

Agricultural Marketing Service

New Employee Handbook



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Welcome to AMS!

Hello, and welcome to the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). By now, we hope you've found your desk/work location, met your coworkers, and learned a little more about your new position. We know that the first several weeks of a new job can be overwhelming, with so many things to learn.

We are very proud of the many programs and accomplishments of AMS. But, most importantly, we are proud of the employees who contribute every day to achieving our mission to facilitate the marketing of agricultural products.

As an AMS employee, we believe that you will have a long and productive career with many opportunities to continue to grow and advance. We fully expect that you will make significant contributions to USDA's and AMS' programs and services.

Our leadership team wants you to have the tools, skills, leadership, and motivation to reach your full potential in support of our Agency's mission. We actively promote open and direct communication in AMS, and have many opportunities for employees to provide ongoing feedback. We hope that you will avail yourself of these opportunities to help make AMS a better place to work.

Thank you for choosing AMS as your employer. We look forward to a long and mutually satisfying working relationship.

Onboarding in USDA and AMS

Welcome to the “People’s Department.” We are pleased to have you join us in our proud tradition of public service. Your first week at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), will be busy learning about the organization, getting your pay and benefits arranged, and meeting colleagues. We want to help you be successful from the first moment and to start your employment as smoothly as possible. To this end, we organized the [USDA Onboarding Portal](#) and [AMS New Employee Orientation Site](#) (hosted by our sister agency, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, [APHIS]) to help you as you start your career with AMS. Please note: many of the websites listed as resources are hosted by our sister Agency APHIS. You will read more about our Mission Area in USDA and how APHIS supports AMS in achieving our mission). Please view the [AMS New Employee Welcome Video](#) to learn more about AMS.

For new employees working in the USDA South Building, the [Department's New Employee Orientation](#) provides additional, site-specific information. For our new employees in the field, please talk to your supervisor for site-specific information.

Your Supervisor

Your supervisor will welcome you to your team, introduce you to the culture and values of USDA AMS, explain what is expected of you, and supervise your employment and experience. USDA AMS counts on your supervisor to make your transition and employment as smooth and successful as possible.

AMS considers onboarding to be a yearlong process, and the first 90 days are critical. Your supervisor will work with you to ensure a faster path to productivity and inclusion.

Your Sponsor – Coming Soon!

To help new employees with their transition, AMS plans to have leaders assign sponsors to their new employees. Your sponsor will be a coworker assigned to you to help you learn the ropes. Your sponsor will give you a tour, help you become acclimated to USDA, AMS culture, and answer your questions. We encourage you to reach out to your sponsor any time you have any concerns or questions. Your sponsor is there to help you.



Members of the AMS Leadership Team brainstorm at their annual retreat.

Overview of USDA

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) serves all Americans daily. The [USDA website](#) describes the USDA mission and vision:

“We provide leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues based on public policy, the best available science, and effective management.

We have a vision to provide economic opportunity through innovation, helping rural America to thrive; to promote agriculture production that better nourishes Americans while also helping feed others throughout the world; and to preserve our Nation's natural resources through conservation, restored forests, improved watersheds, and healthy private working lands.”

In the Department’s early years, the vast majority of Americans lived on farms, and farmers produced only enough food to supply themselves and few other people. Today, although less than 3 percent of the population resides on farmland, farm workers produce enough for this country—as well as for a growing export market. Agriculture is, in fact, this Nation’s largest industry and its largest employer. Approximately 21 million people work in some phase of agriculture, from growing food and fiber to selling it in the supermarket. In addition, Americans enjoy better diets because of USDA’s nutrition research, education efforts, and food assistance programs.

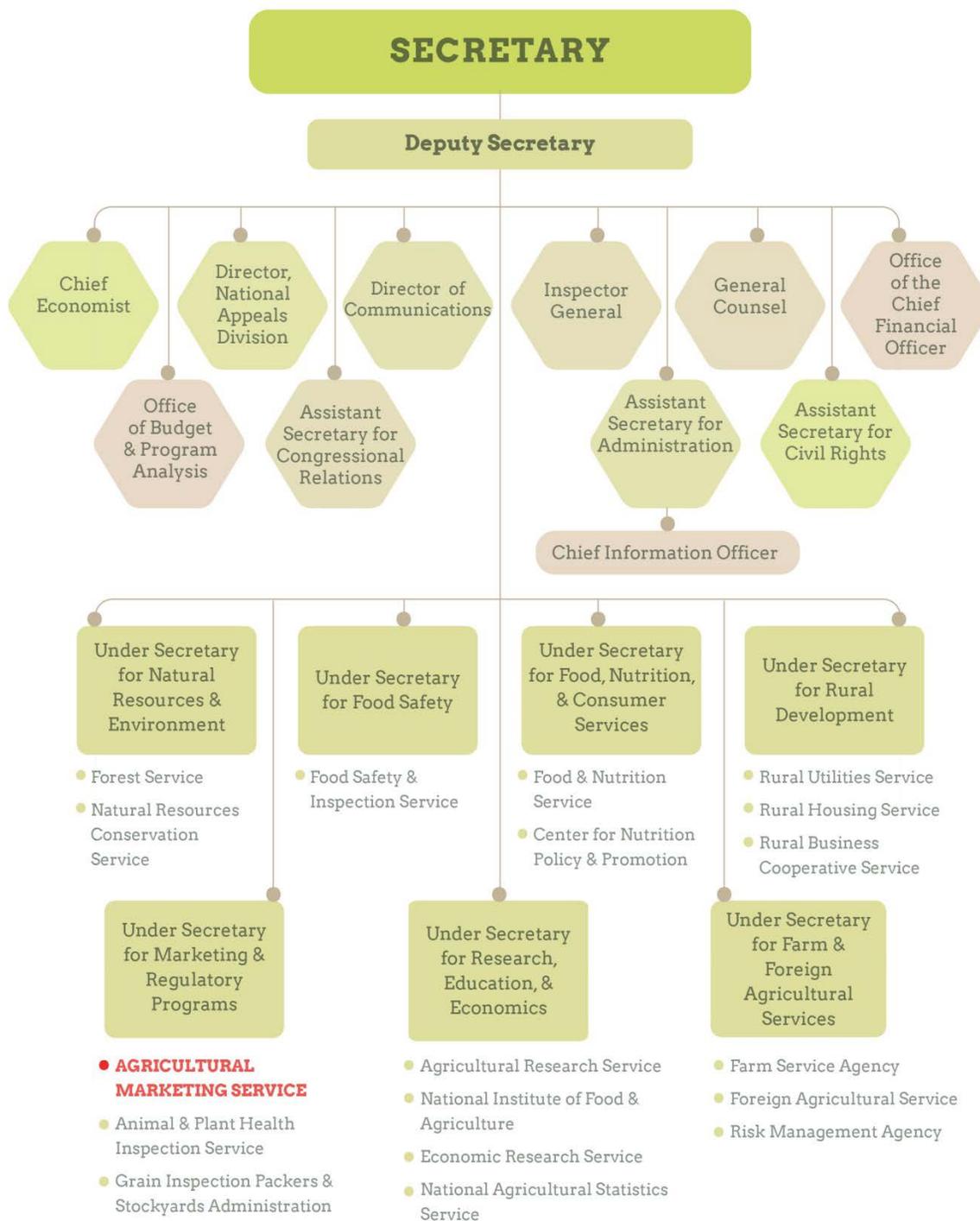
USDA research findings, directly and indirectly, benefit all Americans. The Department’s thorough inspection and grading services safeguard and assure standards of quality in the daily food supply. [Read more about USDA.](#)



Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack visits a farmers market with a congresswoman from Alabama.

USDA Organization Chart

This organization chart displays the Headquarters Organization, including the Secretary, Chief Officers, Under Secretaries, and Assistant Secretaries for various agencies within USDA.



You can review [additional information on each of the USDA's seven Mission Areas](#) online.

The **Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) Mission Area** facilitates domestic and international marketing of U.S. agricultural products and ensures the health and care of animals and plants. MRP agencies are active participants in setting national and international standards.

- [Agricultural Marketing Service \(AMS\)](#)
- [Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service \(APHIS\)](#)
- [Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration \(GIPSA\)](#)

AMS works closely with many of the USDA staff offices. Information can be found through the links below.

- [Office of Budget and Program Analysis \(OBPA\)](#)
- [Office of Communications \(OC\)](#)
- [Office of the Executive Secretariat \(OES\)](#)
- [Departmental Management \(DM\)](#)
- [Office of the Chief Information Officer \(OCIO\)](#)
- [Office of Congressional Relations \(OCR\)](#)



Administrator Elanor Starmer (center) meets with MRP Deputy Under Secretary Elvis Cordova (left).

Overview of the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

In 1939, Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace consolidated a number of bureaus and programs to create a single Agency to carry out a sweeping mission. The new Agricultural Marketing Service was charged with facilitating the efficient, fair marketing of U.S. agricultural products, including food, fiber, and specialty crops.



USDA Market News Reporter Alexandra Wright is part of a network of AMS employees across the country helping American farmers compete in a global market.

Over the last 76 years, AMS has evolved to support American farmers, ranchers, importers, exporters and many other facets of the agricultural industry.

The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) administers programs that create domestic and international marketing opportunities for U.S. producers of food, fiber, and specialty crops. AMS provides the agriculture industry with valuable services to ensure the quality and availability of wholesome food for consumers across the country.

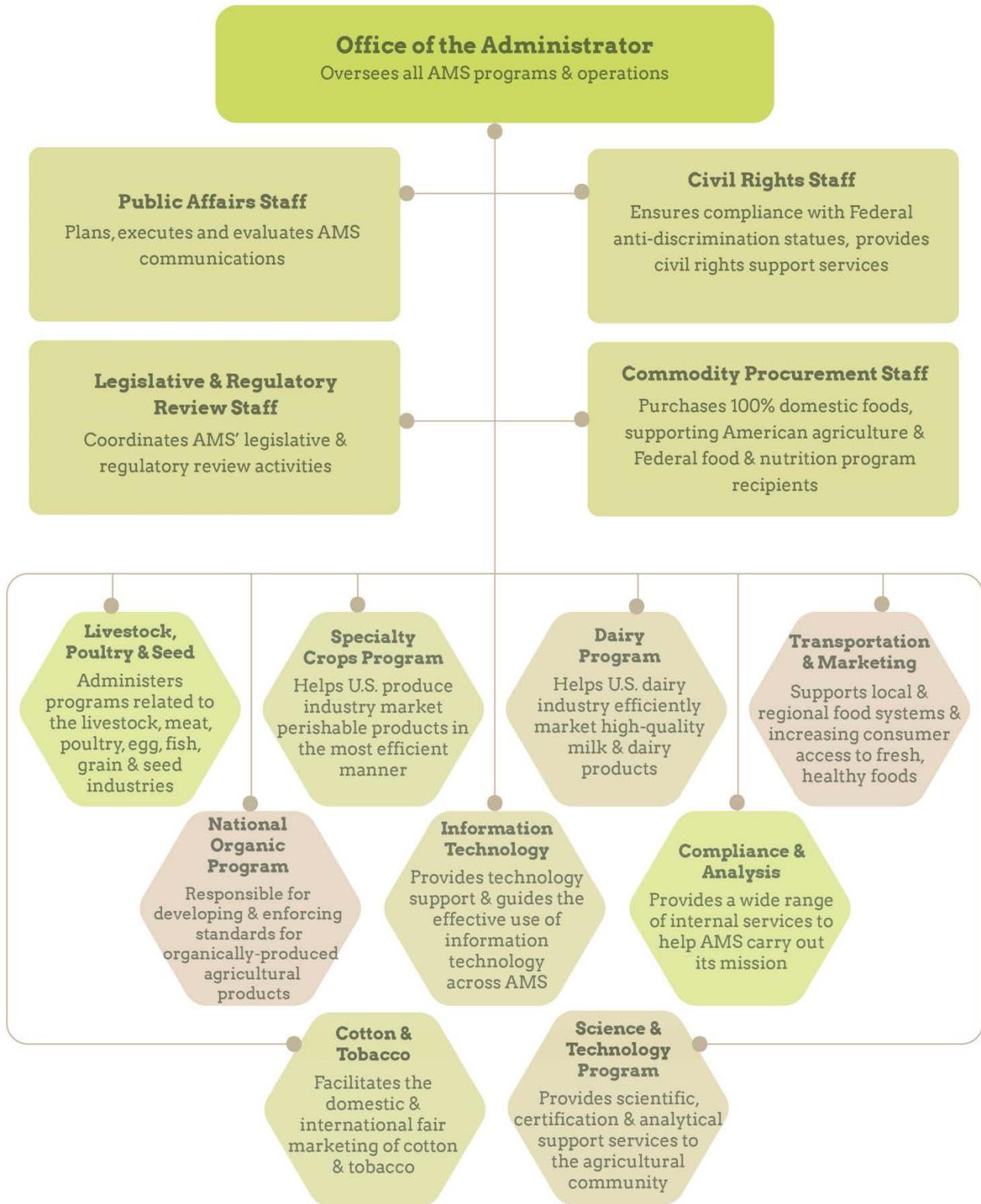
Nearly 4,000 AMS professionals work every day to support the country's diverse agricultural operations, which range from individual farmers to international businesses and employ 1 in 12 people. AMS services and its millions of dollars in annual grant investments also create opportunities by supporting economic development in small towns and rural communities that stand as the backbone of American values.

