

# USDA Information Quality Guidelines for Reference Information

Reference information is defined here as technical reference information disseminated by USDA agencies and offices that helps the public in its daily activities. Examples include information on good nutrition, safe handling of food, and recommendations on good farming practices.

## Guidelines

- **Information should be relevant.**

Reference information should provide value to its intended users and effectively address the purpose for which it is produced. Identify the intended audience and the issues of concern to them to identify relevant topics of interest. Assess the level of knowledge of the target audience and present the information appropriately.

- **Information should be accurate.**

Reference information should be based on sound research or analysis and valid data. Verify that the information is factually accurate prior to its dissemination.

- **Information should be presented clearly.**

Present the information in a clear, complete, and unbiased manner so that its intended audience can easily understand it. Keep language as simple as the subject permits. Use graphical materials in preference to additional text or statistical tables to communicate the message. Clearly title and label charts and statistical tables so they can be understood without referring to accompanying text. Provide a point of contact to which users of the information may refer questions.

- **Information should be current.**

Reference information should be as current as possible as of the date of its dissemination, and the text should indicate appropriate dates such as date of collection, compilation, and release. Review the information periodically as appropriate to ensure that it continues to meet quality standards and is appropriately categorized.

- **The source of the information should be documented.**

Reference information that is based on the results of scientific studies, analyses, or statistical activities should identify the source of the information. Also, clearly identify the originating agency or office and provide a point of contact for questions or additional information.

- **Information should comply with applicable public laws, rules, regulations, and departmental directives, instructions and guidelines.**

All information should comply with current departmental policies and guidelines that

govern information dissemination to the public. The information also should comply with the requirements of applicable public laws and implementing rules and regulations issued under the authority of such laws.

- **Information should be accessible.**

Make reference information easily accessible to its intended audience and make it available in media-print, electronic, visual, audio, etc.-appropriate to accomplish that objective. Archive the information according to agency standards or policy so it may be obtained from agency files and so determinations can be made as to its appropriate role or utility. Documents disseminated on agency websites should be accessible to persons with visual disabilities pursuant to the requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

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We welcome your comments and suggestions about these pages. For information related to the USDA Quality Information Guidelines, please contact [Dr. Bette Fugitt](#), USDA Records Officer. For comments regarding the site itself: [ociowebmaster@ociofc.usda.gov](mailto:ociowebmaster@ociofc.usda.gov)  
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