

New Employee Handbook



WELCOME TO APHIS!

Congratulations on becoming a member of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. The APHIS team includes employees in all 50 States, several territories, and 25 countries worldwide. We are on the job 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, protecting America's agricultural and natural resources. Our efforts benefit millions of Americans every day.

Protecting America's agricultural and natural resources means many things. It means ensuring the health of our animal and plant resources both at home and as they move through the global marketplace; guarding against the introduction of animal and plant pests and diseases that could limit U.S. agricultural production and damage export markets; and monitoring and responding to detections of invasive species, disease outbreaks, and conflicts between humans and wildlife. It means ensuring the humane treatment of animals under the Animal Welfare Act and making sure that biotechnology-derived agricultural products are safe for release into the environment.

As America's agricultural needs and complexities multiply in the years ahead, APHIS' goal is to adapt proactively to these new challenges. As a new employee, you are vital to shaping a future that protects generations of America's agricultural and natural resources. We respect the unique talent and contribution you bring with you to this Agency and we will do all we can to maximize that uniqueness.

That's our goal, our mission . . . and our promise.

Welcome to the team!

Dr. Gregory Parham
APHIS Administrator

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ONBOARDING IN USDA APHIS

Welcome to the “People’s Department.” We are pleased to have you join us in our proud tradition of public service to our fellow Americans.

During your first week at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), you will be busy learning about the organization, getting your pay and benefits arranged, and finding out about your workplace. We want to help you hit the ground running and start your employment as smoothly as possible, so we have organized the [USDA Onboarding Portal](#) and the [APHIS New Employee Orientation Site](#) to help you along your way.



YOUR SPONSOR

To help you with your transition, you have been assigned a sponsor. Your sponsor is a coworker who is not in your chain of command, assigned to you to help you learn the ropes. Once you start, your sponsor will give you a tour, help you become acclimated to USDA Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) culture, and answer your questions. We encourage you to reach out to your sponsor any time you have any concerns or questions. Your sponsor is there to help you.

YOUR SUPERVISOR

Your supervisor’s role in onboarding serves three interrelated purposes. First, it ensures that you feel welcome, comfortable, prepared, and supported. Second, these feelings increase the new employee’s ability to be productive and successful, both immediately and over time. Finally, this employee success leads to satisfaction and retention, which allows the USDA APHIS to continue to fulfill its mission.

Your supervisor will welcome you to your team, introduce you to the culture and values of USDA APHIS, explain what is expected of you, and supervise your employment and experience. USDA APHIS is counting on your supervisor to make your transition and employment as smooth and successful as possible.

While onboarding is a year-long process, the first 90 days are critical. Your supervisor will work with you to ensure a faster path to productivity and inclusion.

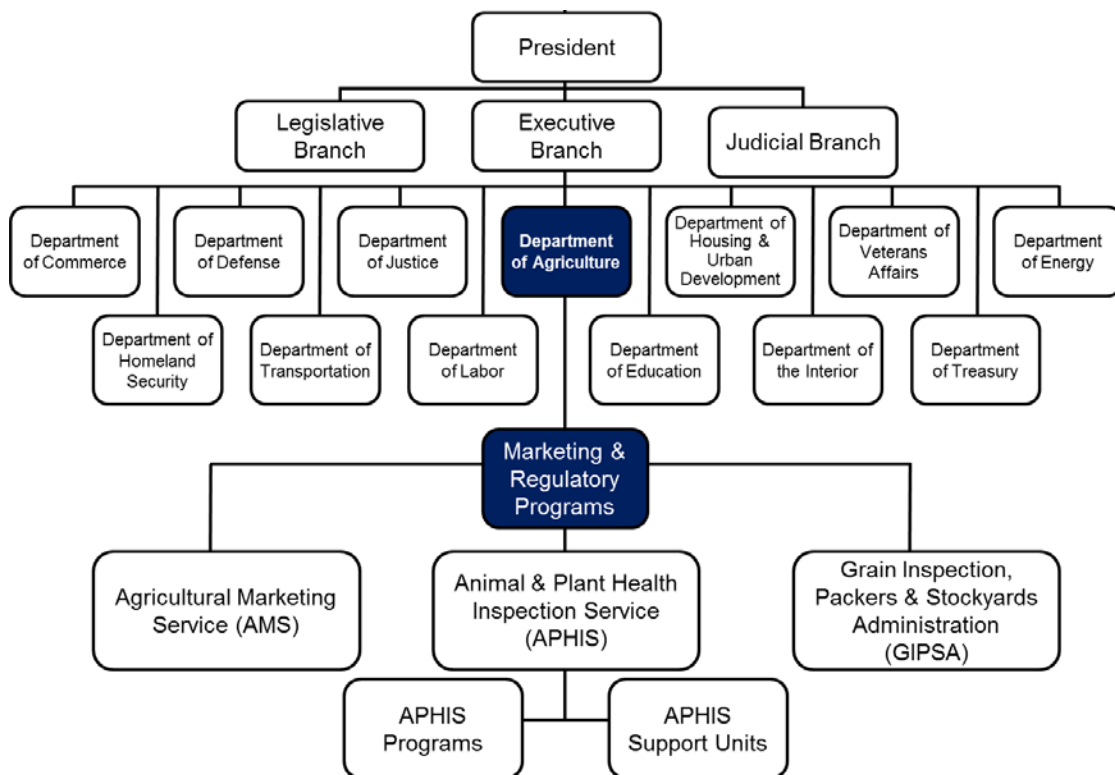
OVERVIEW OF USDA

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) serves all Americans daily. The Department’s mission is to improve and maintain farm income, to assure consumers safe and adequate food supplies at reasonable prices, and to develop and expand markets for projects abroad. 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.

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 county—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. Also, 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.

The Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is one of three agencies comprising the Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) mission area within USDA. The other two agencies are the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA).



OVERVIEW OF ANIMAL & PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE (APHIS)

For nearly 40 years, the central mission of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has been protecting America's agriculture. But as America has changed, that mission has expanded and evolved.

Today, in addition to protecting the health of livestock, poultry, and crops from foreign diseases and pests, APHIS helps defend the environment from invasive species, promote animal welfare, regulate the movement and environmental release of certain genetically engineered organisms, ensure commodities traded internationally are free of animal and plant pests and diseases, limit agricultural damage caused by wildlife, and protect natural resources while contributing to efforts to ensure public health and safety.

The name of APHIS may not be well known to many Americans, but our work is seen and felt, both far and wide. From air travel kept safe against wildlife-related accidents, to an abundance of healthy agricultural commodities from around the world, to our own beautiful tree-lined streets, millions of Americans benefit from the efforts of APHIS employees every day.

Even though APHIS' mission has changed through the decades, our ultimate goal remains the same. By protecting America's agricultural and natural resources, we protect America. And that will never change.

APHIS is composed of 10 program and support units, each focused on its own unique responsibilities and duties. Together, these units work as a dynamic whole—a world class system designed to safeguard the health of animals, plants, and ecosystems throughout the United States and foster safe agricultural trade worldwide.

APHIS Mission: To protect the health and value of American agriculture and natural resources.



VETERINARY SERVICES (VS)

Veterinary Services (VS) protects and improves the health, quality, and marketability of U.S. animals, animal products, and veterinary biologics by:

- Coordinating national animal health emergency preparedness and management.
- Ensuring the safe import of animals, animal products, and biologics.
- Diagnosing foreign and domestic animal diseases.
- Monitoring the health status of livestock and poultry.
- Certifying animals, animal products, and veterinary biologics for export.
- Developing, implementing, and enforcing standards for safe animal vaccines.
- Providing time-critical animal health information and data to address challenges faced by animal producers and stakeholders.
- Directing national programs to eradicate certain animal diseases.
- Managing a national network of laboratories used for testing and emergency response.



PLANT PROTECTION & QUARANTINE (PPQ)

Plant Protection & Quarantine (PPQ) safeguards U.S. agricultural and natural resources from risks associated with the entry, establishment, or spread of agricultural pests and diseases, as well as invasive and harmful weeds, by:

- Preventing, detecting, managing, and if possible eradicating foreign pests and diseases in the United States.
- Developing scientific advances and environmentally sound methods to respond to plant health threats.
- Collecting and analyzing pest data, both in the United States and overseas, to identify and evaluate pathways for the introduction and movement of invasive plant pests and weeds.
- Partnering with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to prevent the introduction of agricultural pests and diseases at ports of entry.
- Developing quarantine policies and regulatory requirements for agricultural commodities and plant resources.
- Establishing requirements for and facilitating the safe import and export of agricultural products.



BIOTECHNOLOGY REGULATORY SERVICES (BRS)

Biotechnology Regulatory Services (BRS) protects against risks to plant health by facilitating the safe importation, interstate movement, and environmental release of certain genetically engineered (GE) organisms by:



- Establishing the requirements for the safe importation, interstate movement, and field testing of certain GE organisms.
- Evaluating the potential plant health risks associated with GE organisms.
- Enforcing regulatory requirements through high-quality inspections.
- Removing from oversight GE plant varieties that do not pose a risk to plant health.
- Working in partnership with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to ensure that the development, testing, and use of biotechnology products occurs in a manner that is safe for plant and animal health as well as the environment.

INTERNATIONAL SERVICES (IS)

International Services (IS) provides animal and plant health expertise to protect American agriculture and facilitate safe agricultural trade around the world by:



- Managing cooperative agricultural health programs in other countries to address priority foreign diseases and pests such as screwworm and Mediterranean fruit fly.
- Providing training and technical support to build animal and plant health infrastructure in developing countries.
- Helping establish and promote the use of international animal and plant health standards to prevent the spread of pests and diseases.
- Monitoring significant animal and plant pests and diseases worldwide.
- Inspecting agricultural commodities prior to shipment to the United States to minimize risk to U.S. agriculture.
- Facilitating the entry of U.S. agricultural and food shipments at foreign ports of entry.
- Negotiating agricultural import and export protocols to expand trade opportunities for U.S. exporters and provide a diverse range of agricultural products year round for American consumers.

ANIMAL CARE (AC)

Animal Care (AC) protects and promotes the welfare of animals bred for commercial sale, used in research, transported commercially, or exhibited to the public by:

- Developing acceptable standards of humane care and treatment.
- Actively working to eliminate the soring of horses.
- Monitoring animal care practices and achieving compliance through inspections, education, and cooperative efforts.
- Providing national leadership on the safety and well-being of household pets during disasters.



WILDLIFE SERVICES (WS)

Wildlife Services (WS) provides Federal leadership to resolve conflicts between people and wildlife and create a balance allowing people and wildlife to coexist peacefully by:

- Managing conflicts between people and wildlife.
- Protecting agriculture.
- Protecting natural resources, including threatened and endangered species.
- Protecting property.
- Protecting public health and safety.
- Monitoring for wildlife diseases.



SUPPORT SERVICES: OVERVIEW

In addition to its six program areas, APHIS has four support units that serve those programs and the Agency mission as a whole. These units support the mission of the Agency and work with all of the Programs to help them achieve their respective missions. Some of the benefits of our work are not immediately visible—for example, efforts to reduce spam so that it does not choke the email system or cause staff to spend unnecessary time and money on effort unrelated to Department mandates or health and safety issues. These efforts avoid interruptions in APHIS' work. Some activities are more tangible—such as hiring employees, publishing rules, saving dollars, and making recommendations.

Support units serve as a liaison between APHIS programs, between APHIS and the Department, and between APHIS and its stakeholders, including Congress and the public. By mobilizing our expertise, we free up program resources so that program staff can focus on delivering *their* expertise. Support units are a watchdog for the Agency when it comes to matters of law, ethics, and best practices. We respond to the requirements of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Office of Management and Budget on behalf of the Agency and its programs. And we have the specialized skills to provide strategic guidance and analysis to the program units to help them realize program goals.

CIVIL RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT AND COMPLIANCE (CREC)

Civil Rights Enforcement and Compliance (CREC) provides leadership, direction, coordination, evaluation, and support to APHIS' civil rights efforts.

APHIS prohibits discrimination based on race; color; religion; national origin; age; sex; disability; reprisal; sexual orientation; gender identity and/or expression; marital, parental, or familial status; political beliefs; protected genetic information; or receipt of public assistance.



Our goal is to make civil rights an essential and integral part of every program, service, and activity. The APHIS management team shares the Secretary's vision for cultural transformation and zero tolerance of any discrimination, harassment, or reprisal. We also strongly support the Secretary's civil rights, equal employment, and diversity policies and goals.

