



United States Department of Agriculture

# Awards & Recognition Handbook

A Guide for Supervisors and Employees

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Office of Management – Office of Human Resources –

Human Resources Management Division – Performance Management and  
Recruitment Branch



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## INTRODUCTION

It is the USDA's policy to establish an Employee Awards and Recognition Program to recognize organizational, individual, and group performance that exceeds performance and/or public service expectations, especially that which contributes to the core values, mission, and goals of the Department. Awards and recognition will:

- Be commensurate with the purpose and intent of the award granted;
- Provide for special acknowledgement of the accomplishments; and
- Be given as close to the time of achievements as possible.

Managers and supervisors will be held accountable for using awards and other forms of recognition to achieve or acknowledge excellence through the mandatory Supervision performance element that includes responsibility for performance management.

The Awards and Recognition Program will be administered in accordance with the principles set forth in 5 U.S.C. 2301-Merit Systems Principles and the policy stated in [DR 4040-451-1](#), USDA Employee Awards and Recognition Program.

All FSIS employees, except those listed below, are eligible to receive monetary and non-monetary recognition, including internal/eternal honorary awards for which they meet the given criteria.

Employees are not eligible to receive monetary and non-monetary recognition during a period that includes:

- Being investigated or undergoing disciplinary action for misconduct, i.e., poor attendance or inappropriate behavior;
- Having Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)/Civil Rights (CR) actions taken against them; and
- Not meeting overall performance expectations, i.e., poor performance.

The USDA has an employee awards cap (a.k.a. limit) on the amount of awards money an employee can receive in a single fiscal year. Any combination of awards that exceed \$5,500 per employee must be approved by the Department. This amount includes performance awards. As required, the Performance Management and Recruitment Branch will obtain Departmental approval prior to processing awards that exceed the employee awards cap.

For additional information or assistance on the guidance provided in this Handbook, please contact the Performance Management and Recruitment Branch (PMRB) at (202) 720-9850 or [PerformanceManagement@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:PerformanceManagement@fsis.usda.gov).

## ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

### *USDA, Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM):*

- Establishes the employee recognition program policies, procedures, and provides technical assistance and advice on issues that arise; and
- Monitors Agency compliance with Departmental policy.

### *FSIS Administrator:*

- Ensures the recognition program is administered in accordance with Departmental and Federal regulations; and
- Incorporates funding for the recognition program into the budget.

### *PMRB/Human Resources Operations Division (HROD):*

- Ensures that awards and recognition are used appropriately to reward employees;
- Provides training, information, and assistance on the recognition program for managers, supervisors, and employees;
- Serves as the focal point for the receipt, dissemination, review and control of award nomination requirements, justifications, guidelines, and submissions;
- Ensures that awards exceeding the employee awards cap are approved by the Department prior to processing;
- Processes award payments through the National Finance Center (NFC); and
- Provides required reports and documentation of recognition program activities to OHRM upon request.

### *Supervisors and Managers:*

- Submits nominations for timely recognition of employee or group achievements;
- Considers input from appropriate sources when making recognition decisions;
- Uses non-monetary recognition as an alternative to monetary recognition for specific achievements or when monetary recognition is not authorized;
- Promotes the recognition program by encouraging employee participation, arranging for appropriate presentations, and publicizing recognition activities;
- Allows those recognized to choose the type of non-monetary recognition they receive when choices are available; and
- Reviews nominations to ensure that recognition is merited, appropriately justified, linked to and commensurate with the contribution and/or accomplishment and that award amounts accurately reflect the value of the contribution.

## JUSTIFICATIONS

**JUSTIFICATIONS** - All awards and requests for recognition items require a written justification, which is the basis for the recognition. Justifications must be clearly written, focus on the employee's contribution and the impact on the Agency's mission and/or goal(s), and describe the degree to which the contribution exceeded normal job responsibilities.

**The following two steps should be followed when developing an award justification:**

**STEP ONE** - Identify what the employee(s) accomplished, the time period covered by the accomplishment, and how the accomplishment exceeded normal expectations.

EXAMPLES OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Volunteering for an extra assignment, from December through February, while continuing to perform primary responsibilities;
- Producing an exceptionally high quality work product in March under a tight deadline;
- Making a high quality contribution in November involving a difficult or important project assignment;
- Displaying initiative and skill in completing an assignment or project, from June through August, before the deadline;
- Using initiative and creativity in making improvements in projects, programs or services from January through May; or
- Ensuring the mission of the work unit was accomplished during a difficult period, from May through July, by successfully completing additional work or a project assignment while maintaining own workload.

