



Meat Grading & Certification Branch
CONTRACTOR ISSUED INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEE CHARGE CARDS

Purpose

This instruction sets forth Meat Grading and Certification (MGC) Branch policy and procedures for use of contractor issued Government charge cards for travel expenses; however, it does not comprise all applicable regulations. Other pertinent regulations, instructions and directives are listed in the Policy section of this instruction.

Policy

The MGC Branch follows the *USDA Zero Tolerance Policy* for the issuance and use of Government contractor issued charge cards including the following directives and regulations that are available online:

Department Regulation 2300-001, Government Travel Card Regulation, October 20, 2003, at: <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/directives/files/dr/DR2300-001.htm>

MRP Directive 2301.1, Marketing and Regulatory Program Supplements to the Agriculture Travel Regulations, July 23, 1998, at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/issuances/mrp2301-1.htm>

AMS Directive 365.1, Employee Responsibilities and Conduct, January 4, 1990, at: <http://agnis/sites/AMSIssuances/SharedDocuements/365-1.htm>

41 CFR Part 301 Chapter 301--Temporary Duty (TDY) Travel Allowances, at: http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_05/41cfrv4_05.html#301-1

Use

In accord with Department Regulation 2300-001, Government Travel Card Regulation, eligible employees must use the Government contractor issued charge card for applicable official travel unless they have an exemption. Unauthorized use of the Government contractor issued charge card is strictly prohibited. Employees must use the Government contractor issued charge card for all major expenses connected with official agency travel, such as:

1. Common carrier tickets (airline, rail, and bus);
2. Lodging expenses;
3. Meals;

4. Automobile rental;
5. Gasoline;
6. Authorized cash advances through ATM transactions; and
7. Other expenses incurred incident to official travel.

Cash Advances

Employees may use the travel card to get cash advances for exempted expenses such as expenses incurred at a vendor that does not accept the Government travel charge card: laundry/dry cleaning, parking, local transportation systems, taxi, tips, meals (when use of the card is impractical, or when the travel card is not accepted), phone calls (when a Government calling card is authorized for use under Departmental policy), house hunting trips, and relocation allowances.

These cash advances are limited to meals and incidental expenses rate (M&IE) and the aforementioned exempted expenses. Cash advances should not exceed \$50 per day or as authorized by the supervisor, whichever is less. Cash advance from the ATM in amounts greater than required for the travel duration are considered excessive.

Payment

Cardholders receive a monthly statement from the contractor. Employees are obligated to pay the undisputed balance within 30 days of statement date. Failure to file travel vouchers in 5 working days after completion of travel or every 30 days if on continuous travel is not a valid reason for the non-payment of the amount due the Government contractor.

VISA allows Government employees to view and pay their VISA bill electronically at: <https://www.myeasypayment.com/>. Payments can be made just by checking the Federal Government Charge Card block, entering the bank routing number and checking account number, with ease and convenience, and at NO COST.

Collection of Delinquent Payments from Employee Pay

Undisputed, delinquent, individual card account balances are eligible for the USDA travel card salary offset program. Before amounts are offset from an employee's pay, the agency will provide the employee with written notice of the amount and the intention to collect from disposable pay, the opportunity to inspect claim records, initiate a written agreement with the contractor to repay the delinquent amount, and review the decision to collect the amount with the agency. The travel charge contractor can request collection assistance on accounts 91 or more days past due from the closing date. On written request from the travel charge card contractor, the National Finance Center (NFC) will begin due process notification to the delinquent employee, following the requirements in Federal Travel Regulation 301-54.100 at http://www.gsa.gov/gsa/cm_attachments/GSA_DOCUMENT/FTR_2005-07_R2QA53_0Z5RDZ-i34K-pR.pdf. Following due process, NFC will collect from an

employee's disposable pay undisputed amounts owed to the travel charge card contractor. NFC will notify the employee about the pending salary offset. An employee who receives a notice must follow the instructions in the notice.

Employees who have an overdue balance of \$50.00 or more that is 91 days past due will be referred by Bank of America (BOA) to the NFC for salary offset. The amount deducted in a single pay period is limited to 15 percent of the employee's disposable pay. Besides the delinquent amount, the employee will be charged an \$85.00 processing fee, and a \$60.00 (\$20.00 a month) delinquent fee. The \$20.00 per month delinquent fee will continue to be assessed until the account is paid. These fees will be charged regardless of the delinquency amount. Example: Employee is 91 days delinquent in the amount of \$50.00. BOA will refer the employee's account to NFC for salary offset. When the salary offset begins, the employee will be assessed \$85.00 plus 3 months delinquent fees of \$60.00.

USDA will not initiate a salary offset request by the travel charge card contractor if the employee has filed a timely voucher and it has not been paid. On receipt of written notice of the intent to administer salary offset, the employee must inform NFC in writing in 5 business days if he/she has not been reimbursed and provide the name and phone number of the employee's travel voucher-approving official for confirmation.

The contractor will permanently cancel accounts that are at least 120 days overdue. If an employee's account is canceled, the employee will not be eligible for an advance of funds or for Government paid travel (GTR) for travel. An employee whose card is cancelled because of payment delinquency must use their personal charge cards or personal funds for official travel.

Misuse

The "*USDA Zero Tolerance Policy*" strictly prohibits the following misuses of the card:

1. Unauthorized charges and charges not associated with official travel including personal family member use of the card;
2. Use of the card near the official duty station or residence is forbidden, unless used for official travel;
3. Cash withdrawals from an automated teller machine are also forbidden when the employee is not in official travel status;
4. Shared use of the card with another employee for official travel purposes;
5. Allowing an account to become delinquent;
6. Failure to use the card while on travel unless exempted;
7. Failure to pay accounts;
8. Failure to properly use Government voucher reimbursements to repay travel expenses; and

9. Excessive cash advances, or cash advances not commensurate with official travel.

To insure proper use and payment, the Livestock and Seed Program Administrative Office program coordinator gets monthly account activity reports for each MGC cardholder and delinquent payment reports from the contractor. Misuse or failure to pay undisputed outstanding balances in a timely manner will result in the following consequences:

1. Supervisory Meat Graders or managers will prepare letters of counseling and guidance to cardholders whose contractor issued charge card accounts are indebted, undisputed, and are 30 or 60 days overdue. Copies of the counseling letters will be sent to Employee Relations.
2. Employee Relations will issue a letter of reprimand.
3. Any misuse of the cards will be immediately reported for all accounts still outstanding after 90 days.
4. Progressive disciplinary action may include removal from service.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.