

*Food Safety and Inspection Service*

# Onboarding Manual

FINAL



# Welcome to USDA!

Congratulations on your new employment with USDA. Since 1862, the public servants of USDA have worked diligently to improve the lives of millions of our fellow Americans. Because the work we do affects every American and meat and poultry exporting country throughout the world, every single day, we are known as the “People’s Department,” as per President Lincoln’s message to Congress two and a half years after he established the Department.

And now, you are part of this proud history of public service and the important work we do. Welcome to USDA.

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# Overview of USDA

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) serves all Americans. The Department's mission is to provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management. It works to enhance the environment and to maintain production capacity by helping landowners protect the soil, water, forests, and other natural resources. Rural development, credit, and conservation programs are key resources for carrying out national growth policies. Other research covers such areas as animal disease and pest control, crop production, and the marketing and use of agricultural products.

USDA is committed to delivering programs and setting policies through seven program mission areas, 18 agencies, and several departmental staff offices. Each mission area houses one or more agencies and is focused on a specific portion of the USDA mission, which is to "provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development nutrition, and related issues based on sound public policy, the best available science, and efficient management."

In the Department's early years, the vast majority of Americans lived on farms, and farmers produced only enough food to supply themselves and few other people. Today, although less than 3 percent of the population resides on farmland, farm workers produce enough for this country—as well as for a growing export market. Agriculture is, in fact, this nation's largest industry and its largest employer. Approximately 21 million people work in some phase of agriculture, from growing food and fiber to selling it in the supermarket. In addition, Americans enjoy better diets because of USDA's nutrition research, education efforts, and food assistance programs.

USDA research findings, directly or indirectly, benefit all Americans. The Department's thorough inspection and grading services safeguard and assure standards of quality in the daily food supply. USDA has seven mission areas, each with a unique purpose. The Food Safety and Inspection Services (FSIS) is the only agency under the Food Safety mission area within USDA.

# Cultural Transformation in USDA

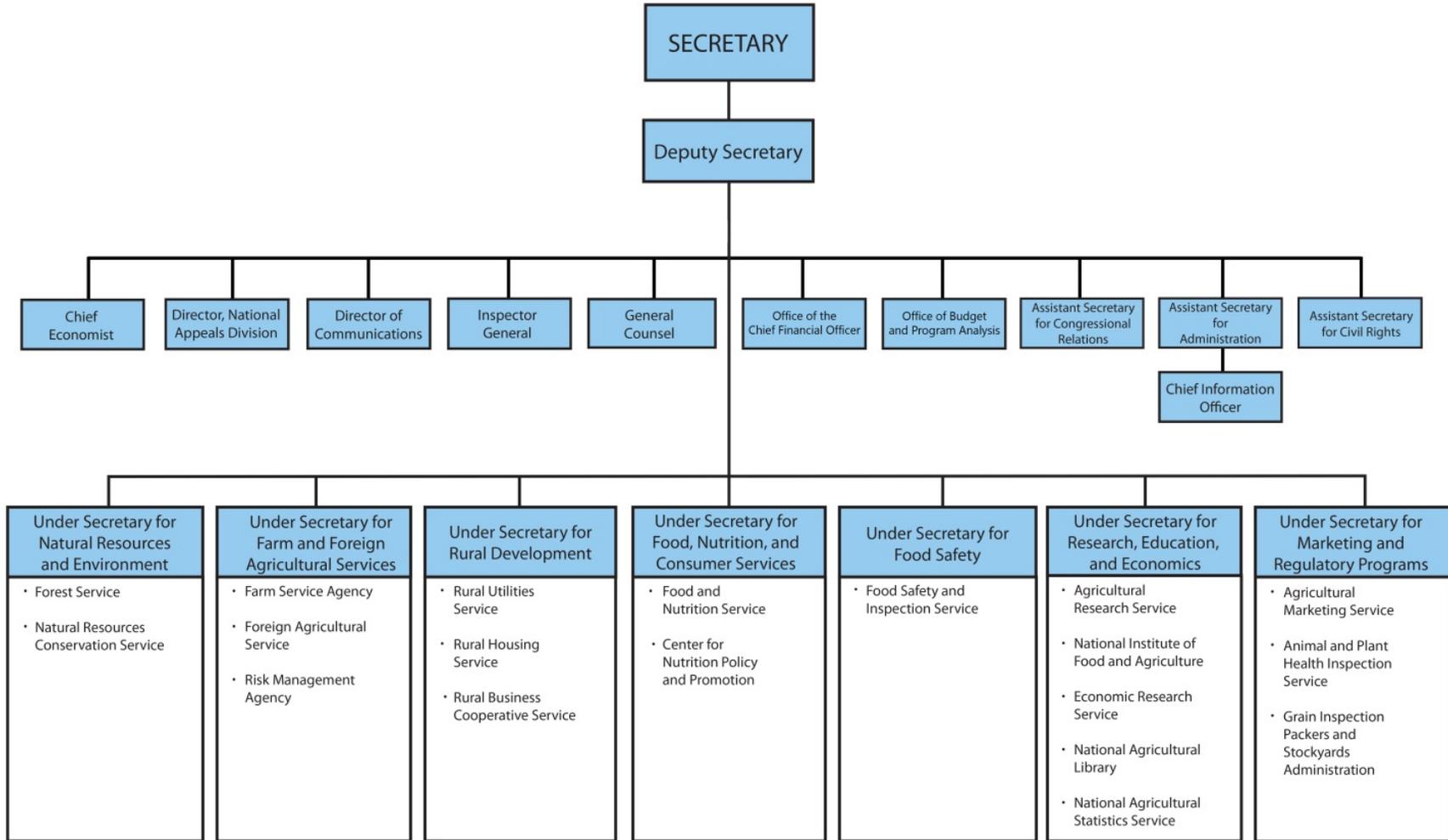
USDA's Cultural Transformation Initiative is important to FSIS' success. The initiative's goal is to create a workplace where there is equity of opportunity and where everyone is empowered to reach their full potential. Only then can we provide our customers with exceptional service in an equitable manner.

The initiative focuses our shared energy toward numerous objectives that, in combination, will help USDA and FSIS become inclusive, high-performance organizations. To name a few, these objectives include improving employee accountability, strengthening program outreach to socially disadvantaged farmers, renewing our commitment to creating a diverse workforce, and striving to make USDA a premier organization and model employer.

FSIS senior leadership shares the Secretary's commitment to cultural transformation and has worked closely with their employees to understand their issues and concerns from not only an operational perspective, but from a leadership, employee interaction, and customer service basis.

At the heart of Cultural Transformation is the creation of a highly performing organization that values diversity and inclusion and leverages the unique talents, abilities, and perspectives of its workforce to enhance decision-making, increase operational efficiency and effectiveness, boost employee morale and performance, and improve customer service. While our senior leadership is responsible for leading change and the efforts for achieving cultural transformation, it is each employee's responsibility to embrace cultural transformation and help lead the charge.

# USDA Organization Chart



# USDA Offices

## **Departmental Management (DM)**

DM provides central administrative management support to Department officials and coordinates administrative programs and services.

## **National Appeals Division (NAD)**

NAD conducts impartial administrative appeal hearings of adverse program decisions made by USDA and reviews of determinations issued by NAD hearing officers when requested by a party to the appeal.

## **Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO)**

The Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO) was established by the 2008 Farm Bill to improve access to USDA programs and to improve the viability and profitability of small farms and ranches, beginning farmers and ranchers and socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers. OAO develops and implements plans to coordinate outreach activities and services provided by the Department through working collaboratively with the field base agencies, and continually assessing the effectiveness of its outreach programs.

## **Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR)**

OASCR's mission is to facilitate the fair and equitable treatment of USDA customers and employees, while ensuring the delivery and enforcement of civil rights programs and activities.

## **Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)**

OBPA provides centralized coordination and direction for the Department's budget, legislative and regulatory functions. It also provides analysis and evaluation to support the implementation of critical policies. OBPA administers the Department's budgetary functions and develops and presents budget related matters to Congress, the news media, and the public.

## **Office of the Chief Economist (OCE)**

OCE advises the Secretary on the economic situation in agricultural markets and the economic implications of policies and programs affecting American agriculture and rural communities. OCE serves as the focal point for economic intelligence and analysis related to agricultural markets and for risk assessment and cost-benefit analysis related to Departmental regulations affecting food and agriculture.

**Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO)**

OCFO shapes an environment for USDA officials eliciting the high-quality financial performance needed to make and implement effective policy, management, stewardship, and program decisions.

**Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)**

OCIO has the primary responsibility for the supervision and coordination of the design, acquisition, maintenance, use, and disposal of information technology by USDA agencies. OCIO' strategically acquires and uses information technology resources to improve the quality, timeliness and cost effectiveness of USDA services.

**Office of the Chief Scientist (OCS)**

OCS provides scientific leadership to the Department by ensuring that research supported by and scientific advice provided to the Department and its stakeholders is held to the highest standards of intellectual rigor and scientific integrity. It also identifies and prioritizes Department-wide agricultural research, education, and extension needs.

**Office of Communications (OC)**

OC is USDA's central source of public information. The office provides centralized information services using the latest, most effective and efficient technology and standards for communication. It also provides the leadership, coordination, expertise, and counsel needed to develop the strategies, products, and services that are used to describe USDA initiatives, programs, and functions to the public.

**Office of Congressional Relations (OCR)**

OCR serves as the USDA's liaison with Congress. OCR works closely with members and staffs of various House and Senate Committees to communicate the USDA's legislative agenda and budget proposals.

**Office of Ethics (OE)**

The Office of Ethics (OE) is the centralized office responsible for coordinating and implementing USDA's Ethics program throughout the Department. OE provides ethics services to employees at all levels of USDA concerning advice and training about compliance with ethics laws and regulations, including the conflict of interest and impartiality rules, as well as the rules governing political activity by Federal employees.

**Office of Environmental Markets (OEM)**

OEM supports the development of emerging markets for carbon, water quality, wetlands, and biodiversity.

**Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)**

OES ensures that all Department officials are included in the correspondence drafting and policy-making process through a managed clearance and control system. Keeping policy officials informed of executive documents enhances the Secretary's ability to review sound and thought-out policy recommendations before making final decisions.

**Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships (FBNP)**

USDA has a long history of working with faith-based and community organizations to help those in need, by providing federal assistance through domestic nutrition assistance programs, international food aid, rural development opportunities, and natural resource conservation.

**Office of the Inspector General (OIG)**

OIG investigates allegations of crime against the Department's program, and promotes the economy and efficiency of its operations.

**Office of the General Counsel (OGC)**

The Office of the General Counsel (OGC) is an independent legal agency that provides legal advice and services to the Secretary of Agriculture and to all other officials and agencies of the Department with respect to all USDA programs and activities.

**Office of Tribal Relations (OTR)**

The Office of Tribal Relations is located in the Office of the Secretary, and is responsible for government-to-government relations between USDA and tribal governments.

# USDA Agencies

## **Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)**

AMS facilitates the strategic marketing of agricultural products in domestic and international markets while ensuring fair trading practices and promoting a competitive and efficient marketplace. AMS constantly works to develop new marketing services to increase customer satisfaction.

## **Agricultural Research Service (ARS)**

ARS is USDA's principal in-house research agency. ARS leads America towards a better future through agricultural research and information.

## **Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)**

APHIS provides leadership in ensuring the health and care of animals and plants. The agency improves agricultural productivity and competitiveness and contributes to the national economy and the public health.

## **Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP)**

CNPP works to improve the health and well-being of Americans by developing and promoting dietary guidance that links scientific research to the nutrition needs of consumers.

## **Economic Research Service (ERS)**

ERS is USDA's principal social science research agency. Each year, ERS communicates research results and socioeconomic indicators via briefings, analyses for policymakers and their staffs, market analysis updates, and major reports.

## **Farm Service Agency (FSA)**

FSA implements agricultural policy, administers credit and loan programs, and manages conservation, commodity, disaster and farm marketing programs through a national network of offices.

## **Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)**

FNS increases food security and reduces hunger in partnership with cooperating organizations by providing children and low-income people access to food, a healthy diet, and nutrition education in a manner that supports American agriculture and inspires public confidence.

**Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)**

FSIS enhances public health and well-being by protecting the public from foodborne illness and ensuring that the nation's meat, poultry and egg products are safe, wholesome, and correctly packaged.

**Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)**

FAS works to improve foreign market access for U.S. products. This USDA agency operates programs designed to build new markets and improve the competitive position of U.S. agriculture in the global marketplace.

**Forest Service (FS)**

FS sustains the health, diversity and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.

**Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)**

GIPSA facilitates the marketing of livestock, poultry, meat, cereals, oilseeds, and related agricultural products. It also promotes fair and competitive trading practices for the overall benefit of consumers and American agriculture. GIPSA ensures open and competitive markets for livestock, poultry, and meat by investigating and monitoring industry trade practices.

**National Agricultural Library (NAL)**

NAL ensures and enhances access to agricultural information for a better quality of life.

**National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)**

NASS serves the basic agricultural and rural data needs of the country by providing objective, important and accurate statistical information and services to farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses and public officials. This data is vital to monitoring the ever-changing agricultural sector and carrying out farm policy.

**National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)**

NIFA's unique mission is to advance knowledge for agriculture, the environment, human health and well-being, and communities by supporting research, education, and extension programs in the Land Grant University System and other partner organizations. NIFA doesn't perform actual research, education, and extension but rather helps fund it at the state and local level and provides program leadership in these areas.

**Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**

NRCS provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain and improve our natural resources and environment.

**Risk Management Agency (RMA)**

RMA helps to ensure that farmers have the financial tools necessary to manage their agricultural risks. RMA provides coverage through the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, which promotes national welfare by improving the economic stability of agriculture.

**Rural Development (RD)**

RD helps rural areas to develop and grow by offering Federal assistance that improves quality of life. RD targets communities in need and then empowers them with financial and technical resources.

# Overview of FSIS

## **Our Mission**

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is the public health agency in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and is responsible for ensuring that meat, poultry, and processed egg products are safe, wholesome, and accurately labeled.

## **Our Authority**

Through a series of Acts, Congress empowers FSIS to inspect all meat, poultry, and processed egg products in interstate commerce.

- Federal Meat Inspection Act (FMIA), 1906
- Agricultural Marketing Act (AMA), 1946 (select sections)
- Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA), 1957
- Egg Products Inspection Act (EPIA), 1970

In addition to these food safety laws, FSIS also implements the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act of 1958, which requires that livestock are handled and slaughtered humanely.

## **Our History**

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the legislation that created the USDA. During his final annual message to Congress, he referred to the USDA as “The People’s Department,” recognizing the connection of agriculture to American prosperity. Throughout the years, reorganization led to several different agencies within the USDA, including the Food Safety and Inspection Service in 1981.

The turning point for domestic meat inspection came in 1905 and 1906, after publication of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*. Details of the book described unsanitary working conditions in a Chicago meatpacking house, putting meat consumers at risk for disease. This led to the passing of legislation providing for meat inspection. Over the years, Congress passed the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Products Inspection Act, the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act and the Egg Products Inspection Act, which the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) enforces.

## **Who We Are Now**

Much has changed since the law authorizing the inspection of meat products was passed by Congress in 1906. Today, tens of billions of pounds of meat and poultry and billions of pounds of liquid egg products are produced, transported, and sold every year. A system of this magnitude requires constant vigilance to prevent the possibility of foodborne contamination.

More than 9,600 employees strong, FSIS personnel work together to accomplish our mission of protecting public health. Making sure that meat, poultry, and processed egg products are safe and wholesome is not an easy task. It requires many motivated, skilled, and highly trained professionals working as *one team with one purpose*.

As part of one team, FSIS participates in Cultural Transformation, a commitment to work in collaboration with USDA on civil rights and equal employment opportunities (EEO), embrace a respectful and diverse workforce, and strive for a highly effective, collaborative work environment. FSIS fosters an inclusive workforce by recruiting and hiring skilled applicants that reflect America's diversity. FSIS eliminates barriers to equal employment and allows employees to advance based on merit. Managers and supervisors lead by example to ensure that the environment is free from discrimination, hostility, intimidation, reprisal, and harassment.

FSIS' new employee initiative, i-Impact, allows employees to discover how their daily work activities contribute to the strategic goals of the Agency and directly support our mission. The workshop includes a workbook and even a video about the different jobs we all hold.

### **Modernization**

Inspection changed from a sight, smell, and touch approach to a more science-based method when FSIS implemented its Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) regulations between January 1997 and January 2000. Science and technology improvements have allowed our inspection to evolve as well, with the implementation of new policies like testing ready-to-eat meat and poultry products for *Listeria monocytogenes*, applying stricter *Salmonella* and new *Campylobacter* performance standards to raw poultry products, and declaring that six additional serogroups of pathogenic *E. coli* (in addition to *E. coli* O157:H7) are adulterants in non-intact raw beef.

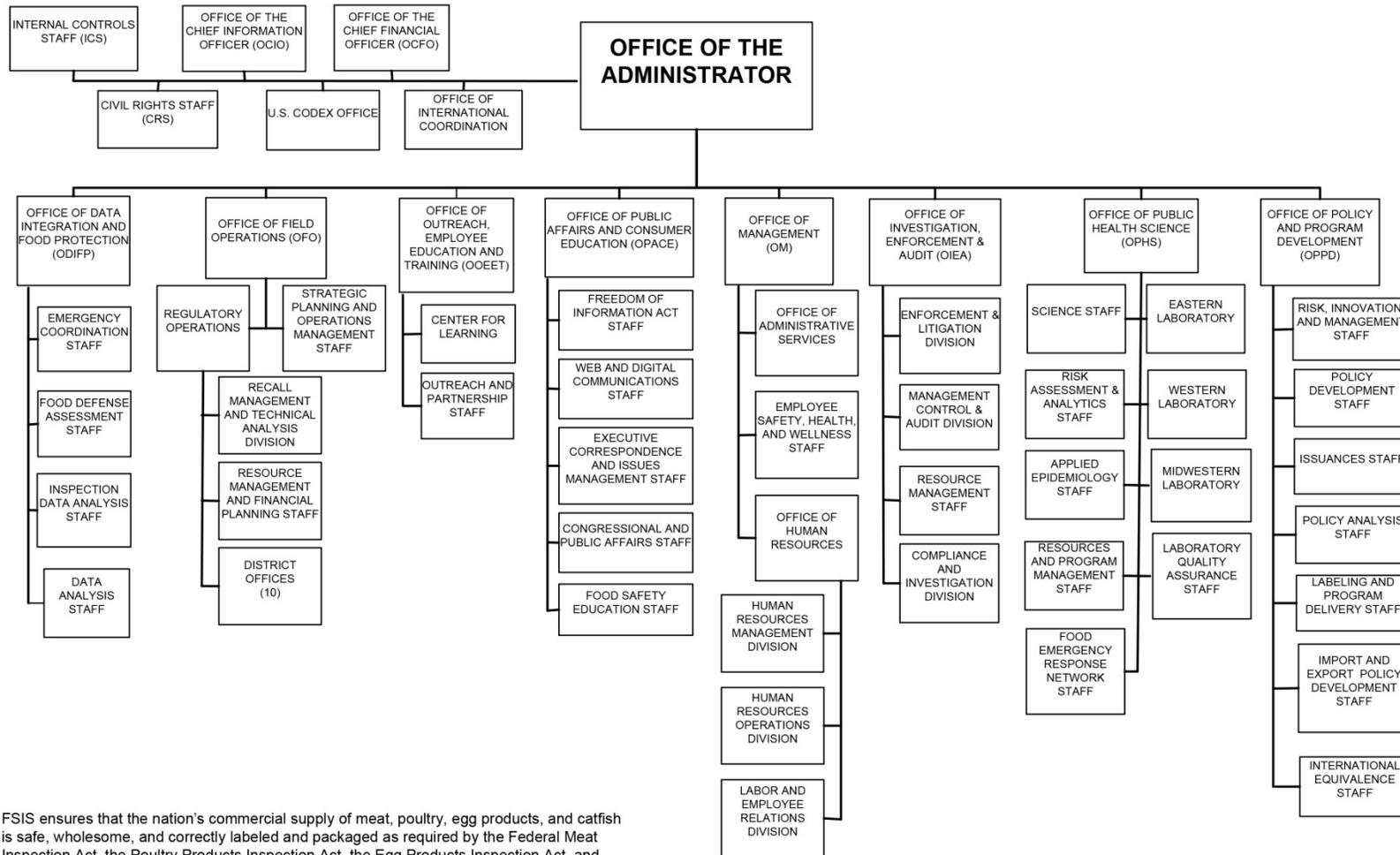
At FSIS, we are always focused on modernizing our approach to food safety. This involves collaborating and communicating with the public—including our partners in industry, foreign governments, consumer organizations, state and local government, academia, and other stakeholders.

In 2013, we established a Strategic Performance Working Group (SPWG) to perform reviews and develop ideas within the Agency to improve our overall performance. This working group, which brings together employees from headquarters and the field, is a great example of what we can do when we bring together a diverse workforce made up of folks with a wealth of knowledge. Their discussions are critical because they directly impact our success as an agency.

Every 5 years, FSIS updates our strategic plan with current goals and initiatives. The FSIS Strategic Plan is the foundation document for both the long range and day-to-day operations of the Agency. A main driver of the Strategic Plan is the desire for the Agency to continue to be an ever more trusted and successful public health agency—an agency that adapts to the changing nature of food safety risks. Outlined in the Agency's strategic plan are several themes and goals within those themes. For example, our 2011-2016 Strategic Plan's themes were "Prevent Foodborne Illness," "Understand and Influence the Farm-to-Table Continuum," and "Empower People and Strengthen Infrastructure."

Each year, FSIS develops an annual performance plan (APP) that sets out three or four key results that each office intends to accomplish to advance the strategic plan. At the end of each year, we publish a report that sets out how well we did in achieving the key results. The APP is important to each of you because each employee's performance standards derive from it

# FSIS Organization Chart



FSIS ensures that the nation's commercial supply of meat, poultry, egg products, and catfish is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged as required by the Federal Meat Inspection Act, the Poultry Products Inspection Act, the Egg Products Inspection Act, and Catfish Regulations. Coordinates U.S. involvement and participation in the Codex Alimentarius Commission, a United Nations' international standard setting organization for food safety and public health. Supersedes Chart approved 2/22/2013

FSIS (1)

(Last Updated: 12/11/15)

# FSIS Program Areas

## **Office of the Administrator (OA)**

OA oversees FSIS' major programs. The Administrator is FSIS' top official, with overall responsibility for all inspection and standard-setting activities.

## **Civil Rights Staff (CRS)**

CRS provides advice, guidance and assistance on the implementation, management and compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity programs. Such programs include Affirmative Employment, Complaints Management, Special Emphasis Programs, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Training, and Workforce Diversity. The staff's goal is to ensure fair and equal treatment to internal and external customers. The staff also conducts mediation, team building, and conflict resolution programs through its Mediation and Conflict Resolution Group (MCRG).

## **Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO)**

OCFO has responsibility for budget and financial management in FSIS. The CFO leads development of policies and financial reporting systems to support FSIS' public health mission and oversees the Agency's strategic planning and performance management functions.

The [FSIS Strategic Plan](#) is the foundation document for both the long-range and day-to-day operations of the Agency. The Plan describes how FSIS will continually earn the public's trust through proper policies and actions focused on decreasing the risk of and preventing foodborne illnesses.

## **Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)**

OCIO has the primary responsibility for business technology and information management and assurance for the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), both in headquarters and in the field. The office leads the development, information assurance, customer support and maintenance of the Information Technology (IT), mission-supporting and innovative enterprise architecture and telecommunications infrastructure to support regulatory decision making and to support food safety, public health, and food security for a highly mobile workforce.

## **Office of International Coordination (OIC)**

FSIS' Office of International Coordination (OIC) is the Agency's primary liaison with foreign governments and other U.S. government agencies on all regulatory matters of concern to the Agency. OIC staff meets regularly with foreign ministers for health and agriculture, embassy staff, interagency representatives and FSIS subject matter leads to discuss international regulatory agency requests for access to the U.S. market for meat, poultry and processed egg products. OIC staff informs foreign governments and U.S. agency representatives about FSIS authorities, regulations and changes in policy on a regular basis and represents FSIS at international meetings.

## **Internal Controls Staff (ICS)**

ICS has the delegated authority to conduct employee misconduct, OIG Hotline, and other investigations to detect and deter fraud, waste, abuse, or mismanagement within the Agency.

**United States Codex Office**

This office serves as the U.S. contact point for the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its activities.

**Office of Data Integration and Food Protection (ODIFP)**

ODIFP develops, maintains, and coordinates all FSIS activities to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from significant incidents resulting from intentional contamination or deliberate acts of terrorism, and other significant non-routine incidents affecting meat, poultry, and processed egg products. The Office also coordinates the data analysis and integration activities of the Agency, and the development and maintenance of analytics that integrate and analyze multiple data streams to determine trends and patterns that may be of public health significance and to help FSIS best use its data.

**The Food Defense Assessment Staff (FDAS)**

FDAS works with government agencies, industry, and other organizations to establish and maintain the Agency's food defense infrastructure that will ensure emergency preparedness and response for chemical, biological and radiological emergencies.

