

**Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program (DVAAP)
Annual Accomplishment Report
FY 2017**

I. Executive Summary

In accordance with Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, Subpart C, this report represents the FY 2017 accomplishments for veterans programs for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). The report provides an assessment of the current status of disabled veterans in the APHIS workforce through partnerships that share information, collaborate, and develop strategies to increase diversity and inclusion throughout APHIS, as well as align APHIS' hiring initiatives and employment opportunities for veterans, disabled veterans, and persons with disabilities.

APHIS is committed to the recruitment, employment, advancement, and retention of people with disabilities, particularly those with targeted disabilities, and disabled veterans with special emphasis on outreach activities for disabled veterans with a 30 percent or more compensable service connected disability. To accomplish this, the Agency:

- ensures nondiscrimination against people with disabilities and fosters full participation in and access to all USDA programs, activities and services;
- provides technical support and assistance in providing reasonable accommodations for applicants and employees with disabilities;
- develops and implements a continuing comprehensive approach to the Department's Affirmative Action Program for Individuals with Disabilities and Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program (DVAAP);
- provides technical employment information on the non-competitive, excepted service appointing authorities and assistance to applicants and employees with disabilities and potential employees;
- ensures that qualified applicants and employees with disabilities receive the necessary work-related accommodations in order to receive USDA services and/or carry out their duties;
- conducts disability awareness training to educate managers, supervisors, and coworkers on how to interact, respect, and work with people with disabilities; and
- works to dispel myths, fears, and misconceptions about what people with disabilities can or cannot accomplish.

In FY 2017, based on the FY 2017 DVAAP Action Plan, APHIS continued to devote substantial efforts to work on promoting diversity and recruiting a dynamic and first-class workforce. In doing so, the Agency continued to focus on increasing the employment of Veterans/Disabled Veterans. APHIS has an extensive recruitment and action plan that addressed and implemented outreach and recruitment activities for these mission areas.

II. Organizational Structure

- Agency Mission Overview: APHIS is a multi-faceted agency with a broad mission area that includes protecting and promoting U.S. agricultural health, regulating genetically engineered organisms, administering the Animal Welfare Act, and carrying out wildlife damage management activities. These efforts support the overall mission of the USDA, which is to protect and promote food, agriculture, natural resources, and related issues.

Within APHIS, the Human Resources Division (HRD) and the Office of Civil Rights, Diversity and Inclusion (OCRDI) work in partnership to support the Agency's Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program objectives. Both organizations provide guidance and assistance to field and headquarters managers and supervisors in an effort to help the Agency meet its goal to acquire and develop a diversified workforce.

- Agency/Office DVAAP Program Office and Point of Contact (POC):
Patrick W. Johnson
Diversity and Inclusion Specialist
National Veterans Employment Program Manager
Office of Civil Rights, Diversity, and Inclusion
E-mail: Patrick.Johnson@aphis.usda.gov
Telephone: (301) 851-3137

III. FY 2017 Accomplishment Report

- **Recruit and Employ**

APHIS continues to reach out and partner with organizations and individuals at the Federal, State, County, and non-governmental levels via its Human Resources (HR) Veterans' Employment Emphasis Coordinator (VEEC). The VEEC fosters these partnerships to ensure increased awareness and access to employment with APHIS. The APHIS VEEC is a veteran himself with over 23 years of active service, who brings firsthand veteran experience that can be beneficial to the veteran entering the application process. In FY 2017, Program Managers and HR Staff regularly referred positions to the VEEC when available with the intent to promote the hiring of veterans and Schedule A (disability) eligible candidates for noncompetitive job placement options.

The VEEC participates in monthly meetings with the APHIS Human Resources Office (HRO) and the Office of Civil Rights, Diversity, and Inclusion (OCRDI) to share best practices, resources, and effective outreach strategies. In addition to positions being directly recruited for, the VEEC continues to conduct outreach efforts to notify veteran organizations nationwide of positions currently being advertised on USAJOBS at the direct request of hiring managers. Management and Regulatory Program Business Services (MRPBS) HRO continued its efforts to increase retention rates of veterans hired by utilizing the Veterans Assisting Leaders Understanding Employing Veterans (VALUE Vet) group previously established in FY 2012. VALUE Vet was founded by veterans already employed in MRP to ensure the newly hired veteran has a group of veterans that have made the transition for military to federal service successfully are available to answer any questions the newly hired

veteran may have, or work with leadership to ensure a smooth transition is implemented to increase the success rate of first time hires into federal service.

APHIS operates under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Office of Economic Opportunity, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service, and USDA to improve employment and career development opportunities for veterans and veterans with disabilities in the Federal Government. This is accomplished by advertising directly to Department of Veterans Affairs, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Officers, and Employment Coordinators, County Veteran Service Officers, and other partners to notify, consult with, and ultimately refer eligible and qualified candidates for possible consideration by hiring managers.

During FY 2017, APHIS broadened its outreach efforts to veterans by continuing its partnership with MilitaryConnection.com as part of APHIS' use of social media to promote hiring opportunities to veterans. MilitaryConnection.com is a comprehensive online directory of resources, whose focus is employment for the veteran. MilitaryConnection.com is recognized by Weddles and the International Association of Employment Web Sites as a Top 100 Employment Web Site that has over 298,000 followers on Twitter. APHIS also initiated a partnership with the various branches of the military service (Marine Corps, Army, Navy, and Air Force) Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Coordinators to ensure veterans preparing to leave the service are familiar with APHIS and the hiring opportunities that exist. APHIS provided each TAP Coordinator with an informational flyer that is included in the veterans' TAP binder for their review and questions. APHIS expects over 50,000 veterans from diverse backgrounds to have participated in the TAP classes during FY 2016.

APHIS has partnered with Departmental Management on a reoccurring basis to network and advertise available positions, seek outreach assistance, and generate awareness on behalf of veteran hiring initiatives. Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) and the Department, under a MOU with the Department of Veterans Affairs, continued the VR&E's Non-Paid Work Experience (NPWE) program by providing stakeholder education of the NPWE directly to APHIS, AMS, and GIPSA leaders and managers during the monthly Administrative Officer calls. In conjunction with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the MRP VEEC, APHIS drafted and distributed a comprehensive information document designed to assist with the understanding and implementation of the NPWE program and has been widely disseminated to all MRP Administrative Officers. APHIS also assisted veterans in the job application process as well as coordinated with veteran service organizations and colleges with higher veteran populations to attract and recruit veteran talent for noncompetitive placement in MRP positions.

Additionally, the APHIS National Veterans Employment Program Manager (VEPM) and VEPMs from other USDA Agencies have developed the *Veterans and Persons with Disabilities Portal*, similar to an established version that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) utilizes. This portal is a result of Secretary Vilsack's commitment to increase the employment of Veterans and Persons with Disabilities at USDA. The primary function of the portal is to provide the resumes of Veterans and Persons with Disabilities that USDA mission areas, agencies, and staff offices can consider filling positions non-competitively across the United States. The portal was developed to emulate the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Shared List of People with Disabilities, with the addition of resume building and other

employment readiness tools. Affectionately known as the Bender List, this resource is a list of people who are eligible to be hired non-competitively through the Schedule A hiring authority.

The Department, in partnership with the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), has implemented an online toolkit for managers on disability employment called the Just-in-Time Toolkit, developed by Cornell University. The Toolkit consists of ten tools: that can each be used in five minutes or less. Tools are based on real-life work situations that real managers have encountered on disability issues, but include specific information unique to your organization. If a manager chooses, each tool contains other links to test your knowledge, print out a one-page sheet of reminders, or pursue further resources.

Also, in FY 2017, the APHIS Office of Civil Rights, Diversity, and Inclusion, APHIS Human Resources Division, the Veterans Employment Program, and Veterans Employee Organization (VEO), hosted the first annual “Benefits of Hiring Veterans Workshop for Managers, Supervisors, and Employees”. Departmental Representatives from the USDA Veterans Recruitment Program, Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, and Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) were panelists and presenters. The workshop was an opportunity for employers to learn about the advantages of hiring Veterans including: Career Fairs, Job Matching, and Apprenticeships.

