



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear USDA Employees,

I am writing to ask each of you for your help with plain writing at USDA. Writing in plain, easy to understand language is an important way for us to help better serve the American people. Plain language makes it easier for the public to get the most from our many critical programs and will save us money too.

On President Obama's first day in office he signed a memorandum emphasizing the importance of establishing "a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration." I am proud of the hard work that all of you have been doing to implement that vision and transform USDA into a more open and accessible organization.

In further support of these goals, last fall the President signed the Plain Writing Act of 2010. The Act requires that, beginning October 13, all Federal Agencies—including USDA—use plain language in new or substantially revised documents that are needed to obtain USDA services or benefits or provide information about them or that explain how to comply with requirements we administer or enforce.

Using plain writing is indispensable to achieving our goals of providing first-class customer service and ensuring access to our programs. When we avoid jargon and excessive acronyms, customers that are new to USDA are more likely to have a positive experience. And when we avoid obscurity and ambiguity, we demonstrate our commitment to serving all Americans, including those who have had trouble accessing our programs in the past.

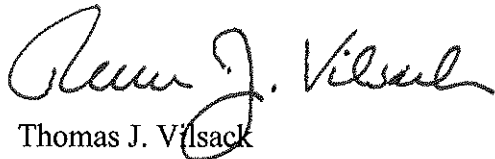
Plain writing is also an important tool for improving efficiency and saving time and money at USDA. Logically organizing your thoughts, using clear tables and graphics, and approaching a document from the perspective of your audience can reduce the number of calls you receive asking to explain a document or form and the number of hours spent on enforcement because a farmer did not understand a regulation.

This past summer USDA published our [Plain Writing Compliance Report](#) to ensure compliance once the Act comes into full effect October 13, 2011. Through the USDA Plain Language working group, each agency has begun identifying covered documents and providing training and resources to employees. I encourage each of you to visit our [Plain Language web page](#) to learn more about the Act.

Included in the newly updated Plain Language web page you will find resources that will help you write and review documents for the public covered by the Act, as well as help you inform our colleagues in order to comply with the Act. I urge you to explore the USDA website, AgLearn courses, and plainlanguage.gov website to learn about and get training regarding writing and reviewing documents for plain language so that we can serve our country best.

As part of our efforts to strengthen our service at USDA, it is important that we communicate clearly and simply with the American people. I know I can count on you to do your best to make it happen in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom J. Vilsack". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" and last name "Vilsack" clearly legible.

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary