



Building Rural America
National Association of Credit Specialists
of the
USDA – Farm Service Agency

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE MET AT THE WESTIN PEACHTREE PLAZA HOTEL IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA ON JUNE 22, 2009, TO REVIEW RESOLUTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE MEMBERSHIP.

THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTIONS ARE RECOMMENDED FOR ADOPTION:

Resolution #1

Concern: Timing out of eAuth is very short requiring users to constantly log in throughout the day. Also, if multiple pages are open in eAuth applications, logging out of one page often logs the user out of all eAuth applications/pages.

Solution: Extend the time out to 90 minutes. This will save considerable time and frustration for the user.

ITSD Response: eAuth is a Department authentication solution that FSA does not control. Per eAuth, the current policy for all USDA applications is 1 hour of inactivity or 9 total hours of application usage. After these times, the user would be forced to log in again. These are the standards set by the Department that eAuth is adhering to

Committee Response: This issue has been brought forward numerous times; it is not within the security parameters for it to be altered. Recommend that in future any resolution involving this issue not be adopted.

Resolution #2

Concern: With the requirement to keep all electronic data forever we are rapidly running out of server storage space causing systems to slow down considerably and will soon be non-functional. This is affecting GIS now and will eventually affect all computing in the office.

Solution: Set up online electronic storage data centers so FSA/NRCS/RD can move the old data off the office server and thus free up space so the system will continue to function optimally.

ITSD Response: ITS is addressing this in their Optimized Computing Environment project and some of the initial maintenance work is being done this year on our environment. ITS is purchasing a data management system that will be installed in the USDA Enterprise Data Centers to collect electronic data from all offices and maintain it within an environment that supports long term management. This approach will remove the need to perform tape backups in the field as well as allow us to eliminate a large number of field office servers. Another benefit will be the ability to respond to eDiscovery requests in a timelier manner and with minimal expenditure of resources.

Committee Response: The equipment has been purchased and the alternate site is in process. Once the site is in place, national notices and instructions will be provided which may involve transferring information via the shared drive. Recommend follow-up on this item if unresolved by next committee meeting.

Resolution #3

Concern: Not being able to change the approval date in the FBP. Once the date of approval has been set in FBP it cannot be changed even by the FBP State Coordinator. This has caused problems as DLS picks up this date which effects the interest rate charged to the borrower. There are certain situations where the loan can be approved manually and not approved in the system, for example: 1. System is down on the date of approval 2. Computer is not accessible by the approval authority. 3. Computer hard drive problems. 4. Approval authority unable to log into FBP.

Solution: Make a change to allow the State FBP Coordinator the authority to change the date if one of these situations occurs to allow the borrower to obtain the correct interest rate.

ITSD Response: The FBP software does not allow the approval date for a credit action to be changed; however, the FBP National Office Program Manager can delete the approval date for a FPB so that a correction can be made.

The national office has established a team of field representatives consisting of Farm Loan Chiefs, FBP Coordinators and NACS representatives that review requested changes and/or enhancements to FBP. The national office has received a request to provide FBP Coordinators with the authority to delete an approval date so that it can be corrected. A decision on whether or not to give this authority to the FBP Coordinators has not yet been made. We would note that historically the number of requests we have received to alter an approval date have been very few. Given this fact and the issues we face with lawsuits and audits the current thought is that this authority should be maintained at the national office level.

Committee Response: Forwarded to FBP taskforce. The committee feels that this resolution has merit and would recommend that the task force follow up on this item. Further, if the instances of this requirement are rare, then a procedure to request this action item be done by the N.O. be provided to the field is requested.

Resolution #4

Concern: The Agency is moving to a newer Microsoft Office package where Microsoft Access may or may not be available. County and State offices have developed essential databases for uses in assisting program delivery. Loss of this program would result in reduced efficiencies and render current databases unusable.

Solution: The continuation of the Access component of Microsoft Office is requested.

ITSD Response: Access 2007 is included in planned migration to Office 2007. Where this may be of concern for your program areas is the differences in the 2003 and 2007 versions of Access. ITS is working with the agencies to provide early adopter access Office 2007 to begin porting dependent applications/documents over to the new version. ITS can provide more specifics on the logistics of the early adopters effort if needed.

