

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

FSIS DIRECTIVE

4410.5
Revision 3

6/4/24

STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM FOR IN-PLANT VETERINARY MEDICAL OFFICERS

I. PURPOSE

This directive provides instructions for the Student Loan Repayment Program (SLRP). This program is for current in-plant Veterinary Medical Officers (VMOs)/Public Health Veterinarians (PHVs), and District Veterinary Medical Officers (DVMOs), hereafter referred to as VMOs and DVMOs. FSIS is reissuing this directive to provide VMOs/DVMOs an opportunity to participate in the program twice for a total of six years and up to \$60,000 in student loan repayment. This directive supplements [FSIS Directive 4537.1, Repayment of Student Loans Program](#), and Departmental Regulation (DR) [4050-537, Repayment of Student Loans](#). FSIS is reissuing this directive to make changes regarding lump-sum payments as discussed in Section VIII. *Payments*, paragraph D and clarifications regarding eligibility as discussed in Section IV. *Eligibility*; and to add the title of District Veterinary Medical Officers to the directive.

II. CANCELLATION

FSIS Directive 4410.5, Revision 2, *Student Loan Repayment Program for In-plant Veterinary Medical Officers*, 1/23/23

III. BACKGROUND

In-plant VMOs and DVMOs possess unique qualifications and perform functions essential to the Agency mission. FSIS uses the SLRP to retain these mission critical employees by offsetting a portion of the education cost to obtain the needed qualifications. An in-plant VMO/DVMO may be eligible to be considered for a student loan repayment if FSIS can demonstrate that in the absence of granting loan repayment benefits, the employee would be likely to leave FSIS for employment outside the Federal service. The SLRP is discretionary and contingent on available funding. The Agency may pay up to \$10,000 per qualified employee, per calendar year, for up to 3 years (\$30,000 total) in loan repayment. Eligible VMOs/DVMOs may participate in the SLRP twice for a total of 6 years and up to \$60,000 in loan repayment. A signed 3-year service agreement will be required for each round of participation in the program. The Agency will announce the application period annually via a FSIS Notice, the *Food for Thought* newsletter, and emails to VMOs/DVMOs. Employees will be selected for the program on a case-by-case basis.

IV. ELIGIBILITY

A. VMOs meeting the following criteria are eligible to receive consideration for student loan repayments:

1. VMOs who are permanent, in-plant employees or are in permanent DVMO assignments, and have been on a career-conditional or career appointment for at least 1 year; and
2. VMOs/DVMOs who are in good standing (i.e., rated fully successful and with no disciplinary actions pending or occurring within the last 3 years)

B. VMOs/DVMOs with loans that are in default are not eligible.

NOTE: In-plant includes VMOs in relief positions and VMOs assigned to patrol assignments or single establishment assignments.

C. A student loan is eligible for repayment if it is:

1. Made, insured, or guaranteed under the Higher Education Act of 1965 Title IV Parts B, D, or E; specifically, Federal Family Education Loans, William D. Ford Direct Loan Program, or Federal Perkins Loan Program;
2. A health education assistance loan made or insured under the Federal Family Education Loans, William D. Ford Direct Loan Program, or Federal Perkins Loan Program; or
3. Loans made or insured under the Public Health Service Act (Loans for Disadvantaged Students, Primary Care Loans, Nursing Student Loans, Health Profession Student Loan, Health Education Assistance Loan).

NOTE: The loan holder needs to be the SLRP applicant and the loan needs to have been used for the specific education of the SLRP applicant.

D. VMOs/DVMOs may apply to participate a second time, during the open application period, upon completion (within 6 months from completion) of the first 3-year service agreement. Eligibility criteria outlined above must be met each time.

V. VMO RESPONSIBILITIES

A. During the application period, VMOs/DVMOs are to complete [FSIS Form 4410-27](#), *Student Loan Repayment (SLRP) for Current Inplant VMO Application* and [FSIS Form 4410-28](#), *SLRP Loan Information* and submit these forms and supporting loan documents to: PHVincentives@usda.gov.

B. VMOs/DVMOs are to notify their immediate supervisor of their intent to apply for this program so that the supervisor can submit a recommendation as outlined in Section VI. VMOs/DVMOs are to follow up with their supervisor to ensure all forms are submitted within the application period.

C. If selected, VMOs/DVMOs will receive an AD-1152, *Service Agreement for a Receipt of Student Loans*. VMOs/DVMOs are to complete and sign the form before loan payments are made. VMOs/DVMOs are to submit the signed form upon request to: PHVincentives@usda.gov.

