

# **World Wide Web Policies and Standards for Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, Alabama Cooperative Extension System and College of Agriculture at Auburn University**

## **POLICIES RELATED TO WEB DEVELOPMENT**

[Introduction](#) | [Official And Unofficial Web Sites](#) | [URLs And Domain Names](#) | [Web Site Content](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Related Policies](#) | [Distance Education](#) | [Notice Of Web Site Copyright](#)

## **INTRODUCTION TO WEB STANDARDS**

[What Is The Purpose Of This Web Site?](#) | [Why Do We Need Web Standards?](#) | [What Are The Missions/Visions Of The AAES/ACES/COAG?](#) | [Who Is In The Web Standards Group?](#) | [What Does The Group Do?](#)

## **OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL WEB RESOURCES**

[Page vs. Site](#) | [Who Can Work On Official AAES/ACES/COAG Web Sites?](#) | [Responsibility Of Site Developer](#) | [Unofficial Web Sites](#)

## **BEFORE YOU START DEVELOPING OFFICIAL WEB SITES**

[Getting Help With Site Development](#) | [Launching New Sites](#) | [Recommended Tools For Development and Maintenance](#) | [Additional Tools and Considerations](#) | [Tools NOT To Use](#) |

## **OBTAINING AND USING THE TEMPLATES**

[Types Of Templates](#) | [Required Links In The Templates](#) | [Elements NOT To Include](#) | [Instructions For Using The Templates](#) | [AAES/ACES/COAG Stylesheets](#) | [Web Training](#)

## **ORGANIZATION AND DESIGN GUIDE**

[A Note About Home Pages](#) | [File Structure](#) | [Design](#) | [About Flash](#) | [About Frames](#) | [Navigation](#) | [Courtesy](#)

## **TEXT AND STYLE GUIDE**

[Colors In Text](#) | [Emphasis](#) | [Text Size](#) | [Text Fonts](#) | [Links In Text](#) | [Editing And Proofreading](#) | [Understand How People Read On The Web](#)

## **USABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY**

[Usability: Basic Principles](#) | [Accessibility: Basic Principles](#)

## **IMAGES AND GRAPHICS GUIDE**

[General Graphics Principles](#) | [AAES/ACES/COAG Graphics Standards](#) | [Image Dimensions And Proportions \(Size\)](#) | [Creating Text Graphics](#) | [Using The AAES/ACES/COAG Image Gallery](#)

## **USING AAES/ACES/COAG LOGOS AND WORDMARKS**

[General Principles Of Usage](#) | [AAES Logos And Wordmarks](#) | [ACES Logos And Wordmarks](#) | [COAG Logos And Wordmarks](#) | [Other Logos](#)

"This material is adapted from the Eastern Michigan University Web Standards Guide, copyright Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan, 48197. Used with permission."

## **POLICIES RELATED TO WEB DEVELOPMENT**

**Introduction | Official and Unofficial Web Sites | URLs and Domain Names | Web Page Content | Privacy Policy | Related Policies | Distance Education | Notice of Web Site Copyright**

### **Introduction**

It is the policy of the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and the College of Agriculture at Auburn University (AAES/ACES/COAG) to ensure that official information published on their Web sites correctly represents the organizations and their missions; is accurate, well-written, timely and visually appealing; and is of the same high standards as other official communications.

It is the responsibility of every Web developer at AAES/ACES/COAG to be aware of and to comply with the relevant policies and regulations governing Web development and use of technology.

### **Responsibility for Policy Implementation**

The leaders of the communications departments and ACES/AG IT are jointly responsible for implementing and administering this policy. They shall resolve issues of interpretation and enforcement of this policy jointly with an appropriate administrative official, a Dean in the case of an academic unit in the College of Agriculture or a Director in the case of AAES or ACES.

### **Scope of Policy Coverage**

This policy applies to all developers of Web resources and facilities in the AAES/ACES/COAG and their related foundations and organizations. All such developers consent to all of the provisions of this policy and agree to comply with all of its terms and conditions and with all applicable local, state and federal laws and regulations. Any developer whose actions violate this policy or any related IT policy or regulation may be subject to limitations or loss of Web development privileges as well as other disciplinary actions. AAES/ACES/COAG reserve the right to remove from their servers Web sites that do not comply with University guidelines or the World Wide Web Standards and Policies for Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, Alabama Cooperative Extension System and College of Agriculture at Auburn University.

### **Official and Unofficial Web Sites**

The AAES/ACES/COAG Web servers host both official Web sites and unofficial Web sites.

#### **Official AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites**

An AAES/ACES/COAG Web site is considered official when it is published by and representative of the organizations and/or their subsidiary departments or units. Official Web sites are considered AAES/ACES/COAG-sponsored communications. Therefore, it is important that official Web sites appropriately represent these organizations' missions and commitment to excellence.

#### **Unofficial Web sites**

AAES/ACES/COAG provide Web server space for individual faculty and staff, student and professional organizations and affiliated external organizations. These sites are considered unofficial sites at AAES/ACES/COAG. While server space is provided for unofficial sites developed within current policies of acceptable use and information content, neither Web development nor site support services are provided by the AAES/ACES/COAG communications or IT departments. The contents of unofficial Web sites must comply with the General Rules on Information Content stated in this policy.

Web space for individual faculty and staff is provided automatically as part of ACES/AG network accounts. Student organizations must be officially recognized or chartered by the Auburn University Student Government Association's Student Senate, or in the one-year probationary period prior to the granting of a charter. Student, professional and external organizations must be sponsored by a AAES/ACES/COAG faculty or staff member. Contact the ACES/AG IT department to request access to the AAES/ACES/COAG servers.

### **URLs and Domain Names**

The issue of Web site names (URLs, or the title that appears in the "address" bar of a Web browser) is increasingly important as AAES/ACES/COAG work to establish a cohesive and professional Web presence for their official Web sites. The URL of the primary AAES/COAG Web site is [www.ag.auburn.edu](http://www.ag.auburn.edu); the URL of the primary ACES site is [www.aces.edu](http://www.aces.edu). In order to promote a unified identity and to provide comprehensive

searching and traffic analysis capabilities, all official sites must be hosted on AAES/ACES/COAG servers and must have URLs in the www.ag.auburn.edu or www.aces.edu domains. Exceptions may be granted in cases where the local servers cannot meet the needs for a particular project. The leaders of the communications and IT departments are jointly empowered to approve requests for exceptions.

The URL of official Web pages must directly and succinctly reflect the name of the department, unit, field office or program, and it should be in the format www.ag.auburn.edu/entity or www.aces.edu/entity, where "entity" is the name of the department, unit, field office or program represented by the page. The communications departments, in consultation with the ACES/AG IT department, provide assistance with naming and establishing your page's URL and associated directory.

Custom, or vanity, domains are defined as Web addresses used to market a particular program or project for which an official URL already exists within the www.ag.auburn.edu or www.aces.edu structure. In the interest of promoting a unified identity, a vanity domain that is used as a marketing tool must resolve to a www.ag.auburn.edu or www.aces.edu URL.

Domain names for Web sites that are co-sponsored by other organizations or agencies are not considered to be vanity domains and are not required to resolve to another URL. For projects that partner with other agencies (e.g. www.AlabamaAgritourism.com partners with the Alabama Dept. of Tourism), the vanity URL may be used, but the Web page must clearly indicate AAES/ACES/COAG involvement. Logo use must follow the rules prescribed in Using AAES/ACES/COAG Logos And Wordmarks.

