



Style Guidelines for Media Materials

USDA follows the Associated Press Stylebook for news releases, advisories, statements, speeches and other materials targeted to the media. Deviations from AP style or issues specific to USDA include:

Acronyms

Spell out U.S. Department of Agriculture and names of agencies and programs in the first reference and use acronyms thereafter. For acronyms that may not be familiar to the reader, a parenthetical reference to the acronym can be used after the first reference to the name.

Attribution

“Said” is used for attribution rather than “stated,” “noted,” “pointed out,” “commented” or “explained.”

Contacts

When the Secretary of Agriculture or subcabinet officials are quoted in the release, the press secretary should be listed as the first contact with the appropriate agency contact listed second. An OC contact may be listed as appropriate.

Datelines

If an announcement is made by an USDA official when he or she is away from Washington, use in the dateline the city where the official is that day. The date should include month, day and year.

EEO

USDA, like all federal agencies, is an equal opportunity employer, so there is no need to restate this in news releases and features, nor on mastheads.

Ending a Release

End a news release with a single # symbol, centered, two lines below the last line of the release. “Note to

Reporters” starts two lines below the #, is single-spaced and should not exceed 1/3 of a page in length.

Formats

News releases and other press materials are single-spaced and left-justified, with 1-inch margins and 1/2-inch paragraph indents. Skip one line between paragraphs. Use Times Roman 12 point typeface. Use MSWord software whenever possible.

Headlines

Use centered, boldface all caps for news release headlines and try to limit to one line. Subheadings are printed in upper and lowercase italics centered below the headline.

Masthead

All news releases will be issued with USDA, agency or special masthead identification for the media. Center the masthead and place 1 inch from the top of the page.

Media Advisories/Statements

Advisories provide information to news media about a planned press event or other items of media interest. These notices typically do not exceed a half page, do not contain quotations and are not written in the same style as news releases. They do, however, answer the questions of who, what, when, where and why of the issue.

Statements should contain only quoted material.

Names

Use a person's full name in the first reference. Use only the last name in further references.

Notes

A short note after the text of a news release can be used to provide additional information to the media, such

as the availability of photographs, publications or sound bites. (See Ending a Release.)

Page Numbers

The Office of Communications distribution unit will insert needed page numbers prior to release. In most cases, news releases should not exceed two pages. Page 1 is not numbered; for page 2, the number should be centered, between hyphens, and placed two lines above the first line of the text.

Party Affiliation

References to legislative officials should include the official's state but not the party affiliation.

Resignations, Retirements

OC does not announce retirements or resignations but will include such information in releases announcing the new appointment or “acting” appointment.

Secretarial Reference

Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman is the correct way to refer to the secretary in materials.

Subcabinet

When using the complete title of a subcabinet member, place the title after the name using lowercases. There is no need to make reference to agriculture (i.e., under secretary of agriculture for food safety) unless the release contains titles of officials from other government departments.

Weights/Measurements

In general, AP style does not abbreviate units of measure. However, abbreviations are used in charts for space reasons. In that case, follow the standard symbols for units of measure listed in the Government Printing Office Style Manual.

Quick Tips on AP Style

Conjunctions

AP style does not call for a comma before a conjunction in a simple series, but does allow it for complex series or where an integral element of the series requires a conjunction.

Dates

When months are used with specific dates, abbreviate the month. Put commas after the day of the week, the month and the year. The exceptions to the abbreviation rule are the five months of five letters or fewer: March, April, May, June, July.

With no specific date, spell out the month. When you have just the month and year, do not put a comma between them.

Internet

If an Internet address falls at the end of a sentence, use a period.

For the most part, use the `http://` protocol at the start of Web addresses.

Do not capitalize the “e” in e-mail.

Do not capitalize home page and always use as two words.

Internet and World Wide Web are capitalized. Other acceptable references are “the Net” or “the Web.” Capitalize “Web” in Web page but lowercase webcast or webmaster.

CD-ROM disc is redundant.

Money

When referring to money, always use the dollar sign \$. Do not repeat the word “dollars” when you use the sign \$.

Use exact figures up to \$1 million. On figures more than \$1 million, round off unless an exact figure is required (i.e., \$3.1 million, \$4.85 billion, etc.).

When you have a range of amounts, repeat the word million or billion (i.e., \$3 million to \$6 million).

Numbers

In general, spell out one through nine, use figures for 10 and above. But, always use figures for age, dimensions, percentages, time, street numbers and days of the month.

For time references, a.m. and p.m. are always closed up and lower-cased.

Percent is one word and should be used rather than the symbol. Use the word percent with each number when giving a range (i.e., 1 percent to 3 percent).

Never start a sentence with a raw number, but you can use the number spelled out. However, you can start a sentence with a year as numbers, but AP does not encourage it.

Use figures for the time of day, except for noon and midnight. Note that 12 noon is redundant.

