

November 15, 2004

SUBJECT: Performance Cycle Ending December 31, 2004

TO: All CSREES Employees

FROM: Colien Hefferan  
Administrator

This memo describes the procedures to be used for finalizing performance appraisals and awards for the January 1, 2004 - December 31, 2004 performance cycle. This memo applies to all employees to include those in scientist and specialist positions.

\*\* Policy and procedures have changed effective this rating cycle. Please pay particular attention to the information pertaining to 1) Quality Step Increase (QSI) eligibility, 2) documentation to be sent to the Human Resources Division (HRD), 3) the due date for receipt of appraisals and awards, and 4) the processing of awards and QSIs.

- Each employee will be rated by their immediate supervisor (rating official). Each rating official will finalize the rating with the reviewing official (typically the second level supervisor). A summary of ratings from each unit will be compiled for the Office of the Administrator (**due January 26, 2005**) and reviewed by the Executive Council (**scheduled for January 31, 2005**). Once these reviews have taken place, the rating officials will then hold formal performance discussions with employees. The purpose of Administrator and Executive Council review is to ensure that each employee receives a rating, identify trends, and resolve any apparent issues.
- Each employee will be required to prepare a 1-2 page accomplishment report. **Accomplishment reports are due to supervisors no later than January 14, 2005.** 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.
- **The Human Resources Division (HRD) will provide training to new employees on the preparation of accomplishment reports on December 15, 2004, at 9:30 a.m. in 1410 Waterfront and January 5, 2005, at 9:30 a.m. in 1410 Waterfront. If you plan to attend one of these sessions, please send your name, telephone number and session you plan to attend via e-mail to [Tbailey@ars.usda.gov](mailto:Tbailey@ars.usda.gov).**

- 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 the use of either cash awards or Quality Step Increases (QSIs) in recognition of *Superior* and *Outstanding* performance. Employees may receive one performance award per year. A performance award will be given to **any** employee who receives a *Superior* rating of record. Employees who receive an *Outstanding* rating of record may receive either a cash award or a QSI. 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. Supervisors should contact HRD if they plan to give any QSIs. Each year, performance award amounts are determined by the Office of the Administrator and the Executive Council based upon annual appropriations and operating funds. The information below describes how performance awards will be allocated this year. Performance awards will be pro-rated for employees who have been employed with CSREES for less than one year.

<u>Summary Rating</u>	<u>Approximate Percent of Salary</u>
8/0 - Outstanding	4.0
7/1 - Superior	2.0
6/2 - Superior	1.5
5/3 - Superior	1.0

- CSREES will continue the use of Spot, Extra Effort, Time Off and Non-Monetary awards to recognize efforts during the rating cycle.
- Supervisors should encourage and recognize team and group efforts.
- Supervisors will encourage employees to prepare/update Individual Development Plans (IDPs) at the beginning of each rating cycle. An IDP is a plan or schedule developed by both the supervisor and employee that identifies formal training, job experience, and/or other developmental activities necessary to enhance employee performance.
- At least one progress or mid-year review must be conducted during the rating period for all employees. The AD-435A must be initialed and dated by the rating official and the employee certifying that such a review took place.

- 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.html](http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/ppweb/435-1.html) 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 [www.afm.ars.usda.gov/divisions/hrd/hrdhomepage/wpforms.htm](http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/divisions/hrd/hrdhomepage/wpforms.htm). 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 (12/31/04) will have their cycle extended if they meet the 90 days **and** can be rated by January 22, 2005. If an employee cannot be rated by January 22, 2005, the employee will receive their first rating of record at the end of the next performance cycle (12/31/05). 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 (12/31/04), will have their cycle extended if they meet the 90 days **and** can be rated by January 22, 2005. If an employee cannot be rated by January 22, 2005, the employee will be rated based on their performance in the previous position.

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:

- 1) Any one element is rated *Does Not Meet Fully Successful* , or
- 2) The rating of record is *Outstanding*. Employee accomplishment reports will serve as justification for *Outstanding* ratings.

