

SUCCESS THROUGH WORKING TOGETHER:  
THE U. S. NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL LIBRARY'S APPROACH TO COOPERATIVE  
ACTIVITIES

Peggy J. Blake and Eleanor G. Frierson<sup>1</sup>  
U.S. National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, Maryland

ABSTRACT

Because of the increasing globalization of the agriculture sector, it is critical for the National Agricultural Library (NAL) of the United States to collaborate with many partners to achieve its mandate. The Library's work in collecting, preserving and making available agricultural information is fundamental to the continued well-being and growth of U.S. agriculture, and the development of food supplies for the U.S. and the world. National and international collaborations are vital to obtaining, organizing, and disseminating information to the global agricultural community. Since the early 1980's, NAL has coordinated an informal national network of public and private agricultural libraries and information centers. NAL's presence in the international agricultural information community is considered an essential part of its program. Collaborative partnerships with national and international organizations and other major research libraries worldwide are essential means to: (1) maximize access to information through innovative use of technology, (2) deliver information electronically to customers worldwide, and (3) preserve and protect agricultural information for future generations. NAL has had a long history of important accomplishments achieved through working with national and international partners. Examples of key partnerships, lessons learned, and plans and opportunities for future collaborations will be discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

The National Agricultural Library of the United States has been serving agriculture since 1862, when the U.S. Department of Agriculture was established. The U.S. Congress has designated NAL as the primary agricultural information resource of the nation and made NAL officially a National Library 1990 through Public Law 101-624, the "Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990."<sup>2</sup> The law ensures that the NAL serves both as a national library of the

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<sup>1</sup>Peggy J. Blake, Special Assistant to the Director and Eleanor G. Frierson, Deputy Director, at the U.S. National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, Maryland, USA (<http://www.nal.usda.gov>)

<sup>2</sup>*Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990*. U.S. Public Law 624. 101<sup>st</sup>

United States and as the Library of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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## 2. BENEFITS TO U.S. AGRICULTURE

National and international collaborations are vital to making information available and valuable to the global agricultural community. For example, invasive species are a serious and costly problem around the world. In the United States alone, about 20 federal agencies and all 50 states share responsibility and authority over some facet of managing the invasive species problem. The benefits to U.S. agriculture of improved information transfer in a global economy include:

- Σ Gaining knowledge of the institutional infrastructures which drive the information system within countries and how best to access them to speed the acquisition and delivery of information critical to the U.S. agricultural community.
- Σ Establishing, expanding, and strengthening organizational networks to facilitate future information transfer activities.
- Σ Identifying and making available previously unavailable unique bibliographic and non-bibliographic databases and other valuable information collections necessary to the work of U.S. agriculturalists.
- Σ Helping the U.S. agricultural research, education, and business communities assure an effective information base to sustain international competitiveness.

## 3. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The NAL engages in many national and international cooperative activities emphasizing cooperation in the worldwide collection and dissemination of agricultural information. The Library collaborates with national, regional and international organizations and other major research libraries worldwide to: (1) maximize access to information through innovative use of technology, (2) deliver electronically information to customers worldwide, and (3) preserve and protect agricultural information for future generations. Collaborative activities encompass several broad areas:

Database production -- NAL promotes the networking of information globally to share resources and expertise, reduce unnecessary duplication and costs, and improve access to information and, to this end, produces a number of databases which are freely available. NAL's flagship database AGRICOLA, a bibliographic database of over 4 million records, has been available worldwide since 1998 via the Internet. An increasing number of AGRICOLA citations provide links to free-of-charge publications.

Development of electronic and Web-based resources. Partnerships and leveraging of resources have enabled NAL to launch or help launch Web sites focusing on topics such as invasive species, nutrition, food safety, and science for citizens. Collaborative funding arrangements with partner organizations support the full cost of developing and maintaining these resources.

Publications exchange -- NAL maintains a large international publications exchange program to more than 7,000 exchange partners.

Training and education -- NAL coordinates in-service training programs with U.S. land-grant universities, and library associations within and outside the United States. The Library also provides consultation services in the development of library and information systems.

Cooperative publications and products -- NAL works closely with national and international organizations in the development of specialized databases and in cooperative indexing of journal literature to improve coverage of the world's agricultural literature.

