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Procedures for Review, Clearance, and Release at USDA's Economic Research Service





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Abstract

Publication in Economic Research Service reports, in scientific and academic journals, and in other data and information products is central to the ERS mission. The ERS publishing process ensures that products meet the objectives of high-quality and timely economic analysis, transparent explanation of methods, objective interpretation of results, and effective communication to the intended audience. This document outlines the peer review and clearance procedures used by ERS to satisfy the high standards expected from one of the Federal Government's 13 principal statistical agencies.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Publication in ERS reports, in scientific and academic journals, and in other data and information products is central to the ERS mission. Consistent with ERS's role as one of the Federal Government's principal statistical agencies, information and analyses provided by ERS staff are expected to meet very high standards for quality, transparency, utility, and objectivity.

The research we publish in USDA-released products represents information from the Federal statistical system and is regulated as such. The peer review and clearance procedures outlined in this document have been adopted and continue to be modified to satisfy the high standards expected from one of the Federal Government's 13 principal statistical agencies.

Federal Standards, Directives, and Regulations

As a principal statistical agency, ERS provides data and analyses that must satisfy standards established through governmentwide and Departmental regulations and guidelines to preserve the public's trust in the accuracy, objectivity, and integrity of information provided by the entire Federal statistical system. ERS's data collection, research, and dissemination activities are guided by the National Research Council's Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency, and nearly all are subject to several directives and other standards issued by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). ERS reports are also subject to USDA's peer review and clearance policy. The most recent USDA effort to strengthen the Federal information system is outlined in Departmental Regulation 1074-001: Scientific Integrity.

ERS Review, Clearance, and Release Process

ERS provides information to the public through a variety of vehicles, including ERS research reports, special outlook reports, outlook newsletters, Amber Waves, and the ERS Web site. Our publishing process aims to ensure that our products meet the objectives of high-quality and timely economic analysis, transparent explanation of methods, objective interpretation of results, and effective communication to the intended audience. The appropriate extent and depth of review depends on the content and intended audience of the particular output.

To satisfy governmentwide standards and to ensure the quality of its reports, ERS requires that all substantively new material—our research report series and our special outlook reports—be reviewed by qualified peers. These are experts who possess the background, perspective, and technical expertise to provide an objective and meaningful assessment of the output's substantive content and clarity of communication. The responsibility for overseeing and coordinating the peer review process rests with ERS's nine-member Peer Review Coordinating Council (PRCC), following a detailed set of established procedures. The PRCC's functions include establishing clear criteria for publication of reports in each ERS report series in terms of quality of research, neutrality of language, and communication of findings. The PRCC also establishes Agency-level review processes after the peer review process is completed.

The PRCC is composed of the Product Coordinators from each of the three program divisions and the Publishing Services Branch (PSB) Chief; the Outlook Coordinator; a temporary staff member from each program division; and an administrative staff person from PSB. Program

division Branch Chiefs also play a key role in the peer review process, approving manuscripts to be submitted for peer review and forwarding names of potential peer reviewers.

After appropriate peer review and revision have been completed, the manuscripts of research reports and special outlook reports are submitted for Agency clearance. Clearance focuses primarily on policy sensitivity, effective communication, and neutrality of language and follows an established process. Some research reports require interagency clearance if the contents are closely related to the work of another agency or agencies—as specified by Departmental regulations. Also in accordance with Department regulations, all USDA publications receive Departmental clearance—research reports by the Office of Communications, and special outlook reports by the World Agricultural Outlook Board.

ERS also follows a specific process for agency review, clearance, and release of each of its other product types: outlook newsletters, Amber Waves (AW) magazine, and Web site content. The procedures focus on ensuring quality, accuracy, and timeliness. AW articles are generally based on peer-reviewed research, but if new research is presented, the articles undergo a peer review process similar to ERS research reports.

ERS strives to ensure that interested USDA officials are kept apprised of ERS's publishing intentions as products are prepared for release. This effort includes quarterly meetings with officials announcing publishing plans for research reports, special outlook reports, AW features, and major data products. ERS also provides embargoed copies of reports after clearance to relevant senior officials and briefings on report findings, if requested.

In the event that a substantive error is detected in a disseminated information product (research report, market analysis and outlook report, data product, interactive map, or AW content), ERS will make a correction and report changes on an errata page on the Agency Web site and in a prominent place in the online product. The errata process is aimed at assuring customers that the Agency makes every effort to provide timely and reliable information.

