

The AgLearn Vine

Volume 1, Issue 1

May 2008



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SP3, Finally!

Well, it is finally here – AgLearn is set to upgrade to the **Service Patch 3 (SP3)** version of Plateau software on June 3, 2008. With this upgrade, there are many changes that will impact the USDA AgLearn administrator community.

Why the upgrade?

There were several reasons why USDA decided to upgrade to this version of Plateau.

First, the **U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB)** mandated that all Federal Agencies standardize the configuration of approximately 300 settings on each of their Windows XP and Vista computers. This is known as the **Federal Desktop Core Configuration (FDCC)**. Having FDCC in place will strengthen Federal IT security by reducing opportunities for hackers to access and exploit government computer systems. The previous version of Plateau (SP1) did not support changes brought about by FDCC.

Second, SP3 allows us also to upgrade the **SkillSoft course player** to version 7.1. Many of the newer SkillSoft courses did not work with the earlier player. Upgrading to SP3 instantly adds over 400 new courses to the AgLearn catalog, many related to Office 2007. The new player will also aid in our **Section 508** courseware compliance issues by providing a more consistent configuration with **Job Access with Speech (JAWS)** screen readers for the visually impaired.

Lastly, TeamAgLearn purchased new hardware months ago in anticipation of SP3. With the upgrade, we will be able to install this hardware and increase our system capacity.

What will be different?

Revised official OPM SF-182 form. Many of you are aware that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) instituted a

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New Policy—Online Training by USDA Employees

Effective June 2008, USDA now requires that agencies first review the previously purchased online training in AgLearn to verify that the course is not already available prior to buying equivalent classroom training or other online instruction. Additionally, all information technology (IT) training must be taken using previously purchased AgLearn online courses, including end-user desktop training. The online IT training approach is a proven success model as evidenced by a similar program in use by the US Army since

2002. The objective is to greatly reduce expense and increase knowledge through the use of online training.

USDA agencies estimated that they spent approximately \$102M in 2004 on training, including tuition and travel expenses. A large amount of USDA's training is conducted using traditional classroom techniques that are often expensive, time consuming and inconsistent from vendor to vendor. Many employees find online training to be more effective than traditional

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SP3, Finally! *(continued from page 1)*

revised SF-182 form in 2007. USDA was granted a temporary waiver from using the new form until it was available via AgLearn. SP3 provides online access to the new official OPM SF-182 form. To help with the implementation process, TeamAgLearn has created online training, job aids, and software tips that should make the external training request process much easier for employees, supervisors, and AgLearn administrators.

Please note: Some administrators have expressed frustration with the online form process and TeamAgLearn continues to work with the Government Plateau Users Group (GPUG) to make recommendations on enhancements.

New Supervisor Interface. Supervisors now have a graphical interface that incorporates the use of dashboard technology. Dashboard technology allows at-a-glance visualization of key performance indicators, such as a graph of completions/non-completions of mandatory training. The AgLearn supervisor dashboard will allow a supervisor to more easily view and monitor the progress

of their subordinates.

Role-Based Security. With SP3, we have implemented a new role-based security structure. Administrator roles have been customized to better reflect the tasks actually performed on the job. For example, administrators who only need access to AgLearn to run registration reports will see just the screens and fields needed to perform those duties. The USDA training community can now be granted access to handle the setup and registration of scheduled offerings.

Administrators Web Page. Our new Administrators web page provides links to training courses as well as additional learning resources to help make the role of the AgLearn administrator more effective and efficient.

These are but a few of the new features that SP3 will make available to all of us. TeamAgLearn especially appreciates the patience of all AgLearn administrators who have patiently waited for this new version.



What USDA learners are saying about some of our most popular online courses.

Course	Improved my knowledge	Use lessons often or always	Very useful or essential to job
Lockout/Tagout	97%	79%	77%
Getting Started with Word 2003	93%	64%	58%
Microsoft Office 2003: New Features for Outlook Users	93%	60%	60%
Hazard Communication	97%	77%	69%
Coping with Stress	100%	83%	77%
Eliminate the Time Wasters	98%	79%	68%
Back Safety	99%	83%	77%
Organize to Remember	96%	46%	55%
Windows XP: Fundamentals	99%	82%	88%
LDC Live Event: Excellence, Execution and Change: Continuing the Search	100%	81%	77%

New Policy (continued from page 1)

training and more attainable. Increasing the use of online training will provide USDA employees with expanded learning opportunities.

AgLearn is recognized as the leading learning management system in the Federal arena and has over 3,000 previously paid for online courses that are available to all USDA employees. Of those, there are over 800 general business courses, over 300 Environmental Safety and Health courses, and over 800 video-based leadership courses available to senior managers (GS-15 and above).

