



United States Department of Agriculture

# AMS VOICE STYLE GUIDE

ISSUED JANUARY, 2018

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Overview 3
- General Guidelines 3
- Writer Checklist 4
- Writing Principles 5

DRAFT - INTERNAL DISCUSSION ONLY

## OVERVIEW

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Office of Public Affairs has developed a variety of best practices for editing and submitting stories and materials to The AMS Voice weekly newsletter to improve consistency and appropriateness in the way AMS communicates to its employees.

This guide is intended to be used by anyone in AMS who is tasked with drafting stories for the newsletter.

### General Guidelines

These guidelines will help you plan and compose a story for The AMS Voice. The recommendations are organized by topics that should always be considered and/or addressed in content planning for your story.

As a general rule, and in compliance with the [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#), only plain language should be used for all communication materials, including newsletter submissions. Also, [Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) requires federal agencies to provide software and website accessibility to people with disabilities, including all communication materials and images.

## WRITER CHECKLIST

### THE WRITER WILL:

- Read the story from beginning to end.
- Obtain the necessary reference materials, and do any preliminary research that may be required to familiarize with the subject matter in general.
- Ensure that consistent terminology is used throughout the whole story.
- Proofread the draft, correcting any errors in grammar, spelling, or style and make sure the draft is coherent.
- Follow the U.S. Government Printing Office Style Manual, and the Associated Press Stylebook, as appropriate.
- Compare the corrected draft with the original file to ensure nothing has been inadvertently omitted or eliminated during the course of reworking and editing.
- Submit for review to the newsletter representative of your respective program.
- Collaborate with the representative to evaluate their recommended changes, discuss with them as needed, and modify the story to ensure accuracy.
- Once revised, the newsletter representative should submit the story to [AMSVoice@ams.usda.gov](mailto:AMSVoice@ams.usda.gov).

## STORY FORMATTING

### A. Length of Content

1. An average of 70-80 words maximum

### B. Font

1. Arial
2. Size: 10 point
3. Color: Black

### C. Title

1. Include short titles that describe the substance of the story

### D. Photos

1. Photos should be submitted as attachments (not in-text)
2. Include captions, as appropriate
3. List the names and programs of the people in the photographs
4. Do this:
  - a. "Caption: Pictured left to right, Jim Smith, Dairy Program; John Pitt, Specialty Crops Program; and Luis Torres, National Organic Program."

### E. Links

1. Include links for more information; especially, for events and trainings registrations

## CONTENT

### A. Audience

1. Indicate if the story is intended for Headquarter or Field employees

### B. Substance

1. Be brief but engaging
2. Include all important facts: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How
3. Double check factual information
4. Story in JPEG or PDF: Provide a word text version

### C. Personally Identifiable Information

1. Do not include:
  - a. Private/personal details
2. Exceptions:
  - a. Retirement
  - b. Promotion
  - c. Awards

### D. Names

1. Once the full name is stated, use first name reference

## DATES AND TIMES

### A. Dates:

1. Monday, January 1 or January 1
2. Do not add year, unless it's not in the current year of publication.

### B. Times:

1. Do this:
  - a. 6 a.m. or 6 p.m.
  - b. 6 - 8 p.m. or 6:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
2. Not this:
  - a. 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### A. Targeted to agency-wide audiences

### B. Include a call to action

### C. Contact Information

1. Name of point of contact
2. Telephone number
3. Email

### D. Reasonable Accommodations:

1. Include contact information

## ABBREVIATIONS

### A. Spell out abbreviations in the first reference

1. Do this: Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

## SUBMISSION PROCESS

### A. Timing

1. **Announcement:** Submit stories a week in advance of the event, at least
2. **Employee Engagement Activities:** Submit stories a week after the fact at the latest to maintain newsworthiness

### B. Schedule

1. **Deadline:** The AMS Voice is a weekly publication, typically on Wednesdays
  - a. Mondays at 12 p.m.
  - B. Holidays: Friday at 12 p.m.

# DRAFT - INTERNAL DISCUSSION ONLY

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.