



## Office of Program Policy Analysis And Government Accountability



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### Follow-Up Report on the Agriculture Management Information Center

#### Abstract

The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has taken steps the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability recommended to improve the Agriculture Management Information Center (AGMIC) including surveying department staff for customer satisfaction and establishing performance measures.

#### Purpose

In accordance with s. 11.45(7)(f), F.S., this follow-up report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in response to Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) Report No. 95-36, issued February 20, 1996. This report presents an assessment of the extent to which the department has addressed the findings and recommendations included in that report.

#### Background

The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Agriculture Management Information Center (AGMIC) is intended to assist in the effective and efficient delivery of services performed by the department. AGMIC provides data processing and computer services to the department's 11 operational divisions. These services include mainframe computer operations, application development, personal computer support, network services, and training. AGMIC is a bureau within the Division of Administration.

AGMIC is funded through general revenue and the department's General Inspection Trust Fund and Administrative Trust Fund. In Fiscal Year 1997-98, the Legislature appropriated \$7.2 million and authorized 53 positions for AGMIC.

#### Prior Findings

The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services relied on outdated and limited information technology resources (ITR) to support many of its regulatory programs.<sup>1</sup> Many of OPPAGA's prior reports noted that department managers frequently lacked critical information on program operations because automated data systems were inadequate or nonexistent. DACS's agency strategic plan for information resource management acknowledged that the department's computer systems were outdated and limited program effectiveness and efficiency. DACS was heavily dependent on mainframe applications that were difficult to maintain and update. Less than half the department's staff whose job functions would be enhanced by personal computers had been assigned computers.

DACS had initiated several projects to modernize its ITR systems. These projects would be costly and required a long-term commitment of resources and additional funding.

While DACS was planning many costly improvements to its ITR systems, it might not realize the full benefit of those improvements without careful design. Although

<sup>1</sup> ITR includes all assets needed for electronic data processing. It includes computer hardware, software, communications, facilities, services, personnel, maintenance, and training.

DACS's Agency Strategic Plan represented an improvement over its previous planning documents, the plan had several weaknesses such as not prioritizing projects and assuming AGMIC's future appropriations would be significantly higher than current funding levels.

DACS acknowledged the need to conduct a study to guide its overall ITR modernization efforts. However, the potential benefits of ITR improvements might not be realized unless the department resolved several weaknesses in its ITR management structure such as filling a vacant information resource manager position. Communications between AGMIC, the department's senior management, and division administrators had been limited, contributing to a perception that AGMIC was unresponsive to customer needs.

Developing a performance measurement system could strengthen AGMIC's operations. The limited number of ITR performance measures in AGMIC's Fiscal Year 1996-97 Legislative Budget Request focused on outputs, such as number of licenses issued, rather than outcomes (whether ITR helped department employees work more productively). AGMIC's measures did not include benchmark data necessary for comparing its performance over time and to other state data centers.

## Actions Taken

The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has taken the steps OPPAGA recommended to improve the Agriculture Management Information Center (AGMIC).

**Reengineering Study.** The 1996 Legislature appropriated \$178,000 to conduct an information systems study for the department. This study, completed in December 1997, assessed the department's telecommunications environment including hardware, software, information needs and processes, organizational structure, and systems infrastructure.

Another section examined what was needed by the department to attain its strategic objectives. A final section provides the specific recommended projects the department should undertake to address its most urgent information technology needs.

**Steering Committee.** A departmental information technology steering committee was established in August 1996. Consisting of senior managers, the committee will evaluate alternatives and establish strategic information systems directions. The committee has met to evaluate alternatives and establish strategic information systems directions on topics such as the Year 2000 problem and the prioritization of division applications projects.

**Surveys/Meetings.** The department has conducted one survey of division directors and plans to start surveying all department staff beginning in June 1998 to determine customer satisfaction. There have been some meetings with users on department priorities. The stated goal of AGMIC is to have quarterly meetings with each division to assess problems and assess how well AGMIC is meeting customer needs.

**Chief Information Officer.** The department appointed the chief of the Bureau of Agriculture Management Information Center as chief information officer on April 23, 1997. The stated purpose of this position is "to improve department-wide information technology resource capabilities."

**Performance Measures.** Performance measures have been developed with benchmark and baseline data being compiled so measures can be implemented to assess AGMIC's performance. These measures are expected to be included in Exhibit D-2 of the department's Fiscal Year 1999-2000 Legislative Budget Request.

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