Publishing@ERS

Procedures for Review, Clearance, and Release at USDA's Economic Research Service

Introduction

Publication in Economic Research Service (ERS) reports, in scientific and academic journals, and in other data and information products is central to the ERS mission. Consistent with ERS's role as one of the Federal Government's principal statistical agencies, information and analyses provided by ERS staff are expected to meet high standards for quality, transparency, utility, and objectivity. ERS authors rely on experience and expertise, as well as access to a unique combination of data resources, to bring unique and important insights to food, agricultural, and rural economic issues. While a key part of the ERS mission is to inform policymakers on issues of relevance, the Agency's products are free of opinion, bias, or recommendations. Staff involved in planning, writing, editing, and reviewing products for publication coordinate their efforts to produce timely information and data that are scientifically and technically accurate, strictly policy-neutral, and consistent with customers' expectations of objectivity (see appendix).

The research ERS employees publish in USDA-released products represents information from the Federal statistical system and is regulated as such. This guide outlines the Federal regulations that apply to ERS publishing and the process for review, clearance, and release of information products by ERS authors.

Federal Standards, Directives, and Regulations

Overview

As a principal statistical agency, ERS provides data and analyses that must satisfy standards established through governmentwide and Departmental regulations and guidelines to preserve the public's trust in the accuracy, objectivity, and integrity of information provided by the entire Federal statistical system. ERS's data collection, research, and dissemination activities are guided by the Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency,¹ developed by the National Research Council's Committee on National Statistics, and are subject to directives and other standards issued by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in its role as coordinator of the Federal statistical system. In addition, the Information Quality Act requires all Federal agencies to maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information provided to the public. OMB's related governmentwide guidelines on information quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity² require that each agency:

- Maintain its commitment to using the best available science and statistical methods;
- Subject information, models, and analytic results to independent peer review by qualified experts, when appropriate;
- Disseminate its data and analytic products with a high degree of transparency about the data and methods to facilitate its reproducibility by qualified third parties; and
- Ensure that the presentation of information is comprehensive, informative, and understandable.

Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review

As indicated above, peer review is critical to ensure that the quality of published information meets the standards of the scientific community. Furthermore, since ERS reports are intended to inform public and/or private decisionmaking, nearly all of our reports are subject to OMB's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review³ requirements for "influential" scientific information. This bulletin spells out the need for arms-length reviews by technical experts inside and outside Government, combined with transparent and publicly available peer review plans for each report and clearly understood procedures for correcting errors in previously released reports—all to build confidence in the Agency's commitment to information quality.

¹Available at: http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=11252.

²USDA's adaptation of these guidelines, USDA Information Quality Activities: General Requirements, can be found at: <https://www.ocio.usda.gov/policy-directives-records-forms/information-quality-activities>.

³2664 Federal Register Vol. 70, No. 10, January 14, 2005. See also, USDA Information Quality Activities: Scientific Research Guidelines/Peer Review, at <https://www.ocio.usda.gov/policy-directives-records-forms/guidelines-quality-information/scientific-research>.

Statistical Policy Directive Number 4

Because ERS provides statistical information, the Agency is also covered by OMB's Statistical Policy Directive Number 4,⁴ which identifies the procedures intended to ensure that statistical products (defined broadly enough to encompass most ERS reports) released to the public adhere to data quality standards at every step in their production, from data collection through equitable, policy-neutral, and timely release of information to the general public.

Departmental Regulation 1401-001: Publications Review/Clearance Policy

To help ensure that USDA publications are informative, understandable, and transparent, Departmental Regulation 1401-001: Publications Review/Clearance Policy⁵ dictates the post-peer review clearance process for USDA-issued reports. These regulations outline the interagency review and Departmental clearance process for all ERS reports and any other product authored by ERS staff that purports to interpret USDA policies or programs. While written to cover Office of Communications clearance of ERS research reports, these general requirements also apply to the Agency's outlook reports and newsletters cleared through the World Agricultural Outlook Board.

Departmental Regulation 1074-001: Scientific Integrity

The most recent effort to strengthen the Federal information system is outlined in Departmental Regulation 1074-001: Scientific Integrity.⁶ By encouraging Government scientists to embrace professional standards of excellence in their research, while also protecting that research from inappropriate influence by political appointees, the regulation aims to increase both the creation of, and reliance on, sound science in government. As such, it builds on previous regulations requiring Federal research to meet standards of quality (producing products that are objective, accurate, transparent, and clearly articulated) through established review and clearance procedures. The regulation also encourages open communication of scientific findings that meet these quality standards without fear of political interference.

⁴ 12622 Federal Register Vol. 73, No. 46, March 7, 2008. 12622 Specific ERS releases may also be covered by Statistical Policy Directive Number 3, concerned with the release of principal economic indicators; 38932 Federal Register Vol. 50, No. 186, September 25, 1985.

⁵ <https://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/departmental-regulation-1410-001>.

