

QUESTION & ANSWER SHEET (9/08/08)

1. When will the second round of reduction-in-force (RIF) actions for competitive service (full-time) employees occur?

In an effort to further mitigate the impact of another RIF, we will be directing the reassignment of employees in locations where we are overstaffed to other areas of the State where we need full-time employees. We hope to utilize directed reassignments through the end of 2008.

2. How many employees will be issued directed reassignments?

Initially, this will impact two GS-7 competitive service (full-time) employees. As plants shift to QAP or other elective services, we will determine if additional directed reassignments are necessary.

3. Will employees who decline a directed reassignment, but meet the minimum eligibility requirements for a discontinued service retirement (i.e., an involuntary retirement) be able to retire?

No. Employees who decline a directed reassignment are not eligible to retire on a discontinued service retirement (DSR) except for a few employees hired by the Processed Products Branch prior to December 13, 1985, which is the date when Agricultural Commodity Graders became subject to geographic mobility according to AMS Directive 327.1, Geographic Mobility Requirements. In other words, most employees who decline a directed reassignment WILL NOT be eligible to retire even if they are 50 years old and have 20 years of service or if they have 25 years of service regardless of their age (these are the eligibility requirements for a DSR). Employees can retire if they meet eligibility requirements for a voluntary/immediate retirement (see Question #5 below for Civil Service Retirement System employees and Question #6 below for Federal Employees Retirement System employees).

4. Will employees who decline a directed reassignment be eligible to receive severance pay?

Any employee covered by AMS Directive 327.1 WILL NOT be eligible to receive severance pay. This Directive applies to Agricultural Commodity Graders.

5. What are the voluntary retirement eligibility requirements for an employee under the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS)?

The retirement eligibility requirements are 30 years of service provided the employee is at least 55 years of age, 20 years of service if 60 years old and 5 years of service if age 62. Please consult with Benefits Specialist Laura Frantes regarding your specific and individual situation. She can be reached at (612) 336-3312 or 1-888-616-7595. Her e-mail address is laura.frantes@aphis.usda.gov.

6. What are the voluntary retirement eligibility requirements for an employee under the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS)?

Generally, the retirement eligibility requirements are 30 years of service provided the employee has met his/her minimum retirement age (MRA), 20 years of service if 60 years old and 5 years of service if age 62. The MRA depends on the year you were born (e.g., if you were born in the years from 1953-1964, your MRA is 56 years). Once a FERS employee reaches his/her MRA, he/she can retire with at least 10 years of service although reduced benefits may apply. Reduced benefits means if you retire at the MRA with at least 10 years but less than 30 years of service, your benefit will be reduced at the rate of 5% for each year you are under age 62. However, you can avoid part or all of the reduction by postponing the commencing date of your annuity. Please consult with Benefits Specialist Laura Frantes regarding your specific and individual situation. She can be reached at (612) 336-3312 or 1-888-616-7595. Her e-mail address is laura.frantes@aphis.usda.gov.

7. How will the September 30, 2008, conclusion of the current performance rating cycle impact directed reassignments?

Directed reassignment notices issued prior to October 31, 2008, will be based on the current retention register. Performance ratings received during the May 1, 2007-September 30, 2008 rating cycle could potentially impact any retention register updated after October 31, 2008.