

New Employee Resource Guide





Welcome to APHIS! Congratulations on becoming a member of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). APHIS employees work 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. There are two core beliefs that guide APHIS' work every day; the first is that healthy and profitable agriculture is good for America because it means feeding and clothing the world. The second is that the Government's role is to do collectively what none of us can do for ourselves.

APHIS' employees are dedicated, compassionate, and highly motivated individuals who work hard to improve the lives of Americans on a daily basis. And now you are a part of that mission. We keep animals and plants healthy—allowing people to enjoy a safe and abundant food supply and protecting the livelihood of our farmers and ranchers. We negotiate trade deals to help agricultural products get to the global marketplace. And we work on the cutting edge of biotechnology and protect the welfare of animals.

This work could not be accomplished without the help of our support units. They help APHIS and its programs accomplish mission critical work by using their expertise in analysis, finance, communications, planning, training, recruitment and talent management, civil rights, and health and safety. The support units make the most of APHIS' resources and create a unified Agency identity.

Much of the work in APHIS is constant, like issuing permits or inspecting licensed facilities. But APHIS is also an emergency response Agency, which means that new challenges or situations can arise suddenly. When that happens, APHIS' program and support unit staffs mobilize to mount a unified and coordinated response effort. Working together as one APHIS, our personnel act swiftly to combat pest and disease outbreaks by communicating vital emergency response information, engaging with producers and farmers, and deploying the resources and staff necessary to ensure that our response efforts are effective.

In conducting all of this work, it's important that we not lose sight of our overall objectives. That's why, when I became APHIS Administrator in 2013, I set very specific goals for the Agency. As you learn more about APHIS and your place in the Agency, I encourage you to take time to read more about these goals on the [Vision and Goals pages](#) of our employee portal, My. APHIS.

As an APHIS employee, you are vital to shaping America's agricultural future by helping us achieve our mission. In fact, APHIS' employees are the Agency's most valuable resource. Your success is fundamental to the Agency's success. That's why we are committed to investing in you, in your training and development and in your health and safety. By working together, I'm sure that we will accomplish many things and overcome any obstacles we face.

Sincerely,

Kevin Shea, APHIS Administrator

During your first week at APHIS, you will be busy learning about the organization, getting your pay and benefits arranged and finding out about your coworkers and your workplace. We want to help you hit the ground running and start your career with us as smoothly as possible. This guide and an upcoming New Employee Portal site are being developed to answer questions commonly asked during the first weeks of employment.

WELCOME TO USDA

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

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 country—as well as for a growing export market. Agriculture is, in fact, this Nation’s largest industry and its largest employer. Approximately 21 million people work in some phase of agriculture, from growing food and fiber to selling it in the supermarket. In addition, Americans enjoy better diets because of USDA’s nutrition research, education efforts, and food assistance programs. USDA research findings, directly or indirectly, benefit all Americans. The Department’s thorough inspection and grading services safeguard and assure standards of quality in the daily food supply.

The [USDA strategic goals](#) outline key priorities and strategies, and objectives to achieve them. USDA provides the best possible service to our customers – the farmers, ranchers, foresters, and producers of American agriculture.

USDA is comprised of 29 Agencies and Staff Offices serving in over 4500 locations domestically and internationally. Agencies are grouped into [Mission Areas](#) each with their own unique focus on protecting American agriculture; a belief that we are all stewards of the land, owned or rented, and it is our responsibility is to leave it better than we found it.

In 2017 under Secretary Sonny Perdue, USDA undertook a large reorganization designed to meet the challenge of advancing agricultural trade, improving service delivery to agricultural producers, and addressing the needs of Rural America.

[USDA Organizational Chart](#)

WELCOME TO USDA APHIS

APHIS is one of the two Agencies that comprise the Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) Mission Area within USDA. MRP facilitates domestic and international marketing of U.S. agricultural products and ensures the health and care of animals and plants. MRP agencies are active participants in setting national and international standards.

- [Agricultural Marketing Service \(AMS\)](#)
- [Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service \(APHIS\)](#)

For nearly 40 years, the central mission of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has been protecting America's agriculture. However, as America changed, that mission 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, promotes animal welfare, regulates the movement and environmental releases of certain genetically engineered organisms, ensures commodities traded internationally are free of animal and plant pests and diseases, limits agricultural damage caused by wildlife, and protects 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 across the nation and beyond its borders. 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: to protect America's agricultural and natural resources. In meeting this mission, we help to ensure the safety and strength of the American agricultural economy.