AMS is organized into nine Program areas and has four management staff offices, including the Public Affairs staff, the Legislative and Regulatory Review staff, Civil Rights staff, and the Commodity Procurement staff. Much of the Agency's support for agriculture is provided through commodity-specific efforts, including the Dairy Program, the Specialty Crops Program, the Livestock, Poultry and Seed Program, and the Cotton and Tobacco Program. AMS oversees the National Organic Program, the Science and Technology Program, and the Transportation and Marketing Program. AMS has two Programs which focus on administrative management, the Compliance and Analysis Program and the Information Technology Service. AMS provides regulatory oversight for over 20 research and promotion programs, and enforces other Federal regulations such as the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA) and the Federal Seed Act.

Together, these units work as a dynamic whole—a world-class system designed to facilitate the efficient, fair marketing of U.S. agricultural products, including food, fiber, and specialty crops.

[Biographies for the leaders of AMS Programs and Staff Offices](#) are available on our website.

AMS Organization Chart



Office of the Administrator

AMS is led by an Administrator who is politically appointed. AMS has two Associate Administrators who assist the Administrator in developing and implementing the Agency’s various programs and services. Each of the 9 Programs is headed by a Deputy Administrator; each Staff Office is headed by a Director. Your supervisor will provide you with more information about the supervisory structure of your specific organization.

Civil Rights

The [Office of Civil Rights](#) is responsible for ensuring Agency compliance with Federal statutes that prohibit discrimination in hiring, employment and program delivery. The Civil Rights staff serves as principle advisors to the Administrator and Agency senior staff on all civil rights issues.

Employees also provide a variety of [civil rights support services to the Agency](#), both in our Washington, DC headquarters and regional field offices across the nation. The Civil Rights Office is responsible for the development, implementation and monitoring of affirmative employment, special emphasis programs, compliance reviews, student/internship opportunities, EEO complaints process, alternative dispute resolution and related training.

Commodity Procurement

AMS purchases a variety of domestically produced and processed commodity food products, through a competitive process among approved vendors. These [purchases made by the AMS Commodity Procurement Staff](#) (CPS) support American agriculture by encouraging the consumption of domestic foods. CPS manages the Web-Based Supply Chain Management (WBSCM), the fully integrated, web-based ordering and procurement system used for the purchase of USDA Foods.

Some of the purchases help producers provide an outlet for surplus products. The wholesome, high quality products, collectively called USDA Foods, are delivered to schools, food banks, and households in communities across the country and are a vital component of our nation’s food safety net.



A 2015 infographic about USDA Food Purchasing. [View larger.](#)

Legislative and Regulatory Review

The Legislative and Regulatory Review Staff has responsibility for the overall coordination of the Agency's legislative and regulatory review activities that are governed by some 50 separate statutes, the Agency's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) activities and the Agency's Information Collection activities.

Public Affairs

The Public Affairs office plans, coordinates, executes and evaluates Agricultural Marketing Service communications, enhancing the Agency's brand and protecting its reputation as the trusted authority consumers and stakeholders can rely on to ensure the quality and wholesomeness of agricultural commodities moving into the commercial marketplace.

The Public Affairs office works responsibly with news media of all types so that AMS messaging is clearly understood by the Agency's numerous stakeholders and consumers nationwide.

Outreach

AMS serves farmers, ranchers, and businesses of all sizes, and the Outreach staff supports and serves all of our stakeholders, including our Farm Bill supported grants to organic certification, grading services to plant variety protection.

In conjunction with the Department's Office of Advocacy and Outreach, our Outreach staff is focused on:

- Improving the viability and profitability of small and beginning farmers and ranchers
- Improving access to USDA programs for historically underserved communities
- Improving agricultural opportunities for farm workers
- Closing the professional achievement gap by providing opportunities to talented and diverse young people to support the agricultural industry in the 21st century
- Improving diversity on USDA advisory boards and committees



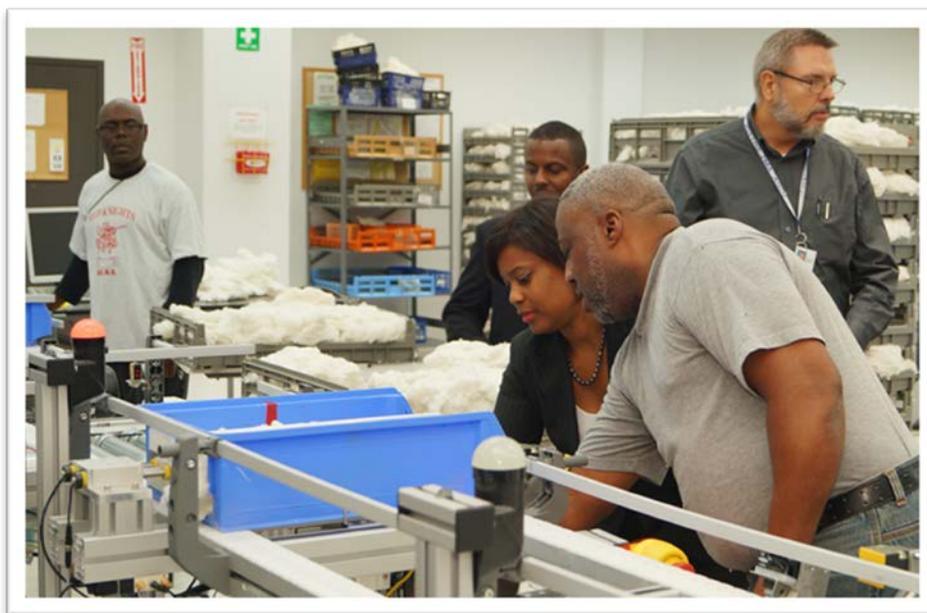
Small farmers & ranchers in the South learn about organic certification.

Cotton and Tobacco (C&T) Programs

The Cotton and Tobacco Programs, based in Memphis, TN, facilitate the domestic and international fair marketing of cotton and tobacco through a variety of services used by industry to measure quality, ensure consistency and report market activity. The program's standards are used by more than 50 countries for the instrument and visual grading of cotton and tobacco.

During a typical cotton season, the Program's services are used to test raw cotton valued at about \$6 billion. Its tobacco services include the grading and random sampling of certified samples that represent tens of millions of pounds of domestic and imported tobacco.

The AMS Cotton Program maintains the National Database (NDB) that allows owners or authorized agents of owners to retrieve classing data from the current crop and/or the previous four crops. The NDB stores classing information from all 10 regional classing offices.



Staff in our Memphis cotton classing office show visitors from HQ how their new technology works.

Dairy Program

The mission of Dairy Program is to facilitate the efficient marketing of milk and dairy products. The Dairy Program's vision is to be efficient, effective, and innovative in program service delivery in the continually changing industry and government environments and to provide excellence in customer service and industry relations with highly skilled and motivated employees.

The Dairy Program recognizes that our government service is a public trust for which we are all accountable. We subscribe to the following core values in our service to the dairy industry, the public, and within our own organization: cooperation, fairness, integrity, objectivity, and respect.

The AMS Dairy Program helps the U.S. dairy industry efficiently market high-quality milk and dairy products. It also ensures that U.S. consumers have access to a sufficient supply of these products at all times.

Livestock, Poultry, and Seed (LPS) Program

The AMS Livestock, Poultry and Seed Program is a team of close to 1,000 Federal and an additional 1,000 State employees who operate under Federal oversight by cooperative agreements with all 50 States. This work is carried out through seven different LPS Divisions. LPS administers a wide range of the Agency's programs related to the livestock, meat, poultry, egg, fish, grain, and seed industries as well as regulatory and support functions that extend to other commodities.

The programs include retail country of origin and method of production labeling programs, quality grading services, testing services, domestic and export auditing and accreditation services, mandatory and voluntary market news reporting services, economic and statistical analysis services, research and promotion program oversight, grant programs, and food product specification development and acceptance services for Federal food and nutrition assistance programs including the National School Lunch Program.

National Organic Program (NOP)

The National Organic Program (NOP) is a regulatory program housed within the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service. NOP is responsible for developing national standards for organically-produced agricultural products. These standards assure consumers that products with the USDA organic seal meet consistent, uniform standards. NOP regulations do not address food safety or nutrition.

Science & Technology (S&T) Program

The Science & Technology Program (S&T) provides scientific, certification, and analytical support services to the agricultural community to improve the quality, wholesomeness, and marketing of agricultural products domestically and internationally. S&T supports AMS and other USDA Agencies, Federal and State agencies, and private sector food and agricultural industries. S&T is organized into three divisions: [Laboratory Approval & Testing Division](#) (LATD); [Monitoring Programs Division](#) (MPD); and the [Plant Variety Protection Office](#) (PVPO).



AMS Food Chemists (from left to right) Lauren Shoemaker, Jonathan Barber, Kouassi Dje provide scientific & analytical support at our National Lab.

Specialty Crops Program (SCP)

The Specialty Crops Program helps buyers and sellers of all sizes in the U.S. produce industry to market their perishable products in the most efficient manner. We partner with State agencies and other industry organizations for the benefit of nationwide growers, shippers, brokers, receivers, processors, retailers and restaurants, direct to consumer sales, and the foodservice industry.

The Program offers a wide array of services that span from helping market the quality of products to ensuring that there is fair trade in the produce industry. The program also helps specialty crop growers and handlers to combine their resources to help their respective industries overcome marketing barriers.

Transportation & Marketing (T&M) Program

The Transportation and Marketing Program supports local and regional food systems and increasing consumer access to fresh, healthy foods in our communities. Our programs, grants and services help small- and mid-sized producers access marketing opportunities through the combination of applied research, technical services and grant support.

The program serves as the expert source for economic analysis on agricultural transportation from farm to markets through transportation market reports, regulatory representation and technical assistance. T&M administers farmers market and local food grant programs to help farmers and ranchers market the food they produce, including programs that further farmers markets, local food systems and specialty crops, such as fruit and vegetables.

The [USDA Farmers Market](#) and [People's Garden](#) located at the Headquarters building serves as a "living laboratory" for farmers markets and community gardens. T&M also manages [USDA's Local Food Directories](#), a set of online resources that are designed to provide customers with convenient access to information about farmers markets, CSAs, on-farm markets and food hub locations, directions, hours, product offerings and accepted forms of payment.



People's Garden Manager Annie Ceccarini helped guests at the 2016 White House Easter Egg Roll plant window boxes.

Information Technology Service (ITS)

The Information Technology Service (ITS) provides technology support services to all of the Agency's business units and is responsible for guiding the effective and efficient use of information technology across AMS.