Requests for vanity domains must be coordinated with the ACES/AG IT department prior to registering the domain. ACES/AG IT will purchase the domain on behalf of the end-user or project and will configure it to function properly with AAES/ACES/COAG servers. The end-user or project is responsible for bearing the cost of registering the domain. Domains that are registered without consulting ACES/AG IT in advance may not operate properly with AAES/ACES/COAG servers.

## **Web Site Content**

In general, AAES/ACES/COAG policies and regulations that apply to the content of publications and communications apply to contents of official Web sites published on AAES/ACES/COAG Web servers.

### **General Rules on Information Content**

All official and unofficial Web sites hosted on AAES/ACES/COAG servers must:

- comply with all laws governing copyrights, intellectual property, libel and privacy,
- not violate any policy, rule or regulation of the AAES/ACES/COAG or Auburn University, and
- not be used for non-AAES/ACES/COAG commercial activities,

Additionally, official sites must comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards or provide text-only alternate versions. Unofficial sites are strongly encouraged to comply with ADA standards whenever possible.

### **Development and Maintenance**

The Agricultural Communications and Extension Communications departments are responsible for developing the main AAES/ACES/COAG home pages and administrative Web sites.

Departments, units, programs and field offices are responsible for developing and maintaining their own official sites according to the AAES/ACES/COAG Web Standards Guide. AAES/ACES/COAG templates are specifically provided for this purpose. Web sites developed by academic departments, units, programs or field offices that do not use provided templates must be approved by the appropriate communications department.

It is the responsibility of the designated representatives in departments, units, programs and field offices to ensure that all information in their electronic (Web) publications is accurate, current and adheres to AAES/ACES/COAG policies.

The leaders of the Agricultural Communications and Extension Communications departments and the ACES/AG IT department are charged with appointing the Web Standards Group, which has ongoing responsibility for establishing and approving standards and guidelines for Web development and recommending new policy items to the Directors of the AAES and ACES and the Dean of the COAG.

### **Advertising, Merchandising and Commercial Activity**

Except for approved AAES/ACES/COAG-related activities, sale of goods and services is prohibited on any AAES/ACES/COAG site. Non-AAES/ACES/COAG advertising, merchandising and commercial activity is prohibited in the .edu domains. Links to outside sites that promote any goods or services must be launched in another window so that users have obviously left AAES/ACES/COAG sites.

As per the Auburn University E-Commerce Management Policy, Web pages residing on AAES/ACES/COAG servers are prohibited from accepting credit card numbers or other related personal information such as name on card or card expiration date. All on-line transactions involving credit cards must use the Auburn University Web payment transaction server.

### **Data Security**

All Web pages that pass confidential or secure data such as passwords or personnel information MUST use a secure connection.

### **Requirements for all Web Sites**

1. Unofficial Web sites must conform to all Auburn University and ACES/AG IT policies. Among these are policies regarding Web Development, Appropriate Use of IT Resources, E-Commerce Management, Copyright Regulations and General Network Usage. For a statement of these policies, visit the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see policies).

2. Space on the ACES/AG Web servers is limited. Storage of large video and audio files should be coordinated with the ACES/AG IT department to ensure optimal server performance and file delivery. Large files that hinder the performance or backup procedure of the Web servers may be removed without notice.

### **Requirements for Unofficial Web Sites**

1. Developers of unofficial sites are not permitted to use the official AAES/ACES/COAG templates or close iterations of the AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites' "look and feel." Unofficial sites are not permitted to use any of the AAES/ACES/COAG logos or wordmarks without explicit, written permission from their communications department. Unofficial sites must be clearly distinguishable from official sites in design and presentation.

2. Any unofficial site hosted on AAES/ACES/COAG servers must clearly indicate that it is unofficial. The approved disclaimer for an unofficial site's home page is as follows:

"This site is hosted on AAES/ACES/COAG servers, but is not an official AAES/ACES/COAG Web site. The material on this site is not officially approved, licensed, sponsored or endorsed by these organizations. These organizations assume no express or implied responsibility for any component of this site, including content, presentation, usability, accessibility, accuracy or timeliness, nor of any links directed from this site. For information about this Web site, please contact [a representative of the group or organization]."

3. All files within an organization's Web site directory on the AAES/ACES/COAG servers must be directly and currently a part of the organization's Web site. Personal files are prohibited in an organization's directory. True personal content should be placed in directories under individual userids on the AU-OIT or the AAES/ACES/COAG servers. Temporary work-related content such as class-related materials should be stored in WebCT or in the department's directory dedicated to classes on the AAES/ACES/COAG servers. All content under individual userids will not be indexed by AAES/ACES/COAG search engines and will be deleted when the individual leaves the organization.

### **Privacy Policy**

AAES/ACES/COAG respect individual privacy and collect no personally identifiable information unless an individual affirmatively chooses to make such information available. The organizations do not, and will not, actively share personal information about Web site visitors. Personal information provided by visitors, such as e-mail addresses or information submitted via online forms, is used by AAES/ACES/COAG to assist individual visitors as necessary. This assistance may involve redirecting an inquiry or comment to another AAES/ACES/COAG individual or unit better suited to provide resolution.

AAES/ACES/COAG analyze their Web servers log files to collect summary information about visitors to their Web sites. This information is analyzed to generate summary statistics for purposes such as guiding design considerations, determining successful site segments and determining problem areas. However, because AAES/ACES/COAG are part of a public institution, some information collected from AAES/ACES/COAG

Web sites may be subject to the Alabama Open Records Act, or in some instances AAES/ACES/COAG may be compelled by law to release information gathered from AAES/ACES/COAG Web servers.

The AAES/ACES/COAG are part of a research institution. At any time there are numerous online surveys being conducted on any of the AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites. Confidential information gathered in these online surveys is used only for the research purpose indicated in the survey. Unless otherwise noted on the specified survey, an individual's answers are confidential and individual responses will not be shared with other parties unless required by law. Aggregate data from surveys may be shared with external third parties.

AAES/ACES/COAG also comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which prohibits the release of educational records without student permission. For more details on FERPA, currently enrolled students should consult the Auburn University Student Handbook (The Tiger Cub) or the University's Office of Academic Records and University Registrar.

Questions about this privacy statement or the practices of any AAES/ACES/COAG Web site should be directed to the communications departments.

### **Related Policies**

For other policies visit the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see policies).

### **Distance Education**

Policies related to distance education can be found at on the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see policies).

### **Notice of Web Site Copyright**

The official AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites and all materials comprising the ag.auburn.edu and aces.edu internet domains are protected by U.S. Copyright law and copyrighted under the Digital Millinium Copyright Act of 1998, unless otherwise noted.

Any unauthorized use of any content from these sites, including but not limited to site design, graphics, images and written content, constitutes copyright infringement. All rights are reserved by the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, Alabama Cooperative Extension System and the College of Agriculture at Auburn University.

Additionally, the names *Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station*, *Alabama Cooperative Extension System* and *the College of Agriculture at Auburn University* and all trademarks, wordmarks, logos and symbols are the property of AAES/ACES/COAG and may not be used without prior, express, written permission from their communications departments.

## **INTRODUCTION TO WEB STANDARDS**

### **What Is The Purpose Of This Web Site? | Why Do We Need Web Standards? | What Are The Missions/Visions Of The AAES/ACES/COAG? | Who Is In The Web Standards Group? | What Does The Group Do?**

#### **What Is The Purpose Of This Web Site?**

This site is designed to assist Web developers at the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and the College of Agriculture at Auburn University (AAES/ACES/COAG) in creating and maintaining official Web sites based on approved AAES/ACES/COAG Web standards. Before using the tools and information at this site, you should understand the basics of Web development and the elements of good design and have access to a computer containing the software necessary to create Web sites. You should also have an ACES/AG user account that allows you to access your department's Web directory on the servers.

