



At a Glance

The Human Resources Division and its Services

By Kathy Slaga

As part of the Cultural Transformation initiative within the USDA, the Mission Area focus on communication in support of the initiatives and the HR Division's priority on customer outreach and feedback, we are providing information in this article on "who we are" and "what we do" so you can more easily access the support and assistance you need from HRD.

The HR Division serves the 14,000 employees of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), and the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA). In addition, we provide HR operational support to the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) and employee/labor relations support to the Department Administration (DA). HRD's primary services are:

- Recruiting and referring high-caliber personnel to carry out the mission
- Providing insurance and retirement benefits information
- Processing salaries, promotions, recognition, and benefits in a timely manner
- Providing policy guidance on a range of HR topics such as, performance management, awards and recognition, Telework, etc.
- Providing supervisors the training and tools they need to support and counsel their employees
- Creating a supportive, diverse, and attractive workplace culture
- Promoting the health, safety, and security of employees
- Planning for workforce and succession needs
- Offering seminars on employee & leadership development
- Providing coaching, mentoring and leadership transition services for managers
- Supporting employee development through AgLearn

These services are carried out through the Office of the Director and three Directorates - Employee and Management Services, Talent Development and Management, and Operations and Policy - please refer to our Organization Chart on page 2.

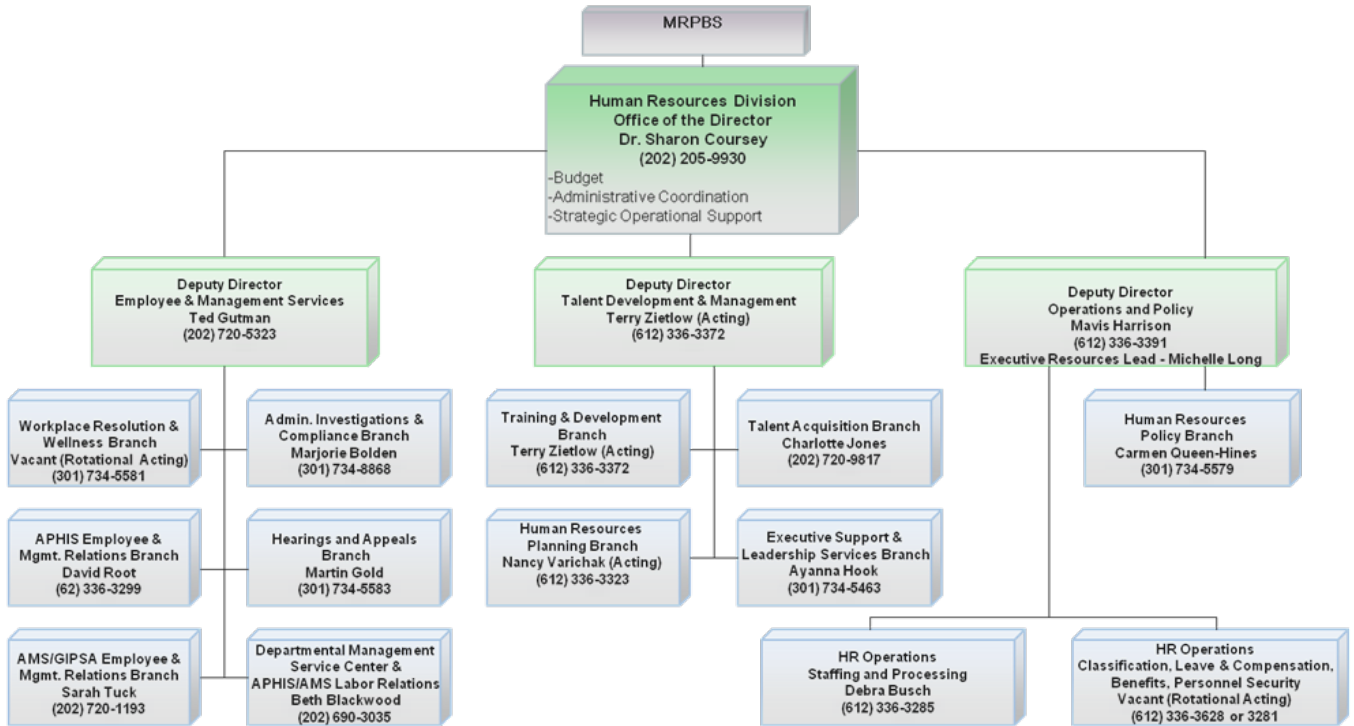
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We hope that the HR Broadcast is meeting your needs and communicating topics of interest, but if there are items you would like to see included in future issues, please contact our HR Broadcast editor, Christina Furnkranz, at Christina.S.Furnkranz@aphis.usda.gov.



