

The AgLearn Vine

Volume 1, Issue 2

August 2008



Inside this issue

AgLearn Strategic Workshop 1

AgLearn and FMT 1

Roles and Training Requirements 3

SkillSoft Course Player 3

Covey's Seven Habits and AgLearn 4

What People are Saying 4

Tips and Tricks 5

Ask Team AgLearn 5



teamaglearn@usda.gov

AgLearn Strategic Workshop

Team AgLearn hosted its semiannual Strategic Workshop (June 24-26) in the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) Waugh Auditorium in Washington, D.C. The workshop was designed for three specific audiences:

- Day One: Senior training officers and managers
- Day Two: Training specialists and AgLearn agency leads
- Day Three: AgLearn administrators, technicians, and training specialists

Stan Gray, AgLearn Program Manager, welcomed participants and began the conference with a status update of AgLearn 2008 objectives, an overview of the financial status and



announcement of the new AgLearn utilization requirement, which states that effective May 2, 2008, all USDA personnel are to use AgLearn as their primary training tool.

This was followed by a presentation from Kathy Fallow, Team AgLearn, on communication and outreach activities taking place within agencies to enhance communication with Team AgLearn staff and agency field training coordinators.

Kathy Fallow also discussed efforts to build blended learning within AgLearn and illustrated a new approach to training administrators.

Experts from Plateau Systems briefed the

Continued on page 2

AgLearn Speaks at USDA FMT Conference

Team AgLearn was invited to speak at this year's USDA Financial Management Training (FMT) conference.

For the past fifteen years, this event has helped educate financial managers and promote working partnerships throughout USDA. This year's theme was "Financial Management is On the Move to Improve".

Stan Gray, AgLearn Program Manager, and Kathy Fallow, Team AgLearn,

presented an overview of AgLearn's capabilities and the vast range of training opportunities available.

Over 400 participants from across USDA attended the two and half day FMT conference (June 10-12), which was held at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C.

AgLearn Strategic Workshop (*continued*)

group on the interrelationship of competencies, individual development plans (IDPs), and the new supervisor dashboard interface.

Team AgLearn announced the upcoming launch of two exciting new pilot programs: USDA enterprise licenses to the Books 24x7.com online book resource and Ninth House leadership and management development programs.

Kathy Fallow, Team AgLearn, facilitated a discussion on competency design and development within AgLearn. Josh Fowler, Forest Service, discussed the planned implementation of competencies within Forest Service.

Day One ended with an overview of the after action review of the mandatory FY08 Security Training. Kathy Fallow presented recommendations based on lessons learned that are currently being addressed in order to improve the next installment of the training, scheduled for release in October 2008.

Day two began with a presentation on NASA's Competency Development delivered by guest speaker Chris Carlson.

Mike Maurath, Project Manager for General Physics Corporation, which provides hosting, professional services, and end-user help support for AgLearn followed with an overview of the requirements and plans for AgLearn's enterprise reporting solution.



Anita Heller from SkillSoft Corp. provided updates on the new course player, new content, additional Leadership Development Channel (LDC) offerings, and new resources available through the SkillSoft Client Community. Zina Sutch, of the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Training Institute, gave a brief on the experience with LDC "Live Event"



offerings used by senior leaders at AMS. Anita followed with an overview of the newly acquired Books 24x7, which provides thousands of on-demand digitized "best-in-class" business and technical books, book summaries, research reports, and best practices. After which, Kathy Fallow gave a presentation on managing IDPs within AgLearn

Day Two concluded with a demonstration from Cathy Williams on the leadership and management development programs offered by Ninth House; an award winning, e-learning provider offering immersion training that is ideal for front line supervisors.

Day Three started with a demonstration by Stephen Sorensen, Team AgLearn, of AgLearn's new automated ticketing system, Magic.

Dwayne Cotti, Project Manager for Vertex Corporation, which provides support for agency AgLearn Administrators, presented details on how agencies can access and purchase additional services such as: AgLearn contractor and partner licenses, Level 1 and Level 2 courseware testing, and SkillSoft licenses.



Guest speakers from the [USDA Broadcast Media and Technology Center](#) identified capabilities for publishing video content for deployment through AgLearn.

Ali Kafshi, Team AgLearn, presented information on the revised process for custom content deployment. Ali also provided a demonstration on building content using the Adobe Captivate development tool. The session was recorded and will be available AgLearn's Administrator Welcome Page.

Finally, Team AgLearn conducted a open forum, answering questions and providing tips on managing learning through AgLearn.

The Captivate demo from the Strategic Workshop is available by [clicking here](#).

New Roles and Training Requirements

New administrative roles have been created and tailored to support the daily responsibilities of an AgLearn administrator as well as maximize the new enhancements of AgLearn version 5.8 Service Pack 3 (SP3).

In preparation, Team AgLearn is developing interactive training and job aids in order to equip administrators with the knowledge they need to efficiently execute their responsibilities. Such training is essential for administrators to fully utilize AgLearn and minimize time spent adjusting to any learning curve.

Therefore, the implementation of these new roles will coincide with the launch of new interactive training and job aids, currently scheduled for August 2008. Watch for upcoming communications from Team AgLearn for more details and precise launch dates.

In the meantime, stop-gap custom roles were created for any administrator that cannot perform their AgLearn responsibilities with their current legacy role. Team AgLearn will apply these roles on a per request

basis from the lead administrator of an agency.

However, administrators don't have to wait to start to review the great wealth of online interactive training courses, job aids, and the Admin Toolkit already available on the new Administrator login page of the AgLearn website.