Committee Response: The issue has been resolved, as Office 2007 does have the MS Access feature.

Resolution #5

Concern: There is much data in SCIMS that would be invaluable to the County Office for implementation of their marketing plans as well as completing procedurally required mailings, newsletters, and form preparation. However, this data is not available for use as it is not transmittable to other software programs. With the eventual loss of the AS 400, this will also affect the farm program staff's ability to develop data lists.

Solution: A bridge be developed whereby data residing in SCIMS be available for marketing and outreach efforts by County Offices, both FLP and FP.

ITSD Response: FSA is working on the implementation of an Enterprise Data Warehouse strategy that will provide the requested access to data. Authorized Service Center users will be able to access this data without impacting the interactive web environment. This access may include the ability to generate information needed for management reporting and possibly download extracts of data needed for mailing and customer outreach.

In addition: MSD/PB/PS is preparing requirements for an enhancement to the COF News Letter application that will provide additional capability for mailings.

Committee Response: SCIMS is a multi-agency program, in order to have any changes to this program all or the majority of the agencies must push for the alterations. Recommend that this committee explore additional avenues to widen the approach for resolution of SCIMS issues.

- NASCOE, NACS-RD, and other groups have similar issues and concerns, a consolidation of efforts would improve the chances of resolving SCIMS issues.
- What agency is the lead? If FSA is not the lead, who is? The committee would benefit from knowing who these issues could be routed too.
- Is there a SCIMS steering committee and does FLP have a presence on this committee? If so, who is the contact? And, contacts for the other agencies as well.

Resolution #6

Concern: Incoming/Outgoing computer lines have full capability of being T1, but are reduced due to smaller employee base in some offices. With the number of programs going to Web based, this is causing severe delays and problems in running the various programs.

Solution: Convert all offices to run at a minimum, the full T1 rate.

ITSD Response: Consideration is being given to data capacity at all sites, however there is also a request from Agencies to ITS to reduce telecommunications costs due to reduced budgets. Increasing service for all sites would be an increase in costs. Because of the need to reduce cost, an evaluation has determined that not all sites are capable of supporting a full T1 due to location and other factors, so some sites were provisioned for less than a full T1.

To meet these competing requests, ITS is looking at alternative services (DSL, increased use of broadband, etc). These are currently in pilot development. Exactly what will be available or effective for all sites/users is not clear at this time but as soon as increased options become feasible, they will be cleared with the agencies for functionality and costing, and implemented where appropriate.

Committee Response: Funding is the driving factor to this issue. Recommend that this issue be pursued at the state level with ITS and at the time of rental agreement renewal or location changes are being considered.

Resolution #7

Concern: When an application is received the county office is required to complete a review of past debts with the agency. The county office will check the GLS loan list to see if there was a loss to the government. The GLS Loan List currently shows loans as either active or terminated. The termination status is used regardless of how the loan was resolved. It does not indicate whether a loan was fully paid or a loss to the government occurred. The county office must then drill down into each individual loan on the list to verify how the loan was resolved. This can be very time consuming when an applicant has had multiple loan assistance.

Solution: Revise the GLS loan list to show the loan status as active, terminated, or loss to the government.

ITSD Response: A Request for Automation (RFA) was submitted in August 2009 requesting changes to the Loan List screen. The RFA asked that the termination reason be displayed as well as several other changes to the screen. The reason will indicate if the loan was paid in full, loss paid, etc.

Committee Response: This issue has been prioritized as Important #2 with estimated complete time of 3 days. Issues have to be prioritized as critical before they are resolved; however, it is a possibility it can be worked into other developments. Recommend follow-up on this item, if not resolved by next committee meeting.

Resolution #8

Concern: Annually the National Office requests information on how many Class I, Modified Class I, and Class II Environmental Assessments were completed for the fiscal year. The information is requested through the State Environmental Coordinator who must request the information from the County Office. At this time there is no electronic way of collecting the information so it must be completed manually.

