

Collection Development Policy for Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library

Introduction

As part of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Special Collections of the National Agricultural Library (NAL) is charged with acquiring, arranging, describing, preserving and making available rare materials significant to the history of agriculture and the USDA. The Collection Development Policy for Special Collections, in conjunction with NAL's overall collection development policy, guides staff in evaluating potential new materials and additions to existing collections. This policy also informs potential donors of the criteria used to evaluate new materials.

Scope and Focus of NAL Special Collections

Factors considered in selecting items for Special Collections include value, rarity, fragility, unusual format or size, and unique provenance or subject focus.

1. Formats Currently in Special Collections

- Rare books.
- Manuscript collections – the papers of individuals or records of organizations.
- Nursery and seed trade catalogs.
- Photographs.
- Original works of art.
- Audiovisual and other multi-media materials.
- Ephemera such as Smokey Bear games, laboratory equipment, etc.
- Recorded research data.

2. Current Collection Strengths

- USDA history, research programs and scientific accomplishments.
- Botanical illustrations and photographs.
- Commercial nursery and seed trade company publications and records.
- Plant exploration papers and plant introduction records.
- History of insect and pest control.
- History of the poultry industry including commercial companies, professional association records and scientific research.
- Promotional materials (government and commercial) for agricultural products, services and programs.
- Records of agricultural professional associations and organizations whose work relates to the USDA.
- History of the floral industry in America.
- History of home economics, 4-H, and human nutrition.

3. Subject Areas in Need of Development

- Minority farming, research, and agricultural pursuits.
- Animal sciences.
- Ornithology.
- First hand accounts of farm and rural life.
- History of agricultural equipment.
- Forestry.
- Original agricultural research data.

Criteria for Evaluation of Potential Acquisitions

NAL uses the following criteria to determine whether materials are appropriate for inclusion in Special Collections:

1. Age

- While age alone will not solely determine whether an item is added to Special Collections, any materials dating before 1900 will be evaluated for inclusion in Special Collections.

2. Research or Market Value

- Documents significant people, innovations, and programs throughout the history of American agriculture that have risen to prominence and/or received critical success as acknowledged by awards. Preference is given to USDA employees and programs, however, Special Collections does not automatically accept all material originated by USDA employees.
- Establishes a new collection in an underdeveloped subject area.
- Documents the work and history of an association whose membership is largely USDA and whose mission is closely aligned with that of the USDA.
- Supports the current and future needs of NAL researchers.
- Fits within the overall collection development policy.
- Adds to or enhances an existing collection.
- Was published or distributed in limited quantities.

3. Artifactual Characteristics

- Primary source material (an original rather than a reprint or copy). Some exceptions are made.
- Fine bindings or publisher's bindings and/or decorated endpapers.
- Books with valuable prints, maps, photographs or illustrations.
- Significant provenance or ownership history.
- Fine printing or printing on vellum or other unusual paper.
- Unusual formats such as ephemera, original works of art, and posters.

4. Condition

- Can be handled and stored without damaging item
- Can be made stable with minimal resources.
- Is free of insect, mold or other types of damage.

5. Ownership and Access

- Comes under complete ownership of NAL.
- Has a documented ownership history.
- Have no restrictions on public access or use in exhibitions.

Resources Needed to Acquire, Process, Store, and Provide Access

The ability to accept new materials may be affected by the following factors:

- Cost to acquire the material.
- Space and resources needed to properly house the materials.
- Staff and funding available to organize, describe, and re-house the material and provide timely access.
- Preservation/conservation needs of the material.

Types of Materials Not Accepted by Special Collections

- Government records that fall within the collection scope of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA): materials documenting the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and transactions of federal agencies. NAL staff and agency Records Managers can help interpret these guidelines.
- Confidential, restricted or classified materials.
- Financial transaction records unless the donor requests inclusion or if they provide historic evidence of use to researchers.
- Material that is widely held at other institutions or readily available elsewhere.
- Material in formats for which NAL cannot provide access.
- Material for which NAL cannot provide proper storage.
- Material deposited anonymously for which there is no donor contact information.

De-accessioning and Transfer Policy

- NAL maintains the right to remove all or part of a collection or transfer it to another organization.
- Individual items may be transferred between the general and Special Collections with the approval of the Head of Special Collections.

Procedures for Donation

All materials considered for inclusion in Special Collections will be evaluated on an individual basis. The time frame for NAL to evaluate a donation will vary depending on the size, nature, and availability of the materials involved.

In order for Special Collections to accept a gift of collection materials, the materials must be substantial enough to enhance the scholarship in that subject. Donors may be asked to provide written documentation describing the contents of the donation prior to evaluation by NAL. Additionally, some gifts will be accepted only if they are received with adequate funds to arrange, describe, and preserve the collection.

NAL staff is willing to help you decide if your material is appropriate for our collection, however, we legally cannot provide appraisals of the financial value of a collection or item.

Prior to sending any materials, potential donors must contact NAL Special Collections staff at specialcollections@ars.usda.gov or 301-504-5876.