We recommend all new administrators take a predetermined amount of training, based on their role, before that administrator is assigned a new role. This will ensure a much smoother transition and greatly reduce the learning curve for a significant number of administrators that are just beginning to work in this capacity.

We are very excited about the new SP3 roles and look forward to providing additional communications regarding the projected rollout schedule and logistics.

SkillSoft Course Player

The SkillSoft Course Player 7 (SCP) will soon be available to AgLearn learners. The SCP introduces a new look and feel as well as a number of new features to support content innovations that are being introduced throughout 2008.

The new course player functionality includes:

- **Auto-Play:** This is available for Business Skills and some Desktop Skills content to provide users with a more dynamic viewing experience.
- **Pause:** This allows the learner to pause/play/replay narrations and accompanying flash animations.
- **Closed Captioning:** For pages where the text is not shown by default, this allows learners to read along.

Additionally, approximately 200 Business Skills courses



have been converted to the latest SkillSoft course design supported by the new course player and will use enhanced templates and a new presentation method referred to as "narrated animation".

Narrated animation refers to a method of presenting content that incorporates Flash-based movies (animations) with verbalized content (narration). The content is brought to life via the graphics and text items in Flash animations, and verbalized via synchronized audio and available onscreen captions.

Covey's Seven Habits and AgLearn

AgLearn now offers SkillSoft courses that align to Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. Below are the seven habits with a sampling of the courses now available! There's no better time to become more effective!

- Habit #1 Be Proactive
 - [Proactive Approaches to Stop Negativity](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)
 - [Framing the Problem](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)
- Habit #2 - Begin with the End in Mind
 - [Leading through Change](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)
 - [Self-empowerment: Managing from Within](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)
- Habit #3 - Put First Things First
 - [Managing Through the Change](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)
 - [Critical Thinking Strategies Simulation](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)
- Habit #4 - Think Win/Win
 - [The Negotiation Process](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)
 - [Perspectives on Conflict](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)
- Habit #5 - Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood
 - [Communicate for Results](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)
 - [Enhancing Your Listening Skills](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)
- Habit #6 - Synergize
 - [Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)
 - [Creative Problem Solving and Effective Thinking Simulation](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)
- Habit #7 - Sharpen the Saw
 - [Implementing and Evaluating Self-directed Learning](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)
 - [Interpersonal Skills on the Fast Track](#) [Add to Learning Plan](#)



What People are Saying about Book24x7.com

Prior to the launch of Books24x7, a small group of accounts were established to test the ease of use and content.

"I have to admit, I was a little skeptical about books online. I like holding the paper in my hands. Call me old fashioned. I just had a chance to take a preliminary look at this and I am truly impressed. I didn't read any of the instructions you sent (ok, I am a man and we just don't read them unless we have to), and I was able to navigate and find interesting stuff! It is intuitive which is great. I really like this. I'd like to hear what everyone else thinks as you get a chance to look it over. I'll try to find some more time to dig into this tomorrow. But I am excited. I guess an 'old dog' can learn new habits."

Roy Wells, Deputy Director HRD Human Capital Planning and Development, Agricultural Research Service

Tips and Tricks

Verifying an SF-182

Verifying an SF-182 is a testimony of an individual's training experience, which is stored in AgLearn, USDA's official system of record and also transmitted to OPM. Anyone that verifies a request becomes accountable for the accuracy of the information, which includes the actual dates and final costs of the training. Therefore, it is essential that employees and their supervisors verify their own requests. This provides the appropriate level of accountability and reduces the risk of any technical issues that may occur when an administrator acts on an employee's behalf.

SF-182 Best Practice Verification Steps:

- A notification is sent to the employee, after the listed completion date, requesting verification

- 
- Employee submits the completed verification
 - A notification is sent to the employee's supervisor, requesting final verification
 - Supervisor submits the completed verification
 - SF-182 process is now complete and record is archived in the employee's learning history

While administrators can also "verify" a training request on behalf of an employee, this should only be done in two separate verifications steps, one for the employee and then for the supervisor. Combining this into one step with the Submit as Approved check box is NOT recommended.

Note: Please advise your users of the following :

- Cost amounts should not contain any commas
- Title field should not contain any apostrophes

Ask Team AgLearn



Dear Team AgLearn: I was updating my supervisor setting in my Profile in AgLearn and noticed the Coach field. What is this field and how does it work?

When we think of coaching, we usually think of someone who directs, instructs or trains a person or group of people, usually with the aim to achieve some goal or to help develop specific skills.

In the workplace, we frequently use the term *mentor* or *advisor* to describe someone who serves as a coach. Often, our supervisor is our coach. He/she gives us direction and feedback on training, particularly in the creation of our individual development plan (IDP).

But what should we do when our mentor

is *not* our supervisor? How are they supposed to be able to view (or edit) our IDP? Well, using AgLearn, we can specify a coach. To do so, you would:

1. Click on the Personal tab AgLearn.
2. Click on the Profile subtopic.
3. Update the Coach field with your choice.

Supervisor: [Select](#) [Clear](#)
Coach: [Select](#) [Clear](#)

4. Click on the Apply Settings button to save and finalize your changes.

Designating a coach will grant that individual access to your IDP. After your coach logs in and clicks on the Career tab, the View Other User's Plans button will display. By clicking  on this button, your coach will be able to view and edit your IDP.

Your coach can add activities to your plan, such as seminars, workshops, books, or developmental tasks to increase your knowledge and abilities.