As a strategic initiative at the AAES/ACES/COAG, Web development falls under the general responsibility of the communications departments (Extension Communications and Ag Communications), in collaboration with two other offices: The Office of Communications and Marketing (OCM) and the ACES/AG IT department. The communications departments also share responsibility for ensuring broad compliance with Auburn University Web standards and policies. If you have questions related to Web development at AAES/ACES/COAG, contact your communications department.

The Web Standards Group and Web developers at the AAES/ACES/COAG are working to create a cohesive, sustainable, user-centered Web presence. AAES/ACES/COAG take seriously their ongoing responsibility to their Web audiences. Therefore, AAES/ACES/COAG take seriously their Web standards and compliance with these standards. Web designers should be aware that a failure to comply with AAES/ACES/COAG Web standards may result in removal of their Web pages or sites from the servers and discontinuation of their access and responsibilities for Web sites. If you are undertaking a new Web development project, you should contact your communications department early in your project to ensure a smooth site development process.

#### **Why Do We Need Web Standards?**

In the higher education marketplace, a professional Web presence is essential to mission, to strategy, to service and to success. The Web has become a key resource for land-grant universities. Prospective and current students use it as a primary means for acquiring information about, and services from, colleges and universities. The Web is an essential resource for faculty, staff, alumni and friends of colleges and universities. It also serves as a means of communicating research-based information to individuals, businesses and communities, both locally and globally. The Web's importance to higher education cannot be underestimated.

Web development at AAES/ACES/COAG has traditionally occurred in a completely decentralized environment. While there is value in the broad creativity of cross-divisional endeavor, it is important for AAES/ACES/COAG's ongoing Web presence to be unified, professional and strategic (see AAES/ACES/COAG's missions and visions below). The development of common standards helps us accomplish these objectives. It will also help the AAES/ACES/COAG community to evolve from static, institutionally centered concepts of "publication" and "information" on the Web to dynamic, user-centered concepts of "communication" and "resources" in Web-based services.

The standards in this guide are established to:

- provide a framework for developing and presenting AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites in a consistent manner;
- maintain appropriate flexibility for departments and units that are participating in the AAES/ACES/COAG overall Web presence;
- ensure that Web pages and sites are consistent with the AAES/ACES/COAG overall strategic marketing and communications efforts; and
- ensure that the public face of AAES/ACES/COAG on the Web is accurate, professional and directly related to the organizations' missions and visions (see below).

### **What Are The Missions And Visions Of The AAES/ACES/COAG?**

#### **AAES's mission**

The Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station (AAES) was established in 1883 to conduct research that

- establishes and enhances Alabama=s economically viable agriculture, forestry and related business and industries;
- promotes environmentally and socially responsible development of Alabama=s natural resources;
- improves the quality of life for all Alabamians; and
- makes available new knowledge discovered through research.

#### **AAES's vision**

To create economically viable growth and natural resource protection for rural Alabama through applied and leading edge research.

#### **ACES's mission**

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System, the primary outreach organization for the land-grant mission of Alabama A&M University and Auburn University, delivers research-based educational programs that enable people to improve their quality of life and economic well-being.

#### **ACES's vision**

To be a world-class educational organization providing real-life solutions that improve the lives of all Alabamians.

#### **COAG's mission**

The College of Agriculture at Auburn University is dedicated to educating people and discovering knowledge that improves the lives of all Alabama citizens through our research, instruction and outreach programs.

#### **COAG's vision**

- To offer students a top-quality education that prepares them for employment, productive citizenship and life-long learning;
- To conduct research that extends and broadens knowledge about agriculture, natural resources, the environment and rural society; and
- To provide educational experiences and information for every citizen of Alabama, the region, the nation and the world through outreach programs that operate within Alabama and globally.

#### **Who Is In The AAES/ACES/COAG Web Standards Group?**

Mark Bransby, ACES Communications, Duncan Hall Annex, Auburn University  
Jonathan Davis, ACES/AG IT, Extension Hall, Auburn University  
Bruce Dupree, ACES Communications, Duncan Hall Annex, Auburn University  
Jean Hall Dwyer, ACES Communications, Dawson Building Alabama A&M University  
Richard Hambley, ACES Communications, Duncan Hall Annex, Auburn University  
Ross Heck, ACES Communications, Duncan Hall Annex, Auburn University  
Troy Hahn, Department of Fisheries and Allied Aquacultures, Swingle Hall, Auburn University  
John Hartley, ACES/AG IT, Extension Hall, Auburn University  
Virginia Morgan, ACES Communications, Duncan Hall Annex, Auburn University  
Terry Rodriguez, AAES/COAG Communications, Comer Hall, Auburn University  
Katie Smith Jackson, AAES/COAG Communications, Comer Hall, Auburn University  
Leigh Stribling, AAES/COAG Communications, Comer Hall, Auburn University  
Carol Whatley, ACES Communications, Duncan Hall Annex, Auburn University

This group was established to provide broad representation to the AAES/ACES/COAG community. Feel free to contact any members of the committee if you have questions or would like to discuss matters related to Web development at AAES/ACES/COAG.

To contact the Web Standards Group, please email [webstandardsteam@aces.edu](mailto:webstandardsteam@aces.edu)

#### **What Does The Web Standards Group Do?**

- meets periodically to discuss issues related to Web development that affect the entire AAES/ACES/COAG community.
- establishes and approves standards and guidelines for Web development at AAES/ACES/COAG.
- recommends new policy items to the Directors of the AAES and ACES and the Dean of the COAG. and
- works to ensure that Web development remains on track as a strategic initiative at AAES/ACES/COAG.

## OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL WEB RESOURCES

### Page vs. Site | Who Can Work On Official AAES/ACES/COAG Web Sites? | Responsibility Of Site Developer | Unofficial Web Sites

#### Page vs. Site

For the purposes of this document, the term “Web page” refers to text, images and other elements that are displayed by a single URL. A “Web site” refers to a collection of pages that, altogether, represent a particular department, project or other entity.

For example, <http://www.ag.auburn.edu/agillustrated/> is the URL or Web address of the collection of Web pages that make up the Web site of the College of Agriculture’s newsletter, *Ag Illustrated*; the Web site contains a collection of pages, which include articles from all past issues of the newsletter.

The URL of a single Web page from the Ag Illustrated Web site is <http://www.ag.auburn.edu/agillustrated/Winter04/fishing.html>. This page contains text and images for one story from a single issue of the newsletter.

#### Who Can Create And Maintain Official AAES/ACES/COAG Web Sites?

Web development requires an understanding of the principles of design, navigation, site structure and usability and it requires a facility with relevant technologies. Even the best tools (and even the AAES/ACES/COAG templates) are no substitute for this knowledge. For this reason, we ask that department heads, deans and area leaders make careful selections when charging staff or faculty with the responsibility for official Web development at AAES/ACES/COAG. Such work requires time, expertise and proper tools.

Once Web sites are developed and templates created, a faculty member or staff person with the requisite skill and time could maintain the site. For academic Web sites, a staff person from each department should be assigned to maintain departmental sites. There are circumstances under which it would be appropriate that students or graduate assistants work on official Web sites (see Getting Help with Site Development).

#### Responsibility Of Site Developer and Maintainer

As the development and maintenance of AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites become part of the assigned responsibilities of faculty or staff, they will become personally responsible for ensuring that the site complies with applicable AAES/ACES/COAG policies, standards and guidelines (located on and linked from this Web site).

If the person with Web development or maintenance duties for the site leaves, another person must be assigned the responsibility for maintaining the site. If no such person has been given this responsibility, both the communications department and either the dean, the unit director or department head must be informed.

