



Agency Priority Goal Action Plan

Improve Customer Experience and Operational Efficiency

Goal Leader(s):

Robert Stephenson, Chief Operating Officer, Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC)
Business Center

Overview

Goal Statement

- Enhance the customer experience for farmers, ranchers, and foresters through operational efficiencies and expansion of service delivery channels. By September 30, 2021, USDA modernization and technology efforts will improve customer experiences by avoiding at least \$50 million in costs, associated with enhancements to acreage reporting, applications and eligibility forms, self-service capabilities, and other process improvements. This time saved will enable employees to spend more time on delivering services and programs to customers directly.

Challenge

- Institutionalizing a whole-lifecycle, customer-centric culture across FPAC.
- Establishing a cross-agency approach to customer relationship management, both from an operational and systems perspective.

Opportunity

- Leverage a cross-agency approach, using customer experience best-practices, to develop cross-organizational and cross-functional ways to gain operational efficiencies and offer new service delivery channels.
- Refine KPIs over time to ensure alignment with FPAC goals and objectives and resource constraints.

Leadership & Implementation Team

Core Team:

- Ken Hill, Acting Director, FPAC Customer Experience Division
- FPAC CX Division Customer Experience (CX) staff; CX Champions and CX Working Group members who are mid-to senior-level employees from Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Risk Management Agency (RMA), and Business Center (BC) who lead and support agency-specific CX initiatives; CX Enhancement Committee members who are Field-level staff from NRCS, FSA, RMA, and BC; FPAC Performance, Accountability, and Risk Division (PAR); and key executive leaders in NRCS, FSA, and RMA

Governance Structure

Entity	Members	Responsibilities
FPAC Executives	FPAC Under Secretary, FSA Administrator, NRCS Chief, RMA Administrator, FPAC Chief Operating Officer, & FPAC Assistant Chief Information Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop comprehensive customer experience (CX) strategy and prioritize CX – Allocate resources – Set “tone at the top” – Lead customer experience initiatives
FPAC Customer Experience Division	FPAC Customer Experience Officer CX Division Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Implement CX strategy – Lead CX innovation initiatives – Lead efforts to incorporate CX into the following in FPAC policies and procedures: Business Process Improvement/Performance Management; Research, data, insights; Marketing/Outreach; Culture
FPAC Customer Experience Core Team	CX Officer, CX Specialists, CX Working Group, CX Enhancement Committee, and representatives from FPAC Program and Mission Support areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lead customer experience initiatives – Recommend new initiatives – Conduct field research

Goal Structure & Strategies

Strategies

	Gain understanding of customer needs	Implement actions to improve customer experiences	Establish performance measurement processes that reflect customer-driven data	Build capacity in Customer Experience Office to meet and adapt customer needs
	<p>Identify producer and field needs. Survey and ideate using a representative group of producers and service center staff. Leverage field employees to develop and test initiatives, pilots etc.</p> <p><i>e.g., Listen to field employees directly and empower them to make recommendations</i></p>	<p>Make programs, policies and processes producer-centric. Change systems to enhance in-person and digital engagement.</p> <p><i>e.g., Standardize terms to improve info sharing across agencies and work with program managers to update eligibility requirements.</i></p>	<p>Develop routine and targeted data gathering instruments, baseline customer experience, assess what works and find out how to get better. Pilot solutions, evaluate, iterate KPIs and refine solutions then scale.</p> <p><i>e.g., Develop and deploy annual surveys and transactional surveys that are program and process specific. Pilot and test enhancements</i></p>	<p>Continue to staff up the office with appropriate resources, staff and authority to be the lead for FPAC customer experience work.</p> <p><i>e.g., Fund national and local Customer Experience (CX) Division budget. Hire subject matter and methodology experts. Share best practices</i></p>
<i>Current State</i>	A committee of field employees and a working group is established. The committee has 5 sub committees targeting key CX areas in FPAC and is developing CX enhancement proposals.	Customer experience pain points and inefficiencies have been identified and will be validated through measurement efforts. Initial experience improvements have been proposed for funding.	A set of KPIs that can be phased in over time have been scoped. Initial KPIs and a data collection plan have been developed.	Customer experience office for FPAC has been established and permanent hiring is underway. Initial priorities and strategy have been scoped, along with annual operational activities.
<i>Objectives</i>	Establish a mechanism to listen to customers in real time and give stakeholders the opportunity to assist in prioritization of work.	Identify 1-2 priority experience projects to be conducted at different levels within the organization (e.g. Field and HQ)	Develop initial KPIs, metrics and analytics to be tested and measured annually	Fully staff the customer experience division. Establish recurring communications mechanisms.
<i>Milestones</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase collaboration between FPAC and other USDA business units • Strengthen relationships between FPAC and its stakeholders • Obtain a greater understanding of customer needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve online experience with Farmers.gov that reflects customer input • Improve functionality of Farm Loan e-Commerce initiative • Optimize workload • Improve efficiency in access and documentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase understanding of experience that employees and producers have online • Collecting and analyzing valid, reliable and routinized data • Increase risk-based planning • Increase understanding of COVID-related implications on customers • Increase understanding of training effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve processes that increase efficiency for front-line staff and producers • Enhance COVID-19-related communications • Establish a fully functional customer experience office • Enhance communication channels