LEGISLATIVE AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS (LPA)

Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA) provides leadership, expertise, and counsel in developing creative, high-quality, and timely communications strategies, products, and services that promote the Agency's mission, manage its challenges, and publicize its successes by:

- Handling public requests for Agency records under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the Privacy Act.
- Responding to congressional inquiries and correspondence on behalf of the Administrator, Under Secretary, and Secretary.
- Writing speeches, travel briefs, memos, and other key documents.
- Addressing media inquiries.
- Promoting Agency and program initiatives and successes.



MARKETING AND REGULATORY PROGRAMS BUSINESS SERVICES (MRPBS)

Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Services (MRPBS) provides resource management and administrative services to support the objectives of APHIS. Additionally, MRPBS provides administrative support to the other MRP agencies—the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA). Following is a summary of the MRPBS divisions and services:



- **Administrative Services Division (ASD)** – Provides all three MRP agencies with acquisition, asset, and facility management support.

MARKETING AND REGULATORY PROGRAMS BUSINESS SERVICES (MRPBS) (CONTINUED)

- **Emergency Management Safety & Security Division (EMSSD)** – Safeguards APHIS workplaces and employee wellness while ensuring that the Agency prepares for and responds effectively to emergencies and contributes its perspective to Federal emergency planning and homeland security.
- **Financial Management Division (FMD)** – Provides leadership and administers financial, budget execution, accounting, travel, systems management, user fee, and agreement services to meet the requirements of all three MRP agencies.
- **Human Resources Division (HRD)** – Partners with MRP leaders and managers to provide quality human resource services to each of the 14,000 MRP employees.
- **Information Technology Division (ITD)** – Provides the IT infrastructure and services used every day within APHIS. This includes the hardware, software, and telecommunications that provide employees with essential email and office automation tools, Internet access, and access to mission-critical program and administrative applications.
- **Investigative & Enforcement Services (IES)** – Promotes the integrity of APHIS programs by providing effective and efficient investigative and enforcement services.

POLICY & PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT (PPD)

Policy & Program Development (PPD):

- Helps APHIS leadership ensure that Agency and program decisions and plans are based on sound science and rigorous analysis of data and are consistent with the Agency's environmental stewardship goals, legal authorities, and overall policies.
- Develops the Agency's budget and looks for ways to improve fiscal responsibility while supporting program development and delivery.



APHIS EMERGENCY RESPONSE

APHIS Emergency Response works to protect agricultural health. APHIS is on the job 24 hours a day, 7 days a week working to defend America's animal and plant resources from agricultural pests and diseases.

In the event that a pest or disease of concern is detected, APHIS implements emergency protocols and partners with affected States to quickly manage or eradicate the outbreak.

APHIS EMERGENCY RESPONSE (CONTINUED)

The following chart shows APHIS' expanding emergency response role.



APHIS Emergency Response:

- Operates and maintains the state-of-the-art APHIS Emergency Operations Center (AEOC).
- Monitors threats to U.S. agriculture and food sectors.
- Coordinates with DHS and other Federal and State emergency management entities.
- Collects and disseminates agricultural information, technology and expertise relating to terrorism and homeland security.
- Develops strategies and policies for effective incident management.
- Coordinates and directs animal and plant health emergency incident response efforts.
- Provides support during all-hazards emergencies.
- Conducts training exercises to ensure personnel are ready for emergency response work.

APHIS EMERGENCY RESPONSE: EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

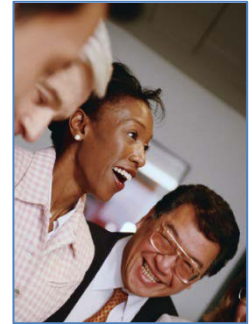
As an Emergency Response organization, all APHIS employees may be required to participate in rotating temporary duty assignments to support agricultural health or homeland security emergencies regardless of their program affiliation or geographic location. Employees are responsible for:

- Familiarization with the [APHIS Mobilization Guide](#), the [APHIS Emergency Responder Qualification Process](#), and the [APHIS Emergency Responder Position Catalog](#).
- Validation of your data held within the Emergency Qualification System (EQS).
- Completion of Incident Command System (ICS) Courses in AgLearn:
 - ICS 100 – Introduction to Incident Command
 - ICS 700 – National Incident Management System (NIMS), An Introduction
 - ICS 800 – National Response Framework (NRF), An Introduction

CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN USDA APHIS

Cultural Transformation is the process of creating a workplace where all employees and customers are treated with dignity and respect, and provided the opportunity for success. We hope you will rely upon it to gain insight into the how USDA and APHIS are progressing in becoming an inclusive, high-performance organization.

USDA's Cultural Transformation Initiative is important to APHIS' 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 APHIS 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.

APHIS 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 decisionmaking, 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.

Each APHIS employee plays a major role in creating an inclusive and highly performing organization, and each can make a significant contribution toward its success.

For additional information about Cultural Transformation, talk with your supervisor, and access the [USDA cultural transformation](#) or the [APHIS cultural transformation](#) Web sites.

APHIS FACILITIES

APHIS has offices, laboratories and field locations across the United States and throughout the world. There are five centralized locations:

- USDA Center at Riverside – Riverdale, MD
- South & Whitten Buildings – Washington, DC
- APHIS Western Regional Office – Fort Collins, CO
- APHIS Eastern Regional Office – Raleigh, NC
- Minneapolis Business Site – Minneapolis, MN



Additional information about services available at any of these locations is available on the APHIS intranet.

POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

It will be beneficial for you to read and understand the regulations and policies that affect your work and conduct as an employee. Each Agency within the Department publishes regulations, policies, and procedures to supplement those provided by USDA or to provide information on matters that pertain only to that Agency. Information pertinent to employees is contained in directives, manuals, circulars, and instructions. Some APHIS-wide resources are listed below. Please check with your program to obtain any program-specific guidance.

- **Human Resources Desk Guide (HRDG)** – The mechanism for communicating personnel procedures for the three MRP agencies. The purpose of the [HRDG](#) is to give supervisors, managers, and employees information needed to fulfill their personnel responsibilities.
- **Human Resources (HR) Broadcast** – The [HR Broadcast](#) is a quarterly publication that provides information related to the HR organization, service offerings, support, and tools available to APHIS employees.
- **Employee Conduct and Responsibilities Directive** – The [Department's regulation](#) on employee conduct and responsibilities.
- **APHIS Issuance Library** – The [Issuance Library](#) is a collection of APHIS Administrative Notices, Directives, Handbooks/Manuals, and Forms.
- **APHIS Internet Use** – APHIS provides links to the Internet to enhance business capabilities. Users are encouraged to use the Internet as a valuable source of information in their work and as a tool to disseminate information about APHIS programs and activities. As with other APHIS assets, however, [Internet access and use](#) must be protected against waste, fraud, unauthorized use, and/or abuse. Use of the Internet requires responsible judgment, supervisory discretion, and compliance with applicable laws. Use of APHIS access to the Internet and other information technology in ways that violate ethical standards, deprive Americans of rightful value for their tax dollars, or embarrass this Agency will not be tolerated.

BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS

All appointments in the Federal Service require some level of background investigation, screening, and/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 and/or are eligible for access to classified information. A full description of the APHIS personnel security process can be found at:

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/personnel_security.shtml. 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 HRD Personnel Security Staff with instructions on how to access OPM's online system.

USDA IDENTIFICATION CREDENTIAL/CARD (LINC PASS)

Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12) was issued on August 12, 2004, and calls for a mandatory, Governmentwide 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 new 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 access to both Federal computer systems (LACS) and Federal facilities (PACS). Therefore it is very important that LincPass cardholders safeguard their LincPasses at all times.

Information is provided to new employees who meet the issuance criteria for the LincPass credential through a series of emails from HSPD12Admin@identitymsp.com regarding the enrollment process and what needs to be done prior to the card's issuance. More indepth information on HSPD-12 and the LincPass credentialing process can be found at: <http://hspd12.usda.gov/employees.html>.

TYPES OF APPOINTMENTS

There are various types of Federal appointments. The letter you received from Human Resources confirming your selection explained the type of appointment for which you were chosen. After you have access to your electronic Official Personnel Folder, you will be able to view the Notification of Personnel Action, SF-50, which is a permanent record of your appointment.

Permanent employees are generally hired into the Federal Government under a career-conditional appointment. The first year of service of an employee who is given a [career-conditional appointment](#) is considered a probationary period. A career-conditional employee must complete 3 years of substantially continuous service before becoming a career employee.

[Temporary and term appointments](#) are used to fill positions when there is not a continuing need for the employees' services. Neither type of appointment is a permanent one, so they do not give the employee competitive status or reinstatement eligibility. Because temporary and term employees do not have status, they may not apply for permanent appointments through Agency internal merit promotion procedures, which are used for filling positions from the ranks of current and former permanent Federal employees. However, qualifying experience gained while employed in a temporary or term position is considered when applying later for a permanent position.

In addition, several Governmentwide appointing authorities permit or require agencies to [noncompetitively convert](#) employees to career or career-conditional appointments from excepted service or temporary appointments.

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 also 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.

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 access the [Human Resources Desk Guide](#).

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. Noncritical duties are not included in performance plans.

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (IDP)

All employees must have an Individual Development Plan (IDP). IDPs are a basic tenet of the Secretary's Cultural Transformation effort providing the structure for APHIS 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 APHIS 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.

PROMOTIONS AND TRANSFERS

Merit Promotion is the process through which current and former Federal employees who have obtained competitive status compete for positions. The MRP 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.

YOUR PAY

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 \(WGIs\)](#) 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 WGIs 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 for advancement 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 nonappropriated 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 nonappropriated fund local wage areas.

APHIS 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 access the [Human Resources Desk Guide](#).

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.

For more information about overtime, talk to your supervisor or access the [Human Resources Desk Guide](#).

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 nonpay status for the entire pay period. Annual leave is earned on the basis of 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:

Full-Time Employees

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

Part-Time Employees

One hour of leave is accrued for each

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 in order 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 access the [Human Resources Desk Guide](#).

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 [Human Resources Desk Guide](#).

HOLIDAYS

There are 10 Federal holidays:

- New Years 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

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Eligibility for [employee benefits](#) depends upon your type of appointment and your tour of duty. Generally, you must be hired under a nontemporary appointment, and have a regular tour of duty, in order to be eligible for benefits. The [Guide to Federal Benefits](#) provides an overview of these options.

For more information about any of the employee benefits identified below, talk to your supervisor, contact the [Benefits Assistant](#) serving your program or visit any of the following Web sites:

- Federal Employee Health Benefits ([FEHB](#)) Program
- [Plan/Smart/Choice](#) – Help for Federal Employees in choosing medical, dental, and vision options
- Guide to [Health Plans](#)
- Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FGLI) [Online Calculator](#) – Determine costs for various combinations of FGLI coverage
- [Dental](#) Benefits
- [Vision](#) Benefits
- [Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program \(FLTCIP\)](#) Application Package
- [Federal Employees Retirement System \(FERS\)](#) Employee Letter
- [Civil Service Retirement System \(CSRS\)](#) Offset Employee Letter

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.

Instructions: Print (1 copy only), sign, fax, or mail the SF-2809 to HRO within 60 days of your eligibility date. You should receive your health plan membership card approximately 4 to 6 weeks after the effective date. Once you enroll, you may not change your enrollment until the next annual open season or until you experience a qualifying life event.

Each November the Government holds an “open season” in which you may change health plans or levels of health coverage.

FEDERAL EMPLOYEES GROUP LIFE INSURANCE (FEGLI)

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. You can also elect optional insurance for you and/or your eligible family members within 60 days of your employment eligibility date.

Eligible family members are identified below:

- Spouse, including a valid common law marriage (marriage means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife).
- Unmarried dependent child under age 22, including adopted child, recognized natural child, or stepchild/foster child (if living with employee in regular parent-child relationship).
- Child age 22 or over incapable of self-support, if disabling condition happened before age 22.

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

Instructions: You need to complete the [SF-2817](#), if you are electing optional insurance, if you are waiving life insurance coverage, or if you are only electing the automatic Basic Life coverage. Print (1 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 the day HRO receives your SF-2817.

There are no regular open seasons for life insurance enrollment.

FEDERAL EMPLOYEES DENTAL AND VISION INSURANCE PROGRAM (FEDVIP)

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 valid common law marriage (marriage means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife).
- Unmarried dependent child under age 22, including adopted child, recognized natural child, or stepchild/foster child (if living with employee in regular parent-child relationship).
- Child age 22 or over incapable of self-support, if disabling condition happened before age 22.