**The Emergency Coordination Staff (ECS)**

ECS provides and coordinates preparedness, response, and recovery initiatives for significant incidents, including natural disasters, and provides advice and consultation to other government agencies and to industry on the response to all threats affecting the food supply.

**The Inspection Data Analysis Staff (IDAS)**

IDAS coordinates the Agency's data collection, analysis, and reporting activities for all operational and strategic analyses needed for FSIS's field operations. It develops analytics to provide field personnel with alerts in response to early detection of trends, patterns, and anomalies, to protect public health. The staff also develops alerts to help inspectors focus on public health tasks.

**The Data Analysis Staff (DAS)**

DAS coordinates the Agency's data collection, analysis, and reporting activities for all non-field operational and strategic activities. The staff develops analytics for FSIS program areas and evaluates data streams, ensuring data analyses are consistent and of high quality and can serve as the basis for informed management decisions.

**Office of Field Operations (OFO)**

OFO manages a nationwide program of inspection and enforcement activities regarding meat, poultry and egg products.

**Recall Management and Technical Analysis Division (RMTAD)**

RMTAD leads and coordinates domestic and import functions across field district offices. These functions include recall activities, import operations, and critical thinking, data-driven analyses of technical issues affecting multiple districts and agency program areas.

### **Regulatory Operations and District Offices**

FSIS has 10 District Offices throughout the U.S.: [Alameda, CA](#) | [Atlanta, GA](#) | [Chicago, IL](#) | [Dallas, TX](#) | [Denver, CO](#) | [Des Moines, IA](#) | [Jackson, MS](#) | [Philadelphia, PA](#) | [Raleigh, NC](#) | [Springdale, AR](#)

### **Resource Management and Planning Staff**

This staff provides leadership in Field Operations allocation and distribution of human and financial resources to accomplish FSIS' public health goals. FSIS must effectively utilize its professional workforce and financial resources in order to implement new initiatives and to ensure food safety and security.

### **Strategic Planning and Operations Management Staff**

This staff is responsible for developing, planning, assessing, and evaluating strategic guidance and procedures and for the operations management of OFO.

### **Office of Investigation, Enforcement, and Audit (OIEA)**

OIEA contributes to the FSIS mission of food safety, public health, and food defense strategic objectives through surveillance and investigation of regulated and in-commerce meat, poultry and processed egg products facilities; investigation of foodborne illness outbreaks; response to natural disaster and contamination events; execution and application of enforcement of FSIS criminal, civil, and administrative sanctions and authorities; and verification that meat, poultry, and egg products imported into the United States are produced under equivalent standards. OIEA is also responsible for defending the Agency before third parties concerning complaints of discrimination, appeals of adverse actions, and unfair labor practice charges.

### **Compliance and Investigation Division (CID)**

CID investigates violations of the food safety, food defense, and other consumer protection statutory requirements; controls unsafe or violative products through detentions, civil seizures, and voluntary recalls; and develops cases through surveillance and investigation activity to ensure that appropriate criminal, administrative, and civil sanctions are carried out according to Agency laws, regulations and directives.

### **Enforcement and Litigation Division (ELD)**

ELD develops and executes FSIS-wide criminal, civil, and administrative enforcement programs to implement and enforce the Federal Meat, Poultry, Egg Products, and Humane Slaughter statutes and conducts litigation to uphold FSIS-wide management decisions involving performance deficiencies, improper conduct, labor-management agreements, and related matters before the federal ruling authorities.

### **Management Control and Audit Division (MCAD)**

MCAD conducts independent and objective audits, investigations, and critical analyses of FSIS programs, conducts comprehensive reviews of Federal and State Meat and Poultry Inspection (MPI) programs to ensure the application of inspection procedures and protocols in inspected meat, poultry, and processed egg products establishments in the United States and has the responsibility of verifying that foreign countries previously approved to export meat, poultry, or egg products to the U.S. are maintaining inspection programs that provide food safety protection at a level equivalent to that in the U.S., and actively participates in the planning and conducting of initial team audits in countries seeking first-time approval to ship to the U.S.

**Resource Management Staff (RMS)**

RMS provides management and oversight on all Agency budgetary systems and conducts management controls over budget execution and formulations.

**Office of Management (OM)**

OM provides a full range of administrative and support services to FSIS.

**Office of Administrative Services (OAS)**

OAS provides support to employees in the areas of property, supply and space management; physical security; information management; procurement; and printing.

**Office of the Human Resources (OHR)**

OHR provides staff leadership for human capital planning for the Agency. OHR leads the development of programs, policies and systems that align the Agency's human resources with its mission, strategic plan, performance plans, training plan, recruitment, and budget.

**Employee Safety, Health and Wellness Staff (ESHWS)**

The Employee Safety, Health and Wellness Staff (ESHWS) provides guidance to the Agency workforce through science, education and outreach to increase work-life balance, improve health and safety, and promote environmental sustainability.

**Office of Outreach, Employee Education and Training (OOEET)**

OOEET is responsible for directing outreach, education and training programs designed to ensure public health and food safety through both inspection and enforcement.

**Outreach and Partnership Division (OPD)**

OPD engages in cross-cutting outreach activities, effectively leverages resources and unifies Agency strategies, methods and delivery of outreach to small and very small plants. It provides technical expertise, information, and advice to small and very small plant owners and operators on the interpretation, application, implementation and enforcement of regulations, policies and systems. This division also promotes State participation in achieving national food safety, food security and other consumer protection goals by planning, organizing, coordinating and supporting FSIS cooperative activities with State agencies with primary responsibility for State meat, poultry and egg product public health assurance inspection programs.

**Center for Learning (CFL)**

CFL provides leadership in implementing training and development policies by assessing, planning, developing and conducting various technical and non-technical programs, activities and resources for the Agency's workforce. The Organization and Employee Development Branch, the Distance Learning Branch and the Training Operations Branch are all part of the Center for Learning.

**Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Education (OPACE)**

OPACE is responsible for conducting public programs to inform, educate and work with a variety of different audiences.

**Congressional & Public Affairs Staff (CPAS)**

CPA provides information products or services to varied audiences, including Congress, the media and constituent groups. Information products include news releases and recall releases, fact sheets, the FSIS Constituent Update, reports to Congress and speeches.

**Executive Correspondence and Issues Management Staff (ECIMS)**

ECIMS handles executive correspondence on a variety of public health, scientific and regulatory issues.

**Freedom of Information Act Staff (FOIAS)**

FOIAS ensures compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act, including responding to FOIA requests that the Agency receives.

**Food Safety Education Staff (FSES)**

FSES educates consumers about the importance of safe food handling. This staff manages educational campaigns including the Meat and Poultry Hotline and Food Safety Discovery Zone.

**Web and Digital Communications Staff (WDCS)**

WDCS develops and maintains Agency websites.

**Office of Policy and Program Development (OPPD)**

OPPD develops and makes recommendations concerning all domestic and international policy for FSIS.

**Import and Export Policy Development Staff (IEPDS)**

The Import and Export Policy Development Staff (IEPDS) provides leadership in the identification and the subsequent development of policy solutions relative to import operations and export certification.

**International Equivalence Staff (IES)**

The International Equivalence Staff (IES) is responsible for ensuring that meat, poultry, and egg products imported into the United States are produced under standards equivalent to U.S. food safety standards.

**Issuances Staff (IS)**

The Issuances Staff (IS) provides leadership for the analysis and development of Agency regulations and associated issuances (FSIS Notices and Directives), administrative issuances, and for the Agency's petition process. IS ensures compliance with relevant legal requirements, program needs, and policy priorities. Represents the Agency in Departmental and Federal regulatory review and clearance process and coordinates interagency food safety initiatives.

**Labeling and Program Delivery Staff (LPDS)**

The Labeling and Program Delivery Staff (LPDS) develops policies and inspection verification methods and administers programs to protect consumers from misbranded and economically adulterated meat, poultry and egg products such that all labels are truthful and not misleading.

**Policy Analysis Staff (PAS)**

The Policy Analysis Staff (PAS) develops and conducts economic and statistical analyses of proposed, final and/or existing agency regulations and policies.

**Policy Development Staff (PDS)**

The Policy Development Staff (PDS) provides leadership in the identification of policy needs, and the subsequent development of policy solutions, to address the intent and application of verification and enforcement policy in in-plant activities.

**Risk, Innovations, and Management Staff (RIMS)**

The Risk, Innovations, and Management Staff (RIMS) ensures that OPPD's policy development initiatives have a strong scientific basis by collaborating with the Office of Public Health Science (OPHS) and that OPPD's resource allocation is aligned appropriately with the Agency's food safety hazards.

**Office of Public Health Science (OPHS)**

OPHS provides the scientific and public health leadership necessary for the support of science-based food safety programs and policies implemented to reduce foodborne illnesses and deaths. OPHS develops (collects, analyzes and reports) scientific information related to meat, poultry and egg products, from their production to consumption and uses that information to assess potential human health risks throughout the farm-to-table continuum.

**Resource and Program Management Staff (RPMS)**

RPMS provides technical expertise, oversight, and support for all administrative, financial management (appropriated and user-fee funded), internal and management control, strategic planning and human capital functions. Assesses and provides support for the highly-specialized program resource and administrative requirements needed to sustain frontline laboratory functions, scientific programs, and public health activities conducted by the program.

**Science Staff (SciS)**

SciS provides expertise and leadership in promoting food safety and advancing the latest scientific approaches to understand and prevent foodborne illness caused by microbiological, chemical, and physical contamination. SciS explores the application of new technologies to prevent and control foodborne hazards in meat, poultry and egg products. The SciS is responsible for the administration of the National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods ([NACMCF](#)) activities.

**Applied Epidemiology Staff (AES)**

AES utilizes the latest epidemiologic, medical, veterinary and public health approaches to identify, investigate, understand, respond to and prevent human foodborne related illnesses and hazards.

**Risk Assessment and Analytics Staff (RAAS)**

RAAS develops and applies state-of-art scientific methods to assess the risks of biological and chemical hazards in meat, poultry and egg products. Those risk assessments estimate the

potential effects of policy options, inform regulatory decisions in support of the Agency's food safety mission, and assess the public health impacts of FSIS actions.

#### **FSIS Field Service Laboratories**

The three FSIS Field Service Laboratories and the laboratory quality assurance staff coordinate and conduct analyses in support of the Agency's farm-to-table strategies that affect the health and safety of consumers worldwide.

- Eastern Laboratory, Athens, Georgia - services: chemistry, microbiology, and veterinary pathology
- Midwestern Laboratory, St. Louis, Missouri - services: chemistry and microbiology.
- Western Laboratory, Alameda, California - services: chemistry and microbiology.

#### **Laboratory Quality Assurance Staff (LQAS)**

LQAS oversees the FSIS laboratory wide quality management system ensuring that the system is in compliance with all ISO/IEC Standard 17025, *AOAC International Guidelines for Laboratories Performing Microbiological and Chemical Analyses of Foods and Pharmaceuticals* and Agency requirements.

#### **Food Emergency Response Network (FERN)**

FERN integrates the nation's food-testing laboratories at the local, state, Federal, tribal and territorial levels into a network that is able to respond to emergencies involving biological, chemical or radiological contamination of food.

# Federal Employment

## **USDA Identification Credential/LincPass**

Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12) was issued on August 12, 2004, and calls for a mandatory, Government-wide standard for secure and reliable forms of IDs issued by the Federal Government to its employees and employees of Federal contractors for access to federally controlled facilities and networks. USDA's HSPD-12 compliant ID is called the LincPass, as it is designed to link a person's identity to an ID credential and the credential to a person's ability to physically and logically access federally controlled buildings and information systems, respectively.

The LincPass will be used not only for identification purposes but also for logical access to both Federal computer systems (Logical Access Control Systems) and Federal facilities (Physical Access Control Systems). Therefore, it is very important that LincPass cardholders safeguard their LincPass at all times and report their loss within 1 hour to comply with Federal guidance. LincPass usage is mandatory in order to log on to Government-furnished equipment. Without it, employees will need to contact the Service Desk 24/7/365 at 1-800-473-9135 for a very short-term ability to use a username and password before automatic re-enforcement. If you are a less than 6-month employee and not eligible for a LincPass, you will be issued an alternative method of two-factor authentication in order to use your Government-furnished equipment. If you experience a lost/stolen laptop, SmartPhone, LincPass or other Government-furnished equipment, immediately contact USDA at 1-888-926-2373 24 hours a day, then contact the FSIS Service Desk 24/7/365 at 1-800-473-9135. FSIS Information Technology policies can be found online: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/regulations/directives/1000-series> and through FSIS Notices.