Summary of Progress – FY20 Q4

- Farmers.gov –

The farmers.gov teams have begun the consolidation of all Service Desk functions. The USDA Call Center was also implemented to provide one place for all USDA Customers to receive phone support. The overall purpose of the various streams of work is to continue to support the customer experience for our producers by reducing their need to travel to our service centers and enhancing their ability to find and request services across multiple channels.
- CX Working Group (CX WG) and Enhancement Committee (Cxec) collaboration –

The CX Champions assisted with reporting accomplishments by reviewing the CX Action Plan accomplishments and cost avoidance estimates in the fourth quarter of 2020. Success is measured by the number of connections we make across silos within FPAC. This year we anticipate over \$10 million in avoided costs through modernization, streamlining our processes and implementation of new tools and automation. Analysis to determine the costs avoided is underway.
- Internal CX and Producer Satisfaction Surveys, including KPI development –

CX Surveys are continuing to receive full support across FPAC and include questions that allow for the development of baseline CX metrics related to customer experience inside and outside of FPAC. The Internal CX survey was executed in June 2020 and the Producer Satisfaction survey was executed in August and September of 2020. The Producer Satisfaction survey seeks to meet OMB Circular A-11 section 280 requirements, develop a statistical look at USDA customers' experience, and align survey results with agency processes and priorities. The Internal CX survey seeks to measure the effectiveness of internal resources, evaluate the effect of internal processes on customer service delivery, and assess the impact of the creation of the FPAC Business Center (Farm Bill requirement). Together this research will help us prioritize next steps and track performance over time.
- CX Division (CXD) Strategy Planning –

CXD continues to leverage partners across FPAC to make progress on CX core work. These partners bring a field perspective to the CX work and their experience is a critical element of our work. CXD participated in the OPM/OMB government-wide hiring action for CX strategists. Two CX strategists were brought onboard in September 2020.

Key Milestones

- Gain understanding of customer needs
- Implement actions to improve customer experiences
- Establish performance measurement processes that reflect customer-driven data
- Build capacity in Customer Experience Office to meet and adapt customer needs

Milestone Summary					
Key Milestone	Milestone Due Date	Milestone Status	Change from last quarter	Owner	Comments
<i>Gain understanding of customer needs</i>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase collaboration between FPAC and other USDA business units by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing mechanisms for CX collaboration (e.g. working groups and committees) • Engaging the FPAC CX Champions 	ongoing	On-Track	N/A	CXD/PAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination with USDA Office of Customer Experience (OCX) and FPAC agency leadership to complete strategic planning for FY2021. • Facilitation of monthly meetings with FSA, RMA, and NRCS CX Champions to implement OMB requirements, conduct workshops, and synergize efforts across FPAC and USDA.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen relationships between FPAC and its stakeholders by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating with the CX Enhancement Committee to support CX awareness campaigns across FPAC • Executing surveys to assess stakeholder engagement and trust 	ongoing	On-Track	N/A	CXD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The second cohort of CXEC field staff was established and began work in October 2020. • The FPAC Internal CX Survey was completed, providing baseline metrics of the effectiveness of internal processes and resources. Leadership is exploring partnerships across FPAC to address high-priority pain points that were identified in the survey.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain a greater understanding of customer needs by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing Human Centered Design support for Farmers.gov • Proposing CX pilot projects and executing them upon approval 	ongoing	On-Track	N/A	CXD/ISD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed the first farmers.gov CX Survey to measure the user-experience of external customers using online tools and services. • Development of the NRCS/FSA Common Forms Workflow, converting high impact forms into digital format for users to submit online.

