



# GIPSA News

A newsletter for the employees of the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration

February 2008

## New IT Systems

*Alan Christian, Washington, DC*

The next several months will be an exciting time in GIPSA as we transition to the much-anticipated new information technology systems. The GIPSA modernization effort has taken many twists and turns over the past 4 years, but the money and effort we have devoted to improving our automated systems is paying off.

The Federal Grain Inspection Service has already released several major components of its *FGISonline* suite of applications, with the Certificate, Delegation, Designation and Export Registration and Inspection Data Warehouse modules in use, and several more modules in development. The Packers and Stockyards Program is set to release its Packer and Stockyards Automated System (PSAS) this spring.

You might think that after all the trials and tribulations we have suffered through to get this far, the long awaited deployment of these new systems should be a walk in the park. Unfortunately, that is usually not the case. To be successful, we have to transition the entire organization to something new and that is often the most difficult step.

I know from talking with Dave

Shipman that during the deployment of the early *FGISonline* programs, many offices expressed frustration with the new systems and their online speed. The initial reaction was to ask to install the software locally to speed up the process. Rather than give up the functionality of an online system, FGIS persevered to improve the Internet capability and now FGIS has excellent automated programs in place. Likewise in P&SP, we are facing some huge hurdles in deploying PSAS. In preparation for the transition, the regions are purging files and preparing records for entry into the new system. To ensure the credibility of the data in PSAS, we are entering the over 6,000 entities we closely regulate into the system by hand rather than trying to transfer the existing non-uniform data from our three old databases. This data entry effort alone is a significant project and may by itself take up to 6 weeks.

The PSAS system is comprised of two parts. The first is an account management database that maintains information about our registered and bonded entities. The second is a workflow database that tracks and manages our major work processes,

such as registering an entity or processing a bond claim or conducting an investigation. Together these two systems will help us manage all of our P&SP operations and eliminate several existing databases, spreadsheets, and manual tracking logs.

PSAS and the *FGISonline* systems will save time and effort, and provide better information so we can manage our workload at the local, regional, and headquarters levels.

*Continued, see PSAS on page 8.*

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# Names in the News

## PERSONNEL

**Tracy Chesley** joined the GIPSA Civil Rights Staff as the Agency's informal EEO specialist.

**Tracy** is responsible for monitoring and coordinating GIPSA's EEO counseling and mediation activities, including providing advice and guidance to Agency employees, supervisors, and managers on complaint processing. Before joining GIPSA, **Tracy** spent over 10 years as an EEO specialist with the Department of the Army. She graduated from the Department of Army Equal Employment Opportunity Intern Program in 1997. She served as an EEO Complaints Manager for 6 years with the Department of Army, Corps of Engineers, in Washington, DC.

**John Fisher** joined the Kansas City office on January 7, 2008, as an office support assistant.

**Marilynn Gallagher** was selected to be a market inspector with the Eastern Regional Office. **Marilynn** received her Bachelor of Science in



Animal Science from Southwest Texas State University, and her Masters in Animal Science, specializing in Bovine Theriogenology, from Texas A&M University. **Marilynn** will move from her hometown of San Antonio, Texas, to relocate to Greenville, South Carolina.

**Rita Hansberry**, economist, joined the P&SP Industry Analysis Division. **Rita** hails originally from Ireland. She received her B.A. and M.A. in economics from Hunter College in New York City. Previously, **Rita** worked with the Treasury Department in Washington, DC.

**Mai Ho**, IT specialist, returned to GIPSA's IT Staff in Washington, DC, after working for several months at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

**Judy Johnson** joined the FMD Field Operations and Support Staff (FOSS). **Judy** transferred from the Wichita Field Office. She will provide customer support for the FGISonline applications and assist with other FOSS activities. She will continue to work at the current Wichita Field Office duty point; her phone number is 316-722-6370 x10.

**Reola Loomis** joined the Washington Federal/State office on January 7, 2008. She has 17 years of experience with the Washington State Department of Agriculture's Pesticide Management Division and has dealt with many customer service and remote communication issues.

**Jaime Ziem** was selected to be a market inspector with the Eastern Regional Office. **Jaime** received her Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Science from SUNY

Codeskill College of Agriculture and Technology. She completed a 5-



*Administrator Jim Link swears in Jaime Ziem*

month internship with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and then worked as an insurance agent specializing in farms. **Jaime** will reside in her hometown of Albany, New York.

