



# enewsletter

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## Welcome to the AgLearn Newsletter.



Welcome to the first issue of the AgLearn Newsletter - a one-stop shop for news you can use. Each quarter we will bring you new and valuable information. Find out about new AgLearn products. Learn about essential training that is available. Obtain important deadlines for mandatory requirements, such as IDPs. The AgLearn newsletter provides knowledge at your fingertips.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

#### Final Steps for Fiscal Year IDPs.

This is the first year that many of you have created your individual development plan (IDP) in AgLearn. As FY11 draws to a close, be sure to make time for finalizing your FY11 IDP.

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#### AgLearn+ Information Security Awareness Training.

The AgLearn team values the feedback employees have provided over the years regarding the annual Information Security Awareness training.

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#### Webinars Provide Benefits to You and Your Agency.

Webinars are a good compromise between face-to-face training and merely distributing updated material to be read. With current budget restraints not likely to go away anytime soon, training is often among the first things to be scaled back.

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## Webinar Benefits.

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This is at odds with its importance throughout the Department. New hires who have to learn USDA's culture and ways of doing business need training. So do field examiners who must keep up with the latest developments in their specialties. Finding ways to complete vital training while saving money have become critical for all agencies.

In its purest form, a webinar is an internet-based presentation that allows an instructor or presenter to communicate directly with an audience of almost any size, regardless of their locations. The sole requirements are a computer and an internet connection. Even a phone bridge is optional.

Conducting training via webinar has several advantages: No travel costs, minimal disruption to work schedules, reduced overhead costs, instructor can control two-way communications, no dedicated meeting space is required.

Webinars can be combined with an in-person presentation, so students unable to travel to the event can also participate. Their level of interaction will not be as complete as for those who are in attendance, but they will not be excluded.

Webinars are not a cure-all. Eye contact and body language that show better than words how well the lesson is being learned are unavailable. Two-way communication may be a problem, depending on the size of the audience. Still, if the only other option is to curtail training, webinars are a viable and inexpensive tool to meet your agency's needs.

More information on webinars and how to conduct them can be found on [USDA Connect](#).

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## No Fear Training Teaches Rights and Responsibilities.

USDA must train all employees on the Notification and Federal Employee Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act of 2002 (No FEAR Act) every two years. To speed the completion of this mandatory training, a brief refresher course has been created. The refresher course reminds employees of their rights and responsibilities under the law. It is shorter and less detailed than the full course, taking only twenty to thirty minutes to complete.

The course has already been added to those eligible to take it. (Look for No FEAR 2011 Refresher Training on your To-Do List.) The deadline for completion is December 30, 2011.

Employees are encouraged to take the web-based version in AgLearn. Those who cannot may request a paper version through their agency's Civil Rights officer or AgLearn administrator.

The No FEAR Act protects employees from unlawful discrimination and retaliation. It covers the following situations:

- Hiring and promotion practices
- Hostile work environments
- Whistleblower protection
- Discrimination based on age, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation

It is in everyone's best interest to be familiar with the No FEAR Act. Its protections make USDA a more pleasant and productive place to work. No one should be treated unfairly without the opportunity to make things right. Understanding one's roles and responsibilities toward that end is the purpose of this training.

## ISA Training.

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While our mission has always been to provide USDA access and tools for training and professional development, we do not typically develop the actual training courses. We take this training every year too though, so we decided this was the year to try something new.

Earlier this year AgLearn partnered with OCIO CPO (Cyber, Policy, Oversight) to enhance the training for Fiscal year 2012. Our goal was to address the areas employees cared about most: training length, “real-life” examples of Security risks and threats, and a more exciting look and feel.

Improvements this year include: a nearly 40% reduction in page count, the ability to “test out” of the training by passing a pre-exam, many new images and animations and – we hope – a lot of “wow” factor. We are also adding a survey to this year’s training so we can measure your feedback on how we did. Please take the time to fill it out; it will only take a few minutes of your time but will go a long way towards ensuring we can continue the process of making all parts of AgLearn better.

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## IDP Time.