Reports from Team AgLearn will be provided periodically to all agencies to help gauge cost avoidance and assess the effectiveness and satisfaction level of online training.

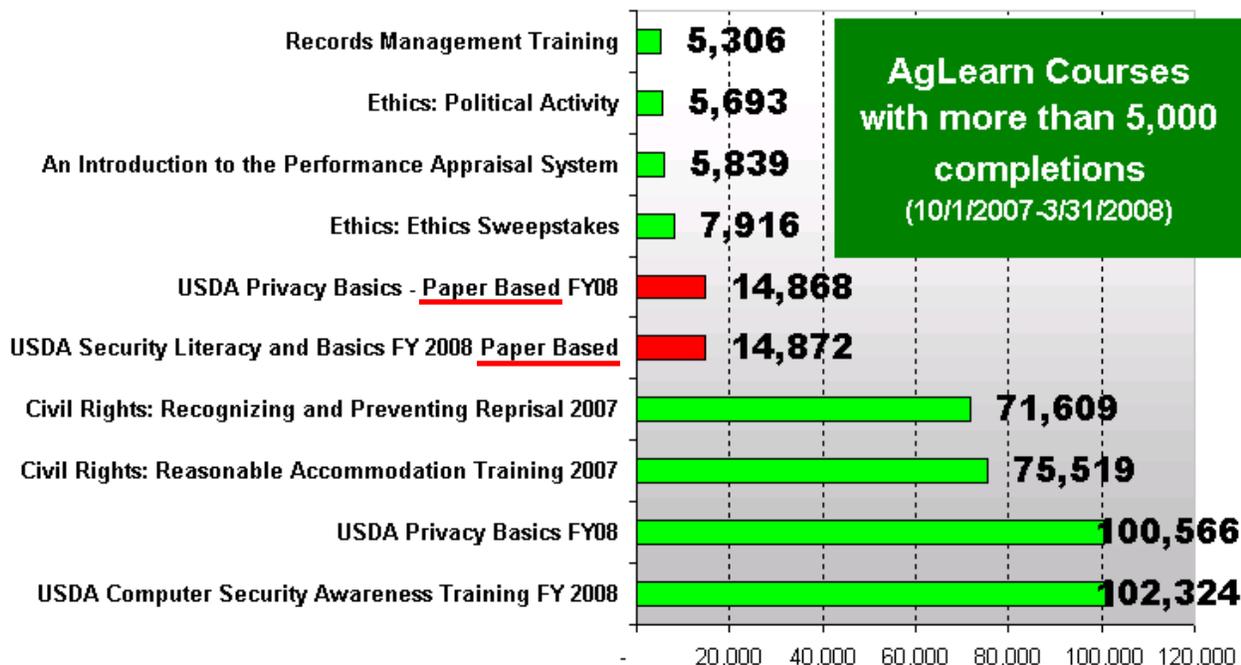
Effectiveness will depend in part on supervisors and employees ensuring that adequate time is available for online training. This initiative will be supported by an awareness campaign to encourage managers, supervisors and employees to use previously purchased AgLearn online courses.

Moving to Office 2007?

Worried about the transition to Office 2007? AgLearn has you covered! Each curricula listed below contains one or more courses to get your learners started.



USDA-MS-2007-002	Microsoft Office 2007: New Features
USDA-MS-2007-003	Microsoft Office 2007: Beginning Word
USDA-MS-2007-004	Microsoft Office 2007: Advanced Word
USDA-MS-2007-006	Microsoft Office 2007: Beginning Excel
USDA-MS-2007-007	Microsoft Office 2007: Advanced Excel
USDA-MS-2007-009	Microsoft Office 2007: Beginning PowerPoint
USDA-MS-2007-010	Microsoft Office 2007: Advanced PowerPoint
USDA-MS-2007-011	Microsoft Office 2007: Beginning Outlook
USDA-MS-2007-012	Microsoft Office 2007: Advanced Outlook
USDA-MS-2007-014	Microsoft Office 2007: Beginning Access



Quarter 2 FY08 Lead Administrator support (Vertex): customer satisfaction score—4.4 out of 5

Administrator Survey



In February 2008, a survey was assigned to all AgLearn administrator learning plans.

Baseline characteristics were captured so that Team AgLearn could compare survey responses against feedback we receive post SP3 implementation. Our plans for the SP3 upgrade include many considerations for AgLearn administrators including a role-based administrator access that is more closely aligned with job tasks, customized online training and blended performance support tools for all administrator roles. Here is a summary of our findings and how our upgrade plans should be welcomed by the administrator community.