### **Completion of Award Forms (AD-287-2)**

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

- Cash awards over \$500 and Time Off awards over 10 hours require a written justification. If written justification is provided for the performance rating as indicated above, you do not need to provide another 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.
- Cash awards of \$500 or less, require no written justification.
- 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 justification provided for the "Outstanding" rating will be sufficient documentation for the QSI. QSIs to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> 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 or to this office.

Since performance awards and QSIs are based upon the annual performance rating, an employee may not be recommended for more than one award in this category. This does not preclude a recommendation for other monetary or non-monetary award categories (such as Extra Effort, Time Off, etc.) during this time period.

Consider giving a Time Off award to an employee in lieu of a performance award or QSI. This option may be appealing to those employees with low leave balances.

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 (*Superior or Outstanding* ) for the rating period January 1, 2004 through December 31, 2004."

### **Documentation to HRD**

Please follow these instructions carefully as procedures have changed.

One package, to include the appraisal and award, is to be sent to HRD for each employee. Each should contain the following and be stapled together in the following order:

- 1) Original AD-287-2
- 2) Original AD-435P
- 3) Performance Rating/Award Justification
- 4) Performance Plan Cover Sheet, if used
- 5) AD-435A/B or Performance Plan

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 all employee appraisal and award packages to the following address no later than February 25, 2005. Completed award packages in by this date will be made effective March 6, 2005, and paid out in March 31, 2005, pay checks.**

All appraisal/award packages are to be sent to:

Theresa Bailey  
USDA/ARS/Human Resources Division  
Performance and Awards Staff  
5601 Sunnyside Avenue, Room 3-1148B  
Beltsville, MD 20705-5107

### **Performance Cycle Beginning January 1, 2005**

Performance elements and standards for the rating period beginning January 1, 2005, should be established and communicated to employees. Please refer to Enclosure 1, "Checklist for Preparing Performance Plans", when developing elements and standards.

### **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.

Enclosure

cc:

Employee Relations Branch

Metropolitan Services Branch

Performance and Awards Staff

## CHECKLIST FOR PREPARING PERFORMANCE PLANS

Performance plans should be developed for each employee within 30 days of the beginning of the appraisal period. It is important to note that an employee who receives an unacceptable rating should not be placed under new performance standards until they receive an opportunity to improve their current performance. Supervisors must contact their servicing Employee Relations Specialist for immediate assistance. The following are some reminders for establishing a performance plan.

1. Check the employee's position description for accuracy; the major duties in the position description should be included in the performance plan as critical elements. Accomplishment of organizational objectives and goals can be included in performance plans.
2. Employee participation in developing the plan is desirable. However, the rating and reviewing officials have the final responsibility for establishing the performance plan.
3. Each plan must have five elements.
4. Three elements must be critical and two elements are noncritical.
5. Standards should be accurate, objective, measurable, attainable, and understandable.
6. Plans must be aligned to organization goals and reflect results.
7. Of the three critical elements for an employee officially designated as "supervisor", one must be a separate critical element that addresses Equal Opportunity/Civil Rights (EO/CR). Incorporated into one of the other two critical elements must be performance objectives that address supervisory responsibilities. (Positions classified as supervisor usually include Supervisory, Supervisor, Manager, Officer, or Administrator in the title.)
8. Performance plans for non-supervisory employees must include (in at least one of the critical elements) the responsibility for demonstrating a commitment to EO/CR. Remember, non-supervisory employees may include individuals who have limited supervisory responsibilities (such as those of a team leader, or those that supervise one technician, clerical employee, or student, etc.).
9. The performance plan must be signed by the employee, supervisor, and reviewing official (normally the second-level supervisor). The employee should then receive a copy of the approved plan.

### In addition:

There must be at least one documented mid-year or progress review during the appraisal period. The performance plan should be initialed and dated by the supervisor and the employee. This shows that such a review took place.

If deficiencies are noted in an employee's performance at any time during the rating period, supervisors should contact their servicing Employee Relations Specialist to discuss the appropriate procedures to handle such circumstances.