#### Unofficial Web Sites: Individual Faculty and Staff, Student and Professional Organizations and Affiliated External Organizations

Requests for Web space for an organization should be submitted via e-mail to [webmaster@acesag.auburn.edu](mailto:webmaster@acesag.auburn.edu) by the faculty or staff sponsor for that organization. The request must include the following information:

1. Name and position of the person making the request
2. Name and affiliation (e.g. student, professional, external agency, etc.) of the organization
3. Prospective URL of the organization’s Web page or site
4. Name and ACES/AG username of the organization’s webmaster(s)
5. Target audience of the Web page or site
6. Estimated disk space required or types of files to be stored (text, images, audio, video, etc.)

All unofficial web sites must meet the content requirements as outlined in Policies Related To Web Development.

## **BEFORE YOU START DEVELOPING OFFICIAL WEB SITES**

### **Getting Help With Site Development | Launching New Sites | Recommended Tools For Development and Maintenance | Additional Tools And Considerations | Tools NOT To Use**

#### **Getting Help With Site Development**

Individual departments and programs are responsible for the development and maintenance of their own sites using the AAES/ACES/COAG site standards and templates in consultation with the communications departments.

Whether you are experienced or inexperienced with Web site development, be sure you are familiar with the principles and guidelines in this document.

#### **Department heads and unit leaders**

If you have someone, either faculty, staff or student who is or will be responsible for developing your site, refer this person to your communications department for consultation and information.

If you do not have faculty, staff or students who will be responsible for Web development, your communications departments (Extension Communications or Ag Communications) can recommend students who are qualified and trained to help you develop and maintain your site.

#### **Those needing training**

Training opportunities are publicized on the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see training)

#### **Launching New Sites At AAES/ACES/COAG**

1. Before you begin an official AAES/ACES/COAG Web development project, make sure you have approval for the Web site's content from your dean, director, department head or program leader and that you have access to the ACES/AG network. (Contact the ACES/AG IT department about network access.)
2. Complete webRequest: Work Request Form, which is a request for approval to develop a Web site. This form will help you develop a clear idea of your site's content and probable structure.
3. Submit the completed webRequest form to your communications department. Your communications department can answer any questions you might have and provide consultation on the scope, process and plan for your work.
4. If your site will include specialized features or server applications or if it will require a custom domain name, contact the ACES/AG IT department.
5. Download Contribute 3 software, which will contain templates for your pages within the program.
6. Develop a few pages of your site using the templates and this online standards guide. Contact the communications department to review your work in progress.
7. Finalize your site; inform the communications department that it is ready to be launched. The Web Standards Group will review your site and suggest any necessary revisions. If the site is ready to launch, the Webmaster will move it to the server or give you instructions for doing so. You must designate a site administrator to maintain your site.

If your site is already completed, notify your communications office that your site is ready for review. Please be aware that developers of official AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites will be asked to bring their sites into compliance with the official AAES/ACES/COAG Web site template standards and guidelines. For this reason, we strongly recommend communicating with your communications office before beginning your project.

#### **Recommended Tools For Web Development And Maintenance**

Web development requires certain essential tools. However, even the best tools are no substitute for certain basic knowledge of Web design and structures, protocols and development. If you are undertaking significant Web projects, we strongly recommend that you invest the time to acquire proficiency for site

development with the tools you select. If you require application development capabilities or training, refer to the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see additional resources and training).

#### **Web design/site management software**

Current versions of Macromedia Dreamweaver and Contribute. The AAES/ACES/COAG templates are designed to be used with Dreamweaver and Contribute. Contact the ACES/AG IT department for information about purchasing software. Dreamweaver is recommended for advanced users only.

#### **Image editing software**

Macromedia Fireworks, Adobe Photoshop or Photoshop Elements

#### **Current browsers**

Internet Explorer 5.x/6; Netscape Communicator/Navigator 4.x and 7. Note that many other browsers will also work fine and are often superior in speed and functionality. Due to high-volume use, Explorer and Navigator are our "supported" browsers, and AAES/ACES/COAG sites must be coded to work in these browsers.

#### **Common browser plug-ins**

The Flash plug-in, Quicktime / Windows Media, RealAudio and Acrobat Reader

### **Additional Tools And Considerations For Web Development**

The following tools are available for Web page development. For further information about using these tools, visit the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see Web development tools)

#### **Database development**

The MySQL database application is available on the AAES/ACES/COAG Web servers. Microsoft SQL and Microsoft Access are NOT supported on the AAES/ACES/COAG Web servers. Individuals using MySQL must be proficient with database development and security practices. Please discuss your plans and needs with the ACES/AG IT department BEFORE working on database development.

#### **Scripting**

PHP, CGI and Perl scripting are all supported on the AAES/ACES/COAG Web servers. PHP is the preferred application, but most commonly used scripts are already on file. Contact the ACES/AG IT department for assistance.

#### **Server-based applications**

In addition to database applications, other applications such as message boards and blogs must be centrally installed and managed by the ACES/AG IT department to ensure proper implementation, integration, security and ongoing maintenance. Contact the ACES/AG IT department for assistance. Java Applets are not supported.

#### **Data Security**

AAES/ACES/COAG Web policy states that all Web pages that pass confidential or secure data such as passwords or personnel information MUST use a secure connection. An SSL certificate is provided for this purpose. As per the Auburn University E-Commerce Management Policy, transactions involving credit cards are expressly prohibited on the AAES/ACES/COAG servers and must instead use the Auburn University credit card transaction server. Contact the ACES/AG IT department for assistance.

### **Tools NOT To Use In Web Development**

Not all available software programs are good Web development tools. We request in the strongest possible terms that you NOT use the following tools for Web development. In addition, many of the following programs will not work with the AAES/ACES/COAG templates.

#### **Microsoft FrontPage**

This program is not supported by AAES/ACES/COAG Web servers. We strongly recommend that you obtain and use Macromedia Dreamweaver for your continued work.

#### **Word Processing Programs**

Traditional word processing programs such as Word and WordPerfect are neither Web development nor design programs. Documents created in Word are best published via PDF or FlashPaper.

#### **Netscape Composer**

This program will not work with the AAES/ACES/COAG templates.

**Microsoft Publisher**

This program is not a Web development program but rather a design program for print publications. Items created in Publisher do not convert to Web safe colors for viewing.

**Technologies that require additional plug-ins**

We recommend that you carefully consider the consequences for usability if you choose to create Web sites that require plug-ins that are not standard components of browsers. Shockwave is (arguably) such a technology. Be aware that if your site requires a non-standard plug-in, you will be automatically excluding a portion of your potential audience.

**Database structures WITHOUT TALKING TO ACES/AG IT DEPARTMENT FIRST**

Many people wish to develop dynamic, database-driven Web sites. We DO support this type of application development within specific parameters. We require a pre-existing proficiency with database administration and the sustainability of site development. Please discuss your plans and needs with your communications department and ACES/AG IT department BEFORE working on database site development.

## **OBTAINING AND USING THE AAES/ACES/COAG TEMPLATES**

Developers of official sites at the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and the College of Agriculture at Auburn University (AAES/ACES/COAG) are required to use the official AAES/ACES/COAG templates, or to design their sites adhering closely to the template concepts, in consultation with their communications departments (Extension Communications or Ag Communications). The goal is that all AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites will present a professional, cohesive, user-centered experience for every visitor to the sites.

The AAES/ACES/COAG Web site templates have been created according to the principles listed here. The structure of the templates provides a range of available options for creative development.

Screen shots of templates for AAES/ACES/COAG Web pages are located on the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see templates).

