I hope this issue of the HR Broadcast finds all of you and your families healthy, safe, and happy. I spoke about hope in the last issue with respect to the pandemic. I am happy to say we are progressing to the more “normal” standard of life. Vaccinations are increasing every day; now, everyone over age 16 can get a vaccination! By following safety precautions, like wearing a mask and receiving our immunization, we have all helped to decrease the spread of the virus. There is a sense of real optimism that we have not seen in over a year.

May is a month of renewal and hope. Remembering former First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson, she would always say “Where flowers bloom, so does hope.” When I look outside, I see hope - the daffodils, the tulips, the crocuses, and the trees all blooming - reminding me of the fresh start we all have.

We must embrace this time for the many that cannot. The ones that paid the ultimate price. We cannot forget those 573,000 who lost their lives to COVID-19 in the United States or the 3,140,000 who lost their lives worldwide. Within the U.S. community, 32,200,000 people have been infected – 149,000,000 worldwide. These numbers are staggering. We cannot lose sight of the end goal and let the lives lost be in vain. We have come too far to declare victory over the virus too early.

I promise all of you that HRD will be there for you. HRD will be there for ourAPHIS family, our AMS family, our extended USDA family, and our stakeholders. Our team will continue to work with you to share new information as it is released, implement new programs to assist you and yours, and enable our mission.

The fresh start will only continue to grow! In the meantime, as I said in a previous Director’s Corner, we all must be Kind, as part of Human Kind. We all are in this together, interdependent upon one another. The power of all of us working together is far stronger than this virus challenge. We just have to continue to care about one another.

As part of that caring and Kindness, HRD is there to support you. If you have a question, give us a call. If you have a problem, tell us about it. We will help you work on a solution. If you have a suggestion, let us know about it. We are in a partnership with you. Working together makes us stronger!

Audrey Hepburn, a film icon/actress and humanitarian, said that “to plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.” I believe that we have already planted our garden, and it is beginning to blossom and bloom. We will soon realize the fruits of our labor! I believe in tomorrow.

Be safe.

Terri Meighan
Terri Meighan, HR Director
Leading a balanced life means you must often juggle competing demands of work, family life, and personal needs, and it can be stressful finding the time to manage all the important events in your life.

Looking for necessary resources like childcare, medical services, or elder care requires countless hours and competes for your time both at work and at home.

The WorkLife4You Program is a comprehensive resource and referral service that is available at no cost. Some of the resources available to you include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Adoption, Parenting, Child Care, Prenatal, Work and Family, Elder Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Wellness</td>
<td>Safety, Diet and Nutrition, Fitness/Exercise, Men’s, Women’s, Senior, Children’s, General and Emotional Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>College, Summer Programs, Special Education, Preschool – High School Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial/Legal</td>
<td>Credit and Debit, Insurance, Social Security, Personal Finance, Medicare/Medicaid, Real Estate and Loans, Retirement Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Life</td>
<td>Travel, Pet Care, Moving/Relocation, Home Improvement, Automotive Services, Consumer Information</td>
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WorkLife4You is available to assist APHIS employees all day, all week, and all year.

Call the toll-free number at 1-800-222-0364 (1-888-262-7848 TTY) to speak to a specialist or visit the WorkLife4You Website at www.worklife4you.com. To log in, look for the Log In box and enter Screen Name: aphis and Password: lifespan
The Pathways Programs are streamlined developmental programs tailored to promote employment opportunities for students and recent graduates in the Federal workforce. There are specific program requirements that must be met to successfully complete the Pathways Internship Program. It is important to adhere to ALL program requirements to remain as an active Pathways participant.

