

April 9, 2009

To: Winter Haven Area Office Competitive Service Employees

From: Terry B. Bane  
Branch Chief  
Processed Products Branch



Subject: Voluntary Early Retirement Authority

The Florida Citrus Industry is continuing the trend towards audit-based inspection programs. In an effort to adjust staffing levels, we are again pleased to offer Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) as authorized by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). We are tendering this offer to all eligible Florida Processed Products Branch (PPB) employees. If eligible, your required retirement date must be no later than June 30, 2009. I encourage eligible employees to consider their options and contact our servicing Benefits Specialist, Laura Frantes, at (612) 336-3312 or 1-888-616-7595, for specific information.

If you are considering this alternative, it is imperative that your decision be made and the attached VERA application be returned by the May 31, 2009 deadline.

### **Positions Covered**

All eligible Florida AMS, Fruit and Vegetable, PPB permanent competitive service employees regardless of work schedule (part-time, full-time, or mixed tour).

### **Eligibility Requirements**

Employees currently covered by the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) or the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS), and who meet either of the following age and length of service combinations:

- Age 50 with at least 20 years of creditable service; or
- Any age with at least 25 years of creditable service.

In addition, at least 5 years of required service must be creditable civilian service. Also CSRS employees must be covered at least 1 year under CSRS within the 2-year period preceding retirement.

Employees unsure if they meet eligibility requirements should contact Ms. Frantes at (612) 336-3312 or 1-888-616-7595.

The following employees are not eligible:

- Employees under time-limited appointments
- Employees in receipt of a decision of involuntary separation for misconduct or unsatisfactory performance.

### **Separation Deadline**

All eligible employees electing VERA must retire NO LATER THAN JUNE 30, 2009.

### **Voluntary Early Retirement Application Procedures**

In order to be considered for Voluntary Early Retirement, you must complete and submit **Attachment 1** NO LATER THAN MAY 31, 2009, to me at the following address:

USDA/AMS/FV/PPB  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Stop 0247  
Washington, D.C. 20250-0247

Or you may also send **Attachment 1** by FAX to my attention at: (202) 690-1087.

In addition, you should FAX **Attachment 1** to the attention of Sharon Hart-Braun, the Eastern Regional Director. The FAX number for the Eastern Region is (630) 469-5162.

**If your application has not been received by COB MAY 31, 2009, you will not be considered for VERA.**

### **Miscellaneous Information for Employees Eligible for Early Voluntary Retirement**

- No voluntary separation incentive payments (“buyouts”) are being offered with this VERA.
- Applying for early voluntary retirement is strictly voluntary; the Agency prohibits any coercion exercised by managers or employees against an employee who is eligible to retire.
- Employees who separate under the early voluntary retirement authorization and who have not been covered by the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) program for 5 years may continue FEHB coverage as a retiree under an automatic waiver of the 5-year coverage rule.

- A request for a retirement annuity estimate should be made by submitting **Attachment 2**. Please fax your request to the attention of Ms. Frantes at (612) 336-3545.
- Annuity estimates will be prepared only for those employees who meet the VERA eligibility requirements.
- You may request the required OPM retirement application forms from Ms. Frantes in Human Resources Operations – Minneapolis. Retirement application forms (**NOT Attachment 1**) should be completed and submitted to Ms. Frantes at least 30 days before the retirement date.

Attachments: 1. VERA Application and Agreement (Attachment 1)  
2. Annuity Estimate Request Form (Attachment 2)

cc: Cindy Douglas, Officer-In-Charge  
Sharon Hart-Braun, Regional Director  
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