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IDPs in AgLearn must be in an Active/Approved status by September 29th. That means that you have created your IDP, identified your goals, submitted your IDP for approval and gotten your supervisor’s approval for that plan earlier in the fiscal year. For the past several months, you have been working on the activities associated with your goals and have updated the status of your progress. Here’s what needs to happen now.

**Employees:** Visit your IDP in AgLearn and make sure you’ve noted all the changes to your goals and activities. Have you completed training? Made progress towards completing a goal? Has your supervisor added any notes to your plan that you have not yet reviewed? Here’s how to tell: From the AgLearn home page, click the IDPs easy link to view the My IDPs page. Now look closely at the Action column on that page. Do you see a Review button associated with your plan? If so, be sure to click the Review button and follow the on screen instructions. If you don’t see any Review buttons, click the View button to review your current plan. Do you see a Submit for Approval button? If so, you’ve made changes that your supervisor needs to review before the end of the fiscal year. Click the Submit for Approval button. Once your supervisor approves your plan, do nothing more. Your plan will automatically move to an Expired status at one minute after midnight on September 30th.

**Supervisors:** Be sure to check your AgLearn Home Page. Your Home Page will provide an alert message, just to the right of your name, if you have any plans that require review and/or approval. Select the link and follow the onscreen instructions to review and approve the plans. Please complete all approvals before September 28th, 2011. IDPs expire at midnight on September 30th, which means that no changes will be accepted on that day.

### Questions?

The IDP online course in AgLearn is a great resource for learning how the AgLearn IDP operates. Simply type AgLearn+ IDP into the catalog search box and then click Launch Content to review the course. Also, USDA Connect has multiple resources about the IDPs. Check out the AgLearn+ adding to your knowledge community. There you’ll find an activity called Best Practices for the AgLearn Online IDP, a series of frequently asked questions about the IDP that also provides additional links to PowerPoint slides and job aids.

## CourseAvenue Enables Increased eLearning.

CourseAvenue is a product that AgLearn implemented in early 2011. This product allows USDA "field personnel" who are trained in the product to develop eLearning courses themselves.

Because AgLearn's technical and branding standards are built into CourseAvenue, any course created using the product will automatically visually match all other AgLearn courses. In addition, CourseAvenue has 508 compliance regulations built in, so every course will be 508 compliant. This makes it easy for trained USDA personnel to create courses without having to work with a technical programmer.

Since CourseAvenue was first introduced, approximately 70 USDA employees have been trained and over 9,000 pages of eLearning content have been created!

## Books24x7 Goes Where You Go.

Books24x7 is a valuable resource filled with tons of information. Book subjects range from professional development to personal improvement. You can learn how to better balance your work life and personal life. You can learn the skills needed to handle workplace conflict.

What's better than having all these resources available at no cost to you? Taking some of those resources anywhere you go! Books24x7 On the Go allows smart device users with access to a mobile version of Books24x7. You can now read leading business book summaries and other information while on the train or waiting for your flight.

In addition, the Books24x7 BusinessPro collection has been enhanced to include an impressive selection of audio book titles. The audio books are in MP3 (audio) format. They can be downloaded and used on any device that supports MP3 files, including the iPod, iPad, and many smart phones.

Lastly, you can download single chapters using Books24x7 mobile. This premium feature provides chapter-level downloads in PDF or ebook-ready formats for offline reading or printing. Using your web-browser enabled device, you can perform Chapters-to-Go downloads via the Books24x7 section in AgLearn. You have the option to download 15 chapters every 90 days.

Click here to access Books24x7.

## USDA Connect Is A Valuable Resource.

You may have noticed that Team AgLearn has boosted its communications presence. In addition to the weekly emails, we have implemented new communications activities that we hope will encourage you to use AgLearn for more than just courses.

USDA Connect is an online collaboration resource for employees across the Department. AgLearn takes advantage of this technology with its own AgLearn page to bring you up-to-date and useful information.

AgLearn postings on USDA Connect provide information about various courses and books in AgLearn. In addition, best practices and "how to" job aids will show employees how to make the best use of AgLearn resources.

We encourage you to visit the AgLearn page weekly for the latest news and information!



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