

106TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 777

AN ACT

To require the Department of Agriculture to establish an electronic filing and retrieval system to enable the public to file all required paperwork electronically with the Department and to have access to public information on farm programs, quarterly trade, economic, and production reports, and other similar information.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Freedom to E-File
5 Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. ELECTRONIC FILING AND RETRIEVAL.**

2 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the
3 date of enactment of this Act, in accordance with sub-
4 section (c), the Secretary of Agriculture (referred to in
5 this Act as the “Secretary”) shall, to the maximum extent
6 practicable, establish an Internet-based system that en-
7 ables agricultural producers to access all forms of the
8 agencies of the Department of Agriculture specified in
9 subsection (b).

10 (b) APPLICABILITY.—The agencies referred to in
11 subsection (a) are—

- 12 (1) the Farm Service Agency;
- 13 (2) the Rural Utilities Service;
- 14 (3) the Rural Housing Service;
- 15 (4) the Rural Business-Cooperative Service; and
- 16 (5) the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

17 (c) IMPLEMENTATION.—In carrying out subsection
18 (a), the Secretary shall—

- 19 (1) provide a method by which agricultural pro-
20 ducers may—
 - 21 (A) download forms from the Internet; and
 - 22 (B) submit completed forms via electronic
23 facsimile, mail, or similar means;
- 24 (2) redesign forms of the agencies of the De-
25 partment of Agriculture by incorporating into the

1 forms user-friendly formats and self-help guidance
2 materials.

3 (d) PROGRESS REPORTS.—Not later than 180 days
4 after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall
5 submit to Congress a report that describes the progress
6 made toward implementing the Internet-based system re-
7 quired under this section.

8 **SEC. 3. ACCESSING INFORMATION AND FILING OVER THE**
9 **INTERNET.**

10 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 2 years after the
11 date of enactment of this Act, in accordance with sub-
12 section (b), the Secretary shall expand implementation of
13 the Internet-based system established under section 2 by
14 enabling agricultural producers to access and file all forms
15 and, at the option of the Secretary, selected records and
16 information of the agencies of the Department specified
17 in section 2(b).

18 (b) IMPLEMENTATION.—In carrying out subsection
19 (a), the Secretary shall ensure that an agricultural pro-
20 ducer is able—

21 (1) to file electronically or in paper form, at the
22 option of the agricultural producer, all forms re-
23 quired by agencies of the Department specified in
24 section 2(b);

1 (2) to file electronically or in paper form, at the
2 option of the agricultural producer, all documenta-
3 tion required by agencies of the Department speci-
4 fied in section 2(b) and determined appropriate by
5 the Secretary; and

6 (3) to access information concerning farm pro-
7 grams, quarterly trade, economic, and production re-
8 ports, and other similar production agriculture infor-
9 mation that is readily available to the public in
10 paper form.

11 **SEC. 4. FEDERAL CROP INSURANCE CORPORATION AND**
12 **RISK MANAGEMENT AGENCY.**

13 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than December 1, 2000,
14 the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation and the Risk
15 Management Agency shall submit to the Committee on
16 Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Com-
17 mittee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Sen-
18 ate a plan, that is consistent with this Act, to allow agri-
19 cultural producers to—

20 (1) obtain, over the Internet, from approved in-
21 surance providers all forms and other information
22 concerning the program under the jurisdiction of the
23 Corporation and Agency in which the agricultural
24 producer is a participant; and

1 (2) file electronically all paperwork required for
2 participation in the program.

3 (b) ADMINISTRATION.—The plan shall—

4 (1) conform to sections 2(c) and 3(b); and

5 (2) prescribe—

6 (A) the location and type of data to be
7 made available to agricultural producers;

8 (B) the location where agricultural pro-
9 ducers can electronically file their paperwork;
10 and

11 (C) the responsibilities of the applicable
12 parties, including agricultural producers, the
13 Risk Management Agency, the Federal Crop In-
14 surance Corporation, approved insurance pro-
15 viders, crop insurance agents, and brokers.

16 (c) IMPLEMENTATION.—Not later than December 1,
17 2001, the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation and the
18 Risk Management Agency shall complete implementation
19 of the plan submitted under subsection (a).

20 **SEC. 5. CONFIDENTIALITY.**

21 In carrying out this Act, the Secretary—

22 (1) may not make available any information
23 over the Internet that would otherwise not be avail-
24 able for release under section 552 or 552a of title
25 5, United States Code; and

1 (2) shall ensure, to the maximum extent prac-
2 ticable, that the confidentiality of persons is main-
3 tained.

Passed the Senate November 4, 1999.

Attest:

Secretary.

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