Human Resources Division Organizational Structure



HRD Fun Facts - in FY 2010:

HRD processed over 101,000 payroll, personnel, and benefits transactions. If you changed your health benefits plan, got married, or received a promotion, HRD assisted in ensuring that your pay and benefits reflected those changes.

HRD announced 1,800 jobs, rated nearly 70,000 applications, and filled 1,600 positions in MRP.

That's an average of 4.4 employees hired per day of the year!

The recently distributed Support Unit Report transmitted to employees from the APHIS Administrator highlighted this and many more support services provided.

Check out our website at:

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/index.shtml>



Coming Soon--HRD's New Homepage! We're revamping our home page to make it easier for you to find upcoming events on our HR CALENDAR, contact our employees through our PHONE DIRECTORY, view what services we provide on our SERVICES LISTING, and understand our structure by viewing the ORGANIZATIONAL CHART.

What is *Cultural Transformation*?

By Terry Zietlow

By now you've probably heard the term, but you may still be a little unsure of what it's all about. At its heart, Cultural Transformation is a means to optimize the use of our Agency's resources and the talents of all our people to increase the quality of the results we achieve and best meet the needs of the public we serve. It's a comprehensive approach focused on creating a workplace that values inclusion, diversity and high performance. It's about celebrating our differences and treating employees and customers with dignity and respect while providing equity of opportunity for all. It's also about the creation of an environment where organizational and personal success becomes part of our everyday work life.

Recently an MRP Cultural Transformation Training Team was tasked with developing a number of training options to help all of us better understand why Cultural Transformation is so important for our Agency's future. In the coming months, as a result of the work of this team you will begin to see a variety of items related to Cultural Transformation from simple marketing and awareness raising to full scale training events designed to educate each of us on the value that diversity and inclusion can add to our work experience. In the meantime, if you are interested in learning more about these concepts, a great resource for you is the USDA Cultural Transformation webpage. You can access this page at the address below using your eAuthentication name and password.

<http://culturaltransformation.usda.gov/oc/ctideas.nsf/pages/about>

CULTURAL
TRANSFORMATION



What We Can Achieve: Increasing Federal Employment of Individuals with Disabilities

By Jacqueline Miles



On July 26, 2010, Executive Order 1354, Increasing Federal Employment of Individuals with Disabilities, was issued and it unveiled a renewed appeal for outreach and inclusion in the Federal workforce, directing Executive departments and agencies to proactively facilitate the recruitment, hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities and targeted disabilities in the Federal workforce. We have captured in this article available resources that HR, in collaboration with hiring managers, may utilize while working through the hiring process. These resources, in concert with HR's assistance, provide support for the Agencies in meeting the hiring goals for Veterans with disabilities and persons with disabilities. HR can also provide advice and resources for ensuring these placements are successful through our Reasonable Accommodations program.

Available Resources

The following resources are part of a flexible framework of programs to enhance agencies' efforts in increasing Federal employment of individuals with disabilities.

- ✓ State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies and State Disability Service agencies are excellent partners for recruiting potential applicants with disabilities. State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies (SVRAs) provide counseling, evaluation, training, and other services to their constituents, individuals with disabilities, and free and timely services to prospective employers.
- ✓ OPM's Shared Register of Candidates with Disabilities. OPM, in collaboration with the Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) Council, established a shared register of individuals with disabilities who have an interest in Federal employment and satisfy qualification requirements of frequently filled positions. The OPM shared register is available at no charge to agencies.
- ✓ The 2011 Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities (WRP) is jointly managed by the Office of Disability Employment Policy and the Department of Defense. The program is a recruitment and referral program and includes access to a database which helps connect Federal agencies nationwide with talented post-secondary students and recent college graduates with disabilities from all academic backgrounds for temporary and permanent positions. Agencies can also distribute vacancy announcements via mass emails to students with disabilities who are registered in the WRP database. The WRP offers prospective employers an effective way to evaluate potential employees and access to the database is free.
- ✓ The Social Security Administration's Ticket-to-Work Program targets beneficiaries receiving Social Security disability benefits who are interested in meaningful employment. Currently, we are collaborating with USDA's Target Center to implement the SSA pilot program, establishing another pipeline to assist Marketing & Regulatory Program (MRP) managers and supervisors in the recruitment and hiring of qualified individuals with disabilities.
- ✓ Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are cross-disability, non-profit organizations designed and operated within a local community by individuals with disabilities. CILs disseminate information about job announcements and career fairs among their constituent groups. CILs assist individuals with disabilities who are eager to assume competitive, meaningful, and integrated employment get to work and obtain the necessary assistance to be successful in the workplace. For further information please visit the National Council on Independent Living at <http://www.ncil.org/>