## **Background Investigations**

All appointments in the Federal Service require some level of background investigation, screening or security clearance. The U.S. Government conducts investigations and periodic reinvestigations to determine whether applicants or incumbents either employed by the Government, or working for the Government under contract, are suitable to occupy a position or are eligible for access to classified information.

All new employees will be required to complete an electronic questionnaire through OPM's secure online e-QIP System. Employees will be contacted by the Human Resources Division Personnel Security Staff with instructions on how to access OPM's online system.

## **Position Classification**

Under the General Schedule (GS) system, jobs are categorized by occupational groups, series, classes and grades. This system ensures that positions that are similar require comparable qualifications, and that employees who are doing substantially equal work receive equal pay. The system is designed to provide a systematic grouping of positions by kind of work, level of difficulty and responsibility and required qualifications of the position.

The classification system is based on a set of written standards and guides, which are used by trained specialists to evaluate and classify positions. Standards are issued by OPM for use throughout the Government.

Consequently, employee performance is not considered in the classification process. Employee performance is rewarded through a system of within-grade increases, quality increases and awards for superior accomplishment. Other factors not considered in classifying a position are volume of work performed, employee's length of service or superior qualifications.

### **Position Description**

Your supervisor will provide you with a description of your job. A position description is the official record of your major duties and responsibilities and the supervisory relationship of your position. The duties and responsibilities that have been assigned to you will determine your title, the kind of position you occupy, the level or grade, series and the base pay that you will receive for performing the work.

If significant changes take place in your job, your supervisor should take immediate steps to see that a new position description is prepared and submitted for classification review. She/he must make certain that your position description represents the current duties and responsibilities that are assigned to you. You and your supervisor have joint responsibility for reviewing your position description, annually, for accuracy and adequacy.

For more information about position descriptions, talk to your supervisor.

### **Work Schedules**

The standard tour of duty for a full-time employee is a 40-hour basic workweek consisting of 5 days of 8 hours each day, Monday through Friday. Your supervisor will determine your work schedule based upon Agency and program needs; however, there are several flexibilities available. For more information about flexible work schedules, talk to your supervisor or contact the Office of Human Resources at 1-800-370-3747.

# Pay and Leave

## General Schedule

The [General Schedule \(GS\)](#) classification and pay system covers the majority of civilian white-collar Federal employees in professional, technical, administrative, and clerical positions. The GS system is divided into 15 grades, each of which has 10 steps. Entry-level hiring into a grade normally is done at step 1.

Pay is locality based. For GS employees, there are more than 30 locality pay areas and a catchall “rest of the U.S.” locality for everywhere else within the 48 contiguous States. Raises are set by local labor market conditions, subject to the availability of funds appropriated by Congress.

[Within-grade increases \(WGs\)](#) or step increases are periodic increases in a GS employee’s rate of basic pay from one step of the grade to the next higher step of that grade. Employees who occupy permanent positions earn WGs upon meeting the following three requirements established by law:

- The employee’s performance must be at an acceptable level of competence. To meet this requirement, an employee’s most recent performance rating of record must be at least Level 3 (“Fully Successful” or equivalent).
- The employee must have completed the required waiting period to advance to the next higher step.
- The employee must not have received an “equivalent increase” in pay during the waiting period. (See 5 CFR 531.407.)

## Wage Grade

The Federal Wage System (FWS) is a uniform pay-setting system that covers Federal appropriated fund and non-appropriated fund blue-collar employees who are paid by the hour. Rates are identified as WG, WS, or WL. The system’s goal is to make sure that Federal trade, craft, and laboring employees within a local wage area, who perform the same duties, receive the same rate of pay. The FWS includes 132 appropriated fund and 125 non-appropriated fund local wage areas.

FSIS Federal employees are paid biweekly. Your annual pay rates are based on 26 pay periods of 80 hours each. You will receive a salary payment every 2 weeks on designated paydays.

For more information about the Federal pay system, talk to your supervisor or contact the Office of Human Resources at 1-800-370-3747.

## Overtime

Overtime is defined as work in excess of 8 hours in a day or 40 hours in a workweek. Overtime also is work that is officially ordered and approved by your supervisor. Regardless of tour, overtime hours of work in excess of 8 in a day are not included in computing hours of work in excess of 40 hours in an administrative workweek. Overtime must be requested and authorized by your supervisor.

## Annual Leave

Annual leave can be used for whatever purposes you desire. Most people use it for vacations and personal business. Except for emergencies, annual leave must be authorized in advance by your supervisor.

An employee earns annual leave for each full pay period of employment unless he/she is in a non-pay status for the entire pay period. Annual leave is earned based on the number of years of Federal employment, including creditable military service. The following table outlines the annual leave categories and the accrual rates for each:

<u>Full-Time Employees</u>	<u>Leave Hours per Pay Period</u>	<u>Total Days</u>
Less than 3 years of service	4 hour leave category	13 days a year
3 years but less than 15 years of service	6 hour leave category	20 days a year
15 years or more of service	8 hour leave category	26 days a year

<u>Part-Time Employees</u>	<u>One hour of leave is accrued for each</u>
Less than 3 years of service	20 hours in pay status
3 years but less than 15 years of service	13 hours in pay status
15 years or more of service	10 hours in pay status

Pay status hours for part-time employees that do not equal the number necessary for a minimum leave credit are carried over from one pay period to the next to accumulate toward future leave credits.

Employees can carry 30 days (240 hours) of unused annual leave from year to year. You are advised to use your annual leave throughout the year to avoid losing accrued leave above the 30-day limit.

The Voluntary Leave Transfer Program allows a Federal employee to donate unused accrued annual leave to another Federal employee who needs leave because of a medical emergency. This program does not allow for the donation of sick leave, compensatory time, or credit hours.

### **Sick Leave**

Sick leave may be used when you: receive medical, dental, or optical examination or treatment; are incapacitated by physical or mental illness, injury, pregnancy, or childbirth; would, because of exposure to a communicable disease, jeopardize the health of others by your presence on the job; or must be absent from work for adoption-related activities. In addition, you may use a limited amount of sick leave to provide care for a family member as the result of physical or mental illness, injury, pregnancy, childbirth, or medical, dental, or optical examination or treatment; or make arrangements necessitated by the death of a family member or attend the funeral of a family member. For more information about the family leave benefits, talk to your supervisor or contact the Office of Human Resources at 1-800-370-3747.

For full-time employees, the sick leave accrual rate is 13 days a year; for part-time employees, it's one hour for each 20 days in pay status. There is no limit on how much sick leave can be accumulated.

There are other forms of leave including: compensatory time off; excused absences without loss of pay and without charge to leave; family and medical leave; 7 days of paid leave each calendar year (in addition to annual or sick leave) to serve as a bone-marrow donor and 30 days to serve as an organ

donor; time off as a form of performance recognition; leave without pay used instead of paid leave for various purposes with supervisory approval; religious reasons, and military leave. For more information about the alternate forms of leave, talk to your supervisor or access the Office of Human Resources at 1-800-370-3747.

### **Holidays**

- There are 10 Federal holidays:
- New Year’s Day—January 1
- Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.—Third Monday in January
- Presidents Day—Third Monday in February
- Memorial Day—Last Monday in May
- Independence Day—July 4
- Labor Day—First Monday in September
- Columbus Day—Second Monday in October
- Veterans Day—November 11
- Thanksgiving Day—Fourth Thursday in November
- Christmas Day—December 25

### **Uncontrollable Office Closures**

There are policies and procedures nonemergency FSIS employees are to follow for early dismissal or closure of activities due to emergency conditions. This information applies to snow emergencies, severe icing conditions, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, air pollution, power failures, interruptions of public transportation, and other situations in which significant numbers of employees are prevented from reporting for work on time or which require offices to close all or part of their activities. Most FSIS employees are designated as nonemergency employees. “Emergency employees” are defined as those who occupy critical positions that may be vital to public health, safety, welfare, national defense, or the operation of essential facilities or functions. If this definition applies to you, you will be notified in writing by your supervisor.

*Employees located in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area  
inside the Capital Beltway (including offices in Beltsville, Maryland):*

When a weather emergency occurs that affects Federal employees working inside the Washington Capital Beltway, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) makes the final decision regarding dismissal of employees and closure of executive agencies. USDA and/or Agency Administrators will make dismissal and closure decisions during Non-weather emergencies. Those decisions, including the time of the earliest dismissal, are communicated through the USDA Director of Human Resources Management to the FSIS Human Resources (OHR) Director. The FSIS HR Director will relay this information to FSIS officials for dissemination throughout the Agency. OPM also provides announcements to the media.

You can also find information regarding emergency office closures through OPM Alert, the official operating status app of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). This free app provides a real time look at the current operating status for Federal Government offices in the Washington, DC area. This app allows you to instantly view the current and active operating status and sign up for optional push notifications when status changes occur.

You can download the mobile app at [www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/snow-dismissal-procedures/mobile-app/](http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/snow-dismissal-procedures/mobile-app/)

In many cases, employees who are telework ready and who have a telework agreement in place are expected to work.

*Employees located in Field Locations:*

Field facilities have their own emergency dismissal or closure plans. Employees who work in plants should follow guidance from their supervisor. The offices have designated officials who will notify employees within their geographical areas of early dismissal. Decisions to excuse employees will be based on any one of the following:

1. Federal Executive Board declares an emergency for which Federal employees will be excused;
2. Official public announcement by local, state, or Federal authorities that travel should be avoided, or;
3. Advice obtained from FSIS Human Resources if the decision cannot be made by any of the above.

If you have any questions or concerns about these types of office closures, please talk to your supervisor or refer to Human Resources Desk Guide, Subchapter 4630, Absence and Leave; or the OPM Washington, DC, AREA EMERGENCY DISMISSAL OR CLOSURE PROCEDURES available at:

<http://www.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2000/dismissal.htm>.

**Requesting Leave**

As a new employee you have no leave established, however, after your first pay period you will accrue 4 hours of annual leave and 4 hours of sick leave every pay period to follow. When requesting leave for more than 5 days it is encouraged to request it at least 3 months in advance for planning and office coverage. For more information regarding leave refer to Directive 4630.2. The Leave directive can be accessed via the link below:

<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/wcm/connect/357c2702-d63a-4e9a-8cff-e2aac695686a/4630.2.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

# Employee Benefits

## Premium Conversion

Premium conversion allows you to reduce your taxable income. Premium conversion uses Federal tax rules to allow you to deduct your share of health insurance premiums, dental and vision insurance premiums and flexible spending account contributions from your taxable income, which means you save on Federal income tax, Social Security, Medicare tax, and state tax (varies from state to state).

As an employee newly eligible for benefits, you will automatically be enrolled under premium conversion, unless you waive your participation. For additional information on premium conversion, please visit the Office of Personnel Management's [premium conversion](#) webpage.

## Health Insurance

Your health insurance coverage becomes effective the first day of the first pay period after your completed SF-2809 is received in Human Resources Operations (HRO), and that follows a pay period during any part of which you are in pay status.

The Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) program offers a variety of health insurance plans. Detailed information on the types of plans, plan options, and premiums available in your area is available at OPM's [FEHB Program](#) website.

Coverage is available for the following family members of employees:

- Spouse, including a common law marriage;
- Children under the age of 26, including adopted child, recognized natural child, or stepchild/[foster children](#) (if living with employee in regular parent-child relationship); and
- Children, age 26 or older, who are incapable of self-support, if the condition occurred before age 26.

Instructions: You must complete an SF-2809 upon becoming eligible for coverage. Print (one copy only), sign, fax, or mail the SF-2809 to HRO within 60 days of your eligibility date. If you are participating in premium conversion, you may not change your enrollment status until the next annual "open season", or if you experience a [qualifying life event](#). The annual open season is held each year from mid-November to mid-December and provides you an opportunity to change your enrollment by electing to enroll in, change, or cancel your enrollment in a health plan, or change your level of health coverage.

If you elect to enroll in a health plan, you should receive your health plan membership card approximately 4 to 6 weeks after the effective date.

## Federal Employees Group Life Insurance

Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) provides group term life insurance coverage for you and for eligible family members. You are automatically covered by FEGLI Basic Life insurance, unless you choose to waive that coverage. Basic life insurance coverage is based on an employee's basic pay rounded up to the nearest \$1,000, plus an additional \$2,000, plus Accidental Death & Dismemberment (AD&D) coverage.

You can also elect [optional insurance](#) for you or your eligible family members within 60 days of your employment eligibility date.

Coverage is available for the following family members of employees:

- Spouse, including a common law marriage;
- Children under the age of 26, including adopted child, recognized natural child, or stepchild/[foster children](#) (if living with employee in regular parent-child relationship); and
- Children, age 26 or older, who are incapable of self-support, if the condition occurred before age 26.

