

## BACKGROUND

The U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has issued government-wide guidelines for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information disseminated by Federal agencies. Congress directed OMB to issue these guidelines in section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law 106-554). OMB published its guidelines in the Federal Register on September 28, 2001 at [66 FR 49718-49725](#) and updated the guidelines on February 22, 2002 at [67 FR 8452-8460](#) and on March 4, 2002 at [67 FR 9797](#).

OMB's guidelines require Federal agencies subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35) to: (1) issue information quality guidelines for the information disseminated by the agency; (2) establish administrative mechanisms allowing affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information disseminated by the agency on or after October 1, 2002 that does not comply with OMB or agency guidelines; and (3) annually report to OMB the number and nature of complaints received by the agency regarding agency compliance with OMB and agency guidelines and how such complaints were resolved.

As the initial step in its development of information quality guidelines, each Federal agency must prepare a draft report providing its guidelines and detailing the administrative mechanisms developed by the agency to allow affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information disseminated by the agency, and post the draft report on the agency's website to provide an opportunity for public comment. With this website posting, USDA is requesting public comments on its draft guidelines.

## TO COMMENT

Interested parties are asked to address the following when submitting comments to USDA:

1. Are USDA's draft guidelines adequate for ensuring the objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information it disseminates as set out in OMB's notices of September 28, 2001 and February 22, 2002?
2. Are USDA's procedures for allowing affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information appropriate and consistent with OMB requirements?

**Deadline for Comments:** The deadline for comments on USDA's draft information quality guidelines is June 15, 2002.

**Address for Comments:** Send comments to Dr. Bette Fugitt, eGovernment, Office of the Chief Information Officer, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, STOP 7602, Washington, DC 20250-7602. Comments may also be sent by fax to (202) 205-2831 or by e-mail to [Bette.Fugitt@usda.gov](mailto:Bette.Fugitt@usda.gov).

**For Further Information Contact:** [Dr. Bette Fugitt](#), Office of the Chief Information Officer, U.S. Department of Agriculture, telephone (202) 720-8020.

## REQUIREMENTS OF OMB'S INFORMATION QUALITY GUIDELINES FOR

## FEDERAL AGENCIES

OMB's guidelines direct agencies to adopt specific standards of quality that are appropriate for the various categories of information the agency disseminates. OMB defines "information" as "any communication or representation of knowledge such as facts or data in any medium or form." OMB defines "dissemination" as "agency initiated or sponsored distribution of information to the public." OMB defines "quality" as an encompassing term, comprising objectivity, utility, and integrity.

To ensure and maximize the quality of information disseminated by Federal agencies, including its objectivity, utility, and integrity, OMB's guidelines instruct agencies to treat information quality as integral to every step of the agency's development of information, including creation, collection, maintenance, and dissemination. This process will enable the agency to substantiate the quality of the information it has disseminated through documentation or other means appropriate to the information. Most importantly, the OMB guidelines require agencies to develop a process for reviewing the quality of information before it is disseminated to the public to ensure that it meets OMB's standards for objectivity, utility, and integrity.

### The Objectivity Standard

To meet the OMB objectivity standard, information disseminated by a Federal agency must be substantively accurate, reliable, and unbiased and be presented in an accurate, clear, complete, and unbiased manner. Data must be generated and analytic results must be developed using sound statistical and research methods. Agencies must identify the sources of the disseminated information, the methods used to produce it, and provide full, accurate, and transparent documentation.

Information the agency deems to be "influential scientific, financial, or statistical information" also must be reproducible to demonstrate its objectivity.

### The Reproducibility Standard for Influential Scientific, Financial, or Statistical Information

Under OMB's guidelines, "influential scientific, financial, or statistical information" means that the agency can reasonably determine that dissemination of the information will have or does have a clear and substantial impact on important public policies or important private sector decisions. Agencies that disseminate influential scientific, financial, or statistical information must ensure a high degree of transparency about data and methods to facilitate the reproducibility of such information. Reproducibility means that there is the capability to use the documented methods on the same data set to achieve a consistent result. In its guidance, OMB states: "The purpose of the reproducibility standard is to cultivate a consistent agency commitment to transparency about how analytic results are generated: the specific data used, the various assumptions employed, the specific analytical methods applied, and the statistical procedures employed. If sufficient transparency is achieved on each of these matters, then an analytic result should meet the 'capable of being substantially reproduced' standard." It is up to each agency to decide which of the scientific, financial, or statistical information the agency disseminates meets the criteria for influential information.

## **The Utility Standard**

To meet the OMB utility standard, information must be useful to its intended users, including the public. In addition, when transparency of information is relevant for assessing the information's usefulness from the public's perspective, agencies must take care to ensure that transparency has been addressed in their review of the information.