Pathways Requirements:
• Must have an Individual Development Plan (IDP)
• Must complete at least 40 hours of training
• Participate in a mentoring event or experience
• Complete at least one rotational assignment
• Participate in agency-wide and department-wide training opportunities

A program wishing to retain a student serving on an appointment with a not-to-exceed (NTE) date must submit an SF-52, Request for Personnel Action, requesting an extension or conversion of appointment to Human Resources Operations (HRO). The appointment must be extended 2 weeks before it expires through the eTracker and sent to HRO, Minneapolis, for processing. HRO posts lists of NTE dates by quarter for temporary appointments on the MRP-HRD Data Resource Center SharePoint site, which is accessible by key personnel in each program. As an alternative, NTE dates can be included when pulling position organization listings (POL) from the NFC Reporting Center. If you have an Intern you do not wish to retain, please notify Geeriee.b.lewis@usda.gov and your Servicing Staffing Specialist (found at the following link) https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/business-services/contact_us/hrd/hrd as soon as possible.

Continue reading on next page...
Pathways Guidance for Managers and Interns is as follows:

**Guidance for Managers**

- Pathways Interns with a NTE cannot occupy a position with promotion potential.
- Pathways Interns may be noncompetitively converted to term, career-conditional, or career positions in the Federal Government, but only when the job opportunity announcement includes a condition of employment that the student may be noncompetitively converted through the job opportunity announcement. The supervisor of the Pathways Intern must contact Human Resources, Staffing Division at least one month prior to the possible noncompetitive conversion of a Pathways Intern. **(Please note - conversions are not mandatory but are at the discretion of the hiring agency)**.
- The Pathways Intern must meet the qualification standards for the position to which he/she may be converted.
- Pathways Interns must complete all conversion requirements prior to graduation. Following graduation, the Pathways Intern has a 120-day window of time during which he/she may continue to work as a student and/or await conversion and/or search for a position.
- The Department’s Office of Human Resources Management recommends that the student’s supervisor assign a mentor to the Pathways Intern.

**Guidance for Students**

Pathways Interns are required to:

- Provide proof of their academic status;
- Provide their official transcripts (spring) and unofficial transcripts (fall);
- Provide proof of enrollment twice a year;
- Maintain good academic standing, as defined by the educational institutions that they are attending;
- Complete their Participant Agreement and obtain signatures from their supervisor and the HR official;
- Remain students as long as they are employed under the Internship Program by their agencies; and
- Meet any other agency-specific requirements outlined in their Participant Agreements.

In addition to these requirements, OPM recommends that any Pathways Intern appointed for longer than 90 days be placed on an IDP to create and track his/her career planning, professional development, and training activities.

For more information about Pathways policy and guidance please access: PATHWAYS PROGRAMS HANDBOOK (opm.gov)
The Volunteer Services Program opportunities are open to all interested persons. The Volunteer Services Program allows individuals to get hands-on experience in a variety of career fields from human resources to agricultural science occupations. Volunteers have the opportunity to develop valuable workplace skills, connect and network with professionals in their specialized area(s) of interest, explore the Federal work environment and learn the mission/responsibilities of the agency.

General provisions:

- All USDA volunteers must execute a volunteer agreement.
- Volunteers are not appointed to a Federal position and are not considered Federal employees; therefore, U.S. citizenship is not required. However, individuals who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents may volunteer with proper authorization to work in the U.S.
- Volunteers must be at least 14 years of age. Participation of minors in the Volunteer Service Program must conform with Department of Labor (DOL) regulations, and Federal, State, and local laws. In addition, volunteers under the age of 18 must have parental consent to participate in the volunteer program.
- Volunteers are not Federal employees for any purpose except for the purposes relating to compensation and injury, and relating to tort claims.
- Volunteer service may not displace any employee, nor may it be used to staff a position that is a normal part of the workforce.
- Current USDA employees may perform volunteer service (with the consent of their supervisor) on their own personal time or while on excused absence. Employees may not perform their regular or recurring duties as a volunteer.
- Typically, volunteer assignments are short-term. Initial volunteer terms may last anywhere from one month to a year in duration. The volunteer assignment may be extended beyond the initial term for 1 additional year.
Student and Non-student Volunteers

Student Volunteers
The Student Volunteer Program (SVP) offers unpaid training opportunities to enrich the student’s educational experience and provide opportunities to explore career options as well as develop personal and professional skills. Student volunteer assignments should be made compatible to the academic aims of the student and the educational institution and must have permission of the institution at which the student is enrolled to participate in the program if he/she is to receive course credit for the related assignment.

Regular Volunteers
7 U.S.C. 2272 permits the Secretary of Agriculture to establish procedures to use volunteers in carrying out programs of the Department. The MRP Volunteer Program provides the participant with work experience and the opportunity to explore career options as well as to develop personal and professional skills.

Volunteer Service Experience
Work experience gained through the individual’s volunteer assignment may be credited as related experience under examination rating procedures should the volunteer pursue employment with the Federal Service.

Volunteer Forms
An agreement between the MRP Program Contact (supervisory Federal employee), the volunteer, and in the case of student volunteers, the educational institution consent is required.

The MRP Volunteer Service Program fillable forms, MRP-126A, Student Volunteer Service Agreement; MRP-126B, Regular Volunteer Service Agreement; and MRP-126C, Volunteer Time and Attendance Record are located in the APHIS Forms Library.

Personnel Security
Volunteers are subject to background investigation procedures, which are applied, based on the duration of the volunteer service and the level of access to facilities, equipment use, etc., the volunteer’s assignment requires. For questions on security requirements, it is best to contact the HR Personnel Security staff. For a list of HR Personnel Security Service Providers, follow this link.
Implementation of Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Guidance for Issuance of Credentialing Standards and Impact on Onboarding

By Steve Crescini (Steven.A.Crescini@usda.gov, 612-336-3285), Nancy Bradford (Nancy.L.Bradford@usda.gov, 612-336-3391), and Mone't Morning (Monet.M.Morning@usda.gov, 612-336-3308)

On December 16, 2020, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) issued non-waivable Credentialing Standards to Departments/Agencies (D/A’s) that were to be implemented within 180 days. This requires any hires onboarding on or after June 6th (PP12) to follow the new standards which include finger-printing and completion of the electronic Questionnaires for Investigation Processing (eQIP) prior to Entry on Duty (EOD) or issuance of a LincPass/PIV card.

This new OPM Guidance is not expected to create any lengthy delays in the onboarding process with timely submission of the background investigation by the selectee to Personnel Security and a positive suitability review of the fingerprint results. Every effort has been made to ensure the onboarding process flows smoothly and new personnel (Federal and non-Federal) are brought on board to support the agencies. The acquisition of FIELDPRINT to provide the critical fingerprint element should go a long way to ensure onboarding success for the programs.

**Impact:** All D/As will use these procedures in conjunction with existing credentialing standards for making all decisions regarding the eligibility of individuals for a PIV credential for physical or logical access to Federally controlled facilities and/or information systems. This:

- Applies to persons (Federal/non-Federal) expected to be onboard over 180 days;
- Does not apply to intermittent or temporary employees whose affiliation is repeatedly terminated and reinstated or for any employees who are expected to serve intermittently over multiple years; and
- Does not apply to internal movement of APHIS and/or AMS employees that already have a LincPass/PIV card, unless the person does not have a current background investigation.

**For Federal Hires (who are brand new to Federal Government or transferring from another agency)** -- once the Hiring Office has made their hiring decision, the selectee will be notified that he/she has 5 days to:

- Respond to the Tentative Offer.
- Finish the pre-employment tasks assigned within USA Staffing and provide any other documents to Human Resources. If the New Hire is onboarding outside the USA Staffing system, he/she will need to provide the documents requested by Human Resources.
- Complete fingerprinting by making an appointment at a FIELDPRINT location (see Appendix A).
  - All hires may not need to be fingerprinted. Those with previous Federal service may have fingerprints accessible to HR.
- Transmit their completed eQIP questionnaire to the agency (see Appendix B).
  - All hires may not need to complete a new eQIP as HR may already have it on file or can request it from the selectee’s previous agency.

