

## **Questions for Gary Washington**

Chief Information Officer, U.S. Department of Agriculture

### **Questions from Chairman Gerald E. Connolly**

Subcommittee on Government Operations

May 25, 2022, Hearing: “Technology Modernization Fund: Rewriting Our IT Legacy”

1. The Department of Agriculture was one of the first to complete a project that paid back the Fund. How you were able to pay back this investment?

#### **USDA Response: Through a re-prioritization of budgeted funds**

2. As a customer of the Technology Modernization Fund (TMF), what would you like to know from the TMF Board about their reimbursement determinations that would be useful to you when you make decisions about which pathways you are going to pursue to modernize your department’s information technology (IT) systems?

**USDA Response: It would be beneficial if GSA TMF Board had a criterion established to assist Federal Agencies in determining upfront if TMF is appropriate for them to utilize for their IT modernization project. The established criteria would help Federal Agencies make informed and proactive decisions instead of waiting until their project proposal is submitted to GSA and then being advised midway or at the end of the review that your proposal will be at a certain repayment loan level, or it was approved as a grant.**

## Questions for Mr. Gary Washington

Chief Information Officer, U.S. Department of Agriculture

## Questions from Ranking Member Jody Hice

Subcommittee on Government Operations

May 25, 2022, Hearing: “Technology Modernization Fund: Rewriting Our IT Legacy”

1. In the December 2021 Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA) Scorecard, USDA received an “A” grade in the Modernizing Government Technology (MGT) Act category. This would mean that the USDA has an IT working capital fund (WCF) with a Departmental Chief Information Officer (CIO) who is in charge of IT decision-making. Please describe the structure of the WCF for the Committee, including, if possible, how this structure differs from the responsibilities accorded to CIOs and Chief Financial Officers at USDA *prior* to passage of the MGT Act and FITARA.

**USDA Response: Prior to receiving the A on the FITARA Scorecard, USDA had segmented the existing Working Capital Fund and management of the WCF was a joint decision-making process. During that time USDA gained experience in how an IT Working Capital Fund, managed by the CIO with the CIO as the sole decision maker, would work. The Department identified what dollars, above and beyond the TMF, could be considered IT Modernization funding and would go into the IT WCF. The CFO updated the WCF Departmental Regulation (DR), where the roles and responsibilities are defined, which clearly identify the CIO as the owner of the IT WCF. The CFO and CIO established processes and procedures requiring adherence to the DR. In addition, USDA, kept the CIO as Vice-Chairperson of the existing WCF Committee. The CIO provide the Executive Staff Officers and Mission Areas briefings on the establishment of the IT WCF.**

2. How has USDA reduced its number of legacy systems with the influx of funds from the at least four projects approved by the Technology Modernization Board (Board)?  
**USDA Response: USDA made tremendous progress in IT modernization efforts to streamline processes and increase efficiencies. Our modernization efforts helped to support farmers, ranchers and our food supply chain across the United States of America and the world while optimizing and securing our infrastructure. USDA with the help of the Department’s Enterprise Architecture will identify those legacy systems end of life and track the progress of reducing legacy systems. The four projects approved currently do not have systems turned off.**

With as much specificity as possible, please identify the older, legacy IT systems, that were eliminated or modernized, and the resulting cost savings realized to USDA.

**USDA Response: GSA approved five (5) USDA Technology Modernization Fund (TMF) projects - Agricultural Marketing Service Specialty Crops System Modernization, Farmers.gov Portal, Infrastructure Optimization and Cloud Adoption, Network Modernization (USDANet), and Network Monitoring, Detection, and Response.**

**A substantial amount of modernization will take place within USDA as a result of the approved TMF which will support decommissioning of legacy applications, elimination of capability gaps in IT assets, updating USDA's network infrastructure, and installing more robust cyber security threat hunting and analytical tools.**

**The completion of these projects will result in two proof-of-concepts for Common Conservation Systems in order to test a common enrollment process and a Robotics Process Automation (RPA) tool that will help reduce manual data entry. The approved projects will also replace legacy inspection systems, modernize and standardize business operations, consolidate cloud expertise, and improve, update, and consolidate network infrastructure.**

**USDA is projecting a cost avoidance of over \$730M over a 10 year period for the Network Modernization (USDANet) effort. As the projects continue to make progress with their implementations more information on additional cost savings and avoidance may be projected.**

3. How does the USDA define a legacy IT system? And how does this definition differ from other agency or government-wide definitions of a legacy IT system, if at all?