Document delivery -- NAL is the U.S. node for the Agriculture Libraries Network (AGLINET) a networked international system of interlibrary lending cooperation operating under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, which enables the Library to obtain and deliver scientific and technical information worldwide.

## 1. NATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

Since the early 1980's, NAL has coordinated an informal national network of public and private agricultural libraries and information centers.<sup>3</sup> Language in the 1977 Farm Bill strongly supported cooperative agricultural activities. However, without funding a formal agricultural information network did not result. The 1982 Interagency or "Blue Ribbon" Panel on NAL and the Subcommittee on Agriculture of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges were key proponents of such a network.<sup>4</sup> NAL's national partnerships include other national libraries, Federal partners, State land-grant colleges and universities, other state-supported educational institutions with agricultural programs, public and private organizations, industry, and agricultural library networks.

The National Agricultural Cooperative Cataloging (AGX) Program consists of a network of libraries that prepare machine-readable cataloging for agricultural titles. The NAL Cataloging Branch also coordinates and monitors national and international cooperative cataloging programs for agricultural materials to enhance the coverage of these materials in the AGRICOLA database.

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<sup>3</sup>Interagency Panel on the National Agricultural Library. *Assessment of the National Agricultural Library--Final Report to the Secretary*. United States Department of Agriculture, Science and Education. Washington, DC:1982.p.1.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas, Sarah E. (1989) "United States Agricultural Information Network: Genesis of a Cooperative Organization." *Special Libraries*, 80 (2) p.113-117.

Agriculture Network Information Center (AgNIC), (1999-), <http://www.agnic.org>, provides global access to agricultural information in its broadest sense. AgNIC is a pioneering Internet-based agricultural information alliance. NAL is collaborating with over 40 land-grant universities and other national and international partners to develop and sustain AgNIC.

Science.gov (2001 -), <http://www.science.gov>, provides integrated, cross-agency, one-stop, gateway access to Web page and database content for selected U.S. government science and technology information, for science professionals, students, teachers, business people, and the general public. There are 14 organizations from 10 government agencies in the Science.gov Alliance. NAL has played a leadership role in Science.gov development since its inception.

The Invasive species Web site (2000-), [www.invasivespecies.gov](http://www.invasivespecies.gov), facilitates access to and exchange of invasive species data and information by researchers, scientists, land managers, public and private sector agencies, and concerned citizens. Invasive species are a serious and costly problem around the world. NAL, the U.S. Department of Interior and many others developed the site. About 20 federal agencies and all 50 states share responsibility and authority over some facet of managing the invasive species problem. The Web site helps coordinate this important work.

The Food Safety Research and Information Office (FSRIO) (1999 - ), [www.nal.usda.gov/fsrio](http://www.nal.usda.gov/fsrio), provides to the research community and the general public information on publicly and privately funded food safety research and prevents unintended duplication of food safety research efforts. FSRIO assists branches of government and private research entities assessing research needs and priorities. The FSRIO Web site was launched via NAL's Web site in 2001, in support of the National Food Safety Initiative.

The International Bibliographic Information on Dietary Supplements ( IBIDS) (1999- ) <http://ods.od.nih.gov/databases/ibids.html>, is a database that helps the public, health care providers, educators, and researchers locate credible, scientific information on dietary supplements including scientific data from foreign sources or the Office of Alternative Medicine. The IBIDS database contains published, international, scientific literature on dietary supplements, including vitamins, minerals, and botanicals. Produced by the National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements (ODS), IBIDS is maintained through an interagency partnership with the Food and Nutrition Information Center of the NAL.

The National Preservation Program for Agricultural Literature (1993-), <http://www.nal.usda.gov/preserve/AgLit/natpresprog.shtml>, provides a plan for the Nation “to preserve in the original or in an archivally sound format—and make readily accessible to scholars, researchers, students, and scientists—the most important pre-1950 published literature and the primary unpublished resources that together document the history of the agricultural sciences in the United States.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Gwinn, Nancy E. (1993, May 16) *A National Preservation Program for Agricultural*

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*Literature*, with assistance from the Advisory Panel on Preservation U.S. Agricultural Information Network. Retrieved May 1, 2002, from the World Wide Web:  
<http://www.nal.usda.gov/preserve/AgLit/natpresprog.shtml>

NAL Specialized information centers (1971- ), <http://nal.usda.gov>, provide in-depth coverage of specific subject areas relating to food and agricultural sciences. The centers are established because of Congressional mandate, U.S. Department of Agriculture priorities and business or professional organization interest in agriculture and related fields. Currently there are six centers covering alternative farming, animal welfare, food and nutrition, rural, technology transfer, and water quality.