Continue reading on next page...
Once the fingerprinting, eQIP, and all other onboarding tasks are completed and suitability has been determined for the selectee, Human Resources will release his/her Background Investigation (BI) to the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA) as the selectee completes his/her assigned tasks within USAS Onboarding (if applicable), discuss an entry on duty (EOD) date with the Hiring Office, and send the selectee his/her Final Offer Letter.

After acceptance of the final offer, the selectee will continue to complete his/her assigned tasks within USAS Onboarding (if hired through USA Staffing) or wait until his/her EOD date arrives. Next, an accession action for the selectee will be processed by Human Resources in NFC, allowing for both the eAuthentication invitation and the Linc Pass enrollment messages to be sent.

For Non-Federal Hires – it is the responsibility of the Contracting Officer or the Contracting Officer’s Technical Representative to:

• Inform the Contractor about the fingerprinting and eQIP requirements and that no access will be given to equipment and/or facilities until suitability is determined and the BI is released.
• Ensure the proper BI level is identified in the Statement of Work (SOW) for the contracted position prior to starting work.
• Work closely with the Personnel Security Specialist/Assistant to ensure all required documentation has been provided.

The Personnel Security Specialist/Assistant will provide the Contractor information to make an appointment with FIELDPRINT and will input the Contractor into eQIP. Once the BI is released, the Contractor will be provided the eAuthentication invitation, and, if applicable, the Linc Pass enrollment message.

FIELDPRINT Appendix A
FIELDPRINT is a company that provides all aspects of the fingerprinting process at more than 1,200 locations nationwide that APHIS will utilize via a Memorandum of Understanding in support of the new OPM guidance. Selectees will receive information in their Fingerprint/eQIP email that will direct them to the FIELDPRINT site where they can search for the most convenient site/distance/hours of operation for them. The fee charged by Fieldprint for this service must be borne by the Federal or Non-Federal person making the appointment. Payment is by credit card only with reimbursement available for Federal hires once they are onboarded.

• They must use the code provided to them in their email when making an appointment.
• They must bring the correct documentation.
  o Fieldprint confirmation email message.
  o Two forms of identification.
• They must pay the fee of $16.50.
The electronic Questionnaires for Investigations Processing (eQIP) is a web-based automated system that was designed to facilitate the processing of standard investigative forms when conducting background investigations for Federal security, suitability, fitness, and credentialing purposes. Selectees can only access the eQIP application if they have been invited to do so by the MRPBS HRD Personnel Security Specialist. The following information is helpful to have ready before starting the eQIP process:

- Proof of Citizenship, if applicable, such as: passport, Citizenship Certificate, Naturalization Certificate, or Alien Registration Number.

- Employment History
  - Current and previous work location addresses.
  - Supervisor names, addresses, and contact information.

- Personal Residence(s)
  - Name, address, and phone number of a person who knew you at each address. Note: All contact information must include a physical address. PO Boxes are unacceptable. APO/FPO is allowed.

- Three personal references.
- Relatives' citizenship information, aliases, employers, and foreign activities.
- Selective Service ID number, if applicable.

For each of the categories listed above, you will need to provide information covering the amount of time specified in the question on the form or to your 16th birthday, whichever is shorter. In most categories, the instructions will state that you should not list information before your 18th birthday unless necessary to provide a minimum of 2 years history.
As we are now in the 3rd quarter of FY2021, there are a few reminders to share for performance management.