Additionally, the following targeted recruitment events were attended during FY 2017:

- **Hiring Our Heroes Hiring Fair – November 16, 2016- Ft. Myer, VA**
- **Operation Warfighter Internship Fair - December 7, 2016- Ft. Belvoir, VA.**
- **Student Veterans of America (SVA) - January 5-7, 2017- Anaheim, CA.**
- **Ft. Meade Community Job Fair - May 24, 2017- Ft. Meade, MD.**

In addition to the targeted recruitment events attended, the following was available as a valuable tool for veterans to reach out and find information on a variety of subjects and issues that could be applicable to them during the course of their pre-employment or employment:

- **Veterans Website.** The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Veterans and People with Disabilities Portal provides veterans and Persons with Disabilities a gateway to uploading resumes and related documents into a central resource from which USDA HR staff and hiring managers can recruit to fill vacant positions non-competitively. The Portal can be visited at www.usda.gov/vpdportal.
- **Veterans Website.** For veterans already employed with USDA, the APHIS Veterans’ Employment Program Manager can access and utilize a web page which is accessible on USDA’s community website at <https://connections.usda.gov/communities/community/veterans>. The site allows

USDA veterans to share information and learn from each other about employment and working at USDA. It offers information on a variety of topics, ranging from helping veterans with credit options to women veterans' health issues.

- **Promote and Develop**

In FY 2017, APHIS veterans had access to a wide variety of development tools, such as the APHIS Leadership Roadmap and the APHIS Leadership Development Toolkit. The Kit provides a methodical process to develop Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and offers guidance on employee growth and continued advancement.

APHIS also offers a mentoring program that is available to all employees, including veterans. The *Open Mentoring Network* is an on-line learning tool which allows users to share knowledge, select mentoring partners, create learning plans, share learning resources, and more. It allows for learning across geographical boundaries, job function, position, and/or demographics. As employees make new connections using the Open Mentoring system, they strengthen their interpersonal networks, share information and expertise, and broaden their knowledge base across APHIS. Veterans can also avail themselves of an internal coaching program designed to help APHIS meet its succession needs by passing on institutional knowledge and developing its leaders. This program provides APHIS leadership with continued support to effectively deal with the challenges of a changing work environment.

The Agency's *Reasonable Accommodation Program* promotes a workplace that provides reasonable accommodations to remove workplace barriers that would prevent individuals with disabilities, including disabled veterans, from participating in the job application process for Federal employment; prevent them from performing essential job functions; and prevent them from enjoying the same benefits and privileges of employment as non-disabled employees. In FY 2017, the Workplace Resolutions and Wellness Branch sponsored five training opportunities on reasonable accommodation-related topics, including an overview of the reasonable accommodation process, accommodating employees with cancer, general telework versus telework as a reasonable accommodation, and assistive technology.

Reference guides and pamphlets are also available, which provide answers to critical questions about employees with disabilities on a range of topics such as: incentives and return on investment; interviewing and hiring; achieving workplace success; and retaining valued employees.

FY 2017 promotion and workforce profiles are reflected in the following chart. Total veteran promotions are 2.0% higher than in FY 2016. 30% or more disabled veteran promotions also increased by about 2.0%. Although the size of the overall Agency workforce decreased in FY 2017, the veteran workforce increased slightly in most categories.

FY 2017 Veteran Promotions						
		Total Promotions	Total Veteran Promotions	Non-Disabled Veteran Promotions*	Disabled Veteran Promotions**	30% or more Disabled Veteran Promotions***
FY 2017 Promotions	#	990	165	58	28	79
	%		17.0%	5.9%	2.9%	8.0%
FY 2016 Promotions	#	949	146	62	28	56
	%		15.0%	6.5%	3.0%	5.9%
FY 2017 WF Profile	#	8211	1121	586	171	364
	%		13.7%	7.1%	2.1%	4.4%
FY 2016 WF Profile	#	8596	1169	662	170	337
	%		13.6%	7.7%	2.0%	3.9%

*5-point (TP) and 10-point 'other' (XP)

**10 point disability (XP) and 10-point compensable (CP)

***10 point 30% or more compensable (CPS)

- **Agency Oversight**

HRD and OCRDI continued to review existing and projected attrition/retention and related issues of the advancement of disabled veterans, and identified any barriers that needed to be removed and/or improved in the employment of disabled veterans. They also evaluated planned efforts to promote employment and advancement opportunities for qualified veterans through review and analysis of hiring, retention, and promotion rates based on statistical analysis. HRD provides a bi-weekly report to the Deputy Administrator for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Services (MRPBS), which is shared with the Administrator and the Under Secretary's office on hiring and profile trends in placement and representation of disabled veterans.

