United States Department of Agriculture

Departmental Administration

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration

1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC
20250-0103

TO: Laurence Brewer
Chief Records Officer of the United States

FROM: Donald K. Bice
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Administration

SUBJECT: Senior Agency Official Report

Enclosed is the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) FY 17 Senior Agency Official Annual (SAO) Report to the Federal Chief Records Officer, which provides the progress USDA is making in meeting the goals of the President's Managing Government Records Directive (MGRD) M-12-18.

USDA is reaffirming the Department's longstanding commitment to preserving and managing its federal records and understands the criticality of a good records management program and government transparency.

The Department of Agriculture made significant progress over the past year towards meeting the goals established in M-12-18. An Electronic Records Management Working Group was established to identify a possible enterprise-wide solution to manage permanent records electronically. USDA has an Enterprise Content Management initiative underway, to digitize the Secretary of Agriculture's incoming correspondence. In addition, USDA developed and implemented a new online records management training course for all current and incoming employees, senior officials, political appointees, and contractors. The details of these accomplishments as well as many others are described in the attached SAO report.

We look forward to continuing a close collaboration with you and your staff as USDA continues with the implementation of this important initiative. Should you have any questions, please contact Colleen Snyder, colleen.snyder@o[redacted]

Provide the following information (required):

- Name of SAORM: Donald Bice
- Position title: Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration
- Address: 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
- Office telephone number: (202) 720- 5303

1. **What agencies, bureaus, components, or offices are covered by this report and your position as SAORM?**

- Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)
- Agricultural Research Service (ARS)
- Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)
- Economic Research Service (ERS)
- Farm Service Agency (FSA)
- Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services (FNCS)
- Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)
- Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)
- Forest Service (FS)
- Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)
- National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)
- Natural Research Conservation Service (NRCS)
- National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)
- Risk Management Agency (RMA)
- Rural Development (RD)
- Departmental Program and Staff Offices
- Office of the Secretary of Agriculture

2. **Is your agency and its components making progress towards managing all permanent electronic records in electronic format by December 31, 2019? (M-12-18, Goal 1.1)**

X Yes
☐No

Please explain your response:

In support of Goal 1.1 of the M-12-18, USDA has taken the following actions within the Department in support of the USDA Agencies to effectuate this requirement, as further detailed below:

- The Department has established an Electronic Records Management Working Group (ERMWG) to identify a enterprise-wide solution to manage permanent records electronically. The ERMWG reviewed policies, practices, and USDA's landscape to leverage existing capabilities for systems already in-place and began to explore leveraging SharePoint as a method to store permanent records as an enterprise-wide solution. The ERMWG will continue to evaluate internal and federal best practices to achieving the goal of managing all permanent records electronically. USDA will continue working with stakeholders to identify and develop additional functional requirements for a cost-effective enterprise solution and provide recommendations on associated pilot programs.

- The Department has integrated records management (RM) requirements into the information technology (IT) governance process, IT portfolio and investment reviews and the Integrated Advisory Board (IAB) to enhance internal RM controls on USDA electronic information systems.

- AMS, NASS and RMA have deployed an electronic RM system, SharePoint, to capture and manage their permanent electronic records. SharePoint ensures records are preserved until the end of their retention period. The system uses native file formats for Microsoft Office documents and .pdf with Optical Character Recognition (OCR) for scanned documents. AMS and RMA are currently upgrading to the latest version SharePoint 2016 in the Cloud. NIFA is in the process of implementing SharePoint, which is 55% complete and expects to meet the 2019 deadline.

- APHIS has established a RM Liaison's Work Group, and tasked each liaison with producing and updating file plans/inventories for their programs. This has allowed them to identify and provide guidance on the formatting of permanent records.

- ARS/ERS Records Mangers are developing processes to identify the owners of the permanent records and where the records are located.

