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USDA OFFERS FREE CREDIT MONITORING TO FSA AND RD FUNDING RECIPIENTS

WASHINGTON, April 20, 2007 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will offer free credit monitoring for one year to people whose private identification information was exposed on a Federal Government website that is accessible to the public. The information was removed from the website immediately after USDA learned of the potential exposure. There is no evidence that this information has been misused. However, due to the potential that this information was downloaded prior to being removed, USDA will provide the additional monitoring service.

USDA became aware of the potential exposure of such information on April 13, when USDA was notified by a recipient of USDA funding that she was able to ascertain identifying information by viewing the website. All of the private identifying information was embedded in a larger number and therefore not immediately identifiable. The same day, all identification numbers associated with USDA funding were removed from the website.

USDA believes that immediately prior to April 13th, the website in question contained private identification information relating to approximately 47,000 individuals who receive USDA funding from the Farm Service Agency and USDA Rural Development. USDA has identified between 105,000 and 150,000 individuals whose private information has been entered into a federal government database at some time during the past 26 years. USDA is in the process of notifying, via registered mail, all 150,000 people whose information was exposed and offering them the opportunity to register for free credit monitoring for one year.

In an effort to avoid revealing information that could increase the vulnerability of this private data, USDA is not providing additional details about the website at this time, knowing the data has likely been downloaded by non-federal entities. USDA will provide additional details once the USDA funding recipients who are potentially impacted have had an opportunity to register for free credit monitoring.

USDA funding recipients who wish to take advantage of the credit monitoring offer will be provided with instructions for how to register. Any USDA funding recipient with questions may call **Enclosure 7**

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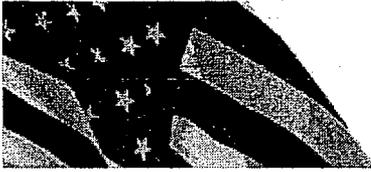
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1-800-FED-INFO (1-800-333-4636) or visit USA.gov. The call center operates from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (EDT), Monday-Friday.

Last Modified: 04/21/2007

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USDA Offers Free Credit Monitoring to Farm Services Agency and Rural Development Funding Recipients Q & A

- A. What Happened and How Does this Affect Me?
- B. What Should I Do?
- C. Receiving a Letter and Credit Monitoring
- D. What is USDA Doing about the Situation?

Topic A - WHAT HAPPENED AND HOW DOES THIS AFFECT ME?

A1. What Happened?

On April 13, USDA was notified that a recipient of USDA funding was able to ascertain private identifying information while viewing a government-wide website. All of the private identifying information was embedded in a larger number and therefore not immediately identifiable. The same day, all identification numbers associated with USDA funding were removed from the website.

USDA is in the process of notifying by letter all persons whose private identification information has been posted on the website and inviting them to sign up for free credit monitoring.

Initially, USDA estimated that as many as 150,000 individuals might be affected. That number included all individuals whose identification number could possibly contain private information. On Friday, April 20, USDA narrowed the number of individuals who might be affected to 63,000. USDA staff continued analysis of the identification numbers throughout the weekend and determined that approximately 38,700 actually contain private information. This completes the review of records posted on the government-wide website in question.

The 38,700 people affected were awarded funds through the Farm Service Agency (FSA) or USDA Rural Development (RD). The FSA programs involve approximately 35,000 of the individuals and are limited to: Seed Loans, Emergency Loans, Farm Ownership Loans, Apple Loans, Soil and Water Loans, and Horse Breeder Loans.

The Rural Development programs involve approximately 3,700 individuals and are limited to: Business and Industry Loans, Community Facilities Loans and Grants, Direct Housing Natural Disaster Loans and Grants, Farm Labor Housing Loans and Grants, Rural Rental Housing Loans, and Rural Rental Assistance Payments.

A2. What information was included?

All of the private identifying information posted on the web site was embedded in a larger number and therefore not immediately identifiable. The same day, all identification numbers associated with USDA funding were removed from the website.

A3. How do I know if my information was included?

USDA has been working to identify the individuals whose information has been posted on the website. USDA believes that the website in

question contained private identification information relating to individuals who receive USDA funding from the Farm Services Agency and USDA Rural Development. USDA is in the process of notifying, via mail, the approximately 38,700 people whose information might have been exposed and offering them free credit monitoring for one year.

Topic B - WHAT SHOULD I DO?

B1. What should I do to protect myself? Do I have to close my bank account or cancel my credit cards?

At this point there is no evidence that any missing data has been used illegally. However, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is asking all persons who may have been affected to be extra vigilant and to carefully monitor bank statements, credit card statements, and any statements relating to recent financial transactions, and to immediately report any suspicious or unusual activity. For tips on how to guard against misuse of personal information, visit the Federal Trade Commission website at <http://www.ftc.gov/>.