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<i>Implement actions to improve customer experiences</i>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve online experience with farmers.gov that reflects customer input by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating on Farmers.gov enhancements and User-Centered Design (UCD) streams of work 	Quarterly	On-Track	N/A	ISD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The goal for the Common Forms Workflow is to align NRCS and FSA forms to reduce the collection of redundant information between agencies and allow customers to fill out forms and submit them to staff for services remotely. This short-term solution is just the first step of the process to address pain points around USDA paperwork.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve functionality of Farm Loan e-Commerce initiative by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing ongoing UCD support 	Q4 2021	N/A	N/A	ISD/FSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work continues on the Farm Loan e-Commerce initiative to allow for functionality such as applying for loans, viewing loan information, and making loan payments in the farmers.gov customer portal.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimize workload by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating with the NRCS and FSA on optimization efforts 	Q4 2021	On-Track	N/A	FSA/NRCS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work continues for multiple workload optimization efforts across FPAC. • See OMB CX Action Plans for FSA and NRCS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve efficiency in access and documentation by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing eAuthentication and eSignature features in Farmers.gov 	Q4 2021	On-Track	N/A	ISD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned for Q4 2021

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<i>Establish performance measurement processes that reflect customer-driven data</i>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase understanding of experience that employees and producers have online by collecting and analyzing valid, reliable, and routinized data by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement CX Employee Survey (Internal) • Implement CX Producer Survey (External) 	Q3 2020	Complete	N/A	CXD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Internal CX Survey was conducted in June, closing June 23rd with a 26% response rate. • The Producer Satisfaction Survey was conducted in August and September and closed on October 2nd with a 32% response rate. Additional responses are still being received by mail and will be compiled for public reporting on the Federal Performance web site.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase risk-based planning by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing risk mitigation strategies that incorporate CX 	Q4 2020	Complete	N/A	CXD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed farmers.gov transactional survey to measure overall customer trust, satisfaction and the key drivers including effectiveness, ease, efficiency, and equity aligning producer and internal survey results with FPAC priority risks for ongoing measurement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase understanding of COVID-related implications on customers by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing targeted CX Micro Surveys 	Q1 2021	On-Track	N/A	CXD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented the COVID-19 FPAC Business Center employee pulse survey in May 2020. • Aligned Producer Survey customer pain-points around COVID disruptions with agency initiatives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase understanding of training effectiveness by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing various training evaluation surveys 	Q3 2021	On-Track	N/A	CXD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented the Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act (FOIA/PA) survey, demonstrating how feedback can help assess program needs for the reorganized nation-wide FPAC FOIA/PA workforce.

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<i>Build capacity in customer experience office to meet and adapt to customer needs</i>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve processes that increase efficiency for front-line staff and producers by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducting CX Strategy Planning – Support the implementation of major process improvements and tools that save significant time for front-line staff and producers 	ongoing	On-Track	N/A	CXD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued working with the CX WG and CXEC to present initiative proposals to FPAC leadership and identify high impact improvement projects for piloting and implementation. • Collaborated with CX WG to invite participants, review applications and select staff across the nation to serve as the second CXEC cohort.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance COVID-19-related communications by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting FPAC leadership by developing communications tools to support additional COVID-19 activities 	ongoing	On-Track			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported FPAC leadership with employee insights to enhance COVID-19 employee communications. • Implementing FPAC Business Center event surveys to improve engagement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a fully functional customer experience office by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully staffing the CX Division 	Q3 2020	Complete	N/A	CXD/HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CX Division has filled all permanent positions. 2 CX Strategists onboarded in September.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced communication channels by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducting CX communication planning/awareness campaigns 	Monthly	On-Track	N/A	CXD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing the communications strategy for the roll-out of the Producer Satisfaction Survey feedback.

Key Indicators

Developing and validating data sources for a cost avoidance indicator:

- Farm Loan Programs (FLP)
 - In FY2020, FSA for the first time began using bot automation. FLP deployed three bots to perform data entry tasks previously completed by loan officials. Use of these bots has resulted (thus far) in an estimated 20,400 hours or almost \$670,000 in cost avoidance annually that can be spent with customers and working on value-added activities.
 - During the process to implement bot automation, two forms were combined, eliminating a form that was mailed to an estimated 33,000 customers each year, resulting in an annual cost avoidance of \$16,995 in supplies. This effort is estimated to save 5,500 hours of field staff time, or almost \$108,000 of cost avoidance, annually that can now be used to work with customers and on value-added activities.
- Other Accomplishments for Analysis:
 - To enable customers to conduct business without ever leaving their home or agricultural operation, FSA and NRCS have implemented Box + OneSpan. This service allows customers and staff to conveniently access, sign, and share documents securely online. In the last six months, US farmers and agricultural producers have used this solution to e-sign over 40,000 documents without putting their safety at risk during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Analysis to determine the costs avoided is underway.
 - FSA has made it easier for America's farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to make their payments instantly with a debit card or Automated Clearing House (ACH) debit. Producers are now able to make payments toward their farm loan repayment, measurement service fees, farm program debt repayment, administrative service fees, and purchasing aerial maps. Offering these new paperless payment options will result in time saved for employees and customers.

