

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE
WASHINGTON, DC

FSIS NOTICE

58-21

12/8/21

BEGINNING OF FISCAL YEAR 2022 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT INSTRUCTIONS

I. PURPOSE

This notice provides instructions to all FSIS Rating Officials in fulfilling their Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 performance management (PM) requirements. This notice addresses establishing performance plans, quarterly conversations, performance evaluations, interim ratings, advisory assessments, and how to address performance concerns, and recognition as set forth in [Departmental Regulation \(DR\) 4040-430, Employee Performance and Awards](#) for the USDA Performance Management System.

II. BACKGROUND

PM is a tool for monitoring employee performance and strengthening employee engagement. Performance feedback and ratings are recorded in the Enterprise Performance Management Application (EPMA). EPMA is the official Departmental system used by supervisors to fulfill their PM responsibilities. The PM team in the Office of Human Resources is responsible for managing the processes for FSIS.

III. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

A. **Eligible Employees.** USDA requires a performance plan and rating of record for each eligible employee. Eligible employees include all USDA employees, in active status. Performance plans and ratings for Members of the Senior Executive Service (SES) and Senior Level (SL) are not covered in this notice or DR 4040-430.

B. **Performance Year.** USDA's official performance appraisal period is October 1 through September 30 of each calendar year (also known as the performance year).

C. **Setting Performance Plans.** Performance elements are to reflect the responsibilities and duties assigned and expected to be performed by the employee, consistent with an accurate and current position description. All elements in the performance plan are designated as critical. The following applies:

1. Rating Officials are to:
 - a. Communicate with the employee the strategic goals of the Department, Agency, and Program Area and how the employee's responsibilities align with those goals;
 - b. Establish individual performance plans that clearly communicate the expectations for Fully Successful (FS) performance; and
 - c. Ensure duties covered by performance elements are included in the respective employee's position description.
2. Employees should have a clear understanding of their performance expectations and how their performance relates to the mission of the organization.

DISTRIBUTION: Electronic; All Field Employees

NOTICE EXPIRES: 12/1/22

OPI: OPPD

D. **Timelines.** An approved performance plan is to be issued to eligible employees no later than:

1. 12/31/2021 for FY22 plans;
2. 15 days from when an employee starts a new position, a detail, or temporary promotion of 90 or more days, or a new assignment or change in assignment that impacts the expectations of the position during the appraisal period;
3. When a Rating Official is assigned to a new supervisory position, performance plans for subordinate employees are to be reviewed with the employees within 30 days, and revised as necessary, or a current plan should be inherited as is within EPMA; and
4. A performance plan put in place fewer than 75 days (after July 15) before the end of a performance year may carry through the next performance year, provided the effective dates on the plan reflect the entire period.

E. **Quarterly Conversations.** Rating Officials are to review progress towards performance goals with each employee no less than once each quarter.

1. The purpose of the quarterly conversation is to facilitate regular and ongoing communication between the Rating Official and the employee that supports the attainment of organizational and individual goals; and promptly identifies and addresses any performance concerns.
2. The following table describes the timeframes for quarterly conversations:

Timeframes for Conducting Required Quarterly Conversations for In-Plant Rating Officials	
Quarterly Timeframe	Completion Opportunity - Q1 through Q4 Conversations
October 1 through December 31	The completion of the performance plan for the upcoming appraisal cycle will serve as the first quarterly conversation.
January 1 through March 31	Utilize the first IPPS assessment as an opportunity to conduct the second quarterly conversation.
April 1 through June 30	Utilize the former third quarter progress review period as an opportunity to conduct the third quarterly conversation.
July 1 through September 30	Utilize the second IPPS assessment as an opportunity to conduct the fourth quarterly conversation without discussing the final rating.

Timeframes for Conducting Required Quarterly Conversations for Non In-Plant Rating Officials	
Quarterly Timeframe	Completion Opportunity - Q1 through Q4 Conversations
October 1 through December 31	The completion of the performance plan for the upcoming appraisal cycle will serve as the first quarterly conversation.
January 1 through March 31	At the Rating Official's discretion during this time period, conduct the second quarterly conversation.
April 1 through June 30	At the Rating Official's discretion during this time period, conduct the third quarterly conversation.
July 1 through September 30	At the Rating Official's discretion during this time period, conduct the fourth quarterly conversation without discussing the final rating.

F. **Evaluating Performance.** The Rating Official is to assess the performance of employees throughout the entire appraisal period according to the elements, standards, and measures in the performance plan. The Rating Official is responsible for ensuring the employee's performance, upon which the ratings are based, is well documented if falling below the FS level. A rating of record is to be produced following the end of the performance year, provided the employee has performed under an established plan for a minimum of 90 days, which need not be consecutive. If an employee did not work under a performance plan for at least 90 days prior to the rating deadline, a rating of record for that performance year cannot be produced.

1. The Rating Official is to prepare a narrative assessment supporting the proposed evaluation of any element below the FS level.

