

AMS

Workforce Plan

FY 1999 - 2004



United States Department of Agriculture
Marketing and Regulatory Programs
Agricultural Marketing Service

**Agricultural Marketing Service
Workforce Plan
FY 1999-2004**

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FOREWORD

This Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Workforce Plan (*Workforce Plan*) details AMS' efforts to ensure the continued delivery of high quality services while striving to remain responsive to the public it serves. Specifically, this *5-Year Workforce Plan* forecasts our recruitment goals and the skill levels required to ensure the needs of our future customers and employees are met. The recommendations contained within this *Workforce Plan* are consistent with the recommendations contained within the report, "Civil Rights at the United States Department of Agriculture--A Report by the Civil Rights Action Team.@"

In compiling this *Workforce Plan*, our efforts included an assessment of the changing business environment in which we work, a review of our current and projected workforce, and identification of the human resource management activities which are necessary to attract and retain the future workforce we desire. The future workforce needs outlined in this *Workforce Plan* provide the opportunity for AMS to focus our efforts to maximize employee opportunities for career enhancement and job satisfaction. This *Workforce Plan* also addresses the issues surrounding affirmative employment, including the required recruitment, training, and retention efforts needed to ensure diversity within AMS adequately reflects the industry we serve.

This is very much a living document, and our procedures will be reviewed, assessed, and revised annually. The strategic approach and initiatives presented are intended to be comprehensive; however, we recognize that change is constant. For this reason, it is critical that the *Workforce Plan* remain flexible, allowing for adjustment as future challenges emerge.

/s/ Enrique E. Figueroa, Ph.D.
Administrator
Agricultural Marketing Service

3/31/99

Date

I. AGENCY OVERVIEW

AMS administers programs that help to improve the efficiency of marketing agricultural commodities. AMS' programs promote a strategic marketing perspective that adapts product marketing decisions to consumer demands and changing domestic and international marketing practices and technologies. Approximately 75 percent of the funds needed to finance AMS' activities come from voluntary programs supported by user-fees paid for by our customers in primarily private industry, and in State and other Federal agencies.

The mission of AMS is carried out through eight broad activities that include: grading and shell egg surveillance; market news; market protection and promotion; wholesale market development; transportation services; payments to States and possessions; the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act program; and the strengthening of agricultural markets and producer income.

AMS has a total of 5,643 employees located throughout the United States, of which 2,605 are permanent and 3,038 are not permanent. Most of our employees work in the industry setting of their respective customers. Only a small percentage of our employees--16 percent--work at our headquarters in Washington, D.C. Although demand for AMS' services can vary depending on seasons and crop sizes, above all, demand for our services depends on the ability of our employees to deliver these services promptly, efficiently, economically, and to our customers' satisfaction.

This *Workforce Plan* implements the *AMS Strategic Plan* and complements AMS' affirmative employment program plan with specific strategies and actions. We compare the forecasted labor needs with the current AMS workforce and the United States civilian labor force. In concert with the *AMS Strategic Plan*, AMS has identified four strategies that must be addressed in a *Workforce Plan*. These are issues that significantly impact the ability of AMS' workforce to carry out our mission--now and into the future. Our intent is to create and maintain a vital workforce with the appropriate skills and characteristics required to meet the ever changing need of our diverse customer base. To accomplish this, we will: (1) prepare AMS employees to meet Agency challenges; (2) use creative outreach, recruitment, and retention initiatives; (3) enhance the quality of work life; and (4) adapt to changing technology. The final step of the planning process is an annual evaluation and report of our successes against the *Workforce Plan*.

Workforce planning is critical for AMS in the rapidly changing labor market and industry environment. Focusing on external customer needs enables us to design and staff our human resource functions according to customer expectations. This *Workforce Plan* is designed to: (1) help managers effectively forecast their future needs for recruiting, selecting, re-training, or rightsizing their current workforce, and (2) assist employees in their career development efforts.

II. FUTURE PROGRAM DELIVERY NEEDS

A. Business Environment

1. Industry

a. Corporate Structure

(1) Consolidation

Continued consolidations at the retail and food service levels and increased numbers of very large operations, especially in the pork, dairy, poultry, and egg industries, will impact our food commodity grading programs and the promotion and research programs with a gradual reduction in AMS workforce needs. As employee workloads decrease, there is a need to seek economies of scale and examine the possibility of rightsizing or seek alternative opportunities to provide services.

(2) Concentration

The trend in the dairy, meat, poultry, and horticultural industries is toward concentration into fewer and larger production and processing units, and vertical integration of production and processing (either by direct ownership or by contract). This increased concentration is driven by a firm's desire to achieve economies of scale to keep prices low.

(3) Strategic Alliances and Cooperatives

With the demise of many local and regional central markets due to the increase in vertical integration, there is a growing need and interest in cooperation among producers through alliances and cooperatives. Cooperatives are marketing tools through which producers can build collective market power. Value-added cooperatives also provide a potential means for farmers to capture a greater share of the value of their product through targeted marketing of value-added products.

b. Marketing

(1) Direct Marketing

To the benefit of growers, customers, consumers, and society as a whole, direct marketing is gaining popularity. Direct marketing includes farmers markets, farm stands, pick-your-own farms, subscription farming, catalog sales, and other

arrangements that minimize “middleman” costs and/or loss of direct contact with consumers by producers. The driving forces from the consumer end are: (1) increasing interest in organically grown farm products, and (2) consumers’ desire to buy more traditional “small farm raised or produced” products that are perceived to be more ripe, fresh, and high quality products. To support and promote this trend, AMS is undertaking multiple projects, in cooperation with numerous industries, academic institutions, and State organizations. AMS workforce knowledge and skills that are and will be even more needed include customer relations, marketing, economics, survey design, and statistics.

(2) Marketing of Products and Services to Niche Markets

Niche markets are opportunities to sell specialized products or services to a select group of customers willing to pay, often at a premium, for specific differences in commodity characteristics or methods of production. Side-by-side with concentration and consolidation in the industry, there are a growing number of businesses offering products or services tailored to a relatively small group’s requirements, interests, or desires. These include (but are not limited to) organically-grown products, fresh-cut produce, value-added products, partially or fully prepared products, home meal replacements, ethnic foods, electronic commerce, quality assurance, and food safety programs. In order to provide service to this highly diversified segment of the industry, AMS will need knowledge and skills in: marketing, cultural awareness, foreign languages, food manufacturing technology, quality control systems, standards development, auditing, and communications technology for outreach and public awareness.

(3) Transportation

Although America’s farmers and agribusinesses have always depended upon an efficient, timely, and competitive U.S. transportation system, this past year’s rail service crisis illustrates just how heavily U.S. agriculture relies upon adequate transportation services. If U.S. agriculture is to enjoy continued prosperity into the 21st century, a number of long-term transportation infrastructure challenges will have to be addressed. For example, the increasing concentration of the U.S. rail industry, evidence of inadequate rail capacity, the current condition of the rural road and bridge infrastructure, and the need to rehabilitate the U.S. waterway infrastructure are all issues of valid concern to U.S. agriculture. Moreover, the reliance of U.S. agriculture on adequate transportation services is increasing with the changes the 1996 Farm Bill made in basic farm policy. To take advantage of opportunities, both in international and domestic markets, farmers need more responsive and cost-effective transportation services. The future structure of U.S. agriculture and the ability of U.S. producers to compete in world markets depends on how transportation infrastructure challenges of U.S. agriculture are addressed.

To this end, AMS is working closely with constituents to identify the salient transportation needs of U.S. agriculture, to prioritize the relative importance of those needs, and to discuss how those needs could be addressed through the *USDA Long-term Agricultural Transportation Strategy*.

c. Technology

Success in the agriculture industry is firmly rooted in the effective use of technology. Ranging from the active use of the Internet in electronic commerce to the incorporation of automated protocols for product grading and testing, opportunities for employing technologies to increase the profitability of agriculture are growing.

The simple integration of technology as a means for automating existing systems has also been superseded by the re-engineering of business processes. While early applications of technology to business--automation--were viewed as ways to work *faster and more efficiently*, businesses are now more aware that faster does not necessarily mean better--or more profitable. Industry now examines the work processes themselves, with technologies serving as enablers, rather than as panaceas, for the improvement of work processes.

(1) Internet

The Internet is becoming an increasingly important method of communication and will likely continue to broaden in scope and accessibility in the future.

(2) Video Sales

The use of video transmissions to facilitate the classing or buying and selling of agricultural commodities provides the industries we serve with an alternative method to effectively carry out commercial transactions for unusual situations. Video transmissions of commodity classing or buying and selling offer new opportunities to reach out to locations and potential buyers and sellers who previously were unable to participate due to distance or time constraints. In instances where AMS services are more difficult or costly to provide, such as at remote locations or areas with limited workload requirements not requiring full-time graders or reporters, services could possibly be accomplished by viewing satellite transmissions.

(3) Electronic Commerce

Electronic commerce or the use of electronic communications networks and technology to simplify the sale or purchase of goods or services will free the government and industry from limitations placed by physical location, time, and

other related barriers. On occasion, these factors have opportunities to carry out commercial exchanges in the United States and the global marketplace. The expanding use of electronic commerce will serve as a medium through which goods and services will be advertised, catalogued, inventoried, purchased and sold--changing traditional business processes and resource requirements. Customers will have nearly instantaneous access to our programs and services and will have the ability to interact electronically to provide input, bid on contracts, and request information. By using this technology, AMS could become more efficient in utilizing its workforce and financial resources and will have more opportunities to provide new and improved services.

2. Public Need

a. Customer Service

AMS services are requested only if our customers believe they add a proven value to their products in commercial markets. With more than 80 percent of AMS employees involved in providing user-fee services to customers, customer service is critical to our Agency's sustained viability. These customers-- agricultural producers, processors, wholesalers, retailers, importers and exporters, and procurement officials--pay for our integrity and consistency in applying the standards of quality to their products, and our reputation and credibility in upholding those standards. While AMS has had a longstanding and vested interest in customer service, our clientele expects continual improvement in the level of service we provide and in all facets of our business. Using benchmark customer service surveys, AMS has established an operating standard in concert with the Government Performance Results Act. Our customers expect us to address our business shortcomings in a timely and appropriate manner.

b. Environmental

Environmental issues are of increasing concern to the agricultural industry. State and Federal regulations are changing the parameters that define the operating methods of food and fiber producers and processors. It is critical that AMS' programs are able to assist the agricultural industry in operating effectively within the new parameters. As the industries that we serve change production and processing methods to comply with environmental regulations, we must tailor our services to accommodate new ways of doing business. Agricultural producers and processors are exploring ways to conserve energy and natural resources and to produce less waste. An example of this are the new technologies that are emerging to develop value-added products from the waste stream. If opportunities exist for AMS to class or report on these products, AMS should remain vigilant in identifying new areas where our services could be found useful.

c. Accessible Information

The broad-based constituency that AMS serves has a high expectation of service availability—being able to get what they want, when they want it, and how they want it. Reliable, accessible data is needed at all points in the marketing chain. Our customers expect us to keep abreast of rapidly changing information technologies and provide our data in formats that permit further analysis and they want immediate access, such as through the Internet or on-demand fax systems. In a more broad sense, the public does and should expect Government to be responsive and accessible. However, more specifically, there is an increasing demand for “how to” information from the Government. Specifically, AMS is receiving requests for more information that enables the public to either understand the different types of products available to them in the marketplace or for producers to learn how to market their unique products, such as organic and/or other niche products. AMS should provide community access and education that promote greater public awareness of the industries that we serve.

d. Food Quality Assurance and Food Safety

The food industries that we serve are increasingly interested in a variety of methods that will ensure the quality and safety of food products. These include audit-based inspection and self-certification plans, such as Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plans and International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9000 quality system management programs, as well as plant surveys and sanitation verification. Quality is a key marketing decision factor for commercial buyers and consumers, which, in turn, drives quality assurance programs that often represent a shift in processing and production practices. Buyers and consumers often look to the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide the underlying assurance that they are purchasing quality food products. AMS’ emerging quality identification programs address that issue and allow quality assurance labeling to be used on products.

e. Nutrition

The general population has placed heightened emphasis on the nutritional content and value of food products. As a result of food labeling requirements, food processors have developed a host of new products targeted for specific nutritional needs, such as low-fat or low-sodium diets. This shift in the consumer’s definition of “high quality” products away from just taste and visual appeal will have significant impact on food product marketing. The changes will be evident in new specification development for products targeted for school nutrition programs, in research funded by commodity checkoff programs, and in grade standards and specifications for food products. The food processing industry is increasingly exploring niche markets. Low-fat products continue to be one of the primary growth areas for product development.

3. Global

a. Export Expansion

One of AMS' primary goals is to expand economic and trade opportunities for agricultural producers. The opening and expansion of foreign agricultural markets has never been more important. Recent changes in Federal farm policy, including those adopted in the 1996 Farm Bill, have made it clear that new and growing markets are critical to the future income growth for our farmers and ranchers. We have made some notable progress in achieving our export expansion goal in recent years. U.S. agricultural exports reached \$57.3 billion in fiscal year (FY) 1997, the second highest level on record. FY 1998 also marked the fourth consecutive year that exports topped \$50 billion. Our North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) partners accounted for \$13 billion in U.S. exports in FY 1998, 24 percent of our total agricultural exports worldwide and greater than our sales to Japan. However, we also experienced declines in other top markets with value declines to three key Asian markets--Japan, Taiwan, South Korea--ranging from 10 to 30 percent. AMS plays a critical role in our efforts to achieve the USDA's goal of expanding overseas markets through international market news reporting, commercial dispute resolution, export inspections for quality and grade, the formulation of international standards, and a range of transportation services for exporters.

b. International Standards

As international trade becomes an increasingly important factor in the marketing of agricultural commodities, the need grows for international standards to facilitate trade and assure that U.S. producers are able to compete effectively in the global marketplace. Marketing specialists who know and understand U.S. agricultural production and marketing, and also understand the rules of the World Trade Organization, NAFTA, and other trade agreements, will be needed to represent U.S. interests. The AMS already represents the United States on international standards' organizations such as, CODEX Alimentarius Commission, United Nations/Economic Commission for Europe and, through the American National Standards Institute, facilitates the United States industry participation in ISO standards' development process.

The human resource needs for these types of activities are expected to increase as international trade of agricultural products grows and competition with other producing countries becomes more intense.

c. International Conformity Assessment

As international standards begin to play a greater role in the global marketplace, the demand for verification of compliance with standards will increase in importance. This demand will necessitate the review and possible recognition (accreditation) of exporting countries' conformity assessment systems. Our workforce will need to acquire new skills to address this challenge.

Further, the methods of ensuring that products conform to recognized standards are changing. Traditional methods required AMS personnel to examine each product to ensure that the standard was met, however, this is being supplemented by audit-based systems, such as ISO 9000 and HACCP models, that require process controls be in place to ensure that only products conforming to the standard are produced. This type of system requires a workforce with a new set of skills that emphasize examining systems and conducting audits, rather than examining products.

d. Increased Competition

There is an important lesson in the current trade difficulties we face--trade can take farm incomes and U.S. agriculture to new heights and new depths. Trade is not always predictable, new factors such as currency exchange rates can greatly affect export demand independent of product quality or consumer demands on the other end. This year our producers face a triple challenge: weak demand in Asia; increased export competition due to large world supplies; and a strong U.S. dollar. Our once strong, vibrant markets in Asia have turned sluggish due to the financial crisis affecting the region. And, at the same time, our major competitors around the world have produced bumper crops while our strong currency is making our products less price-competitive in overseas markets, particularly in many Asian markets where currency has devalued.

4. Internal

a. Demographics

The face of America continues to evolve and reflect increased numbers of minorities and women in the general populous and workforce. We must utilize a variety of outreach, recruitment, and retention methods to build and maintain a diverse workforce that meets the needs of our customers. Increased participation of small businesses (particularly 8(a), small disadvantaged, and women-owned) in AMS commodity purchase programs will require use of different types of contracting methods.

b. Procurement Practices

In light of Department-wide goals to use small and minority owned businesses for commodity purchases, employees must be able to employ innovative contracting methods, have good communication skills, and be familiar with USDA, AMS, and Small Business Administration programs, policies, and regulations.

c. Increased Government Oversight

The need for fiscal responsibility will impact the budgets and workforce of many Government agencies. Rightsizing in oversight agencies requires that programs assume additional review and evaluation duties related to missions under their administration. Legislation mandating price reporting of livestock, meats, and poultry, and country of origin labeling would require additional workforce resources.

d. Technology

In order for AMS to remain cost-effective, employees must be able to incorporate new technologies into their daily operations. Technological applications include a wide range of methods, from scientific instrumentation in AMS laboratories, to automated methods for data recording (such as palmtop recorders), to testing technologies in field grading and standardization activities. AMS continually seeks and values the input of front-line employees who are likely to realize new work processes and technologies that can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of AMS' operations.