The National Center for Agricultural Law Research and Information (NCALRI) (1987- ), <http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/>, provides access to important agricultural law information through this national clearinghouse for the systematic collection, indexing and publication of agricultural law information. The Center provides cataloging and indexing records for the AGRICOLA database.

The NAL Visiting Scholars Program hosts individuals and study-groups from the U.S. and the international arena — virtually every continent. The library conducts specialized briefings on its programs and operations and tours of its facilities. Visiting scholars include librarians, information specialists, scientists, researchers, and students studying at USDA.

The United States Agricultural Information Network (USAIN), (1988- ), <http://www.usain.org/usain.html>, officially inaugurated in 1990, facilitates access to agricultural information for those who need it. USAIN “is an organization for professionals that provides a forum for discussion of agricultural issues, takes a leadership role in the formation of a national information policy as related to agriculture, makes recommendations to the National Agricultural Library on agricultural information matters, and promotes cooperation and communication among its members.”<sup>6</sup>

## 2. INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

An important aspect of the mission of the National Agricultural Library is to provide leadership to ensure U.S. participation in international library and information systems. NAL’s linkage to the international agricultural information community is considered an essential part of its program. The challenging international environment in which U.S. agriculture finds itself is increasingly reaffirming the important role of agricultural libraries in the transfer of information.

International programs of the National Agricultural Library can be categorized in several broad areas: advanced technologies and database production, publications exchange and products, training and education, document delivery, networks and special projects. The programs include:

The Agriculture Network Information Center, described earlier, which currently has

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<sup>6</sup>United States Agricultural Information Network, Retrieved May 16, 2002, from the World Wide Web: <http://usain.org/usain.html>

international alliance members in Latin America, the Caribbean and Canada.

AGRIS, the international information system for the agricultural sciences and technology (1974-), <http://www.fao.org/agris>, facilitates information exchange and identifies world literature dealing with all aspects of agriculture. AGRIS is a cooperative system in which participating countries input references to the literature produced within their boundaries and, in return, draw on the information provided by other participants.<sup>7</sup> NAL has served over 25 years as the designated U.S. Center for AGRIS. As part of its international cooperative activities, NAL prepares a special monthly tape of U.S. imprints for input contributing over 45,000 new citations annually to the AGRIS database.

The NAL Publications Exchange program: as noted earlier, NAL provides USDA publications to foreign and international institutions which in turn provide their agricultural titles to the National Agricultural Library.

Cochran Fellowship Program (1984 -), <http://www.fas.usda.gov/icd/food-industries/cfp/index.html>. The U.S. Congress provides funds for training agriculturalists from middle income countries, emerging markets, and emerging democracies. NAL offers in-service training programs in co-operation with USAID, the USDA's International Cooperation and Development Division and other organizations, arranging for study and training in library management and technology.

The Agricultural Libraries Network (AGLINET), (1971- ), mentioned earlier, delivers documents to agricultural users worldwide by providing partner libraries with access to the literature originating in the country or region or for a given specialization. Coordinated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation ( FAO), AGLINET is a world-wide, voluntary network of large international agricultural libraries working together to serve other member libraries. NAL is the U.S. node for AGLINET.

The International Association of Agricultural Information Specialists (IAALD), (1955 -), <http://www.lib.montana.edu/~alijk/IAALD.html>, facilitates worldwide development of and communication among members of the agricultural information community. IAALD's goal is to enhance access to and use of agriculture-related information resources.<sup>8</sup> NAL is a member of this network which provides a platform for information exchange and supports professional development of its members.

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<sup>7</sup>AGRIS Factsheet, Retrieved May 1, 2002, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.fao.org/agris/MagazineArchive/magazine/factsheets/agris.htm>

<sup>8</sup>IAALD: International Association of Agricultural Information Specialists. Retrieved May 1, 2002, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.lib.montana.edu/~alijk/IAALD.html>

IFLA (The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, (1927-), <http://www.ifla.org/III/index.htm>, the “global” voice of the library profession, is the leading international body representing the interests of library and information services and their uses. NAL is a member of this important international organization.