**STEP TWO** - Describe the result or outcome of the employee's contribution.

AREAS TO CONSIDER:

- Savings in time, money and/or materials;
- Increased efficiency;
- Technological advancement;
- Increased productivity; and
- Improved levels of cooperation.

## CITATIONS

**CITATIONS** - The Citation is the formal method used to express gratitude for and to recognize the contributions of our employees. The citation is the exact language that will appear on the certificate/plaque if one is being given as part of the employee(s) recognition. The citation should accurately and succinctly describe the accomplishment that is being recognized.

### EXAMPLES OF CITATIONS:

- For demonstrating calm and clear thinking by immediately coming to the aid of a plant employee in a crisis situation contributing to his survival and ultimate recovery. Thank you for your exceptional level of commitment;
- For your consistent support, resourcefulness, and teamwork. Your willingness to take on additional duties and responsibilities demonstrates your commitment to the Alameda District EEOAC. Your dedication contributes to civil rights and equal employment;
- In recognition of your outstanding contributions working together as “One Team, One Purpose” to empower employees by improving recruitment, promoting diversity, and hiring a skilled workforce dedicated to preventing foodborne illness and protecting public health;
- In recognition and appreciation of your contributions which have resulted in the improved effectiveness of the Food Safety and Inspection Service; or
- In appreciation of your demonstrated leadership and measurable success in the financial management of the Food Safety and Inspection Service’s public health mission. Thank you for your commitment, hard work, and exceptional team spirit.

## INTERNAL AWARDS & RECOGNITION

RECOGNITION TYPE	DESCRIPTION	PROCESS/TIMEFRAME
<b>Administrator's Awards (Monetary/ Non-monetary)</b>	<p>Highest award granted by the FSIS Administrator for contribution or achievement in support the mission or goals of FSIS.</p> <hr/> <p>Can be for individual or group recognition.</p>	<p>Nominations are solicited annually, in August/September. Forms and supporting criteria are available to all employees.</p> <hr/> <p>PMRB screens nominations for conformance with requirements and EEO/CR violations.</p> <hr/> <p>Nominations with highest Panel Review Board rating are forwarded to the Administrator for decision.</p> <hr/> <p>Nominator can be any FSIS employee.</p> <hr/> <p>Top nominations are forwarded to the Department for consideration for a Secretary's Honor Award.</p>
<b>Career Service Award (Non-monetary)</b>	<p>Recognition of length of Federal service.</p> <hr/> <p>Presented starting with 10 years of service through 50+ years of service, at 10-year intervals.</p> <hr/> <p>For individual recognition.</p>	<p>HROD generates a report on a monthly basis to determine years of Federal service. Names of employees who have met the years of service milestones, along with a pin and certificate for those employees, are provided to each program area headquarters and/or field office for presentation to the employees.</p>
<b>Extra Effort Award (Monetary)</b>  Formerly Special Act or Service Award	<p>A cash award that recognizes specific accomplishments that are in the public interest and have exceeded normal job requirements. Accomplishments are typically of higher significance and broader scope than those recognized by a Spot Award.</p> <hr/> <p>Award amounts range from \$50 to more than \$10,000.</p>	<p>At any time, award recommendations of \$5,500 or less can be submitted by supervisor/manager emailing completed Form <a href="#">AD-287-2</a>, to <a href="mailto:FSISawards@fsis.usda.gov">FSISawards@fsis.usda.gov</a>. The PMRB will obtain concurrence from the Administrator for awards exceeding \$1,000.</p> <hr/> <p>For recommendations of more than \$5,500, the completed form should be emailed to <a href="mailto:PerformanceManagement@fsis.usda.gov">PerformanceManagement@fsis.usda.gov</a>. The PMRB will obtain concurrence from the Secretary of Agriculture for amounts higher than \$5,500.</p>

	<p>Can be for individual or group recognition.</p>	<p>Justification outlining the accomplishment is required and must accompany the form.</p> <p>The nominator's Assistant Administrator (AA) or designee must sign the form as the Approving Official.</p> <p>Award amount is determined in conjunction with the Measurable and Non-measurable Benefits Scale.</p> <p>The award amount recommended on the AD-287-2 is the gross amount of the award. Taxes will be withheld and the employee will receive the net amount.</p>
<p><b>Honor Award (Non-monetary)</b></p>	<p>Highest honorary award granted by the Secretary of Agriculture for a contribution or achievement in support of the organization's mission or goals.</p> <p>Can be for individual or group recognition.</p>	<p>Nominations are solicited annually, in April. Forms and supporting criteria are available to all employees.</p> <p>PMRB screens nominations for conformance with requirements and EEO/CR violations.</p> <p>Top nominations for the Administrator's Awards are forwarded to the Department for consideration for the Abraham Lincoln Honor Awards.</p> <p>Secretary of Agriculture approves nominations.</p>
<p><b>Peer Recognition (Non-monetary)</b></p>	<p>Provides employees the opportunity to express appreciation to a colleague(s) for exemplary performance, professionalism and dedication, teamwork, or improved service delivery.</p> <p>Can be for individual or group recognition.</p>	<p>At any time, award recommendations can be submitted to the Program Area point of contact.</p> <p>Assistant Administrators (AA) make selections and present certificate on a quarterly basis.</p>

