

National Agricultural Library

Evaluating Items for Transfer to Special Collections

The National Agricultural Library's Special Collections accepts donations of materials documenting the history of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the extraordinary research accomplishments of USDA employees. Current USDA staff or former employees frequently contact library staff with offers of materials. Because USDA offices and employees are located throughout the world, Special Collections staff members are unable to evaluate each collection and therefore rely on detailed descriptions of materials provided by potential donors to decide whether the materials fit the collection scope. **This document serves as a reference for donors to use in evaluating and describing their holdings.** A Collection Survey Form is appended. It must be completed for NAL staff to determine if resources are available to acquire, provide access to, and/or conserve the collection.

While evaluating material for possible transfer to NAL Special Collections, if you have questions, contact us (Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at: specialcollections@ars.usda.gov or 301-504-5876, 301-504-7953 (fax)

I. Policy

A. Types of Materials Considered for Acceptance

- Research records not designated for the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) according to the official records disposition schedule. Contact information for your records manager is located here: <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/recmgmt/Contacts.htm>
- Original materials created in the course of official USDA work that document the significant history of an office, program, laboratory, or an employee's research that resulted in notable accomplishments or achievement.
- Materials in good condition, i.e. no mold contamination, excessive moisture damage, or insect contamination. Fragile materials may require funding for conservation work.
- Formats may include: professional correspondence; research findings; laboratory data or field notebooks; scientific drawings, artwork, photographs, slides, acetate or glass negatives, posters, scrapbooks, audiocassettes, or videotapes illustrating research or documenting personnel; handwritten or typed manuscript notes for an unpublished or published work with accompanying published item; USDA organizational charts, USDA reports, newspaper clippings used for research purposes or announcing research results; official USDA press releases; speeches of USDA employees; and studies or surveys used for background research.

B. Conditions of Acceptance

- Non-USDA published works or reprints are accepted if an integral part of the whole collection and would enhance the research value of the collection. For reprint or book collections that are not rare and therefore not appropriate for addition to Special Collections, contact NAL, Gift Donations Program at 301-504-5210.
- Acceptance of materials in digital or electronic formats is subject to the availability of technology to provide access.
- Inappropriate files include personal or confidential information, personnel records, junk mail; education records; financial records; personal travel documents; family photographs or ephemera (official portraits are acceptable); office supplies; and office equipment.
- In most cases, funding to evaluate, arrange, describe, preserve, and selectively digitize donated collections is required. This may be discussed after NAL staff members receive the survey.

II. Steps to Follow to Evaluate Materials:

- **Survey or inspect items.** Physically view several examples of each format or group of materials. Take notes regarding subject area, format, approximate date range, quantity, condition, and arrangement order. See Collection Survey Form for guidance.
- Briefly describe the **physical condition** in which the collection is stored.
- **Check materials for damage** such as mold, moisture, insect contamination, or brittleness (fragile condition) as damaged materials may require attention before transfer to the library.
- What is the **volume of materials** (provide number and size of boxes, cabinets, or other formats)?
- Are any **original materials** from the office or employee already in Special Collections? See the Special Collections online manuscript database: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/speccoll/collectionsguide/mssindex1.shtml>
- Are any of the **published materials** already available at the National Agricultural Library or another institution? NAL online catalog AGRICOLA: <http://agricola.nal.usda.gov> or call 301-504-5755 for assistance. Check the *Guide to Federal Records* at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA): <http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/>
- Are any of the materials records of an **agricultural organization**; that is, was an employee involved with a professional association and in the course of that association acquired some of their official records?
- Do the materials seem complete or do other, related items exist in another office, with the employee's family, or at another institution? Please list other sources and contact information.

October 2012