ITS supports the Agency's strategic goals and USDA's strategic IT priorities by keeping AMS technology investments business-driven, solution-oriented, and sustainable. From investment planning, to application development, network performance, and user support, the service helps Agency programs use information technology to successfully deliver their mission in the 21st Century.



Code for America Northern Virginia Brigade members tackle hackathon challenges in the foreground while USDA subject matter experts & IT specialists provide support in the background (right side).

Compliance & Analysis (C&A) Program

Compliance and Analysis (C&A) is an internal Agency program that provides a wide range of professional services to AMS to help carry out its mission. C&A services include: analysis and information that supports decision-making; administrative management; employee safety and stewardship of facilities and resources; homeland security; compliance and investigations; budget and performance monitoring; financial management procedures and monitoring; management tools and reform initiatives that support mission achievement; and process improvement activities.

AMS Facilities

With nearly 4,000 employees and 430 locations, AMS has offices and laboratories across the United States.

Map of AMS office & laboratory locations across the country and in Puerto Rico.



Employee Engagement in USDA, AMS

AMS employees play a major role in creating an inclusive and highly performing organization, and each can make a significant contribution toward its success.

Improving employee engagement is an important goal across the Federal government and is directly linked to both the Strategic Goal 5 of the USDA's 2014-2018 Strategic Plan: Create a USDA for the 21st Century that is high-performing, efficient, and adaptable; and the Strategic Goal 6 of the AMS 2014-2018 Strategic Plan: Cultivate a Rich & Diverse Organizational Environment.

AMS leadership holds the development of a highly motivated, engaged, and diverse workforce as a top priority. AMS employee engagement efforts ensure that our stakeholders and the American people receive the best service our Agency can offer, and that our employees have an inclusive, highly-productive working environment full of opportunities.

AMS employee engagement focuses on the following primary objectives:

- Investing in Agency leaders and employees
- Leveraging technology for mission-critical activities
- Finding new efficiencies, improvements and cost-savings
- Encouraging and supporting diversity
- Continuing to address opportunities identified through the annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey to make AMS one of the best places to work in Federal Government.

To assist the Agency's leadership in carrying out these objectives, AMS has two employee-led committees, the Headquarters Employee Engagement Committee and the Field Employee Engagement Advisory Committee. Both committees consist of employees from each of AMS' nine Program areas.

For additional information about Employee Engagement, talk with your supervisor and access the Employee Engagement Folder, under the [One AMS site on USDA Connect](#).



Administrator Elanor Starmer (left) & Civil Rights Director Cliff Gilchrist (right) at the AMS observance of Women's History Month.

Policies and Regulations

You will benefit from reading and understanding the regulations and policies that affect your work and conduct as an employee. Each Agency within the Department publishes regulations, policies, and procedures to supplement those provided by USDA or to provide information on matters that pertain only to that Agency. Information pertinent to employees is contained in directives, manuals, circulars, and instructions. Some AMS-wide resources are listed below. Please check with your Program's administrative or human resources representative to obtain any Program-specific guidance.

Employee Conduct and Responsibilities

Each new employee should review:

- The USDA Directive - [DR 4070-735-001](#)
- The Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch - [5 CFR 2635](#)
- The Supplemental Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the USDA - [5 CFR 8301](#)

Human Resources (HR) Broadcast

The [HR Broadcast](#) is a quarterly publication that provides information related to the HR organization, service offerings, support, and tools available to AMS employees.

Human Resources Desk Guide (HRDG)

The [HRDG](#) is the mechanism to communicate personnel procedures for the three MRP agencies. Its purpose is to give supervisors, managers, and employees information needed to fulfill their personnel responsibilities.

AMS Issuances Library

The [AMS Policies and Administrative Issuances Library](#) is a collection of AMS Administrative Notices, Directives, Handbooks/Manuals, and Forms. It includes the AMS Civil Rights Policy and the AMS Anti-Harassment Policy.

AMS Internet Use

AMS provides links to the Internet to enhance business capabilities. Users are encouraged to use the Internet as a valuable source of information in their work and as a tool to disseminate information about AMS programs and activities. As with other AMS assets, however, [Internet access and use](#) must be protected against waste, fraud, unauthorized use, and/or abuse. Use of the Internet requires responsible judgment, supervisory discretion, and compliance with applicable laws. Use of AMS access to the Internet and other information technology in ways that violate ethical standards, deprive Americans of rightful value for their tax dollars, or embarrass this Agency will not be tolerated.

Background Investigations

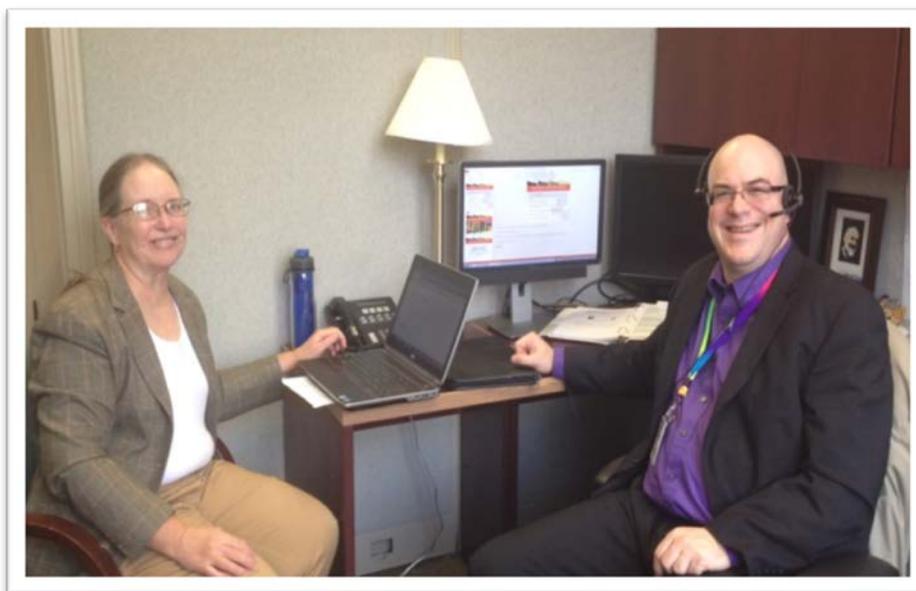
All appointments to the Federal Service require some level of background investigation, screening, and/or security clearance. The U.S. Government conducts investigations and periodic reinvestigations to determine whether applicants or incumbents either employed by the Government, or working for the Government under contract, are suitable to occupy a position and/or are eligible for access to classified information. A full description of the personnel security process can be found at [Personnel Security](#). All new employees are required to complete an electronic questionnaire through OPM's secure online e-QIP System. Employees will be contacted by the HRD Personnel Security staff with instructions on how to access OPM's online system.

USDA Identification Credential/Card (LincPass)

Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12), issued on August 12, 2004, calls for a mandatory, Government-wide standard for secure and reliable forms of IDs issued by the Federal Government to its employees and employees of Federal contractors for access to federally controlled facilities and networks.

USDA's HSPD-12 compliant ID is called the LincPass, as it is designed to link a person's identity to an ID credential and the credential to a person's ability to physically and logically access federally controlled buildings and information systems, respectively. Since the LincPass is used not only for identification purposes, but also to access both Federal computer systems and Federal facilities, it is very important that LincPass cardholders safeguard their LincPass at all times.

Information is provided to new employees who meet the issuance criteria for the LincPass credential through a series of emails from HSPD12Admin@identitymsp.com regarding the enrollment process and what needs to be done prior to the card's issuance. More [in-depth information on HSPD-12 and the LincPass credentialing process](#) is available online.



Ken Petersen & Donna Burke-Fonda from the AMS Specialty Crops Program host a webinar on GroupGAP certification.

Types of Appointments

There are various types of Federal appointments. The letter you received from Human Resources confirming your selection explained the type of appointment for which you were chosen. After you have access to your electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF), you will be able to view the Notification of Personnel Action, SF-50, which is a permanent record of your appointment.

Permanent employees are generally hired into the Federal Government under a career-conditional appointment. The first year of service of an employee who is given a career-conditional appointment is considered a probationary period. A career-conditional employee must complete 3 years of substantially continuous service before converting to career employee status.

Temporary and term appointments are used to fill positions when there is not a continuing need for the employees' services. Neither type of appointment is a permanent one, so they do not give the employee competitive status or reinstatement eligibility. Because temporary and term employees do not have status, they may not apply for permanent appointments through Agency internal merit promotion procedures, which are used for filling positions from the ranks of current and former permanent Federal employees. However, qualifying experience gained while employed in a temporary or term position is considered when applying later for a permanent position.

In addition, several Government wide appointing authorities permit or require agencies to non-competitively convert employees to career or career-conditional appointments from excepted service or temporary appointments.

Position Classification

Under the General Schedule (GS) system, jobs are categorized by pay plan, occupation series, and grades. This system ensures that positions that are similar require comparable qualifications, and that employees who are doing substantially equal work receive equal pay. The system is designed to provide a systematic grouping of positions by kind of work, level of difficulty and responsibility, and required qualifications of the position.

The classification system is based on a set of written standards and guides, which are used by trained specialists to evaluate and classify positions. Standards are issued by OPM for use throughout the Government.

Consequently, employee performance is not considered in the classification process. Employee performance is rewarded through a system of within-grade increases, quality increases, and awards for superior accomplishment. Other factors not considered in classifying a position are volume of work performed, employee's length of service, or superior qualifications.

Position Description

Your supervisor will provide you with your job description. A position description is the official record of your major duties and responsibilities and the supervisory relationship of your position. The duties and responsibilities that have been assigned to you will determine your title, the kind of position you occupy, the level or grade, series, and the base pay that you will receive for performing

the work.

If your job duties and responsibilities significantly change, your supervisor should take immediate steps to see that a new position description is prepared and submitted for classification review. She must make certain that your position description represents your current assigned duties and responsibilities. You and your supervisor have joint responsibility for reviewing your position description, annually, for accuracy and adequacy.

More [information about position descriptions is available online](#) and through your supervisor.

Work Schedules

The standard tour of duty for a full-time employee is a 40-hour basic workweek consisting of 5 days of 8 hours each day, Monday through Friday. Your supervisor will determine your work schedule based upon Agency and program needs, however, there are several flexibilities available.

For more [information about flexible work schedules access the HRDG](#) or talk to your supervisor.

Performance Standards

All employees must have an individual performance plan. A performance work plan is a written document that identifies critical elements of an employee's position and the standards by which that employee will be rated. Employees should receive a final written copy of each plan as soon as practicable, but no later than 30 days after the beginning of each performance year, or no later than 15 days after the assignment of an employee to a different position. All AMS employees participate in the development of their performance standards. All AMS employees participate in a mid-year and end-of-year performance review.

Additional information about performance management can be found by talking with your supervisor or visiting the USDA [Performance Management website](#).

Individual Development Plan (IDP)

All employees must establish an Individual Development Plan (IDP). IDPs are a basic tenet of the Employee Engagement efforts to provide the structure for AMS to encourage, support, and invest in the short- and long-term development of its employees. Your IDP can be an effective tool to guide your development. For example, as part of a career planning strategy, employees, supervisors, and training managers can use IDPs to outline appropriate training and help close competency gaps related to work currently performed. Equally important, IDPs can help direct employees to activities that foster engagement, or encourage them to take on stretch assignments, thereby becoming better prepared for a possible promotion or simply assuming new responsibilities.

Communication between you and your supervisor is essential in developing performance plans and IDPs. There should be a common understanding about the expectations for performance as well as for your development as an AMS employee. In addition, there should be a discussion of the goals within your Program or support unit and your involvement in or contribution to these goals for the upcoming year.

Promotions and Transfers

Merit Promotion is the process through which current and former Federal employees who have obtained competitive status compete for positions. The MRP Merit Promotion Plan also permits candidates eligible for appointment under noncompetitive hiring authorities, such as the Veterans Recruitment Appointment (VRA) and the Schedule A authority for people with disabilities, to apply for positions announced through Merit Promotion procedures. Federal employees who do not have competitive status (i.e., term, temporary and excepted service employees) are generally not eligible to compete through Merit Promotion unless they are eligible for reinstatement or appointment under a noncompetitive hiring authority. Employees who do not have competitive status can apply for positions through Case Examining procedures.

