



enewsletter

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Welcome to the AgLearn Newsletter.



Happy Holidays! Welcome to the December 2011 AgLearn Newsletter — a one-stop shop for news you can use. As 2011 is coming to a close, AgLearn is gearing up with new resources. This issue includes information about the new courses and other updates you can expect in the very near future.

Team AgLearn wishes you and yours a fun and safe holiday season!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

AgLearn IDP Update.

IDPs can be an effective tool to help you develop your skills, further your agency's mission and achieve your career goals. Supervisors can use IDPs to develop and motivate their staff.

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AgLearn 6.4 System Upgrade.

A kickoff meeting was held November 7 including AgLearn, hosting vendor General Physics, and software vendor Success Factors to launch AgLearn's upgrade to Success Factors version 6.4.

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Government Leadership Advantage.

Leadership is essential to any organization and now there is an AgLearn resource specifically for government leaders. After the New Year, current and potential leaders will have access to SkillSoft's Government Leadership Advantage.

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IDP Update.

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Managers who promote the use of IDPs also send a clear message to their subordinates that they view each person's professional development as a priority.

As you read this newsletter, we are close to completing the first quarter of FY12. For those of you with fiscal year IDPs, you should now be working toward making progress on your submitted and approved goals. Unfortunately, many of you have still not submitted your plans to your supervisor for approval. This lack of action on your part means that you'll have less time to work on these goals and document your progress.

If you are a supervisor and have yet to approve your subordinates' IDPs, please take a moment and visit AgLearn to review and approve the plans that have been submitted to you.

If you have questions on how best to complete your IDP, AgLearn has a number of learning resources available.

The AgLearn+ IDP – This AgLearn online course will walk you through the steps of creating your IDP, adding goals and activities, checking your status, and submitting your plan for approval. All employees who elect to use the AgLearn IDP should review this course.

USDA Connect – Visit this website and search for a public community called AgLearn+ adding to your knowledge. There you'll find a number of resources on the IDP, including an Activity called Best Practices for the AgLearn Online IDP and a blog titled Getting Comfortable with AgLearn IDPs.

The AgLearn Splash Page (www.aglearn.usda.gov) has a link to Frequently Asked Questions in the Resource Center section of the site. There you'll find additional job aids and tools that will help you with the IDP process.

Coming Soon: Government Leadership Advantage.

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The Government Leadership Advantage is a leadership resource with a collection of materials focused on essential leadership and management skills for federal employees. A series of targeted learning tracks allows you to acquire the mix of skills and abilities you need to successfully lead your organization now and into the future.

The SkillSoft Government Leadership Advantage's targeted learning tracks cover key leadership and development abilities. Each learning track uses multiple forms of instruction, including text, video and interactive activities to keep the learning quick, easy, and engaging. Tracks are designed to take no more than two hours from start to finish, integrating easily into your busy lives.

You can read key concepts and summaries with ExecBlueprints and ExecSummaries. Or listen to the audio versions. You will be able to watch the QuickTalk videos for visual learning. Or become involved and participate in interactive exercises and simulations, which let you watch, listen, and ask questions during live events. There are also resource guides that let you create activities and share what you've learned with others in your organization. The Business Impact Series and interactive case studies offer rich, scenario-based learning in real world situations. The Challenge Series provides you with a perfect way to review and put you new skills to the test.

This new resource is coming to AgLearn soon! Be on the lookout!

AgLearn Help At Your Fingertips.

Few things are more frustrating than needing help and not knowing where to get it. AgLearn constantly seeks to minimize how much help is required while adding more ways for you to get the help you need.

The help screens in AgLearn can answer most “How do I?” questions. What if you can’t get into AgLearn? A new feature, called Ask AgLearn Now, provides the answers to many frequently asked questions and is accessible without logging into AgLearn. Ask AgLearn Now can’t answer everything, but it is always available when you need it. High call volumes are not an issue, so you’ll never wait for an answer. If the information you need is not there, the links at the right of the screen can direct you to more personal assistance.

A common question concerns completed training that does not appear in Completed Work. This is most often due to a survey that has not been submitted. Since July, mandatory surveys are attached to all AgLearn items; items will not mark complete until the survey has been submitted. Each survey takes only a few minutes, and the feedback received is invaluable.

