

September 15, 2008

SUBJECT: Performance Cycle Ending September 30, 2008

TO: All CSREES Employees

FROM: Colien Hefferan /s/
Administrator

This memo describes the procedures to be used for finalizing performance appraisals and awards for the January 1, 2008 - September 30, 2009 performance cycle. USDA agencies are transitioning to a fiscal year performance cycle, which results in a 9-month cycle for CSREES in 2008. Since the current cycle is shorter than the normal one year period, it is necessary to modify past practices and policies, including amounts for performance awards. The monetary or time-off value of performance awards in 2008 will be 75% of the value of such awards in a normal one-year performance cycle.

- Each employee will be rated by their immediate supervisor (rating official). Each rating official will finalize the rating with the reviewing official's approval (typically the second level supervisor). Each Deputy Administrator and OA Director will meet with the Associate Administrator to review their unit's rating. A summary of ratings from each unit will be compiled and reviewed by the Associate Administrator. Once the unit's meeting with the Associate Administrator occurs, the rating officials will then hold formal performance discussions with employees. The purpose of Associate Administrator review of summary ratings is to ensure that each employee receives a rating to compare/evaluate against the achievement of overall Agency goals, identify trends, and resolve any apparent issues.
- Each employee will be required to prepare a 1-2 page accomplishment report. Additional pages will not be considered. **The deadline for employee submission of accomplishment reports is determined by supervisors but will be no later than October 10, 2008.** The report should be formatted by performance element and focus on the specific accomplishment, as well as its impact on the process/work, client/customer, or unit/organization. Employees may find it useful to refer back to previous accomplishment reports, activity or status reports, and/or calendars in preparing accomplishment reports. Accomplishment reports serve as a reminder to supervisors and employees of specific individual and/or group achievements, contributions, and accomplishments within a rating cycle. Supervisors will use personal observation of employee performance, written accomplishment reports, and/or feedback from various sources to determine an employee's rating of record.
- **HRD will provide training to new employees (and those who would like a refresher) on the preparation of accomplishment reports on October 7, 2008, at 9:30 a.m. in 1410 Waterfront.** If you plan to attend this session of Writing Accomplishment Report Training, please register in AgLearn. If you have problems registering, please contact Ashley Magill (301) 504-1476. There also is information on "Writing Accomplishment Report" available at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/performance/presentations.htm>
- The following levels of performance are defined to provide clarification. Supervisors should communicate these definitions to their employees.

Fully Successful - Fully Successful performance is good performance. Work performed at this level is of good quality, the expected quantity, and is accomplished within the established deadlines or time frames.

Exceeds Fully Successful - Performance which consistently exceeds the performance standards established for the Fully Successful level.

- CSREES will continue to recognize *Fully Successful with at least 2 points in the Exceeds Column, Superior and Outstanding* performance. Employees who receive a Fully Successful rating of record with at least 2 points in the Exceeds Column will receive a performance award. Employees who receive a *Superior* rating of record may receive either a performance award or time off award of 18 hours. Employees who receive an *Outstanding* rating of record may receive either a performance award, QSI, or time off award of 30 hours. If considering time off, please refer to the policy guidance at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/awards/files/table-monetary-non-monetary.pdf>. Employees who have received a QSI in the past 52 weeks or have been promoted or reassigned to a different position near the end of the rating cycle are not eligible to receive a QSI. Therefore, if you received a QSI for your 2007 Outstanding performance rating, you will only be able to receive a cash or time off award, not a QSI. Supervisors should contact their servicing specialist in HRD if they plan to give any QSIs. A separate justification, in addition to the employee's accomplishment report, is required for a QSI. Performance awards will be pro-rated for employees who have been employed with CSREES for less than one year.
- CSREES will continue the use of spot, extra effort, time off and non-monetary token awards to recognize efforts during the rating cycle.
- Supervisors should encourage and recognize team and group efforts.
- Performance management policy document, P&P 435.1 - CSREES Performance Planning and Appraisal, can be found on www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/435-1.htm for reference purposes.

Completion of Performance Appraisals (AD-435P)

Performance Appraisals (AD-435P) will be completed using the electronic version of the form, available on e-Forms. Units may make the necessary changes to employee AD-435P forms that were saved on disk last year. Each Deputy Administrator will receive an employee list from HRD that will provide the employee information necessary to update/complete the upper section of each AD-435P. Once the form is completed and printed, each individual AD-435P should, again, be saved to disk and retained for use for future performance cycles. Since the disk will contain sensitive information, please keep the disk in a secure place and/or password protect the documents on disk or in your system, when saving.