What We Can Achieve: Increasing Federal Employment of Individuals with Disabilities



Available Resources (continued from page 4)

- ✓ Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Government (DHHIG) has a two-fold purpose: it serves as an employee support group for Federal employees who are either Deaf or Hard of Hearing and as a resources organization for the Federal government. DHHIG coordinates and collaborates with OPM, EEOC, Congress, the White House, and the President's Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities. For more information please visit: <http://dhhig.org/>
- ✓ American Council of the Blind is the nation's leading organization for the blind and visually impaired and consults with industry and government to facilitate employment opportunities for blind and visually impaired individuals. For more information please visit: <http://www.acb.org/>
- ✓ Numerous agencies and organizations exist to assist veterans with disabilities find and maintain meaningful employment. America's Heroes at Work, a U.S. Department of Labor initiative, provides information and support to employers on hiring veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The focus is on service members with hidden disabilities, such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). For more information visit: <http://www.americasheroesatwork.gov/>
- ✓ The Wounded Warriors Project assists veterans with service-connected disabilities with the transition into the civilian work force and educates employers on the benefits of hiring veterans. Employers may create an account to obtain free access to the Warrior to Work program and post job announcements and review the resumes of registered veterans. For more information visit: <http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org>

As you have read, there are many resources available to help us meet the goals of this important initiative and we look forward to the opportunity to partner with you and provide assistance to you in accessing these resources.

Human Resources is available to assist and guide hiring managers with recruiting and hiring individuals with disabilities.

[APHIS Staffing Specialists](#) [AMS Staffing Specialists](#) [GIPSA Staffing Specialists](#)

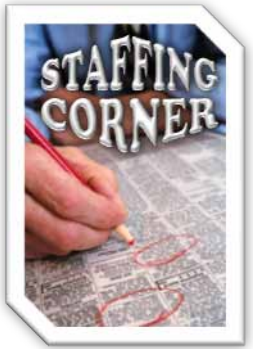
In addition, our Reasonable Accommodation Specialists will provide advice and resources for making these placements successful. If you have questions about reasonable accommodation, please contact Sherri Sirotkin, Reasonable Accommodations Program Coordinator, at (301) 734-3162 or sherri.sirotkin@aphis.usda.gov



Persons with disabilities who need program information in alternate formats (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY).

Federal Career Intern Program to be replaced by the Pathways Programs

By Debra Busch



Marketing and Regulatory Programs discontinued the use of the Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP) in mid-December, following direction issued by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), via the USDA, Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM). The OPM decision to halt use of the program came on the heels of a recent Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) ruling that the FCIP is inconsistent with the Civil Service rules governing placement of positions in the Excepted Service.

Since the discontinuation of the FCIP, a new program has been proposed to help the Federal government compete more effectively for students and recent graduates. The Pathways Programs will consist of three programs, each focused on people at differing stages of their education. The three programs are the Internship Program, the Recent Graduates Program and the Presidential Management Fellows Program. Appointment to a Pathways Program will allow agencies to convert eligible participants non-competitively to term, career, or career conditional appointments. OPM is in the process of developing implementing regulations for the Pathways Programs; therefore, it will not be available for use until March. Additional information on each of the three Pathways Programs follows:

Internship Program

The Internship Program will provide students in high schools, community colleges, 4-year colleges, trade schools, career and technical education programs, and other qualifying educational institutions and programs with paid opportunities to work in agencies and explore Federal careers while still in school. The Internship Program would replace the existing Student Career Experience Program (SCEP).

Recent Graduates Program

The Recent Graduates Program will provide individuals who have recently graduated with developmental experiences in the Federal Government intended to promote possible careers in the civil service. To be eligible, graduates must have obtained a qualifying degree, or completed a qualifying career or technical education program, within the preceding two years. Veterans who, due to their military service obligation, were precluded from participating in the Recent Graduates Program during the two-year period shall be eligible to participate in the Program within six years of obtaining a qualifying degree or completing a qualifying program.

The Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program

The Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program is an existing program that aims to attract to the Federal service outstanding men and women from a variety of academic disciplines at the graduate level who have a clear interest in, and commitment to, the leadership and management of public policies and programs. Participants in this program must have received, within the preceding two years, a qualifying advanced degree.

Significant details on all three programs, such as qualifying degrees and/or programs are under development by OPM. Questions on these employment programs may be directed to your servicing Staffing Specialist.





Leave Restoration *By Nella Roberts*

Happy New Year! Did you know that if you lost annual leave in 2010 due to various emergency situations and/or high priority work projects, you may be eligible for leave restoration? Guidance on the leave restoration process is on the web at: http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/tod_self_study/use_lose.shtml

A few important points to remember:

- Your supervisor must have cancelled your leave in writing.
- This memo must have included: the reason(s) the leave was cancelled, (i.e., explain the operational emergency in detail), the dates and hours cancelled, higher level concurrence in the decision to cancel leave (in the form of a signature on the memo).
- Lost leave may not be restored if compensatory time off in lieu of overtime pay was used instead of use/lose annual leave during the 2010 leave year.
- This does not include Compensatory Time Off for Travel or credit hours.
- Programs have the authority to restore lost leave due to operational emergencies (exigencies of the public business).
- Leave lost due to illness or administrative error must be forwarded to HRD for consideration.

PROTECTING PRIVACY

As Federal employees, we are responsible for protecting the privacy of employees. This means protecting what is called Personally Identifiable Information (PII). PII includes information such as names, social security numbers (SSN), date of birth (DOB) or other personal data that when combined, can be linked to a specific individual.

The USDA's policy on SSN is that it will collect, use, maintain, and/or disseminate social security numbers and other PII information only when required by statute or when specifically authorized to do so. As part of the Department's Social Security Number Elimination Plan within IT systems, Agencies must mask or encrypt a SSN so it cannot be viewed on computer screens, reports, or other work products.

In compliance with this policy, the Personnel Action Tracking System (PATS), has undergone some refinements early in FY2011. The SSN and DOB fields will be masked (numbers not shown) on the electronic SF-52 form and during electronic transmission to the HR Operations office. Printed SF-52's and reports from PATS will also have a masked SSN (XXX-XX-XXXX) and DOB (XX/XX/XX). PATS users should notice no change in their ability to create, save, submit or track SF52's.

We appreciate your understanding as we take the steps needed to protect your PII data.



LEAVE & COMPENSATION



Delivery of the 2010 W-2

By Cindy Hadlich



In January 2011, the 2010 Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Form W-2,

Wage and Tax Statement, will be mailed to the employee's residence mailing address as recorded in the National Finance Center (NFC) system. The data on the W-2 includes salary payments for pay period 26, 2009, through pay period 25, 2010, inclusive.

You may also view your W-2 on the NFC Employee Personal Page (EPP).

<https://www.nfc.usda.gov/> Click on the "My EPP" icon, and login. After you are logged in, scroll down to the W-2 under the "Personal Info" section.

Please contact your servicing Civilian Pay Technician on the Leave and Compensation Team with any questions.

http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/lct.pdf

GOOD NEWS!



Tax Relief in 2011

The "Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act of 2010" provides that during 2011 the Social Security employee tax rate will be temporarily decreased from 6.2% to 4.2%. This means that employees will see their payroll deductions for Social Security tax decrease by 2% effective pay period 26 of 2010. Employees will not have Social Security tax withheld once their earnings have reached the 2011 maximum taxable income limit of \$106,800, which remains unchanged from 2010. There will be no deduction change based on this Act for employees covered by the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), because these employees do not have payroll deductions for Social Security tax. The employer's tax rate of 6.2% will remain the same.





Time to Bring in the New Year!

The start of a new year is the perfect time to ensure your employee records are in order. A good place for a Federal employee to start is with their Statement of Earnings and Leave (SEL). Checking your SEL for accuracy is an important employee responsibility which should be done each pay period, especially if you have recently made a change which would affect your pay. If errors are reported quickly, it is relatively easy to correct them. If the error continues for an extended period of time, the effect could be financially disastrous.

Some things to review....