Vacancy announcements are posted on OPM's [USAJOBS website](#). When reading vacancy announcements, you should always check the "Who may be considered" section to determine which recruitment method is being used. The announcement tells you everything you need to know about applying and includes the name of an HR staff member to call if you have questions or need reasonable accommodation in the application process.

For additional information on promotions and transfers, please talk to your supervisor.



AMS employees gather for a career workshop.

Your Pay

General Schedule

The [General Schedule \(GS\)](#) classification and pay system covers the majority of civilian white-collar Federal employees in professional, technical, administrative, and clerical positions. The GS system is divided into 15 grades, each of which has 10 steps. Entry-level hiring into a grade normally is done at step 1.

Pay is locality based. For GS employees, there are more than 30 locality pay areas and a catchall “rest of the U.S.” locality for everywhere else within the 48 contiguous States. Raises are set by local labor market conditions, subject to the availability of funds appropriated by Congress.

[Within-grade increases \(WGs\)](#) or step increases are periodic increases in a GS employee’s rate of basic pay from one step of the grade to the next higher step of that grade. Employees who occupy permanent positions earn WGs upon meeting the following three requirements established by law:

- The employee’s performance must be at an acceptable level of competence. To meet this requirement, an employee’s most recent performance rating of record must be at least Level 3 (“Fully Successful” or equivalent).
- The employee must have completed the required waiting period to advance to the next higher step.
- The employee must not have received an “equivalent increase” in pay during the waiting period. (See 5 CFR 531.407.)

Wage Grade

The [Federal Wage System \(FWS\)](#) is a uniform pay-setting system that covers Federal appropriated fund and non-appropriated fund blue-collar employees who are paid by the hour. Rates are identified as WG, WS, or WL. The system’s goal is to make sure that Federal trade, craft, and laboring employees within a local wage area who perform the same duties receive the same rate of pay. The FWS includes 132 appropriated fund and 125 non-appropriated fund local wage areas.

AMS Federal employees are paid biweekly. Your annual pay rates are based on 26 pay periods of 80 hours each. You will receive a salary payment every 2 weeks on designated paydays. For more [information about the Federal pay system access the HRDG](#) or talk to your supervisor.

Overtime

Overtime is defined as work in excess of 8 hours in a day or 40 hours in a workweek. Overtime also is work that is officially ordered and approved by your supervisor. Regardless of tour, overtime hours of work in excess of 8 in a day are not included in computing hours of work in excess of 40 hours in an administrative workweek. Overtime must be requested and authorized by your supervisor. For more [information on overtime policies access the HRDG](#) or talk to your supervisor.

Annual Leave

Annual leave can be used for whatever purposes you desire. Most people use it for vacations and personal business. Except for emergencies, annual leave must be authorized in advance by your supervisor.

An employee earns annual leave for each full pay period of employment unless he/she is in a non-pay status for the entire pay period. Annual leave is earned based on the number of years of Federal employment, including creditable military service. The following table outlines the annual leave categories and the accrual rates for each category.

Full Time Employees	Leave Hours Per Pay Period	Total Days
Less than 3 years of service	4 hour leave category	13 days/year
3 years – 15 years of service	6 hour leave category	20 days/year
15 years or more of service	8 hour leave category	26 days/year

Part Time Employees	One hour of leave is accrued for each:
Less than 3 years of service	20 hours in pay status
3 years – 15 years of service	13 hours in pay status
15 years or more of service	10 hours in pay status

Pay status hours for part-time employees that do not equal the number necessary for a minimum leave credit are carried over from one pay period to the next to accumulate toward future leave credits. Employees can carry 30 days (240 hours) of unused annual leave from year to year. You are advised to use your annual leave throughout the year to avoid losing accrued leave above the 30-day limit.

The Voluntary Leave Transfer Program allows a Federal employee to donate unused accrued annual leave to another Federal employee who needs leave because of a medical emergency. This program does not allow for the donation of sick leave, compensatory time, or credit hours.

Sick Leave

Sick leave may be used when you: receive medical, dental, or optical examination or treatment; are incapacitated by physical or mental illness, injury, pregnancy, or childbirth; would, because of exposure to a communicable disease, jeopardize the health of others by your presence on the job; or must be absent from work for adoption-related activities. In addition, you may use a limited amount of sick leave to provide care for a family member as the result of physical or mental illness, injury, pregnancy, childbirth, or medical, dental, or optical examination or treatment; or make arrangements necessitated by the death of a family member or attend the funeral of a family member. For more [information about the family leave benefits access the](#) HRDG or talk to your supervisor.

For full-time employees, the sick leave accrual rate is 13 days a year; for part-time employees, it's one hour for each 20 days in pay status. There is no limit on how much sick leave can be accumulated.

Other Types of Leave

There are other forms of leave including: compensatory time off; excused absences without loss of pay and without charge to leave; family and medical leave; 7 days of paid leave each calendar year (in addition to annual or sick leave) to serve as a bone-marrow donor and 30 days to serve as an organ donor; time off as a form of performance recognition; leave without pay used instead of paid leave for various purposes with supervisory approval; religious reasons, and military leave. For more [information about the alternate forms of leave](#) or talk to your supervisor.

Holidays

There are 10 Federal holidays:

- New Year's Day—January 1
- Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.—Third Monday in January
- Presidents Day—Third Monday in February
- Memorial Day—Last Monday in May
- Independence Day—July 4
- Labor Day—First Monday in September
- Columbus Day—Second Monday in October
- Veterans Day—November 11
- Thanksgiving Day—Fourth Thursday in November
- Christmas Day—December 25

For additional information about leave as it relates to federal holidays, talk to your supervisor or access the [HRDG](#).

Leave Donation Program

At times, there are AMS employees who may be out of the office for an extended period of time due to a serious medical condition and have exhausted all their available leave. If you would like to donate annual leave to employees approved to receive leave donations, go to our [Leave Donor Program site](#). There you will find links to the current leave recipient list, and the Leave Transfer Program Donor Application (AD-1043).

If you would like to apply as a donor, please complete the application and submit it (via fax or mail) to:

Fax: (612) 336-3544
Mail: USDA APHIS MRPBS HRD
Attn: LCT
Butler Square 5th Floor
100 North 6th Street
Minneapolis, MN 55403

Employee Benefits

[Eligibility for employee benefits](#) depends upon your type of appointment and your tour of duty. Generally, you must be hired under a non-temporary appointment, and have a regular tour of duty, in order to be eligible for benefits. Temporary employees are immediately eligible for dependent care flexible spending accounts and become eligible for limited benefits after they have completed one year of continuous service. [Find out more about eligibility for employee benefits.](#)

For more information about any of the employee benefits identified below, talk to your supervisor, contact the [Benefits Assistant](#) serving your program, or visit any of the following websites:

- [Federal Employee Health Benefits \(FEHB\) Program](#)
- [Healthcare.gov](#)
- [Federal Employees Group Life Insurance \(FGLI\)](#) online calculator- determine costs for various combinations of FGLI coverage
- General Information on [Dental and Vision Benefits](#)
- [Benefeds.com](#) – to enroll in Dental and Vision Benefits
- [Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program \(FLTCIP\)](#) Application Package
- [Federal Employees Retirement System \(FERS\)](#) Employee Letter
- [Civil Service Retirement System \(CSRS\)](#) Offset Employee Letter

Premium Conversion

Premium conversion allows you to *reduce* your taxable income. Premium conversion uses Federal tax rules to allow you to deduct your share of health insurance premiums, dental and vision insurance premiums, and flexible spending account contributions from your taxable income, which means you save on Federal income tax, Social Security, and Medicare tax, and state tax (varies from state to state).

As an employee newly eligible for benefits, you will automatically be enrolled under premium conversion, unless you waive your participation. For additional information on premium conversion, please visit the Office of Personnel Management's [premium conversion](#) webpage.

Health Insurance

Your health insurance coverage becomes effective the first day of the first pay period after your completed [SF-2809](#) is received in Human Resources Operations (HRO) and that follows a pay period during any part of which you are in pay status.

The [Federal Employee Health Benefits \(FEHB\)](#) Program offers a variety of health insurance plans. Detailed information on the types of plans, plan options, and premiums available in your area, is available at OPM's [Federal Employee Health Benefits](#) site.

Coverage is available for the following family members of employees:

- Spouse, including a common law marriage
- Children under the age of 26, including an adopted child, recognized natural child, or stepchild or foster children (if living with employee in regular parent-child relationship)
- Children age 26 or older who are incapable of self-support, if condition occurred before 26.

Health Insurance Instructions

You must complete an SF-2809 upon becoming eligible for coverage.

Print (one copy only), sign, fax, or mail the SF-2809 to HRO within 60 days of your eligibility date. If you are participating in premium conversion, you may not change your enrollment status until the next annual open season, or if you experience a [qualifying life event](#). The annual open season is held each year from mid-November to mid-December and provides you an opportunity to change your enrollment by electing to enroll in, change, or cancel your enrollment in a health plan, or change your level of health coverage.

If you elect to enroll in a health plan, you should receive your health plan membership card approximately 4 to 6 weeks after the effective date.

Each November the Federal Government holds a benefits “open season” in which you may change health plans, levels of health coverage, and dental and vision care.

Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FGLI)

Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FGLI) provides group term life insurance coverage for you and for eligible family members. You are automatically covered by FGLI Basic Life insurance, unless you choose to waive that coverage. Basic life insurance coverage is based on an employee’s Basic pay rounded up to the nearest \$1000, plus an additional \$2,000, plus Accidental Death & Dismemberment (AD&D) coverage.

You can also elect optional insurance for you and/or your eligible family members within 60 days of your employment eligibility date.

Eligible family members include:

- Spouse, including a common law marriage
- Children under the age of 26, including adopted child, recognized natural child, or stepchild or [foster children](#) (if living with employee in regular parent-child relationship).
- Children age 26 or older who are incapable of self-support due to pre-existing condition

Additional information may be found on OPM’s [FGLI Program](#) website, including the FGLI Program Booklet, which provides general information about FGLI and the online calculator, which determines costs for various combinations of FGLI coverage.

FGLI Instructions

Instructions: You must complete an SF-2817 upon becoming eligible for coverage.

Print (one copy only), sign, fax, or mail the SF-2817 to HRO within 60 days of your eligibility date. Basic coverage is effective the day you enter on duty in pay status. Optional coverage is effective the first day you enter on duty in pay status on or after HRO receives your SF-2817. Opportunities to increase your coverage include open season, a [qualifying life event](#), or after completing a physical exam and submitting an [SF-2822](#).

There are no regular open seasons for life insurance enrollment.

Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP)

The Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) provides a variety of nationwide and some regional plans. FEDVIP allows self only, self plus one, or self and family enrollment options.

Eligible family members are identified below:

- Spouse, including a common law marriage
- Unmarried dependent child under age of 22, including adopted child, recognized natural child or stepchild or [foster children](#) (if living with employee in regular parent-child relationship).
- Children age 22 or over if incapable of self-support, if disabling condition happened before age 22

FEDVIP Instructions

Instructions: You can enroll through the [Benefeds website](#) within 60 days of the date you become eligible for benefits. Enrollment is effective the first day of the first pay period after your enrollment request is received by BENEFEDS. Once you enroll, you may not change your enrollment until the next annual open season or until you experience a qualifying life event.

Questions about BENEFEDS can be addressed by calling 1-877-888-3337 or TTY 1-877-889-5680.

Federal Flexible Spending Account Program (FSAFEDS)

The Federal Flexible Spending Account Program (FSAFEDS) provides you the opportunity to pay for out-of-pocket medical expenses and/or child and elder care expenses with pre-tax dollars, which saves you money.

There are three types of accounts available: a general purposes health care flexible spending account (HCFSA), a limited expense health care flexible spending account (LEXFSA), and a dependent care flexible spending account (DCFSA).