Specifically, in the area of information technology, employees must be skilled in the use of a variety of computer software programs and technologies. One of AMS' strategic goals has been to have a completely computer-literate workforce by the Year 2000.

e. Budget

Stagnant or declining budget allocations as well as cost constraints in user-fee funded programs will negatively affect the number of position vacancies able to be filled and monetary incentives needed to employ a diverse workforce. Correspondingly, program services and workforce resources in those industries could be affected.

Investments in: (a) technologies to increase the efficiency of operations and to reduce the cost of operations, and (b) enhancing employee skills, have emerged as two of AMS' primary strategies for meeting budget reductions.

B. Workforce Plan

1. Workforce Assessment

The data in the following charts (Exhibits 1-15) show the AMS workforce and demographic data by race and national origin, targeted disabilities, and gender. This information is presented by grade and summarized for the entire Agency. The information was extracted from the National Finance Center Data Base and provided to AMS by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and represents AMS' permanent workforce through January 1999. Data on race, national origin, and gender for the civilian workforce is compared to the AMS workforce. *Exhibit 1* reflects the workforce profile. Information for the civilian workforce is from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

a. Workforce Analysis

In January 1999, AMS had 2,605 permanent employees. This number remained fairly constant over the past 12 months. We examined employee data by grade, by major job series, and by race, gender, and national origin. We compared our employee data with the 1998 U.S. Civilian Labor Force (CLF) data available from BLS. In comparison with the CLF, the AMS workforce had a higher African American representation (13 percent of AMS employees were African American compared to 12 percent of the CLF), and a lower representation of American Indian/Alaskan Natives, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and Whites. AMS also had slightly higher male/female ratio (AMS male/female ratio was 59 percent/41 percent compared to the CLF ratio of 54 percent/46 percent). Employees with Targeted Disabilities represented 1 percent of the workforce. The fiscal year 1999 AMS goal on targeted disabilities is 1.39 percent of the total workforce.

Nearly half of the AMS employees are Agricultural Commodity Graders and most of those positions are targeted for the GS-9 level. It was not surprising to find that AMS had 760 employees at the GS-9 level, which was more than double the population at any other grade level. Males outnumbered females by more than 2 to 1, African Americans were the predominant minority group at 11 percent of the GS-9's, followed by Hispanics at 5 percent, and other minorities at 4 percent.

Looking at the leadership at AMS, we examined statistics at the Branch Chief, Associate Deputy Administrator, and Deputy Administrator level--GS-14, 15, and Senior Executive Service (SES)--and found that the diversity declined sharply. This group is 81 percent male, 4 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 3 percent African American, 2 percent Hispanic, and has no American Indian/Alaskan Native representation.

The second significant group includes the GS-11, 12, and 13 grade levels. These are our mid-level managers and largest candidate pool for movement into upper management positions in the Agency. The population of this grouping is considerably larger than the first group, with 797 employees, AMS is showing some movement of women and minorities into mid-level management. African Americans emerged as the predominant minority group at 12 percent of the mid-level managers, followed by Hispanics at 3 percent, Asian/Pacific Islanders at 2 percent, and American Indian/Alaskan Native at 1 percent. The mid-level manager population in AMS is 72 percent male and 28 percent female.

b. Retirement Projections

We examined retirement eligibility both by grade and by major job series. Looking first at grade, we find that 60 percent of the SES employees and 57 percent of the GS-15's will be eligible to retire within 5 years. As expected, the retirement eligibility declined by grade level, with 23 percent of the GS-9's eligible within 5 years. While significant numbers of employees will be eligible for retirement, not all employees will choose that option.

The job series that showed the highest percentage of eligible employees, 40 percent, was 301, Miscellaneous Administrative and Program. The 301 series is used for most of the SES positions, as well as many specialized administrative positions. Agricultural Marketing Specialists, Agricultural Commodity Graders, Agricultural Market Reporters were quite similar, with 25 percent to 28 percent of these employees eligible to retire within 5 years.

2. Skills Needs Assessment

In order to determine our future workforce skills requirements and our skills gaps, we looked at our current workforce skills and the future technological, process, and economic changes taking place in the industries we serve. While we recognize that skills such as written and verbal communication, analytical reasoning, and interpersonal skills will always be needed and can always be improved, we identified three major workforce skills gaps that have resulted from changes in the way the industries we serve do business in the global market economy and the changes in the potential workforce.

This *Workforce Plan* looks at the skills gaps identified--information technology, audit-based process management, and international marketing--and tries to design interventions that will make AMS better prepared to cope with the expected changes and continue to succeed in the future. We will seek to close the skills gaps with identified over- and under-representation of the various groups in our workforce, compared to CLF, and use effective processes and procedures that attract and retain employees so that we may achieve a fully diverse workforce.

a. Information Technology

Telecommunications and information technologies are being employed by AMS to make access to its services faster and more convenient and efficient. As AMS increasingly relies on modernization of its information technology to respond to customer requirements, provide quality services, and conduct day-to-day business operations, the overall technology competency of its employees will remain critical and will need to increase.

b. Audit-Based Process Management

The food industry is moving away from 100 percent or statistical sampling of food products to ensure that standards are met. Many AMS programs are now using audit-based systems that include HACCP or ISO-based programs. These programs ensure and document that companies' operations are in compliance with provisions of contracts and/or their own standards and procedures. This type of system requires new skills to examine systems and conduct audits, rather than examine products through line-inspections.

c. International Marketing

To remain more competitive in today's world, American agriculture has become global, and AMS has strived to be a strong partner in expanding markets for U.S. agricultural products. AMS provides certification services when exporting to a country that has specific import requirements, laboratory testing for exporters of domestic food commodities, grading services, transportation information, and market news information on sales and prices of both imports and exports. AMS provides leadership in harmonizing international quality standards and exploring opportunities for equivalency. AMS employees are required to develop new skills to develop and implement programs that are required by our international customers.

In addition to core competencies and functional skills outlined above, initiatives in leadership and communication techniques will be critical. The rapidly changing business and public needs environments will require staff and managers who can analyze and communicate the relationship between external developments and evolving programs. At the same time, the changing AMS workforce will necessitate managers who can lead a diverse workforce.

III. STRATEGIES

Strategies to Meet Workforce Needs

The *AMS Strategic Plan* identifies a management initiative to “Create and maintain a vital workforce with the appropriate skills and characteristics to serve our diverse base of customers.” Since AMS serves a constantly changing and diverse range of customers, we can best meet the needs of all of our customers only if we have a fully diversified and trained workforce. AMS intends to broaden the scope of our recruiting efforts to embrace all groups of Americans who can bring and/or acquire the necessary skills and professional values. This *Workforce Plan* implements the *AMS Strategic Plan* and complements AMS’ affirmative employment program plan with specific strategies and actions. These initiatives affect all 5,643 AMS employees, including managers and supervisors. The commitment and involvement of all employees is critical to the success of this *Workforce Plan*, and Agency managers will be held accountable for meeting the goals set forth as *Workforce Plan* strategies.

Strategy 1: Preparing AMS Employees to Meet Agency Challenges

This 5-year *Workforce Plan* identifies action items designed to ensure that the AMS workforce possesses the skills and knowledge necessary to meet Agency challenges--both today and into the future. We will provide technical, communication, and management training opportunities to prepare employees with the necessary skills to enhance performance and career development. We will pay particular attention to forecasting future skills needed for the changing work environment.

AMS training is targeted and focused on being able to respond to changing customer needs. While this preparation of employees includes traditional program training, our efforts will be enhanced with innovative methods, such as developmental assignments, details, and cross-agency teams. Well-designed plans will enable management to address program and industry specific requirements, such as providing language and cultural sensitivity training for employees. Our strategy is to monitor critical information about the capabilities, weaknesses, and training needs of the staff, and, subsequently, to allow for smooth transitions to new systems and programs as the need arises. With human resource planning, AMS will be able to respond rapidly and decisively to changing conditions within and outside the organization. As we continue to manage our workforce profile, we will develop policies on skills upgrading, re-training, and career out placement.

Strategy 2: Using Creative Outreach, Recruitment, and Retention Initiatives

Our outreach efforts will be multifaceted. We will seek opportunities to educate both the public and private sector on our Agency mission, program initiatives, and employment opportunities. We will attend conferences, provide guest lectures at colleges and high schools, assist with agricultural product judging contests, partner with 4-H and Future Farmers of America efforts and various student organizations, sponsor developmental assignments for college professors, and participate in

numerous community grassroots activities that reach a broad-based constituency.

