Department of Agriculture and Forestry
Social Media Policy

Effective Date: *August 6, 2013*
Authorization: *Commissioner Mike Strain, DVM*
Deputy Commissioner Brent D. Robbins, DVM

PHILOSOPHY

The Louisiana Department of Agriculture & Forestry is fully committed to supporting the responsible use of social media which provides a valuable means of assisting the Department and its employees in meeting community education, community information and related organizational objectives. Although this Department recognizes the role that social media plays in our employees' personal lives, employees should realize that the personal use of social media may have an adverse impact on the Department and its employees in their official capacities. This policy serves to provide guidance of a cautionary nature by identifying restrictions and prohibitions on the use of social media by Department personnel.

APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all employees and appointees of the Department, as well as potential employees, potential appointees, individuals providing service through a contract with a third party employer (i.e., temporary agency employees), and all other persons having an employment relationship with the Department, whether classified, unclassified, student employees, student interns, full-time, part-time or temporary.

This policy is not meant to address one particular form of social media but rather, social media in general terms as technology will outpace our ability to discover emerging technology and create policies governing its use.

DEFINITIONS

1. *Authorized User:* A Department employee responsible for the creation, development, use, administration, management, monitoring and/or retention of social media, social media tools or websites, and/or social media content in the name of or on behalf of the Department. Authorized users are either employed within the Department's Public Information Office or so designated by the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner.

2. *Blog:* A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions or comments.

3. *Post:* Content an individual shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.

4. *Profile:* Information that a user provides about himself or herself on a social networking site.

5. *Social Media:* A category of Internet-based resources that enable the user to generate content and encourage other user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites: Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, blogs and other similar sites.

6. *Social Networks:* Platforms where users can create profiles, share information and socialize with others using a range of technologies.

7. *Speech:* Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videotape, audiotape or related forms of communication.

STANDARDS FOR DEPARTMENT SANCTIONED USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Authorized users representing and acting on behalf of the Department in utilizing social media outlets must comply with the following standards:

- Adhere to the standards of conduct and professionalism expected and required of all employees as representatives of the Department.

- Adhere to Department Information Technology policies and procedures by insuring that all postings and communications are lawful, ethical and professional.

- Insure that accounts, profiles, pages or sites representing the Department are not established nor terminated without approval of the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner.

- Insure that information or links (hyperlinks) to any Internet site or other materials and communications are not posted on a Department social media account unless directly related to the mission, services and business objectives of the Department.

- Insure that confidential information, including photographs and videos, are not posted, transmitted or otherwise disseminated, on Department electronic media.

- Abide by all copyright, patent, trademark, and service mark restrictions in posting materials to electronic media.

- Abide by political activity policies and related prohibitions defined by law.

> **NOTE:** Authorized users must be mindful that Department websites and social media postings are subject to disclosure by subpoena and generally are publicly accessible under Title 44 of the Louisiana Revised

Statutes (Louisiana's Public Records Act). As such, social media sites must be developed, managed and maintained in accordance with express law.

STANDARDS FOR PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Department employees are free to express themselves as private citizens on personal social media sites to the extent their speech does not impact nor impede the performance of duties, create disharmony amongst co-workers, impair employee discipline or decorum, or negatively affect the public perception of the Department or its employees. As public employees, Department personnel are cautioned that their social media speech, whether on or off-duty or in the course of their official duties for the Department, may have a nexus to the employment relationship. Furthermore, such speech may be personal in nature and not necessarily a matter of public concern and thus, not protected as free speech by the First Amendment.

Employees must understand that they are personally accountable and responsible for their speech, postings and content in using social media, including reading, understanding and complying with the terms of use of any social media site. In addition, employees should be aware that they may be subject to civil litigation for publishing or posting false information that causes harm to, or damages the reputation of another.

Employees must comply with the following standards in their personal use of social media:

- Employees are prohibited from posting any information or conducting any on-line activity violative of state, federal or local laws or regulations.

- Employees are prohibited from using the Department's e-mail address when registering for or participating in social media.

- Employees are prohibited from posting, transmitting and disseminating any information to which they have access as a result of their employment by the Department that is privileged, confidential, sensitive or otherwise not authorized for public disclosure.

- Employee postings shall be consistent with and not violative of existing Department policies, such as those prohibiting discrimination, sexual harassment, substance abuse, workplace violence, etc.

- Employees are prohibited from posting, transmitting and disseminating information, opinions or positions which could bring adverse criticism or embarrassment upon the Department.

- Employees are prohibited from displaying any ~~of~~ Department logos, uniforms or similar identifying items on a personal social media web page.

- Employees are prohibited from posting, transmitting and disseminating any information

which expressly or impliedly states that such is the official view, opinion, policy, statement or position of the Department.

- Employees are prohibited from participating in social media activities while on work time or via the use of Department computers. Use of personal cell phones or other electronic devices which can access social media is allowed only during lunch breaks.

- Employees are prohibited from posting on social media critical, degrading, derogatory, disparaging, discriminating or harassing comments, opinions or other communications regarding the Department, their co-workers and supervisors.

- Employees are encouraged to be professional in their personal use of social media.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Any employee becoming aware of, or having knowledge of a posting, website or webpage in violation of the provisions of this policy shall immediately notify his or her supervisor.

VIOLATIONS

Disciplinary action, including the possibility of termination, will be imposed for violations of this policy, but only after a complete and thorough review of all available information. Classified employees will be provided pre-deprivation notice and a meaningful opportunity to respond prior to the imposition of disciplinary action as required by Chapter 12 of the Civil Service Rules. Factors to be considered in determining the appropriate sanction include, but are not limited to, the nature and circumstances of the posting, the employee's candor and cooperation during the investigative process, the employee's work history, length of service, current job performance and the existence of prior corrective action.

QUESTIONS

Questions regarding this policy should be addressed to the Human Resources Director.