Eligible family members for HCFSA and LEXFSA reimbursement are identified below:

- You & your spouse, including a valid common law marriage
- Any person who may be claimed as a taxable dependent
- Adult children under the age of 27 (Adult children are covered through December 31 of the year in which they turn 26)

Eligible family members for DCFSA reimbursement are identified below:

- Children under the age of 13
- Any person who may be claimed as a dependent for tax purposes

FSAFEDS Instructions

Enroll through [FSAFEDS website](#) within 60 days of the date you become eligible for benefits. You are not eligible to enroll on or after October 1 of each year, but can enroll during the annual open season period following October 1.

Additional information may be found on OPM's [FSAFEDS program](#) website. Questions about FSAFEDS can be addressed by calling 1-877-372-3337 or TTY 1-800-952-0450.

Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program (FLTCIP)

The Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program ([FLTCIP](#)) provides financial resources for care in a nursing home, assisted living facility, adult day care, or at home. FLTCIP helps cover the costs of certain long-term care services. Long-term care is the assistance you receive to perform activities of daily living or supervision you receive because of a severe cognitive impairment. Your premium is based on your age on the date you apply as well as the benefit options you select. The FLTCIP is medically underwritten. Certain medical conditions, or combinations of conditions, will prevent some people from qualifying for coverage. You, your spouse, domestic partner, adult children, parents, parents-in-law, and stepparents are all eligible to apply for FLTCIP at any time. A domestic partner applicant must indicate on the FLTCIP application that a [Declaration of Domestic Partnership](#) form has been submitted to HR in Minneapolis, MN:

USDA APHIS MRP-BS HRO
Attn: Benefits Team
Butler Square
100 N. 6th Street
Minneapolis, MN 55403
Fax: (612) 336-3545
Email: Kristi.Carrier@aphis.usda.gov

Additional information may be found on the [FLTCIP](#) program website or by calling Long Term CarePartners at 1-800-582-3337 or TTY: 1-800-843-3557.

FLTCIP Instructions

Instructions: Applications with abbreviated underwriting are accepted within 60 days of the date you become eligible for benefits, or you may apply at any time with full underwriting.

Retirement

There are two retirement pension plans for Federal employees. Eligibility for retirement coverage under any of the retirement systems is determined by the type of appointment and work schedule of the employee.

History of the Federal Retirement Systems

The Civil Service Retirement Act of 1920 established the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS). The retirement system provided a defined benefit (pension) once an eligible employee met certain age and service requirements. In return, regular CSRS employees contributed 7% of their basic pay to the Civil Service Retirement & Disability Fund and did not contribute to Social Security. With the passing of the Social Security Amendments of 1983, certain Federal employees were subject to Social Security tax and covered under CSRS Offset. In 1987, the Federal Employees' Retirement System (FERS) was established and created a retirement system that includes a defined benefit, social security, and a 401(k) type savings and investment plan called the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP).

Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS)

- Coverage is automatic based on type of appointment and work schedule; however, if you were previously covered by the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), the FERS information may not apply to you.
- Your FERS annuity (pension) will be based on your highest 3 years of salary and your years of creditable service.
- If you have performed active duty military service, find out how to add this military time to your [FERS Service Credit](#).

Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS)

- Coverage is based on type of appointment and work schedule, and whether you were previously covered by the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS). If you were previously covered by CSRS, your Benefits Specialist may provide you with an opportunity to elect FERS coverage.
- Your CSRS annuity (pension) will be based on your highest 3 years of salary and your years of creditable service.
- If you have performed active military service after 1956, find out how to add this military time to your [CSRS Service Credit](#).

The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP)

The Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) is a savings and investment plan similar to a 401(k). Employees covered by the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) or the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS)/CSRS- Offset are eligible to contribute tax-deferred salary to the TSP. Newly hired or re-hired employees, with a break in service of more than 30 days, will automatically have 3 percent of their basic pay contributed to their account. FERS employees are eligible for Agency contributions immediately – there is no waiting period for receiving Agency automatic (1 percent) contributions or matching contributions on up to 5 percent of basic salary.

Newly eligible employees are able to opt out of the automatic enrollment and request a refund within the first 90 days.

Please refer to the following documents for additional information:

- [TSP Automatic Enrollment Notification Letter for Newly Eligible FERS Employees](#)
- [TSP Automatic Enrollment Notification Letter for Newly Eligible CSRS/CSRS Offset Employees](#)

The [TSP Summary Booklet](#) provides general information for employees about this program.

TSP Enrollment Instructions

Complete the [TSP-1](#) to start, increase/decrease, or stop your TSP contributions. Print, sign, and mail, fax, email the form to:

USDA APHIS MRP-BS HRO

Attn: Benefits Team

Butler Square

100 N. 6th Street

Minneapolis, MN 55403

Fax: 612-336-3545

Email: Kristi.Carrier@aphis.usda.gov

Designating Beneficiaries for your Federal Benefits

Designations of Beneficiary forms are used to specify who you want to receive these benefits in the event of your death. Complete these designation forms **ONLY** if you want to designate differently than the normal order of precedence, or if you are updating previously filed designations.

You may submit the following designation forms at any time.

Form	Information
Designation of Beneficiary for Unpaid Compensation SF-1152	Designate who you want to receive your unpaid salary, annual leave, or any other payroll payment.
Designation of Beneficiary for Federal Employees Group Life Insurance SF-2823	Designate who you want to receive payment of your life insurance.
Designation of Beneficiary for Federal Employees Retirement System SF-3102	For employees covered by FERS only, this form designates payment of your FERS contributions if there is no survivor eligible for an annuity.
Designation of Beneficiary for Civil Service Retirement System SF-2808	For employees covered by CSRS only, this form designates payment of your CSRS contributions if there is no survivor eligible for annuity.
Designation of Beneficiary for Thrift Savings Plan TSP-3	Designates payment of your Thrift Savings Plan account. Instruction: Complete without erasures or mistakes. Print, sign, and obtain two witness signatures. Mail to the TSP address shown on the form. Do not fax.

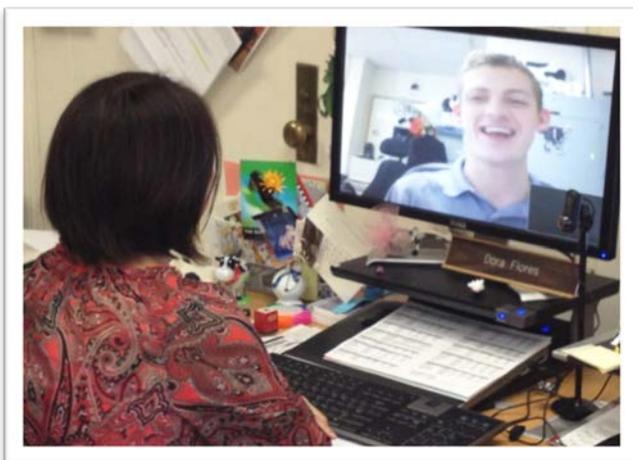
Employee Programs and Services

Telework

While participation in telework is not an employee entitlement, AMS begins with the presumption that many of our positions are appropriate for telework. AMS positions that are not suitable for core telework may still be suitable for situational telework or unscheduled telework. Every employee will receive an annual notification that will indicate whether the employee's position is telework eligible. Telework agreements will be approved on a case-by-case basis or with an approved reasonable accommodation.

To participate in telework, you must have:

- An approved telework agreement in place prior to the beginning of telework
- Completed mandatory telework training
- Demonstrated dependability and the ability to handle responsibility
- A proven or expected minimum performance rating of "fully successful or equivalent"
- No disciplinary action, adverse action or placement on leave restriction in the preceding 12 months.



For more information about telework, talk to your supervisor, access the [HRDG](#) or visit the [APHIS Telework Site](#).

Employee Dora Flores teleconferences with a student intern. The AMS Dairy Program created a nationally-recognized virtual student internship program.

Transit Incentive Program

The Transit Incentive Program provides AMS employees who use public transportation and/or a registered vanpool an Agency-paid subsidy to cover part or all of your round-trip commuting costs to and from work. The Federal Transit Incentive Program was established through several public laws, a notice, and Executive Order 13150, Federal Workforce Transportation. The Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) transit incentive program was established in 2001.

The goals of the Federal Transit Incentive Program are to:

- Improve the environment for our day-to-day lives and for future generations
- Save fuel
- Reduce traffic congestion
- Reduce the number of single-occupant vehicles on the road

For more [information about the Transit Incentive Program](#) visit the HRDG or talk to your supervisor.

AMS Mentoring Program

The AMS Mentoring Program is designed to facilitate the learning process and offer experiences that will assist protégés in understanding and fulfilling their career potential. It is a voluntary program that benefits both employees and AMS by fostering career relationships and the exchange of career information between mentors and protégés. Mentors can provide numerous benefits to protégés, including but not limited to:

- Helping employees develop as professionals by improving their skills in translating values and strategies into productive actions;
- Developing new and/or different perspectives;
- Obtaining assistance for new and innovative ideas,
- Demonstrating their strengths and exploring potential, and
- Increasing career networks and receiving greater exposure within the Agency/USDA.

Each fiscal year, the AMS Mentoring Program accepts applications for both mentors and protégés. Pairs are matched and provided guidance and training for a successful mentoring partnership. The Mentoring Program committee hosts a kickoff meeting, other development events, and a closing ceremony. All AMS employees are encouraged to participate.



AMS Mentoring Program participants gather for a book discussion.

The AMS Voice

The AMS Voice is the Agency's weekly internal e-newsletter that delivers information to all employees about important events, Agency highlights, and employee happenings. You must subscribe to the service in order to receive it. Instructions to subscribe are below.

AMS uses a powerful, easy-to-use email subscription service called GovDelivery to create and distribute the Voice. To subscribe to the Voice via GovDelivery, follow this four-step process:

Step 1: Sign Up

1. Visit the [AMS internal quick subscribe page](#). **Do not forward** this link to anyone outside of AMS. Those outside of the Agency should click the red envelope GovDelivery icon on the home page to subscribe: 
2. Enter your email address and click the "Submit" button.
3. On the "New Subscriber" page, confirm your email address, select an "Email Delivery Preference" option and create an optional password (highly recommended).
4. Enter the "Submit" button, and you will be taken to the "Subscription Topics" page.

Step 2: Subscribe to the Voice and Choose Other AMS Topics of Interest

1. Under "Subscription Topics," look for the "AMS Internal Newsletters" category. Click the checkbox next to "[The AMS Voice e-newsletter](#)" topic under that category.
2. You can also subscribe to a vast array of topics covering all aspects of AMS' mission. Browse the "Subscription Topics" categories and topics of interest. Click on the "+" sign to expand categories and topics.
3. If you want to receive e-mail updates on a particular category or topic, click the checkbox next to that category or topic. If you choose a category, you'll receive updates for all the topics under that category.
4. Save your topics by clicking the "Submit" button at the bottom of the page. You will be taken to the "Questions" page.

Step 3: Fill in the Information on the "Questions" Page

1. Enter your first and last name, select whether you are a headquarters or field employee and, if you are a field employee, select your state from the dropdown box.
2. Click the "Submit" button.
3. **Important:** Click the "Finish" button to complete your subscription process.

Step 4: Get the Updates You Want

When AMS has new information to share related to any of the categories or topics you chose, GovDelivery will e-mail that information to you.

Work Life Wellness (WLW) Program

The Work Life Wellness (WLW) Program provides resources and services to assist employees in balancing work and personal lives. The objective of the WLW Program is to encourage employees to generate a healthy attitude and lifestyle and to develop habits that will improve their health and morale, and prevent illness. Program representatives at headquarters, regional hubs, and field locations are trained to provide WLW services at the local, state, and regional level.

For more information on Work Life Wellness, talk to your supervisor or visit the WLW website at [WLW Program](#).

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) helps employees resolve personal and work problems through professional assistance. The EAP helps with the following types of problems: marital, financial, alcohol, drug, family, vocational, work-related stresses, legal referral, weight/weight loss, physical/medical, dependent care, emotional or psychological, and any other problems that may surface.