## **The Integrity Standard**

Integrity refers to the security of the information. To meet the OMB integrity standard, information must be protected from unauthorized access or revision to ensure that it is not compromised through corruption or falsification.

## **USDA'S APPROACH TO DEVELOPING QUALITY GUIDELINES FOR THE INFORMATION DISSEMINATED BY USDA AND ITS AGENCIES AND OFFICES**

USDA agencies and offices will adopt a basic standard of quality (including objectivity, utility, and integrity) as a performance goal and will take appropriate steps to incorporate information quality criteria into their information dissemination practices. Quality will be ensured and established at levels appropriate to the nature and timeliness of the information to be disseminated.

USDA agencies and offices will review the quality (including the objectivity, utility, and integrity) of information before it is disseminated and treat information quality as integral to every step of their development of information, including creation, collection, maintenance, and dissemination.

USDA's information quality guidelines apply to all the agencies and offices that comprise the department. However, component agencies and offices may, if they so choose and as appropriate, develop more detailed guidelines within the departmental framework for the quality of the information that they disseminate.

In accordance with OMB's guidance for agencies to adopt specific standards of quality that are appropriate for the various categories of information they disseminate, USDA has developed separate information quality guidelines for the six basic categories of information that the department and its agencies and offices disseminate to the public. The six categories are described below.

### **Statistical Information**

Statistical information disseminated by USDA agencies and offices that is obtained from original data collections, administrative records, or compilations of data from primary sources, as well as estimates and forecasts derived from statistical models, expert analyses, or a combination of the two. This category also includes analyses and interpretation of statistical information.

### **Scientific Research Information**

Scientific research information that is produced by or used by USDA agencies or offices and disseminated to the public.

### **Regulatory Information**

Information disseminated to the public by USDA agencies and offices in conjunction with their rulemaking activities. Such information includes economic, cost/benefit, scientific, environmental, risk, reporting and recordkeeping, and other pertinent analyses prepared or presented by agencies in support of those activities.

### **Reference Information**

Technical information disseminated by USDA agencies and offices that helps the public in their daily activities. Examples include information on good nutrition, safe handling of food, and recommendations on good farming practices.

### **Programs and Services Information**

Information about the programs and services that USDA agencies and offices provide to their customers. Examples include what the programs and services are, who is eligible, and how and where to apply.

### **Organizational Information**

General descriptive information about USDA and its agencies and offices. Examples include the agencies' history, functions, and legislative authorities; their organization charts, the offices within the agencies and their functions; the agencies' strategic and performance plans and their budgetary information; and information pertaining to the agencies' administrative processes.

## **INFORMATION NOT SUBJECT TO USDA'S INFORMATION QUALITY GUIDELINES**

OMB guidelines specifically exclude certain types of information from coverage under OMB or agency information quality guidelines. The following types of information are not subject to USDA's Information Quality Guidelines:

- Opinions, where USDA's or a USDA agency's or office's presentation makes it clear that what is being offered is someone's opinion rather than fact or the agency's views.
- Information disseminated by a USDA, USDA agency, or USDA office grantee, contractor, or cooperator who publishes and communicates his or her research findings in the same manner as his or her academic colleagues where the dissemination is not initiated or sponsored by USDA, the USDA agency, or the USDA office.
- Information for which distribution is limited to government employees, agency contractors, or grantees.

- Intra- or inter-agency use or sharing of government information.
- Responses to requests for agency records under the Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy Act, the Federal Advisory Committee Act or other similar law.
- Distribution of information limited to correspondence with individuals or persons, press releases, or archival records, public filings, subpoenas, or adjudicative processes.
- Archival information disseminated by Federal agency libraries.
- Hyperlinks from USDA, USDA agency, or USDA office websites to information that others disseminate.

## **PROCEDURE TO SEEK CORRECTION OF INFORMATION DISSEMINATED BY USDA**

USDA has developed administrative mechanisms to allow affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information disseminated by USDA on or after October 1, 2002 that does not comply with Office of Management and Budget or USDA Information Quality Guidelines. Click on the link to review the procedure.

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[Link to the Information Quality Guidelines main page](#)

We welcome your comments and suggestions about these pages. For information related to the USDA Quality Information Guidelines, please contact [Dr. Bette Fugitt](#), USDA Records Officer. For comments regarding the site itself: [ociowebmaster@ociofc.usda.gov](mailto:ociowebmaster@ociofc.usda.gov)  
[http://www.ocio.usda.gov/irm/qi\\_guide/main.html](http://www.ocio.usda.gov/irm/qi_guide/main.html)

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