We will recruit and nurture a motivated workforce that reflects the many faces of America, recognizing and celebrating diversity, and creating opportunities, incentives, and rewards for achievement. Although recruitment will often be focused on colleges and universities, we will also target other nontraditional recruitment sources. Recruitment initiatives will encompass a variety of sources, including innovative approaches that go beyond the academic disciplines that have traditionally provided the largest portion of new AMS hires. We will identify academic disciplines and curricula that best support our programs. Through a careful screening program, we will establish a cadre of highly-skilled recruiters and coordinate recruitment activities at both Program and Agency levels. Recruiters will be specifically trained to recognize and help eliminate their systemic and attitudinal barriers that cause imbalances in recruitment. Our outreach and recruitment efforts will often be targeted for specific program needs and will vary in scope.

Retention continues to be a paramount issue for AMS as we examine what motivates employees to make AMS their employer of choice. Using data from exit interviews and employee surveys, we will tailor mentoring programs and career plans to provide opportunities for employee successes. We will use a variety of established and innovative tools to create incentives and achievement rewards that can be used to retain and motivate employees.

The AMS work environment must welcome and embrace diversity. Where data indicates a misrepresentation of specific groups at either various levels in the organization or in specific occupational series, AMS will take positive actions to create a workforce that reflects the diversity of American society. We will monitor employee turnover and take specific action to identify the underlying causes. We will fully integrate civil rights with our focus on creating a bias-free, welcoming environment.

Strategy 3: Enhancing the Quality of Work Life

We will enhance the quality of work life of AMS employees to ensure that the workplace serves as an encouraging, challenging, safe, and motivating environment that heighten productivity. We recognize that AMS' workforce is faced with increasingly demanding issues outside of the workplace, and that we are often in direct competition with the private sector that can offer numerous incentives and enhancements to the quality of work life, particularly enhanced salaries and benefits. We will identify and implement initiatives that bridge many of these difficult challenges. We will use employee input to identify desired workplace environments and will implement initiatives, within policy, that will make us more competitive with other organizations.

Our strategy is to be flexible in helping employees integrate home and life needs with workplace requirements. We will use many of the tools available to management in adapting our workload needs to employee needs when they are consistent with the mission of AMS. Recognizing the challenge of matching the expectations of the traditional work environment with the greater demands of employees for flexibility will be one of the greater challenges facing Agency managers.

We will expand the use of innovative work life policies, and continue to address safety and health concerns, protecting our employees from work hazards and encouraging safe work habits.

Strategy 4: Adapting to Changing Technology

We will provide employees with the most appropriate technology available to enable them to be highly productive in a rapidly changing world, within our available resources. Advancing technologies are rapidly emerging and are capable of enhancing the ability of AMS employees to work more efficiently and effectively. We realize that complacency in discovering, understanding, testing, and adopting new technologies in a timely and cost-effective fashion can place AMS in a strategic disadvantage, crippling the Agency's ability to meet customer demands.

AMS is always faced with the rapid adoption of new technologies by Agency customers and increased demands to incorporate more cost-effective technologies to lower costs of operations. The success that AMS achieves in adopting new technologies relies in large part on the ability of each employee to help identify opportunities to apply new technologies and, following adequate testing, to incorporate the new technologies in work processes. Similarly, the ability to rapidly deploy these technologies depends on the availability of the appropriate skills and training within our workforce. The availability for these skills impacts both the hiring of new employees and the investments that the Agency makes in its existing workforce. Our business processes are technology-dependent, and rely heavily on the distribution of timely, accurate, and cost-effective information.

IV. ACTION PLAN

The action items addressing these strategies are ongoing initiatives that will be implemented by Deputy Administrators and Staff Directors. Each action item will be implemented when deemed appropriate by one or more AMS Programs. The individual AMS Programs will establish milestones to be accomplished in each fiscal year. Prior to the end of the fiscal year, a report will be prepared documenting the activities and accomplishments addressing the action items.

Implementing the action items listed below may require commitments of financial and human resources beyond those currently made available for these types of activities. The availability of additional funds needed to implement these actions relies heavily upon the particular economic situation of each user-fee program in AMS. These services are unique and specific for each commodity area, and the amount of funds generated by user-fee services varies widely among program areas. Ongoing rightsizing initiatives also will impact the ability of some programs to implement the action items regarding recruitment. Each AMS Program will continue to review the action items, and where applicable, implement appropriate actions as resources become available.

STRATEGY 1: Preparing AMS Employees to Meet Agency Challenges

Action Items:

- ! Document and disseminate emerging trends and changes in organizational requirements and workforce requirements through workforce planning.
- ! Provide managers with training on how to coach and counsel employees.
- ! Build leadership skills in the workforce through formal training programs.
- ! Increase the use of technology to keep employees informed of Agency programs: electronic mail, Internet, video, and teleconferencing.
- ! Provide training and developmental opportunities to prepare employees to meet targeted workforce requirements.
- ! Establish an Agency mentoring program.

STRATEGY 2: Using Creative Outreach, Recruitment, and Retention Initiatives

Action Items:

- ! Hold managers accountable through performance evaluations for outreach efforts.
- ! Educate industry, academia, students, and consumers about AMS services and job opportunities.
- ! Develop a marketing plan for existing and new AMS services and utilize media to educate potential customers about our services.
- ! Identify AMS employees to serve as recruiters and provide them with required communications training, sensitivity awareness training, and overview of hiring authorities, job qualifications, training on all AMS programs, and related administrative topics.
- ! Expand the number of colleges/universities participating in the faculty internship program.
- ! Conduct outreach and recruitment activities at conferences and make presentations at universities and colleges that partner with USDA.
- ! Facilitate work details for career development.

- ! Enhance New Employee Orientation Program.
- ! Identify AMS employment needs and establish a recruitment plan.
- ! Increase utilization of the Student Career Experience Program.
- ! Enhance employment under the Welfare to Work Program.
- ! Expand outreach efforts to organizations representing individuals with disabilities.
- ! Make all AMS educational and technical assistance services, publications, and videos available to customers in the language appropriate to the community served and in closed captioning.
- ! Examine the current grade structure.
- ! Streamline the hiring process.

STRATEGY 3: Enhance the Quality of Work Life

Action Items:

- ! Provide employees with appropriate health and safety training and equipment.
- ! Make available alternative work schedule and work-site programs whenever they are consistent with the mission of the Agency.
- ! Solicit employee and union input and suggestions on quality of work life issues.
- ! Explore the use of the Government-wide transportation subsidy program.
- ! Utilize Agency-wide surveys to improve communication and quality of work environment.
- ! Adopt Agency-wide awards program.
- ! Make greater use of alternative work schedules whenever they are consistent with the mission of the Agency.
- ! Adopt job sharing program.

STRATEGY 4: Adapting to Changing Technology

Action Items:

- ! More widely advertise and employ employee suggestions and invention awards, along with estimates of tangible benefits, where possible.
- ! Determine the computer training needs for AMS personnel and provide training within available resources.
- ! Promote increased use of advanced information technologies.
- ! Promote employee involvement with decisionmaking.

V. REVIEW AND EVALUATION

This *Workforce Plan* will evolve to meet the changing circumstances of the labor market and our customers' needs. Evaluations of both the workforce planning process and the effectiveness of programs and strategies used in filling employment gaps will be conducted annually. The measure of effectiveness will be the extent to which the previously identified gaps are narrowed, and the extent to which AMS has the appropriate people, with the appropriate skills, in the right place, at the right time to meet the challenges of the future. To achieve the ultimate goals--maximum career enhancement, job satisfaction, and a representative workforce --constant monitoring and re-profiling of initiatives and resources will be required. It is critical that the plan remains flexible, allowing for implementation of new programs and services that meet identified gaps and development or deletion of initiatives as situations change. To this end, a review of AMS' *Workforce Plan* will include the following key elements or actions:

- ! Develop an accomplishment verification plan to validate that the *Workforce Plan's* milestones have been met;
- ! Develop a statistical data base to measure progress toward meeting the *Workforce Plan's* milestones;
- ! Prepare annual reports on the progress of the *Workforce Plan*; and,
- ! Re-profile strategies annually to address new priorities and readjust strategies to maximize results.

VI. Workforce Data and Exhibits

Race and National Origin Definitions for Exhibits 2, 11, 12, 13, and 14:

American Indian represents American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian represents Asian or Pacific Islander

Black represents Black, not of Hispanic Origin

Hispanic represents those whose origins are Mexican-American, Chicano, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Hispanic

White represents White, not of Hispanic Origin

Exhibit 1: Distribution of Permanent Workforce by Grades ⁽¹⁾

Grades	Targeted Disabilities	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian or Pacific Islander	Black	Hispanic (2)	White	Female	Male	Total
SES	0	0	0	0	0	10	2	8	10
15	0	0	1	2	1	24	7	21	28
14	1	0	4	1	1	75	14	67	81
13	1	0	3	18	2	172	50	145	195
12	4	5	5	42	9	215	74	202	276
11	2	0	4	38	12	272	100	226	326
10	0	0	1	1	2	17	4	17	21
9	12	11	16	84	36	613	216	544	760
8	0	0	0	9	12	162	101	82	183
7	2	5	12	56	23	272	209	159	368
6	1	0	1	43	5	75	116	8	124
5	1	3	3	31	7	111	119	36	155
4	3	1	2	17	3	43	57	9	66
3	2	0	0	3	0	4	7	0	7
2	0	0	0	3	0	1	2	2	4
1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
Total AMS	29	25	52	349	113	2,066	1,078	1,527	2,605
1998 U.S. Civilian Labor Force	N.A.	(3)	6,276,000	15,982,000	14,317,000	115,415,000	63,714,000	73,959,000	137,673,000
Percent of AMS	1.1	1.0	2.0	13.4	4.3	79.3	41.4	58.6	100.0
Percent of U.S. Civilian Labor Force	N.A.	(3)	4.6	11.6	10.4	83.8	46.3	53.7	110.4 (2)

(1) AMS has a total of 5,643 employees; 2,605 are permanent; and 3,038 are not permanent.

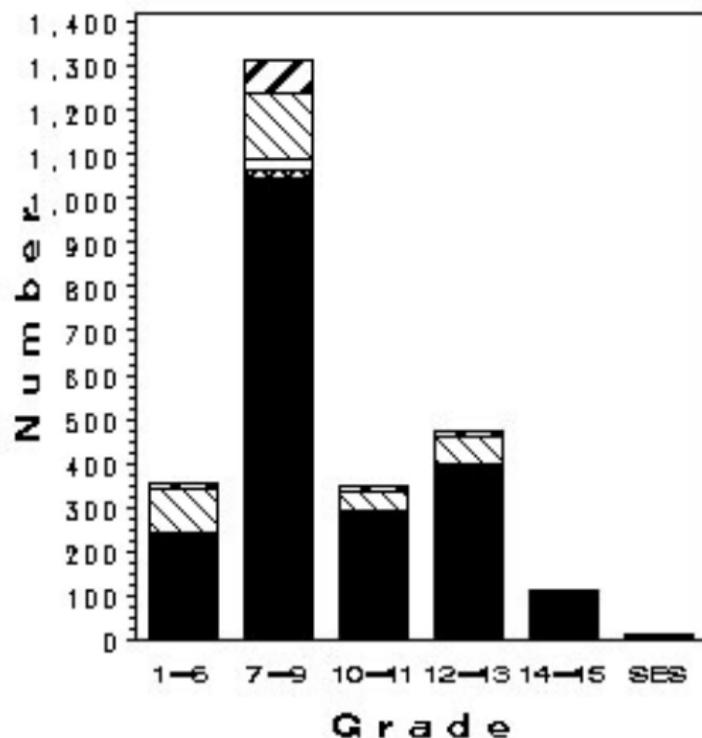
(2) In the U.S. Civilian Labor data, Hispanics are considered a national origin and not a race. In the AMS data, Hispanics are considered a race.

Therefore, the U.S. Civilian Labor Force data overstates the percentages of the other racial categories.

(3) The Asian or Pacific Islander group includes Asians and Pacific Islanders and American Indians and Alaskan Natives.

Data Sources: U.S. Civilian Labor Force information is from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and AMS data is from the National Finance Center, January 1999.

**Exhibit 2: Assessment of Permanent Workforce
Grades by Race and National Origin**



Race and National Origin	
	White
	Asian
	Hispanic
	American Indian
	Black

Exhibit 3: AMS Permanent Employees Eligible to Retire Within 5 Years

Grades	Years to Retirement						Total Eligible to Retire	Total AMS Employees	Percent Eligible to Retire Within 5 Years
	0	1	2	3	4	5			
SES	2	0	1	0	3	0	6	10	60.0
15	2	3	3	3	2	3	16	28	57.1
14	16	3	1	7	5	2	34	81	42.0
13	22	11	6	11	6	11	67	195	34.4
12	33	7	8	13	13	8	82	276	29.7
11	42	10	11	6	6	12	87	326	26.7
10	3	0	1	1	1	0	6	21	28.6
9	92	20	15	18	13	19	177	760	23.3
8	11	8	7	7	7	6	46	183	25.1
7	20	6	8	9	9	5	57	368	15.5
6	6	2	0	2	4	1	15	124	12.1
5	7	3	3	4	3	5	25	155	16.1
4	6	1	3	0	2	3	15	66	22.7
3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0.0
2	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	4	50.0
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.0
Total Eligible to Retire	263	75	67	81	74	75	635	2,605	24.4

Definitions:

Years to Retirement

0 = Number of employees eligible to retire at any time

1 = Number of employees eligible to retire within a year

2 = Number of employees whose retirement eligibility is greater than a year but less than 2 years

3 = Number of employees whose retirement eligibility is greater than 2 years but less than 3 years

4 = Number of employees whose retirement eligibility is greater than 3 years but less than 4 years

5 = Number of employees whose retirement eligibility is greater than 4 years but less than 5 years

Retirement eligibility calculated by APHIS, USDA

AMS data is from the National Finance Center, January 1999

Exhibit 4: AMS Permanent Employees Eligible to Retire Within 5 Years by Job Series Classification

Job Series	Years to Retirement						Total Eligible to Retire	Total AMS Employees	Percent Eligible to Retire Within 5 Years
	0	1	2	3	4	5			
110	2	0	1	0	0	1	4	25	16.0
301	5	2	2	1	4	1	15	38	39.5
318	20	8	5	5	9	7	54	329	16.4
334	4	0	0	0	0	1	5	54	9.3
343	3	0	1	2	5	3	14	47	29.8
1146	19	10	7	12	6	10	64	235	27.2
1147	20	3	6	9	5	6	49	174	28.2
1311	0	0	1	1	1	1	4	20	20.0
1320	3	2	2	2	0	0	9	31	29.0
1980	172	42	37	43	37	38	369	1458	25.3
Other	15	8	5	6	7	7	48	194	24.7
Total	263	75	67	81	74	75	635	2,605	24.4

Definitions:

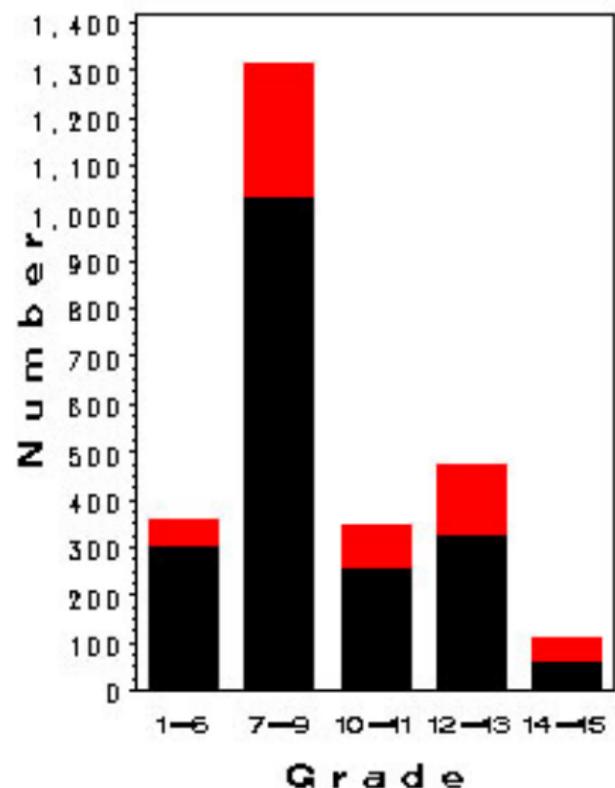
Years to Retirement

- 0 = Number of employees eligible to retire at any time
- 1 = Number of employees eligible to retire within a year
- 2 = Number of employees whose retirement eligibility is greater than a year but less than 2 years
- 3 = Number of employees whose retirement eligibility is greater than 2 years but less than 3 years
- 4 = Number of employees whose retirement eligibility is greater than 3 years but less than 4 years
- 5 = Number of employees whose retirement eligibility is greater than 4 years but less than 5 years

Job Series:

- 110 = Agricultural Economists
- 301 = Misc. Administrative and Program
- 318 = Secretaries, Misc. Clerks and Assistants, Office Automation Clerks
- 334 = Computer Specialists
- 343 = Management Analysts
- 1146 = Agricultural Marketing Specialists
- 1147 = Agricultural Market Reporter
- 1311 = Physical Science Technician
- 1320 = Chemists
- 1980 = Agricultural Commodity Grader
- Other = 201,341,403,415,430,493,501,503,505,525,544,560,630,801,896,963,1101,1301,1801,1981,2130,3359,3501,3502,4417

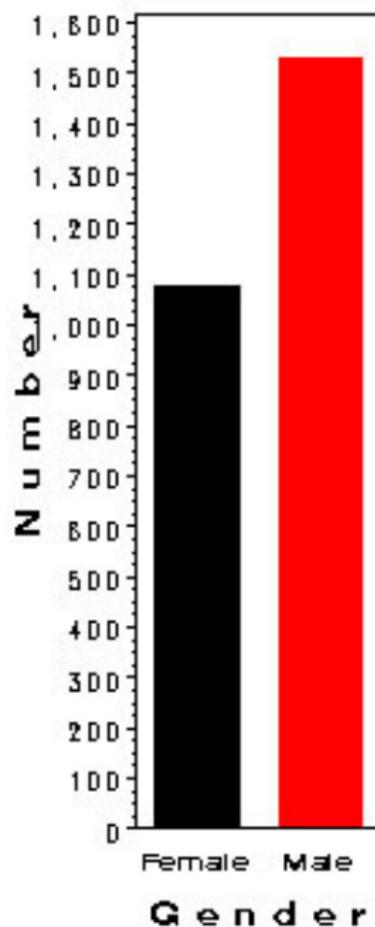
**Exhibit 5: Assessment of Permanent Workforce
Eligible to Retire Within 5 Years and Grades**



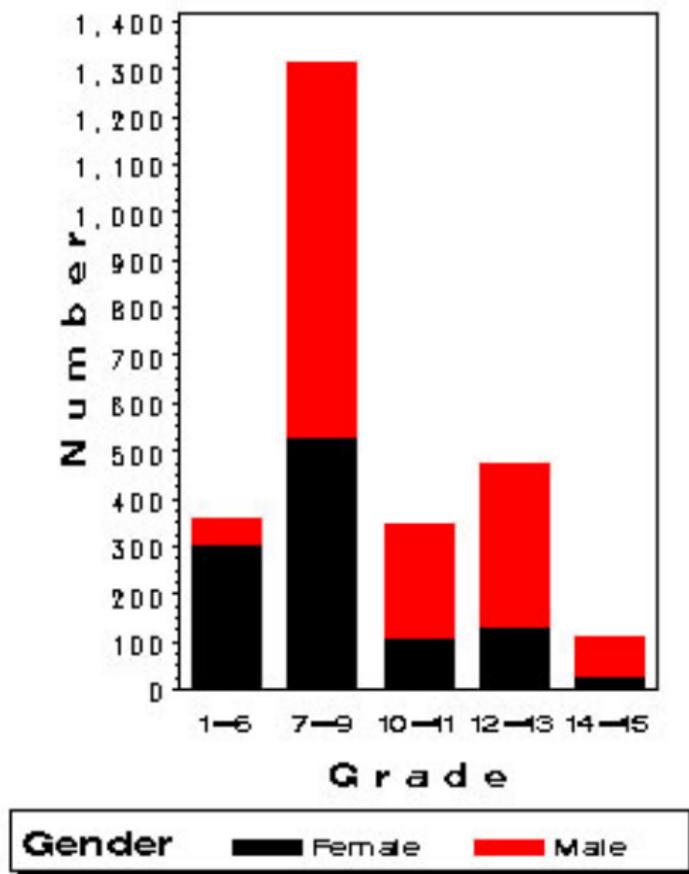
Eligible to Retire ■ No ■ Yes

Exhibit 6: Assessment of Permanent Workforce

Gender

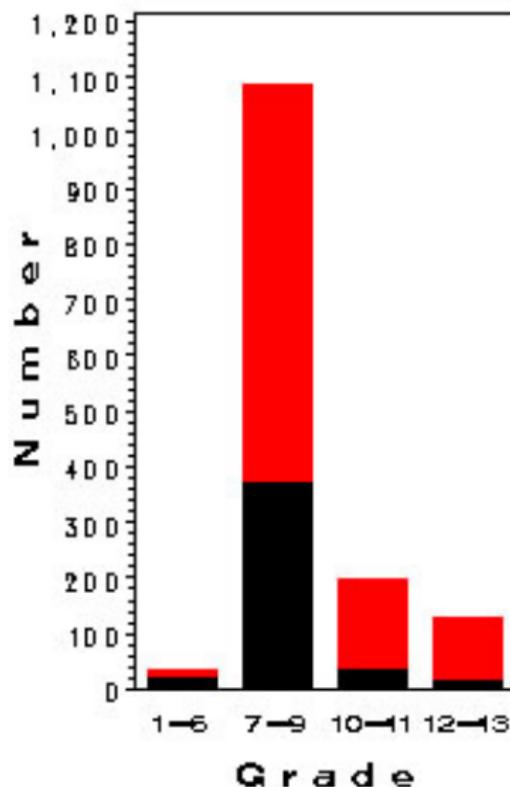


**Exhibit 7: Assessment of Permanent Workforce
Gender and Grades**



SES category includes 2 females and 6 males

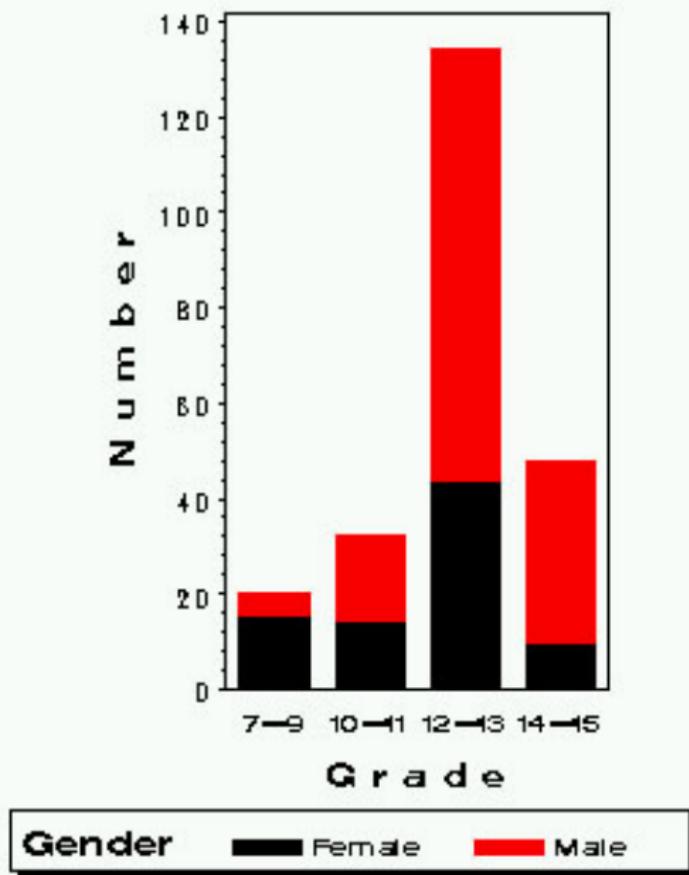
Exhibit 8: Assessment of Permanent Workforce
Series 1980: Agricultural Commodity Grader



Gender ■ Female ■ Male

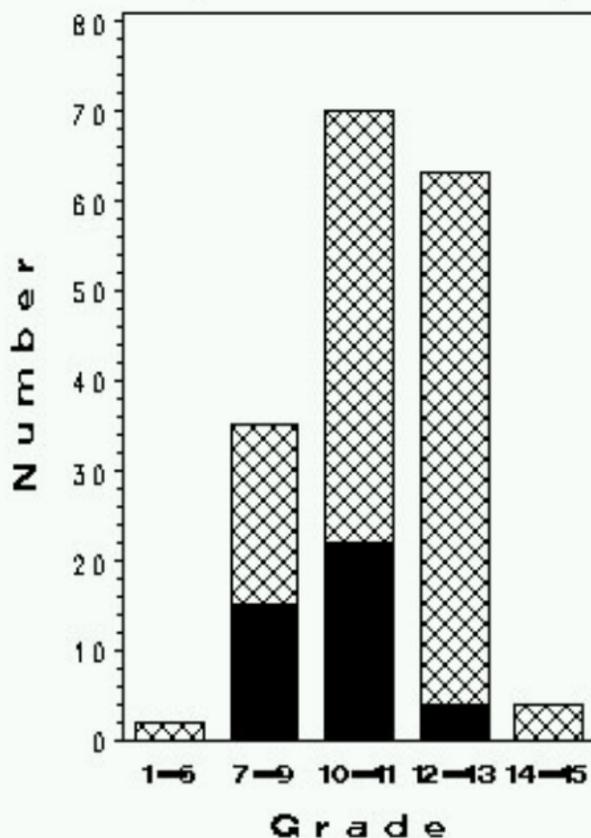
In the 14-15 grade levels there are 10 males and 1 female