EAP encourages voluntary participation. If a person thinks they have a problem, they can call the EAP number and set up an appointment. A professional EAP counselor will work directly and confidentially with the employee or family member to help resolve the problem. In some cases, the EAP counselor's role will be to assist in determining what additional community resources can provide future assistance.

The cost of EAP is covered by your employer. Costs associated with referral may be covered by medical benefits. Call 1-800-222-0364 or TTY 1-888-262-7848 or visit <http://www.foh4you.com/>

APHIS Ergonomics Program

The [APHIS Ergonomics Program](#) is available to all AMS employees, both in headquarters and in the field, and uses a comprehensive and participative approach to inform employees of possible ergonomic hazards to which they may be exposed. This program focuses on employees whose primary work-related tasks require repetitive motions, awkward postures, high repetition, and forceful exertions. It has established several proactive tools to meet the ergonomic needs of AMS employees. The use of this program does require an Inter-Agency Agreement between AMS and APHIS before any services are performed. If you need a workstation review, please talk to your supervisor.

The USDA [Target Center](#) can also assist with special or individualized equipment to ensure that the electronic workplace is accessible to all of our employees. Most of this technology is available at no cost to qualified Federal employees with disabilities through the Computer Accommodations Program (CAP) at Department of Defense. We encourage you to visit the [CAP website](#), where you will find video demonstrations of the most common assistive technology. AMS employees should talk with their supervisor about specialized equipment needs and submit a request through the TARGET Center, which will procure the equipment through CAP. The Target Center's [Frequently Asked Questions](#) is very helpful in navigating through specific questions.

The Work Number for Everyone

"The Work Number for Everyone" is a service that allows you to provide almost instant verification of employment to secure a loan, rent an apartment, or anything else where employment verification is required. This automated, paperless service is available 7 days a week and provides employment and salary verification through a touch-tone phone to credit and reference verifiers upon request.

Employees are responsible for authorizing the release of their employment and salary information. The credit and reference verifiers must receive an authorization code from you to access your information.

To obtain an authorization code, with a touch-tone telephone, you can call (800) 367-2884. You will need the following information:

- USDA's company code *
- Your social security number
- Your individual PIN number *

* Please call (612) 336-3334 to obtain "USDA's company code" and "your individual PIN number."

You can then access and print out Reference Cards through the NFC Website at the following address: <http://www.nfc.usda.gov/worknum/index.htm>

Once you have given the Reference Card to the verifier, it is their job to call 1-800-367-2884 to access your employment information.



AMS meat grader Amy Forsyth of Grand Island, NE at work.

AMS Workplace Safety

AMS is a diverse Agency, in regards to its daily work setting and environments. The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 and Executive Order 12196 charge the Federal Government to ensure that all employees are safeguarded from workplace hazards which could cause serious physical harm or death. To help meet this responsibility, AMS employees are to be cognizant of the workplace hazards in their laboratory, processing plant, market, or business office, and follow all local safety policies. Plant employees may be required to follow some practices specified by the company (such as slip resistant or impact resistant shoes, hearing protection in some locations, etc.) New employees should be oriented to current practices and policies by their supervisor.

If you are injured on the job, please report the event to your supervisor promptly, to help protect yourself from further injury and to arrange treatment as necessary. For further information, ask your supervisor for the name of your respective program safety coordinator, or contact the AMS Safety and Occupational Health Manager at 202-720-4352 or Richard.Tyner@ams.usda.gov.

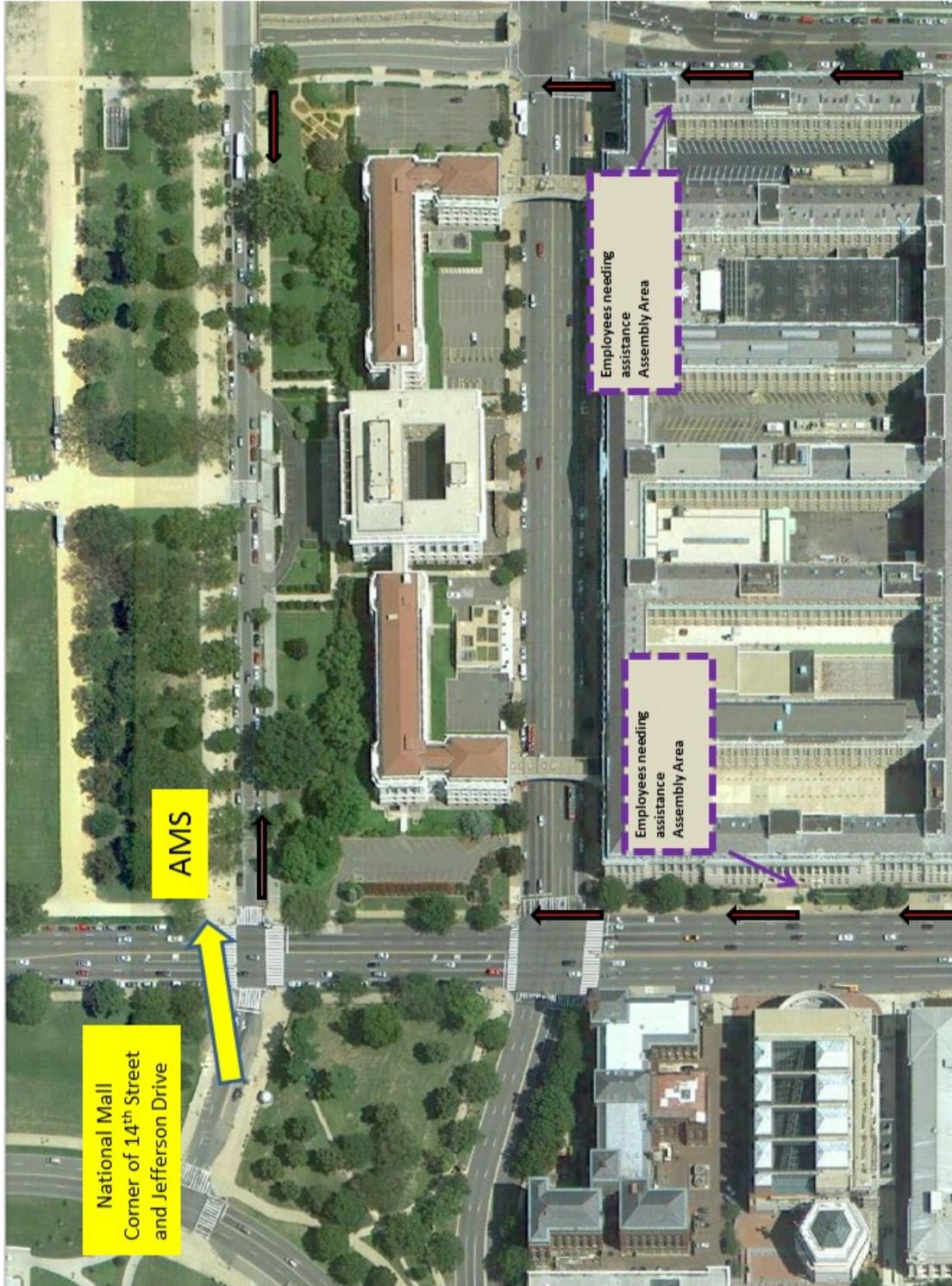
The following page is the map of the meeting location if AMS Headquarters staff are required to evacuate the South Building. Please print this map out for reference.

Additional Information and Numbers of Interest

- USDA's D.C. Health Unit – (202) 720-3281 or <http://www.dm.usda.gov/oo/health.htm>
- Employee Assistance Program – (800) 222-0364
- USDA's Office of Operations Security Control Center – (202) 720-0000
- AMS' Workplace Violence Prevention Program Manager – (202) 720-2374
- [USDA Headquarters Employee Emergency Response Guide](#)

For more information about AMS Field locations specific numbers or what to do if a specific emergency occurs, talk to your supervisor.

AMS ASSEMBLY AREA



Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act ([USERRA](#)) protects the job rights of individuals who voluntarily or involuntarily leave employment positions to undertake military service or certain types of service in the National Disaster Medical System. USERRA prohibits employers from discriminating against past and present members of the uniformed services, and applicants to the uniformed services.

Merit Systems Principles

Personnel practices are carried out in accordance with the [Merit Systems Principles](#). Through assessment of Agency human resources management, violations of the principles and related laws, rules, and regulations are identified. This compliance is also accomplished by administering the Government's [classification appeals](#) and [Fair Labor Standards Act](#) programs.



National Organic Program staff members pause to take a selfie while making organic tacos for a lunchtime fundraiser.

Job Protections

Prohibited Personnel Practices

The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) has the authority to investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute claims of “prohibited personnel practices.” There are twelve prohibited personnel practices defined by law, including reprisal for whistleblowing. A list of all twelve is available at the following link: <http://www.mspb.gov/ppp/ppp.htm>.

Please review the following brochure for additional information: [US OSC Know Your Rights When Reporting Wrongs brochure](#).

Anti-Discrimination Laws

Federal employees are protected from discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, and Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. These laws are enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Generally speaking, under these laws it is illegal to discriminate in any aspect of employment including: hiring and firing; compensation, assignment, or classification of employees; transfer, promotion, layoff, or recall; and recruitment and testing. Discriminatory practices under those laws also include harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or age.

Title VII also prohibits discrimination because of participation in schools or places of worship associated with a particular racial, ethnic, or religious group. The law prohibits not only intentional discrimination, but also practices that have the effect of discriminating against individuals because of their race, color, national origin, religion, or sex.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

The AMS Alternative Resolution (AR) Program, administered by C&A, offers an informal process for Non-EEO disputes between the Agency, customer, supervisors, staff, and co-workers to help the Agency manage conflict more effectively. The use of AR benefits AMS, employees, and customers. Benefits include:

1. Achieving effective, mutually satisfying, and lasting resolution of disputes;
2. Decreasing time, cost, and other resources required to resolve disputes;
3. Fostering a culture of respect and trust between AMS and its employees; and
4. Increasing employee morale, customer satisfaction, and cooperation

For more information about the Alternative Resolution program, visit our website at: <http://agnis/AR/SitePages/Home.aspx> or contact the AR Program Manager at AR@ams.usda.gov.

Equal Employment Opportunity Program

If you are an employee or applicant for employment and believe that you have been discriminated against, you may file a complaint with the [AMS Office of Civil Rights](#).

An EEO counselor or mediator will assist you with traditional EEO Counseling or mediation through Alternative Dispute Resolution. An attempt will be made to bring about a resolution within 30 days. If during counseling, the counselor is unable to accomplish this, and you agree, the time may be

extended up to an additional 60 calendar days. If the matter is not resolved by the conclusion of the counseling process, the EEO counselor or mediator will advise you of the procedures for filing a formal complaint. [Find out more about filing an EEO Discrimination Complaint.](#)

Race, Ethnicity, Sex, Disability Status

The information that you provide to Human Resources that identify your status is extremely helpful to AMS in compiling our reports and assessing whether our workforce populations reflect our workforce planning goals. We ask that employees check their information is recorded accurately.

To check and/or change your Ethnicity or Race Information (ERI) or Disability status, access the NFC using the following link [NFC Application Page](#) and follow these steps:

1. Click on the “My EPP” (Employee Personal Page) icon, and then enter your User ID and password. If you’ve received your eAuth information, you may log in using your eAuth account.
2. Select the “ERI, Gender, and Disability” tab from the menu on the left-hand side of the screen to review your current information.
3. To make any changes, click the “Self-Service” button on the top right-hand side of the screen;
4. Select the “Change” button under “ERI,” “Gender,” or “Disability” buttons to make your changes and then click “Submit.”
5. To verify your veteran status, click on the “Vet Status & Preference” tab on the left-hand side of the screen. If your status is not correct, click on the link to your servicing Personnel/Human Resources organization to update this information.

Any changes you make after you log out of “My EPP” will be reflected in the next pay period’s processing cycle.