3rd Quarter Performance Conversations

Supervisors and employees must meet at least once a quarter to discuss progress of assignments, to provide feedback of observed performance and performance expectations, and to identify assignments and/or projects in the upcoming quarter and remainder of the performance year. Third Quarter conversations can be completed anytime during the quarter but must be completed no later than June 30, 2021. There is no minimum time for the employee to perform under standards or for the Rating Official to be in that role before a quarterly performance conversation can occur. Once completed, the conversation is documented in the Enterprise Performance Management Application (ePMA).

Looking Ahead to Year-End Appraisals

Employee performance plans should be established and in place by June 30, 2021, (90 days prior to the end of the performance cycle) for employee performance to be evaluated and rated at the end of the performance cycle (September 30, 2021). Steps should be taken to ensure all employees, including new hires, those who have been reassigned or promoted, and employees who are on temporary promotions or details of more than 90 days are covered by appropriate performance plans and logged into ePMA by June 30. ePMA has job aids and videos available to demonstrate how to prepare and revise performance plans and other performance activities. Additional ePMA training will be offered in late summer as we approach the end of the FY2021 performance cycle and prepare for year-end performance appraisals.

Additional information is available on the MRP Performance Management webpage: MRP Performance Management or you may contact Gwen Montgomery at 301-851-2928 or via email at Gwen.Montgomery@usda.gov. For information regarding ePMA, please contact the HR Systems and Reporting Branch at HR.System.Access@usda.gov.
As award distribution for FY 2021 is underway, please remember that under USDA’s new Employee Performance and Awards policy, the focus has shifted from rating-based awards given at the end of the year, to achievement-based awards distributed throughout the year. The change is intended to make awards more meaningful by shortening the time between employee contributions and recognition. In contrast to the previous policy’s focus on end of year ratings and performance awards, noteworthy, impactful employee effort can and should be recognized when it occurs.

Now that we are fully transitioned from the “old” to the new policy, we encourage you to review the training and summary materials provided during the launch of the new USDA policy (partial list and link below).

**USDA Awards Program Highlights**

- Rating-based Performance Awards and Spot Awards no longer exist. They were permitted during the transition to recognize FY 2020 accomplishments, but awards for FY 2021+ contributions will mostly be in the form of Achievement Awards.
- Achievement Awards (formerly known as Extra Effort Awards) can be given at any time and more than once in a year; can be given as cash and/or time off; and can be given in generally the same amounts that Extra Effort and Spot Awards were (consistent with the scales in Appendix E of the Departmental Regulation (DR) to determine the amounts and Appendix D to determine the approving officials, including the 1st or 2nd line supervisor on all awards). Cash awards are reported as compensation and taxes withheld accordingly; this was also true under the old policy, but some features of Spot Awards were not apparent to some.
- Quality-Step Increases (QSIs) are still available, but with more stringent criteria and approvals.

In the area of Time-Off Awards (TOAs), the policy says that TOAs will not expire and employees may carry up to 80 hours of unused TOA into the next leave year; employees may transfer TOAs to or from other USDA agencies; and up to 40 hours of existing TOAs may be honored for employees transferring into USDA from other Federal departments. The AMS and APHIS Administrators have determined this will help in recruiting Federal employees, and this will be done consistently for employees who transfer into AMS or APHIS on or after 10/1/20 (effective date of the DR).

- **Note:** If you are an employee, supervisor, or administrative support staff of an employee who transferred to AMS or APHIS on or after 10/1/20 with an unused TOA balance at the previous Federal department (e.g., Department of Commerce), please contact Tara Hengtgen, Supervisor, HR Processing (612-336-3321/Tara.Hengtgen@usda.gov), for a review of records, to determine if the TOA can be transferred.

**Refresher materials:**

- **AgLearn:** 1) “New USDA Performance & Awards Policies,” previously assigned to all USDA employees’ accounts and 2) “FY2021 Performance Management and Awards Webinar,” recorded in July 2020 for MRP supervisors and employees.
- **Summary document on Awards & Recognition** distributed by the Department during roll-out of the policy.
- **Bookmark DR 4040-430** for reference, including the charts in Appendices D & E on award amounts and authorization levels.
On December 27, 2020, the Consolidated Appropriations Act was signed into law and extended the repayment period for the deferred Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) taxes. Specifically, the repayment period will run from January 1, 2021 through December 18, 2021 (pay period 26/2020, through pay period 25/2021). The total amount of the 2020 deferred OASDI withholding will be collected on a prorated basis from impacted employees’ pay, divided evenly among those 26 pay periods.

The National Finance Center (NFC) will issue corrected W-2s (for 2020) to impacted employees. However, the corrected W-2s will not be issued until 2022, due to the repayment period. NFC will provide further guidance regarding what employees can expect when we get closer to 2022. You can find more information on OneUSDA.

If you have any questions, please reach out to your Leave and Compensation service provider.
Statements of Earnings and Leave (SELS) are issued each pay period to employees paid through the automated payroll system. SELs can be accessed electronically through the Employee Personal Page (EPP).

Employees are responsible for reviewing the accuracy of all information on their SEL. Employees are encouraged to review their SELs after they make changes, e.g., change in tax withholding, direct deposit allotments, new election or change of health benefits/life insurance coverage, etc.

If an employee finds an error or has questions regarding his/her SEL, he/she should contact the appropriate official:

- Supervisor.
- Civilian Pay Technician on the Leave and Compensation Team.
- Benefit Assistant on the Benefits Team.
- Time and Attendance Clerk.

Below is an explanation of fields found on your SEL:

**Identifying Data**
Provides information about the employee, i.e., social security number, pay period, grade, step, and salary information.

**Earnings and Deductions**
- Provides transaction codes and description of each code entered in webTA.
- Lists number of hours by transaction code per pay period and year-to-date. The total of pay period hours is the total hours of each code and not necessarily the total of hours worked. For example, TC-11 (Night Differential) when paid will appear twice, once as TC-01 paying regular time, and again as TC-11 paying an additional 10%.
  - The total number of hours worked for the pay period will then be more than 80 according to the Statement of Earnings and Leave.
- In most cases the transaction codes and hours should correspond to those reported in webTA.
- Provides monetary amounts that were paid for each transaction code by pay period and year-to-date.
- Shows each deduction in the pay period and year-to-date totals such as:
  - Federal/State tax and exemptions claimed.
  - Retirement (CSRS and FERS, FER-RAE, or FERS-FRAE).
  - Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) deductions.
  - Medical Hospital Insurance Taxes (HITS) of 1.45% on gross earnings.
  - Old Age and Survivors Disability Insurance (OASDI) portion of social security tax of 6.2%.
  - FEHB - shows enrollment code and amount for health insurance.
  - FEDVIP - shows amounts deducted for vision and/or dental insurance.
  - FEGLI - shows basic coverage amount for life insurance.
  - Optional FEGLI - shows age bracket for life insurance.
  - Long Term Care (LT CARE) insurance deductions.
  - Flexible Spending Account (FSA)/Health Savings Account (HSA) deductions.
- Year-to-date totals typically begin with pay period 25 and run through pay period 24 of the following year, because the payment for pay period 25 is usually not issued to employees until the following year.
Year-to-Date Leave Status
An employee’s leave information on his/her SEL reflects what is in the NFC database as well as in his/her EPP.

If an employee finds a discrepancy with his/her leave balances, he/she should have his/her timekeeper complete a leave audit and send it to Leave and Compensation for review and processing.

The “Projected Use or Lose” field shows the amount of annual leave that should be used by the end of the leave year (pay period 26) to avoid forfeiture of annual leave.

Remarks
This field provides information about:
- Adjustments - where pay is adjusted (gross and net).
- Annual salary increase.
- “Over Earn” limitations – this remark will appear when an employee has exceeded the bi-weekly earnings limitation.

If you have any questions, please reach out to your Leave and Compensation service provider.