You do not have to close your bank account or cancel your credit cards. You should, however, take steps to protect yourself against identity theft. One way to monitor your financial accounts is to review your credit report. By law you are entitled to one free credit report each year. Request a free credit report from one of the three major credit bureaus - Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion - at <http://www.AnnualCreditReport.com> or by calling 1-877-322-8228.

The Department of Agriculture is offering one year of free credit monitoring to affected Farm Services Agency and Rural Development funding recipients, as described in the USDA press release at <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/s.7.0.A/7.0.1OB?contentidonly=true&contentid=2007/04/0105.xml>. USDA funding recipients who wish to take advantage of the credit monitoring offer will be provided with instructions for how to register. Any USDA funding recipient with additional questions may call 1-800-FED-INFO (1-800-333-4636). The call center operates from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (EDT), Monday-Friday.

B2. What is identity theft?

Identity theft occurs when your personal information is stolen and used without your knowledge to commit fraud or other crimes.

B3. I haven't noticed any suspicious activity in my financial statements, but what can I do to protect myself and prevent being victimized by credit card fraud or identity theft?

The Department of Agriculture strongly recommends that individuals closely monitor their financial statements and call FTC's Identity Theft Hotline at 1-877-438-4338 or visit them online at <http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft>.

B4. Should I reach out to my financial institutions or will the Department of Agriculture do this for me?

The Department of Agriculture does not believe that it is necessary to contact financial institutions or cancel credit cards and bank accounts, unless you detect suspicious activity.

B5. What should I do if I detect a problem with any of my accounts?

The Federal Trade Commission recommends the following four steps if you detect suspicious activity:

Step 1 – Contact the fraud department of one of the three major credit bureaus:

- Equifax: 1-800-525-6285; <http://www.equifax.com>; P.O. Box 740241, Atlanta, GA 30374-0241
- Experian: 1-888-EXPERIAN (397-3742); <http://www.experian.com>; P.O. Box 9532, Allen, Texas 75013
- TransUnion: 1-800-680-7289; <http://www.transunion.com>; Fraud Victim Assistance Division, P.O. Box 6790, Fullerton, CA 92834-6790

Step 2 – Close any accounts that have been tampered with or opened fraudulently.

Step 3 – File a police report with your local police or the police in the community where the identity theft took place.

Step 4 – File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission by using the FTC's Identity Theft Hotline:

- By telephone: 1-877-438-4338
- Online at <http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft>
- By mail at Identity Theft Clearinghouse, Federal Trade Commission, 600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington DC 20580.

B6. Where can I get more information?

The Department of Agriculture has set up a toll-free telephone number for individuals that features up-to-date news and information. Please call 1-800-FED-INFO (333-4636). Or visit <http://www.usda.gov> and www.USA.gov.

Topic C - RECEIVING A LETTER AND CREDIT MONITORING

C1. If I receive a letter, does that mean I am eligible for the free credit monitoring?

Yes. If you receive an official notification letter from the Department of Agriculture, you are eligible to activate one year of free credit monitoring. You will receive one letter that serves as your notification letter and a second letter that provides instructions for how to activate the credit monitoring.

C2. When I receive a letter, what do I need to do next?

The second letter you receive from the Department of Agriculture will contain specific instructions on how to activate your service.

C3. How do I know the letter I receive is the official USDA notification letter?

There are specific instructions unique to the USDA event and information to activate your credit monitoring. Call 1-800-FED-INFO or the contact information contained in the notification letter to verify the authentication of your letter.

Topic D - WHAT IS USDA DOING ABOUT THE

SITUATION?

D1. What is USDA doing about this?

USDA has previously bolstered efforts to protect private identification information by assigning a team of information security specialists to review the records of all 17 USDA agencies. USDA is now expediting and broadening the scope of its information security review.

Also, the Department of Agriculture is offering one year of free credit monitoring to Farm Services Agency and Rural Development funding recipients. USDA funding recipients who wish to take advantage of the credit monitoring offer will be provided with instructions for how to register. Any USDA funding recipient with additional questions may call 1-800-FED-INFO (1-800-333-4636). The call center operates from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (EDT), Monday-Friday.

D2. How is information being shared?

We are providing as much information as we have about the incident and alerting affected individuals of the situation. We are in the process of identifying who may have been affected so we can provide them more information, where possible.

D3. Will USDA send me a letter?

The USDA will send out individual notification letters to affected individuals to every extent possible.

D4. What will be done to prevent this from happening in the future?

USDA will bolster its efforts to safeguarding the use and release of private information.

Page Last Reviewed or Updated: May 29, 2007



If you have questions about the federal government:

Check our frequently asked questions, e-mail USA.gov, or call 1 (800) FED INFO (1-800-333-4636).

USA.gov™ is the U.S. government's official web portal:

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