Appeal Rights

Career employees receiving disciplinary actions from their supervisor may be eligible to appeal to the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB). Another form of appeal is the administrative (or negotiated if you are covered by a bargaining unit contract) grievance, which normally covers workplace disputes and disciplinary actions not within the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) jurisdiction. AMS encourages early resolution of workplace and program disputes using the Alternative Dispute Resolution Program. These procedures vary; contact Human Resources for additional information.

Ethics and Political Activities

Ethical Conduct

At the USDA, we pride ourselves on the fact that our employees work diligently to meet both the letter and the spirit of the ethics laws and regulations. In order to become well versed on these rules and regulations, ethics training is essential. By continuing our tradition of compliance with Federal ethics regulations, we ensure the public's confidence in the integrity and effectiveness of our programs.

Each Agency within USDA has a staff of ethics advisors. These are the folks who review the confidential financial disclosure reports filed by covered staff, administer your ethics training program, and stand ready to field your questions. If you have any doubts whatsoever regarding the permissibility of a specific action, you should first e-mail or call your ethics advisor. They know your program activities and are likely able to respond immediately.

Political Activities

Under the 1939 Hatch Act, Federal employees face restrictions on their ability to participate in political activities. Congress amended the Hatch Act in 1993 to permit more political activity, although many restrictions still apply. Certain agencies and categories of employees, primarily in national security and law enforcement, are covered by the stricter rules that predate that amendment. Further information can be obtained from the [Office of Ethics Political Activities](#).



Employees from across the Agency showcased their talents in a USDA talent show for charity.

Uncontrollable Office Closures

There are policies and procedures nonemergency AMS employees are to follow for early dismissal or closure of activities due to emergency conditions. This information applies to snow emergencies, severe icing conditions, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, air pollution, power failures, interruptions of public transportation, and other situations in which significant numbers of employees are prevented from reporting for work on time or which require offices to close all or part of their activities. Most AMS employees are designated as nonemergency employees. “Emergency employees” are defined as those who occupy critical positions that may be vital to public health, safety, welfare, national defense, or the operation of essential facilities or functions. If this definition applies to you, you will be notified in writing by your supervisor.

Employees in the Washington, D. C. Metropolitan Area

When a weather emergency occurs that affects Federal employees working inside the Washington Capital Beltway, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) makes the final decision regarding dismissal of employees and closure of executive agencies. USDA and/or Agency Administrators will make dismissal and closure decisions during non-weather emergencies. Those decisions, including the time of the earliest dismissal, are communicated through the USDA Director of Human Resources Management to the MRP Human Resources (HR) Director. The MRP HR Director will relay this information to APHIS officials for dissemination throughout the Agency. OPM also provides announcements to the media.

Employees located in Field Locations

Field facilities have their own emergency dismissal or closure plans. The offices have designated officials who will notify employees within their geographical areas of early dismissal. Decisions to excuse employees will be based on any one of the following:

1. Federal Executive Board declares an emergency for which Federal employees will be excused
2. Official public announcement by local, state, or Federal authorities that travel should be avoided
3. Advice obtained from MRP Human Resources if the decision cannot be made by any of the above

If you have any questions or concerns about these types of office closures, please talk to your supervisor or refer to Human Resources Desk Guide, [Subchapter 4630](#), Absence and Leave; or the OPM Washington, DC, AREA EMERGENCY DISMISSAL OR CLOSURE PROCEDURES available at: <https://archive.opm.gov/oca/compmemo/2000/dismissal.htm>.

Professionalism and Expected Conduct

Dress Code

Neither AMS nor USDA has a formal dress code policy. Some AMS employees wear uniforms and have a uniform policy, but for most of us, the AMS office dress code is business casual. Your work setting and environment will influence your clothing style, and your goal is to dress appropriately for each occasion.

We suggest you project a positive, professional image at all times, because your choice of attire is a reflection on you *and* AMS. Inappropriate clothing includes: shorts, flip flops, short skirts, crop tops, t-shirts with advertising, and clothing that is not neat and clean and free of tears or holes. If you have any questions about what might be appropriate or not appropriate to wear at your worksite, please talk with your supervisor.

Uniform Allowance

Each Program sets its own internal policy regarding uniforms and work clothing. At minimum, each Program's policy will describe eligibility, specific garment acquisition procedures, usage, and accountability. Each Program will develop and include a list of approved vendors for specific uniform needs.

Permanent, full-time employees are eligible for the entire annual allowance. For part-time and intermittent employees, the amount will be prorated to the percentage of time the employee worked the prior fiscal year, or other method as determined by the Program. New employees will be eligible for an initial work clothing allowance of \$400 for garments purchased under this program. Please talk to your supervisor to learn more about this benefit.

Telephone Tips

We must make every effort to maintain good customer service. Listed below are several tips for a successful telephone conversation:

- Check voice mail frequently throughout the day.
- Maintain an up-to-date and accurate message at all times.
- Answer your phone personally whenever possible.
- Use self-discipline to maintain an ongoing dialogue; even in difficult situations.
- Make a brief apology if there is a problem, and do it with a smile. Callers can always hear your smile.
- Let the other person talk without interrupting him/her.
- Improve listening by taking accurate notes.
- Ask questions so that you keep in tune with what the caller is thinking as well as saying.
- Always remember: to each and every person who calls, you are a representative of AMS.

Office Mail

Most Agency business letters that are mailed use the official postage- and fees-paid privilege. However, they must conform to postal regulations and to Agency mailing procedures. **Do not use government letterhead or postage-paid privileges for personal business.** It is a violation of Federal laws and regulations to use postage-paid government envelopes to file job applications or for personal use. Do not have personal mail or packages sent to your office.

Email

AMS uses Microsoft Outlook as its email and calendar tool. There are courses on Microsoft Outlook available on AgLearn. It is important to make sure you are helpful and responsible as an AMS email user. Remember, as a government employee there is no expectation of privacy in email or any other applications on a government computer, smartphone, or tablet. You should not use your government email addresses for personal business.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Information

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) allows virtually anyone to request records from any Federal Government Agency. This means that any work and communication performed by AMS employees, contractors, and research and promotion board members, and staff, can be requested for release via a FOIA request. Each Program office has designated at least one staff member as FOIA coordinator for that program office. The FOIA coordinators work with the AMS FOIA Officer to review requested records before they are released in order to determine what information can be legally withheld and released. If your records and communication become subject to a FOIA request, please work with your FOIA coordinator to collect all potentially responsive records and to identify any information that could cause harm to AMS operations or would violate personal privacy.

All emails sent to and from an employee's work email addresses are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). This means that any emails sent or received by an employee could potentially be released, in full, or in part, to members of the media, a non-government organization, or the general public. The FOIA defines an "Agency record" as any information in the Agency's possession at the time a FOIA request is made. As a result of this definition, emails that do not discuss official business, but are in AMS's possession, are also subject to FOIA and will be treated as an Agency record if they are requested.

All email you send or receive must be properly managed on a daily basis. As an AMS employee, it is your responsibility to manage your email!

If you have any questions about email, FOIA, or the proper management of email, please talk with your supervisor.

Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

In accordance with the provisions of the Privacy Act of 1974, AMS employees are responsible for protecting personal information about individuals that is maintained by AMS from unauthorized access, disclosure, and alteration; and for providing individuals appropriate and complete access to AMS records concerning themselves, including the opportunity to correct any errors in those records.

Protecting PII in Federal systems is critical because its loss or unauthorized disclosure can lead to serious consequences for individuals. These consequences include identity theft or other fraudulent activity, which can result in substantial harm, embarrassment, and inconvenience to those individuals affected.

AMS employees are required to report any lost or stolen IT equipment immediately to the USDA Lost Equipment hotline directly at (888) 926-2373. A second option is to contact the AMS ITS Cyber Security Division hotline at (202) 720-7511.

Government Property

Employees have a duty to protect and conserve government property and should not use government property for other than authorized purposes. Government property includes items such as office supplies, telephone and other telecommunications equipment and services, government mail; automated data processes capabilities, printing and reproduction facilities, government records, and government vehicles.

USDA policy provides for limited personal use of government telecommunications equipment on an occasional basis, provided that the use involves minimal expense to the government and does not interfere with official business. Occasional personal use of telecommunications resources shall normally take place during the employee's personal time. [See the Department's policy on personal use of government property.](#)

While the occasional use of telecommunications resources in moderation is acceptable, uses not meeting the USDA policy are strictly prohibited. Employees are expected to conduct themselves professionally in the workplace and to refrain from using telecommunications equipment for activities that are inappropriate or offensive to co-workers or the public, such as sexually explicit materials or remarks that ridicule others on the basis of race, creed, religion, color, sex, disability, national origin, or sexual orientation. Questions concerning appropriate use of government telecommunications equipment should be addressed with your supervisor.

Travel

Many employees travel to attend training courses or to conduct official government business. Discuss travel with your supervisor prior to making final travel plans. See the AgLearn section below about accessing travel and travel card training.

There are four fundamentals you need to know about government travel:

- Travel must be conducted in the most cost effective and efficient manner and only when necessary to accomplish the purposes of the government.
- Employees traveling on official business are expected to exercise the same care in incurring expenses that a prudent person would exercise if traveling on personal business.
- Except in emergencies, travel must be authorized in writing, in advance, by an official at least one level above the traveler.
- Use of the government-sponsored, contract-issued charge card is mandatory for all official travel-related charges, unless there has been an exemption granted for non-use of the card.

Concur is our e-travel system that interfaces with the Agency financial system. The [USDA travel policy](#) and [New Employee Brochure](#) are great references to navigate through this process. If you have questions about the Concur system, please talk with your supervisor.

Government Travel Credit Card

A government travel card is issued to AMS employees who travel two or more times per year. You must use the card only for expenses incurred in connection with official travel. Government employees are required to carry their government travel card with them when on official government travel. Information about the travel card can be found [here](#).

Possession of the card does not exempt you from the use of Department's Travel Management

Centers (TMC) or government contract carriers. Use of the card does not relieve you of the responsibility to employ prudent travel practices and to observe rules and regulations governing travel at USDA as set forth in the [Federal Travel Regulation](#) (FTR) and the [Agriculture Travel Regulation](#) (ATR). Please contact your Federal Agency Travel Administrator (FATA) for more information.

Employees who use the charge card for inappropriate or nonofficial purposes or who fail to pay their account balance in a timely manner will be subject to disciplinary action, which can range from a letter of reprimand to removal from duty.

When you receive your card and complete the Travel Card training in AgLearn, you can set up your online access to your U.S. Bank travel card account. With [online access](#) you can pay your bill online, review your account transactions, update account information (address, phone numbers, fax, and email address), and view account details (account limits, past due information, payment due date, daily authorizations/declines).

Per Diem

Official government travel must be approved by your supervisor. When you are required to travel for official purposes, you will be reimbursed for expenses essential to the transaction of official business. Reimbursable expenses include but are not limited to:

- Transportation (including flights and train)
- Meals & lodging
- Miscellaneous expenses (such as baggage expenses, & official telephone calls)
- Taxi fares (including tips)
- Rental cars
- Mileage allowances for privately owned vehicles, parking, and tolls

[View per diem rates.](#)

Government-Owned Vehicles (GOVs)

Throughout your career at AMS, you may be required to operate a government-owned vehicle (GOV) for official government business. When possible, as assigned, a GOV will be shared with other personnel to eliminate the use of a privately owned vehicle. If an employee is required to be an incidental motor vehicle operator, that individual will be required to maintain a valid State driver's license and complete a defensive driving course (available in AgLearn). Employees who fail to maintain a valid driver's license or who misuse a GOV may be subject to disciplinary action including possible removal. The [MRP Motor Vehicle Manual](#) is available online.

In an effort to better inform its employees and protect them from uninsured liabilities, AMS requested a legal opinion from the Office of General Counsel concerning an employee's individual personal liability while operating a GOV. This guidance also covers situations where you may be driving a vehicle leased by the government, or leased by you as an employee in travel status.