- Ü Employees under the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS), like those employees covered under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), now receive credit for their sick leave balance at the time of retirement in their annuity estimates. Make sure you review your sick leave balances and request a leave audit if necessary.
- Ü Only employees enrolled in High Deductible Health Plans (HDHP) are eligible to contribute to Health Savings Accounts (HSA), please make sure you have not enrolled in an HSA if you are not enrolled in a HDHP.
- Ü Make sure your withholdings for your health, dental and vision insurance benefits and withholdings for your flexible spending accounts accurately reflect any changes made during open season.
- Ü If you no longer have to provide health and life insurance coverage for your family members, make sure you have dropped your family coverage.
- Ü Review how much you are saving for retirement in your Thrift Savings Plan account.
- Ü Review your tax withholdings.
- Ü Make sure to review the withholdings for any allotments you may need to change or no longer need.
- Ü Please note the deductions for Social Security tax has decreased from 6.2% to 4.2% effective pay period 26.

By reviewing the information captured on the SEL on a regular basis, you could prevent a lot of frustration and it could save you money!

Please take some time today to review your SELs. If you have any questions after reviewing your statement, please do not hesitate to call Human Resources Operations (HRO) at 612-336-3281, so that your questions may be directed to the appropriate staff member. Access your SEL through the National Finance Center's Employee Personal Page at <https://www.nfc.usda.gov/personal/index.aspx>.

For questions on employee eAuthentication accounts, contact ATAC (APHIS Technical Assistance Center) at 877- 944-8457, or send an email to ATAC@aphis.usda.gov .

**The Importance of Contributing
to Your Thrift Savings Plan Account**
By Stephanie Orth



Why should employees contribute to a Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) account?

- ✓ For employees covered under the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS), TSP is an important savings component of your retirement plan.
- ✓ Employees covered under FERS can receive free money, up to 4% of their basic pay!
- ✓ For employees covered under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), TSP is a great way to supplement your retirement plan.
- ✓ Employee contributions are withheld on a tax deferred basis which means an employee's current taxable income is lowered.

The FERS retirement benefit consists of three components: a Basic Annuity, Social Security, and the TSP. The TSP account is the only component employees are able to control. Participating early and throughout an employee's career can mean the difference between a comfortable and a not so comfortable retirement.

FERS employees automatically receive 1% of their basic pay from the agency and are eligible to receive an additional 4% in agency matching contributions. FERS employee contributions are matched by the agency dollar for dollar on the first 3%, and fifty cents on the next 2% contributed. You can decide to contribute a dollar amount or a percentage. Even small contributions can add up to impressive savings.

TSP contributions are tax-deferred. Employee contributions are deducted from their salary before income tax is withheld, which reduces your taxable income. All employees may contribute up to the 2011 IRS elective deferral limit of \$16,500. Employees who are 50 years or older may contribute in 2011 an additional \$5,500 in TSP Catch up contributions. <https://www.tsp.gov/PDF/formspubs/tsp-1-c.pdf>

Employees may enroll or change their TSP election at any time by using the National Finance Center's (NFC) Employee Personal Page (EPP) at <https://www.nfc.usda.gov/personal/index.aspx>. As an alternative, an employee may FAX a completed form TSP-1 to HRO Minneapolis - Benefits at (612) 336-3545. TSP-1 forms are effective at the beginning of the pay period after they are received in Benefits.

Employees may find additional information at www.tsp.gov or may contact the servicing Benefits Specialist for their program http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/benefits.pdf.

INSURANCE HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2011

By Barb Watry



Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHB)

- Did you forget to enroll your adult child (over the age of 22 and under the age of 26) in your Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) coverage during open season and are you afraid you missed your opportunity? Good news! You can still enroll your child under a Qualifying Life Event (QLE), event code 1C, and you have until March 2, 2011, to do so.

Here's what you need to do:

- Ø If you currently enrolled in a Self-only plan and need to change to a Self and Family plan, you will need to complete an SF-2809 Health Benefits Election Form, indicating the event code of 1C, and fax it to the HRO Minneapolis - Benefits at 612-336-3545. Your child will be covered retroactively to January 1, 2011, and you will pay premiums retroactively to the effective date of the enrollment or change.
- Ø If you currently have a Self and Family plan, you need to contact your health insurance provider and let them know that you wish to enroll your child in your FEHB plan and they will assist you with the process.