- FNCS, FSIS and GIPSA have identified their permanent electronic records which reside in scheduled electronic information systems. FNCS has established electronic signature capabilities and plans to pilot an electronic document management application. FSIS is collaborating with their programs areas to ensure that they maintain their digital versions as the official records copies.

- FS is in the process of implementing an agency-wide electronic records management system. The system is anticipated to "go live" in May 2018. FS completed a review and analysis of the agency's records reschedule in FY2017 as part of the agency's preparation for the adoption of an electronic RM system. The analysis resulted in a proposal to streamline and consolidate a majority of their records retention schedules. The next step in this effort is submission of numerous records schedules to NARA in FY2018. Ongoing reviews will be conducted to continue the refinement of the agency's mission-specific records retention schedules.

- The Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES) has an enterprise electronic correspondence RM initiative underway. OES is in the process of defining department-wide functional and technical requirements as well as researching tools that would automate record disposition, including the transfer of permanent records to NARA in accordance with approved records retention schedules.

3. **Has your agency developed plans or taken actions to evaluate and implement the digitization of permanent records created in hard copy or other analog formats (e.g., microfiche, microfilm, analog video, analog audio)? (M-12-18 Goal 1.1)**

X Yes
X No , See FS and FSIS responses below.

Please explain your response and include any obstacles you are facing in planning or implementing digitization initiatives.

- USDA has an enterprise-wide solution, Enterprise Content Management, to digitize the Secretary of Agriculture's incoming correspondence. This content management solution enables USDA to capture, store, manage and track correspondence from initial receipt, completion and archival storage.

- APHIS and GIPSA have identified scanning tools for APHIS's use and resources have been a hindrance on this task.

- ARS/ERS is currently scanning their hardcopy permanent records.

- FNCS has developed a process and created guidance for document conversion projects, to ensure hardcopy records are converted to standard electronic format. The purpose is to provide their program areas with guidance and create a standard approach and process for document conversion initiatives. Answering the questions in the document will be the basis for a requirements document required to contract out a scanning operation. It will also ensure sensitive information is safeguarded, valuable data/documentation is captured, FNS Agency retention requirements are followed, and technology resources are used with efficiency.

- NIFA has inventoried all hardcopy permanent records and these records will be converted to electronic/digital records for future use.

- RD has created a records digitization team sponsored by the Assistant to the Secretary for RD, championed by the Chief Risk Officer, and managed by the Support Services Division. The digitization team is comprised of the RD Records Officer, Managers and Senior Manager in the RD's Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Officer of the Chief Information Officer, Programs, and the Officer of the General Counsel. Meetings are conducted weekly on various digitization activities and a bi-weekly progress report is

submitted to the Assistant to the Secretary for RD. The report provides an all-encompassing status of the digitization effort, including the M-12-18 Goal 1.1.

- FS has no plans to digitize all closed permanent records. Closed permanent records will be digitized on a case-by-case basis. The agency is taking actions to determine the cost of digitization of current holdings. This initial analysis will be combined with other actions to develop a digitization plan that meets the agency's business needs. Active records will be digitized, as required, when FS implements the mandatory use of the FS electronic RM system, which is projected to be October 1, 2019.

- FSIS lacks resources to scan all their old paper permanent records as this time.

4. OMB M-17-22 required agencies to create reform plans that may result in re-organizations and the elimination of offices and/or functions. Where necessary, has your agency taken steps to ensure that recordkeeping requirements and other records management needs have been or will be accounted for and implemented when making these changes?

X Yes
☐ No

Please explain your response:

The Secretary of Agriculture announced the creation of an

- Assistant to the Secretary for Rural Development
- Undersecretary for Trade and Foreign Agriculture Affairs and realign the Foreign Agriculture Service to report to the new Undersecretary.
- Undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation and realign the Farm Service Agency, the Risk Management Agency, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to report to the new Undersecretary.

The Agency Records Officers for all four agencies have been meeting to discuss the reorganization. The agencies have taken steps to ensure that the RM function continues to serve as a critical part of these organizations. The agencies will assess the need for additional resources and staffing while undergoing these restructuring efforts.

