

Agriculture, Fire Weather Service and Marine Radiofax Privatization Questions and Answers

Following is a comprehensive set of questions and answers on the privatization of the NWS specialized agriculture weather, non-federal, non-wildfire fire weather services and marine radiofacsimile program and the National Weather Summary. This document is broken down into four sections: general questions related to privatization of the tailored programs; questions specifically related to the agriculture weather program; questions related to the fire weather services program; questions related to the marine radiofacsimile program; and questions concerning the NWS' public-private partnerships. We have tried to anticipate all questions that might arise related to these issues, but as others come up, we will update this document as needed.

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GENERAL

Q1: What National Weather Service programs have been and will be eliminated?

A1: As part of the President's FY 1996 Budget and in response to the Administration's Reinventing Government initiatives, the National Weather Service (NWS) discontinued three programs on Oct. 1, 1995: Fire Weather Service to non-Federal entities for non-wildfire activities; Marine Radiofax broadcasts; and the National Weather Summary.

At that time, the private weather industry assumed production and distribution of the Non-Federal non-wildfire Weather Services and the National Weather Summary, while the U.S. Coast Guard assumed transmission of the Marine Radiofax broadcasts.

The Administration proposed to eliminate agricultural weather services on October 1. The NWS will continue providing tailored agricultural weather service until April 1, 1996. At that time issuance of all tailored agricultural products will end with the exception of the fruit frost products. NWS has given a limited number of forecast offices the approval to issue fruit frost forecasts in California, Arizona, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Utah, through April 20, 1996. All fruit frost products which have already started or will begin before March 31, 1996 will be issued and continued until April 20, 1996. If a freeze or very cold weather is in progress on April 20, 1996, fruit frost products will continue until the episode ends.

Q2: Due to the elimination of these programs how many offices will be closed and how many people will be affected?

A2: Due to the elimination of these programs, several NWS offices providing agricultural and/or fire weather services exclusively have been and will be closed.

Four Agricultural Weather Service Centers in College Station, Texas; Stoneville, Mississippi; Auburn, Alabama; and West Lafayette, Indiana. In addition, Weather Service Offices in Yuma, Arizona, and Twin Falls, Idaho will be closed in April 1996.

In addition, all Fruit Frost Operations in Tampa Bay, Florida, and Brownsville, Texas, will be discontinued on April 1, 1996.

A total of 45 full-time equivalent positions will be eliminated including 8 from Fire Weather Services, 8 from Fruit Frost Services and 29 from Agricultural Weather Services.

Q3: What will happen to the NWS employees whose positions are being eliminated?

A3: The NWS has and will continue to make every effort to place the employees whose positions are being eliminated. They most likely will have to relocate.

Q4: What are the savings to the Federal taxpayer for eliminating these programs?

A4: A total savings of \$3.3 million will result in Fiscal Year 1996.

Q5: What are the savings beyond Fiscal Year 1996?

A5: The savings noted above are recurring savings.

Q6: Wasn't privatization of these programs proposed during the Reagan administration?

A6: Privatization of these programs has been proposed in budget resolutions 13 of the last 15 years. In 1995, Congress and the Administration agreed that the private meteorological sector has now grown (\$200 million annual estimated revenues) to the point that this business sector can provide these weather services to the agricultural community and non-Federal fire weather agencies for non-wildfire activities.

Q7: These cuts are just a "drop in the financial bucket." Why drop programs that cost so little to run?

A7: The Congress and the Administration are aiming toward balanced budgets and thus many NOAA programs and functions are on the table for transfer to the private sector. The NWS guidelines established in the 1991 Public-Private Partnership statement published in the Federal Register offer a blueprint for the provisions of weather services by the NWS and the private sector. Over the years, the NWS has successfully transferred services to the private sector such as direct commercial radio broadcasts, newspaper weather page preparation and weather-by-telephone services.