D. VMOs/DVMOs are to make loan payments on all portions of the remaining loans that FSIS does not pay. The Government's payments do not exempt employees from this responsibility or from their liability for the loans.

E. VMOs/DVMOs are to pay for any income tax obligations resulting from the loan repayment benefit.

VI. AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES

A. The Office of the Chief Financial Officer will determine the maximum number of new loan repayments that will be authorized in a fiscal year based on budgetary resources.

B. To recommend the granting of a Student Loan Repayment, the immediate supervisor is to complete form [AD-1151](#), *Repayment of Student Loan(s)*, referenced in Appendix A of DR [4050-537](#), and sign the request as the Recommending Official. The immediate supervisor is to submit the signed form to the District Manager (DM) or designee for further concurrence and submission. The immediate supervisor is to complete this in a timely manner to ensure documents are received within the application period.

C. The DM or designee will submit the form to PHVincentives@usda.gov. The e-mail submission will be considered concurrence with the immediate supervisor recommendation; no additional signatures are required from the DM or designee.

D. The completed AD 1151 is to be received from the DM or designee within the application period.

E. Complete application packages will be reviewed by a panel consisting of headquarters employees within the Office of Field Operations (OFO). OFO will make selections and notify all applicants of the status of their applications approximately 2 weeks after the application period closes.

F. An OFO designee will provide an AD-1152, *Service Agreement for a Receipt of Student Loans* to selected VMOs.

VII. SERVICE AGREEMENTS

A. As outlined in Section V. C., employees are to sign a service agreement that acknowledges their commitment to complete a 3-year service period of employment with OFO. A service agreement does not constitute a right, promise, or entitlement for continued employment or noncompetitive conversion to the competitive service.

B. Employees selected to participate in the SLRP a second time will sign a new 3-year service agreement. The new 3-year commitment does not overlap with the previous commitment.

C. The minimum employment period established under a service agreement is three years regardless of the loan repayment amount.

D. If the employee fails to complete the service agreement because they separate from FSIS voluntarily or involuntarily due to misconduct or poor performance, the entire amount of the loan paid by the Agency will be recovered according to USDA regulations governing offset from indebted Government employees or through provisions governing debt collection if the individual leaves Federal service.

VIII. PAYMENTS

A. Student loan payments are:

1. Discretionary and subject to the conditions in the written service agreement between the Agency and the employee;
2. Applied to the indebtedness outstanding at the time that the Agency and the employee enter into the agreement;
3. Required to be disbursed once per calendar year regardless of any pauses to student loan repayments announced; and
4. Made directly to the holder of the loan.

B. When payment is made, tax withholdings are deducted or applied.

C. More than one loan may be repaid as long as the loan repayments do not exceed the \$10,000 annual limit.

D. Payments for VMOs/DVMOs selected for this program who are also participating in the Department of Education's Public Service Loan Forgiveness program will be made to the holder of the loan as a one-time lump-sum payment. The lump-sum payment will be applied to outstanding interest first and the remainder applied to principal outstanding; depending on the participant's monthly payment amount, the lump-sum payment may cover future monthly payments up to one year. Employees are responsible for paying remaining balances not covered by funds disbursed.

IX. TERMINATION OF BENEFITS AND REIMBURSEMENT

A. The employee is required to reimburse the Agency if the employee:

1. Involuntarily separates for misconduct or performance reasons before completing the service agreement. If the employee is involuntarily separated for reasons other than misconduct or performance (e.g., work reduction, downsizing), reimbursement is not required; or
2. Voluntarily separates before completing the service agreement. This includes resignations from Federal service, voluntary retirements, or transfers to other Federal agencies.

B. The minimum employment period established under a service agreement is 3 years regardless of the loan repayment amount. For example, if an employee's agreement states that they will receive \$10,000 per year for 3 years and the employee leaves FSIS with 6 months remaining on the service agreement after receiving \$30,000 in loan repayment benefits, the employee is required to reimburse the Agency for the entire \$30,000.

C. The employee will not be required to reimburse the Agency if the employee accepts another position within FSIS not eligible for student loan repayment; however, the employee will forfeit any remaining payments that have not been disbursed.

IX. QUESTIONS

Refer questions regarding this directive to PHVincentives@usda.gov.



Assistant Administrator
Office of Policy and Program Development