Instructions: You can enroll through the [BENEFEDS Web site](#) 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 (FSAFEDS)

The Federal Flexible Spending Account Program (FSAFEDS) provides you the opportunity to set aside pre-tax money to pay for qualifying expenses for health care and dependent care. [FSAFEDS](#) allows you to save money on health care and/or child care/elder care expenses. You set aside money from your salary before taxes are withheld, incur eligible expenses, and receive reimbursement. Enrolling in FSAFEDS lowers the amount of income tax you pay because the salary you set aside for FSAFEDS is not taxed.

Eligible family members are identified below:

- Spouse, including a valid common law marriage (marriage means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife).
- Adult children under the age of 27. ([Adult children](#) are covered through December 31 of the year in which they turn 26.)

Instructions: Enroll through [FSAFEDS Web site](#) 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.

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

FEDERAL LONG TERM CARE INSURANCE PROGRAM (FLTCIP)

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.

Your spouse, domestic partner, adult children, parents, parents-in-law, and step parents are all eligible to apply for FLTCIP.

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

RETIREMENT

There are two retirement pension plans for Federal employees.

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 duty military service after 1956, find out how to add this military time to your CSRS service credit.

THE 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 on up to 5 percent of basic salary.

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, and fax or mail it to USDA APHIS MRPBS HRO, 100 N 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
[\(SF-1152\)](#)

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 [\(SF-2823\)](#)

Designate who you want to receive payment of your life insurance.

Designation of Beneficiary for Federal Employees Retirement System [\(SF-3102\)](#)

For employees covered by FERS only, this form designates payment of your FERS contributions if there is no survivor eligible for an annuity.

Instructions: Complete without erasures or mistakes. Print, sign, and obtain two witness signatures. Mail to USDA APHIS MRPBS HRO, 100 N 6th Street, Minneapolis, MN 55128. Do not fax.

Designation of Beneficiary for Civil Service Retirement System
[\(SF-2808\)](#)

For employees covered by CSRS only, this form designates payment of your CSRS contributions if there is no survivor eligible for an annuity.

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.

Designation of Beneficiary for Thrift Savings Plan [\(TSP-3\)](#)

Designates payment of your Thrift Savings Plan account.

Instruction: Complete without erasures or mistakes. Print, sign, and obtain two witness signatures. Mail to the TSP address shown on the form. Do not fax.

BARGAINING AGREEMENT OR UNION REPRESENTATION

All employees are encouraged to find out if they are part of a bargaining unit, and if so, to determine who the point of contact is for the union at their location.

If your new position is covered under a bargaining agreement or union representation, refer to the following information. If you have any questions, please contact your supervisor.

PPQ

APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) unions cover employees below grade GS-13, except supervisors, laboratory employees, geneticists, biologists, microbiologists, employees involved in confidential matters, and certain others determined on a case-by-case basis.

- PPQ SITC Officers are covered by:
http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/labor_relations/lr_sitc_officers.shtml (Employees Only)
- PPQ other than SITC Officers are covered by:
http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/labor_relations/downloads/redbook.pdf (PDF) (Employees Only)
- PPQ Office Support employees are covered by:
http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/labor_relations/nappqose.shtml (Employees Only) }

VS

All Veterinary Services (VS) employees in the Center for Veterinary Biologics (CVB) and National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) programs (except for employees of the Animal Health and Veterinary Biologics Program and management officials, supervisors, professional employees, and employees engaged in personnel work in other than a purely clerical capacity) are covered by:
http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/labor_relations/downloads/AFGE_2315.pdf (PDF)

Ames IA CVB/NVSL (Ames IA) AFGE Local 2315

VS Tick Riders

Veterinary Services Tick Riders are covered by:
http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/labor_relations/downloads/FinalTickRidersAgreement82009.pdf
(PDF)(EMPLOYEES ONLY)

Tick Riders (VS TX) (AFGE Local 3106)

EMPLOYEE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

TELEWORK

While participation in telework is not an employee entitlement, APHIS 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. APHIS positions that are not suitable for core telework may still be suitable for situational telework or unscheduled telework on a case-by-case basis or an approved reasonable accommodation.

To participate, 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.”
- No disciplinary action or adverse action within the preceding 12 months.

For more information about telework, talk to your supervisor, access the [Human Resources Desk Guide](#), or visit the [APHIS telework site](#).

TRANSIT INCENTIVE PROGRAM

The Transit Incentive Program provides APHIS employees who use public transportation and/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 as a result of several public laws, a notice, and Executive Order 13150, Federal Workforce Transportation. The Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) transit incentive program was established in 2001.

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.
- Reduce the number of single-occupant vehicles on the road.

For more information about the Transit Incentive Program in APHIS, talk to your supervisor, access the [Human Resources Desk Guide](#), or contact your program’s Transit Coordinator by following the link below http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/transit_subsidies/index.shtml

WORK LIFE WELLNESS (WLW)



[Work*Life Balance >](#)

[Fitness >](#)

[Nutrition >](#)

[Mental Health >](#)

[Emotional Health >](#)

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.

There are field representatives at Headquarters, Hubs, and field locations who are trained to provide WLW services at the local, State, and regional level.

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 stress, 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 referral may be covered by medical benefits. Call 1-800-222-0364 or TTY 1-888-262-7848 or visit www.FOH4YOU.com.

APHIS ERGONOMICS PROGRAM

The [APHIS Ergonomics Program](#) is available to all employees and uses a comprehensive and participative approach to inform employees of possible ergonomic hazards to which they may be exposed during the course of duty. The program has established several proactive tools to meet the ergonomic needs of APHIS employees.

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 17 hours a day, 7 days a week, and provides employment and salary verification through a touch-tone phone to credit and reference verifiers upon request.

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.

MERIT SYSTEMS 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.

PROHIBITED PERSONNEL PROCESSES

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, including reprisal for whistleblowing, which are defined by law.

JOB PROTECTIONS

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAWS

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, and Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. These laws are enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Generally speaking, under these laws it is illegal to discriminate in any aspect of employment including: hiring and firing; compensation, assignment, or classification of employees; transfer, promotion, layoff, or recall; and recruitment and testing. Discriminatory practices under those laws also include: harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or age.

Title VII also prohibits discrimination because of participation in schools or places of worship associated with a particular racial, ethnic, or religious group. The law prohibits not only intentional discrimination, but also practices that have the effect of discriminating against individuals because of their race, color, national origin, religion, or sex.

APPEAL RIGHTS

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. APHIS encourages early resolution of workplace and program disputes using the Alternative Dispute Resolution Program. These procedures vary; contact Human Resources for additional information.

