

**Farm Credit Administration**  
**Plain Writing Act Implementation Plan**  
**July 8, 2011**

FCA has thus far met, or is in the process of meeting, the requirements of the April 13 memorandum issued by the Office of Management and Budget to convey final guidance on implementing the Plain Writing Act of 2010. We have organized the following report according to the bulleted list of requirements on page 2 of the OMB memo.

**I. “Designate one or more Senior Officials for Plain Writing who will be responsible for overseeing the agency’s implementation of the Act and this guidance.”**

In May 2011, Mike Stokke, Director of the Office of Congressional and Public Affairs (OCPA), was designated as FCA’s Senior Agency Official for Plain Writing. Emily Yaghmour, Writer/Editor in OCPA, serves as FCA’s Coordinator for Plain Writing. On May 24, we sent an e-mail announcing these two appointments to OMB.

**II. “Create a plain writing section of the agency website.”**

On May 25, FCA posted [Plain Writing at FCA](http://www.fca.gov/home/plainwriting.html), its plain writing Web page, located at <http://www.fca.gov/home/plainwriting.html>. The page is linked from FCA’s [Open Gov page](#), which has a link on the Agency’s [home page](#) at [www.fca.gov](http://www.fca.gov).

In addition to describing the requirements of the Plain Writing Act of 2010, the page also invites feedback from the public regarding the clarity of the text on FCA’s website. We encourage visitors to contact us if they have difficulty understanding any of the information we provide on our website.

**III. “Communicate the Act’s requirements to agency employees and train agency employees in plain writing.”**

So far, FCA has communicated the requirements of the Plain Writing Act to employees in the following ways.

- On May 25, an article was published in the Agency’s employee newsletter, FCA Today, announcing the Agency’s Plain Writing Official.
- On June 22, we sent an e-mail to all of the agency’s office directors, asking them to identify the employees in their offices who should receive plain writing training. The e-mail informed the directors that employees who write or edit documents covered by the Plain Writing Act should be among the first to be trained.
- Also in June, FCA published information on the Plain Writing Act on the Agency’s SharePoint page, which serves as FCA’s employee intranet. This page provides information on employee training, as well as links to the Federal Plain Language Guidelines and to PlainLanguage.gov.

- On July 7, an article was published in FCA Today to inform employees about the Federal Plain Language Guidelines and to announce a series of weekly plain writing articles in FCA Today. Each week for the next few months, FCA will publish an article in FCA Today featuring an excerpt from the Federal Plain Language Guidelines. The series is called “Uncle Sam Says.” The first two articles in the series will be “Uncle Sam Says: Write Short Sections” and “Uncle Sam Says: Don’t Use Slashes.”

We addressed the training requirement by first contacting all FCA office directors and requesting lists of employees who should receive the training. From these lists, an agencywide training list is being created. Fortunately, more than half of FCA’s almost 300 employees have already met the plain writing training requirements.

For many years, FCA’s examiners have been required to take two writing courses—“Writing I: Writing Correctly” and “Writing II: Writing Effectively”—within their first two years of employment. These courses, which are now provided online, were developed specifically for FCA examiners. Together, these courses cover many of the principles of plain writing that are addressed in the Federal Plain Language Guidelines. Since more than half of the agency’s employees are examiners who have taken these classes, more than half of the agency’s employees have received training in the principles of plain writing.

For the employees who are required to receive plain writing training and who have not yet received it, we have developed a training plan. So far, the plan gives employees the following three options. However, we may identify other appropriate ways to meet the training requirement in the future.

- **Take Writing I and Writing II.** Although these online courses were designed for FCA examiners, you don’t have to be an examiner to find them useful. The first course, “Writing Correctly,” covers such basics as punctuation, sentence problems, and words that are similar and often confused. The second course, “Writing Effectively,” contains instruction on how to organize documents most effectively. This course also helps you learn to identify style problems, such as hidden verbs, deadwood construction, and inappropriate use of the passive voice. Both courses are engaging, with a fun, Jeopardy-style quiz to test your knowledge at the end of each course.
- **Take a plain writing course at FCA.** For those employees who prefer a real classroom setting, plain writing classes will be offered periodically at the agency. The first class is scheduled for the morning of Wednesday, August 24. The instructor is provided free of charge by the Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN).
- **Take an approved course from an outside vendor.** Employees may receive plain writing training by taking a course from an outside vendor. The FCA Plain Writing Coordinator will review the course description to confirm that it covers the principles of plain writing.

#### **IV. “Establish a process by which the agency will oversee its ongoing compliance with the Act’s requirements.”**

OCPA staff members edit many of the documents that would be considered covered under the Plain Writing Act. For example, they edit the Agency’s three major reports—the Annual Report

on the Farm Credit System, the Performance and Accountability Report, and the Proposed Budget—to ensure that they are written and organized clearly. In addition, OCPA staff has written or edited much of the content for the Agency’s website, as well as the agency’s news releases.

The editors who currently serve in OCPA are not trained in economics and finance as are most of the professional staff at the agency. Therefore, they can provide valuable feedback to subject-matter specialists about what members of the public may find confusing.

The OCPA staff is not large enough to review all of the agency’s covered documents. To ensure that all of the agency’s covered documents are written using plain language, we will provide each office with a checklist of plain writing tips and will encourage employees to use this checklist as they prepare their documents.

In addition, FCA employees will be encouraged to use StyleWriter4, a software program located on the FCA computing network. StyleWriter4 can help identify overuse of the passive voice, overlong sentences, jargon, and other problems that can make a document difficult to read.

Documents will be selected randomly for plain language review, and StyleWriter4 may be used to help assess the clarity of the documents.

**V. “Publish an initial report, on the plain writing section of the agency’s website, that describes the agency’s plan for implementing the Act’s requirements.”**

On July 8, FCA published its Implementation Plan on its website.