Programs Committee Q&A

National Programs Chair, Richard Csutoras, introduced the representatives from WDC who had volunteered to answer member questions. Present were: Mike Schmidt, DAFP; Larry Gross, OCIO; Tony Cossa, ACRSI; Brenda Carlson, Ext Affairs; and Brent Orr, ARCPLC via teleconference. Here is a brief, *paraphrased* summary of the questions asked by the breakout participants and the answers provided. Please note these answers were provided to help clarify decisions or look into enhancing service and do not represent new policy.

1. Q: ARCPLC’s HIP provisions seem to be continuously changing which make it hard to administer. A good examples of this include first prohibiting and now allowing recons of farms with HIP. Can you give us a little background on the reasons behind this? A: There was a lot of producer interest in being able to put farms together. After we decided to limit recons on HIP farms we realized that producers may have made elections assuming recons would be allowed. So we decided to change the rule back to what producers anticipated and allow recons. ARCPLC is a very complicated program and while we try to think of everything there will probably be more things we didn’t anticipate. We hope to keep these minimal.
2. Q: How to we code WebTA for time spent waiting on software? We feel it would be useful to capture the amount of downtime as a result of software and network failures. A: We understand that this may be good information to have, but the current system has no way to track it. They are looking into replacing WebTA, but for now you should record that time under the program you are attempting to work on.
3. Q: Currently CLPS does not allow for multi-county producers to process one loan. Producers are being made to travel to each separate office to request multiple loans and pay multiple fees. Why is software overriding policy here? A: This is a known issue with the CLPS software and is scheduled to be fixed in a future release of the software. We currently don’t know how long that will be. In the interim we will look into the possibility of waiving or refunding the duplicate fees.
4. Q: When trying to link a producer from Business Partner in CLPS we get an error if more than one user is trying to link a producer at the same time anywhere in the nation. The workaround provided by several state offices is to keep trying and eventually the other user logs off. This is causing significant delays. A: We were unaware of this issue and will follow up.
5. Q: We need our software to work. Too often the program reliability is sporadic. A: As we mentioned earlier, there are a lot of factors that affect our software and we are working to correct them. Our software connectivity is not where we want it to be but it’s not a problem that can be fixed overnight. It’s going to take time to fix it in a smart, lasting way. Until then, we need to know when systems are down, so please continue to elevate concerns.
6. Q: Moving CLU lines in MIDAS is very time consuming. Now we are getting reports of overlaps that need fixed. Are these kind of errors going to continue? A: The current overlap reports are for small acreages not previously addressed (conversion from tenths to hundredths), not newly created overlaps.
7. Q: It performance is becoming a joke. It seems like whatever you do during the weekend breaks the system for us when we come in on Monday. A: When you get the spinning wheel that is a local workstation issue. If it is a system issue you get the host error messages. In both cases we are working on it. We don’t have details to share, but a review of CITRIX showed that the installation of CITRIX was not optimal for performance. We’re waiting until November to begin making changes to avoid affecting sign up & payments. Please remember there is no magic bullet to fix the issue. Our systems are spread out and the way they integrate makes it more complex.
8. Q: Is anything good coming out of the MIDAS review? A: We’re contracting with a third party vendor and waiting for their report and recommendations. One of the lessons learned by MIDAS is it isn’t realistic to have one system and expect it to do everything.
9. Q: Please don’t wait until November to fix CITRIX. A: We have already done some things to fix the issues. We’re also piloting some additional fixes. We don’t want to do the big bang in the middle of reporting season. However, we are the largest user of CITRIX within USDA and they are paying attention to us.
10. Q: When you look at what isn’t working, you don’t seem to be looking down the road at future deadlines. A: We are aware of the deadlines. Val has told us that all of the systems must work and he expects daily reports of what is working and what isn’t. We know the systems need fixed and there is an entire team looking into these issues. Also, our system is fragile and we know that as we push the load up that the system goes down. We need to fix it so the last two days before any deadline the system doesn’t break. We’re running metrics daily to watch load and performance.
11. Q: What can we do to help you? A: Put in remedy tickets. The people in IT don’t work for FSA, so remedy tickets are how we track and determine how widespread issues are.
12. Q: Who puts in the ticket? A: The person having the problem. The longer a ticket is open, the more people are asking why the issue isn’t resolved. If ITSD is telling you not to submit tickets, they want to know that.
13. Postcards are effective at getting producers to come into the office, but we don’t know who gets them and what they say. A: We need to get you a list more timely. A lot of effort has gone into the upcoming ARCPLC postcards. We are trying to do a good job of making sure the mailing goes to only those who need it by running lists before the mailing. We’ll try and limit our target a little bit.
14. Q: Can you require more than one name on the COC elections because this makes us look foolish? A: This is a DAFO issue, but we’ll take him the note.
15. Q: What options do we take for Remedy? A: There was an email with the requirements within the last 90 days.
16. The MAL software (CLPS) is limiting us to one designate payment entity. This is causing producers problems and making them pay extra service fees. A: This is a known issue. We’re not sure how long it will take to fix, but maybe we can look at waiving or refunding those extra fees.
17. Brenda Carlson commented: GovDelivery is a small little bit of what I do, along with many other assigned duties. Whether we like GovDelivery or not, we do have an obligation to use the system. During the civil rights reviews we need it to show how much program and rule outreach was done. It’s also used during producer appeals to see whether emails were sent and delivered.
18. STO makes me send newsletters each month with prepopulated data. Why do counties have to do this? Why can’t STO send it out? A: I’m assuming you mean the FLP articles that are mandatory. We’re trying to break out of Farm Programs vs. Farm Loan. Some counties are doing great and others need the requirement for the FLP outreach. As far as counties sending out the newsletters instead of STO, generally there is a greater chance of getting the producers to open the email that way. But I hear what you’re saying and will see if we can improve the process.