Employees who have been under performance elements and standards (PE/S) for at least 90 days must receive an appraisal using the AD-435P. Those excluded include student assistant appointees, employees in full-time training, employees who are on intermittent work schedules, and employees on temporary appointments limited to one year or less. Performance cycles for employees who have not been covered under PE/S for the 90 day minimum appraisal period are normally extended. The information below describes how extension of performance cycles will be handled. The reason for this policy is so that employees in these situations who are eligible for performance awards get included in the annual agency

allocation for performance awards. Please call HRD if there are other situations which require policy determinations.

1) Employees new to CSREES who will not be covered under PE/S by the end of the performance cycle (September 30, 2008) will have their cycle extended if they meet the 90 days and can be rated by October 18, 2008. If an employee cannot be rated by October 18, 2008, the employee will receive their first rating of record at the end of the next performance cycle (September 30, 2009). Since the performance cycle for employees in this situation is longer, supervisors should consider scheduling an additional progress review to provide the employee with important performance feedback.

2) Employees who were put on new PE/S later in the performance cycle due to promotion or reassignment and who will not be covered under those PE/S by the end of the performance cycle (September 30, 2008), will have their cycle extended if they meet the 90 days and can be rated by October 18, 2008. If an employee cannot be rated by October 18, 2008, the employee will be rated based on their performance in the previous position.

NOTE: Employees who have retired or separated and were covered under a certified performance plan for at least 90 days in the rating cycle should be appraised and receive a performance award if their rating warrants. Employees must submit an accomplishment report, preferably before their departure.

In order to effectively assist an employee receiving a *Less Than Fully Successful* summary rating, supervisors should contact their servicing Employee Relations Specialist immediately upon making that determination. A written justification providing the details concerning an employee's performance must accompany the AD-435P form to HRD if any one element is rated *Does Not Meet Fully Successful*.

Completion of Award Forms (AD-287-2)

A Recommendation and Approval of Awards form (Form AD-287-2) must be prepared for each award nomination.

- All Cash awards and Time Off awards require a written justification. If you provide a written justification for the performance rating as indicated above, you need not provide one for the award. HRD is requiring one justification for the performance rating/award package as indicated in "Documentation to HRD" below. An award justification may be a narrative description (achievement, role, and impact), or an employee's accomplishment report.
- A QSI may be recommended only for those employees who receive an Outstanding rating, who have not received a QSI within the last 52 weeks, and who have not been promoted or reassigned to a different position near the end of the performance cycle. QSIs are given in the position and at the grade level for which performance was assessed. A copy of the accomplishment report provided for the "Outstanding" rating WILL NOT be sufficient documentation for those employees receiving a QSI. Supervisors will need to prepare a separate justification for a QSI following the guidance in Attachment A. QSIs to the 4th and 7th steps of a grade extend the employee's current within-grade waiting period by one year. For specific questions regarding QSIs, refer to your servicing Human Resources Specialist.
- The latest date a QSI will be made effective is December 7, 2008. Any QSIs received after this date will be changed to cash awards.

- A QSI will not be held for a Within Grade Increase (WGI) to be effective.

A citation must be provided in Block 11 of AD-287-2 for performance awards and QSIs. The following citation is recommended:

"This award is based upon an official performance appraisal rating of (*Fully Successful, Superior or Outstanding*) for the rating period January 1, 2008 through September 30, 2008."

Signatures are needed in blocks 20, 21 and/or 22.

Since performance awards, time off awards, and QSIs are based upon the annual performance rating, an employee may not be recommended for more than one award in this category. Recognizing specific accomplishments or achievements during this time period with other awards, such as extra effort or non-monetary, is permitted.

Documentation to HRD

The performance appraisal and award package is to be sent to HRD for each employee. Each package should contain the following required documents and be stapled together in the following order:

- 1) Employee Listing
- 2) Original AD-287-2, if an award will be given;
- 3) Original AD-435P signed and dated by the Rating and Reviewing Officials and the employee;
- 4) For Cash and Time Off Awards: The employee's accomplishment report or supervisory written justification (if absent an employee accomplishment report);
For QSIs: Supervisory written justification per guidance in Attachment A
- 5) A supervisory written justification for an Unacceptable Rating; and
- 6) Original Performance Plan.

Individual employee appraisal and award packages should be bundled by location or office and forwarded to HRD as a group with the Employee Listing for the location/office on the top of the bundle.

NOTE: Supervisors must complete and document the Employee Listing in space provided indicating the date the appraisal was issued or a reason as to why it was not, i.e., employee's cycle was extended through (date) or employee reported (date) and will be rated next cycle, etc. Please do not send Individual Development Plans (IDPs), training forms, lists of publications, or other management documents to HRD in this package. These are not required documents in the Employee Performance File and will not be filed if received.