<p><b>Performance Award (Monetary)</b></p>	<p>A cash award based on annual performance rating of record which recognizes sustained levels of individual performance over the course of the rating period.</p> <hr/> <p>For individual performance recognition.</p> <hr/> <p>Employees who receive a rating of record of Superior or Outstanding are eligible.</p> <hr/> <p>Employees receiving a Quality Step Increase (QSI) are not eligible to receive a performance award for the same rating period.</p>	<p>Following the end of the performance year, PMRB will initiate the processing of performance awards based on the employee's rating of record.</p> <hr/> <p>Award amount will be a specified percentage of an employee's salary. The amount varies annually based on the availability of program funds and the number of employees rated at the Superior and Outstanding levels.</p> <hr/> <p>The dollar amount of the awards granted to employees receiving Outstanding ratings will be higher than the amount granted to employees receiving Superior ratings.</p> <hr/> <p>Will be given within 90 days of the end of the rating period.</p>
<p><b>Recognition Item (Non-monetary)</b></p>	<p>Non-monetary recognition is an alternative to or can be in addition to monetary recognition or time-off for specific achievements.</p> <hr/> <p>Can be a letter of appreciation and/or an item from the Non-Monetary Recognition Catalog or another appropriate item that does not cost more than \$250, including engraving and shipping.</p> <hr/> <p>Can be for individual or group recognition.</p>	<p>Recognition items can be presented at any time.</p> <hr/> <p>Letters of appreciation can be created by the supervisor and issued to the employee.</p> <hr/> <p>To order items from the <a href="#">Non-Monetary Recognition Items Catalog</a> supervisor completes <a href="#">FSIS Form 4451-9, Request for Recognition Item</a>, following the instructions in the catalog and on the form.</p> <hr/> <p>To purchase recognition items through an approved GSA vendor, the Purchase Card/Procurement process must be followed, see FSIS Directive FSIS 2100.6</p>
<p><b>Quality Step Increase (QSI) (Monetary)</b></p>	<p>A QSI is an increase in an employee's rate of basic pay from one step of the grade of the position to the next higher step within that grade. QSI's permanently increase an employee's rate of basic pay.</p>	<p>Following the end of the performance year, PMRB will initiate the processing of QSIs based on the employee's rating of record and recommendation by the manager/supervisor.</p> <hr/> <p>Each program area will be provided with allocations for numbers</p>

	<p>For individual performance recognition.</p> <hr/> <p>Employees who receive an Outstanding rating of record are eligible.</p> <hr/> <p>Employees receiving a Performance Award are not eligible to receive a QSI for the same rating period.</p>	<p>of QSIs that may be granted. The allocations vary annually based on program funds.</p> <hr/> <p>A manager/supervisor reserves the discretion to grant a QSI.</p>
<b>Spot Award (Monetary)</b>	<p>A cash award that recognizes day-to-day extra efforts and contributions.</p> <hr/> <p>Should be awarded within three days, but no later than 30 days after completion of the accomplishment being recognized.</p> <hr/> <p>Award amounts range from \$50 to \$750 (in increments of \$25).</p> <hr/> <p>Can be for individual or group recognition.</p>	<p>At any time, award recommendations can be submitted by supervisor/manager emailing completed Form <a href="#">AD-287-2</a>, <i>Recommendation &amp; Approval of Awards</i>, to <a href="mailto:FSISawards@fsis.usda.gov">FSISawards@fsis.usda.gov</a>.</p> <hr/> <p>Justification outlining the accomplishment is required and must accompany the form.</p> <hr/> <p>The nominator's Assistant Administrator (AA) or designee must sign the form as the Approving Official.</p> <hr/> <p>Award amount is determined in conjunction with the Measurable and Non-measurable Benefits Scale.</p> <hr/> <p>The award amount recommended on the AD-287-2 is the amount the employee will receive.</p>
<b>Suggestion Award (Monetary/non-monetary)</b>	<p>Recognition for a suggestion adopted under the <a href="#">Employee Suggestion Program (ESP)</a>. Suggestions must contain constructive ideas or proposals that contribute to the efficiency, economy, energy conservation or improvement of Government operations or achieve a significant reduction in paperwork.</p>	<p>At any time, suggestions can be emailed to <a href="mailto:FSISuggestions@fsis.usda.gov">FSISuggestions@fsis.usda.gov</a>. When a suggestion is implemented under the ESP, the PMRB in conjunction with the Suggestion Review Board will develop a written justification outlining the suggestion and submit the award or request for recognition item form for processing.</p> <hr/> <p>Award amount is determined in conjunction with the Measurable</p>