Q8: I've been getting these services for free. Now I'll have to pay for them. What's in this for me, Joe Taxpayer?

A8: The taxpayer will continue to receive high-quality general weather forecasts (including frost and freeze warnings) and weather data on which to base decisions. With continuing modernization efforts, these NWS products and services are expected to continue to improve. The breadth of private weather services available make it likely that a variety of products and services will become available to affected users.

Q9: How should customers go about getting these services from the private sector?

A9: Customers can write the Office of Industrial Meteorology for a directory of private weather service companies described above. Address letters to: NOAA/National Weather Service, Office of Industrial Meteorology ([W/IM/](#)), 1325 East-West Highway, Room 18462, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

TAILORED AGRICULTURAL WEATHER SERVICES

Q10: Why is the NWS terminating the tailored agricultural weather program?

A10: The Administration proposed to eliminate tailored agricultural weather services on Oct. 1 as part of the President's FY 1996 Budget and in response to the Administration's Reinventing Government initiatives.

The NWS will continue providing tailored agricultural weather services until April 1, 1996. At that time issuance of all tailored agricultural products will end with the exception of the fruit frost products. NWS has given a limited number of forecast offices the approval to issue fruit frost forecasts in California, Arizona, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Idaho through April 20, 1996.

If a freeze or very cold weather is in progress on April 20, 1996, fruit frost products will continue until the episode ends.

Q11: What are NWS agriculture weather services?

A11: The NWS agriculture weather service program provides the Nation with weather and climate information specific to the needs of the agricultural industry. Tailored agricultural weather forecasts include unique meteorological elements (soil temperatures, moisture evaporation) to assist growers in planning field operations such as when to plant, fertilize, spray, and harvest.

Q12: What products will no longer be provided when the agriculture weather service program is eliminated?

A12: The following NWS products will not be produced and will no longer be available from the NOAA Weather Wire Service or Family of Services and will not be broadcast over NOAA Weather Radio:

- Agricultural Weather Forecast - forecasts of unique meteorological parameters tailored to the needs of agriculture
- Fruit Frost Forecast - forecasts and warnings of critical minimum temperatures over the next 24 hours for specific agriculture sites
- Special Agricultural Weather Forecast - special short-term forecasts covering weather conditions expected to adversely affect the local agricultural industry; issued as needed
- Weather Advisory for Ag operations - advisories for the agricultural community issued during the growing season
- 30-day Agricultural Weather Outlook - forecast of expected temperatures and precipitation anomalies of interest to the agricultural community
- National Agriculture Weather Highlights

Some examples of forecasts to be eliminated include the following:

- Cranberry Bog Forecasts in Wisconsin, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Washington
- Haying Forecasts in many areas of the country
- Lettuce Ice Forecasts in Arizona and California

Services that will be eliminated include routine assistance to users and providers of agricultural weather information, county and state extension programs, and agricultural departments at land-grant universities.

Q13: Does the elimination of the agriculture weather service program mean farmers will no longer get forecast information?

A13: NWS forecasts will be available, but will not be specifically tailored for agricultural users. The NWS will continue to provide frequent, high-quality forecasts (including frost and freeze warnings), and climatological data to all users.

Q14: Suppose Congress decides in the future that the agriculture weather program should not be eliminated. What happens then?

A14: If Congress provides funding for the National Weather Service to continue to provide agricultural weather services after April 1, 1996, then the NWS would comply with that decision and continue to provide these services.

Q15: Who are the typical customers for NWS agricultural forecasts?

A15: The largest number of agricultural weather service customers are small family-owned growers and farming operations. Also using NWS information are large agri-business operations, County Agriculture Research and Extension facilities, universities, climatologists and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Q16: What is an Agricultural Weather Service Center?