APHIS is very proud of the leaders who serve as the heads of each of their Programs & Support Units. In many cases these leaders started out just like you – a brand new APHIS employee. Be sure and check out their biographies: [APHIS Leadership Biographies.](#)

APHIS has six operational programs units, three management support units, and an office supporting federal government-wide initiatives. Together, these units work as a dynamic whole—an excellent system designed to safeguard the health of animals, plants, and ecosystems throughout the United States and foster safe agricultural trade worldwide.

If you have been hired into the MRPBS Support Unit, you'll find your work has some unique challenges. You may service not only APHIS customers, but our sister agencies of AMS and/or FAS as well. MRPBS is also responsible for providing data/reports to USDA or other Government-wide oversight offices. APHIS' MRPBS employees do a great of striking that balance, getting their customers what they need and keeping us in good legal standing with those outside the agency.

APHIS PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT UNITS

1. **[Animal Care \(AC\)](#)**
Determines and promotes standards of humane care and treatment of animals through inspections and educational efforts.
2. **[Biotechnology Regulatory Services \(BRS\)](#)**
Protects agricultural and natural resources by ensuring safe development of genetically engineered organisms using a science-based regulatory framework.
3. **[International Services and Trade Support Team \(IS\)](#)**
Provides international animal and plant health expertise to safeguard American agricultural health and promote U.S. agricultural trade.
4. **[Plant Protection and Quarantine \(PPQ\)](#)**
Safeguards agriculture and natural resources from risks associated with the entry, establishment, or spread of pests and noxious weeds.
5. **[Veterinary Services \(VS\)](#)**
Protects and improves the health, quality, and marketability of our nation's animals, animal products, and veterinary biologics by preventing, controlling, and/or eliminating animal diseases, and monitoring, and promoting animal health and productivity.
6. **[Wildlife Services \(WS\)](#)**
Provides leadership to resolve wildlife conflicts and create a balance allowing people and wildlife to peacefully coexist.
7. **[Emergency & Regulatory Compliance Services \(ERCS\)](#)**
Focuses on all issues related to emergency preparedness and response, regulatory investigative and enforcement activities and the regulation of agricultural select agents in one APHIS program.

1. **[Legislative and Public Affairs \(LPA\)](#)**
Manages communications with Congress, States, industry stakeholders, trading partners and the media.
2. **[Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Services \(MRPBS\)](#)**
Provides resource management and administrative services to support the three USDA MRP agencies, one of which is APHIS. Provides investigative, enforcement, and regulatory support services to four APHIS programs
3. **[Policy and Program Development \(PPD\)](#)**
Provides rigorous policy analysis and budgetary and regulatory development for APHIS that is consistent with the Agency's environmental stewardship goals and legal authorities. Also conducts critical programmatic evaluations and reviews to ensure programs are operating efficiently and effectively.

1. **[Office of Civil Rights, Diversity, and Inclusion \(OCRDI\)](#)**
Provides leadership, direction, and technical support to all employees and external service recipients on Civil Rights matters.

YOUR SUPERVISOR

When you arrive in APHIS, you will be welcomed by your Supervisor. It is the responsibility of your

Supervisor to ensure that you have met all the onboarding requirements; that you have access to all the systems and tools your specific work requires and that you have contact with people who can help you build relationships for success.

YOUR SPONSOR

To help you with your transition, your Supervisor may assign you a Sponsor. Your sponsor will typically be a coworker who is not in your chain of command but 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 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.

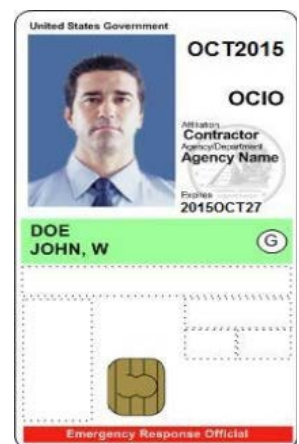
NEW SUPERVISORS

If you are a new supervisor, welcome! This guide contains information you'll need about your own personal onboarding. In addition – as a new Supervisor – there are some requirements specific to supervising others that can be found at the [New Supervisor](#) page of the [Center for Training & Development \(CTOD\)](#) SharePoint site. Additional resources like the Supervisor Reference Guide can be found on the [New Employee Portal](#).