### **Types Of Templates | Principles Of Template Use | Required Links In The Templates | Elements NOT To Include | Instructions For Using The Templates | AAES/ACES/COAG Stylesheets | Web Training**

#### **Types Of Templates**

The AAES/ACES/COAG templates are designed to be used for official AAES/ACES/COAG pages. Templates have been created for each of the following categories: administrative, academic, programmatic, auxiliary and co-sponsored.

- Administrative sites include all non-academic operations.
- Academic sites include official College sites or academic program sites.
- Programmatic sites include Extension program areas sites.
- Auxiliary sites focus on specific areas that are closely affiliated with the missions of AAES/ACES/COAG.
- Co-sponsored sites are like auxiliary sites but have received funding or been planned by organizations or agencies outside of the AAES/ACES/COAG.

The templates provide a “family look” to each category of AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites. It is important for AAES/ACES/COAG sites to contain specific elements of similarity so that they present a unified look and feel to Web site visitors.

#### **Principles Of Template Use**

All new pages will be required to use the templating system and old pages will be converted as soon as possible.

Page templates should be used as provided, or modified minimally, with your communication department's assistance and approval, to accommodate specific area needs.

All modifications to the official page design must conform to the template concepts, so there is a "family look" to all AAES/ACES/COAG sites. This generally includes template elements such as the navigation bar, the color palette, the stylesheet components, the graphical presentation and other elements. There is room for creativity within these concepts; please consult with your communications department for individual sites.

It is the responsibility of Web site content providers to ensure that all information in their Web sites remains accurate, current and compliant with University policies and that all materials in their directories on the AAES/ACES/COAG servers contain ONLY files and data that are directly and currently a part of their official AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites.

#### **Required Links In The Templates**

**For all templates:**

**On all pages of your site,** the title bar (the very top of the browser window, above the Web page itself) must include your organization's name: Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, Alabama Cooperative Extension System or the College of Agriculture at Auburn University.

**On all pages of your site,** there must be a link to your site's main page (designed or labeled so it is distinguishable from the link to the AAES/ACES/COAG home pages).

**On your site's main page**, a link to Auburn University and ACES (for AAES and COAG ) or Auburn University, A&M University, and AAES (for ACES) must be present. This can be included as part of the footer / masthead.

**On your site's main page** you are required to have the logo of your organization (AAES, ACES or COAG). The logo should be used to link to that organization's home page.

**On your site's main page only**, there must be a link to an e-mail address for your current site administrator. We recommend that you not use the person's name, but rather include a link such as this: "Contact the site administrator," or something similar ("Webmaster" is acceptable). This information must be kept current and accurate. We further recommend that you use the Secure Mail system developed by ACES/AG IT.

**For all templates EXCEPT co-sponsored templates:**

**On all pages of your site**, you should include links to Calendar (the centrally used calendar) and Search.

**On your site's main page**, you are required to link to the following statements as appropriate: Disclaimer, Copyright, Privacy Policy, In furtherance, Equal Opportunity. These statements are incorporated in the AAES/ACES/COAG templates and can be found on the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see statements).

### **Elements NOT To Include**

There are certain elements that detract from the user experience and from the professionalism of your site's presentation. Please do not include the following on your Web site:

Do not include: Individual dates or other specifically time-sensitive information on Web pages, unless you are thoroughly prepared to update them EVERY day, or unless you have an automated method for daily updates. It is important to maintain completely updated information.

Do not include: The site administrator's name on every page of your site. A reference to the site administrator (not by name) is recommended on the main page only. At deeper site levels, it can be hard to maintain this information accurately, and it is also unnecessary.

Do not include: Distracting design elements, such as flashing GIFs, blinking text, background images, super-saturated (very bright) colors, huge or tiny text sizes, very large image files, looped sound files or oversized images.

Do not include: Traffic counters. Information about traffic on your site is available through WebTrends.

Do not include: any non-AAES/ACES/COAG advertising, promotions or commercial activity. These activities are prohibited in the ag.auburn.edu and aces.edu domains, because they are .edu domains.

Do not include: Any files or data of any kind that are not directly and currently a part of your official AAES/ACES/COAG Web site (even if they are not linked on the site).

Do not include: Frames, or Flash-only navigation. Further information is in Organization and Design Guide

### **Instructions For Using The Templates**

After you obtain approval from your communications department and download Contribute, templates for your pages will be available within the program.

You should use the appropriate template as a main page for your department, program or area site. Then, use the options for content pages to create the additional pages within your site.

The "live" links that are included in the template include both local and global navigation. There are also link "placeholders" in the templates that are not live links. Use these link placeholders and link lists to create your site's customized content.

After you have added content, including text and images as you wish, your page(s) are ready to be published to the Web. Contact the person with publishing responsibilities within your department or area.

### **AAES/ACES/COAG Stylesheets**

The templates are based on stylesheets. Examples of AAES/ACES/COAG stylesheets are located on the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see stylesheets). It is important that you do not override stylesheets by specifying your own styles or the Web pages you create using the templates will not appear correctly.

### **Web Training**

If you need assistance in using the templates and graphics files, contact your communications department about training. Other training opportunities will be publicized through the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see training).

Tutorials on Dreamweaver and Contribute are available the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see tutorials).

Contribute software contains tutorials and help files for creating your Web site.

## **ORGANIZATION AND DESIGN GUIDE**

The Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, Alabama Cooperative Extension System and College of Agriculture at Auburn University (AAES/ACES/COAG) Web sites are constructed around some general principles of organization, design and navigation that should guide the development of all official AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites. Following these principles is particularly important because these sites have a broad variety of audiences, and site visitors are looking for very different kinds of information and resources.

### **A Note About Home Pages | File Structure | Design | About Flash | About Frames | Navigation | Courtesy**

#### **A Note About Links On The AAES/ACES/COAG Home Pages**

On a very limited basis, time-sensitive information MAY be added to the AAES/ACES/COAG home pages or on other appropriate pages, at the discretion of the communications departments (Extension Communications or Ag Communications). This is the exception, not the rule. Instead, there are specific sections of the home pages developed to accommodate, publicize and provide information about time-sensitive events, activities and AAES/ACES/COAG highlights. Overall, the designs provide a more unified and intuitive site structure--and a better user experience.

#### **File Structure**

Plan your site's proposed file structure graphically to establish links and hierarchy. Establish directories, subdirectories and navigational paths. This will also help you to determine how to use the AAES/ACES/COAG templates for your individual site. If you require assistance with developing a logical site structure, contact your communications department.

Follow these additional principles as well:

- Make sure that the default file in each directory and subdirectory is titled "index.php", all lowercase.
- Use lowercase titles for all your file names. File and directory names are case sensitive.
- Make sure that file names have proper extensions, such as .html or .inc, .htm, .jpg, .gif, .swf, .php,
- Do not use spaces or punctuation in file names, other than the hyphen "-" convention.
- Use intuitive naming for your files and directories; keep file names as short and descriptive as possible.
- Place all your images and graphics in a subdirectory called "images." Dreamweaver and Contribute automatically create this subdirectory, which should be located within your site's top-level directory.
- Use relative pathnames for links and images, where possible. Dreamweaver and Contribute automatically create relative pathnames for links and images.
- Use your organization's name (Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, or College of Agriculture at Auburn University) in the top (title) bar of the browser window for every page on your site--even those in the lower tiers.

#### **Design**

The purpose of Web design is to enhance and support the user experience. A site's design should not create distractions or confusion; it should emphasize the site's navigation and primary elements.

Perhaps the most important principle of user-centered design is consistency. Other design principles include the following:

- Use background images selectively. They frequently cause problems with readability, which is an essential component of usability. They also increase download time.
- Use animated GIF files extremely sparingly. Animated GIFs that repeat continuously on a Web page can be distracting and annoying.