A16: An Agricultural Weather Service Center (AWSC) is a National Weather Service office on a land grant University Campus dedicated to providing weather forecasts and products tailored to the agricultural community. The NWS currently operates several Agricultural Weather Service Centers across the U.S. including:

- College Station, Texas, collocated with Texas A&M University
- Stoneville, Mississippi, collocated with the U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Auburn, Alabama, collocated with Auburn University

The number of employees at each AWSC varies depending on the services and functions provided.

Q17: How does the decision to eliminate the agricultural weather program meet with the NWS mission of protection of life and property?

A17: As part of the NWS mission to protect property, the NWS continues to issue warnings and forecasts for the protection of life and property. The tailored weather forecast products for agricultural interests that will be transferred to private sector meteorologists.

Q18: Why were agricultural weather services not terminated October 1, 1995, when the NWS ended specialized fire weather services and transferred the marine radiifax broadcasts to the U.S. Coast Guard?

A18: H.J. Resolution 108 (the initial FY 1996 Continuing Resolution) provided no funding for the marine radiofacsimile broadcasts or fire weather support for non-federal agencies for non wildfire activities. The Coast Guard determined that the radiofacsimile broadcasts were mission-essential for their ships and assumed all costs for the broadcasts from the NWS.

The House and Senate Appropriations Committee Reports reflected an intent of those committees that NOAA continue the Agriculture and Fruit Frost programs until April 1996. The NWS redirected its own FY 1995 carryover funds to provide these services.

Q19: With a Congressional Continuing Resolution in effect and areas of the country still needing agricultural weather information how can you terminate the agricultural weather program at this time?

A19: At the direction of both the Administration and Congress, NOAA has directed the NWS to privatize the agricultural weather services program by April 1, 1996.

Q20: Why was Minimum Temperature Forecast season allowed to be completed in the southern states, while terminated in the northern agricultural districts?

A20: The date of ending the agricultural weather service program was not selected to harm any particular growing region of the country. Congress provided the NWS with the authority to continue fruit frost forecasts in certain areas but only with available funds. After April 1, 1996, available funds for the fruit frost program will be exhausted.

Q21: Why were we (growers and packers) not given ample lead time to approach Meteorologists in the private sector?

A21: The NWS has made a concerted effort since July 1995 to notify customers of agricultural weather service products that significant programmatic changes were proposed by the Administration and scheduled to take effect at the beginning of FY96 (October 1, 1995). NWS' Office of Industrial Meteorology produced a directory of private meteorological companies from the membership rosters of various professional meteorological organizations (American Meteorological Society, National Weather Association, Commercial Weather Services Association and the National Council of Industrial Meteorologists). The directory was disseminated to agricultural weather customers nationwide in July 1995 to assist growers in finding alternative weather forecasting resources to use after October 1, 1995. Delays in the budget process since October 1 and four continuing resolution spending bills have allowed the agricultural weather program to continue until now.

Q22: What guarantees are there that a responsible agriculture weather service (private sector) will be available in my area?

A22: Local NWS offices and the Office of Industrial Meteorology will work with you on providing a list of alternate sources for weather forecast services, however, we cannot recommend nor endorse any service provider. A directory of more than 330 private meteorological companies across the country is accessible via the internet at <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/IM/>.

Q23: Last year response to the Cramer Report determined that there would be no degrading of NWS services along the Eastern slopes of the Cascade Mountains in both Washington and Oregon and in the Sacramento Valley. This looks as if you are in fact degrading NWS services, in violation of the Cramer Report. Please explain!

A23: The Cramer Report only addressed the NWS warning and forecast services, not NWS programs. Public Law 102-567 does not pertain to services the NWS can no longer provide as a result of budget restrictions. Thus, agricultural weather services do not come under the Public Law 102-567 criteria. The NWS will continue to provide warnings and forecasts of weather conditions affecting the agribusiness in your region. NWS products will continue to include freeze warnings, frost warnings, frost advisories, excessive heat, excessive precipitation, drought, high wind, thunderstorms, hail, and climatic predictions.

Q24: I cannot afford the services of a private meteorologist. My orchard is my sole source of income. When my local weather office closes, where do I get weather forecasts?

A24: Weather forecasts will be available from TV, radio, and NOAA Weather Radio broadcasts. Many growers affected by this decision fall into your category: low subsistence orchardists who depend on low cost, accurate weather information. The private meteorological sector has become quite competitive. Prices for consulting services have responded to the increased competition. Grower groups and Associations may be able to obtain a lower cost per orchard bid than an individual seeking the same service. The NWS will continue to issue general forecasts as well as warnings and watches.

Q25: Will the climatology records for my area be discontinued?

A25: The NWS mission includes responsibility to observe, define, and predict the climate of the United States. Official observations and records pertaining to that function will continue and will be available through National Climatic Data Center and the Regional Climate Centers.

In cooperation with the Department of Agriculture, the NWS is currently working to maintain the Nation's agricultural weather observation network even after local weather offices are closed.

Q26: Who is responsible for the decision to terminate agricultural weather services and do I have any recourse in this matter?

A26: At the direction of Congress and the Administration, the administrator's of NOAA, NWS's parent agency, terminated all NWS agricultural weather services. Your questions on this matter may be directed to your local NWS office or the NWS Office of Industrial Meteorology (301-713-0258) Suite 18100, 1325 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

Q27: Many growers have contributed or donated hard earned money to finance part of a NOAA Weather Radio in our area for the purpose of broadcasting agricultural weather. Now that the NOAA Weather Radio is installed the NWS has terminated agricultural weather services, we feel that we have been betrayed. Is it possible to get a refund?

A27: NWS would prefer to maintain the existing hardware arrangement and continue to provide the listening area with valuable continuous weather information and local forecasts that still have value to the agricultural community. Weather warnings for severe thunderstorms, tornadoes, floods, high winds, freezes and winter storms help protect against the loss of life and property in the regions. Another, less desirable, option is to return the radio transmitter back to the purchaser. The NWS, however, would have to retain the radio frequency authorization.

Q28: Why couldn't the NWS wait until after the frost season to end its agricultural forecasts?

A28: In the FY 1996 Appropriations Conference Report, the language states: "the conferees recognize that it may be necessary, within funds available, to continue to provide agricultural, fruit frost and fire-related services for a limited time in areas where private sector entities are not yet able to provide these services." Although the appropriation associated with this language has not been passed into law, the NWS has tried to comply with its intent to effect a smooth transition of these services to the private sector.

The NWS has already used more than \$500K from its operating funds during FY 1996 in support of the agricultural forecast program. Beyond April 1, 1996 the NWS can no longer absorb the cost of these programs without effecting the ability to perform its basic weather warning and forecast mission.

Q29: Are there any private-sector forecasts available for use immediately after the NWS ceases its agriculture weather forecasting? I need forecasts now, not when a private company is ready next year.

A29: The NWS Office of Industrial Meteorology has compiled a Directory of Private Weather Services that contains more than 330 private meteorological companies across the country. This Directory is accessible via the internet at <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/IM/> or by calling (301) 713-0258.

Q30: Will the NWS be making its historical agriculture materials available to the private sector? If a private entity is given the material, will it then become their property, exclusively? How long will the NWS be keeping its old records/forecasts?

A30: The NWS plans to archive and make available all agricultural records to the public and private sector. Also, forecasting techniques and software will be made available to the private sector. Because these materials were developed with taxpayer dollars, no private entity can "own" them.

FIRE WEATHER SERVICES FOR NON-FEDERAL, NON-WILDFIRE ACTIVITIES

Q31: What is the NWS Fire Weather Program?

A31: The NWS plays a vital role in supporting land management agencies' efforts to control and extinguish wildfires. Specially-trained NWS personnel take NWS data and surveillance information and produce forecasts tailored to the needs of firefighters, emergency managers, and other users.

Q32: What is the role of the NWS at fires?