Additional information may be found on OPM's [FEGLI Program](#) website, including the [FEGLI Program Booklet](#), which provides general information for employees about this program and the Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) and the [Online Calculator](#), which determine costs for various combinations of FEGLI coverage.

Instructions: You must complete an SF-2817 upon becoming eligible for coverage. Print (one copy only), sign, fax, or mail the SF-2817 to HRO within 60 days of your eligibility date. Basic coverage is effective the day you enter on duty in pay status. Optional coverage is effective the first day you enter on duty in pay status on or after HRO receives your SF-2817. Opportunities to increase your coverage include open season, a [qualifying life event](#), or upon Office of FEGLI approval after completing a [physical exam](#).

There are no regular open seasons for life insurance enrollment.

### **The Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program**

The Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) provides a variety of nationwide and some regional plans. FEDVIP allows self only, self plus one, or self and family enrollment options.

Eligible family members are identified below:

- Spouse, including a common law marriage;
- Unmarried dependent child under age of 22, including adopted child, recognized natural child of stepchild/foster child (if living with employee in regular parent-child relationship); and
- Children, age 22 or over, if incapable of self-support, if disabling condition happened before age 22.

Instructions: You can enroll through the [BENEFEDS website](#) within 60 days of the date you become eligible for benefits. Enrollment is effective the first day of the first pay period after your enrollment request is received by BENEFEDS. Once you enroll, you may not change your enrollment until the next annual open season or until you experience a qualifying life event. Questions about BENEFEDS can be addressed by calling 1-877-888-3337 or (TTY: 1-877-889-5680).

### **Federal Flexible Spending Account Program**

The Federal Flexible Spending Account Program (FSAFEDS) provides you the opportunity to pay for out-of-pocket medical expenses or child and elder care expenses with pre-tax dollars - which saves you money.

There are three types of accounts available: a general purposes health care flexible spending account (HCFA), a limited expense health care flexible spending account (LEXFSA), and a dependent care flexible spending account (DCFSA).

Eligible family members for HCFA and LEXFSA reimbursement are identified below:

- You
- Spouse, including a valid common law marriage
- Any person who may be claimed as a taxable dependent

- Adult children under the age of 27 (Adult children are covered through December 31 of the year in they turn 26.)

Eligible family members for DCFSA reimbursement are identified below:

- Children under the age of 13
- Any person who may be claimed as a taxable dependent

Instructions: Enroll through [FSAFEDS Website](#) within 60 days of the date you become eligible for benefits. You are not eligible to enroll on or after October 1 of each year, but can enroll during the annual open season period following October 1.

Additional information may be found on OPM's [FSAFEDS program](#) webpage.

Questions about FSAFEDS can be addressed by calling 1-877-372-3337 or (TTY: 1-800-952-0450).

### **Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program**

The Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program ([FLTCIP](#)) provides financial resources for care in a nursing home, assisted living facility, adult day care, or at home. FLTCIP helps cover the costs of certain long-term care services. Long-term care is the assistance you receive to perform activities of daily living or supervision you receive because of a severe cognitive impairment. Your premium is based on your age on the date you apply as well as the benefit options you select. The FLTCIP is medically underwritten. Certain medical conditions, or combinations of conditions, will prevent some people from qualifying for coverage.

You, your spouse, domestic partner, adult children, parents, parents-in-law, and stepparents are all eligible to apply for FLTCIP at any time. A domestic partner applicant must indicate on the FLTCIP application that a

[Declaration of Domestic Partnership](#) (PDF) form has been submitted to HR in Minneapolis, MN:

USDA FSIS MRP-BS HRO – Attn: Benefits Team  
Butler Square, 100 N. 6th Street - Minneapolis, MN 55403

Additional information may be found on the [FLTCIP Program](#) webpage or by calling Long Term Care Partners at 1-800-582-3337 or (TTY: 1-800-843-3557).

Instructions: Applications with abbreviated underwriting are accepted within 60 days of the date you become eligible for benefits, or you may apply at any time with full underwriting.

### **Retirement**

There are two retirement pension plans for Federal employees. Eligibility for retirement coverage under any of the retirement systems is determined by the type of appointment and work schedule of the employee.

Federal Employees Retirement System ([FERS](#))

- Coverage is automatic based on type of appointment and work schedule; however, if you were previously covered by the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), the FERS information may not apply to you.
- Your FERS annuity (pension) will be based on your highest 3 years of salary and your years of creditable service.
- If you have performed active duty military service, find out how to add this military time to your FERS Service Credit.

### Civil Service Retirement System ([CSRS](#))

- Coverage is based on type of appointment and work schedule, and whether you were previously covered by the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS). If you were previously covered by CSRS, your Benefits Specialist may provide you with an opportunity to elect FERS coverage.
- Your CSRS annuity (pension) will be based on your highest 3 years of salary and your years of creditable service.
- If you have performed active military service after 1956, find out how to add this military time to your CSRS Service Credit.

#### History of the Federal Retirement Systems

The Civil Service Retirement Act of 1920 established the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS). The retirement system provided a defined benefit (pension) once an eligible employee met certain age and service requirements. In return, regular CSRS employees contributed 7 percent of their basic pay to the Civil Service Retirement & Disability Fund and did not contribute to Social Security. With the passing of the Social Security Amendments of 1983, certain Federal employees were subject to Social Security tax and covered under CSRS Offset. In 1987, the Federal Employees' Retirement System (FERS) was established and created a retirement system that includes a defined benefit, social security, and a 401(k) type savings and investment plan called the Thrift Saving Plan (TSP).

### **Thrift Savings Plan (TSP)**

The Thrift Savings Plan ([TSP](#)) is a savings and investment plan similar to a 401(k). Employees covered by the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) or the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS)/CSRS-Offset are eligible to contribute tax-deferred salary to the TSP. Newly hired or re-hired employees, with a break in service of more than 30 days, will automatically have 3 percent of their basic pay contributed to their account. FERS employees are eligible for Agency contributions immediately – there is no waiting period for receiving Agency automatic (1 percent) contributions or Matching contributions of up to 5 percent of basic salary.

Newly eligible employees are able to opt out of the automatic enrollment and request a refund within the first 90 days.

Please refer to the following documents for additional information:

- [TSP Automatic Enrollment Notification Letter for Newly Eligible FERS Employees](#)
- [TSP Automatic Enrollment Notification Letter for Newly Eligible CSRS/CSRS Offset Employees](#)

The [TSP Summary Booklet](#) provides general information for employees about this program.

Instructions: Complete the [TSP-1](#) to start, increase/decrease, or stop your TSP contributions; print, sign, or mail it to: USDA FSIS MRPBS HRO, 100 North 6th Street – 5th Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

### **Designating Beneficiaries for your Federal Benefits**

Designations of Beneficiary Forms are used to specify who you want to receive these benefits in the event of your death. Complete these designation forms ONLY if you want to designate differently than the normal order of precedence, or if you are updating previously filed designations.

You may submit the following designation forms at any time.

Designation of Beneficiary for Unpaid Compensation ( <a href="#">SF-1152</a> )	Designate who you want to receive your unpaid salary, annual leave, or any other payroll payment.
Designation of Beneficiary for Federal Employees Group Life Insurance ( <a href="#">SF-2823</a> )	Designate who you want to receive payment of your life insurance.
Designation of Beneficiary for Federal Employees Retirement System ( <a href="#">SF-3102</a> )	<p>For employees covered by FERS only, this form designates payment of your FERS contributions if there is no survivor eligible for an annuity.</p> <p>Instructions: Complete without erasures or mistakes. Print, sign, and obtain two witness signatures. Mail to USDA FSIS MRPBS HRO, 100 N 6th Street, Minneapolis, MN 55128. Do not fax.</p>
Designation of Beneficiary for Civil Service Retirement System ( <a href="#">SF-2808</a> )	<p>For employees covered by CSRS only, this form designates payment of your CSRS contributions if there is no survivor eligible for an annuity.</p> <p>Instructions: Complete without erasures or mistakes. Print, sign, and obtain two witness signatures. Mail to the OPM address shown on the form. Do not fax.</p>
Designation of Beneficiary for Thrift Savings Plan ( <a href="#">TSP-3</a> )	<p>Designates payment of your Thrift Savings Plan account.</p> <p>Instructions: Complete without erasures or mistakes. Print, sign, and obtain two witness signatures. Mail to the TSP address shown on the form. Do not fax.</p>

### **Creditable Military Service Buy-Back for FERS**

Veteran Federal employees can receive retirement credit for military service once they make a deposit into a civilian annuity covering their military service. The deposit will be processed through your agency's Personnel or Human Resources Office. The military buy-back rules vary based on the year the Veteran became employed by the Federal Government. Detailed information regarding creditable military service for retirement purposes can be located within the Federal Employees Retirement System Transfer Handbook, which is located on the Office of Personnel Management's website.

# Employee Programs and Services

## Telework

While participation in telework is not an employee entitlement, FSIS begins with the presumption that all positions are appropriate for telework, unless the supervisor can document otherwise according to official duties not being suitable for work at an alternative worksite. An FSIS position that is not suitable for core telework may still be suitable for situational telework or unscheduled telework. These agreements will be approved on a case-by-case basis or with an approved reasonable accommodation.

To participate in telework, employees must have:

- An approved telework agreement in place prior to the beginning of telework;
- Completed mandatory telework training;
- Demonstrated dependability and the ability to handle responsibility;
- A proven or expected minimum performance rating of “fully successful or equivalent;” and
- No disciplinary action, adverse action, or placement on leave restriction in the preceding 12 months.

Below is the contact information for your program’s Telework program within FSIS:

- Email: [telework.awa@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:telework.awa@fsis.usda.gov)
- Directive: <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/departmental-regulation-4080-811-002>

For more information about telework, talk to your supervisor.

## Work Life Wellness (WLW)

The Work Life Wellness (WLW) Program provides resources and services to assist employees in balancing work and personal lives.

The objective of the WLW Program is to encourage employees to generate a healthy attitude and lifestyle and to develop habits that will improve their health and morale and prevent illness.

Field representatives at Headquarters, Regional Hubs, and Field locations are trained to provide WLW services at the local, state, and regional level.

For more information on Work Life Wellness programs, talk to your supervisor.

## Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) helps employees resolve personal and work problems through professional assistance. The EAP helps with the following types of problems: marital, financial, alcohol, drug, family, vocational, work-related stresses, legal referral, weight/weight loss, physical/medical, dependent care, emotional or psychological, and any other problems that may surface.

EAP encourages voluntary participation. If a person thinks they have a problem, they call the EAP number and set up an appointment. A professional EAP counselor will work directly and confidentially with the employee or family member to help resolve the problem. In some cases, the EAP counselor’s role will be to assist in determining what additional community resources can provide future assistance.

The cost of EAP is covered by your employer. Costs associated with referrals may be covered by medical benefits. Call 1-800-222-0364 or (TTY: 1-888-262-7848) or visit [www.FOH4YOU.com](http://www.FOH4YOU.com).

### **The Work Number For Everyone**

"The Work Number for Everyone" is a service that will allow you to provide almost instant verification for employment to secure a loan, rent an apartment, or anything else where employment verification is required. This automated, paperless service is available 7 days a week and provides employment and salary verification through a touch-tone phone to credit and reference verifiers upon request.

Employees are responsible for authorizing the release of their employment and salary information. The credit and reference verifiers must receive an authorization code from you to access your information. To obtain an authorization code with a touch-tone telephone, you can call 1-800-367-2884. You will need the following information:

- USDA's company code \*
- Your social security number
- Your individual PIN number \*

\* Please call (612) 336-3334 to obtain "USDA's company code" and "your individual PIN number." You can then access and print out Reference Cards through the NFC website at:

[https://www2.nfc.usda.gov/ClientServices/Back\\_Office/onboarding/workNumber.php](https://www2.nfc.usda.gov/ClientServices/Back_Office/onboarding/workNumber.php)

Once you have given the Reference Card to the verifier, it is their job to call 1-800-367-2884 to access your employment information. If you have any questions, please contact FSIS Human Resources at 202-720-6617.

### **Pre-Tax Parking**

The Pre-Tax parking program authorizes FSIS employees who use public transportation and pay to park the ability to exclude parking expenses from their taxable incomes up to \$230 per month (or any subsequent statutory limit), or their actual parking cost, whatever is less. **NOTE:** Employees may be eligible for both commuter transit subsidy benefits and pre-tax parking benefits simultaneously. This benefit is provided for by Executive Order 13150, 26 Code of Federal Regulations 1.132.9, and 5 United States Code 7905.