For additional information on changes under the health care reform, please visit

<http://www.opm.gov/insure/health/aca/>

Health Care Federal Flexible Spending Accounts (HCFSA)

- Effective January 1, 2011, the items eligible for reimbursement from your FSAFEDS health care account have changed. Over-the-counter (OTC) medications or drugs (with the exception of insulin) will not be eligible for reimbursement from your FSA **unless** you have a prescription for that item written by your physician. Other OTC items that are not medications or drugs, such as bandages or nasal strips, will continue to be eligible for FSA reimbursement.
- The Grace Period for using 2010 FSA funds will run from January 1 through March 15, 2011, which means you can submit expenses incurred during that time for reimbursement from unused 2010 FSA funds. Any eligible OTC medicine or drug purchases made in the calendar year 2010 can be submitted for reimbursement during the Grace Period. You may not request reimbursement for OTC drugs or medicines purchased during the Grace Period without a prescription, even if you are requesting reimbursement from 2010 funds.
- Remember - You have until March 15, 2011, to incur expenses to deplete your 2010 FSA account, and you must have the claim for these expenses submitted to FSAFEDS prior to Midnight Eastern Time on April 30, 2011. Any funds remaining in your 2010 account after that time will be forfeited! You can check your account balance by going to the FSAFEDS website at <https://www.fsafeds.com/fsafeds/index.asp>
- If you have any questions, you should contact FSAFEDS at 1-877-FSAFEDS, TTY: 1-800-952-0450, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. until 9 p.m. Eastern Time, or via email at FSAFEDS@shps.com.

INSURANCE HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2011

By Barb Watry



(continued from page 11)

Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (FEGLI)

- The following changes to the FEGLI program were effective October 1, 2010.
 1. Newly hired or newly eligible employees now have 60 instead of 31 calendar days from date of eligibility to elect Optional FEGLI insurance.
 2. Employees who have experienced a FEGLI qualifying life event (QLE) now have 60 instead of 31 calendar days to elect Basic, plus any or all Optional insurance – Option A, Option B (up to the maximum of 5 multiples with no restrictions) and Option C (up to the maximum of 5 multiples with no restrictions). Some qualifying life events include marriage, divorce, death of a spouse, and birth or adoption of a child.
 3. Employees preparing for retirement will have the opportunity to choose “Mixed Elections”, which means that, for example an employee carrying 3 multiples, can elect to have two with full reduction and one with no reduction. This election will be made at the time of retirement: a second election at age 65 will no longer be available.
- For more information on the recent FEGLI changes, please visit <http://www.opm.gov/insure/life/fegli/FEGLIProgramChanges.pdf>

If you have any insurance or retirement related questions, please contact the Benefits Specialist for your program http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/benefits.pdf

Time to file a new W-4

By Margaret McKinney

If you were exempt from Federal Tax in 2010, and do not expect to owe taxes in 2011, you **MUST** file a *new* W-4 restating your exempt status for the 2011 tax year. The new form must be completed and submitted **before February 13, 2011 (PP4)**. If you do not file a new W-4, your 2011 tax withholding will default to an exemption status of Single with zero exemptions. After the February 13, 2011 deadline, no adjustment will be made to reimburse you for taxes withheld at the single rate, so please submit your 2011 W-4

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/forms/other.shtml> in a timely manner to your Processing Service provider
http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/processing_prog_assignments.pdf

Alternatively, you can use the NFC Employee Personal Page (EPP): <https://www.nfc.usda.gov> to complete this information.



What is E-Verify?

By Lorie Gleason

E-Verify is an electronic system which checks employee information obtained from the Employment Eligibility Verification form (I-9 form) against records maintained by both the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Social Security Administration (SSA). The Office of Management and Budget has directed all Federal agencies to verify employment eligibility for all new employees via E-Verify.

The Human Resources Division has been verifying employment eligibility of all new hires since December 10, 2007. In order for MRPBS to continue to comply with the OMB Directive, please complete the following within three work days of a new employees' hire date:

- **FAX** a completed I-9 to 612-336-3551 within 3 days of hire date with the following information:
 - Attention 'e-verify' at the top of the I-9 form
 - Contact name, phone number and employee's supervisor name
- Please be sure that the form is legible and completed correctly (please remember to indicate the employee start date on the I-9)
- Please contact Lorie Gleason if you have any questions regarding e-verify
- Continue to forward a completed I-9 and other new hire paperwork to your Processing Service Provider.