THE LINC PASS

Protecting and securing government assets such as facilities, computers, or information systems is a fundamental responsibility of government employees. To ensure consistent implementation across the federal government, enacted is the Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12). HSPD-12 provides for a standardized federal identity credential; designed to enhance security, reduce identity fraud, and protect the personal privacy of those issued government identification.

USDA refers to the “Linc Pass” as the identification badge. The “Linc Pass”, named after Abraham Lincoln, who established the USDA in 1862. You may also see or hear of it referred to as a PIV credential or a US Access credential. As an employee, you will receive several email messages from HSPD-12 over the course of your employment. Your Linc Pass will contain your photo and a computer chip. The Linc Pass is for physical access into USDA facilities as well as electronic access to computers, networks, and computer applications. Until your Linc Pass arrives, you may receive a Visitor or Site badge for physical access.



Card Life Cycle

- Enrollment
- Card Pickup
- Activation

Card Maintenance

- Required Linc Pass Certificate update at the 3-year mark
- Required Linc Pass Renewal at the 5-year mark
- Required Linc Pass Renewal at the 10-year mark

It is very important that you make an enrollment appointment for your Linc Pass as soon as you receive the message requesting that you do so. Appointments at enrollment stations nearest to you may be limited. If you do not receive an email message from HSPD-12 by the end of your first workweek, please contact: lincpass.security@aphis.usda.gov

You can track the status of your Linc Pass by using the Linc Pass Tracker - <https://hspd12.usda.gov/lit>

Your Linc Pass is only one part of your ability to access the many automated applications you will use during your tenure as an APHIS employee. Prior to and in conjunction with the Linc Pass is eAuthentication. **An eAuthentication ID and Password is available to you within your first workweek and will allow you access to applications until your Linc Pass arrives.**

EAUTHENTICATION

eAuthentication also called “eAuth” is a mechanism to grant access to multiple online programs (WebTA, AgLearn, the APHIS Portal, Concur, electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF), or the Employee Personnel Page (EPP) with your Linc Pass and PIN or with an eAuth ID and password.

All USDA employees, whether full-time or part-time, permanent or temporary, must complete the annual “Information Systems Security Awareness” and the “Rules of Behavior” training. You will not receive access to any USDA computer system without passing this training.

It is very important that you accept the eAuthentication invitation when you receive the message requesting that you do so. The invitation lasts only a few days before expiring. You will receive an email from DoNotReply.ICAM@ocio.usda.gov with the subject line of “eAuthentication: Action Required - Internal User Account Registration” with a link to the registration page.

If you have not received the email after at least 1 week of work, you can contact the APHIS Technical Assistance Center (ATAC) by email to help@usda.gov or by phone at 877-944-8457.

You can request that you receive your eAuth registration email by providing your Government email address. If you will not have access to a Government email address, you can use a personal email to establish an eAuth account.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE AGENCY

APHIS has a long history of successfully responding to traditional animal and plant health emergencies, such as outbreaks of Avian Influenza and Mediterranean Fruit Fly. As America changed, that mission expanded and evolved. Today, in addition to protecting the health of livestock, poultry,

and crops from foreign diseases and pests, APHIS also works closely with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide assistance and coordination during all-hazards emergencies, including natural disasters such as Hurricanes: Harvey, and Maria. There are two programs under our emergency response:

- [Plant Health Response](#)
- [Animal Health Response](#)

APHIS' Emergency Management Safety and Security Division (EMSSD), a branch of service under MRPBS, is responsible for APHIS-wide emergency planning, response, and communications, as well as protecting the health, safety, and security of all employees.

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.

The APHIS Emergency Mobilization Guide identifies standard response procedures for APHIS. The purpose of the Guide is to facilitate the cost-effective and timely coordination of resources needed to successfully respond to agricultural and all-hazards incidents.

- [APHIS Emergency Mobilization Guide–FINAL](#)
- [APHIS Mobilization Guide and Mandatory Plan Q&A](#)
- [APHIS Program Mandatory Mobilization Plans](#)
- [APHIS National Incident Management Teams \(NIMT\)](#)

Voluntary Emergency Ready Response Corps (VERRC)—The VERRC is a cadre of APHIS employees who volunteer to be trained in specific emergency response positions so they can respond as needed to emergencies across the agency. To find more information about the VERRC use the link below.