Solution: The Loan Making Checklist in LM includes information when the following Environmental forms are completed: Form 1940-22 "Environmental Checklist for Categorical Exclusions." Form 1940-21 Class I assessment. Form 1940 - Class II assessment. Document contact with SHPO. Document contact FWS as applicable. FSA 851 "Environmental Risk Survey Form." I recommend that an environmental report be created in LM and in LS if the same information is in DLS. The report should be able to compile the information on the County, State and National level. With this electronic report manual collecting of this information will be eliminated. The State Environmental Coordinator and National Office Staff will be capable of pulling the information at any time as needs arise.

ITSD Response: A report providing this information as already been included as a priority for development in DLS. We hope to have a report of this information available for field offices sometime in FY 2010.

Committee Response: FACO will follow-up with this issue to ensure this item has been included in the task list for the next phase of LS implementation. Recommend that the committee follow-up if not resolved by the next committee meeting.

Resolution #9

Concern: When accessing customer profiles in Direct Loan Making when checking remaining eligibility for term limits per loan type for applicants how are the years remaining for OL and FO eligibility populated? (Ex. for OL - I have checked the profile of a borrower that I know has no eligibility remaining for OL but yet still shows 7 years remaining). (Ex. for FO I have checked the profile of a borrower who closed a FO back on 12/13/99 and his date for eligibility remaining to obtain a FO populated is automatically 12/13/09 even though he paid off on 11/13/08. This date which appears in the box as the day his eligibility for FO assistance will run out is not correct since it is unknown at what date the borrower will have accumulated the 10 years of outstanding principal with FO loans. As of the day the loan was paid in full the borrower only has used 9 years of the 10 allowed under 3-FLP, Par.132, Sec.E. The question is can the FO and OL eligibility remaining fields in DLM in the customer profiles be reprogrammed to calculate actual eligibility remaining by showing the years and days left of eligibility per the different rules of OL and FO term limits? *** This question is also dependent upon the answer to my resolution submitted for Term Limit definition for FO.

Solution: Since the customer profile screen shows all loans the applicant had and when the loans were closed as well as the paid in full dates reprogram the boxes to calculate exactly how many years and days are left for each type of loan according to the term limits rules for each loan type?

Change FO term limit deadline to reflect years and days of eligibility remaining. Change calculation for both FO and OL term limit eligibility remaining to use PLAS database to figure exact term limit eligibility remaining. This will prevent employee error, by not having to rely on memory and old files to determine term limit eligibility.

ITSD Response: The original term limits were converted from the Management of Agricultural Credit (MAC). This was due to the fact that in the MAC Input Section all loans were looked at and the original loan and date were determined manually and entered in MAC to aid in determining term limits and taking into account the transition rules.

The OL term limit field was left open in DLS so that corrections, if needed, could be made. A subtraction of 1 for the OL term limits is performed at the end of the each calendar year if the borrower received 1 or more loans in the calendar year. DLS calculates how many years, full or part, the borrower has remaining. The calculation is for non-beginning farmers only since beginning farmers are exempt from term limits as long as they meet the definition of a beginning farmer. It is important to note that once a farmer no longer meets the definition of a beginning farmer, he is subject to term limits which are shown retroactively calculated on the DLS Customer Profile.

As for the FO term limits, DLS calculates 10 years from the date of the first direct FO loan made. The exemption to this would be when loans are paid off early. DLS does not calculate for this exception, this must be done manually. Programming for the exception would be near impossible to keep updated on a daily basis.

Committee Response: The committee recommends that if corrections are warranted to the eligibility years for DOL, a Problem Report be submitted to FLOO as a proposal to have this field remain open at all times is unwarranted. In addition, the DFO exception would be extremely rare and would not impact the ability to make a loan within the year of expiration; therefore, the committee would not recommend the continued exploration of this item.

Resolutions respectfully submitted by the 2008/2009 Information Technology Committee:
Lisa (LeAnn) Gibbs, Zone A; Craig Argabright, Zone B;
Marla Koerner, Zone C; Theresa Windham, Zone D

Committee Response respectfully submitted by the 2009/2010 Information Technology Committee:

Lisa (LeAnn) Gibbs, Zone A

Bill McAnally, Zone B,

Debbie Turner, Zone C

Theresa Windham, Zone D Chairperson