⁶ <https://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/departmental-regulation-1074-001>. Also embedded in USDA's Scientific Integrity policy is the need to satisfy Departmental regulations on research misconduct (see, USDA Intramural Research Misconduct Policies and Guidelines, DR-2401-001, <https://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/departmental-regulation-2401-001> and ethics (e.g., USDA Office of Ethics. Ethics Issues Related to USDA Scientists, Issuance No. 09-1, <https://www.ethics.usda.gov/rules/issuances/09-1-scientists.htm>).

ERS Review, Clearance, and Release Process

Overview

ERS provides information to the public through a variety of vehicles, including ERS research reports, special outlook reports, outlook newsletters, Amber Waves, and the ERS Web site. While the intended audiences for each of these products can vary (see page 6, “ERS Products”), the overriding objectives for all such outputs are high-quality and timely economic analysis, transparent explanation of methods, objective interpretation of results, and effective communication to the intended audience. Our publishing process aims to ensure that these goals are met.

The appropriate extent and depth of review depends on the output’s content and the intended audience. For example, the official release of new research results on a sensitive topic requires more careful review than nonsensitive material. Authors work with their Branch Chiefs and division offices to determine appropriate review.

The Agency’s four Product Coordinators—one from each of the economic divisions plus an outlook Product Coordinator from the Markets and Trade Economics Division (MTED)—play a key role in the publishing process. The Product Coordinators serve on the nine-member Peer Review Coordinating Council (PRCC), which coordinates peer reviews of all research reports. In addition to their responsibilities in the PRCC process, each economic division’s Product Coordinator, in coordination with the PSB Branch Chief, shepherds manuscripts through the post-PRCC clearance and publication process. Product Coordinators also are responsible for clearing other types of outputs, including presentations, journal articles, and book chapters. Product Coordinators verify that these outputs contain appropriate material, are policy-neutral, and include disclaimers when necessary to distinguish Federal Government research from research done by Federal employees (see p. 7, “Peer Review Process: Roles and Responsibilities”).

The Peer Review Process

To satisfy governmentwide standards and to ensure the quality of its reports, ERS requires that all substantively new material—our research report series and our special outlook reports—be reviewed by qualified peers who possess the background, perspective, and technical expertise to provide an objective and meaningful assessment of the output’s substantive content and clarity of communication. Reports that discuss the programs or policies of other Federal agencies must also be reviewed by the relevant program agencies for technical accuracy.

Role of the Peer Review Coordinating Council (PRCC)

The PRCC oversees the review and clearance process for each research report series (Economic Research Reports, Economic Information Bulletins, Technical Bulletins, and Economic Briefs) and special outlook reports. These peer-reviewed reports are often the basis for web content and Amber Waves articles. Peer review is done before these reports move into Agency clearance, editing, and production. The PRCC also establishes Agency-level review processes with the goals of providing high-quality, timely reviews, maintaining a permanent record of each manuscript’s technical review, and ensuring a transparent process for authors and managers to track the status of ERS manuscripts under review.

Council Structure. The PRCC comprises nine members. Product Coordinators (and the outlook Product Coordinator) from the three program divisions and the PSB Branch Chief serve as permanent members. A staff representative from each program division serves as a temporary member. Finally, an

administrative staff person from PSB is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Council (maintaining the electronic tracking system, handling payments to reviewers, updating various forms, etc.).

Council Responsibilities. The PRCC, which meets biweekly, is responsible for coordinating formal review and balancing timeliness with thoroughness of review. The PRCC receives draft manuscripts from Branch Chiefs, who have worked with authors to respond to in-house reviewers' comments and have approved revised manuscripts at the branch level. Specific responsibilities of the PRCC include:

- Establishing clear criteria for publishing in each ERS report series in terms of quality of research, neutrality of language, and communication of findings;
- Coordinating technical (peer) reviews in consultation with the Branch Chief(s) and providing clear guidance to Branch Chief(s) on issues raised during the review process (Branch Chiefs retain their responsibility to work with authors to address comments);
- Providing ERS staff with information on the status of draft manuscripts during the review process; and
- Making recommendations to Division Directors for approval or disapproval of PRCC-reviewed manuscripts for consideration as Departmental publications prior to editing and clearance.