On a quarterly basis, the HR Broadcast Newsletter is published and provides valuable information to managers, supervisors, and employees on a variety of topics, including veterans hiring. Additionally, management actively seeks out and listens to employee

opinions and concerns, through town hall meetings, forums, and on-line portals that allow for open communication. Through these venues, employees have a clear picture of the mission and direction of the organization, and how their work contributes to Agency goals. These communication venues enhance efficiency, avoid duplication and confusion, and are designed to ensure that policies and messages are consistent.

A training course has been made mandatory for managers to provide them with a solid understanding of veterans hiring authorities and flexibilities. The course familiarized participants with veterans' employment options and described the benefits to all parties involved: managers, the Agency and veterans seeking Federal employment. This course also explains how certain special appointing authorities can be used to increase the number of veterans in the workplace and to expedite the hiring process.

- **Program Execution**

In FY 2017, HRD and OCRDI assisted APHIS programs with diversity and inclusion efforts through the review of existing and projected attrition and retention and related issues and, in concert with key management officials, strategized corrective measures. HRD and OCRDI continued to pursue partnerships within the mission area, with other organizations, and in the local community to support disabled veterans programs and the hiring of veterans in the Federal government. As part of the DVAAP Plan, APHIS continues its efforts to retain, recruit, and hire disabled veterans. It adheres to the vision and strategic goals set forth in the Office of Personnel Management's Government-wide Veterans' Recruitment and Employment Strategic Plan.

IV. Agency Challenges

In FY 2017, APHIS had a total of 953 separations, and of those separations 160 (16.8%) were veterans. The total percentage of veterans separating from the Agency was slightly lower in FY 2017 than in FY 2016. Additionally, more veterans separated than were hired, but this is likely due to the hiring freeze imposed on Federal agencies earlier this year. The Agency had a total of 698 new hires, and of those new hires 96 (13.8%) were veterans. At the end of FY 2017, APHIS had a total of 1121 veterans in the workforce, 531 of which were disabled veterans.

FY 2017 APHIS Veteran Employees by Preference Type						
		Total Hires	Total Vets	Non-Disabled Vets*	Disabled Vets**	30% or more Disabled Vets ***
FY 2017 Hires	#	698	96	26	15	55
	%		13.8%	3.7%	2.1%	7.9%
FY 2016 Hires	#	1064	214	78	36	100
	%		20.1%	7.3%	3.4%	9.4%
FY 2017 Separations	#	953	160	84	25	51
	%		16.8%	8.8%	2.6%	5.4%
FY 2016 Separations	#	814	142	80	19	43
	%		17.4%	9.8%	2.3%	5.3%
FY 2017 WF Profile	#	8211	1121	586	171	364
	%		13.7%	7.1%	2.1%	4.4%
FY 2016 WF Profile	#	8596	1169	662	170	337
	%		13.6%	7.7%	2.0%	3.9%

*5-point (TP) and 10-point 'other' (XP)

**10 point disability (XP) and 10-point compensable (CP)

***10 point 30% or more compensable (CPS)

FY 2017 APHIS Veterans Preference – Minority Gender Profile		
Female	Male	Total
209 (18.6%)	912 (81.4%)	1,121 (100.0%)

V. Plan Certification

This certification indicates that the DVAAP program is being implemented as required by 5 CFR 720 and appropriate guidance issued by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. Additionally, APHIS has a current plan as required by the regulation.

A. Designated DVAAP Certifying Official:

- 1) Name: Michon M. Oubichon
- 2) Title: Director, Office of Civil Rights, Diversity, and Inclusion
- 3) Email: Michon.M.Oubichon@aphis.usda.gov
- 4) Telephone: (202) 799-7012

B. Designated DVAAP POC:

- 1) Name: Patrick W. Johnson
- 2) Title: Diversity and Inclusion Specialist
- 3) Email: Patrick.Johnson@aphis.usda.gov
- 4) Telephone: (301) 851-3137

C. Plan Last Amended:

Date

D. Date Effective:

Date

CERTIFYING OFFICIAL SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____