Below is the email address for your program's Pre-Tax Parking program within FSIS:

Email: [pretaxparking@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:pretaxparking@fsis.usda.gov)

### **Transit Incentive Program**

The Transit Incentive Program provides FSIS employees who use public transportation or a registered vanpool an Agency-paid subsidy to cover part or all of your round-trip commuting costs to and from work. The Federal Transit Incentive Program was established through several public laws, a notice, and Executive Order 13150, Federal Workforce Transportation. Employees who commute round trip from their residence to their official duty station are entitled to the Agency's designated maximum benefit amount (currently \$130 a month) or their actual commuting costs, whichever is less.

The goals of the Federal Transit Incentive Program are to:

- Improve the environment for our day-to-day lives and for future generations;
- Save fuel;
- Reduce traffic congestion; and
- Reduce the number of single-occupant vehicles on the road.

Below is the contact information for your program's transit subsidy program within FSIS:

- Email: [transitsubsidy2@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:transitsubsidy2@fsis.usda.gov)
- SmartBenefits Transit Program Page ([www.WMATA.com](http://www.WMATA.com))

For more information about the Transit Incentive Program in FSIS talk to your supervisor. Appendix I contains a copy of the Transit Assist Form.

# Forum Available to Employees

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination against its customers, employees, and applicants for employment on the bases of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, religion, reprisal and, where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or if all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Department. (Not all prohibited bases will apply to all programs and/or employment activities.)

## **Equal Employment Opportunity Program**

The Civil Rights Staff (CRS), Office of the Administrator, provides advice, guidance and assistance on the implementation, management and compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity programs. Such programs include Affirmative Employment, Complaints Management, Special Emphasis Program, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Training and Workforce Diversity. The staff's goal is to ensure fair and equal treatment to internal and external customers. The staff also offers alternative dispute resolution to include mediation, team building and conflict resolution. Federal employees are protected from discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 and Title II, Genetic Information Non-discrimination Act of 2008. These laws are enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In addition to the above mentioned laws, Executive Orders and USDA regulations also prohibit discrimination on the bases of a person's sexual orientation, marital or familial status, parental status or political affiliation/belief. Under these laws, Executive Orders and regulation it is illegal to discriminate against an employee, former employee or applicants seeking employment with FSIS.

FSIS employees, former employees and applicants for employment with FSIS may contact the CRS if they believe they have been subjected to discrimination based on race, color, sex, national origin, religion, mental or physical disability, age (40 or over), marital or family status, parental status, protected genetic information, political beliefs, sexual orientation or reprisal. The telephone number for the CRS is 1-800-269-6912. Individuals wishing to file an EEO complaint may also do so in person at 5601 Sunnyside Avenue Building 1, Room 2260, Beltsville, MD 20705. If you believe that you have been the victim of discrimination you must contact an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) counselor within 45 calendar days of the alleged discriminatory or, in the case of a personnel action, within 45 calendar days of the effective date of the action.

## **Alternative Dispute Resolution**

The Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Program is a fast and confidential process offered to employees to help resolve workplace disputes. ADR makes available a number of conflict resolution alternatives to assist employees, supervisors and managers in resolving disputes. The CRS provides prompt intervention services to all individuals along with an opportunity to enhance communication and improve workplace conditions. To seek ADR services, contact the CRS at the number previously provided.

### **Merit System Principles**

Personnel practices are carried out in accordance with the [Merit System Principles](#). Through assessment of Agency human resources management, violations of the principles and related laws, rules and regulations are identified. This compliance is also accomplished by administering the Government's [classification appeals](#) and [Fair Labor Standards Act](#) programs.

### **Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act**

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act ([USERRA](#)) protects the job rights of individuals who voluntarily or involuntarily leave employment positions to undertake military service or certain types of service in the National Disaster Medical System. USERRA also prohibits employers from discriminating against past and present members of the uniformed services and applicants to the uniformed services.

### **Office of Special Counsel**

The U.S. Office of Special Counsel ([OSC](#)) has the authority to investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute claims of "prohibited personnel practices." There are 12 prohibited personnel practices defined by law, including reprisal for whistleblowing. A list of all 12 is available at: [www.mspb.gov/ppp/ppp.htm](http://www.mspb.gov/ppp/ppp.htm).

### **Merit Systems Protection Board**

Career employees receiving disciplinary actions from their supervisor may be eligible to appeal to the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB). Another form of appeal is the administrative grievance, which normally covers workplace disputes and disciplinary actions not within the MSPB's jurisdiction. FSIS encourages early resolution of workplace and program disputes using the Alternative Dispute Resolution Program. These procedures vary; contact Human Resources for additional information.

### **Administrative Grievance Process**

FSIS recognizes that occasional concerns or disagreements may occur in a working environment. It is the Agency's goal to resolve employee concerns quickly, and fairly. Employees who are not in the bargaining unit may file a grievance using the Administrative Grievance Process under USDA FSIS Directive 4771.1 Rev. 3. The Administrative Grievance Process covers subjects related to one's employment that cannot be filed in other forums such as EEO, OPM and OWCP.

### **Negotiated Grievance Process**

The Grievance Procedure is provided in Article 14 of the Labor Management Agreement. It allows for the filing of complaints by a bargaining unit employees and/or their representatives concerning most matters relating to the employment of the employee. Some subjects such as OWCP are barred from being heard, but the grievance process allows employees to voice their concerns and seek redress for alleged harms.

# Employee Development

## Performance Standards

All employees must have an individual performance plan. A performance work plan is a written document that identifies critical elements of an employee's position and the standards by which that employee will be rated. A critical element is a work assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance on the element would result in a determination that the employee's overall performance is at the unacceptable or "Results Not Achieved" level.

## Individual Development Plan

All employees are encouraged to establish an Individual Development Plan (IDP). IDPs are a basic tenet of the Secretary's Cultural Transformation effort providing the structure for FSIS to encourage, support, and invest in the short- and long-term development of its employees. Your IDP can be an effective tool to guide your development. For example, as part of a career planning strategy, employees, supervisors, and training managers can use IDPs to outline appropriate training and help close competency gaps related to work currently performed. Equally important, IDPs can help direct employees to activities that foster engagement or encourage them to take on stretch assignments, thereby becoming better prepared for a possible promotion or simply assuming new responsibilities.

Communication between you and your supervisor is essential in developing performance plans and IDPs. There should be a common understanding about the expectations for performance as well as for your development as an FSIS employee. In addition, there should be a discussion of the goals within your program or support unit and your involvement in or contribution to these goals for the upcoming year.

## FSIS Leadership Competency Model

FSIS has developed a leadership competency model to build upon the foundation of skilled and trained professionals to meet our current and future needs. The competency model includes 18 customized competencies that directly link to essential FSIS job functions, strategic plans, and organizational mission. This resource guide contains detailed information about the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors required for competency and professional development.

The Paths to Success: FSIS Leadership Competency Model can be found at the following link with e-Authentication credentials.

<https://inside.fsis.usda.gov/fsis/emp/static/centerContent/fsisPage.jsp?keyword=training>

## Promotions and Transfers

Merit Promotion is the process through which current and former Federal employees who have obtained competitive status compete for positions. The Merit Promotion Plan also permits candidates eligible for appointment under noncompetitive hiring authorities, such as the Veterans Recruitment Appointment (VRA) and the Schedule A authority for people with disabilities, to apply for positions announced through Merit Promotion procedures. Federal employees who do not have competitive status (i.e., term, temporary, and excepted service employees) are generally not eligible to compete through Merit Promotion unless they are eligible for reinstatement or appointment under a

noncompetitive hiring authority. Employees who do not have competitive status can apply for positions through Case Examining procedures.

Vacancy announcements are posted on OPM's USAJOBS Web site. When reading vacancy announcements, you should always check the "Who may be considered" section to determine which recruitment method is being used. The announcement tells you everything you need to know about applying and includes the name of an HR staff member to call if you have questions or need reasonable accommodation in the application process.

### **AgLearn**

AgLearn is "the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) enterprise-wide learning management system (LMS)." The program allows both you and your supervisor to plan and monitor much of your Agency-directed training, as well as offers you a wide selection of online courses. AgLearn is an invaluable tool for the new employee as well as the experienced employee.

Instructions:

1. Access AgLearn at [www.aglearn.usda.gov/](http://www.aglearn.usda.gov/) and click on "Learner Login."
2. Log in using your eAuthentication User ID and password.

When you first log into AgLearn, you will see that you have some courses already populated on your "To Do" List.

AgLearn is much more than just a website you go to for mandatory online training. AgLearn:

- Offers a wealth of other educational resources—including an extensive online book collection available free to all employees.
- Has more than 12,000 book titles available online. When you log in through your "Learner Login" and select the "Key Resources: Books/Videos/Etc." tab, you will see icons for the three book collections: Business Pro, ITPro, and Office Essentials. If you have ever been nagged by a troublesome software problem, visit the Office Topics or IT and Technical Topics collections for complete reference books, quick reference guides or even tutorials on a particular subject.
- Offers courses to improve your management skills, or just freshen your thinking about leadership.
- Provides an electronic registration and training approval tool in FSIS. When you register for a course in AgLearn, an email will be sent to your supervisor asking him/her to approve your registration.

### **Mandatory Training**

All FSIS employees are required by law to complete specific training requirements. For example, the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) of 2002 requires security awareness training for all employees, contractors and partners that have access to government information systems. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) therefore requires security awareness training every year for all government employees, contractors and partners. Employees are also required to take "Your Rights as a Federal Employee" as well as "Know Your Rights When Reporting Wrongs." Employees are required to ensure that their training record, which can be accessed through AgLearn, is complete.

For more information on federally mandated training, please visit the link below:  
<http://www.opm.gov/wiki/training/Federally-Mandated-Training/Print.aspx>

### **Mentoring Program**

In support of the Agency's Cultural Transformation initiative, the FSIS Office of Outreach Employee Education and Training (OOEET) runs an agency-wide Mentoring Program. The program is open to all FSIS employees and provides a series of developmental experiences. The structured, collaborative one-on-one relationships focus on strengthening competencies and developing leadership skills during a period of up to 12 months. The FSIS Mentoring Program is designed to promote opportunities for mentors and protégés to network and share information and experiences. Additional desired outcomes include creating an environment that fosters personal and professional growth, enhances learning, and promotes diversity.

For more information on the Mentoring Program, please visit the link below:  
<https://inside.fsis.usda.gov/fsis/emp/static/includes/moreTabPage/featuresMore.jsp?keyword=jobs>

### **Employee Recognition Program**

The Employee Recognition Program is designed to fairly and equitably recognize and reward individuals and groups for excellence in fulfilling FSIS's mission. The requirements for each of the award categories are outlined below.

#### **Spot Award**

Spot Awards are lump-sum cash payments ranging from \$50 to \$750 net pay, in increments of \$25. Spot Awards grant immediate recognition to employees for their day-to-day extra efforts and significant contributions that warrant smaller awards that affect, support or enhance the accomplishment of the Agency's strategic plan, mission goals and objectives.

*Who is eligible to receive a spot award?* All USDA employees (except Senior Executive Service and equivalent employees) are eligible for Spot Awards.

*How do you determine the appropriate amount to award an employee?* Based on the Non-measurable Benefits Scale, Spot Awards are considered to be moderate in value.

#### **Extra Effort Award**

Extra Effort Awards are lump-sum cash payments that recognize individuals or groups who make significant one-time contributions to the strategic plan, mission objectives, and goals of the Agency or Department. Extra Effort Awards may be given for a specific outstanding accomplishment, such as a superior contribution on an assignment or project, an act of heroism, scientific achievement, major discovery, or significant cost savings.

*Who is eligible to receive an extra effort award?* All Federal employees and former employees are eligible for an Extra Effort Award. Former employees are eligible for monetary awards for recent (within one calendar year) contributions made while employed by the Agency.

*How do you determine the appropriate amount to award an employee?* Extra effort awards will be proportionate to the benefits obtained by the Government from the contribution. The

amount of a monetary award must be determined in accordance with the Measurable or Non-measurable Benefits Scales.

### **Time Off Award**

Time Off Awards are excused absences from work, without charge to leave or loss of pay, that recognize individual employees for extra efforts and range in amount from one to 40 hours based on the significance of the contribution that leads to the accomplishment of the Agency's strategic plan, mission goals and objectives.

*Who is eligible to receive a time off award?* All employees (except SES and equivalent and intermittent employees) are eligible for time off awards.

*What is the maximum number of hours that can be granted per award? Is there a limit to the number of hours an employee can receive?* Full-time employees may be granted up to a maximum of 40 hours of time off per award, and up to a total of 80 hours of time off per leave (calendar) year. Part-time employees may be granted up to a maximum of one half of their official biweekly tour of duty per award, and up to a total of the official biweekly tour of duty per leave year. For example, if a part-time employee's official biweekly tour of duty is 64 hours, the employee may be granted up to a maximum of 32 hours of time off per award, and up to a total of 64 hours of time off per leave year.