- Use background colors selectively. Generally speaking, use light background colors for large bodies of text, the main content of your page. Darker colors can be used for navigation buttons, menus and side bars with small amounts of text. The AAES/ACES/COAG templates are designed using specific background colors in certain areas only.
- Avoid using visible tables, unless there is a compelling reason for all those column-and-row lines (like presenting data). Tables are best used as invisible components of page layout. If you use visible tables for presenting data, keep the lines small (border size 1).
- Use professional, legal graphics and images, and keep your image file sizes small, so the images will load quickly. This is particularly important for Web pages with numerous images. Further information on images is available in the Images and Graphics Guide.
- Do not use auto-loading sound files, unless there is a compelling reason to do so (as in a multimedia presentation, where the sound is part of the information content). Do not use looping audio files--the kind that continually play in the background as the user views the site.
- Be sure your site is ADA compliant.

### **About Flash**

Many Web designers are using Flash to add interest and interactivity to their Web site designs. Flash may be used on official AAES/ACES/COAG sites, but only as an extra element. The Flash components of the site must be reviewed by your communication department prior to launch. We recommend that you request an initial review EARLY in the development of your site, so any potential problems or issues can be resolved before you do extensive site development. Please refer to Usability and Accessibility.

The following principles apply to the use of Flash on all official AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites:

- Do not use Flash as the site's primary or exclusive navigation component or as a requirement to view the primary content of the site (i.e. no "all-Flash" sites).
- Make Flash site "introductions" or "splash pages" optional (i.e. provide a "skip intro" option). Audio components must be optional (provide an "off" option).
- Provide a fully-functional and accessible non-Flash site or version of the site. Include a detect script for non-Flash-enabled browsers, in addition to the required "skip" option for Flash-enabled browsers.
- Provide a direct link to the current download of the free Flash player on the site's main page. (i.e. "To view all the content on this site, you will need the Flash player, available as a free download here.")

### **About Frames (Don't Use Them)**

Please do not use frames in official AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites. The AAES/ACES/COAG Web standards do not support the use of frames. The AAES/ACES/COAG templates are not structured to use Frames because Frames cause problems with accessibility, bookmarking and inter-site navigation.

For ease of site maintenance, use the Dreamweaver templating feature to create site elements (such as navigation bars) to retain and update common information for a variety of pages on your site.

There is one exception to the don't-use-frames rule: I-frames. AAES/ACES/COAG templates will support the use of I-frames, which quickly load PDF files into a frame. Contact your communications department for assistance in setting up I-frames properly.

### **Navigation**

Navigation is the anchor of your site's usability. Navigation can make the difference between a user-centered site and a poorly designed site. The AAES/ACES/COAG templates are designed with the recommended navigation structure for AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites. Developers of official AAES/ACES/COAG sites should use this navigation structure or a similar one.

There are a number of principles for good site navigation. Here are a few:

- Organize your site navigation with user expectations in mind. Throw out your AAES/ACES/COAG divisional organizational chart; it is not a good model for organizing your site's navigation. Your site's structure should require no institutional knowledge on the part of the user. A complete stranger should be able to figure out how to navigate your site.
- Keep your navigation consistent; let the user know what to expect and where to find it. Use intuitive navigation so users do not have to spend time figuring out how to use your site.
- Do not experiment with unusual navigational conventions. Your site's navigation should meet the expectations of people who use the Web. Even inexperienced users should be able to find their way around.
- Wherever links are present on your site, make it visually clear that they are links. It is also helpful to users to distinguish between links that have been visited and those that have not.
- Make the hierarchy of the site evident through your navigation (how to find information and how the information is organized). Users should also find an easy way to search the site.

## **Courtesy**

It is important to design your site from a user-centered perspective, not an institutionally centered or departmentally centered perspective. Some rules of Web design courtesy include the following:

- Assume that your users do not know who you are, how your department or area functions and what your organizational structure is. Do not assume any institutional knowledge. Constantly consider what the users of your site will want and expect. Conduct basic usability testing on your site by working with people from your expected audience (people who do not know what you know about your area or department).
- Make sure your users know what to expect. Clearly indicate text links via underline, color change or button effects, but be consistent throughout your site. If a link on your site will cause the user to download a PDF file or Word document or other file, tell the user that the link leads to a download. If the user will need certain technologies to view or navigate particular components of your site (make careful decisions about this), indicate this information clearly.
- Do not force users to adapt to your navigational structure. While a good navigational structure will be the basis by which many users obtain what they want from your site, some users will encounter your site through entrances other than your home page (such as by using a search engine). Give your users navigational choices. Do not require them to use a specific browser or any non-standard technology. Let them know where they are. Make information and resources easy to find.
- If you use a back button, use a Javascript function that truly goes to the last page visited. Some users have navigational habits (such as the back button) that are part of common expectations.
- Do not force your visitors to accommodate both horizontal and vertical scrolling. In general, horizontal scrolling is discouraged. Try to design your pages to fit the general screen width that monitors and browsers accommodate. On an 800 x 600 pixel monitor, the acceptable page width is 760 pixels.
- Create your pages so that they can be printed. Even if you don't intend for people to print your pages, some will, and you should accommodate this option. For general page design, printable pages require certain design protocols, such as no reversing body text out of a dark background, for example. You should also avoid extreme landscape-oriented designs (larger than 760 pixels wide).

## TEXT AND STYLE GUIDE

If you want people to use your site, be consistent. One of the best ways to ensure consistency and professionalism in your text is to use cascading stylesheets, which ensure that the presentation of your text is consistent throughout your site. The AAES/ACES/COAG stylesheet appropriate for your organization (Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, Alabama Cooperative Extension System or the College of Agriculture at Auburn University) makes it very easy to make changes that apply to your entire site--a change to the stylesheet automatically changes every page that refers to it.

The AAES/ACES/COAG stylesheets also incorporate an ADA-compliant heading system hierarchy, which makes it easier for text readers to determine the information flow of the site. See the ACES/AG IT Web development site (stylesheets)

If there is a compelling reason that you cannot use the existing AAES/ACES/COAG stylesheets for your Web site, your stylesheet still must retain the elements of the AAES/ACES/COAG stylesheets and be approved by your communications department. Also please be aware that you will be responsible for ensuring that your site continues to comply with AAES/ACES/COAG's evolving site standards in the future.

A note about content: Ultimately, YOU are responsible for the content (both text and graphics) that appears on the pages of your Web site. This standards guide will provide some assistance in developing your site, but you must be attentive to the accuracy, currency and professionalism of all your official AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites.

### Colors In Text | Emphasis | Text Size | Text Fonts | Links In Text | Editing And Proofreading | Understand How People Read On The Web

#### Colors In Text

- For text, use dark colors on a light background for maximum contrast and readability. Recommended body text colors are #000000 (black) or #000066 (dark blue). Always use dark colors for any text longer than a couple of lines.
- Background color for body text should be #FFFFFF (white). Alternative colors are #CCCCCC (light grey), #FFFFCC (pale yellow), or #CCCC99 (light tan).
- Use hard returns between paragraphs in your body text to create white space and make the text easier to read. Reading long lines of type causes eye strain and makes keeping track of the text difficult. For improved readability, limit the width of the text to about 356 pixels, or about nine to 11 words per line of 12 pixel type.
- Menus are useful not only for navigation but also as a means of organizing and designing your page. As such, it is a good idea to use colors for menus that contrast with the text background colors. For AAES and COAG sites, acceptable background colors for menus are #0000FF, #003399, #6666CC, #6666FF (shades of blue) and #FF6600, #FF3300, #CC3300 (shades of orange). Recommended text colors for these backgrounds are #FFFFFF (white), #CCCCCC (light grey) or #CCCC99 (light tan). For ACES sites, acceptable background colors are the #1E78C1 (blue) and #006666 (green).
- If you wish to use color in text, stick to the Web color palette (256 colors) and use colors that will work within the AAES/ACES/COAG color palette. Avoid using multiple text colors. Text colors should be used sparingly for selective highlights, not as a way to add decoration or color to a page.
- If you are using color in text for emphasis, provide an additional means of emphasis as well, for those who are colorblind. Any colors you use should also be clear, contrasting and readable.

