

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

FSIS NOTICE

45-24

10/16/24

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT INSTRUCTIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025

I. PURPOSE

This notice provides instructions to all FSIS Rating Officials in fulfilling their Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 performance management requirements. This notice addresses establishing performance plans, quarterly conversations, performance evaluations, interim ratings, advisory assessments, how to address performance concerns, and recognition as set forth in [Departmental Regulation \(DR\) 4040-430](#), *Employee Performance Awards* for the USDA Performance Management System.

II. BACKGROUND

Performance management is a tool for monitoring employee performance and strengthening employee engagement. Performance feedback and ratings are recorded and acknowledged in the Enterprise Performance Management Application (EPMA). EPMA is the official Departmental system used by supervisors and employees to fulfill their performance management responsibilities. The Performance Management 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. FSIS eligible employees include all GS employees in an active status.

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 by following the instructions in the [EPMA Planning Phase](#) overview guide in EPMA, that clearly communicate the expectations for Fully Successful performance; and
 - c. Ensure duties covered by performance elements are included in the employee's position description.

DISTRIBUTION: Electronic

NOTICE EXPIRES: 11/1/25

OPI: OPPD

2. Employees are to have a clear understanding of their performance expectations and how their performance relates to the mission of the organization.
 3. Employees are to electronically acknowledge their performance plans via the Employee Page by following the instructions in the [Acknowledging Your Plan](#) guide in EPMA.
- D. Timelines. An approved performance plan is to be electronically issued to each eligible employee via EPMA no later than:
1. October 30, 2024;
 2. 15 calendar 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; and
 3. 30 days after a Rating Official is assigned to a new supervisory position. The performance plans for subordinate employees are to be reviewed and revised as necessary, or a current plan is to be inherited by following the instructions in the [Reviewing Officials Inheriting Plans](#) guide in EPMA.
- E. Newer Plans. Performance plans put in place fewer than 75 days before the end of a performance year (after July 17) will carry through the next performance year, provided the effective dates on the plan reflect the entire period. Supervisors or their proxies can extend employee plans into the FY 2025 performance cycle by following the instructions in the [Extending A Plan](#) guide in EPMA.
- F. 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 and how the In-Plant Performance System (IPPS) can be used as an opportunity for In-Plant Rating Officials to also conduct 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 through June 30	Conduct the third quarterly conversation within this timeframe.
July 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	Conduct the second quarterly conversation within this timeframe.
April through June 30	Conduct the third quarterly conversation within this timeframe.
July through September 30	Conduct the fourth quarterly conversation within this timeframe without discussing the final rating.

3. Rating Officials are to document quarterly conversations by following the instructions in the [Documenting Quarterly Conversations](#) overview guide in EPMA. Employees are to electronically acknowledge their quarterly conversations via the Employee Page by following the instructions in the [Acknowledging Your Quarterly Conversation](#) guide in EPMA.

G. Evaluating Performance. The Rating Official is to assess individual employee performance 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 rating is based, is well documented if falling below the Fully Successful 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. The Rating Official can do this by following the instructions in the [Rating of Record](#) overview guide in EPMA. 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 Fully Successful 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 Fully Successful 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.

H. 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 by following the instructions in the [Providing An Interim Rating](#) guide in EPMA. 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 an employee:

1. Has been reassigned or promoted (permanent and temporary);
2. Transferred outside of USDA;
3. Resigns or otherwise leaves that position; and
4. Has a change of supervisor.

I. Interim Rating as Final. An interim rating serves as the final rating of record when it is known that the employee will receive no other rating from any USDA supervisor for the performance cycle. Interim ratings will serve as the final rating of record when an employee:

1. Has been promoted to a new position with less than 90 days in the rating cycle;
2. Transferred outside of USDA; or
3. Resigns or otherwise leaves Federal service.

J. 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 by following the instructions in the [Providing An Advisory Assessment](#) guide in EPMA.

K. 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.

L. 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 Fully Successful level as described in their performance plan.

1. The Rating Official is responsible for ensuring performance below the Fully Successful level has been properly communicated to the employee and 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 Subparagraph L.1., Rating Officials are to consult the Performance Management team to discuss the development of a DO. A DO is not to be issued unless the Performance Management team has been consulted.
 - 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 closeout letter informing him/her of the successful completion. The letter also states that if the employee's performance falls below the Fully Successful level within 52 weeks of the DO closeout, 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 are to recognize their employees' noteworthy contributions throughout the performance year through the achievement awards program. Achievement awards are non-rating-based monetary or time off awards that recognize specific accomplishments that are in the public or Agency 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 been in their position for 90 days, performing at the Fully Successful level, and not have a current rating of below Fully Successful;
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 is to 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. For time off awards, the employee is to 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). See [FSIS Notice 39-24](#), *Fiscal Year 2024 Quality Step Increase Instructions*, for instructions regarding QSIs.

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. Refer questions related to the EPMA system to the designated Program Area or District [EPMA Data Administrators](#).



Assistant Administrator
Office of Policy and Program Development