Pending surveys appear on your To-Do List. Since they’re due five days after the training has been marked complete, they should appear near the top. If you can’t find the survey you’re looking for, click the drop-down menu next to “Show” at the top of your To-Do List, and select “Course Evaluations.” This will clear everything but surveys from your screen.

If the survey does not appear, your next recourse is to call the AgLearn Help Desk at (866) 633-9394. The staff there are much better equipped to diagnose and solve your problem than your AgLearn agency lead, and they are available at all working hours.

AgLearn Upgrade.

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The upgrade will be completed in 2012.

The 2010 upgrade focused on the user interface, and introduced the To-Do List, Completed Work, and enhanced survey abilities. The 2012 upgrade will focus on changes to the administrators’ working space. It will eliminate the need for separate user and administrator logins; everything will be accessible from the same home page.

The primary changes on the user side will be for supervisors. Supervisor tools have been redesigned for easier use and more flexibility. Organization owners will be able to create their own custom charts and save those changes for future reference.

The biggest changes will occur for administrators. Search features and workflows have been revamped to be more intuitive. Functionality has been created to allow you to easily return to recent records you have viewed or edited. Favorites can be created to avoid the need to re-search for records that are used a lot. The redesign is intended to decrease the time needed for a new administrator to become comfortable with the application.

Announcements and training materials will appear more often as the go-live date approaches. Check your email and USDA Connect for news as the schedule becomes more definite.

The 2012 upgrade of AgLearn will keep the changes that were so popular in last year’s upgrade and expand them to aid administrators. This will also help end users, since the time needed for administration will decrease as everyone becomes more comfortable with the changes.

AgLearn Resources on USDA Connect Webinar Provided Valuable Information.

On Wednesday, November 30, Team AgLearn held the “AgLearn Resources on USDA Connect” webinar. The webinar was very successful, with nearly 200 employees in attendance.

The webinar was aimed at informing employees about both USDA Connect and the AgLearn resources available there. Since some employees may not have been familiar with USDA Connect, attendees were first walked through the process of accessing the site. USDA Connect can be found using the following URL – <https://connections.usda.gov>.

The webinar highlighted a variety of AgLearn resources, including the AgLearn Community on USDA Connect. This community page contains the latest news and information about the program. AgLearn blog entries are updated every couple of weeks. Attendees were also shown the many AgLearn-related files and links available.

Also discussed were the links in USDA Connect to major AgLearn resources, such as Books24x7 and KnowledgeCenters. The webinar delved a little deeper into Books24x7 and KnowledgeCenters in case those in attendance were not familiar with these particular resources.

IDP and “how to host a webinar” information were hot topics during the webinar. The AgLearn Webinar Community on USDA Connect was emphasized, as well as the 8-part webinar blog series on the AgLearn Community.

The webinar not only focused on AgLearn resources, it also showed attendees how they could use the interactive “Activities” function in USDA Connect to manage and track projects for themselves and their office.

Questions and their respective answers related to the webinar will be posted to the AgLearn Community soon. In the meantime, click [here](#) to access the presentation from the AgLearn Resources on USDA Connect webinar.

New Retirement Courses Coming Soon.

The New Year is upon us and one item you may want to stick on your resolution list is to plan your retirement. Updated retirement courses are coming to AgLearn and these will help you reach your goal.

The new, updated courses will help you decide whether a Tax-Deferred TSP, Roth TSP, or both may be what you need. With these courses, you will be able to:

- Develop your own financial plan with the help of a Certified Financial Planner.
- Learn how to choose between Roth TSP, original TSP, and IRAs before you start 2012 contributions.
- Learn how to select and allocate investments for your TSP and other savings for short-, intermediate-, and long-term goals.
- Calculate your potential savings growth and additional savings needed.

The Dmason TSP, Retirement, and Financial Planning courses in AgLearn are customized for your Federal retirement system and provide training for all career levels: Early-, Mid-, and Late-Career. Keep an eye out for these new courses coming soon!

AgLearn Quotes.

“AgLearn is right on my desktop at no cost to me. I don’t always have the time or opportunity to travel to a class.”

~Mervalin Morant, Ph.D.
National Program Leader
USDA - National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)

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