Peer Review Procedures

The following steps indicate how these responsibilities are implemented:

- The Branch Chief(s) emails a double-spaced Word document of the complete manuscript to the PRCC's administrative staff person with copies to the relevant division Product Coordinator(s) and Division Director(s), stating that the manuscript is ready for review as an ERS publication. The names and contact information of recommended reviewers are included. The email format for this step is available through the in-house intranet, ConnectERS, at <http://connecters/content/2646>.
- The administrative staff member prepares the manuscript for review (removes authors' names, adds line numbers, etc.) and logs the information into the Editorial Express tracking software.
- The PRCC Chair assigns a Council member to assess the manuscript's readiness for external review.
- If that Council member determines that the manuscript is not ready for review, and the PRCC agrees, the manuscript is returned to the Branch Chief within 10 working days. The assigned Council member also can propose a pre-edit by PSB to address issues not directly related to the quality of the underlying analysis.
- If the report is deemed ready for review, the PRCC selects reviewers. Usually, the manuscripts are sent to two external reviewers who are familiar with the subject matter, to one internal reviewer, and to technical reviewers from any relevant agencies. The request for review includes a general purpose statement for the series (i.e., Economic Briefs) and provides reviewers with general directions for providing feedback. The Council generally requests that review comments be returned within 4 weeks for research reports and 2 weeks for special outlook reports. The Council member sends the manuscript to reviewers and follows up with reminders, if necessary. This process provides for a double-blind review: reviewers receive a draft report without the authors' names, and a reviewer may choose to remain anonymous.

ERS Products

ERS Web site—www.ers.usda.gov. The ERS Web site functions as the primary source of ERS information and research on food, farming, natural resources, and rural America for a broad audience of public and private decisionmakers and their staffs, as well as researchers, the media, and the public. The Web site serves as a gateway to all publicly available ERS products. Topic pages provide information on a large number of issues. Data products offer detailed data in downloadable formats.

Amber Waves—Provides nontechnical coverage of ERS research on the economics of food, farming, natural resources, and rural America targeted toward a primary audience of public and private decisionmakers and their staffs, as well as a general audience. The online magazine's content is drawn primarily from existing ERS publications or Web site materials.

Economic Briefs (EB)—Present timely findings and their implications for a primary audience of public and private decisionmakers and their staffs. These short and nontechnical reports list findings and implications of currently relevant economic information or research by ERS that often draw upon more technical published research, including ERS reports and other peer-reviewed publications by ERS authors. As such, they may describe all or a portion of the results from a single publication or from multiple publications.

Economic Information Bulletins (EIB)—Present new economic information in a concise format to public and private decisionmakers and their staffs, as well as other nontechnical audiences. This type of publication provides economic information of a more specialized or indepth nature (or for a more specific audience or purpose) than that included in Amber Waves or on the ERS Web site, and with less analysis or interpretation than the Economic Research Report series. EIBs are nontechnical and are flexible in format, usually including numerous charts and maps.

Economic Research Reports (ERR)—Present original economic analysis, findings, and implications primarily for public and private decisionmakers and their staffs and for researchers. This type of report is distinguished from an EIB by its original analytical content and its emphasis on new findings and implications. An ERR might include some technical details in the main body of the report, with additional technical detail presented in an appendix.

Technical Bulletins (TB)—Used to document models employed in economic policy analysis or econometric estimates and data generated by technical models. The information in these publications is used primarily by other economists and researchers.

Special Outlook Reports—Present new economic information and/or analysis related to the forces shaping commodity markets, financial and agricultural input markets, and trade for public and private decisionmakers and their staffs. These reports are differentiated from EIBs and outlook newsletters by their indepth analytical focus on specific domestic or international market developments that affect the medium or longer term market outlook. Special outlook reports are cleared by the World Agricultural Outlook Board (WAOB).

Outlook Newsletters—Complement the release of USDA's World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) by providing more detailed analysis and data on the short-term outlook for specific U.S. and global commodity markets. Outlook newsletters are reviewed and cleared by the WAOB.

Peer Review Process: Roles and Responsibilities

Peer Review Coordinating Council (PRCC): The PRCC oversees the peer review process, including providing guidance to the Branch Chief at this stage. The roles and duties of PRCC members are detailed below.

Author: The author(s) of a research report—or special outlook report—delivers a manuscript that is professional both in content and style to the respective Branch Chief. An author will work with his/her Branch Chief to coordinate in-house review before submission to the PRCC. Authors are expected to consider reviewer comments seriously and to respond in a professional and timely manner (either accepting the reviewer suggestions or explaining why they were not accepted).

Branch Chief: The Branch Chief reviews the submitted report and works with the authors to revise the report according to his/her review and the reviews provided by the in-house review process. Once the Branch Chief is satisfied with the status of the report, he/she will submit the manuscript to the PRCC (see p. 5 for more specific instructions) along with a list of potential peer reviewers. The list of suggested reviewers should include at least three professionals from outside institutions, at least two ERS reviewers, as well as reviewers from relevant USDA agencies. The Branch Chief also reviews report revisions prior to resubmission to the PRCC.

PRCC Editor: The assigned PRCC editor manages the peer review process, communicates review comments to the author and Branch Chief, and makes recommendations to the PRCC regarding the publication or rejection of reports.