ETHICS AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

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](#).

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 Web site](#).

PROFESSIONALISM AND EXPECTED CONDUCT

DRESS CODE

Neither APHIS nor USDA has a formal dress code policy. Some APHIS employees wear uniforms and have a uniform policy, but for most of us, the APHIS 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* APHIS. Shorts, 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 APHIS workplace. If you have any questions about what might be appropriate or not appropriate to wear at your worksite, please talk with your supervisor.

TELEPHONE TIPS

We must make every effort to maintain good customer service. Listed below are several tips for a successful telephone conversation:

- Check voice mail frequently throughout the day.
- Maintain an up-to-date and accurate message at all times.
- Answer your phone personally whenever possible.
- Use self-discipline to maintain an ongoing dialogue; even in difficult situations.
- Make a brief apology if there is a problem, and do it with a smile. Callers can always hear your smile.
- Let the other person talk without interrupting him/her.
- Improve listening by taking accurate notes.
- Ask questions so that you keep in tune with what the caller is thinking as well as saying.
- Always remember: to each and every person who calls, you are a representative of APHIS.

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

APHIS 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 APHIS email user. Remember, as a Government employee there is no expectation of privacy in email or any other applications on a Government computer.

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, or other sensitive information.

All email is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and its release is subject to the same FOIA exemptions that apply to other Agency records. Many, if not most, of the email you receive may not be a record. However, email you send that is related to the business of APHIS probably is a record. Note that eMail that constitutes a record must be treated as any other Federal record. As such, its disposition is dependent on the applicable records schedules. Because email records are no different from other types of Agency records, they are also subject to release through FOIA.

All email you send or receive must be properly managed on a daily basis. As an APHIS employee it is your responsibility to manage your email!

A training course that addresses many questions related to emailing in APHIS is available at:
<http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/training/email.shtml>

PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION (PII)

In accordance with the provisions of the Privacy Act of 1974, APHIS employees are responsible for protecting personal information about individuals that is maintained by APHIS from unauthorized access, disclosure, and alteration; and for providing individuals appropriate and complete access to APHIS 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.

APHIS employees are required to report any lost or stolen IT equipment immediately to the Information Technology Division (ITD) APHIS Technical Assistance Center (ATAC) 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 and does not interfere with official business. Occasional personal use of telecommunications resources shall normally take place during the employee's personal time.

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.

TRAVEL

Many employees travel to attend training courses or to conduct official Government business. Discuss travel with your supervisor prior to making final travel plans.

There are four fundamentals you need to know about Government travel:

- Travel must be conducted in the most cost-effective and efficient manner and only when necessary to accomplish the purposes of the Government.
- Employees traveling on official business are expected to exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business.
- Except in emergencies, travel must be authorized in writing, in advance, by an official at least one level above the traveler.
- Use of the Government-sponsored, contract-issued charge card is mandatory for all official travel-related charges, unless there has been an exemption granted for non-use of the card.

GOVTRIP is our e-travel system that interfaces with the Agency financial system. This state-of-the-art system allows remote users to process travel actions without having to transmit paper to the accounting provider.



GOVTRIP is state-of-the-art, Web-based travel expense reporting software. With this powerful tool, the travel experts at MRPBS can process all your travel needs from authorizations and reservations to vouchers. No more paper authorizations or vouchers are needed!

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 & Lodging](#).
- Miscellaneous Expenses (such as baggage expenses, & official telephone calls).
- Taxi Fares (including tips).
- Rental Cars.
- Mileage allowances for privately owned vehicles, parking, and tolls.

GOVERNMENT-OWNED VEHICLES (GOVs)

Government-owned vehicles (GOVs), when available, may be used by employees for official purposes only. 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. The [MRP Motor Vehicle Manual](#) is available online.

GOVERNMENT TRAVEL CREDIT CARD

A Government travel card is issued to APHIS employees who travel two or more times per year. You must use the card only for expenses incurred in connection with official 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) and any Agency-specific directives.

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).

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.
- Awards.

The next section introduces you to several of the APHIS systems and applications that will help you maintain personal records.

APHIS SYSTEMS AND APPLICATIONS

Your supervisor or sponsor will help you obtain access to all the program-specific applications you'll need to perform your duties. Some applications are used APHIS-wide and are accessible by a single sign-on mechanism called your "E-Authentication" or "E-Auth" ID and password.

eAUTHENTICATION

eAuthentication (eAuth) is a mechanism to grant access to multiple online programs (WebTA, AgLearn, APHIS Portal, GovTrip, eOPF, EPP) with a single ID and password.

When you begin working for APHIS and complete your new employee paperwork, your documents will be submitted to the MRPBS Human Resources Office in Minneapolis. Within 2 to 3 weeks, your information is placed in the USDA National Finance Center (NFC). The eAuthentication server uplinks to NFC on a 21-day basis, and when it finds a new employee has come on board it creates an eAuthentication account for that individual.

All USDA employees, whether full-time or part-time, permanent or temporary, must complete an annual "Information Systems Security Awareness" training. Access to any USDA computer system cannot be granted by the IT staff until the new employee has successfully passed (70%) this training.

Note: Your eAuthentication account will not be created until 3 weeks after your start date. Creation of the account should coincide with the issuance of your first paycheck.

eAUTHENTICATION (CONTINUED)

Instructions:

1. You will receive an email from the eAuthentication server, 3 weeks after receiving your first paycheck. The email will invite you to register your eAuthentication account. Embedded in the email is a link that you will click on to take you to the registration page.
2. If you have not received the email and at least 3 weeks have passed since receipt of your first pay check, you can contact the APHIS Technical Assistance Center (ATAC). Contact can be by email to ATAC@aphis.usda.gov or by phone at 877-944-8457. Request that the registration email be sent, and provide your Government email address.
3. When you click on the embedded link in the email, you will be taken to the registration page and can follow the instructions to complete the registration.
4. After you have registered your eAuthentication account, with your eAuthentication credentials you should be able to log into AgLearn as well as the many other applications that are password protected.
5. Contact ATAC to get your eAuthentication ID and password reset if problems occur.

ELECTRONIC OFFICIAL PERSONNEL FOLDER (EOPF)

Some personnel records are in your [electronic Official Personnel Folder](#) (eOPF), which can be accessed after you receive your eAuthentication credentials. You will be asked to register when you access eOPF for the first time.