Exhibit 9: Assessment of Permanent Workforce
Series 146: Agricultural Marketing Specialist



There is 1 male in the SES Category

Exhibit 10: Assessment of Permanent Workforce
Series 1147: Agricultural Market Reporter



Gender

Female

Male

Exhibit 11: Assessment of Permanent Workforce

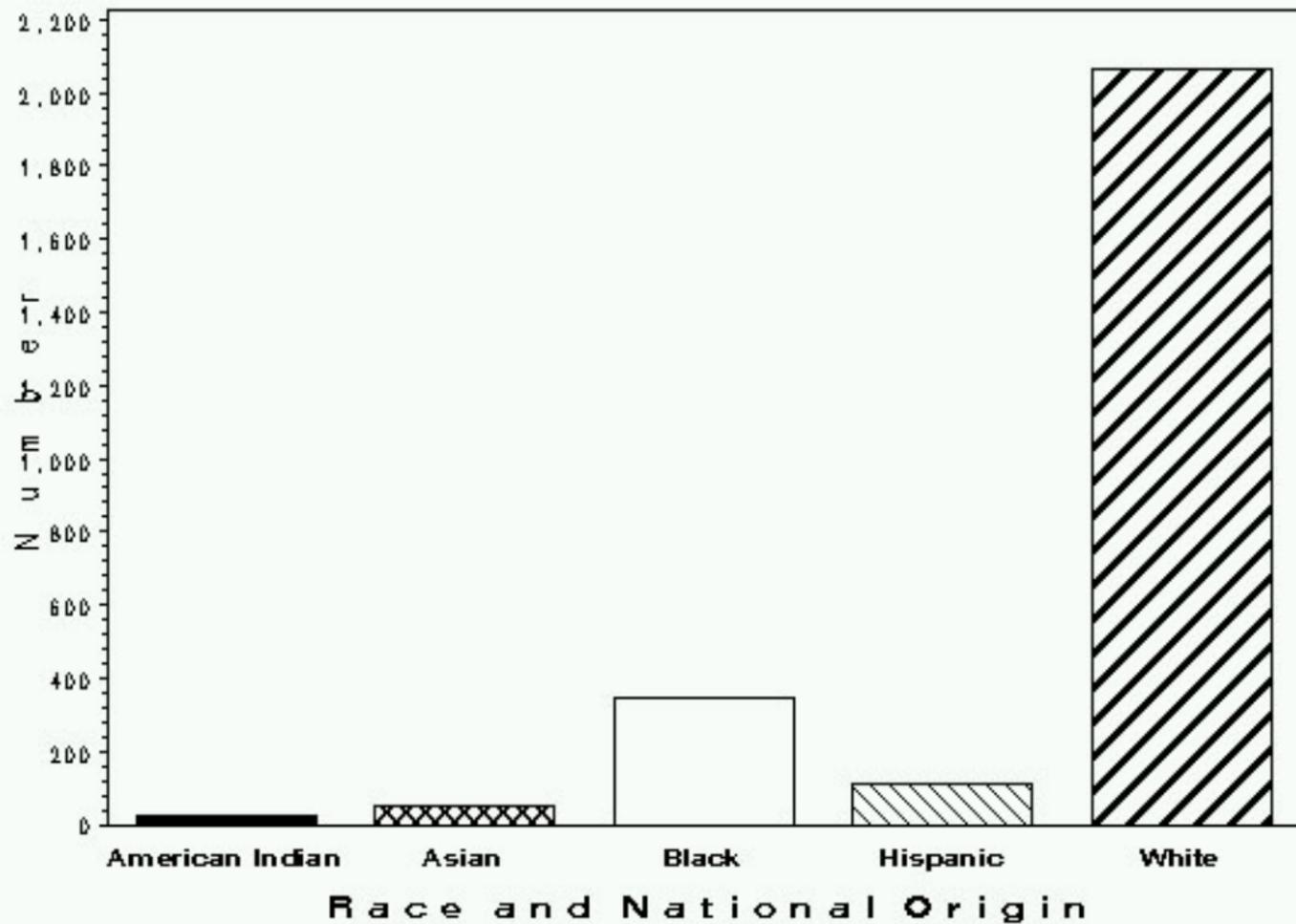
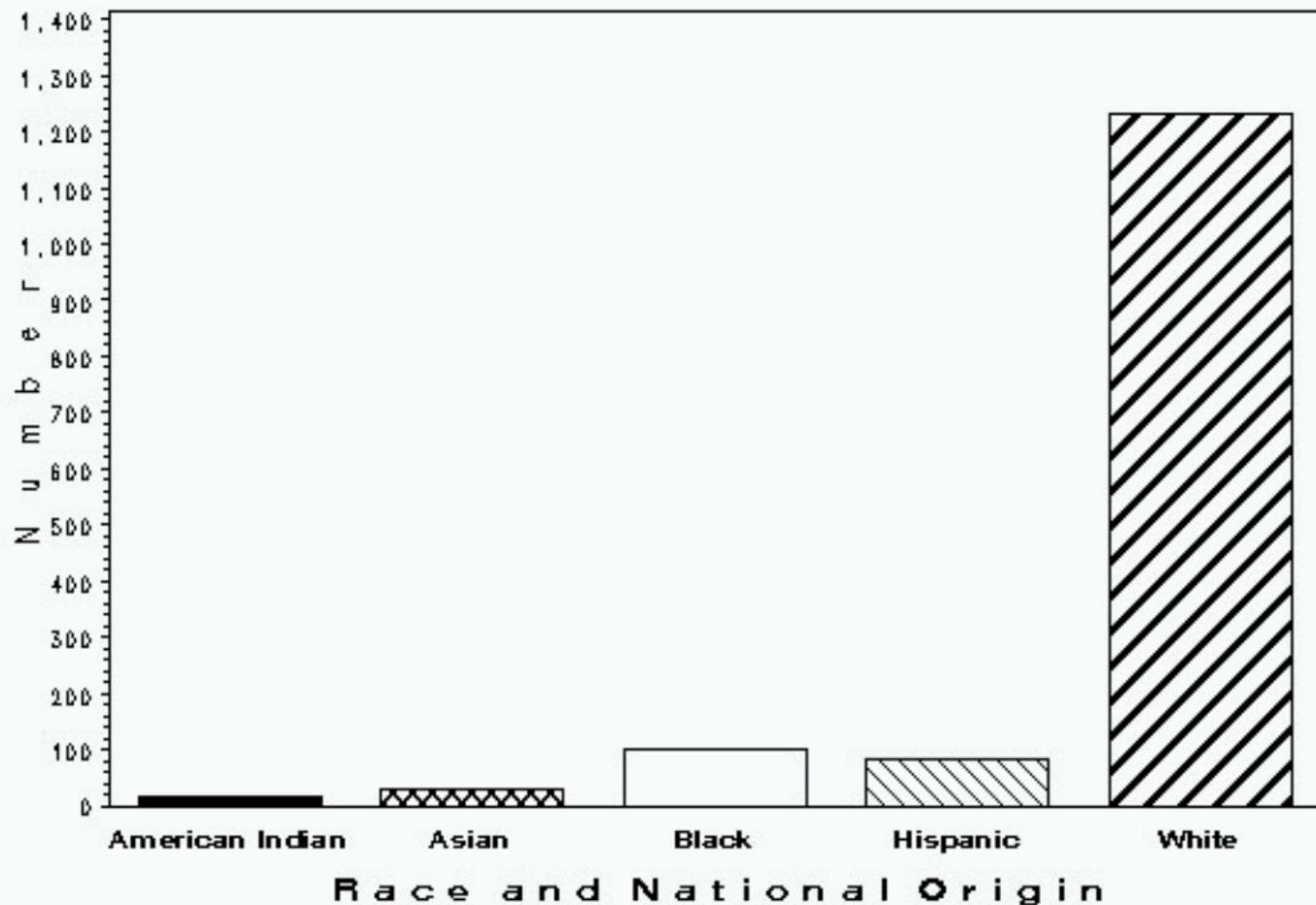


Exhibit 12: Assessment of Permanent Workforce
Job Series 1980: Agricultural Commodity Grader