*Can time off awards expire?* Time Off Awards must be used within 1 year (26 pay periods) after the effective date of the award and cannot be transferred to another USDA or Federal agency; any unused time off is automatically forfeited. A Time Off Award will not convert to a cash payment under any circumstances, and cannot be restored if it is unused.

# Web-Based Tools

## E-Authentication

FSIS employees with email and computer access will receive a Level 2 Employee e-Authentication, or "e-Auth," account that provides access to a wide range of FSIS, USDA and Federal applications and Web sites. eAuth is a service provided by USDA and not FSIS. An e-Authentication account consists of a user ID, password, and user profile. The FSIS Employee Intranet and AgLearn, two applications that require e-Auth, are further explained on the following pages. WebTA, FSIS's time and attendance system, also makes use of e-Auth.

You should begin registration for your e-Authentication credential as soon as possible by going to <https://identitymanager.eems.usda.gov/registration/index.aspx>. NOTE: If you already have an eAuth account, such as a transfer from another USDA agency or a former State employee, **do not create a new one**. Notify your supervisor that you already have one and include your user name (**do not** include your password). You may only have one active eAuth account. In most cases, existing eAuth accounts can be upgraded and transferred to prevent information loss and the breaking of the linkage of AgLearn records. In order to register, employees need two forms: the Earnings and Leave Statement (AD-334) and the most recent Personnel Action Form (SF 50-B). You may get copies of these forms from Human Resources. Enter the information on the registration page exactly as it is listed on these forms. For assistance in establishing an e-Authentication credential, visit the help link at <https://www.eauth.usda.gov/MainPages/eauthHelp.aspx> or e-mail the e-Authentication Help Desk at [eAuthHelpDesk@usda.gov](mailto:eAuthHelpDesk@usda.gov).

It may take several weeks or even a month for your e-Authentication login to be activated because of the USDA payroll processing systems. Until then, you will not be able to access systems such as WebTA or the employee intranet. Your supervisor or administrative assistant will make sure that any needs you have regarding those tools are taken care of in the meantime. Remember that the sooner you turn in your e-QIP information, the sooner you will have access to handle such tasks yourself. Be cautious when using a public computer and remember to log out of the website when finished and clear the browser cache. Also, do not share your username or password with anyone.

## InsideFSIS

FSIS has an employee intranet that is accessible from any computer at any time via an e-Authentication user ID and password. New employees should take the time to navigate through the site and familiarize themselves with the organization and information available. InsideFSIS is meant only for FSIS employees.

Once your e-Auth account has been activated, you can access the InsideFSIS at <https://inside.fsis.usda.gov>. Some features include:

- Publications: Here you will find many new and archived publications originating from the various offices, including the daily Food Safety eNews, News & Notes, and the monthly Beacon.

- **Tools:** This tab provides links to a dictionary and encyclopedia, USDA directories, search engines, and even the local weather.
- **Forms:** From this tab, you can search for nearly any government form pertaining to FSIS or not-by number, title, or keyword. There is also a helpful "Top Requested Forms" section.
- **Administrator's Blog:** Updated regularly, the Administrator's Blog is the FSIS Administrator's outlet to discuss relevant agency topics with employees in all offices and all locations.
- **Facilities & Services:** In this section, view shuttle bus schedules between various USDA offices, check the operating status for headquarters employees during bad weather and other crises.
- **Travel & Commuting:** This section provides any logistical or reimbursement information you may need regarding commuting to your office and other travel that FSIS requires for you.
- **Tech Tips:** You can read designated Tech Tips in the weekly Wednesday Newsline. Tech Tips provide instructions for the various software programs used within FSIS and some tips are relevant only to certain positions within FSIS.

### **FSIS Web Site**

The FSIS homepage provides information about the Agency, including news and events, fact sheets, careers opportunities, and contact information.

Website: [www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

- **Home:** Serves as the front door to the FSIS Website. The left-hand toolbar provides several search options, and the right-hand toolbar provides links to various services available to visitors (i.e. Ask Karen, Resources for Small Plants, *askFSIS*, etc.), links to FSIS new media, and the USDA.gov/Open widget. The body of the main page provides the latest news headlines and a spotlight on selected fact sheets.
- **Employee Page:** An "Information for FSIS Employees" webpage is now available on the public website at [www.fsis.usda.gov/employees](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/employees). The page will be especially helpful to employees who do not have level 2 eAuthentication. The page was built to be employee-centric. You will find news, career development information (such as detail opportunities), and highlights from *The Beacon's* latest issue. Content will be updated frequently.
- **About FSIS:** Gives the history of the Agency and links to Agency publications. This page also includes FSIS biographies and organizational charts. Clicking "Structure and Organization" will take you to each program areas' informational section. "Associated Agencies" and "Agency History" are other excellent resources in the right-hand toolbar.
- **News & Events:** Provides recent and archived press releases, as well as information on upcoming public meetings and speeches by FSIS officials. Visitors can also view newsletters, congressional communications, and image and video libraries.
- **Fact Sheets:** Presents information on a variety of topics relevant to FSIS, including safe food handling, foodborne illness, and inspection procedures.

- Careers: Lists current job openings and career opportunities in the Agency.
- Forms: Provides downloadable forms that are frequently requested by the public and forms necessary for employees.
- Help: Gives assistance to the navigation of the web site.
- Contact Us: Lists important phone numbers (including the Meat and Poultry Hotline and Policy Development Division) and e-mail addresses.
- En Español: Provides selected content in Spanish.

### **USDA Employee Personal Page**

In 2004, the Department of Agriculture announced a newly enhanced self-service feature of the National Finance Center's web-based Employee Personal Page (EPP). The Employee Personal Page features provide a wealth of information from a single source. All payroll and personnel self-service activities for USDA employees will be provided through EPP at [www.nfc.usda.gov/personal/epwarning.asp](http://www.nfc.usda.gov/personal/epwarning.asp). Within five business days after an accession action is applied to the NFC database, NFC will automatically send you an EPP password and access instructions. Please carefully safeguard your password and access instructions so that they are available for future reference.

For a demonstration of EPP, link to [https://www.nfc.usda.gov/epps\\_demo/index.aspx](https://www.nfc.usda.gov/epps_demo/index.aspx) and click "Log-in" on the sample page. Employees are encouraged to utilize EPP to experience the ease in accessing personal payroll information.

In February 2007, USDA made the decision to convert the Statement of Earnings and Leave (SEL) to an electronic paperless distribution. The Department has the opportunity to reduce its payroll expense by almost \$1 million per year by making form AD-334, SEL, electronic for USDA employees.

Although everyone has the option to request a waiver, it is expected that waiver requests will not be approved when individuals have easy access to a computer at work. Still, we acknowledge that each situation is unique and everyone has the option to request a waiver. Before doing so, however, please consider the following benefits of "going paperless."

User Friendly Access- You will have access to review and print your SEL through the EPP at [www.nfc.usda.gov/personal/epwarning.asp](http://www.nfc.usda.gov/personal/epwarning.asp). Your SEL is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with the latest information accessible immediately after payroll processes. From any location, a mouse-click to your computer screen will access your current pay period data or a year's worth of payroll statements, and can be saved in electronic format or printed on a local printer.

One-Stop Service - Because you have immediate access to your own payroll data, an electronic SEL eliminates the need to request information from the Human Resources Management Staff. You, the user, are going straight to the source for your own personal pay information. In addition to reviewing and printing your SEL, there are many benefits to using the EPP: You can easily:

- Change your address
- Change your Federal income tax withholding
- Change your state tax withholding

- Start, change or stop financial allotments
- Change your Direct Deposit information
- Start, change or stop savings bond participation
- Change your TSP contribution

More Timely Earnings and Leave information is available right after the payroll process completes. No more waiting for the paper statement to show up in your mailbox days later.

Electronic Filing - No more paper SEL to file or lose. At least a year's worth of statements will be available with a click of a button. You can print an SEL whenever you might need a copy. The electronic copies will be retained on line for 3 years. Save a tree. Save the environment.

E-Authentication Access -Once you set up the Employee Personal Page (EPP) to be accessed through your E-Authentication user name and password, you won't have the hassle of remembering yet another ID and password.

Secure - Employee data is protected with 128-bit Secure Socket Layer encryption when it travels over the internet. It can be accessed only with your Social Security Number and Personal Identification Number, or your E-Authentication ID and password, known only by you.

Should you still want to receive a hard copy of the SEL by mail, you will need to provide a written waiver request form to the Human Resources Field Office (HRFO). To request a waiver request form (FSIS Form 3530-7), you should call 1-612-659-7057, Press 0 or 1-800-370-3747, Press 0. You will submit a waiver request form to the Human Resources Field ' Office (HRFO) address located on the form or fax form to 612-370-2005. You will be notified via email when your request is evaluated.

The National Finance Center (NFC) will continue to mail the employee Wage and Tax Statement (W-2) and the annual summary of benefits statements to you regardless of whether or not a waiver is filed and approved. Only the hard copy mailing of the SEL has been discontinued. You will be able to view pay stubs, W-2 forms, and other documents, as well as change data such as your residential address, through the National Finance Center's web-based EPP. As soon as you receive your e-Authorization you can log on at <https://www.nfc.usda.gov/epps/eplogin.aspx>.

For additional information or assistance, contact the Performance and Compensation Policy Branch at (202) 720-6287 or the HRFO Administrative Unit, at 1-800-370; 3747, Press 0.

### **E-Quip**

E-QIP may be the most urgent form for you to complete your first week. You should have received a letter from Human Resources sometime during your first week that gives you instructions and a deadline of about two weeks. However, the speedy processing of e-QIP determines how soon you can access many other tools. Therefore, read the instructions sent to you by HR, have the information you will need on-hand, and complete e-QIP. The website is [www.opm.gov/investigations/e-qip-application/](http://www.opm.gov/investigations/e-qip-application/).

### **Electronic Official Personnel Folder**

Electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF) is a system developed as a management solution to handle official personnel files and to simplify your access to your own Official Personnel Folder (OPF). The OPF contains human resource (HR) records and documents related to Federal civilian employees. An OPF is

created when an employee begins Federal service, and is maintained throughout the employee's career in accordance with the United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) regulations.

The eOPF solution provides electronic, web-enabled access for all employees and HR staff to view eOPF documents. All employees will be able to view their own OPF through this eOPF solution. Your eOPF may be accessed here: <https://eopf.nbc.gov/landing/>.

### **Foot Prints**

New employees who qualify to have a government issued laptop or a printer will be issued on the day of arrival. If at any time you experience a problem with your computer, printer, phone, connectivity or other technology issue or if you are requesting to use technology not provided to you, you must put a request in FootPrints. Service requests can be made in three ways:

1. Online while connected to the FSIS Network: <http://service/footprints>
2. Via email: [FSISServiceDesk@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:FSISServiceDesk@fsis.usda.gov)
3. By phone: 1-800-473-9135

### **rDirectory**

FSIS can check their contact information in the Outlook directory to ensure it is accurate and up to date and update most items themselves. This is particularly true if you have changed offices within FSIS. In Outlook, the rDirectory is a web-based interface for users to modify the information displayed in the Outlook Global Directory, including office mailing address, phone, fax and mobile device numbers and other directory data. (To update job title, employees need to submit a Footprints ticket to request the change, which your supervisor will need to approve.)

Go to the web address below and enter your network username and password.

<http://selfservice/logon.aspx>

For more information, see Tech Tip #108 and #201 with instructions on how to enable the Signature block feature, and refer to Tech Tip #203 regarding the Directory and updating your information. Tech tips can be found at:

<https://inside.fsis.usda.gov/fsis/emp/static/global/offices/oSpace/ocioOffice/techTips/techTips.jsp>.

### **Helpful Links**

- [USDA Onboarding Portal](#)
- [FSIS Web Site](#)
- [USDA Web Site](#)
- [Human Resources](#)
- [Thrift Savings Plan \(TSP\)](#)
- [HR Desk Guide](#)
- [USDA Finance Center](#)
- [AgLearn](#)
- [WebTA](#)
- [Concur](#)
- [NFC Employee Personal Page](#)
- [eOPF](#)
- [Inside FSIS](#)

# Expected Conduct

## Dress Code

Neither FSIS nor USDA has a formal dress code policy. Some FSIS employees wear uniforms and have a uniform policy, but for most of us, the FSIS office dress code is business casual. Your work setting and environment will influence your clothing style, and your goal is to dress appropriately for each occasion.

We suggest you project a positive, professional image at all times because your choice of attire is a reflection on you and FSIS. Shorts, jeans, flip flops, short skirts, crop tops, t-shirts with advertising, and clothing that is not neat and clean and free of tears or holes, are examples of inappropriate clothing in any FSIS workplace. If you have any questions about what might be appropriate or not appropriate to wear at your worksite, please talk with your supervisor.