2. The narrative is to specify the factual details regarding any expectations not met relative to each element that is evaluated at the Does Not Meet FS level.
3. The narrative is to be objective and is to clearly describe the employee's performance during the appraisal period based on documentation or other evidence.
4. Ratings of record are to be completed after the end of the appraisal period and issued to employees no later than October 30.

G. Interim Ratings. If an employee has performed under an established plan for a minimum of 90 consecutive or non-consecutive days, an interim rating is to be produced. Interim ratings are to be completed within 15 days of the conclusion of the abbreviated appraisal period, including issuing the rating to the employee. Interim ratings are to be provided when:

1. An employee has been reassigned or promoted (permanent and temporary);
2. Transferred outside of USDA;
3. Resigns or otherwise leaves that position; and
4. When there is a change of supervisor.

H. Advisory Assessments. When an employee has performed for at least 60 but fewer than 90 days either in a temporary role or on a performance plan that is being revised, an advisory assessment is to be produced within 15 days of the end of the temporary assignment or of the effective date of the revised plan.

I. Addressing Performance Concerns. Rating Officials are responsible for taking appropriate action to address performance not meeting expectations. A current, accurate position description and performance plan is to be in place before performance problems can be officially addressed. Rating Officials are to work with employees to identify the opportunity for development to improve or enhance performance.

J. Demonstration Opportunity. A Demonstration Opportunity (DO) is the formal time period provided for an employee to demonstrate acceptable performance in one or more elements when the employee is performing below the FS level as described in their performance plan.

1. The Rating Official is responsible for ensuring performance below the FS level has been properly documented (i.e., verbal and written communications with the employee, work products, etc.), and the employee has received a reasonable opportunity to improve.
2. After completing the requirement in J.1 above, Rating Officials are to consult the PM team to discuss the development of a DO.
 - a. The time period for a DO is 30 calendar days for non-bargaining unit employees and 60 calendar days for bargaining unit employees.
 - b. An employee who successfully completes the DO period will receive a close out letter informing him/her of the successful completion. The letter also states that if the employee's performance falls below the FS level within 52 weeks, the matter may be referred directly to the Labor and Employee Relations Division (LERD) for adverse action.
 - c. If the employee does not successfully complete the DO period, the PM team will refer the case to LERD for adverse action.

IV. RECOGNITION

A. Supervisors should recognize their employees' noteworthy contributions throughout the performance year through the achievement awards program. Achievement awards are non-rating-based awards that recognize specific accomplishments that are in the public interest and have exceeded normal job requirements. To be considered eligible for an achievement award the employee is to:

1. Demonstrate exemplary performance toward an accomplishment specific to FSIS' mission and goals;
2. Have an FS performance rating;
3. Be nominated for an achievement. The nominated employee does not need to be in the nominating official's program area or chain of command; however, the nominating program area must notify and get concurrence from the employee's 1st or 2nd line supervisor. The 1st or 2nd line supervisor is listed as the recommending official on the FSIS Achievement Award Nomination spreadsheet.
4. Be free of disciplinary action (reprimand to removal and including an unacceptable performance rating) unless an exception is granted from the employee's Program Area Assistant Administrator (AA). For time off awards, the employee must not have been on a leave restriction for the previous 52 weeks; no exception can be made to this restriction.

B. Quality Step Increases (QSIs) are reserved for the most exceptional performance. No single accomplishment merits a QSI. It may be granted only to those employees who have demonstrated sustained exceptional performance, commensurate with the classification of the employee's position, over at least an 18-month period in the same grade and type of position. Employees are to meet the following criteria to be considered eligible for a QSI:

1. Be at the full performance level of their position;
2. Have performed in the same grade and type of position for at least 18 months before the end of the appraisal cycle;
3. Be below step 10 of their grade level;
4. Have received a rating of record of at least FS in the most recent performance year under the FY 2021 two-tier performance management system. For FY 2019 and 2020, the rating of record would have had to be Outstanding. If the employee has not been in the Federal Government long enough to have three performance ratings, supervisors will use their two most recent performance years;
5. Not have received a QSI within the previous 104 weeks;
6. Have demonstrated sustained performance of the highest quality, and demonstrably above the expectations defined at the FS level of their performance plan in the FY 2021 two-tier performance system and at the Outstanding level under the FY 2019 and FY 2020 performance management system; and
7. Have attained accomplishments that contributed substantially to the organization's goals, commensurate with the classification of their position.

C. Each Program Area is to establish a review panel to evaluate QSI recommendations and submit their QSI nominations by the due date communicated to the FSIS Management Council in accordance with the Quality Step Increase End of the Year Instruction e-mail. The review panel will consist of the Assistant

Administrator (AA) or Deputy AA for each Program Area, and the district managers, lab directors, or other program/staff heads in the AA's chain of command. The allocations for each program area will vary annually.

V. QUESTIONS

A. Refer questions regarding this notice or performance management policy to the Office of Human Resources, Human Resources Business Systems Division, Program Management and Information Systems Branch at FSISHR1@usda.gov with "Performance Management" in the subject line.

B. EPMA system-related questions should be directed to designated Program Area or District EPMA Data Administrator(s).



Assistant Administrator
Office of Policy and Program Development