**Exhibit 13: Assessment of Permanent Workforce
Job Series 1146: Agricultural Marketing Specialist**

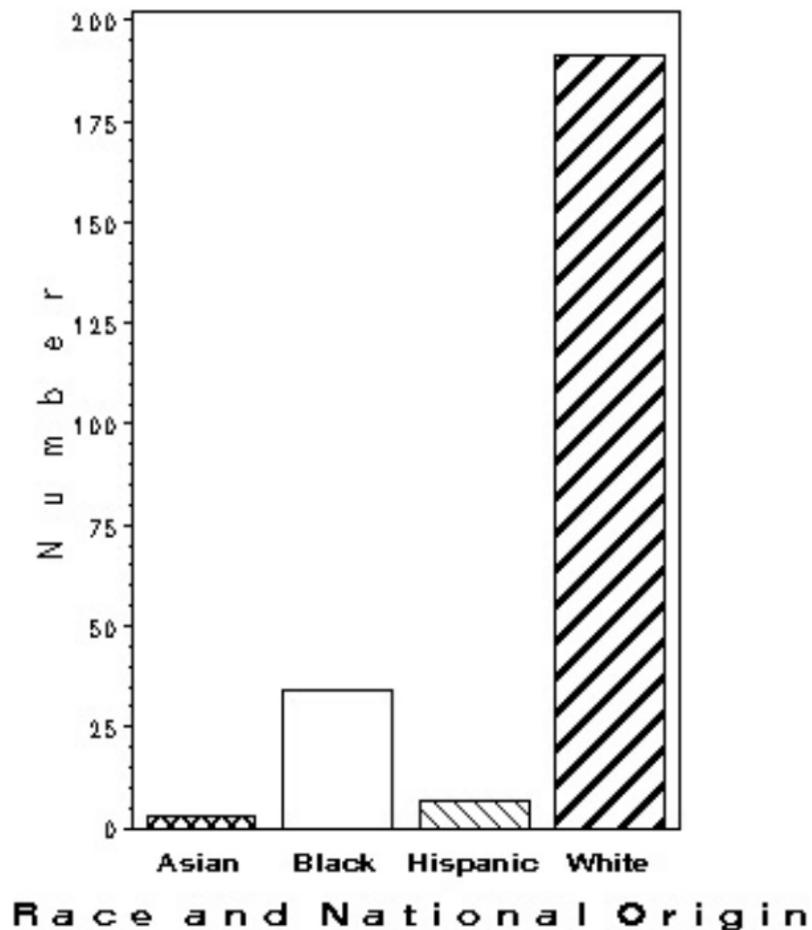


Exhibit 14: Assessment of Permanent Workforce
Job Series 147: Agricultural Marketing Reporter

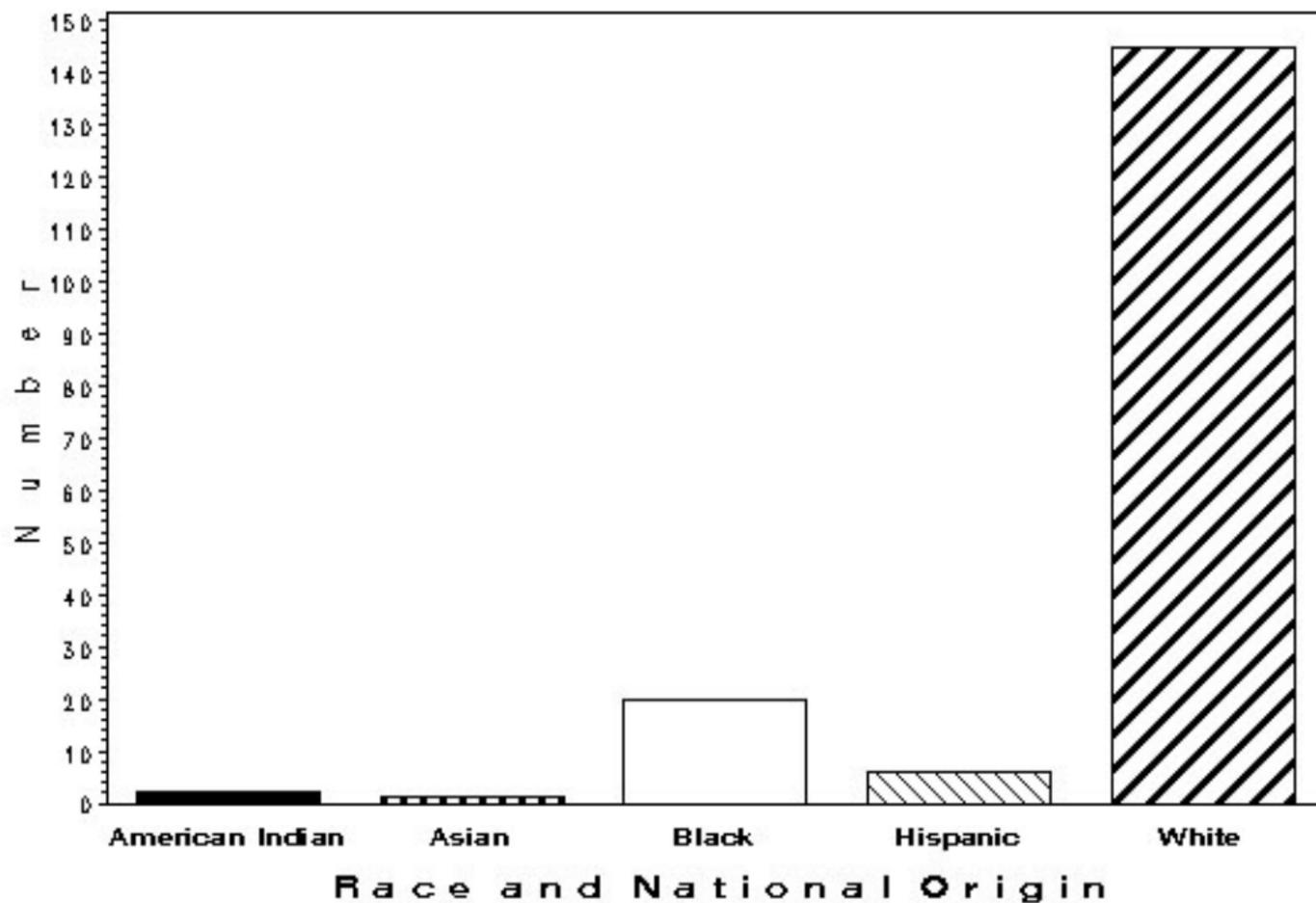
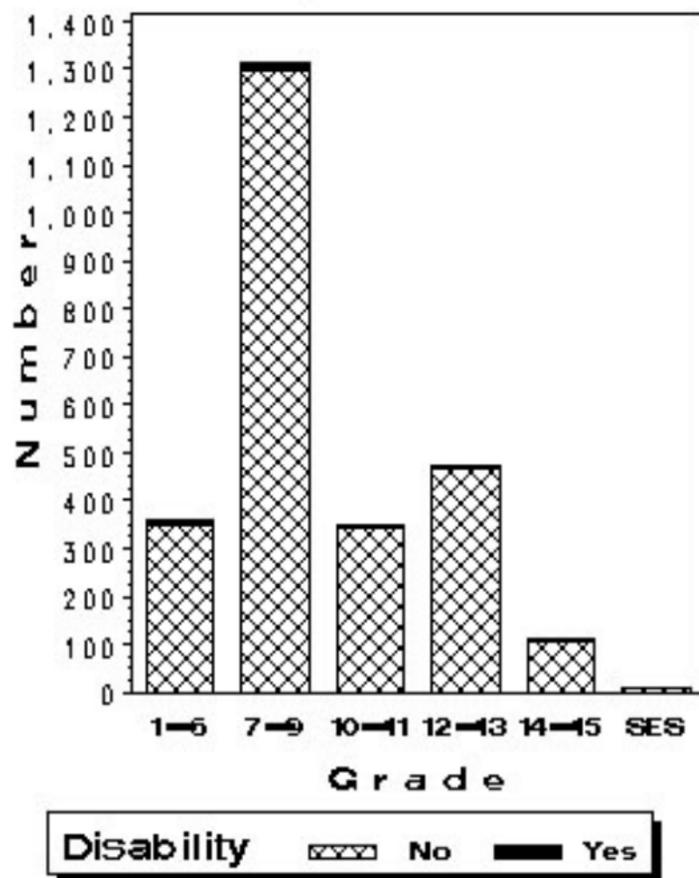


Exhibit 15: Assessment of Permanent Workforce Disability and Grades



The FY99 AMS goal on targeted disabilities is 1.39 percent of the total workforce.