### 3. SPECIAL INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

NAL has been involved in several international projects that support U. S. Department of Agriculture initiatives. Activities and special programs involved cross-training of librarians, producing agricultural information systems, and strengthening document delivery arrangements. Collaborators have involved countries in Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Mexico and Russia.

The Egyptian National Agricultural Library (ENAL), (1990-1999). NAL assisted the government of Egypt in establishing the Egyptian National Agricultural Library, which officially opened in September 1996. A goal was to develop a state-of-the-art electronic library for Egypt that other Middle Eastern and African nation can emulate. NAL and ENAL produced and published in 1995, a CD-ROM of the 1930, Nicoll's Birds of Egypt, a 700-page, 2-volumes work through the National Agricultural Text Digitizing Program.

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), (1994-). The NAL Director and Director General of IICA formalized collaboration that established a plan for enhancing access to agricultural information within the hemisphere. An outgrowth of this collaboration has been the designation of the Autonomous Agricultural University Antonio Narro as the Mexican depository library for U.S. and Canada agricultural publications. NAL is also part of a consortium which is guiding the ongoing development of IICA's Agricultural Information and Documentation System for the Americas (SIDALC), <http://www.sidalc.net> network based in Costa Rica. SIDALC recently became an AgNIC partner specializing in topics related to Latin American and Caribbean agriculture. NAL also serves as a mirror site for the SIDALC system in North America.

U.S./Central and Eastern European Agricultural Library Roundtable Initiative. In 1991, NAL and several Central European Countries formalized a Joint Program of Cooperation to assist agricultural libraries in Central and Eastern European countries. Areas of interest included: (1) exchange of agricultural materials, (2) exchange of personnel, (3) cooperation in producing electronic information systems and products on subjects of mutual interest, and (4) increased cooperation in strengthening document delivery. Over 12 countries participated in Round Tables held over the years in Maryland, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic and Arizona.

#### 4. LESSONS LEARNED

We have learned many lessons from national and international collaborations involving many partners. The first and foremost lesson is the critical importance of shared financial responsibility. Shared investment is a great incentive to shared effort and commitment. Also, no single library, organization or country can or should carry the financial burden for a partnership.

Flat budgets and declining purchasing power are key driving forces to collaboration which is needed more now and in the future to keep pace with user demands and to leverage resources.

We need new models for extending access to the wealth of electronic resources produced globally. The advent of Internet access has broadened our customer bases. Many service areas have had nearly a 200 percent increase in Web-based services vs mediated services over a 3-year period. Job re-engineering and re-casting roles for information professionals are critically needed. We need more data to help align priorities with customer needs. The field of E-Metrics is emerging fast and furiously to address a lack of clear and consistent definition of data elements; vendors do not “count” things in the same manner as one another. Other areas needing attention are re-allocation of staff and skills training and restructuring of programs and service areas to emphasize web-based services and self-service options.

#### 5. FUTURE COLLABORATION: PLANS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Recent world events have further emphasized the need for strengthening global dimensions of library and information systems and resources. Collaborative partnerships such as those described earlier ensure the free flow of information to present and future generations. It is important to continue to explore better mutual ways to provide agricultural information to researchers, policy makers, educators, students, farmers, and other specialists by: a) strengthening existing avenues; and b) expanding the use of technologies. The development of new strategies and approaches to help keep abreast of the continuing internationalization of scientific and technical information is very much needed.

Connecting customers to information – the right information, at the right times, in the right place, in the right format – using cost-effective methods is the focus of NAL operations. We see providing desktop access and building content as key elements of our customer service scenario.

Creating a National Digital Library for Agriculture is a major NAL goal for the next five years. We see this initiative as a major contribution towards building a global electronic agricultural information services network that will link and integrate the resources information and services of many partners. Operating in the digital environment, the National Agricultural Library will continue to focus its efforts, through increased collaboration, on managing electronic information; promoting standardized formats; repackaging essential information for mass distribution; and mediating electronic access to information irrespective of where the information or our customers may reside.

NAL, the world’s largest agricultural library, has had a long history of important national and

international collaborations that resulted in major accomplishments. We expect that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond they will continue to expand and look forward to opportunities to work together with IATUL members.