Division Director: After a report has been cleared by the PRCC, the Division Director (or designee) receives a copy of the report from the Branch Chief, along with the clearance form (ERS-31). Once the Division Director is satisfied with the status and content of the report, he/she signs the ERS-31 form, approving the report for editing.

- The assigned Council member may request a technical review of the manuscript from relevant agencies (distinct from the formal interagency policy review process, which may be requested later in the clearance process).
- Once reviews are received, the assigned Council member briefs the full PRCC on the tenor of the review. At this point, the PRCC decides, based on the review, whether to return the manuscript for revision or reject the manuscript.
 - If the manuscript is returned for revision, the assigned Council member returns review comments to the authors and the Branch Chief with guidance for revision.
 - If the manuscript is rejected, the assigned Council member meets with the Branch Chief to convey why the manuscript is not suitable for publication and the review process ends.
- The author(s) works (with his/her Branch Chief's guidance) to address the reviewers' comments and document their responses. When ready, the author(s) and Branch Chief meet with the assigned Council member to discuss the comments and revisions. The author(s) prepares a statement of response to each of the reviewers' comments.
- Revisions may be sent out for further review at the assigned Council member's discretion.

- When all agree that the revisions are satisfactory, the assigned Council member takes the manuscript to the PRCC for approval. (If the assigned Council member is not the relevant division's Product Coordinator, the Product Coordinator also reads the manuscript at this stage, prior to Council approval, to identify any clearance concerns.)
- To satisfy OMB reproducibility requirements, once the PRCC approves a manuscript, copies of the computer program(s) used to complete the analyses, along with any nonconfidential data, are submitted to the division's Product Coordinator. These materials are stored in a restricted-access drive on the LAN should someone ever need to reproduce the report's results.
- After PRCC approval, the clearance package is signed by the Branch Chief(s) and sent to the relevant Division Director(s). Once approved by the Division Director (or designee), the manuscript is then sent to PSB for editing and follows the existing process (outlined below) for final clearance by the Division Director, ERS Administrator, and USDA's Office of Communications/World Agricultural Outlook Board.

Clearance/Release of Research Reports and Special Outlook Reports

Clearance. After peer review, there are several clearance steps that must be completed for research reports (ERRs, EIBs, TBs, and EBs) and special outlook reports before they may be approved for public release.

Agency clearance. Manuscripts are submitted for Agency clearance after appropriate peer review and revision have been completed. Clearance focuses primarily on policy sensitivity, effectiveness of communication, and neutrality of language. All ERS outputs must be cleared by the relevant Branch Chief(s) and Division Director(s) or their designees before public release. Outputs with authors in more than one branch require clearance by the Branch Chief of the lead author. Similarly, outputs with authors in more than one division require clearance by the Division Director (or designee) of the lead author. All Departmental reports are also cleared by the ERS Administrator.

The complete Agency clearance package consists of:

- Standard cover letter to the Administrator,
- Signed copy of ERS-31 (clearance form),
- Copy of the manuscript to be cleared,
- Supplemental Information form providing answers to standard OC questions about the report,
- Metadata/social media form, and
- Signed AD-159 (Interagency Clearance, if apt).

Interagency clearance. Before a research report is cleared by the ERS Administrator, it may require interagency clearance (through a formal interagency policy review and clearance process). Departmental regulations specify that manuscripts “related closely to the work, programs, or policies of another agency” must be reviewed by that agency before release. While the PRCC may request a technical review from relevant agencies, formal policy review often is requested following PRCC approval. PSB sends such requests to the other agency’s publications control officer, who arranges for the review and returns the comments to ERS, either on the AD-159 form or in an email.

Outline of ERS Review and Clearance Process

Economic Research Reports, Economic Information Bulletins,
Technical Bulletins, Economic Briefs, and Special Outlook Reports

1. Author’s Branch Chief submits draft report to ERS Peer Review Coordinating Council (PRCC)
2. PRCC obtains double-blind reviews from technical specialists in other agencies and research peers in ERS and outside government
3. Author responds to reviewers’ comments; PRCC evaluates author’s responses to reviewers and recommends Agency clearance
4. Initial clearance decision by senior ERS managers
5. Edited by ISD staff, sent for interagency policy review, if necessary, and cleared by ERS division director and ERS Administrator
6. Clearance decision by the USDA’s Office of Communications (by the World Agricultural Outlook Board for special outlook reports)
7. Advance copies of all cleared reports and an invitation to be briefed are delivered to relevant Departmental officials and Agency Administrators 7-10 days before report’s scheduled release
8. Report is released
9. Any corrections must adhere to ERS errata policy

Pre-release Notifications

- Manuscripts undergoing peer review are identified on the ERS website.
- At regularly scheduled meetings with USDA’s Office of the Secretary and Office of Communications, ERS briefs participants on reports scheduled for release in the next 2-3 months. Updates to the ERS Publishing Plan are emailed to REE and Subcabinet officials weekly.
- One week before a report is released, ERS includes its title and abstract in the “ERS Weekly Report” sent to REE.

Departmental clearance. In accordance with Departmental regulations, all USDA publications receive Departmental clearance.

Monographs: Departmental reports (ERRs, EIBs, EBs, and TBs) are cleared by OC. For this phase of the process, the clearance package includes:

- Copy of the manuscript to be cleared,
- AD-59 (Request for Manuscript Review) form signed by the Division Director and designated Publications Control Officer and indicating the desired return date,
- Signed AD-159 (Interagency Manuscript Review) form if the manuscript discusses the programs or policies of other Federal agencies,
- Supplemental Information form providing answers to OC questions about the report, and
- Metadata/social media form.

Special outlook reports: Special outlook reports receive Departmental clearance through the WAOB, which is responsible for coordinating USDA interagency release of economic intelligence and commodity outlook information for U.S. and world agriculture. The clearance package for WAOB consists of:

- A copy of the manuscript to be cleared; and
- The names and affiliations of internal and external peer reviewers.

The WAOB review process ensures consistency with published USDA data and outlook reports and that the comments of USDA interagency reviewers have been addressed. Any review comments from the WAOB review and clearance process are addressed by ERS prior to final WAOB clearance.

Release. ERS strives to ensure that interested USDA officials are kept apprised of ERS's publishing intentions. Beyond the official reviews conducted by OC and the WAOB, the following protocols are built into our established publishing process:

- ERS's Peer Review Agenda (www.ers.usda.gov/about-ers/peer-reviews.aspx) for potentially influential scientific information is posted on the ERS Web site. This agenda is updated quarterly.
- ERS holds regularly scheduled meetings that include officials in OC, a representative from USDA's Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area, and the communications coordinators for USDA mission areas. The public affairs directors of each agency are also invited. An ERS Publication Plans document is distributed (which includes research reports, special outlook reports, Amber Waves features, and selected data products), and ERS representatives discuss upcoming releases. Weekly updates to the ERS Publication Plans document are emailed to Subcabinet officials and others.
- Two weeks before a report is released, ERS includes the title and abstract of the report in the "Forthcoming ERS Reports" document sent weekly to the OC communications coordinator for REE and in the "ERS Weekly Report" sent to REE.

- After a manuscript has been cleared by OC (or by the WAOB in the case of special outlook reports) and before it is released, ERS provides embargoed copies of the report and its summary to senior officials in relevant USDA agencies. These notification copies are accompanied by an offer to brief USDA staff on the report's findings upon request. These copies are distributed for information purposes only, not for additional review. Release of the report is embargoed for about 10 days to give recipients the time needed to examine the advance copy and request a briefing on the study's findings, if desired.

Review/Clearance/Release of Outlook Newsletters

ERS outlook newsletters, released monthly or quarterly for a range of commodities, provide time-sensitive data and analysis.

Review and clearance. Outlook newsletters are written, reviewed, and cleared within several days of the monthly release of the Departmental World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) report. These ERS outlook reports follow an expedited review and clearance process coordinated by WAOB. ERS outlook newsletter drafts are first reviewed internally by the relevant subject-matter experts. Final review and clearance is conducted by the WAOB chairpersons of the respective Interagency Commodity Estimates Committees.

Release. Each monthly outlook newsletter is released on the date specified in the ERS Outlook Calendar published at the beginning of each calendar year. No release of content is permitted before the official release date and time. All outlook reports are available on the date of release through the ERS Web site and at Cornell's Mann Library, which houses commodity reports from USDA. ERS notifies email subscribers of the week's releases each Friday.

Review/Clearance/Release of Amber Waves

Amber Waves (AW) covers the full range of ERS research and analysis. The online magazine allows ERS to expand the usefulness of its research by highlighting its relevance to contemporary events and by clearly communicating important program and policy implications to Government decision-makers, food and agricultural business leaders, and the media.

Review and clearance. Each AW article is reviewed by the author's Branch Chief and the division's AW Associate Editor and Product Coordinator. AW features that discuss the policies and programs of another agency are sent for interagency review. AW articles are generally based on peer-reviewed research and so do not require a separate technical review. However, when new research is presented, articles must undergo a peer review process similar to that required for ERS research reports. Internal and external review of new material is coordinated by the division's Product Coordinator in cooperation with the author's Branch Chief.

AW articles are submitted to PSB for editing and clearance after the appropriate reviews and revisions are completed. Clearance focuses primarily on policy sensitivity and effective communication. All articles edited by PSB must then be cleared by the author's Division Director. Articles with authors in more than one division require clearance by each author's Division Director.

AW articles also must be cleared by the ERS Administrator and then by OC. The complete clearance package sent to OC is identical to that for ERS research reports, described above.

Release. AW features are included in the ERS Publication Plans document discussed at quarterly OC/OSEC briefings and distributed weekly to Subcabinet officials. New AW material is released monthly on the ERS Web site.

Review/Clearance/Release of ERS Web Site Products

The ERS Web site is the Agency's primary communications vehicle, and the web publishing process is a logical extension of the Agency's communications planning and publishing process. Review of products featured on the Web site is critical to ensuring the quality and timeliness of information and alignment with Agency goals.

Review and clearance. Web content undergoes agency review and clearance, with appropriate peer, Agency, and interagency reviews prior to final release.

Each web product undergoes a series of reviews. The Web Managing Editor oversees web product development and serves as final authority for posting to the Web site following appropriate reviews. The Assistant Directors for Communications in the three research divisions and the Deputy (MTED) Director for Outlook coordinate reviews for substance and accuracy with the relevant ERS authors, Product Coordinators, and program-division management and approve final products for release. They also ensure regular reviews and updates of web pages and certify the content.

Release. Research reports, special outlook reports, outlook newsletters, and Amber Waves are published on the ERS Web site and follow the release procedures outlined in earlier sections. Other web products (topic pages, data products, mapping applications, multimedia, etc.) are generally released along with their corresponding publications. Products are created on a development (or staging) server accessible only to internal staff, where metadata are applied, and they are catalogued and mapped to relevant subjects/products on the Web site. The web products are reviewed by editors, designers, authors and their Branch Chief(s)—and, depending on the division and product—either by the Assistant Director for Communications or the Deputy (MTED) Director for Outlook. Once approved by the Web Managing Editor, web products are released to the public Web site.

Correcting Errors in Publicly Released ERS Products

The transaction costs of making a correction are lower for a digital publication than for a print publication, but digital corrections should not be taken lightly. Each correction of published content reflects on the quality of ERS research and analysis, as well as on the quality of an author's work. The ERS Errata Policy (see page 14) supplements the standards for objectivity and integrity described in OMB's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review. ERS differentiates between the procedures for correcting a publication versus a data product (e.g., table, chart, web query application, or interactive map). Not all statistical and research agencies feature an errata page such as the one ERS posts on its Web site (<https://www.ers.usda.gov/about-ers/information-quality/ers-error-correction-policy/errata.aspx>), but we feel it is important to assure customers that we make every effort to provide accurate and reliable information and to provide transparency regarding any changes they might see in our products subsequent to release.

ERS Correction Process

Decisions to revise a publication or data product and post an errata notice are made by ERS management. Consistent with other statistical agencies, ERS makes spelling and typographical corrections without errata, but these are also approved by the Administrator.

1. When a post-release error is discovered (including typos), the following division representatives are immediately notified, along with the appropriate Branch Chief and Division Director:
 - a. Research reports and Amber Waves: Product Coordinator
 - b. Outlook reports: Outlook Coordinator
 - c. Data and other web products: Web Steering Committee representative.
2. The division representative sends an email to the Administrator, with cc's to Branch Chiefs of ISD's Publishing Services and Web Services Branches (PSB and WSB), describing both the error and the correction.
3. The Administrator decides whether the correction should be made and whether an erratum is needed.
4. The division representative gives the PSB or WSB Branch Chiefs the revised copy and the errata statement for the ERS Web site errata page and the product's index page. Corrections are made as follows:
 - a. Research reports and Amber Waves: Add a statement to the report's contents page (online page and in the PDF).
 - b. Amber Waves: Add a statement on the affected page of the article.
 - c. Outlooks: Add a "sticky note" to the first page of the PDF, describing corrections. Add the same note to the web page (stays up until new content replaces it). Note: outlook newsletters follow a fast-track process of immediately making the change online simultaneously to notifying the Administrator.
 - Make the necessary correction and send the corrected version (including sticky note) and updated index page (noting the correction) for posting.
 - At the same time, send notification to the Office of the Administrator (OA); add the item to the errata log on the Web site, and post the updated product, index page, and errata page.
 - d. Data and other web products: Add a statement to the data product index page and to the Microsoft Excel file.
5. PSB and the author work together to ensure the correction is made. Both the division representative and the PSB Branch Chief review the correction, which is then posted.
6. PSB ensures that the correction is included on the Agency Web site errata page (which remains in place as a running log).
7. The WSB Branch Chief ensures any errata information is included in the weekly emails ERS sends to customers about new products.

ERS Errata Policy

In the event that a substantive error is detected in a published information product (research report, market analysis and outlook report, Amber Waves, data product, or interactive map), ERS will make a correction.

- ERS publications (research reports, market analysis and outlook reports) and Amber Waves will be corrected as soon as possible after an error is discovered. If the information in question is factually incorrect, or presented in a manner that is subject to misinterpretation by the reader, a correction statement will be issued on the errata page on the ERS web site, on the product's index page, and in the product itself.
- ERS data products (tables, charts, dynamic applications, and interactive maps) and other web products will be corrected as soon as possible after an error is discovered. A correction is different from a data update, whereby numbers are revised to incorporate more recent source information, which will be reflected in the next update cycle. The frequency of updates varies by data product, and updates are noted on the ERS calendar. A correction notice will be posted on the errata page, on the product's index page, and on any files (Excel, HTML, PDF) containing the corrected data. The notices will remain with the data until the next update.

www.ers.usda.gov/about-ers/information-quality/ers-error-correction-policy.aspx

Clearance of Other Publications by ERS Authors

As part of their research duties at ERS, researchers often publish academic journal articles and book chapters, as well as conference papers, posters, and slide sets that are presented at both internal and external events. All of these materials are reviewed and cleared by ERS division-level management.

All research products authored by ERS staff are required to be policy-neutral and should ensure that any descriptions of USDA programs and policies are accurate. Reviews of "other publications" are not as focused on technical accuracy as those conducted for official ERS publications. Instead, author(s) and their Branch Chief(s) generally arrange for peer review of the research. The lead ERS author then submits a draft copy of the paper, poster, or presentation slide set, together with a signed clearance form (ERS-31) to his/her Branch Chief who reviews it for factual correctness, readability, and presentation style. The Branch Chief submits the draft copy to the division Product Coordinator for policy review and clearance. Although conference papers, posters, journal articles, and other "outside" publications are produced as part of the authors' research time, the findings do not go through Departmental clearance, so OMB requires a disclaimer clearly signifying that the findings are not official USDA-released information.⁷ After the publication has been reviewed by the division Product Coordinator, it is cleared through signature on the clearance form by the Division Director or designee.

⁷A proper disclaimer states the following: The views expressed here are those of the authors and cannot be attributed to ERS or the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Appendix—Using Neutral and Objective Language in Science and Technical Writing at ERS (applies to all ERS output)

ERS publications serve multiple objectives, including provision of information that can affect public policies and programs or that evaluates the impact of food and agricultural policies and programs. However, because ERS is a research and statistical agency, it is not appropriate for ERS publications to advocate a specific policy, and in almost all cases, such statements would go beyond the data and analysis presented.

As a Federal statistical agency ERS must provide information that is relevant to issues of public policy, while maintaining credibility among data and research users. This requires a strong position of independence with a clear distinction made between statistical information and analysis on the one hand and policy interpretations of such information on the other. The National Research Council's Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency provides additional information on this topic.

ERS authors may draw connections between their findings and official USDA policies but must do so without making specific policy recommendations.

Examples of writing about policy relevance are provided below.

Not acceptable: "Therefore, this analysis is timely as a reminder to public health and nutrition organizations to encourage parents to continue to apply for and use WIC benefits even after children are no longer drinking infant formula."

Acceptable alternative: "This analysis shows more economically advantaged households are more likely to delay entry into the program or exit after a child turns one year of age."

Not acceptable: "Nutrition educators and WIC program coordinators working with pregnant women can apply these findings in practice, as they provide further evidence of the benefits of healthy food choices."

Acceptable alternative: "These findings provide further evidence of the benefits of improved food choices."

Not acceptable: "Policymakers should take into account that reduction in labor supply has negative effects on the overall economy."

Acceptable alternative: "Moreover, this reduction in labor supply has negative effects on the overall economy."

Not acceptable: "In order to boost payments to producers, the level of revenue aggregation used to trigger ACRE payments should be changed."

Acceptable alternative: "Changing the level of revenue aggregation used to trigger payments in a program like ACRE would alter expected payments and the reduction in farm revenue risk from the program."

Not acceptable: "However, the importance of government payments as a percent of net cash farm income varies by ERS production region."

Acceptable alternative: "However, the ratio of government payments to net cash farm income varies by ERS production region."

Not acceptable: "Excessive or poorly timed fertilizer application can cause nutrient runoff from farms into wells, waterways, wetlands, and estuaries."

Acceptable alternative: "Excessive or poorly timed fertilizer application can contribute to nutrient runoff from farms into wells, waterways, wetlands, and estuaries."

Not acceptable: "Policymakers have been concerned about supporting small and midsized farmers."

Acceptable alternative: "Federal initiatives have been developed recently to support small and midsized farmers."