A32: Specially-trained forecasters work directly with Fire Behavior Analysts and Incident Commanders to provide specific weather information which will aid in predicting the movement and intensity of specific fires. This information is used in planning fire suppression strategies, including the safe placement of personnel and equipment.

Q33: What elements of the fire weather service were turned over to the private sector and what does the NWS continue to provide?

A33: The NWS eliminated fire weather services to non-Federal entities for non-wildfire activities. The following NWS fire services to state and local agencies were terminated as of October 1, 1995:

- spot forecasts for prescribed burning
- spot forecasts for non-fire forest management activities
- transport and stability forecasts for smoke management
- consultation and liaison for non-wildfire activities
- land management forecasts issued outside fire services

The NWS continues to provide meteorological support for all aspects of wildfire suppression, including presuppression and National Fire Danger Rating System forecasts; on-site support for wildfires; and meteorological training for fire fighters. The NWS also continues to provide forecasts in support of other Federal agencies' land management activities.

Prescribed burning by non-federal agencies to reduce fuels are no longer supported by the NWS.

Q34: Do Fire Weather program changes have an impact on public safety?

A34: No. The National Weather Service continues to issue forecasts in pursuit of its mission to protect life and property. Any and all wildfires will receive NWS support.

Q35: Where are state agencies and others turning for fire weather forecasts and information?

A35: Customers turned to private meteorologists and weather companies equipped to provide fire weather support to all non- federal entities. Some state agencies have developed their own internal capabilities.

Q36: Who are the customers of fire weather service?

A36: Major customers of fire weather services include state forestry departments, federal land management agencies, local fire departments, and more.

Q37: What if a wildfire spreads from Federal lands to non- Federal lands? Will the NWS provide meteorological support?

A37: The NWS will ALWAYS provide wildfire support no matter where the fire starts.

MARINE RADIOFACSIMILE PROGRAM

Q38: What changes were made to the Marine Radiofax Program?

A38: Until October 1995, the NWS prepared and disseminated analyses, forecasts, and warnings of marine weather and oceanographic conditions. These charts were disseminated via radiofax broadcasts from six coastal or Great Lakes radio stations (listed below). The NWS still produces the maps. The U.S. Coast Guard has assumed the cost of transmission of these maps as a result of the cutoff of NWS funds for this purpose.

Q39: What did the privatization of the Marine Radiofax mean?

A39: As of October 1, 1995, the NWS ceased transmitting weather charts directly to the six marine radiofax broadcast stations, (radio station operators noted in parentheses) including:

- NMF - Marshfield, Massachusetts (U.S. Coast Guard)
- NMC - Pt. Reyes, California (U.S. Coast Guard)
- NOJ - Kodiak, Alaska (U.S. Coast Guard)
- WLO - Mobile, Alabama (Mobile Marine Radio, Inc.)
- KVM70 - Honolulu, Hawaii (Department of Defense)
- WLC - Rogers City, Michigan (Central Radio, Inc.)

The NWS continues to prepare marine weather and oceanographic charts for its internal use and for distribution to other Federal agencies that require them in order to meet responsibilities related to safety of life and property at sea. The Coast Guard has assumed all cost for transmission of these maps from the above transmitters.

Providing basic forecast and warning services to coastal populations and the marine community still leaves the private sector opportunity to provide customized weather data and forecasts to individual clients.

Q40: How many broadcasts were issued by the NWS per day?

A40: 58 marine charts were broadcast according to a fixed schedule each day; 31 charts for the Pacific Ocean and 27 for the Atlantic Ocean.

Q41: Who are the customers for the Marine Radiofax service?

A41: The shipping industry, commercial and sport fishing community, and larger recreational boat mariners are the primary Marine Radiofax customers.

Q42: Where can mariners turn to get the same information?

A42: Mariners can receive marine radiofax broadcast from the U.S. Coast Guard. They can also receive coastal water forecasts over NOAA Weather Radio and private marine radio stations.