#### Emphasis

- Do not underline text or use blinking (<blink>) text for emphasis; use bold (<strong>) or italic (<em>) text instead. For Web users, underlined text--and particularly colored underlined text--signifies a link.
- When using bold or italic for emphasis, do not overemphasize. As the saying goes, "all bold is no bold." And, since italicized text is harder to read than regular text, use italics sparingly and for no more than a few lines of text at a time.

## **Text Size**

For good legibility and visual organization use the following guides: header fonts should be 20 to 24 pixels; subheads should be 14 to 16 pixels; body text should be 12 pixels or size "2"; and footers should be a little smaller. Text sizes are built in to the AAES/ACES/COAG stylesheets.

Be aware that font sizes are rendered differently on Mac and PC browsers (PCs render text larger than Macs).

## **Text Fonts**

Specified fonts on your Web pages should be part of the common set that is the default on current desktop/laptop PCs and Macs. This is a very limited set. A good convention is to use the default font, which is usually Times or Times New Roman for serif text, or the "arial, helvetica, verdana, sans-serif" convention for sans-serif type. Text specifications are built in to the AAES/ACES/COAG stylesheets. The AAES/ACES/COAG templates and stylesheets are designed to use Verdana / Arial as the sans-serif default for online text.

If you wish to use a non-standard font in a limited way (such as in a page header, etc.), you can create an image file using the font. Don't forget to use ALT text for ADA compliance.

Avoid using multiple fonts on a page--this is unprofessional and distracting.

## **Links In Text**

Link text must be legible on the background color. Unvisited links should be a different color than visited links. Make sure the user knows they are links. For graphic links, construct the navigation so links are obvious. Be consistent with text throughout your site.

## **Editing And Proofreading**

You are responsible for editing and proofreading your site's content. You may wish to create text in a word processing program (such as Word) that has full-featured grammar and spell-checking capabilities. Dreamweaver and Contribute also provide a very functional spell-check feature. Even so, there is no substitute for a human proofreader.

Common resources for writing styles are Associated Press and Chicago style guides.

## **Understand How People Read On The Web**

Studies have shown that people generally do not read large blocks of text on the Web. Most readers approach large blocks of text on Web sites in the following three ways:

They scan the content for highlights.  
They print out pages.  
They leave the site without reading the text.

Therefore, if you want people to read the text on your Web pages, make the content scannable. Use the following principles:

- Break up large blocks of text into small portions.
- Use bulleted lists.
- Highlight important terms or phrases (but not excessively). Don't expect your readers to read every word.
- Try to be concise.
- Design your pages to lead to the most important sections (primary navigation or elements) with clear visual cues.

## USABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Sometimes the hardest thing for Web developers to realize is that the site they are developing is not primarily for them. The second hardest thing to realize is that a Web site's impact goes beyond the Web. A visitor's perception of a Web site affects that person's view of the product or service represented by the site. So your Web site affects your department, program or unit's credibility, image and perceived value.

Your site should be developed for your organization's audience—the audiences of the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and the College of Agriculture at Auburn University (AAES/ACES/COAG). Your site should focus on audience needs, expectations and user patterns. For more information on usability and accessibility, visit the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see usability and accessibility resources)

Additionally, accessibility is an important component of usability. It's so important that it gets its own section below. Remember that your site's usability will make the difference between satisfied and dissatisfied visitors. Its implications go beyond the Web, so it's worth your attention.

### Usability: Basic Principles | Accessibility: Basic Principles

#### Some Basic Usability Principles

- Keep your audience in mind during the entire site development process.
- Make it obvious. Design your site and your navigation so it's immediately clear where things are and how to use the site.
- Make it accurate. Information should be correct and fresh. The site should be free of typographical and other errors.
- Make it fast. Your pages--especially your home page--should load very quickly in all browsers, approximately 15 seconds or less on a 56K modem.
- Make it valuable. Give your users what they came for--and then some.
- Make it searchable. Provide a search function, and optimize your site for presentation on search engines.
- Design it professionally. Presentation matters.
- Keep it up to date. Refresh your content; give the visitor a reason to return.
- Keep your promises. Respond quickly to e-mail and comments. Keep links updated (NO "under construction" pages!).
- Make yourself (or someone else) accessible by e-mail. We recommend using the Securemail form. For more information, visit the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see securemail).

#### Some Basic Accessibility Principles

It is important to make your site as accessible as possible for visitors who have some form of disability--conditions such as blindness, colorblindness or conditions affecting motor coordination. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has developed guidelines for developing Web sites that accommodate these disabilities. Review the Web Accessibility Initiative.

Section 508 of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act is also based on these general standards. Section 508 was "enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology, to make available new opportunities for people with disabilities, and to encourage development of technologies that will help achieve these goals." Section 508 Web-based standards are summarized here.

Rules of thumb to help you make your site accessible and compliant with AAES/ACES/COAG Web standards include the following (similar suggestions are found under the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative):

- If you are using images or graphics of any kind, including graphs and charts, on your site, use ALT tags to describe these elements.

- If you are using image maps, use client-side image maps and ALT text for hot spots.
- If your site has audio or video components, provide captions and transcripts of audio and written descriptions of video.
- For links in text, describe the link rather than using "click here" or providing the URL directly.
- Use a consistent structure in organizing the pages of your Web site.
- Do not use non-breaking spaces (&nbsp;) for text alignment on pages.
- If you are using scripts, applets or plug-ins, provide alternative content for all features that may not be accessible in every browser.
- Do not use frames.
- If you wish to use Flash, do not use Flash as the primary or exclusive navigation tool on your site. Use it only as an auxiliary component of your site. Also, create a mirror site that does NOT require Flash.
- Use the accessibility verification tools available on the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see usability and accessibility resources).

## IMAGES AND GRAPHICS GUIDE

Most sites on the Web today use images or graphics. The two terms are generally interchangeable in a Web context. (Sometimes a distinction is drawn between photographic "images" and line-art "graphics." We use the terms interchangeably.)

The most important principles for images and graphics on Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, Alabama Cooperative Extension System and College of Agriculture at Auburn University (AAES/ACES/COAG) Web sites are that they should be relevant, professional, optimized for the Web and legal.

The principles and guidelines here deal primarily with static images, but the same principles generally apply to images in flash animations, video clips and other multimedia presentations.

If you do not have experience with creating and editing images for the Web, we recommend that you obtain assistance from someone who does. Visit the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see training).

### **General Graphics Principles | AAES/ACES/COAG Graphics Standards | Image Dimensions And Proportions (Size) | Creating Text Graphics | Using The AAES/ACES/COAG Image Gallery**

#### **General Graphics Principles**

Professionalism and presentation are important. The way your graphics are designed and presented is a reflection not only on your Web site and its information and resources, but also on the entity your site represents. If you do not have experience with professional design, we recommend that you obtain assistance from someone who does.

Relevance is important. The graphics on your site should be directly and obviously related to your site's content.

