Privacy Act

What is the purpose of the Privacy Act?

The Privacy Act provides safeguards against invasion of personal privacy through the misuse of records by Federal agencies. Records may be protected from release pursuant to one or more of the Privacy Act exemptions. See exemptions here. In accordance with the Privacy Act, these records may be withheld, even from the person to whom the records pertain, unless release is required under the Freedom of Information Act.

What records can be requested under the Privacy Act?

The Privacy Act is concerned essentially with documents contained in a system of records that is retrievable by a person's name or personal identifier.

Who can request records under the Privacy Act?

You must be a United States citizen or an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence to the United States to make a request for Privacy Act records.

How do I request my own records?

For assistance in requesting your own records from the Office of Adjudication, please refer to "Where and How To Make a Privacy Act Request." For help with your request letter, view a sample Privacy Act letter.

May I request records pertaining to another individual?

Yes, you may request records concerning another individual, with their written permission. This kind of request is called a "third party request." A third party request accompanied by proper written consent will be processed as first party requests.

Will there be a charge for documents obtained under the Privacy Act?

Yes. Under the Privacy Act, you can only be charged the cost of copying records, not for time spent locating them. The Department of Agriculture charges $.20 per page for duplication.
Whom do I contact to find out the status of my PA request or appeal?

You may contact the Office of Adjudication FOIA Specialist, at 202-720-5212, or via email to ascrfoia@usda.gov.

What if I am not a US citizen or permanent resident alien and I want records about myself?

You may request records concerning yourself, even if you are not a US citizen, but your request will be processed under the Freedom of Information Act, not the Privacy Act.

How do I decide which Act - the Freedom of Information Act or the Privacy Act - pertains to the records I want?

You do not have to make that decision. When a request is received at the Office of Adjudication, the FO