NATIONAL WEATHER SUMMARY

Q43: What was the National Weather Summary?

A43: Issued by the Severe Storms Forecast Center (now known as the Storm Prediction Center) in Kansas City, Missouri, the National Weather Summary described significant or unusual national weather events over the last 24 hours. The Summary described weather events such as tornadoes and floods that occurred during the previous

24 hours and notes areas that received excessive precipitation or experienced extreme temperatures. It also contained a section entitled "On This Date in Weather History," which described one or two noteworthy weather events that occurred in the last 125 years.

Q44: Who used it?

A44: The media were the primary users of the National Weather Summary.

Q45: Why was it eliminated?

A45: Budgetary constraints fueled the decision to transfer the National Weather Summary to the private meteorological sector. Several companies have expressed an interest in providing a National Weather Summary product to their customers. Some private weather companies already create a similar product for their clients including newspapers and radio stations.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Q46: What is the history of public-private partnerships between the National Weather Service and the private sector?

A46: Over the last 25 years, the National Weather Service and the private meteorological industry have forged a mutually beneficial economic relationship--a relationship unparalleled in the rest of the world.

Primarily from re-dissemination by the private sector, the Nation receives timely weather forecasts and warnings through the media; business interests obtain site-specific forecasts and value-added services that maximize profits.

The Policy Statement on Weather Service and Private Sector Roles was published in the Federal Register on January 18, 1991. This NWS policy was forged with the private sector over a three-year period and is further detailed in the NWS Operations Manual, Chapter A-06.

Q47: Has the private meteorology industry expressed an interest in performing these programs?

A47: Yes, members of the private meteorological industry are willing to assume the agricultural weather services as soon as the NWS stops dissemination of these products. The private sector has already assumed fire weather services for non-Federal entities for non-wildfire activities and the National Weather Summary.

Q48: Do private meteorological firms exist now to provide these services? Who are they?

A48: There are more than 100 different meteorological firms operating in all facets of the U.S. weather industry, with annual revenues between \$200 and \$250 million. More than 10 percent of these 8,000 private sector professional meteorologists engage in specialized facets of industrial meteorology including agricultural forecasting, fire weather, and marine forecasting.

Although the National Weather Service cannot endorse one official provider of services, the Office of Industrial Meteorology has developed a directory of private meteorology companies across the United States. This Directory is frequently updated and accessible via the Internet at <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/IM/> or by calling (301) 713-0258.

Q49: The FY96 budget also called for the privatization of specialized aviation weather services--will those be turned over the private sector?

A49: The NWS performs critical functions in the areas of marine and aviation forecasts that are inherently governmental; e.g. issuing severe weather warnings and short-term forecasts, and conditions of icing, turbulence, high winds, and high seas. These critical functions are not being considered for privatization.

Q50: What steps is the NWS taking to ensure a smooth transfer of services to the private sector?

A50: In July 1995, the NWS began notifying customers of the special services and products; notifying members of Congress; and broadcasting notifications over NOAA Weather Radio and attaching advisories to the special written products that faced elimination. In addition, the NWS notified users of the transition in a Federal Register Notice on July 5, 1995. The NWS will again notify customers about the elimination of tailored agricultural weather services on April 1, 1996 through a variety of means including a second Federal Register Notice and a letter to users.

Q51: Who will assure us that we will have dependable sources of weather information in the future?

A51: The NWS will continue to be the primary source of weather data to the nation. The private meteorological sector will, as it has in the past, provide the source of tailored forecasts to specialized users such as agriculture.

Q52: As a taxpayer and user of these products, why should I have to pay twice for information that is already produced by the NWS and then simply reformatted by private sector meteorologists for distribution?

A52: When an organization pays for private services, it receives value-added forecasts--more than general forecasts. This specific information helps the customer (company/organization) to operate more efficiently with savings passed on to the consumer or taxpayer.