[eOPF registration](#) provides you electronic access to all the documents in your eOPF and will notify you when a new document is added to your folder. If you have any problems accessing eOPF, simply contact the Human Resources Office. You are also responsible for notifying your supervisor and Human Resources of any change in your name, home address, and family status.

TIME AND ATTENDANCE (T&A) RECORDS

An official Time and Attendance (T&A) record for each employee is maintained by the webTA system. Your timekeeper is the official record keeper for time and attendance purposes. Currently, APHIS uses the webTA system to process T&As. You will have [access to webTA](#) when you receive your eAuthentication credentials. Until then you'll need to follow the manual process identified by your supervisor or sponsor.



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*Time &
Attendance*

Please [login](#) to the Time & Attendance System

At the end of each biweekly pay period, you will electronically enter and validate your time and attendance via webTA. Your T&A will show your time worked, holiday pay, previous leave balance, leave earned, leave taken, and current balance. You should review all entries for accuracy. Your supervisor will certify your T&A, which electronically sends it to the National Finance Center (NFC) for further processing.

Each APHIS program or support unit may have individual policies around T&As. For more information about webTA, talk to your supervisor or timekeeper or access the [Human Resources Desk Guide](#).

EMPLOYEE PERSONAL PAGE (EPP)

You also have access to your own [Employee Personal Page \(EPP\)](#) through the National Finance Center (NFC). The EPP allows you to view your payroll, leave, travel, life insurance, health insurance, savings bonds, and other personal information. As a new employee, you will receive a letter containing your PIN at your home address.

The EPP is accessible using your eAuthentication credentials after you have been authenticated using your EPP ID and password the first time. A Statement of Earnings and Leave (SEL) is updated through the EPP each pay period, under the E&L Statement. It is important to verify that the statement accurately reflects your hours worked, leave taken, and required or elected payroll deductions. Report any errors immediately to the Human Resources Office.

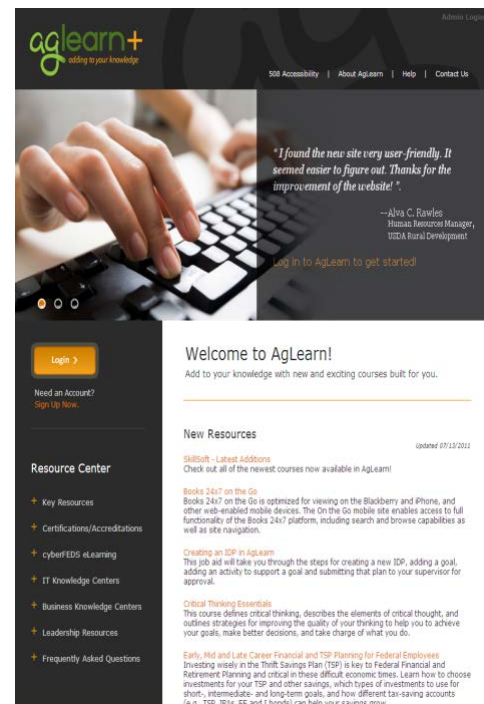
AgLEARN

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 <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’ll see that you have some courses already populated on your “To Do” List.



AgLearn Features

AgLearn is much more than just a Web site 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’ve 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 APHIS. When you register for a course in AgLearn, an email will be sent to your supervisor asking him/her to approve your registration.

APHIS PORTAL

The APHIS portal:

- Provides up-to-the-minute news about what's happening in APHIS, blogs by APHIS Senior Executives, and the ability to provide feedback, share your ideas, or ask questions of APHIS leadership.
- Allows you to directly access many APHIS applications (eOPF, AgLearn, webTA, etc.) that are accessible via eAuthentication.



Click and Go Access

This icon is available on your Windows desktop screen, giving you quick access to the Agency's portal pages. All you need to do is click it and enter your eAuthentication.

APPENDIX A: WEB RESOURCES**A Message From Human Resources**

Before the Internet, it was sometimes difficult and often frustrating to find out about human resources regulations and entitlements. Now you can do just about anything online. You can also find the answer to almost any conceivable question you have quickly and easily.

We have developed the [Human Resources Web site](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/) specifically for you.

We feel that the Web site, together with this guide, provide you with the information you need to take full advantage of your Federal benefits. You are always welcome to contact us with any issue or concern, but we highly recommend that you use the tools provided on the Web to stay up to date on Federal employee benefits and information. To have a successful career and to take full advantage of your benefits, we recommend that you make it a priority to develop a sound foundational knowledge of human resources.

USDA Onboarding Portal	http://www.dm.usda.gov/OBP/OBPIndex.htm
APHIS New Employee Orientation	http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/new_employee_orientation/index.shtml
APHIS Web Site	http://www.aphis.usda.gov/
USDA Web Site	http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome
Human Resources Web Site	http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/
Thrift Savings Plan (TSP)	https://www.tsp.gov/index.shtml
HR Desk Guide	http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/hr_desk_guide/index.shtml
Listing of HR Service Providers for Each Program or Support Unit	http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/index.shtml Click on Contact HR Service Providers for “APHIS” from the right-hand menu.

APPENDIX A: WEB RESOURCES (CONTINUED)

Web sites that can be accessed once you receive your eAuthentication credentials include:

APHIS Web Portal	https://my.aphis.usda.gov/wps/myportal/
AgLearn	http://www.aglearn.usda.gov/
WebTA	https://wtausda.nfc.usda.gov/usda/
GovTrip	https://govtrip.com/govtrip/site/index.jsp
NFC Employee Personal Page	https://www.nfc.usda.gov/personal/index.aspx
eOPF	https://eopf.nbc.gov/landing/?TID=
APHIS Intranet	http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/
APHIS Civil Rights New Employee Orientation	http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/crec/new_employee_orientation_information.shtml
APHIS Cultural Transformation	http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/ct/index.shtml
USDA Cultural Transformation	http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov
Telework	http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr_telework.shtml

APPENDIX B: ONBOARDING CHECKLIST

Your supervisor will work with you to complete the following onboarding activities:

Day 1: Orientation

- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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.
 - 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/directives/> for a complete list of departmental regulations.

Week 1

- ✓ Ensure you clearly understand your job roles and responsibilities.
- ✓ Review training program and AgLearn (www.aglearn.usda.gov).
- ✓ Review organizational structure and key staff and contact information.
- ✓ Review the Ethics Office Web site (www.usda.gov/ethics).

