



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Agricultural
Marketing
Service

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FEB 1 - 2000

Dear Review Committee Members:

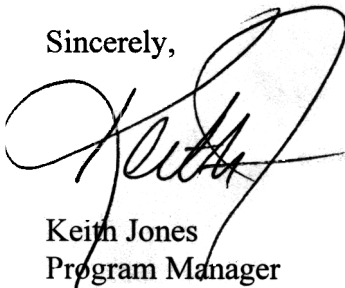
This letter is sent in support of a project submitted by Dr. Stuart Shulman of Providence College. I encourage the review committee to give ample consideration to Dr. Shulman's request. The results from his planning grant will assist the Department of Agriculture (USDA) in our continuing effort to adapt Internet technology to the rule-making process.

The USDA's National Organic Program was the first federal agency to conduct a fully electronic rule-making procedure. USDA allowed public comments in response to proposed regulations to be submitted via the Internet. While USDA's embryonic attempt to broaden citizen involvement in the regulatory process was well received, the questions explored in Dr. Shulman's project are of considerable interest as we attempt to fine tune our process.

Given that federal agencies have been directed to further encourage citizen/government interaction through the adoption of new technologies, independent research efforts such as Dr. Shulman's are of great value in benchmarking our methodology. The exploration of how a qualitative analysis software may be used to more effectively analyze a large and diverse data-set of public comments could offer useful guidance for future agency practice.

We have had numerous discussions with Dr. Shulman and have provided him with an initial data-set of 20,000 comments. We look forward to a future collaborative effort with Dr. Shulman in assessing USDA's efforts in digital democracy.

Sincerely,



Keith Jones
Program Manager



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is an agency of the
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