing reporting forms that request information from the public.

1. Essential Items Required on All Reporting Forms
  - a. Agency identification and return address.
  - b. Instructions for return.
  - c. Form title.
  - d. Form number.
  - e. Bureau of the Budget report approval number.

- f. Identification of respondent.
- g. Date line and period covered by report.
- h. Postal ZIP Code of originating agency.

2. Other Items to Include if Needed

- a. Authority or basis for collection.
- b. Confidential clause.
- c. Item number, column, and line designations and instructions.
- d. Units to be reported.
- e. Footnotes.
- f. Signature, certification, or oath.

SPECIAL CLEARANCE PROCEDURE

The Statistical Reporting Service is responsible for obtaining Bureau of the Budget clearance for all Departmental reports that request data from the public. Departmental clearance procedures for these reports are contained in 1 AR 559-566.

**USDA'S PUBLIC IMAGE**

The Department's public reporting programs bring us in close and frequent contact with a large segment of the general public. The public recognizes that this reporting represents time and, in many instances, dollars. They may be less quick to recognize the benefits that they receive from the reports that we publish.

The way we design reporting forms, conduct surveys, or carry out our reporting responsibilities influences the attitudes of many -- inside, as well as outside, the Department. Every employee and every supervisory official who is responsible for any phase of the collection, design, preparation, or use of reports in this Department can - and should - work constantly to improve our

reports, and to improve our Department's public image.

Congressman Arnold Olson said recently, "Government reports can play havoc with the small businessman and can go so far as to turn his profits into losses. There are serious side effects, too. These good, honest people get the idea that the Government is breathing down their necks and that the Federal Government in Washington is almost an enemy, because of this heavy burden of paperwork. These people want to obey the law, but it is becoming increasingly difficult for them because so much reporting is required. We simply cannot allow the causes of this type of feeling to go unchecked. Nor do we intend to."

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## APPENDIX

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

CHAPTER 8 - REPORTS MANAGEMENT

SECTION 1 - GENERAL

\*→800. PURPOSE. This chapter sets forth policies, responsibilities and procedures for the management of reports within the Department.

801. POLICY. Management and operating officials at all levels need dependable information to measure the accomplishment of objectives, and to improve the effectiveness of programs, policies, and procedures. It is Department policy that this information shall be obtained through systematically planned and administered systems that will assure (1) adequacy, accuracy and usefulness of collected data, and (2) maximum economy in collecting and disseminating data.

802. ROLE OF REPORTS IN MANAGEMENT. Reports are an important means of communication in the management process. Although routinely considered a device to measure the progress of programs for which the manager is responsible and to control the activities of subordinates, they are also a primary source of information for planning and directing future programs.

803. OBJECTIVES OF THE REPORTS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM. The USDA reports management program is designed to help each manager carry out his responsibilities, and at the same time achieve maximum economy, uniformity, and simplicity in reporting systems. An effective reports management program should:

- a. Provide management with needed information at times and places, and in the forms most useful to it.
- b. Combine and simplify reports wherever possible.
- c. Reduce frequency and distribution of reports to the minimum required for sound operation.
- d. Eliminate non-essential reports and information.
- e. Provide employees with needed direction and means for the preparation of required reports. ←\*



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TITLE 4 - PLANT AND OPERATIONS

- \*→804. DEFINITIONS. a. Report. The transmission of recorded data or information between organizations, whether form, narrative, tabular, graphic, questionnaire, punch card, tape, or other medium, regardless of the method of processing, preparation, or transmission.
- b. Recurring Report. A report which requires repetitive preparation in whole or in part.
- c. One-Time Report. A report prepared on special request, one-time only, by one or more activities.
- d. Situation Report. A report prepared in connection with a specific event or temporary situation. A situation report might require repetitive submission during a stated period of time to satisfy the single requirement. The total submission constitutes one report.
- e. USDA Report. A report required by a Departmental staff office to be submitted by other staff offices and/or agencies.
- f. Agency Report. A report required by an agency to be submitted by an activity under its jurisdiction.
- g. Interagency Report. A report required by one USDA agency to be submitted by another USDA agency or its activities.
- h. External Report. A report required by an agency outside USDA to be submitted by the Department, or agencies of the Department.
- i. Feeder Report. An optional term used to identify reports that are required for the sole purpose of providing information needed in preparing other reports.
- j. Due Date. The date a report is to arrive at its prescribed destination.
- k. Federal Reports Act of 1942 (57 Stat. 1078; 5 U.S.C. 139-139f). The Federal statute requiring Federal agencies to obtain the approval of the Bureau of the Budget before imposing reporting and record keeping requirements on the public, (i. e. persons, industrial organizations, State and local governments, etc.) ←\*

- \*→1. Report Control Symbols (RCS). A system of code-numbering and/or lettering used to identify and catalog individual reports.

SECTION 2 - RESPONSIBILITIES

805. PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITY. The Office of Plant and Operations will:

- a. Develop and promote techniques to improve the effectiveness of reports management programs and activities throughout the Department.
- b. Provide Departmental standards and guidelines for the creation and use of reports.
- c. Advise and assist staff offices and agencies in establishing and administering effective reports management programs and systems.
- d. Direct and coordinate periodic reviews of USDA staff office and agency reports.
- e. Evaluate progress and summarize results of USDA staff office and agency reports management programs.

806. DEPARTMENTAL STAFF OFFICE RESPONSIBILITY. The head of each Departmental staff office will:

- a. Establish internal controls and procedures necessary to achieve the reports management program's objectives, including adequate systems for reviewing, clearing and controlling proposed reports.
- b. Periodically, or as requested by the Director of Plant and Operations, conduct a systematic review of USDA and external reporting requirements to determine whether any reports for which his office is responsible should be modified or discontinued.
- c. Maintain a current inventory of all reports required to be submitted by and to his office (see sample inventory format at Exhibit 1 & 2). ←\*

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TITLE 4 - PLANT AND OPERATIONS

\*→807. AGENCY RESPONSIBILITY. The Administrator of each agency will:

- a. Establish a reports management program within his agency.
- b. Issue appropriate directives implementing Departmental reports management policies and objectives throughout his agency.
- c. Establish internal controls to assure conformity with agency standards and program objectives, including adequate systems for reviewing, clearing and controlling proposed reports.
- d. Periodically, or as requested by the Director of Plant and Operations, conduct a systematic review of all reports submitted by or to the agency to determine whether any should be modified or discontinued.
- e. Maintain a current inventory of all reports required to be submitted by and to the agency (see sample inventory format at Exhibits 1 & 2).
- f. Designate an individual to function as reports management officer for the agency, or as chairman or coordinator of an agency reports management committee.

808. OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT SERVICES. The Director, Office of Management Services, will, upon mutual agreement with staff offices and agencies serviced by Office of Management Services, provide the reports management support services required by these regulations.

809. STATISTICAL REPORTING SERVICE.

- a. The Administrator, Statistical Reporting Service, is responsible for administering that portion of the Federal Reports Act of 1942, as implemented in Bureau of the Budget Circular A-40.
- b. Procedures for obtaining Bureau of the Budget clearance for Departmental or agency plans and reports forms which request data of general public interest are contained in 1 AR 559-566.←\*

\*→810. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE REPORTS MANAGEMENT OFFICER. Each individual designated as a reports management officer will:

- a. Observe agency reports activities to assure compliance with policies enumerated in this and agency instructions to achieve the objectives of the reports management program.
- b. Administer reports clearance and control-symbol procedures within his agency or office.
- c. Insure that instructions for recurring reports are contained in permanent directives of the agency.
- d. Identify categories of information to be exempted from reports control procedures.
- e. Establish evaluation procedures necessary to improve the quality of reports.
- f. Maintain liaison with Departmental staff offices and other agencies to assure maximum economy and effectiveness in his activity's reporting program.

### SECTION 3 - REPORTS CONTROLS

811. REPORTS CLEARANCE PROCEDURE. Prior to clearance, each new or revised report will be reviewed for need, usefulness, and adequacy. Staff offices and agencies will establish internal clearance procedures to insure adequate coordination, and approval of each reporting requirement by a responsible official. This clearance may be accomplished separately, or as part of the review and clearance of the directive or forms associated with the report. An optional clearance form AD Form 368 Report Clearance Request, is attached at Exhibit 3, for those agencies desiring an independent reports clearance procedure. This form contains the type of information which should be considered during the initial clearance review.

812. EXEMPTED REPORTS. Certain categories of reports normally are exempt from reports management procedures. ←\*

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\*→Examples are: Investigative and audit reports; informational copies of personnel transaction documents; annual and supplemental budget estimates, justifications, and supporting information; individual supply and procurement transactions; information presented in narrative form, such as research findings, technical summaries, special studies, projects, or surveys. Reports management officers should analyze office and agency informational requirements and identify those categories to be exempted.

813. REPORTS CONTROL SYMBOLS (RCS). a. Principles of Use. Experience has shown that the use of reports control symbols makes several important contributions to efficient reports management. Specifically, they permit quick identification of approved reports, provide a means of easy reference and inventory listing, and sometimes tie records and files to the reports they are associated with.

b. Reports Control Symbol Systems. The symbol system may be geared to the organization's directives or forms numbering system, to the organizational structure, to a subjective classification system, or to any other system that meets the organization's needs.

c. Use. A reports control symbol should be assigned to each new reporting requirement upon completion of the initial clearance procedure, and prior to issuance.

814. CENTRAL REPORTS CONTROL RECORDS. Each staff office and agency will maintain control records on all reporting requirements which it originates. The records should include:

a. A current inventory of all reports required to be submitted by and to the agency. The inventory should be maintained in such form that it can be made available or reproduced, as required, for systematic review, analysis, and appraisal of reports. (See sample inventory format at Exhibits 1 & 2).

b. A copy of each report clearance form with a copy of the directive that established the report, and any forms associated with the report.

c. A copy of the evaluation made on each report analyzed during the periodic review process. ←\*

SECTION 4 - REPORTS SURVEY AND EVALUATION  
PROCEDURES

\*→815. CONTINUOUS SELF EVALUATION. Managers and operating officials at all levels shall continuously evaluate the need for individual reports received in their offices. Those that do not satisfy a valid and current requirement should be discontinued. Particular emphasis should be placed on:

- a. Utility of the information, and value received in relation to the cost of the report.
- b. Simplicity of data requirements.
- c. Frequency and number of respondents required to submit the report.

816. PERIODIC SURVEYS AND REVIEWS. Periodically, or upon specific request from the Director of Plant and Operations, the head of each staff office and the administrator of each agency will conduct a comprehensive review of all recurring reports required to be submitted by or to his activity. During this review operating officials should be asked to reaffirm the continued need for each report submitted to their offices and to suggest specific improvements in those that are required.

817. RECOMMENDING IMPROVEMENTS. Agencies and staff offices are urged to evaluate carefully all reports which they are required to submit and the directives prescribing them, and to recommend improvement, simplification or discontinuance, where appropriate. Individual recommendations should be submitted as they are developed. Recommendations resulting from periodic surveys should be prepared individually and submitted in a group identified with the survey. Recommendations should be submitted to the responsible departmental staff office or, in the case of inter-agency reports to the responsible agency. Each recommendation should include, but is not limited to:

- a. A copy of the report and a citation of the directive prescribing the report.
- b. An estimate of the number of man-hours consumed in preparing the report throughout the agency, including←\*

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\*→feeder reports when pertinent.

c. A statement of the recommended change, and the reasons for the change. This statement should be as specific as possible and offer constructive criticism for improving the quality of the report, or give valid reasons for discontinuing it.

818. REPORTS EVALUATION CHECKLIST. AD Form 367, Reports Evaluation Checklist, (Exhibit 4) will help identify weaknesses and develop recommendations for improving individual reports. The evaluation checklist and the reports clearance form (or their equivalents) should be used during the periodic survey of reports required by the agency as a means of assuring adequate appraisal. ←\*

INVENTORY OF REPORTS REQUIRED

(Staff Office or Agency)

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Reports Control Symbol	Required By	Title of Report	Purpose and Description	Prepared By	Other Distribution	Frequency Due In	Authorizing Directive
List each report only once			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Specific program which the report supports. Describe the type of data included in the report.</li> <li>2. If report is a Feeder Report, identify Agency requiring the report and the report title and RCS (if different).</li> </ol> <p>Group reports by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Organizational unit establishing initial requirement.</li> <li>b. Program area which the report supports.</li> </ol>		Show Distribution of all copies received	D - Daily W - Weekly M - Monthly Q - Quarterly A - Annually  Use prefix "semi" when report is required twice weekly, twice monthly, twice annually, etc.  Use prefix "bi" when report is required every 2 weeks, 2 months, 2 years, etc.	

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EXHIBIT 1 - 4 AR 806c, 807e and 814a



INVENTORY OF RECURRING REPORTS SUBMITTED

(Staff Office or Agency)

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Reports Control Symbol	Prepared By	Title of Report	Purpose and Description	Submitted To	Other Internal Distribution	Frequency Due Out	Authorizing Directive
List each report only once			1. Identify specific program which the report supports. Describe type of data included in the report.  2. If the report is a Feeder Report, identify agency requiring the report, the report title, and RCS (if different).  Group reports by: a. Organizational unit preparing the report or b. Program area which the report supports			D - Daily W - Weekly M - Monthly Q - Quarterly A - Annually  Use of prefix "Semi" when report is submitted twice a week, month, year, etc.  Use prefix "bi" when report is submitted every 2 weeks, months, years, etc.	

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EXHIBIT 2 - 4 AR 806c, 807e and 814a

AD-368  
(7-63)

**REPORT CLEARANCE REQUEST**

*(See Instructions on reverse)*

1. REPORTS CONTROL SYMBOL  
*(Inserted by Reports Mgmt. Officer)*

2. EXACT TITLE OF REPORT *(Attach copy of prescribed form or reporting format)*

OFFICE REQUIRING REPORT

4. PURPOSE OF REPORT

5. REPORT IS *(New or revised)*

6. REPORTING FREQUENCY *(Specify)*

7. DUE DATE

ONE TIME \_\_\_\_\_ RECURRING \_\_\_\_\_

8. DIRECTIVE ESTABLISHING REPORT *(Attach copy)*

9. OFFICES PREPARING REPORTS *(Show numbers and kinds of preparing offices)*

10. DISTRIBUTION OF REPORT COPIES *(Specify each recipient office)*

11. IDENTIFY PRESCRIBED SOURCE DATA FORM(S) OR FORMAT(S) *(Attach copy)*

12. IS COMPUTER EQUIPMENT USED IN

PREPARING REPORTS

ANALYZING REPORTS

NOT USED

13. LIST REPORTS SUPERSEDED BY THIS REPORT

14. REPORT REQUESTED BY *(Signature)*

14A. TITLE

15. REPORT APPROVED BY *(Signature)*

15A. TITLE

16.

**PERIODIC REVIEWS**

17. REMARKS

AD-368

EXHIBIT 3 - 4 AR 811 (Page 2)

AD-368 (Reverse)  
(7-63)

REPORT CLEARANCE REQUEST INSTRUCTIONS

- A. Use Form AD-368 to get approval for each new or revised agency or staff office reporting requirement.
- B. Submit an original and one copy of the form to reports management office.
- C. Follow the instructions below when preparing request.

- 
- 1. Leave Blank.
  - 2. Indicate title of report.
  - 3. Identify office requiring report.
  - 4. Indicate the program which the report supports and why the report is needed.
  - 5. Self Explanatory.
  - 6. Check appropriate entry. If recurring, specify frequency. Use: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly, Annually, etc.
  - 7. Self Explanatory.
  - 8. Recurring reports requirements should be stated in standard directives of office or agency. Temporary instructions should be codified at earliest possible date. One time reports are usually established by letter, TWX etc.
  - 9. Be specific by office or type of office to prepare report. Include number of offices. E.G., "all state offices," "300 county offices," etc.
  - 10. Self-explanatory.
  - 11. Consider how preparing offices will collect and file data. Provide work sheets on source forms for this purpose. This reduces cost of report and insures that you get what you want.
  - 12. The reference here is to electro-mechanical tabulating card machines and to electronic data processing machines.
  - 13. Identify by Title or Reports Control symbol or both.
  - 14. Self Explanatory.
  - 15. Self Explanatory.
  - 16. Include date and signature of Reports Management Officer.
  - 17. The "Remarks" space is for the use of the Reports Management Officer.

AD-368 (Reverse)

AD-367 (7-63)	<b>REPORTS EVALUATION CHECKLIST</b>	REVIEW DATE
REPORT TITLE		

**SECTION 1--DETERMINE THE NEED**

INSTRUCTIONS: Check either column (b) or (c). If questionable, show changes in column (d) (a)	QUESTION- ABLE (b)	SATISFAC- TORY (c)	PROPOSED CHANGES (Attach Additional Sheets, if Needed) (d)
1. THE REPORT AS A WHOLE Who uses it? How? What is its purpose? Should it be continued?			
2. USE OF EACH ITEM. Is every item used? Any missing items to be added?			
3. USE OF EACH COPY. Are all copies used to good advantage?			
4. FUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP. Is the information within the scope of the office functions?			
5. MISAPPLICATION. Does the report try to solve a problem which should be solved by other means?			
6. STAND-BY DATA. Is the data obtained for "just-in-case" use?			
7. ANOTHER AVAILABLE SOURCE. Is the data available in another report or office?			
8. BY PRODUCT. Is it possible to get the data by some other process?			
9. DIRECT USE OF RECORDS. Could actual records or "fast copy" of record be used instead of a report?			
10. SAMPLING. Would a sampling of a few offices give reliable data?			
11. EXCEPTION REPORTING. Would it be appropriate to report conditions only when other than normal?			
12. COMBINATION. Could this report be combined with another report?			
13. NON-RELATED MATERIAL. Are non-related subjects included in the same report?			
14. ADEQUACY AND SUITABILITY. Is scope or content tailored to meet needs?			
15. VALUE VS. COST. Is the report worth its cost?			

**SECTION 2--VERIFY THE TIMING**

16. REPORTING PERIODS. Are reporting periods properly stated?			
17. FREQUENCY. Is the present frequency suitable, excessive, or inadequate?			
18. DUE DATE. Is the due date specifically stated?			
19. PREPARING OFFICE WORKLOAD. Has this been considered? Can due dates be changed to avoid peak workloads?			

AD-367

EXHIBIT 4 - 4 AR 818 (Page 2)

AD-367 (7-63)	<b>REPORTS EVALUATION CHECKLIST (Page 2)</b>	REVIEW DATE
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REPORT TITLE

**SECTION 3-- REVIEW STYLE OF PRESENTATION**

INSTRUCTIONS: Check either column (b) or (c). If questionable, show changes in column (d). (a)	QUESTION- ABLE (b)	SATISFAC- TORY (c)	PROPOSED CHANGES (Attach Additional Sheets, if Needed) (d)
20. REPORT TITLE. Is it the same as, or listed in the directive?			
21. PURPOSE OF REPORT. Is it clearly stated?			
22. REPORTING INSTRUCTIONS. Are reporting instructions clear and adequate?			
23. INTEGRATED REPORTING. Are data needs of other levels tied in?			
24. FEEDER REPORTS. Are procedures for feeder reports provided to assure uniformity and simplicity?			
25. REPORTING UNITS. Are reporting units shown? Are there too many, too few?			
26. NEGATIVE REPORTS. Are negative reports required? What use is made of them?			
27. NUMBER OF COPIES. Are number of copies specified?			
28. ROUTING. Are correct mailing addresses given?			
29. NARRATIVE OR FORM Is the best format for this report used?			
30. ARRANGEMENT AND SIZE. Are items sequenced to source? Is spacing adequate? Are item captions clear? Is size adequate & practical?			
31. STANDARDIZATION. Do all offices use the same form or format?			
32. SUMMARY INFORMATION. Would a summary of information rather than statistics or a narrative be better?			
33. CUMULATIVE DATA. Can data be maintained on a cumulative basis to eliminate last-minute workloads?			
34. COMPARISONS. Are comparisons made against goals, past performance, or current performance of others?			
35. GRAPHICS Are graphics used to good advantage?			
36. AUTHENTICATION. Are verifying or approving officials' signatures used only when necessary?			
37. DATA SOURCES. Are records from which reports are to be prepared identified?			
38. ARRANGEMENT OF RECORDS. Should records be rearranged to simplify reporting?			
39. REPORT SYMBOL. Is it shown after title of report?			
40. STYLE OF PRESENTATION Does the overall report provide clarity and simplicity?			