## AWARDS

**Tyhisa Luckey**, Office of the Deputy Administrator, P&SP, received a spot award for assistance in preparing and mailing the P&SP standard operating procedures and sub-processes to P&SP staff in a short period of time.

**Dana Mitchell**, certification assistant, New Orleans, received a spot award for maintaining a heavy workload and providing exceptional service to internal and external customers.

*Continued, see Names on page 3.*



*Administrator Jim Link swears in Marilyn Gallagher.*



## Personnel News

*Monica Alexander,  
Washington, DC*

January 9, 2008

Beverly Whalen  
USDA, GIPSA, FGIS  
Beacon Facility, Stop 1404  
P.O. Box 419205  
Kansas City, Missouri 64141-6205

Dear Beverly:

I wanted to thank you for attending the USA Rice Outlook Conference this past December and hosting your meeting with our Industry Standards Committee. We appreciate the outreach effort you made as well as the past work you've done on behalf of the U.S. rice industry. We hope that you received informative answers to your questions of our group. From our side, we received nothing but positive remarks concerning your meeting and your trip back downstairs to answer further questions as you were preparing to depart Orlando.

We look forward to continuing to work with you on these and other issues as they arise.

Once again, thank you on behalf of the entire rice industry.

Sincerely,

Reece Langley  
Vice President, Government Affairs

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**Names**, from page 2.

**Sherri Murphy**, Field Management Division (FMD), Washington, DC, received a performance award for outstanding performance and professionalism which contributed to the increased effectiveness and efficiency of FMD and GIPSA.

**Irene Omade**, Information Technology Staff, Washington, DC, received a time-off award for valuable service as a Combined Federal Campaign keyworker for GIPSA.

**Regina Pankowski**, Field Management Division, Washington, DC, received a performance award for outstanding performance and professionalism which contributed to the increased effectiveness and efficiency of FMD and GIPSA.

**TSP Highlights.** The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) will begin mailing annual statements, in addition to the quarterly statements! Visit [www.tsp.gov](http://www.tsp.gov) for more information or look in your mail for more information.

**NFC Website Gets a New Look!** The National Financial Center (NFC) recently unveiled its redesigned website on January 21, 2008. The most noticeable changes to the website include a new home page and "spotlight" features, a Customer Support page, a newly formatted Publications Page, a separate Forms page, a summary of NFC, help enhancements and resources, and an updated Contact Us page. Visit the website at [www.nfc.usda.gov](http://www.nfc.usda.gov)!

**2008 Federal Pay Increases.** Executive Order Number 13454, dated January 4, 2008, authorized a 2.5 percent across-the-board increase in the rates of basic pay, effective January 6, 2008, for employees paid under the General Schedule (GS) and Foreign Service Schedule statutory pay systems. For a complete list of the 2008 salary tables, visit [www.opm.gov](http://www.opm.gov).

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## Issuances

*Terri Henry, Washington, D.C.*

- DON (Vomitoxin) Handbook, Issuance Change No. 11, dated January 14, 2008.