Key Indicators

Developing and validating data sources for a cost avoidance indicator:

- Highly Erodible Land (HEL) Determination Tool

The NRCS HEL Tool enhanced customer service resulting in faster response times for HEL determinations. The tool increased product quality and consistency and provided an easy-to-use tool for field staff of all skill levels. FY2021 is the second year of the implementation of this tool, which is estimated to avoid \$10 million annually.

- Each year approximately 60,000 determinations are completed.
- The time savings resulting from the tool is 2.5 hours per determination or 53 staff years annually which allows for expedited determinations and reduced waiting time for our customers both internally and externally.
- Estimates will be validated during the 2021 program cycle.

- Additional Accomplishments for Analysis:

- Food Security Act Compliance - The NRCS compliance status reviews are conducted to ensure that USDA program participants are complying with the Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions. The Technical Assessment has been streamlined to improve the speed of the process.
- The NRCS video series to increase producer awareness of conservation practices (“show, don’t tell”) called, “Conservation at Work” series is [hosted on YouTube](#) and farmers.gov for our customers and staff. The series is comprised of 27 (90 second) videos that showcase our farmers, ranchers, forest landowners and producers implementing conservation practices to treat critical resource concerns.

Key Indicators

Developing and validating data sources for a cost avoidance indicator:

- NRCS deployed the new Conservation Desktop application. This tool streamlines how NRCS and conservation partnership employees provide technical and/or financial assistance to customers. In addition to the Conservation Application Ranking Tools (CART), this is part of a national effort to make meaningful changes and improvements to all programs and services. The following estimates will be validated and assessed for cost avoidance during the 2021 program cycle.
 - Traditionally, NRCS has accepted between 30,000 and 50,000 duplicate applications. This system allows clients to submit one application for many considerations of a program simultaneously (e.g. EQIP-General, EQIP-Socially Disadvantaged, EQIP-Beginning Farmer, EQIP-Air Quality, EQIP-etc.); thereby, reducing the paperwork burden on our clients, and the amount of work in our field offices. States have reported that processing times for an application are now about 15 minutes. This results in an estimated 7,500 hours of reduction in staff time to help clients progress more quickly into the planning process in preparation for program contracting.
 - Additionally, NRCS has traditionally employed over 120 technical tools to run two times in the conservation planning process (e.g. RUSLE-2, WEPS, SVAP2, PCS, etc.). CART enables planners to take advantage of almost 90-geospatial layers of data to automate processing calculations during conservation planning. Conducting two RUSLE-2 runs to estimate Soil Conditioning Index (SCI) for Cover Crop (our highest invested conservation practice) has been estimated to be 60-minutes. This practice was applied 221,672 times in FY2020. CART allows planners to select targeted questions, along with employing geo-spatial layers, to reduce this amount of time to a fraction of previous estimates.

Data Accuracy and Reliability

Data Sources:

- Survey and KPI Data source: Qualtrics survey tool for employee, Producer, and KPI data will be used.
- Cost-avoidance Data sources –
 - Average salaries for field and loan staff were used to estimate FSA cost avoidance estimates.
 - Highly Erodible Land (HEL) Determination Tool, Conservation Desktop and CART implementation will be assessed during FY2021 using similar methodology combining operational dashboard data tracking time saved with averaged staff salary to provide final estimates of cost avoidance, others TBD.
 - ACH and OneSpan estimates will be based on operational data and web analytics for websites as appropriate.

Data quality:

- Producer Satisfaction survey – High Quality
- Cost-avoidance Data sources – Operational Dashboards populated with WebTA information to track hours is of High Quality.

Additional Information

Contributing Programs

Organizations:

- FPAC
 - Business Center – CXD, Performance, Accountability and Risk Division, Information Solutions Division
 - Business Center, FSA, NRCS, RMA
- USDA Office of Customer Experience (OCX)
- GSA
- OMB

Program Activities:

- FPAC Customer Experience Program

President's Management Agenda:

- CAP Goal – Improving Customer Experience with Federal Services
 - This goal will provide a modern, streamlined, and responsive customer experience across government, comparable to leading private-sector organizations.

Regulations:

- OMB Circular No. A-11 – Section 280