Legality is critical. Site developers must know, understand and comply with the rules of copyright for images on the Web, as well as in print. The easy availability of images on the Web, along with the anonymity of the Web, can create complacency about image ownership and copyright. As a general rule, if you don't know who owns an image, or if you have not been granted express permission to use an image, DO NOT USE that image.

An important corollary to legality is ethics in the use of images and site content. AAES/ACES/COAG is committed to ethical Web development. If you have ANY questions about the origin, alteration, use or development of the content on your site, please contact your communications department for consultation.

It is important to have written permission on file for any photographs of people. It is especially critical to keep written parental permission on file for any photos of children under age 16.

Finally, it is also important to understand the regulations for using AAES/ACES/COAG logos and wordmarks on your Web site.

If you require assistance choosing, obtaining or using images on your Web site, contact your communications department for suggestions. You may also refer to the online image gallery (which is under continued development) if you would like to use existing AAES/ACES/COAG images on your site.

#### **AAES/ACES/COAG Graphics Standards**

- Keep all graphics for each site in the images folder. The link paths in your site should be relative (i.e. "images/graphic.jpg" or "../images/graphic.gif.")
- Use good syntax for naming images: lowercase letters, no spaces or extraneous characters except the hyphen "-" or the underscore "\_" character, short and descriptive file names.
- Avoid using background images (sometimes called background GIFs or tiling backgrounds). They are often distracting and rarely add to the professionalism of a site's appearance.

- Avoid flashing or animated GIFs. With rare exceptions, these icons do not add to the professionalism of Web pages or a Web site.
- Avoid using cute or whimsical clip art. Graphics should be professionally produced and presented.
- Pay attention to colors. Your colors should work well together and should complement the site's images and content. While you are not required to use the Web-safe color palette, we do recommend that you optimize your colors for the Web. The Web-safe palette provides a good way to do this.
- Use GIF and JPG images appropriately for the types of images on your site. (While some browsers can read WBMP images, it is not a good idea to use this format on your site.) For the most effective use of the relative compression algorithms, JPG is usually used for photographic images, and GIF is usually used for graphics with larger areas of common color and images that include text. It is important to note that JPG does not support transparency, so if you want a transparent image, it will need to be a GIF. You can simulate transparency on a JPG by setting it on a background identical to the background color on a Web page.
- Since all images on the Web are displayed at 72 dpi, save your high-resolution original images in an image editing program, then create 72 dpi JPGs or GIFs for Web use.
- Optimize your graphics for small file sizes. A Web page should load in about 15 seconds over a 56k modem. Full-featured image editing programs, such as Fireworks or Photoshop, provide tools for image optimization. These include reducing the color palette, creating slices and increasing image compression. Be careful that your selections for image optimization do not degrade image viewing quality.
- Always use ALT tags for images, as a component of accessibility.
- All AAES/ACES/COAG logos, wordmarks and symbols are copyrighted by AAES/ACES/COAG. Further information and regulations governing their use are here.

### **Image Dimensions And Proportions (Size)**

- Do not resize images in browsers using HTML; this degrades image viewing quality. Resize your images in an image editing program such as Fireworks, Photoshop or Contribute.
- Present each image at 100% of its original proportions. Do not stretch or squish images to fit a particular area of your Web page. If you need an image at different proportions than your original image, either crop the image to fit the space at 100% proportions, or select an alternative image that better fits your Web page.
- In addition to using 100% dimensions and proportions for your images, please make sure that your images are prepared at 72 dpi in your image editing program. Browsers have to interpret images at other sizes, and the results are undesirable.
- Finally, larger images are not necessarily better; in fact, they often distract from the professionalism and usability of your site. Remember that people use browsers of different sizes, so a 4x6 image on your browser may take up most of someone else's screen. Use thumbnail images to link to larger images if necessary.

### **Creating Text Graphics For Your Site**

If you want to use a custom font, you should create a text graphic using Fireworks or Photoshop. Text graphics should be used sparingly because they increase download time.

### **Using The AAES/ACES/COAG Image Gallery**

AAES/ACES/COAG will provide a gallery of images online for official Web development at AAES/ACES/COAG. These images may or may not suit your needs; we will be adding images to this gallery over time. PLEASE NOTE that all images in the gallery are permitted for use on official AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites only.

THE IMAGE GALLERY SECTION NEEDS WORK. WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT SEVERAL ISSUES, INCLUDING WHICH IMAGES THE PUBLIC WILL HAVE ACCESS TO AND WHICH IMAGES WILL BE FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY.

## **USING AAES/ACES/COAG LOGOS AND WORDMARKS**

Like all colleges, universities and federal and state organizations, Alabama A&M University, Auburn University, the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station and Alabama Cooperative Extension System have specific regulations governing the use of their logos and wordmarks. These images are copyrighted and wholly owned by the institutions, and may not be used on documents, the Web, presentations or any other application without express permission.

Express permission is hereby granted to official AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites ONLY (not for ANY other use) to use official AAES/ACES/COAG logos and wordmarks according to the standards on this Web site. Unofficial Web sites, including faculty and student home pages, student organization sites and professional organization sites, are not permitted to use any official AAES/ACES/COAG logos or wordmarks without explicit, written permission from their communication department.

Specific rules governing the use of the AAES/ACES/COAG logos and wordmarks in print (as well as downloads for print), are located on the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see images and graphics).

If you believe you have a legitimate use for an AAES/ACES/COAG logo for a purpose not addressed above, please send a specific inquiry to your communications department. Permission for other uses of the AAES/ACES/COAG logos may be granted on a limited, case-specific basis.

### **General Principles Of Usage | AAES Logos And Wordmarks | ACES Logos And Wordmarks | COAG Logos And Wordmarks | Other Logos | Notice Of Web Site Copyright**

#### **General Principles For Using AAES/ACES/COAG Logos And Wordmarks**

AAES/ACES/COAG logos and wordmarks may be used on all official AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites only and may not be used on unofficial Web sites or personal pages.

All AAES/ACES/COAG logos and wordmarks are intended for use "as is," which means they must not be altered in any way, including re-creation; changes in size, proportions, colors or characteristics; or special effects such as animations, shadows, etc.

The approved color combinations are located on the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see logos).

We recommend that you link to the existing images on the servers rather than downloading the files for each of your own pages.

Logos must be linked to the organizations home page with target=\_blank or target=\_top.

If you are developing an official AAES/ACES/COAG site and you need a logo in a specific size or with specific characteristics, please contact your communications department.

Do not resize logos using html. Use the logos as they are sized on the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see logos/images).

#### **AAES Logos And Wordmarks**

<http://www.ag.auburn.edu/adm/comm/logo-gallery/index.php>

Current AAES tagline (Ideas Grow Here) should only be used for marketing-specific applications in consultation with your communications department.

#### **ACES Logos And Wordmarks**

<https://ssl.acesag.auburn.edu/internal/drive/>

#### **College Of Agriculture Logos And Wordmarks**

<http://www.ag.auburn.edu/adm/comm/logo-gallery/index.php>

Current COAG tagline (People Grow Here) should only be used for marketing-specific applications in consultation with your communications department.

**Other Logos**

Official AAES/ACES/COAG Web sites may not use logos/wordmarks, or variations of logos/wordmarks, that are not explicitly approved or provided by your communications departments (Extension Communications or Ag Communications).

Also, outdated logos, signatures and taglines may not be used on the Web (or in any other communications medium).

Contact your communications department if you have any questions regarding the use of any AAES/ACES/COAG logos or wordmarks or if you need an electronic version of an AAES/ACES/COAG logo or wordmark for your Web site that is not on the ACES/AG IT Web development site (see logos).