[Voluntary Emergency Ready Response Corps](#)

APHIS LOCATIONS



APHIS has offices, laboratories, and field locations across the United States and throughout the world. Our five centralized office locations are shown below:

- USDA Center at Riverside – Riverdale, MD
- South & Whitten Buildings – Washington, DC
- APHIS Fort Collins Building B Office – Fort Collins, CO
- APHIS Raleigh Office – Raleigh, NC
- APHIS Minneapolis Office – Minneapolis, MN

WORK SCHEDULES

The standard tour of duty for a full-time employee is a 40-hour workweek consisting of 5 days of 8 hours each day, Monday through Friday. Though, there are flexibilities available, you and your supervisor will discuss your work schedule based upon Agency and program needs.

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Establishing performance requirements and managing employee performance is critical. Performance appraisal ratings are very important to the career of a Federal civil service employee. A performance rating is a factor in making promotion selections and in determining who will receive a performance award. A performance rating also provides a basis for taking adverse action because of poor performance, which can mean a reduction in grade or even removal from Federal service.

Since the performance document is meant to clarify for both the employee and the supervisor what work is to be accomplished for the year; it is important for you to provide as much input as possible. Greater employee input leads to greater employee "buy in" of the goals and tasks to be accomplished.

Government-wide requirements and USDA policy provide that employees should be rated on an annual basis. The results of the appraisal process are to be used as a basis for training, rewarding, reassigning, promoting, reducing in grade, retaining, or removing employees. Employees must perform their duties under established performance elements and standards for a minimum period of time before they may be evaluated. USDA agencies have some flexibility to set this minimum time, but under no circumstances can it be less than 60 days. Time frames can also be negotiated and included in the collective bargaining unit agreement (as applicable).

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

USDA promotes the use of Individual Development Plans (IDP) as a positive way to develop effective and engaged employees. In that context, every employee should have an IDP. USDA encourages every employee to use “My Plan” in AgLearn for the development their online IDP.

- A clear statement of your career goals
- A map for attaining goals that specifies immediate and long-range developmental need
- An individually-tailored action plan to develop specific competencies (knowledge and skills) needed to improve performance in the employee’s present position or to prepare for new responsibilities
- A written plan for scheduling and managing your development
- A tool for a supervisor to estimate resources needed for your development training

YOUR PAY

It is very important that you review your first paycheck (also known as [Leave and Earnings Statement](#)), thoroughly and ensure you receive an answer for every question that you pose. Further, it is even more important to review your paycheck every payday or thereafter. Trying to fix errors, several pay periods later can prove to be incredibly difficult not only for the pay technician; however, even more of a challenge for the employee. 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. If you have questions about your LES or your pay, you should contact your respective [Leave and Compensation Service Provider](#).

OVERTIME

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

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

ANNUAL LEAVE

Annual leave is for any reason you need time off. Most people use it for vacations and personal time off. Except for emergencies, you must request approval from your supervisor in advance. An employee earns annual leave for each full pay period of employment unless he/she is in a non-pay status for the entire pay period. Your number of years of Federal employment, including creditable military service determines the accrual rate. The following table outlines the annual leave categories and the accrual rates for each:

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

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

Pay status hours for part-time employees that do not equal the number necessary for a minimum leave credit are carried over from one pay period to the next to accumulate toward future leave credits. Employees can carry 30 days (240 hours) of unused annual leave from year to year. Note, use your annual leave throughout the year to avoid losing accrued leave above the 30-day limit.

The [Leave Donor Program](#) allows a Federal employee to donate unused accrued annual leave to another Federal employee that 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](#).

OTHER FORMS OF LEAVE

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

BENEFITS

Eligibility for employee benefits will depend upon your type of appointment and your tour of duty. Generally, you must be hired under a non-temporary appointment and have a regular tour of duty, in order to be eligible for benefits. Temporary employees are immediately eligible for dependent care flexible spending accounts and become eligible for limited benefits after they have completed one year of continuous service. **Benefits selections are a personal choice**, below is a rundown on all of the Federal benefits that are available and the window of opportunity to enroll in them outside of an open season period or qualifying life event. **NOTE – you may have the opportunity to complete these benefits forms electronically within USAS Onboarding. Please do not send hard copies if you have done them electronically.**

HEALTH INSURANCE

You have 60 days to submit the health benefits election form on the SF-2809. You can submit this form to your Benefits Servicing Provider (last two pages only) and they will process it for you.