## Office Mail

Most Agency business letters that are mailed use the official postage- and fees-paid privilege. However, they must conform to postal regulations and to Agency mailing procedures. **Do not use Government letterhead or postage-paid privileges for personal business.** Do not have personal mail or packages sent to your office. It is a violation of Federal laws and regulations to use postage-paid Government envelopes to file job applications or for personal use.

## Email

FSIS uses Microsoft Outlook as its email and calendar tool. There are courses available through AgLearn or quick reference guides for these applications that can be obtained from IT personnel. It is important to make sure you are helpful and responsible as an FSIS email user. Remember, as a Government employee there is no expectation of privacy in email or any other applications on a Government computer. You should not use your government email addresses for personal business.

If you receive email containing sensitive information, you need to apply the same standards and precautions to the email containing sensitive information as you would to the same information in any other medium. However, you should not use the email system to transmit messages that contain confidential business information, information covered by the Privacy Act, classified or other sensitive information. You may not use your personal email address to conduct Agency business or forward business-related emails.

## Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is a Federal disclosure statute which grants access to Federal agency records when a proper FOIA request is filed.

“Agency records” are any documents created or obtained by agency employees. These documents include but are NOT limited to the following examples:

- Policies, Handbooks and Manuals
- Directives and other Guidance
- Letters
- Email Correspondence
- Data (alpha-numeric and geo-spatial form)
- Memorandums, Briefings and Reports
- Calendars
- Photos, Slides, Audio and Video Recordings and Spatial Imagery
- Visitor's Logs
- Handwritten Notes
- Drafts (electronic or hard copy)

In short, nearly any type or form of record in an agency's file may be an agency record under the FOIA. Therefore be careful when composing email messages from your work email account, drafting documents or making hand-written notes. Your written work may become an agency record and therefore releasable under the FOIA.

### **Out of Office Reply of Outlook**

In conjunction with your "out of office" voicemail greeting, you can create an out of office reply for Outlook. This lets people know why you may not be answering e-mails and where else they can get assistance.

To create an out of office reply, go to the Out of Office Assistant under Tools. In the Auto Reply box, type a message with information matching your voicemail greeting. Check "I am currently Out of the Office" and then click OK. Be sure to turn off the out of office reply when you return.

### **Signature Block**

The use of a signature block in all emails sent, replied to, or forwarded is not only beneficial to the recipient, but is also required by Agency policy (Directive 1300.7, part 6). The signature block should include:

- Name and title
- Department, Agency, division, and branch
- Mailing address
- Telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address

From the Microsoft Outlook menu bar, go to "Tools/Options/Mail Format." Mail Format is a tab at the top of the popup window menu. Then select the "Signatures" button at the bottom of the window and select "New" for a new signature or "Edit" to modify an existing one.

If you have a Smartphone, you should also include a signature block on it for emails that are sent from your Smartphone. Click on options and then mail settings.

### **Personally Identifiable Information (PII)**

In accordance with the provisions of the Privacy Act of 1974, FSIS employees are responsible for protecting personal information about individuals that is maintained by FSIS from unauthorized access,

disclosure and alteration; and for providing individuals appropriate and complete access to FSIS records concerning themselves, including the opportunity to correct any errors in those records.

Protecting PII in Federal systems is critical because its loss or unauthorized disclosure can lead to serious consequences for individuals. These consequences include identity theft or other fraudulent activity, which can result in substantial harm, embarrassment, and inconvenience to those individuals affected.

FSIS employees are required to report any lost or stolen IT equipment immediately to USDA at 1-888-926-2373 24 hours a day, then contact the FSIS Service Desk 24/7/365 at 1-800-473-9135. For incidents involving paper or non-paper-related PII, contact USDA's PII Hotline at: 1-877-PII2YOU (1-877-744-2968).

### **Government Property**

Employees have a duty to protect and conserve Government property and should not use Government property for other than authorized purposes. Government property includes items such as office supplies, telephone and other telecommunications equipment and services, Government mail, automated data processes capabilities, printing and reproduction facilities, Government records, and Government vehicles.

USDA policy provides for limited personal use of Government telecommunications equipment on an occasional basis, provided that the use involves minimal expense to the Government, does not interfere with official business and does not impose a security risk. Occasional personal use of telecommunications resources shall normally take place during the employee's personal time. Your email address is considered government property and cannot be used for personal use.

While the occasional use of telecommunications resources in moderation is acceptable, uses not meeting the USDA policy are strictly prohibited. Employees are expected to conduct themselves professionally in the workplace and to refrain from using telecommunications equipment for activities that are inappropriate or offensive to co-workers or the public, such as sexually explicit materials or remarks that ridicule others on the basis of race, creed, religion, color, sex, disability, national origin, or sexual orientation. Questions concerning appropriate use of Government telecommunications equipment should be addressed to your supervisor.

### **Personal Records**

As an employee, you should maintain important personal documents and records. You are responsible for ensuring that your records are current and accurate. Some of your important records include:

- Time and Attendance Reports;
- Personnel Actions;
- Performance Standards and Appraisals;
- Position Descriptions;
- AgLearn Training; and
- Awards.

### **Ethical Conduct**

At the USDA, we pride ourselves on the fact that our employees work diligently to meet both the letter and the spirit of the ethics laws and regulations. In order to become well versed on these rules and regulations, ethics training is essential. By continuing our tradition of compliance with Federal ethics regulations, we ensure the public's confidence in the integrity and effectiveness of our programs. All

new employees nationwide must complete Orientation Ethics training located on the [USDA Onboarding Portal](#).

Each Agency within USDA has a staff of ethics advisors. These are the folks who review the confidential financial disclosure reports filed by covered staff, administer your ethics training program, and stand ready to field your questions. If you have any doubts whatsoever regarding the permissibility of a specific action, you should first e-mail or call your ethics advisor. They know your program activities and are likely able to respond immediately.

### **Political Activities**

Under the 1939 Hatch Act, Federal employees face restrictions on their ability to participate in political activities. Congress amended the Hatch Act in 1993 to permit more political activity, although many restrictions still apply. Certain agencies and categories of employees, primarily in national security and law enforcement, are covered by the stricter rules that predate that amendment.

Further information can be obtained from the [Office of Ethics website](#).

# Travel

## **Per Diem**

Official Government travel must be approved by your supervisor. If you are required to travel for official purposes, you will be reimbursed for expenses essential to the transaction of official business.

Reimbursable expenses include, but are not limited to:

- Transportation (such as contract city-pair airline fares or common carrier commercial fares);
- Meals and Lodging;
- Miscellaneous Expenses (such as baggage expenses);
- Taxi Fares (including tips);
- Rental Cars; and
- Mileage allowances for privately owned vehicles, parking, and tolls.

## **Government-Owned Vehicles (GOVs)**

Throughout your career at FSIS, you may be required to operate a government-owned vehicle (GOV) for official government business. When possible, as assigned, a GOV will be shared with other personnel to eliminate the use of a privately owned vehicle. If an employee is required to be an incidental motor vehicle operator, that individual will be required to maintain a valid State driver's license and complete a defensive driving course (available in AgLearn). Employees who fail to maintain a valid driver's license or who misuse a GOV may be subject to disciplinary action, including possible removal.

In an effort to better inform its employees and protect them from uninsured liabilities, FSIS requested a legal opinion from the Office of General Counsel concerning an employee's individual personal liability while operating a GOV. This guidance also covers situations where you may be driving a vehicle leased by the Government, or leased by you as an employee in travel status.

When operating a GOV, Federal employees are shielded from individual liability as long as they are "acting within the scope of their employment" at the time of the alleged negligent act. There is no distinction between an employee who operates a GOV during official travel status or an employee who operates a GOV to and from his place of residence on a daily basis. The only relevant analysis is whether the employee was acting within his/her scope of employment as defined by the laws of the jurisdiction where the accident took place. As these laws and their application vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, it is impossible to provide absolute examples of what actions are deemed to be within the scope of employment and which are not. Therefore, there may be situations where a Federal employee is authorized to use a GOV, but is held personally liable for any alleged negligent act he/she commits. For that reason, you should consider consulting with your private insurance company to determine whether your current policy provides sufficient liability coverage for any accident that occurs while operating a GOV and is ultimately deemed as falling outside of the scope of your employment. If your policy is insufficient or it lacks such coverage, you may want to consider purchasing additional insurance to close this potential gap in liability coverage. The Federal government is prohibited from reimbursing you for such coverage.

## **Government Travel Credit Card**

A Government travel card is issued to FSIS employees who travel two or more times per year. You must use the card only for expenses incurred in connection with official travel. Government employees are required to carry their government travel card with them when on official government travel.

Possession of the card does not exempt you from the use of Department's Travel Management Centers (TMC) or Government contract carriers. Use of the card does not relieve you of the responsibility to employ prudent travel practices and to observe rules and regulations governing travel at USDA as set forth in the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR), the Agriculture Travel Regulation (ATR) and any Agency specific regulations.

Employees who use the charge card for inappropriate or nonofficial purposes or who fail to pay their account balance in a timely manner will be subject to disciplinary action, which can range from a letter of reprimand to removal from duty.

When you receive your card and complete the Travel Card training in AgLearn, you can set up your online access to your U.S. Bank travel card account. With online access you can pay your bill online, review your account transactions, update account information (address, phone numbers, fax, and email address), and view account details (account limits, past due information, payment due date, daily authorizations/declines).

### **Concur**

Our travel system - Concur® Government Edition, is used for your travel arrangement, authorizations and vouchers. You may access the Concur website, using your eAuth ID and password, at the following address: <https://cge.concursolutions.com/ui/ssou/sda>, or through your FSIS Applications shortcut folder located on your desktop.

The Office of the Chief Financial Officer has created a resource web page within the FSIS intranet to address your Concur needs. For information on how Concur works, how to become familiar with the system, or explore our helpful system documents, please visit our Concur page at <https://inside.fsis.usda.gov/fsis/emp/static/centerContent/fsisPage.jsp?keyword=ConcurGovernmentEditionTrave4167>. Your eAuth ID and password will be required for access.

While there, please also visit the OCFO Travel Resource web page as well, located at <https://inside.fsis.usda.gov/fsis/emp/static/centerContent/fsisPage.jsp?keyword=Travel9970>. The web page has information to help answer all your other travel related questions. Both web pages link to each other for easy navigation.

If you have questions regarding travel that are not answered on the site, you may contact your program or district area FATA, or the OCFO Financial Services Center (FSC) Customer Contact Center at 1-800-949-3964 (Option 5) and [FSCGeneral@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:FSCGeneral@fsis.usda.gov).

# Onboarding Checklist

## Day 1: Orientation\*

- ✓ Report for duty at the designated location.
- ✓ Meet fellow team members and your sponsor.
- ✓ Take a tour of your facility.
- ✓ Learn about the organization and its culture.
- ✓ Ensure all necessary forms are completed and submitted to HR.
- ✓ Take Security Awareness and Rules Behavior training and receive a passing score
- ✓ Learn about policies and procedures (to include, but not limited to):
  - Workplace safety (include injury reporting, health clinic info, etc.);
  - Work policies (tour of duty, overtime, comp time, telework, schedules, WebTA, inclement weather, use of equipment, etc.);
  - Building access for employee and visitors; and
  - What's prohibited (e.g., weapons, recording devices, etc.).
  - Other (Ethics, FOIA, EAP, dress code, wellness services, work-life programs, etc.).
- ✓ Visit <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/policy-directives-records-forms/directives-categories> for a complete list of departmental regulations.
- ✓ Visit <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/regulations> for a complete list of FSIS Directives and Notices

## Week 1:

- ✓ Ensure you clearly understand your job roles and responsibilities.
- ✓ Review training program and AgLearn ([www.aglearn.usda.gov](http://www.aglearn.usda.gov)).
- ✓ Review organizational structure and key staff and contact information.
- ✓ Review the Ethics Office website ([www.usda.gov/ethics](http://www.usda.gov/ethics))
- ✓ Complete the Emergency Contact Sheet
- ✓ Register for the Transit Incentive Program

## First 90 Days:

- ✓ Review performance expectations and review your Performance Plan (Mandatory Requirement: Performance Plan must be issued within 15 days).
- ✓ Meet employees and stakeholders of other program offices.
- ✓ Develop your Individual Development Plan (Expected Requirement Day 90).
- ✓ Ask for performance feedback early, and often, and check in regularly to help you build the knowledge needed to perform your work.
- ✓ Complete assigned or required training on internal systems and operating practices.
- ✓ Obtain information and skills needed to perform your job.

\*Onboarding procedures may vary based on location