# 2007 FGIS Customer Survey

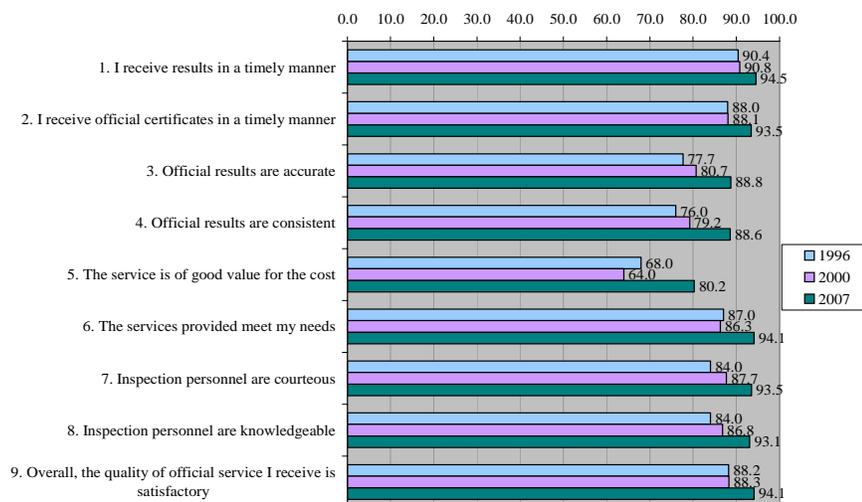
*Idelisse Rodriguez, Washington, DC*

From September through November 2007, FGIS surveyed customers of the official inspection and weighing system. FGIS mailed surveys to 1,018 customers of 43 private official agencies, 12 State agencies, and 5 FGIS field offices (i.e., League City, TX; New Orleans, LA; Portland, OR; Stuttgart, AR; and Toledo, OH). Of the total mailed, 49 surveys did not reach the intended recipient. Five hundred five (505) of the remaining 969 customers who received the survey completed it, for a response rate of 52 percent.

FGIS previously conducted mail-out surveys of the paying customers of the official inspection and weighing system in 1996 and 2000. In the 1996, 2000, and 2007 survey responses, customers rated FGIS highest in the areas of timeliness of and overall quality of services. We attribute satisfaction in these areas due to the fact that more official service providers have been adding on-site laboratories offering quicker services, and more providers are also providing electronic inspection results.

Over the course of the three surveys, FGIS not only learned that customers were satisfied with the timeliness and overall quality of services, but that they were least satisfied with the cost of services and the accuracy and consistency of results. To this end, FGIS has undertaken several complex initiatives with the goal of improving our performance in these areas. For example, FGIS has undergone an organizational restructuring, and expects to improve its ability to provide highly accurate and consistent results. Currently, FGIS is carefully reviewing its fee structure for its commodity inspection program. It is worth noting that although customers expressed the least level of satisfaction with the cost of services, overall satisfaction levels have increased by over 12 percent from the 1996 to 2007 survey. FGIS will not be satisfied with the status quo, however, and will continue to make strides to increase satisfaction levels to even higher levels in these areas.

The 2007 FGIS Customer Survey Report is available in the About Us section of the GIPSA web site.



## AgLearn Helps Overcome Overload

AgLearn offers courses specifically designed to help lighten your load. Check out the ones featured below by clicking on the course name and adding it to your learning plan today! (Remember to have your User ID and password ready.)

- ◆ **Eliminate the Time Wasters.** This course offers a number of practical hints you can implement immediately that will conserve your time by identifying those tasks that can be delegated or eliminated and even effectively saying no to tasks.
- ◆ **Organize to Remember.** Can't remember everything you need to take to a meeting? Ease memory overload by implementing a few organizational systems that will help you remember details without having to put them to memory. Often, overload is synonymous with stress. Take time to check out these courses today and start reducing your stress.
- ◆ **Coping with Stress.** Find out how to manage self-induced stress and diffuse negative thoughts.
- ◆ **Balancing Your Personal and Professional Life.** In addition to learning how to manage stress, learn how to manage the sources of stress.

Learning just got easier and more convenient. Log on today!

[www.aglearn.usda.gov](http://www.aglearn.usda.gov)

# Seeking Applicants for Overseas Collateral Duty Positions

*Edward C. Durgin, Washington, DC*

FGIS periodically places employees on temporary, short-term overseas assignments to represent the Agency and conduct activities consistent with our mission. These assignments typically address a specific issue.

We also offer long-term assignments that offer opportunities to work with our overseas customers and their Governments in a more proactive manner. They allow for opportunities to listen, and discuss and initiate activities that better address our interests and those of our overseas customers. In 2002, the Office of International Affairs (OIA) established collateral-duty grain marketing specialist positions at the GS 12-13 levels to implement a new approach in working with our overseas customers and/or their Governments.

In 2002, we placed a representative in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on a 3-month temporary duty assignment to work in Asia. Following the successful completion of this initial assignment, we have annually placed representatives in Asia.

Our presence in the region under this program continues to draw praise from our customers (buyers, millers, and processors), USDA cooperators, and Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) representatives in the area. We are commended by these parties for adding value to their work, nurturing relationships, and developing a more proactive approach to our work.

While each overseas assignment is unique, the more common activities include the following:

- Participating in educational seminars for importers and end users to explain the role and responsibilities of GIPSA/FGIS. These seminars are usually sponsored by USDA Cooperator organizations (e.g., U.S. Wheat Associates, U.S. Grains Council, American Soybean Association, etc.).
- Investigating a receiver's alleged discrepancies in quality or weight for grain shipments that were inspected and weighed by FGIS at the time of loading.
- Participating in FAS-directed government-to-government discussions or negotiations concerning import restrictions or conditions/specifications that restrict U.S. trade.