Please send employee listing and all employees' appraisal and award packages to the address below no later than November 17, 2008. Completed award packages in by this date will be made effective December 7, 2008, and paid out in this calendar year. Packages received after November 17th or incomplete packages will be paid out in 2009.

Please send all performance appraisal/award packages to the following address:

Theresa Bailey
USDA/ARS/Human Resources Division
Performance and Awards Staff
5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Room 3-1282D
Beltsville, MD 20705-5107

Contact

Questions regarding performance appraisal and awards policy or procedures may be referred to Theresa Bailey on 301-504-1452. Rating officials should refer any performance problems which may result in a *Less Than Fully Successful* rating, to their servicing Employee Relations Specialist.

Other Information

Attachments B-D provide a summary of the important dates for completing the 2008 performance cycle, the award amounts for the 2008 cycle, and probable dates for the 2009 performance cycle.

To learn more about the performance management process, employees are encouraged to take the AgLearn course, "Performance Management at USDA – Achieving Results Together." Even though the course is framed from a supervisor's perspective, it will help all employees better understand the performance management process. This training is optional but it has been added to employees' training plans.

Justification Outline

1. **During the period of (give time of performance), (individual/group) did what? Beginning paragraph should start with this sentence.**
2. **This exceeded expected performance as identified in the current position description by:**
 - Improving quality
 - Timely completion of the project
 - Increasing productivity
 - Overcoming adverse obstacles or working under unusual circumstances
 - Using unusual creativity
 - Saving the Government time and/or money
 - Increasing program effectiveness
3. **As a result:**
 - Project acceptance
 - Savings in time, money, and/or material
 - More efficiency
 - Effectiveness
 - Technological advancement
 - Productivity increase
 - Improved levels of cooperation
4. **Therefore, we propose an award of (amount/hours) which has been calculated using the (Measurable Benefits/Non-measurable Benefits/Time-Off Scales.)**
 - If based on measurable benefits, enter the expected Benefit to the organization.
 - If based on non-measurable benefits, enter the Value of Benefits and the Application.

2008 Performance Appraisal Cycle

September 2008	Administrator issues annual letter on Performance Appraisal Cycle
September 30, 2008	2008 Performance Appraisal Cycle ends
October 7, 2008	HRD training on preparation of accomplishment reports
October 10, 2008	Employee submission of accomplishment report is determined by the supervisor but will be no later than October 10, 2008
October 18, 2008	Extension date for meeting 90 day minimum appraisal period If an employee has not been under a performance plan for 90 days by this date, they will not be rated until the 2009 rating cycle.
October 14 - October 24, 2008	Deputy Administrators/OA Directors meet with Associate Administrator to review summary of unit's ratings
October 27 – November 14, 2008	Supervisor meets with employees to discuss the rating after the approval by the Reviewing Official and review by the Associate Administrator
November 17, 2008	Unit's employee listing & all appraisal and award packages due to HRD
December 7, 2008	Effective date of performance awards if documentation received in HRD by 11/17/08
December 29, 2008	Performance awards will be in this pay check if documentation received in HRD by 11/17/08

Summary of 2008 Performance Awards

\$425	Fully Successful rating with at least 2 points in the Exceeds Column
\$575 or 18 hours	Superior rating of 5/3
\$750 or 18 hours	Superior rating of 6/2
\$975 or 18 hours	Superior rating of 7/1
QSI or cash (see below) or 30 hours	Outstanding rating (2.5% increase above the step 1 of the grade or a minimum of \$1,125)

2008 Performance Award Amounts for Outstanding Rating

Rating/ Grade	Cash Award 9 Months in 2008
Outstanding 15	2,883
Outstanding 14	2,451
Outstanding 13	2,075
Outstanding 12	1,745
Outstanding 11	1,455
Outstanding 10	1,325
Outstanding 9	1,203
Outstanding 1-8	1,125

REMINDERS:

Employees who have been here the entire 9 month cycle and are receiving Outstanding ratings should be given the option of receiving the Cash Award, Time Off Award, or QSI if they did not receive a QSI in the last 12 months.

Amounts are to be pro-rated for employees who have been employed with CSREES for less than the 9 month cycle and they cannot receive a QSI or Time Off Award.

2009 Performance Appraisal Cycle

October 1, 2008	Start of 2009 performance cycle
November 5, 2008	Performance plans should be provided to employees at the beginning of each appraisal period (normally within 30 days) per 5 CFR 430.206
December 15, 2008	Supervisors certify to HRD that 2009 performance plans have been put in place for all ratable employees
March-May 2009	Mid-year performance reviews
September 30, 2009	End of performance cycle – for all USDA agencies