First 90 Days

- ✓ Review performance expectations and review your Performance Plan (Mandatory Requirement Day 30).
- ✓ Meet stakeholders of other departments.
- ✓ Develop the Individual Development Plan (Mandatory 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.

APPENDIX C: USEFUL ACRONYMS**A**

AC	Animal Care
ACMS	APHIS Cost Management System
AEOC	APHIS Emergency Operations Center
AGM	Asian Gypsy moth
AHPA	Animal Health Protection Act
ALB	Asian long-horned beetle
AMS	Agricultural Marketing Service
AMT	APHIS Management Team (OA plus Deputy Administrators)
APHIS	Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
AQI	Agricultural Quarantine and Inspection (PPQ program)
ARD	Assistant Regional Director
ARS	Agricultural Research Service
ASD	Administrative Services Division
ATAC	APHIS Technical Assistance Center
AVIC	Area Veterinarian In Charge
AWA	Animal Welfare Act

B

BRS	Biotechnology Regulatory Services
BSE	Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (mad cow disease)

C

CAPS	Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey
CBI	Confidential Business Information
CBP	Customs Border Protection
CCC	Commodity Credit Corporation

APPENDIX C: USEFUL ACRONYMS (CONTINUED)**C**

CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CDFA	California Department of Food and Agriculture
CEAH	Centers for Epidemiology and Animal Health (VS)
CFIA	Canadian Food Inspection Agency
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CITES	(pronounced sigh-tees) Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
COTR	Contracting Officer's Technical Representative
CPHST	(pronounced C-fist) Center for Plant Health Science and Technology
CREC	Civil Rights Enforcement and Compliance
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CSRS	Civil Service Retirement System
CVB	Center for Veterinary Biologics

D

DA	Deputy Administrator
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DO	Deputy's Office or Director's Office
DOJ	Department of Justice

E

EA	Environmental Assessment
EAN	Emergency Action Notification (PPQ 523)
EAP	Employee Assistance Program
eAuth	eAuthentication
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EMLC	Emergency Management Leadership Council

APPENDIX C: USEFUL ACRONYMS (CONTINUED)**E (CONTINUED)**

EMSSD	Emergency Management Safety and Security Division
eOPF	Electronic Official Personnel Folder
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EPP	Employee Personal Page
EQS	Emergency Qualification System
ER	Eastern Region

F

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (USDA affiliate)
FAS	Foreign Agriculture Service
FATA	Federal Agency Travel Administrator
FDA	Food and Drug Administration (HHS)
FEDVIP	Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program
FEGLI	Federal Employees Group Life Insurance
FEHB	Federal Employees Health Benefits
FERS	Federal Employees Retirement System
FLTCIP	Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program
FMD	Financial Management Division
FMMI	Federal Management Modernization Initiative
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact (on the human environment)
FR	Federal Register
FSAFEDS	Federal Flexible Spending Account Program
FSIS	Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA)
FWS	Federal Wage System
FY	Fiscal Year

APPENDIX C: USEFUL ACRONYMS (CONTINUED)**G**

GAO	Government Accountability Office
GE	Genetically Engineered
GIPSA	Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (USDA)
GMO	Genetically Modified Organisms
GOV	Government Owned Vehicle
GPO	Government Printing Office
GS	General Schedule

H

HPA	Horse Protection Act
HR	Human Resources
HRD	Human Resources Division
HRDG	Human Resources Desk Guide
HRO	Human Resources Office

I

ICS	Incident Command System
IAS	Integrated Acquisition System
IDP	Individual Development Plan
IES	Investigative and Enforcement Services (APHIS)
IS	International Services (APHIS)
ITD	Information Technology Division

L

LPA	Legislative and Public Affairs (APHIS)
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APPENDIX C: USEFUL ACRONYMS (CONTINUED)**M**

MBS	Minneapolis Business Site
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRP	Marketing and Regulatory Programs (AMS, APHIS, GIPSA)
MRPBS	Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Services
MSPB	Merit Systems Protection Board

N

NAIS	National Animal Identification System
NAPPO	North American Plant Protection Organization
NASAHO	National Assembly of State Animal Health Officials
NASDA	National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
NCAH	National Center for Animal Health
NCIE	National Center for Import and Export (VS)
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NFC	National Finance Center
NGO	Nongovernment organization
NIMS	National Information Management System
NRF	National Response Framework
NVSL	National Veterinary Services Laboratory

O

OA	Office of the Administrator (APHIS)
OBPA	Office of Budget and Program Analysis (USDA)
OC	Office of Communications (USDA)
OCIO	Office of the Chief Information Officer
OCR	Office of Congressional Relations (USDA)

APPENDIX C: USEFUL ACRONYMS (CONTINUED)**O (CONTINUED)**

OGC	Office of the General Counsel (USDA)
OIE	World Organization for Animal Health
OIG	Office of the Inspector General (USDA)
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPIS	Offshore Pest Information System (PPQ)
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
OSC	Office of Special Counsel
OSEC	Office of the Secretary

P

PA	Public Affairs (LPA)
Phyto	Phytosanitary Certificate (also called PC)
PIA	Privacy Impact Assessment
PII	Personally Identifiable Information
POV	Personally Owned Vehicle
PPA	Plant Protection Act
PPD	Policy and Program Development
PPQ	Plant Protection and Quarantine (APHIS)

R

ROSS	Resource Ordering & Status System
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S

SAGARPA	Mexican equivalent of APHIS
SEL	Statement of Earnings and Leave
SITC	(pronounced sit-C) Safeguarding Intervention and Trade Compliance (PPQ)
SOD	Sudden Oak Death/Phytophthora ramorum

APPENDIX C: USEFUL ACRONYMS (CONTINUED)**S (CONTINUED)**

SORN	System of Records Notices
SPHD	(pronounced spud) State Plant Health Director, a PPQ employee
SPRO	(pronounced sproe) State Plant Regulatory Official, a State employee
SPS	Sanitary and Phytosanitary, usually “SPS Agreement”

T

T&A	Time and Attendance
TSP	Thrift Savings Plan
TST	Trade Team or Trade Support Team (APHIS)

U

USERRA	Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USTR	United States Trade Representative

V

VMO	Veterinary Medical Officer
VRA	Veterans Recruitment Appointment
VS	Veterinary Services

W

WAR	Weekly Activity Report (APHIS)
WGI	Within-Grade Increase
WLW	Work Life Wellness
WR	Western Region
WS	Wildlife Services
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization