

Notes from June 10, 2013

Call with FSA Administrator Juan Garcia

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- Juan acknowledged that MIDAS is not yet performing at an optimal level and is experiencing a performance dip while moving from deployment to the daily operations and maintenance. Juan asks for everyone's help and patience in making it the software platform we need it to be. Resolving on-going MIDAS issues is a top priority and we are utilizing all available resources to triage and assist.
- FSA is beginning to plan for FY2014 funding. The President's budget allows for adequate funding for the Agency in FY2014, although it is uncertain if the President's budget will be approved. In the FY14 planning process Headquarters' is developing plans to optimally mitigate the impact of budget shortfalls if funding levels are at the FY2013 level.
 - A reduction of FY2014 staff ceilings is being used in the planning process along with the review of other budget line items. It is important to note that ceilings for 2014 have not been set for the states.
 - Sequestration could very likely further negatively impact the final FY2014 appropriation. Current law provides for sequestration over the next 9 years.
 - The likelihood of beginning FY2014 with a continuing resolution is also problematic in trying to judge adequate full-year funding levels.
 - Both the House and Senate versions of the farm bill propose funding for Title I implementation. The Senate version has \$97 million and the House has \$100 million for implementation. Once FSA knows the final authority a determination will be made on how to utilize the funding. In the past FSA has used this funding for IT development, training, and staffing.
 - FSA is presenting a VERA request to the Department as early as today. If approved, the VERA would be implemented in July 2013. It is anticipated that a response will be provided soon.

- The Agency is also reviewing a possible VSIP plan. In order to implement a VSIP, plan we must obtain approval by OPM and obtain additional funding to carry out the proposal. A proposal has not been requested at this time.
- Office consolidations, although not currently a part of the planning, may need to be considered at some point.
 - The current farm bill still has the language limiting the Secretary's authority to close offices that are located less than 20 miles from another FSA office and have 2 or fewer permanent full-time employees.
 - An amendment to the House version of the 2013 Farm Bill would require office closing justification using a workload analysis before any office consolidation could be proposed.
- A task force comprised of SEDs and Program Specialist will meet next week in WDC to review ARS data and discuss its potential use in analyzing staffing levels.
 - Juan would like to be able to take a good look at staffing ceilings to be certain we have an equitable distribution of employees. The new mix of programs in the next farm bill will be a factor in determining reoccurring workload.
- We asked about the expansion of the pilot Administrative Services Project into other areas of the State Office operations. Juan explained that the current ASP Pilot is still in the formulation process, therefore he is not able consider any additions to the Pilot at this time. Juan will continue to provide updates on the project as they are available.
- To help accommodate for the delays we are currently having in getting programs implemented we have authorized a register for CRP sign-up.