A significant portion of our admin population has been performing their role without formal training. While classroom based training was available previously, many administrators were unable to take advantage of it and others have forgotten much of what might have been presented. The perishable nature and the expense of traditional classroom delivery has prompted Team AgLearn to consider an alternative model, a blended approach that would provide consistent, online training customized to specific roles, supplemented with job aides and other performance support strategies such as communities of practice, webcasts and virtual classrooms, which would provide both asynchronous training that is always available and synchronous online venues that provide an opportunity to communicate “live” with subject matter experts.

Customized online training targeted to specific roles will enable administrators to train on those procedures that they will use in their daily activities. Requisite training will be available to review at their own pace and practice to proficiency. Refresher training will always be available and will be easily accessible. Job aids and performance support tools will keep their skills current and provide the necessary updates and revisions as the environment changes. Common issues can be addressed through a central distribution point, such as the new Admin Welcome page, creating a sense of community among AgLearn administrators and promoting the sharing of best practices and lessons learned.

Team AgLearn plans to resurvey AgLearn administrators one year after the implementation of this blended training approach to assess progress and make adjustments if and where necessary.

Click for SURVEY results

Just in Time, Just Enough Training is Big Hit with Busy USDA Employees!

AgLearn has over 3,000 courses available from a variety of sources, such as SkillSoft, that all USDA employees can use at no additional cost. Each time an employee completes one of these **online** courses he/she is required to address six survey questions. We have summarized the over 25,000 individual responses taken from the beginning of the fiscal year through March 31, 2008. These results confirm that online training is providing meaningful impact on job performance within USDA.

1. How well did the training prepare you to perform the tasks described in the course objectives? **Very Well**
2. Please rate your knowledge or skill regarding the training topics BEFORE taking the course. **Good**
3. Please rate your knowledge or skill regarding the training topics AFTER taking the course. **Very Good**
4. Overall, how satisfied are you with this course? (i.e., would you recommend it to others). **Very Satisfied**
5. How OFTEN will you use the knowledge or skill presented in this course? **Often**
6. How IMPORTANT to your job is the knowledge or skill presented in this course? **Very Useful** *

* Responses were nearly equally split between "Essential" at 8,158 responses and "Very Useful" at 8,403 responses

Want more information?

<https://aglearn.usda.gov/scorm-content/JobAids/SkillSoftSurveyResults.pdf>

Tips and Tricks

"Want to be sure to receive all notifications from AgLearn?"

If you're wondering why you may not have received a recent reminder or notification from AgLearn, it may be because your AgLearn profile isn't up to date. The two most important fields for all learners to keep current in AgLearn are the **email address** and the **supervisor name**. To update your information, follow the procedure below:

1. From the **Learner** home page, click the **Personal** menu and choose **Profile**.
2. In the **Employment and Account Information** section, locate the **Supervisor** field.
3. If the field is empty, or an incorrect name is identified, click **Select**.
4. In the **Search Supervisor** window, read the instructions that help you enter data to search for your supervisor.

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5. Click **Search**.
 6. Locate your supervisor and click the corresponding **Select** link.
 7. Observe that your supervisor's name is now displayed in the Supervisor field.
 8. Scroll down to the **Contact Information** section.
 9. Enter your current address in the **Email Address** field.
 10. Scroll to the bottom of the screen and click **Apply Changes**.

Congratulations! You've updated your profile!

Ask TeamAgLearn



Dear TeamAgLearn: I am always having trouble printing a completion certificate at the end of an online course. Is there a special trick to this?

I hate to answer a question with a question, but are you *sure* you really want to print a certificate?

In the past, when students attended training, paper certificates were the “proof” that they completed the course. Usually, that piece of paper was filed away in an office file folder and was never heard from again. Supervisors had to rely upon their memory as to whether or not a particular employee had attended a specific class.

Times have changed quite a bit. Today, **AgLearn** serves as the **System of Record (SOR)** for all training within USDA. What does that mean? Well, a SOR is a storage system which is the authoritative data source for a given piece of information. AgLearn is where all training records

should be stored, not in a dusty file cabinet somewhere. With AgLearn, USDA regularly provides employee training records electronically to OPM.

The important thing shouldn't be printing a paper certificate — it should be inspecting your **Learning History** screen in AgLearn to make sure the completion recorded properly!

I know, I know — now you are going to tell me that your supervisor *insists* on you providing him or her with a paper copy. Well, your supervisor should be able to view ALL of your information (profile, learning plan, and learning history) via the **My Employees** tab in AgLearn. Think of the trees that could be saved!

Did you know?

Your Learning History has a **Print Completion Certificate** button associated with every item listed.