The Secretary also announced the merger of the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyard Administration into the Agricultural Marketing Service. The recordkeeping requirements and responsibilities will remain in place and will merge into one agency.

The Secretary announced the merger of the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion into Food Nutrition Service (FNS). FNS's recordkeeping requirements and responsibilities will remain in place and will continue to cover the FNS (including CNPP) as one Agency. The RM program will continue to assess reform plans as well as new and/or reorganized program offices to ensure RM needs and compliances are met.

RD Records Officer is revising the internal staff instruction for RM activities. The instructions will describe the manner in which paper files are managed and the transition to electronic files. The instruction will also include program retention schedules.

5. **Have you, as the SAORM, taken steps to ensure that your records management program has the strategic direction, support and resources it needs to be successful?** (see: NARA Bulletin 2017-02: Guidance on Senior Agency Officials for Records Management https://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/bulletins/2017/2017-02-html)

X Yes
☐No

Please explain your response

- Approved the development of an extensive online RM training course and assign the training to all employees. The course addressed the Federal Records Act to ensure the proper identification and handling of USDA records, as well as the use of personal or non-official electronic messaging. All USDA employees and contractors were required to complete this training course "*USDA Records Management – Training 101 and Refresher*", which was assigned to their learning plan with a required completion date of September 14, 2017.

- Through the Secretary of Agriculture's realignment of functional areas and to elevate the importance of RM, the USDA Records Management Program will be moved from the Office of the Chief Information Officer to the Office of the Executive Secretariat. In the future, this function will be treated as a working capital fund cost eliminating some of the unknowns from being an appropriated program.

6. **Have you, as the SAORM, ensured that all incoming and outgoing senior officials* receive briefings on their records management responsibilities including documenting their public service, use of personal email, and other recordkeeping requirements.**

*****Senior officials are the heads of departments and independent agencies; their deputies and assistants; the heads of program offices and staff offices including assistant secretaries, administrators, and commissioners; directors of offices, bureaus, or equivalent; principal regional officials; staff assistants to those aforementioned officials, such as special assistants, confidential assistants, and

administrative assistants; and career Federal employees, political appointees, and officers of the Armed Forces serving in equivalent or comparable positions.

X Yes
☐No

Please explain your response:

- USDA's Chief Information SAORM provided a briefing to all incoming senior officials and political appointees. In 2017, USDA developed an online RM course that was assigned to all current employees, senior officials, political appointees, and contractors. New employees, senior officials, political appointees, and contractors are also required to take the RM course within 90 days of their start date.

- Incoming senior executives and political appointees are provided additional RM orientation during USDA agency onboarding processes.

- USDA conducts and documents for accountability RM exit interviews as required for all employees, including senior officials and political appointees per Departmental Regulation (DR) 3099-001, RM Policy for Departing Employees, Contractors, and Political Appointees.

- The Office of General Counsel addressed federal RM obligations in a memorandum to all Subcabinet Officials, All Agency and Staff Office Heads and All Political Appointees. The memorandum discussed USDA Departmental Regulations relating to RM, the Federal Records Act, roles of public officials and employees using only USDA official electronic messaging accounts, and the use of personal email and text account to conduct government business.

- FS requires RM staff routinely brief senior officials regarding the agency's RM program. All employees (including senior officials) are annually reminded (via official letter and required annual training) of their RM responsibilities.

- FSIS provides an annual notice to all employees reminding them of their records responsibilities. FSIS also provides personal support for officials leaving the Agency to ensure records are properly handled.

- RD is in the process of developing various training activities for all audiences within RD, including senior officials. In December 2017, an orientation for new State Directors (who are political appointees) was held. Part of the materials provided at the orientation included a handbook containing guidance on RM.

- RMA Agency Records Officer ensures that all appropriate officials understand the requirements, each business area is provided with reports on their records status and all appropriate resources including senior official will receive training on how to utilize the

new Electronic Records System.

7. **Is the records management program and related requirements included in your agency's Information Resource Management Plan or an equivalent information management plan? (OMB Circular A-130, Managing Information as a Strategic Resource)?**

X Yes
☐ No

Please explain your response:

- The Department has integrated RM requirements for the system development lifecycle into the IT governance process, IT portfolio and investment reviews and the IAB to enhance internal RM controls on USDA electronic information systems. The Department previously updated the RM policies to ensure electronic systems incorporate proper RM lifecycle controls, including the implementation of disposition within systems. The Department is building these requirements into our lifecycle management and systems development lifecycle processes.

- AMS Information Technology Services (ITS) includes the RM Program for the AMS. The FY 2017 Business Plan for ITS included an objective to migrate the AMS Electronic Records Center (ERC) to SharePoint 2013 and provide customer education on the capabilities and use of the ERC. The FY 2018 priorities for ITS include integrating the RM Programs for GIPSA and AMS following the merger of the two agencies in the first quarter of FY 2018.

- FAS/FSA have developed a restructuring plan that will impact both FSA and FAS. The agencies have taken steps to ensure that the RM function continues to serve as a critical part of the organizations. The agencies will assess the need for additional resources and staffing while undergoing these restructuring efforts.

- FNS conducted a successful RMA pilot project starting in October 2015 and completed in July 2016. Although a successful pilot, the pilot was limited to the Information Management Office comprised of RM, FOIA, Privacy, Directives, and Forms. FNS plans to continue considering other strategic methods and possibly in-house resources for electronic document management due to the funding constraints until a working "system" is fully implemented agency-wide. Currently, electronic recordkeeping guidance has been incorporated into all training tools/resources. In addition, RM is fully integrated into their system development lifecycle (SDLC) process for all internal electronic information systems, ensuring the scheduling of all newly developed electronic systems. An electronic information system (EIS) Questionnaire has been completed or is under review for all known electronic information management systems

- FS has initiated an Information Management Advisory Board (IMAB) project. Development of an Information Resource Management Plan (IRMP) is one as part of the IMAB project. The IRMP will include development of a strategy for agency-wide information management policy and governance and will reference RM policy and program activities.

- FSIS - OMB Circular A-130, Managing Information as a Strategic Resource, covers all the key components of the FSIS Records Management program. These items are covered in our Agency directives and notices.

- NASS has been included in their Capital Planning and Investment Control Process (CPIC) and the IAB.

- NIFA's RM program is outlined in the NIFA yearlong Records Management Communications Plan the gives guidance on the records management priority for the year.

- RD conducts weekly meetings as well submits bi-weekly report to the Assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture for RD on the overall progress regarding the digitation effort which complies with Circular A-130.

- RMA's Electronic Records System is already part of their investment portfolio and strategic roadmap, which is reviewed with our Executive Management Team several times a year. RMA is engaged in a project to upgrade the system and migrate records from the legacy application. The management team received weekly updates as to the progress of the new system.

8. What policies, guidance or support do you need from NARA to ensure a successful transition to fully electronic recordkeeping? (NARA Strategic Plan. Goal 2.4)

- We would ask that NARA plan to have more direct interaction with agencies to provide technical assistance, continue to provide any updates as they move forward with new initiatives and guidance related to electronic records.

- Support for retaining pre-2019 closed records in hardcopy format if agency, for whatever reason, cannot digitize the records prior to accession to National Archives.

- Agencies need the authority to determine the best approach for implementing retention schedules, including General Records Schedule (GRS) items. Although NARA did a great job in updating the GRS, many individual items still appear to be based on an administrative procedure or the grouping of information similar to a paper file. We would encourage NARA to further consolidate GRS items.

- A firm date by which agencies must implement electronic records systems. Include a process by which agencies request approval to retain records in hardcopy.