



Food Safety and Inspection Service

In-Plant Public Health Veterinarian (PHV) Group Retention Incentive Program Questions and Answers

Q1: What is a retention incentive?

A1: A retention incentive is a monetary payment to encourage an employee or a group of employees to remain employed in a specific position, or a specific group of positions.

Q2: Why is FSIS implementing a group retention incentive for in-plant PHVs?

A2: Attracting and retaining veterinarians for our mission-critical in-plant PHV positions is essential to advancing the Agency's core mission and aligns with goals set forth in the FSIS Strategic Plan and Annual Plan. FSIS is launching this program as part of the Agency's overall strategy for increasing the retention of our in-plant PHV talent. FSIS recognizes the time, effort, and money expended in pursuit of veterinary education. PHVs have one of the highest educational requirements within FSIS as a basic qualification for their jobs.

Q3: Who is eligible for this group incentive payment?

A3: FSIS in-plant PHVs with satisfactory performance and conduct are potentially eligible, depending on their years of service as an in-plant PHV (see questions 5 and 8).

Q4: When is this program starting?

A4: This program will launch during the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 on July 1, 2020. Those who are eligible to receive a biweekly payout in FY 2020 should expect to receive it on or about July 28. Those who sign a service agreement this year should expect to receive a payout in the fourth quarter of FY 2021.

Q5: What categories of in-plant PHVs can receive payments?

A5: Eligible FSIS employees with 5-11 years of service as an in-plant PHV will be issued biweekly retention incentive payments. No service agreement will be required. Additionally, those with service as an in-plant PHV are eligible to receive a lump sum retention incentive payment at key 5-year milestones upon completion of a one-year service agreement to be paid out in years 15 and at 5-year intervals thereafter with 20, 25, 30, and 35+ years of service. Eligible in-plant PHVs may enter into service agreements in year 14 and at subsequent 5-year intervals.

Q6: What is the basis upon which the amount of the retention incentive payment is determined?

A6: The retention incentive payment is based on the PHV’s administratively determined service year group and basic pay, including locality pay.

Q7: What locations does this group retention incentive for in-plant PHVs apply to?

A7: This retention incentive applies to in-plant PHVs in all geographic locations.

Q8: How will the retention incentive be determined and paid out? Is a service agreement required?

A8: See the table below:

Retention Incentives for In-Plant PHVs Based on Years of In-Plant Service and Retention Incentive Payout Amounts

In-Plant PHV Service as of Program Launch Date	% of Employee’s Rate of Basic Pay	Payout Method and Timing	Service Agreement Required?
5-6 years	6%	Biweekly	No
7-8 years	4%	Biweekly	No
9-11 years	2%	Biweekly	No
14, 19, 24, 29, 34+ years	5%	Lump sum	Yes

Q9: I am eligible for retention incentive payments starting at 6%. Will my salary go down as I progress from high (6%) to lower (4%, 2%) retention incentive payment year groups?

A9: There is a distinction between your basic pay, which includes locality pay, and the total compensation you receive when combining your basic pay with retention incentive payments. Keep in mind the incentive payment is an extra payment, separate from your basic pay or salary. In most cases, with a combination of locality pay, general pay increases, and within-grade increases (WGs), you will see an increase in your total compensation as you progress through the retention incentive payment groups and their associated percentages. There may be situations in which you could see a reduction to your total compensation, however. As an example, you are at the end of the 9-11 year category and have been receiving a 2% retention incentive that is concluding because you have received it for 3 years. That year, there is a freeze on general pay increases. Your basic salary will not decrease, but there could be a reduction to your total compensation once the incentive ends. Many variables affect pay and each circumstance is different.

Q10: Who authorized the group in-plant PHV retention incentive program?

A10: FSIS requested, and received, delegated authority from USDA to develop, implement, and administer a group retention incentive plan for in-plant PHVs in accordance with OPM, 5 CFR, and USDA guidelines. This authority was delegated to the FSIS Administrator and subsequently redelegated to the FSIS Chief Human Capital Officer to provide HR policy and technical oversight of the program.

Q11: Why aren't in-plant PHVs with 0-4 years of service as an in-plant PHV eligible for the retention incentive?

A11: Many current in-plant PHVs with 0-4 years of service are already receiving recruitment incentives. An employee cannot receive recruitment and retention incentives simultaneously. FSIS made the decision to add retention incentives to the PHV incentive program. The initial retention incentives will start after the employee's eligibility for the recruitment incentive has ended. Eligible In-Plant PHVs will receive biweekly payments during 5-11 years of service, and then receive lump sum payments when they reach key 5-year service years following the completion of a one-year service agreement. Service years will be determined at program launch and reviewed annually.

Q12: What happens if I do not meet or complete the terms of a service agreement?

A12: Generally, the terms of the service agreement need to be satisfied to receive a retention incentive.

Q13: I have 15 years of service; why didn't I receive a service agreement?

A13: Service was reviewed immediately prior to the launch of the program. Those with 14, 19, 24, 29, 34, 39 years of service at the time of the review were identified to sign a service agreement, with the lump sum payment occurring after the one-year service agreement is completed in years 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40. Subsequent reviews will be completed annually.

Q14: I left FSIS and have now come back to work as an in-plant PHV. I have enough service to place me into one of the retention incentive payment categories. Will I receive a retention incentive payment?

A14: Employees who left FSIS and have had a 90-day or greater break in service will need to work for one year prior to being considered for a retention incentive. Service is reviewed at pre-determined, annual intervals to coincide with the initial reviews completed at the launch of the program. Previous in-plant PHV service will be considered when determining service group year.

Q15: I have service as an in-plant PHV and have service in another type of position. Is all my service considered when determining my eligibility for a retention incentive?

A15: Only service as an FSIS in-plant PHV is considered when determining eligibility for a retention incentive.

Q16: How does my Service Computation Date (SCD) factor into determining the amount of my retention incentive payout?

A16: Service will be reviewed for each PHV at the launch of the program and annually thereafter. The reviews serve as the basis upon which the retention incentive amount is calculated. This is potentially different from an employee's Service Computation Date (SCD); however, it does not change the employee's SCD.

Q17: How long will the group in-plant PHV retention incentive program exist?

A17: The Agency's intent is to continue this program for the foreseeable future. However, this program is discretionary and can be unilaterally discontinued by FSIS for any reason, including a lack of funds.

Q18: Is the PHV retention incentive being offered as a part of the change to the performance appraisal system USDA is instituting in FY 21?

A18: No, there is no connection between the USDA performance appraisal system and the FSIS in-plant PHV retention incentive program. There are different requirements, purposes, and regulations regarding each. Employees eligible to be considered for the in-plant PHV retention incentive are also eligible to be considered for awards under the awards program, including achievement awards (monetary extra effort or spot awards), time off awards, quality step increases and non-monetary awards.

If you have further questions or need additional information, please email:
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