TO: All FSIS Employees
FROM: Alfred V. Almanza
Deputy Under Secretary
Office of Food Safety
Acting Administrator, FSIS

SUBJECT: Voluntary Early Out Authority (VERA) and Voluntary Separation Incentive Payments (VSIP)

As the agency transitions to the New Poultry Inspection System (NPIS), the Food Safety and Inspection Service needs to maximize its flexibility in assigning personnel, while maintaining full inspection coverage at the establishments we regulate.

To assist us in our efforts, FSIS has requested and obtained Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) and Voluntary Separation Incentive Payments (VSIP) authority through CY2016. FSIS has the authority to honor up to 300 applications for VERA and VSIP. The VERA and VSIP opportunities will be offered during a series of windows in conjunction with NPIS implementation.

This authority covers the following positions:

- Retirement eligible employees who occupy inplant GS-1862 Consumer Safety Inspector positions.

- Retirement eligible employees who occupy inplant GS-1863 Food Inspector positions.

Please note that this authority only covers inspectors who are eligible for regular optional retirement OR special early retirement under the VERA.

The agency’s VERA, commonly referred to as “early out” authority, expands the normal retirement eligibility to allow certain individuals to qualify for early retirement. The agency’s VSIP authority, commonly referred to as a “buyout,” allows the agency to offer a separation incentive payment of up to $25,000 to eligible employees who choose to retire.

Within a few weeks, complete information packages, including application forms, will be mailed to employees in the 1862 and 1863 series because they are potentially covered under the VERA and VSIP authorities. In addition, prior to
each open VERA and VSIP window, the agency will issue notices specifying who may submit applications for consideration during that open window.

It is important to note that while this initial memo is being shared with all employees as part of our efforts to keep communication lines open during NPIS implementation, the VERA and VSIP authority is limited to 1862 and 1863 employees eligible for either optional retirement or an early out under VERA. The authority is only to be used in conjunction with NPIS implementation. Those located in or near plants converting to NPIS will be given priority for VERNVSIP offers.

**VERA Eligibility and Basic Early Out Requirements**

All of the following requirements must be met to be eligible for VERA:

(1) Must be serving in a position for which the agency has offered a VERA opportunity. In other words, it must be in the specific geographic area, organization, series, and grade being offered a VERA opportunity. Currently, our VERA authority is limited to 1862s and 1863s.

(2) Cannot be serving in an occupation for which the USDA has direct hire authority (granted because of a critical hiring shortage). Within FSIS, Veterinary Medical Officers in the 0701 occupational series and Information Technology Management Specialists (Information Security) in the 2210 occupational series are excluded from an early out opportunity.

(3) Must meet basic retirement eligibility for VERA — 50 years of age and 20 years of service OR 25 years of service and any age. Employees should be aware that accepting early retirement can result in a reduction to their annuity.

(4) Must have been continuously on USDA rolls at least 30 days prior to the date of USDA's application for VERA authority, as required by the Office of Personnel Management. The USDA applied for VERA authority on September 24, 2014.

(5) Cannot be serving under a time-limited appointment.

(6) Cannot be in receipt of a decision notice of involuntary separation for misconduct or unsatisfactory performance.

(7) Must apply for and receive approval for a VERA from the agency making the offer.

**VSIP Eligibility and Basic Buyout Requirements**

All of the following requirements must be met to be eligible for VSIP:

(1) Cannot be serving in an occupation for which the USDA has direct hire authority (granted because of a critical hiring shortage). Within FSIS, Veterinary Medical Officers in the 0701 occupational series and Information Technology Management Specialists (Information Security) in the 2210 occupational series are excluded from a VSIP opportunity.

(2) Cannot be serving under a time-limited appointment.
(3) Must be currently employed by the Executive Branch of the Federal Government for a continuous period of at least 3 years.

(4) Must be serving in a position covered by an agency VSIP plan (i.e., in the specific geographic area, organization, series and grade).

(5) Must apply for and receive approval for a VSIP from the agency making the VSIP offer.

(6) Must not be included in any of the ineligibility categories listed below.

   a) Is a reemployed annuitant.
   b) Has a disability such that he/she is or would be eligible for disability retirement.
   c) Received a notice of involuntary separation for misconduct or poor performance.
   d) Received any VSIP from the Federal Government previously.
   e) Performed service during the 36-month period preceding the date of separation for which a student loan repayment benefit was paid or is to be paid.
   f) Performed service during the 24-month period preceding the date of separation for which a recruitment or relocation incentive was paid or is to be paid.
   g) Performed service during the 12-month period preceding the date of separation for which a retention incentive was paid or is to be paid.

Supervisors should make a copy of this e-mail available to inspection personnel without Outlook accounts.