The continuation of the collateral duty program, duration of assignments, and frequency of travel are contingent upon factors such as funding, an assessment of the Agency's priorities, security considerations, and aid from FAS and USDA cooperators. As we project our program requirements to FY 2009 and beyond, we see a need for additional employees for possible overseas collateral duty assignments.

Incumbents may also be temporarily assigned to assist OIA in Washington to support the activities of others concurrently working in an overseas assignment. Those selected for the collateral duty positions will receive training necessary for successful participation in the program. When assigned overseas, collateral duty representatives will be required to establish and maintain effective

interpersonal relationships in diverse work settings. Applicants should be self-starters who possess strong oral and written communication skills and can demonstrate the ability to initiate and prioritize multiple and diverse work assignments with minimal day-to-day supervision.

The collateral duty position may require frequent and extensive travel on short notice, irregular work schedules, and various work settings (offices, vessels, warehouses, elevators and processing facilities). Before submitting an application, please consider any health conditions that would influence your ability to perform these duties.

This will be a collateral duty position. Those selected will continue to work in their current positions when not assigned to a position overseas or to OIA at headquarters. Incumbents may be eligible for a temporary promotion when assigned overseas. The OIA director will supervise the position.

Look for a forthcoming vacancy announcement with additional information about the position and the selection criteria. In the meantime, please contact OIA staff at 202-720-0226 for more information regarding the collateral duty position.

If shorter-term international assignments interest you and you have not yet expressed your interest to OIA, please let us know. A questionnaire appears on *inGIPSA*.

Give me a call at 202-720-0226 if you have any questions.

## FGISonline

On January 11, GIPSA bid farewell to **Chuck Smith**, who had provided leadership and management for GIPSA's Application Modernization (GAM) Program, now known as FGISonline, over the past several years.

**Karen Guagliardo**, chief, Compliance Division's Review Branch, assumed responsibility for managing the FGISonline projects. **Karen** is a certified project manager and has been involved with the design, development, and deployment of several FGISonline applications. Under **Karen's** leadership and management, FGIS will proceed with bringing a number of new applications into operation, including equipment checktesting, licensing, inspection testing and weighing (the new Cu-Sum plus more), and quality assurance and control. **Karen** can be reached at 202-720-7312.

**Are EEO/CR issues or concerns affecting your employment with GIPSA? Do you have questions? Need help?**

**Then let your voice be heard.**

Call the EEO Advisory Committee at...

**1-800-639-5167**

Civil Rights Hotline

## 2008 International Poultry Exposition

*John Rollins, Atlanta*

The 2008 International Poultry Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia, drew large crowds, including staff of the Eastern Regional Office. More than 30 members of the chicken and turkey industry attended, including Randy Stroud, corporate officer for Pilgrim's Pride Corporation, Pittsburg, Texas; Terry Maness and others from Perdue Farms, Inc.; Brad Harp, vice president, Live Production, Cagle's, Inc., Atlanta, Georgia; Don Waldrip, D.V.M. Area Live Production manager, Wayne Farms LLC, Oakwood, Georgia; and Steve Pretanik and Bill Ronigk from the National Chicken Council.

I gave a presentation on proposed regulations and the comments received regarding the proposed regulations. The presentation focused on the proposed rules published in the August 1, 2007, *Federal Register* on section 201.100 of the regulations, "Records to be furnished poultry growers and sellers."

We also discussed future regulations regarding live poultry and feed weighing and contracting, and further amendments to 201.100. Topics of primary interest are the timing of weighing live poultry, new requirements for scale ticket evidencing, and language requirements for poultry growing arrangements. Attendees were encouraged to take part in the rulemaking process and offer their comments on GIPSA's proposals.

The P&SP booth was staffed by the Eastern Regional Office during the Exposition. Hog and poultry industry members stopped by; and Elkin Parker, Creig Stephens, Joe Moore and I interviewed students for potential employment.



*Eastern Regional Office staff welcomes visitors to the P&SP booth at the International Poultry Expo.*

# Travel Bits & Pieces

*Monica Alexander, Washington, DC*

**GovTrip Implementation.** We are almost 6 weeks away from launching GovTrip, the Agency’s new e-Travel system! The Agency’s transition from the current system (TRVL and Fedtraveler) are going well so far and we have accomplished all milestones, on time, since our official launch in November.

The following are some questions have been asked by many Agency employees regarding the new system, and some answers to them:

11/7/2007	12/4-5/2007	01/18/2008	01/18/2008	01/22-25/2008
Official Launch	Business Process Meeting	TACT Table Updates	User Profile Updates	Federal Agency Travel Administrator (FATA) Training
02/08/2008	02/12-15/2008	02/26/2008	02/27-3/10/2008	03/10/2008
SF-1143 Due	Train-the-Trainer Kansas City, MO	IT Security Checks Due	Agency-wide Training	GovTrip “Go Live” date
<i>Planned</i>	<i>Complete</i>	<i>Did not complete</i>		

**Q. Who will use the system?**

A. Users of GovTrip are identified in three categories: travelers, arrangers, and approving officials. A traveler is a user that enters the system to create their own authorization, reservations, and vouchers related to temporary duty travel. An arranger is a user that enters the system to do the above on behalf of a traveler. An approving official/routing official is a user that enters the system to approve or review travel authorizations created by a traveler or travel arranger. A user can be any one or all of these categories.

**Q. Will the temporary duty travel policy change with the new system?**

A. No. Employees traveling on official government business will continue to follow Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) and Departmental Travel Regulations related to travel and travel card policy.

**Q. When will I receive training?**

A. The GIPSA GovTrip training will begin with a 4-day train-the-trainer course for key Agency personnel who will administer the training to employees in the regional and field offices, as well as headquarters. The training will be a combination of one-on-one, web-based, netmeeting, and self-paced training, which may last up to 6-8 hours. The training will be administered to employees who will use the system immediately and continue until all users are trained. Employees will be notified by their local training point of contact or the GIPSA Training Staff.

**Q. What are the changes from the current system?**

- A. The most significant changes from the current system to the new GovTrip system are:
1. Travel authorizations will obligate funds when approved, therefore approving officials will need to monitor budgets to ensure funds are available at the time of authorizing travel.
  2. Users will use their e-authentication user ID and password to log into the system (the same user ID and password used for AgLearn).
  3. Users will use one system to authorize travel, make reservations, and voucher for the travel, unlike the current process, which requires the use of two systems.
  4. Travelers will no longer use the AD-202 and AD-616 forms. Travel orders details will be automatically generated on a GSA-87 Form.

*Continued, see **Travel** on page 8*

**Premium Class Travel.** The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently conducted an audit of premium class travel within the government. The audit revealed several weaknesses in the policy and approval process for premium class travel in USDA. While GIPSA was not named in the audit as having a problem, it is important that all GIPSA employees are aware of the new procedures for obtaining approval for premium class travel.

Per the October 2, 2007, memorandum from Acting Secretary Chuck Conner, all employees seeking to purchase premium class travel accommodations must request approval from the USDA Chief of Staff. The process is as follows:

1. Complete a justification on the “Authorization for Use of First and Business Class Travel” form.
2. Submit the form, through your administrative office, to the GIPSA Travel Coordinator.
3. The form will be forwarded to the Under Secretary or General Officer for approval.
4. The form will be returned to the traveler upon approval or denial, and reservation can be booked.

Please allow time for the approval process when seeking premium class travel. The form can be obtained from your administrative office, *in*GIPSA or GIPSA MSS.

**Travel Card Usage.** Each month, GIPSA receives data from the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) regarding “questionable” transactions on travel cards. Many transactions are legitimate, but are purchased from vendors or companies that may be registered as a gift shop, catalog company, etc., which causes transactions be flagged as inappropriate. As a reminder, all GIPSA travel card holders must adhere to the Departmental Travel Card Policy Regulation-DR 2300-01, with special emphasis on the following:

- § Do not make purchases or make cash withdrawals when not on official government travel,
- § Do not use your card for personal expenses, EVER,
- § ATM cash withdrawals are limited to \$50 per day or \$250 per week for domestic travel,
- § Pay government card bills upon receipt,
- § Do not purchase travel accommodations for others with your travel card, even if someone is traveling with you, and
- § Do not make travel arrangements for personal travel with your travel card.

Travel card accounts are monitored each month and misuse is reported to individuals and supervisors accordingly.

Please contact me with questions or concerns related to Federal government travel, [monica.m.alexander@usda.gov](mailto:monica.m.alexander@usda.gov), 202-720-7045.

But to realize this benefit, every user has to be willing to try something new and give it a chance. We know the system will not be perfect out of the box, but we have a great group of people working with the contractors to get the best product we can. I am confident we are on the right track.

As we enter this transition, please be patient, willing to adapt, and supportive of those who are working hard to make these new systems a success. During the deployment of a new automated system, there is usually one group (in P&SP it is the Program Support Unit in the regional offices) that is responsible for most of the additional work during the transition phase. Please be willing to lend a hand or wait a little longer for a response from these folks as they take on this important responsibility to improve our operations and make all of our jobs easier.

## **Employee Assistance Program**

Call for confidential help.

Washington, DC personnel, call...  
1-800-222-0364

Field personnel, call...  
1-800-222-0364

# For Your Health

Mavis Rogers, Washington, DC

**Health Food Shopping Do's and Dont's.** Any food called "healthy" must contain at least 10% of the daily values per serving of several important nutrients, and be low in trans fat, saturated fat, sodium, and cholesterol.

○ **DON'T** forget fiber's finest. Load up on whole grain breads, rolls and cereals, as well as brown rice and dried beans. When shopping, look for the word "whole" at the top of the package ingredients list.

○ **DO** pick the greenest. When buying salad greens, select those deepest in color –dark greens and red. The dark color means higher concentration of antioxidant vitamins A, C, and E, folic acid, calcium and other nutrients.

○ **DON'T** dismiss frozen produce. Some frozen fruits and vegetables contain as many nutrients as fresh produce -- sometimes more. One study found frozen green beans had about twice the vitamin C as fresh beans that sat on display and in a refrigerator for nearly a week.

○ **DO** select frozen dinners carefully. Choose frozen meals that contain less than 10 grams of fat and the least amount of sodium and cholesterol.

○ **DON'T** pass up pasta. Pasta is high in protein and contains B vitamins and iron.

○ **More DOs.** Avoid shopping on an empty stomach; choose fruit "juices" instead of "drinks", buy skinless poultry; remember that a standard serving of meat or fish should be the size of a deck of cards.

*Courtesy: TOPHEALTH: The Health & Wellness Newsletter.*

# IT Tidbit

Tracey Paugh, Washington, DC

Software Quality Assurance plays a critical role in the success of the FGISonline system applications. The Information Technology Staff's test team that uses Mercury Interactive tools to test application functionality, validity, and performance to ensure a quality product.

The test team has consolidated all the business requirements into one repository; a Mercury tool called Quality Center. All automated, manual, and performance test scripts are written and placed in a Quality Center. This enables the team to trace test cases directly back to the business requirements and allows the project management team to see what test cases have been run.

Once test cases have been executed manually, the process of writing automated test cases begins. These test cases are written in the Mercury tool Quick Test Professional (QTP). This is a graphical user interface automated test tool that acts exactly like an end user, recording key strokes as though a user is running the application. When the automation is complete, the team can execute test cases and verify results. These are tasks that would have taken days to complete if done manually.

Performance test scripts are written in LoadRunner, which is also a Mercury tool. These scripts are stored in a Quality Center and mapped directly to the business requirements. When performance tests are run, monitoring is also run, which enables the test engineer to pinpoint bottlenecks at either the hardware or software level.

The test engineer also runs Smoke Test scripts with every new release of an application. These scripts validate every link and open every page of the application, verifying that the application migration was successful. Smoke tests enable the test engineer to validate the new releases of each application within a matter of minutes, eliminating hours of manual testing.

As we continue to develop state-of-the-art application systems, we plan to capitalize on the tools that make software quality assurance a successful endeavor.

**GIPSA News** is the employee newsletter of the USDA Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration. Send your news, ideas, suggestions, comments, questions, or thoughts for the next issue to:

**Dana Stewart**  
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1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-3614  
Phone (202) 720-5091  
FAX (202) 690-2333  
dana.b.stewart@usda.gov

**by February 25, 2008!**

**Retiring?** To be included on our email distribution list after you retire from GIPSA, please send your email address to dana.b.stewart@usda.gov.

OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR  
USDA, GRAIN INSPECTION, PACKERS  
AND STOCKYARDS ADMINISTRATION  
STOP 3601  
1400 INDEPENDENCE AVENUE, SW  
WASHINGTON, DC 20250-3601

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