**USDA Response: Definition of a legacy system is captured in DR3185-001 Enterprise Architecture: [Enterprise Architecture | USDA](#)**

**Legacy System. A legacy system is identified as a system that is outdated or obsolete and may also be based on outdated technologies but is critical to day-to-day operations. A legacy system, in the context of computing, refers to outdated computer systems, programming languages, or application software that are used instead of available upgraded versions. A legacy system is also known as a legacy platform. (Source: Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014 (FISMA 2014))**

**Since it is sourced via FISMA 2014 it aligns government wide.**

4. In your written testimony, you described a "Farmer's.gov" USDA project that was awarded \$10 million in 2018. In 2020, the project was modified downward with \$6

million of the investment returned to the TMF. You explained in your testimony that, “the project was closed out prior to implementation in May 2021 because we found the project not ready for further development.”

- a. Why was the project stopped and what is being done to ensure the services that would have been provided by the completed USDA project are still being provided?

**USDA Response: USDA Leadership determined after reviewing the proof of concept for the Common Conservation System that additional process re-engineering would be required prior to further development of the technology solution for common enrollment processes for the two agencies. Because of the need for additional process re-engineering before development could continue, USDA made the decision in 2020 to reduce its requested TMF allocation so as not to tie up the limited TMF resources. The FSA and NRCS software targeted for the TMF-funded work remain operational, are being maintained and supporting services to USDA’s customers. No loss of services have occurred.**

- b. Given the post-TMF award determination that the project was not ready for further development, why did USDA fail to foresee prior to submitting this application that the project would not be successful?

**USDA Response: The project was developed in an incremental, agile approach so that as the project progressed USDA leadership and the TMF Board/Program Management Office could regularly assess progress and risks, measured against original project estimates, plans, and assumptions. In addition, the proof-of-concept was to inform decisions about further development. At the conclusion of the proof-of-concept, leadership reached a conclusion that additional process re-engineering, beyond what was originally planned, would be required. USDA subsequently proposed (and received approval for) scope changes to the TMF Board.**

5. Please describe USDA’s approach to the TMF application process before and after the May 2021 OMB funding guidance, which relaxed TMF award repayment requirements. To what extent did this OMB guidance impact USDA’s decision to apply for additional awards?

**USDA Response: Prior to May 2021 USDA Mission Areas and Staff Office would submit their TMF proposal directly to the TMF Board after being vetted and approved through their own internal processes. USDA now leverages a new Enterprise approach to the TMF proposal review process in which All TMF recommendations/request will go through the Department’s Enterprise Governance process (IAB then E-Board). They will require Secretary or Dept Secretary approval before submission to GSA. The new TMF process is as follows:**

1. **TMF proposals will start at the Agency Integrated Project Team (IPT).**
2. **TMF proposals will then require approval from the Mission Area Governance Board.**
3. **TMF proposals will then be assessed at the Department's Integrated Advisory Council (IAB) for a decision, and recommendation to the Executive Information Technology Investment Review Board (E-Board).**
4. **The E-Board will review all USDA's TMF proposals and provide final approval with concurrence from the Secretary.**
5. **USDA will send the approved TMF proposals to the GSA Technology Modernization Board (TMB).**
6. **The GSA TMB will evaluate the project proposals for funding in accordance with the Modernizing Government Technology (MGT) Act.**
7. **After GSA's TMB approves the Initial Proposals the Mission Area Integrated Project Team (IPT) will prepare the Full Proposal.**  
*If Initial Project Proposal is approved by GSA, repeat steps 1-6 for the Full Project Proposal.*
8. **If the TMB approves the Full Project Proposal (FPP) for funding, the GSA program office along with the agency IPT will finalize a written agreement.**  
*Written Agreements and TMF dispersants will require approval from USDA CIO and Deputy Chief Financial Officer.*
9. **USDA will capture approved proposal amount and milestones, in the Department's Portfolio Management tool.**
10. **Mission Area IPTs will establish reoccurring Touchpoints with the Department's Governance boards, which the Department will schedule and conduct prior to the GSA TMB's quarterly reviews of project milestones.**

6. What do you believe is the intent of the TMF and the purpose of the MGT Act? As currently administered by the Board, is the intent of the MGT Act being met

**USDA Response: As the mission states for the Technology Modernization Funds (TMF), the TMF intent is to enable agencies to reimagine and transform the way they use technology to deliver their mission and services to the American public in an effective, efficient, and secure manner. The intended purpose of the MGT Act was to address the inability to reduce the number of Legacy Systems across the Federal Government and increase the capabilities of Cybersecurity in defense of the nation. TO facilitate this effort the Technology Modernization Fund provides relatively quick access to capital to modernize Legacy Systems and enhance Cybersecurity capabilities outside the year plus timeframe it takes to get the FY budget approved. MGT Act implementations are being done. There are projects that do get approved. Strengthening the legacy systems traceability back to MGT Act would improve the implementation.**