and Non-measurable Benefits Scale.

Non-monetary recognition item is determined in conjunction with the Level of Contribution in the Non-Monetary Recognition Items Catalog.

**Time-off Award  
(Non-monetary)**

An excused absence granted without charge to leave or loss of pay.

Full-time employees may be granted up to 80 hours of time off during a leave year, but no more than 40 hours for a single achievement.

Part-time employees may be granted up to the average number of hours in their bi-weekly scheduled tour of duty during a leave year. The limit for a single achievement is one-half of their average number of scheduled work hours.

Time-Off Award must be used within 26 pay periods from the effective date. If not used in that time it is forfeited.

Can be for individual or group recognition.

At any time, award recommendations can be submitted by supervisor/manager emailing completed Form [AD-287-2, Recommendation & Approval of Awards](#), to [FSISawards@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:FSISawards@fsis.usda.gov).

Justification outlining the accomplishment is required and must accompany the form.

The nominator's Assistant Administrator (AA) or designee must sign the form as the Approving Official.

Time-Off-Awards Scale is used to determine number of hours awarded.

## EXTERNAL AWARDS & RECOGNITION

FSIS participates in a number of awards programs sponsored by external organizations. Many of these award nominations must be submitted through various levels of Senior Leadership for review and approval before the nomination is submitted to the sponsoring organization. PMRB prepares and releases the memo to FSIS with instructions on submitting nominations. Below are some of the major external awards programs in which FSIS participates.

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	ELIGIBILITY
The National Public Service Awards	Honors individuals who make outstanding contributions and whose accomplishments can be viewed as models of public service within and outside the work environment.	All levels of public service – local, state and federal governments, international, and public service nonprofit organizations.
Unsung Heroes Awards	Honors employees who have demonstrated extraordinary service to the public and dedication to fulfilling the USDA’s mission.	All USDA employees and/or retirees.
President’s Volunteer Service Awards	Honors Americans who, by their demonstrated commitment and example, inspire others to engage in volunteer service.	Individuals who have achieved a certain number of hours of volunteer service to neighbors, community, and nation.

## MEASURABLE BENEFITS SCALE\*

Benefit	Award
Up to \$10,000	10 percent of the benefits
\$10,001 - \$100,000	\$1,000 for the first \$10,000 in benefits, plus 3 percent of benefits over \$10,000
\$100,001 or more	\$3,700 for the first \$100,000 in benefits plus .005 of benefits over \$100,000. Award amount should not exceed recipient's annual salary.

\*Use this scale if the accomplishment/achievement has a cost benefit/savings.

## NON-MEASURABLE BENEFITS SCALE

Value of Benefits	Application		
	Limited	Broad	General
	Impacts the public interest, or a specific small work unit including a division or region.	Impacts the public interest, or several regional areas or an entire agency.	Impacts the public interest, or more than one agency, or the entire Department.
<b>Small/Moderate</b>	<b>\$50-\$325</b>	<b>\$325-\$650</b>	<b>\$650-1300</b>
<b>Moderate/Substantial</b>	<b>\$325-\$650</b>	<b>\$650-1300</b>	<b>\$1300-3150</b>
<b>Substantial/Extended</b>	<b>\$1000-\$2500</b>	<b>\$2500-\$5500</b>	<b>\$5500-\$10,000</b>

## TIME-OFF AWARDS SCALE

VALUE OF THE EMPLOYEE'S CONTRIBUTION	HOURS TO BE AWARDED
<b>SMALL/MODERATE</b> – Contributions that helped to ease a backlog or completion of a special project that benefited primarily the employee's staff office	1-10 Hours
<b>MODERATE/SUBSTANTIAL</b> – Contributions that significantly improved operating principles or procedures.	11-20 Hours
<b>SUBSTANTIAL/EXTENDED</b> – Contributions that significantly impact an entire division, region, department, or other large geographical area.	21-40 Hours