- This link may help you choose a plan:
<http://www.opm.gov/insure/health/planinfo/index.asp>.
- This link is to a tool that allows comparison of up to four different plans at once:
<http://www.opm.gov/insure/health/search/PlanSearch.aspx?zipcode=20737&FFSSearch=on&empType=a&payPeriod=c>.

LIFE INSURANCE

You have 60 days to increase your life insurance. You currently have Basic coverage, and at your time of hire, may elect any additional coverage options you wish.

- This Link is to the FEGLI form SF-2817. This can be submitted to your Benefits Servicing Provider for processing
- This link summarizes the different options you have for coverage:
<http://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/insurance-overview/life-insurance-overview.pdf>
- You may use the FEGLI calculator to determine the coverage and cost of the different options. Here's a link to the calculator: <https://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/calculators/fegli-calculator/>.

THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN

You automatically enrolled contributing 3% to your traditional (pretax) account in an age appropriate Lifecycle Fund. Since the agency matches up to 5% of your contributions (traditional and or Roth), it is highly recommended that you increase your contributions to at least 5%.

- This link is to the TSP form: <https://www.tsp.gov/forms/tsp-1.pdf>

If you decide to change your contribution amount, you can either make the change yourself using the Employee Personal Page (EPP) or submit the TSP-1 form to us for processing. There is no time limit to do this and you can change it whenever you like (but no more than once a pay period). To learn more about the Thrift Savings Plan, you can visit their website: www.tsp.gov.

DESIGNATION OF BENEFICIARY

It is only necessary to complete a designation of beneficiary form when you do not want to follow the **normal order of precedence**, which is:

- To the **widow or widower**.
- If none of the above, to the **child or children**, with the share of any deceased child distributed among the descendants of that child.
- If none of the above, to the **parents** in equal shares or the entire amount to the surviving parent.
- If none of the above, to the **duly appointed executor or administrator of the estate**.

- If none of the above, to the **other next of kin** who are entitled under the laws of the domicile of the insured at the date of death.

Designation of Beneficiary forms, if completed, must be witnessed and mailed, not faxed because we have to have the original form. Also, a word of caution: there can be no white-out or cross-outs on these forms.

DESIGNATION OF BENEFICIARY FORMS

- Unpaid Compensation (covers any money owed to you by the agency):
http://opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/SF1152.pdf
- FEGLI (life insurance): http://opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf2823.pdf
- FERS (retirement contributions): http://opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/SF3102.pdf
The original Thrift Savings Plan designation form must be sent to TSP, not HRD. There is an address for TSP on the form. <https://www.tsp.gov/forms/tsp-3.pdf>

You should review your designation of beneficiary forms periodically to ensure they reflect your current intentions and information. A will has no effect on payment of Federal benefits. However, a court order, if present, does take precedence over the designation.

OTHER BENEFITS FORMS

- Flexible Spending Account (60 day deadline for enrollment):
www.fsafeds.com or 1-877-372-3337
- Dental and Vision Insurance (60 day deadline for enrollment):
www.benefeds.com or 1-877-888-3337
- Federal Long Term Care Insurance (you can enroll at any time, but if you do it within 60 days, you can use the abbreviated application):
www.ltcfeds.com or 1-800-582-3333

TALX – THE WORK NUMBER FOR EVERYONE

TALX - Work Number for Everyone is a national employment verification service which provides employment and salary verification information to credit and reference verifiers immediately upon request. As an employee, you are responsible for authorizing the release of your employment and salary information to the credit and reference verifiers.

To obtain an authorization code:

- Call 1-800-EMP-AUTH (1-800-367-2884) from a touch-tone phone or [via the web](#)
- Enter the following information when prompted:
 - USDA's company code (10284)
 - Your social security number
 - Your individual PIN number. Your PIN number is based on your 4-digit month and day of birth. For example, if your birthday is September, 24 - your PIN is 0924.

To access your employment information, verifiers will need:

- one of your authorization codes
- the verifier's phone number 1-800-367-5690 or [via the web](#)
- your social security number
- USDA's company code (10284)

WORKPLACE RESOLUTION & WELLNESS

[Workplace Resolutions and Wellness Branch](#) provides many services to assist employees on a personal level and with issues that arise in the work environment. The services include:

- Transit Subsidy Program
- Telework Initiative
- Employee Assistance Program
- Work Life Wellness Program
- Reasonable Accommodations for people with disabilities
- Collaborative Resolution

BARGAINING AGREEMENTS & UNION REPRESENTATION

All employees are encouraged to confirm if they are a part of a bargaining unit. If so, determine the point of contact for the union at their location. If your new position is covered under a bargaining agreement or union representation, please contact the [Labor Relations team](#) and or your supervisor.

EMPLOYEE CONDUCT & RESPONSIBILITIES

As an APHIS employee you should be aware that there are thirteen [prohibited personnel practices](#), including reprisal for whistleblowing, which are defined by law at § 2302(b) of title 5 of the United States Code (U.S.C.). A personnel action (defined in 5 U.S.C. § 2302(a)(2)(A) to include appointments, promotions, reassignments, disciplinary actions, and other personnel matters) may need to be involved for a prohibited personnel practice to occur.

Additionally, USDA also has directives regarding employee conduct and responsibilities. Please review the details of the following directives:

- [USDA Directive - DR4070-735-001](#) Employee Responsibilities and Conduct (10/04/07)
- [Standards of Ethical Conduct](#) for Employees of the Executive Branch, [5 CFR 2635](#)

- Human Resources Desk Guide (HRDG) – The mechanism for communicating personnel procedures for the two MRP agencies. The purpose of the [HRDG](#) is to give supervisors, managers, and employees’ information needed to fulfill their personnel responsibilities.
- APHIS Communications Guidelines – The [Communications Guidelines](#) inform APHIS employees on how to communicate with the public, Congressional staff, and the media.
- [APHIS Information Technology](#) (ITD) - there are a guidelines with regards to use of information technology tools such as computers, software – email, work mobile phones, etc.
- [APHIS Telework](#) – please discuss any questions you have with your supervisor.

UNIFORMED SERVICES EMPLOYMENT AND REEMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ACT

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act ([USERRA](#)) protect 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.

CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964

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.

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM

If you are an employee or applicant for employment and believe that you have been discriminated against, you may file a complaint with the [Office of Civil Rights, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) (OCRDI). An EEO counselor or mediator will assist you with traditional EEO Counseling or mediation through Alternative Dispute Resolution. An attempt will be made to bring about a resolution within 30 days. If during counseling, the counselor is unable to accomplish this, and you agree, the time may be extended up to an additional 60 calendar days. If the matter is not resolved by the conclusion of the counseling process, EEO will advise you of the procedures for filing a formal complaint.

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](#).

UNSCHEDULED OFFICE CLOSURES

There are policies and procedures nonemergency APHIS employees are to follow for early dismissal or closure of activities due to emergency conditions. This information applies to snow emergencies, severe icing conditions, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, air pollution, power failures, interruptions of public transportation, and other situations in which significant numbers of employees are prevented from reporting for work on time or which require offices to close all or part of their activities.

Most APHIS employees are designated as nonemergency employees. "Emergency employees" are defined as those who occupy critical positions that may be vital to public health, safety, welfare, national defense, or the operation of essential facilities or functions. If this definition applies to you, you will be notified in writing by your supervisor.

MRP Teleworkers, regardless of type of agreement, are expected to be prepared to telework, especially when weather events are predictable. Only in rare, occasional circumstances will "weather and safety leave" be granted to a teleworker who is unprepared or unable to telework. All instances where this type of leave is granted will be documented on the employee's T&A. During emergency situations, management will determine and advise emergency employees if they are needed at the worksite or may perform duties at an approved telework location.

Employees located in the **National Capital Region** (Washington DC & Riverdale MD) will follow guidance issued by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) regarding dismissal of employees and closure of executive agencies for weather related emergencies. The [Employee Information Line](#) provides information on the Status of USDA facilities in the National Capital Region USDA and/or Agency Administrators will make dismissal and closure decisions during non-weather emergencies. Those decisions, including the time of the earliest dismissal, are communicated through the USDA Director of Human Resources Management to the MRP Human Resources (HR) Director. The MRP HR Director immediately relays this information to designated officials of APHIS for dissemination within their respective agencies. OPM also provides announcements to the media.

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

- Federal Executive Board declares an emergency for which employees will be excused
- Official public announcement by local, state, or Federal authorities to avoid travel
- Advice obtained from MRP Human Resources if the decision cannot be made

If you have any questions or concerns about these types of office closures, please talk to your supervisor or refer to Human Resources Desk Guide, [Subchapter 4630](#),

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.

EMAIL & INTERNET USE

It is vital that you are a trustworthy and responsible as an APHIS email & [Internet user](#). While employees 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; Internet access and personally identifiable information (PII) must be protected against waste, fraud, unauthorized release and/or abuse. This includes those systems owned, operated or funded by APHIS or those supplied for APHIS use by contractors.

Remember, as a Federal employee there is no expectation of privacy in your email, instant or text messages, Internet browser history or any applications on a Government computer.

Government computer systems and networks are monitored on a regular, on-going basis. As an employee, contractor, or subcontractor you have consented to such monitoring through your use of these systems and networks. You can be held liable to investigation, prosecution or disciplinary action based on the inappropriate use of these systems and networks. USDA computer systems and networks are to be used only for official USDA business. Unofficial use includes such things as browsing gambling or sexually explicit sites, conducting unofficial business or spending significant time online. Such use is prohibited. Employees are permitted limited personal use of the internet before or after work, and during designated lunch periods and breaks. Employees may not use government computer equipment to engage in a for-profit personal business.

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 messages 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 messages that constitute a record will also 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.

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.

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 but is not limited to items such as: office supplies, computers, telecommunications equipment and services, Government mail; printing and reproduction facilities, Government records, and Government vehicles.

TRAVEL & THE GOVERNMENT TRAVEL CARD

CONCUR is the APHIS e-travel system that provides all of the tools that federal government users need to quickly book travel, as well as create and submit authorizations and vouchers. Before you are issued a Government travel card, you will need to pass the course entitled *USDA Travel Charge Card Training* found within AgLearn.

The Government Travel card must only be used for expenses incurred with official travel. Government employees must carry their government travel card with them when on official government travel. You must employ prudent travel practices and to observe rules and regulations governing travel at USDA as set forth in the [Federal Travel Regulation](#) (FTR), the [Agriculture Travel Regulation](#) (ATR) and any Agency specific regulations.

Employees who use the Travel charge card for inappropriate or nonofficial travel 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. 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

There are four key fundamentals 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.

GOVERNMENT-OWNED VEHICLES (GOVs)

Throughout your career at the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), you may be required to operate a government-owned vehicle (GOV) for official government business. When possible, as assigned, a GOV will be shared with other personnel to eliminate the use of a privately owned vehicle. If an employee is required to be an incidental motor vehicle operator, that individual will be required to maintain a valid State driver's license and complete the *APHIS – NSC 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.

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

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

employment. If your policy is insufficient or it lacks such coverage, you may want to consider purchasing additional insurance to close this potential gap in liability coverage. The Federal government is prohibited from reimbursing you for such coverage.

PERSONAL RECORDS

As an employee, you should maintain copies of your 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
- AgLearn Training
- Awards

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

EMPLOYEE PERSONAL PAGE (EPP)

You 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 synched your credentials with eAuthentication using your EPP ID and password the first time. Your Leave & Earnings Statement is updated through the EPP each pay period. It is important to verify that the statement accurately reflects your hours worked, leave taken and earned, and required or elected payroll deductions. Report any discrepancies immediately to your Human Resources Office.

TIME & ATTENDANCE (WEBTA)

An official Time and Attendance (T&A) record for each employee maintained by the WebTA system. Your timekeeper is the official record keeper for time and attendance purposes. You will have access to WebTA when you receive your eAuthentication credentials; until then, you will follow the manual process identified by your supervisor.

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.

AgLearn

AgLearn is the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) enterprise-wide learning management system (LMS). The application 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. AgLearn is much more than just a Web site you go to for mandatory online training.

- 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. If you have ever been nagged by a troublesome software problem, you may find reference books, quick reference guides, or even tutorials on a particular subject within AgLearn.
- Offers courses on management skills, or leadership.
- Provides an electronic registration and training approval tool in APHIS to support your learning and development.