State Abbreviations

Spell out the names of all the states when they stand alone, but abbreviate most state names when used with a city.

Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas and Utah are always spelled out. The following are the correct abbreviations for the other states:

Ala.	Ill.	Miss.	N.C.	Vt.
Ariz.	Ind.	Mo.	N.D.	Va.
Ark.	Kan.	Mont.	Okla.	Wash.
Calif.	Ky.	Neb.	Ore.	W.Va.
Colo.	La.	Nev.	Pa.	Wis.
Conn.	Md.	N.H.	R.I.	Wyo.
Del.	Mass.	N.J.	S.C.	
Fla.	Mich.	N.M.	S.D.	
Ga.	Minn.	N.Y.	Tenn.	

Do not use the post office’s two-letter abbreviations.

Streets and Addresses

In an exact, numbered address, capitalize and abbreviate only Blvd., Ave. and St. after the street name. All the rest (Road, Drive, Court, Lane, etc.) are spelled out completely and capitalized.

Abbreviate direction in an exact address, whether it comes within or at the end of the address.

Titles

Titles are capitalized before the name, lowercased after the name. One exception: do not capitalize the title when there is punctuation between the title and the name.

Very few titles are abbreviated. Those that are (such as Gov., Sen., Rev., Dr.) are abbreviated only when they come before the name, not after. When the title stands alone, with no name, spell it out and do not capitalize it.

Long titles go best after the name.

On legislators, such as senators, representatives, etc., set off state (or area) with commas, not parentheses.

Miscellaneous Abbreviations

As a noun, United States is spelled out. As an adjective, it can be U.S., with periods and closed together. The same is true for U.N., which also takes periods.

No periods are used with mph, as in 35 mph, nor with mm, as in 35mm. Note that the 35mm is all run together.

Never abbreviate association or department, but do abbreviate Co., Corp. and Inc. There is no comma before the Inc. in a name. In most cases the Inc. is unnecessary, but use it when it is an important part of the name.

Do not use periods for acronyms, except for a.m. and p.m.

Miscellaneous Capitalizations

Capitalize words like river, dam, county, street, etc. when part of a proper name, but use lowercase when plural.

Capitalize specific regions: Midwest, East, West Coast, South, etc.

Capitalize Congress, Senate, House, General Assembly and government agencies, including City Council and County Commission. Later references

are lowercase, i.e., council, commission. Capitalize party in Republican Party, Democratic Party.

Capitalize branches of the U.S. (not foreign) military—Army, Navy, Marines, etc.

Miscellaneous Usage

Compound modifiers are hyphenated when their meaning would be unclear without the hyphen, but do not hyphenate modifiers that end in “ly.”

When using quotes, the comma and the period go inside the closed quote.

Nicknames are enclosed in quotes, not parentheses.

Put quotes around the titles of movies, plays, books (but not the Bible or reference works), operas, songs, TV programs, speeches and works of art, but not around the names of newspapers or magazines.

When using two initials instead of a first name, run the two together.

When referring to a city, such as the city of Washington, lowercase the word “city.”

Do not say “about” for exact figures.

Do not use “like” when you mean “such as.”

Do not use “at about” when referring to time. Whenever it is an estimate, use “about” and round off. Whenever it’s an exact time, use “at.”

If you use percentages, ensure that they add up to 100 percent.

Professor is never abbreviated. Ensure that the rank is correct, i.e. professor, assistant professor, associate professor.

Frequently Misused Words

Affect, effect—In general, use affect as a verb and effect as a noun.

All, any, most, none, some—Can be singular or plural; singular if it refers to a unit or general quantity, plural if

it refers to amount or individuals.

Demolish, destroy—Both imply “totally” so don’t write, “totally demolished.”

Different from, different than—The safe form is “different from.”

Disinterested, uninterested—“Disinterested” means impartial; “uninterested” means not interested.

Each, either, neither—Singular.

Ensure, insure—Use “ensure” to mean guarantee; “insure” for reference to insurance.

Farther, further—“Farther” refers to distance; “further” refers to quantities like time or degree.

Hopefully—Don’t use.

Irregardless—Not a word.

Lay, lie—“Lay” (lay/laid/laid) implies an action and has an object (I lay the book on the table.) “Lie” (lie/lay/lain) implies a state of being; in the present tense it means recline on a horizontal plane (the book lies on the table).

Lend, loan—You lend money. The money is a loan.

Less, fewer—Use “fewer” for things you can count; use “less” for things you cannot count.

Like, as—Use “as” when there is a verb in the prepositional phrase, “like” when there is not. (Example: He blocks like a pro football player. He blocked as a pro would do it.)

Oral, verbal—“Verbal” may be spoken or written; “oral” is spoken only.

Over, more than—Use “more than” with figures, “over” with spatial comparisons.

Proved, proven—AP style allows “proven” only as an adjective: a proven record. “Proved” is the verb form: He proved his point.

Since, because—“Because” refers to a reason; “since” refers to time.

That, which—“Which” adds some secondary information, which could be dropped without losing the meaning of the sentence. “That” introduces essential information and is not set off with commas.

Notes:

Samples

 **NEWS RELEASE**
United States Department of Agriculture • Office of Communications • 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1500 • Voice: (202) 720-4623 • Email: oc.news@usda.gov • Web: <http://www.usda.gov>

Release No. 0272.01 Alisa Harrison (202) 720-4623

VENEMAN NAMES GILBERT G. GONZALEZ JR. AS DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

WASHINGTON, Dec. 21, 2001—Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman today announced the selection of Gilbert G. Gonzalez Jr. as deputy under secretary for rural development. Gonzalez's responsibilities include performance and results analysis, strategic planning, special initiative development, outreach, and application of contemporary business and banking practices to the mission area.

"Gilbert Gonzalez brings to USDA extensive knowledge in banking and community development and he will contribute greatly to our efforts to revitalize rural America," said Veneman.

Gonzalez is the founding president of the San Antonio Business Development Fund Inc., a multibank community development corporation. He has been active in banking, housing and economic development efforts in the state of Texas since 1984. Gonzalez serves on numerous boards and commissions, including the City of San Antonio Enterprise Community Commission, Texas Mezzanine Fund Inc., the Fannie Mae Advisory Council and Texas Community Development Financial Institution Coalition.

Gonzalez brings a dynamic banking background to the rural development mission. Prior to founding the San Antonio Business Development Fund Inc., he was a commercial loan officer for the Money Store Investment Corporation, a business development specialist for the University of Texas Small Business Development Center, and an assistant vice president of budgeting and finance for First Gibraltar Bank.

Gonzalez received a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Texas at San Antonio.

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Note to Reporters: Photographs of Gonzalez are available from USDA's photography center at (202) 720-6633 or user.photo@usda.gov.

 **MEDIA ADVISORY**
United States Department of Agriculture • Office of Communications • 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1500 • Voice: (202) 720-4623 • Email: oc.news@usda.gov • Web: <http://www.usda.gov>

Release No. 4014.01 Alisa Harrison (202) 720-4623
Larry Quinn (202) 720-4623

SECRETARY VENEMAN TO ANNOUNCE FUNDING FOR RURAL SCHOOLS, FOREST COMMUNITIES

WASHINGTON, Dec. 12, 2001 – Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman will release USDA funding for 41 states to benefit rural community schools, forest stewardship and road projects.

WHAT: A media briefing on the payments to states as a result of legislation passed by the Congress last year. The funding will benefit public schools and road projects in rural communities hosting national forests and pay for local forest stewardship projects.

WHO: Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman
Sen. Larry Craig, Idaho
Sen. Gordon Smith, Ore.
Sen. Ron Wyden, Ore.
Forest Service Associate Chief Sally Collins

Also invited are Rep. Bob Goodlatte, Va.; Rep. Allen Boyd, Fla.; Rep. Peter DeFazio, Ore.; and Rep. Greg Walden, Ore.

WHEN: Thursday, Dec. 13, 2001, noon EST

WHERE: Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building
12th & Jefferson Dr., SW, Room 107-A
Washington, D.C.
No parking provided; Smithsonian metro station one block away.

HOW: Reporters in and around the Washington area are welcome to attend the briefing. Media credentials are required. Media wishing to "listen in" to a live broadcast should call (202) 720-4623 for dial-in information.

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 **STATEMENT**
United States Department of Agriculture • Office of Communications • 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1500 • Voice: (202) 720-4623 • Email: oc.news@usda.gov • Web: <http://www.usda.gov>

Release No. 0274.01 Pete Pierce (202) 720-6767
Alisa Harrison (202) 720-4623

by
Under Secretary Mark Rey
Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment Appeals
Dec. 27, 2001

"Yesterday I completed my examination of the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment appeals to determine if departmental discretionary review of Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth's Nov. 16 appeal decision is warranted.

"I affirm Chief Bosworth's decision and his instructions to the Pacific Southwest regional forester. Therefore, I will not conduct a discretionary review. I have returned the chief's appeal decision to the agency to implement in accordance with his instruction to the regional forester to reexamine certain aspects of the forest management plan.

"I am confident that the regional forester will put forth an aggressive plan to respond to the chief's decision and that he will continue to engage the public through an open, cooperative process. I am also confident that the regional forester's action plan will address a number of issues raised in the appeals that I reviewed.

"The Sierra Nevada Framework would not have been possible without the hard work of many Forest Service employees, interested citizens, governmental agencies and a host of others.

"I am grateful to each person who had a part in this activity and wholeheartedly encourage all participants to remain engaged throughout the process of refining, implementing and, where necessary, amending the plan."

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