When operating a GOV, Federal employees are shielded from individual liability as long as they are "acting within the scope of their employment" at the time of the alleged negligent act. There is no distinction between an employee who operates a GOV during official travel status or an employee who operates a GOV to and from his place of residence on a daily basis. The only relevant analysis is

whether the employee was acting within his/her scope of employment as defined by the laws of the jurisdiction where the accident took place. As these laws and their application vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, it is impossible to provide absolute examples of what actions are deemed to be within the scope of employment and which are not. Therefore, there may be situations where a Federal employee is authorized to use a GOV, but is held personally liable for any alleged negligent act he/she commits.

For that reason, you should consider consulting with your private insurance company to determine whether your current policy provides sufficient liability coverage for any accident that occurs while operating a GOV and is ultimately deemed as falling outside of the scope of your employment. If your policy is insufficient or it lacks such coverage, you may want to consider purchasing additional insurance to close this potential gap in liability coverage. The Federal government is prohibited from reimbursing you for such coverage.

Personal Records

As an employee, you should maintain important personal documents and records. You are responsible to ensure that your records are current and accurate. Some of your important records include:

- Time and Attendance reports
- Personnel Actions
- Performance Standards and Appraisals
- Position Descriptions
- AgLearn Training
- Awards

The next section introduces you to several of the AMS systems and applications that will help you maintain personal records.



Dairy Program employees show their generosity by donating to Feds Feed Families.

AMS Systems and Applications

Access to AMS Applications

You will access many automated applications during your tenure as an AMS employee. In an effort to reduce the number of IDs and passwords needed, AMS put many of these applications behind an e-Authentication firewall. This means that only **ONE** ID and password is needed to gain access to many applications. Obtaining an e-Authentication ID and password is a process that takes several weeks. Until you receive those credentials, you will not be able to access these types of applications.

Your supervisor or sponsor will help you obtain access to all the program-specific applications you will need to perform your duties. Some applications are used AMS-wide and are accessible by a single sign-on mechanism called your “e-Authentication” or “e-Auth” ID and password.

e-Authentication

When you begin working for AMS and complete your new employee paperwork, your documents will be submitted to the MRPBS Human Resources Office in Minneapolis. All USDA employees, whether full-time or part-time, permanent or temporary, must complete an annual “Information Systems Security Awareness” training. Access to any USDA computer system cannot be granted by the IT staff until the new employee has successfully passed this training.

Instructions: You will receive emails from the HSPD-12 and USAccess. Please respond to these emails in a timely manner to ensure that the process is not delayed.

Electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF)

Some personnel records are in your [electronic Official Personnel Folder](#) (eOPF), which can be accessed after you receive your e-Authentication credentials. You will be asked to register when you access eOPF for the first time.

[eOPF registration](#) provides you with electronic access to all the documents in your eOPF, and notifies you when a new document is added to your folder. If you have any problems accessing eOPF, simply contact the Human Resources Office. You are also responsible to notify your supervisor and Human Resources Office of any change in your name, home address, and family status.

Employee Personal Page (EPP)

You have access to your own [Employee Personal Page](#) (EPP) through the National Finance Center (NFC). The EPP allows you to view your payroll, leave, travel, life insurance, health insurance, and other personal information. As a new employee, you will receive a letter containing your PIN at your home address.

The EPP is accessible using your e-Authentication credentials after you have been authenticated using your EPP ID and password the first time. A Statement of Earnings and Leave (SEL) is updated through the EPP each pay period, under the E&L Statement. It is important to verify that the statement accurately reflects your hours worked, leave taken, and required or elected payroll deductions. Report any discrepancies immediately to the Human Resources Office.

Time and Attendance (T&A) Records

An official Time and Attendance (T&A) record for each employee is maintained by the WebTA system. Your timekeeper is the official record keeper for time and attendance purposes. Currently, AMS uses the WebTA system to process T&As. You will have [access to WebTA](#) when you receive your e-Authentication credentials. Until then you'll need to follow the manual process identified by your supervisor or your sponsor.

At the end of each biweekly pay period, you will electronically enter and validate your time and attendance via WebTA. Your T&A will show your time worked, holiday pay, previous leave balance, leave earned, leave taken, and current balance. You should review all entries for accuracy. Your supervisor will certify your T&A, which electronically sends it to the National Finance Center (NFC) for further processing.

Each AMS program or support unit may have individual T&A policies. For more information about WebTA, talk to your supervisor or timekeeper or access the [HRDG](#).



Employees from Compliance & Analysis Program and our Marketing Order & Agreement Division (MOAD) attend a military veterans recruitment event.

AgLearn

AgLearn is “the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) enterprise-wide learning management system (LMS).” The program allows both you and your supervisor to plan and monitor much of your Agency-directed training, as well as offers you a wide selection of online courses. AgLearn is an invaluable tool for all employees.

Instructions:

1. Access AgLearn at <http://www.aglearn.usda.gov/> and click on “Learner Login.”
2. Log in, using your e-Authentication User ID and password.

When you first log into AgLearn you will see that you have some courses already populated on your “To Do” List.

AgLearn Features

AgLearn is much more than just a website you go to for mandatory online training.

- AgLearn offers a wealth of other educational resources—including an extensive online book collection, available free to all employees.
- It has more than 12,000 book titles available online. When you log in through your “Learner Login” and select the “Key Resources: Books/Videos/Etc.” tab, you will see icons for the three book collections: Business Pro, ITPro, and Office Essentials. If you have ever been nagged by a troublesome software problem, visit the Office Topics or IT and Technical Topics collections for complete reference books, quick reference guides, or even tutorials on a particular subject.
- AgLearn offers courses to improve your management skills, or just freshen your thinking about leadership.
- AgLearn provides an electronic registration and training approval tool in AMS. When you register for a course in AgLearn, an email will be sent to your supervisor asking him/her to approve your registration.



AMS employee Vicki Dudley shows a school classroom how egg candling works.

Appendix

Online Resources

Website	Web Address
USDA Onboarding Portal	http://www.dm.usda.gov/obp/index.htm
AMS New Employee Orientation Site	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/business-services/new_employee_orientation/new_employee_orientation
AMS New Employee Welcome Video	https://youtu.be/HfD31SSdSXA
About USDA website	http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=ABOUT_USDA
Department's New Employee Orientation	http://www.dm.usda.gov/newemployee/docs/HQOrientation_2016.pdf
USDA's Mission Areas website	http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=USDA_MISSION_AREAS
Agricultural Marketing Service	http://www.ams.usda.gov/
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/home/
Grain Inspection, Packers, and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)	http://www.gipsa.usda.gov/
Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)	http://www.obpa.usda.gov/
Office of Communications (OC)	http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=OC_Splash.xml
Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES)	http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=OES_Splash.xml
Departmental Management (DM)	http://www.dm.usda.gov/about.htm
Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO)	http://www.ocio.usda.gov/
Office of Congressional Relations (OCR)	http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=OCR
AMS Leaders' Biographies	http://www.ams.usda.gov/about-ams/our-leadership

AMS Commodity Procurement	http://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food
Laboratory Approval & Testing Division	http://www.ams.usda.gov/services/lab-testing
Monitoring Programs Division	http://www.ams.usda.gov/datasets/pdp
Plant Variety Protection	http://www.ams.usda.gov/services/plant-variety-protection
USDA Farmers Market	http://www.ams.usda.gov/about-ams/programs-offices/usda-farmers-market
People's Garden	http://www.ams.usda.gov/about-ams/peoples-garden-initiative
USDA's Local Food Directories	https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/food-directories
One AMS site on USDA Connect	https://connections.usda.gov/communities/service/html/communityview?communityUuid=1ef904f9-0bbf-442f-bfc0-fe08c9b48073
Departmental Regulation - Employee Responsibilities and Conduct (DR 4070-735-001)	http://www.ocio.usda.gov/document/departmental-regulation-4070-735-001
Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch (5 CFR 2635)	https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/5/part-2635
Supplemental Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Department of Agriculture (5 CFR 8301)	https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/5/part-8301
HR Broadcast	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/business-services/forms_publications/hrd_broadcast
Human Resource Desk Guide (HRDG)	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/business-services/forms_publications/hr_desk_guide/hrdg
AMS Policies and Administrative Issuances	http://www.ams.usda.gov/about-ams/policies-and-administrative-issuances
Use of Government Property including Internet access and use	http://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Use%20of%20Government%20Office%20Equipment.pdf
Personnel Security	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/business-services/HRD/Personnel_Security
HSPD-12 and LincPass Credentialing	https://hspd12.usda.gov/employees.html

Position Descriptions	http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/policy/prepare-pd.htm
Performance Management website	http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/policy/perf-mgmt.htm
OPM's USAJOBS website	https://www.usajobs.gov/
General Schedule (GS)	https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-systems/general-schedule/
Within-grade increases (WIGIs)	https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/within-grade-increases/
Federal Wage System (FWS)	https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-systems/federal-wage-system/
Eligibility for employee benefits	http://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/hr/benefits/downloads/benefits_eligibility_charts.pdf
New Employee Benefits information - APHIS	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/new_employee_orientation/downloads/Employee_Benefits.pdf
Benefits Assistant	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/contact_us/downloads/benefits.pdf
Federal Employee Health Benefits	https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/healthcare/
Healthcare.gov	https://www.healthcare.gov/see-plans-2015/
Federal Employees Group Life Insurance	https://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/calculators/fegli-calculator/
Dental and Vision Benefits	https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/dental-vision/
Benefeds.com	http://www.benefeds.com/
Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program	http://www.ltcfeds.com/
Federal Employees Retirement System	https://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/fers-information/
Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS)	https://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/csrs-information/
Health Insurance Premium Conversion	https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/healthcare/reference-materials/#url=Premium-Conversion
SF-2809	https://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf2809.pdf
Family Member Definitions - foster	https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-

children	insurance/healthcare/reference-materials/reference/family-members/
Qualifying life event	https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/life-events/
FEGLI Program	https://www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/life-insurance/
SF-2822	https://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf2822.pdf
Benefeds website	https://www.benefeds.com/
FSAFEDS website	https://www.fsafeds.com/GEM
OPM - FSAFEDS program	http://www.opm.gov/news/media-center/mediacentervideos.aspx?vid=8005
FLTCIP	http://www.ltcfeds.com/
Declaration of Domestic Partnership form	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/library/forms/pdf/Declaration_of_Domestic_Partnership.pdf
FERS Service Credit	https://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/fers-information/service-credit/
CSRS Service Credit	https://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/csrs-information/service-credit/
TSP Automatic Enrollment Notification Letter for Newly Eligible FERS Employees	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/new_employee_orientation/downloads/Congratulations_fers.pdf
TSP Automatic Enrollment Notification Letter for Newly Eligible CSRS/CSRS Offset Employees	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/mrpbs/publications/new_employee_orientation/downloads/Congratulations_csrs.pdf
TSP Summary Booklet	https://www.tsp.gov/PDF/formspubs/tspb08.pdf
TSP-1	https://www.tsp.gov/PDF/formspubs/tsp-1.pdf
SF-1152	https://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/SF1152.pdf
SF-2823	https://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf2823.pdf
SF-3102	https://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf3102.pdf
SF-2808	https://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf-2808.pdf
TSP-3	https://www.tsp.gov/PDF/formspubs/tsp-3.pdf
APHIS Telework Site	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/wps/portal/aphis/ourfocus/business

	services?url=wcm%3apath%3a%2Faphis_content_library%2Fsa_our_focus%2Fsa_business_services%2Fsa_publications%2Fsa_hr_desk_guide%2Fsa_hrdg_4368%2Fct_4368_seca
AMS Voice internal quick subscribe page	https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAAMS/subscriber/topics?qsp=USDAAMS_6
WLW Program	http://inside.aphis.usda.gov/wlw
APHIS Ergonomics Program	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/wps/portal/aphis/resources/manualsandguidelines?url=wcm%3apath%3a%2FAPHIS_Content_Library%2FSA_Our_Focus%2FSA_Business_Services%2FSA_MRPBS_Divisions%2FSA_EMSSD%2FSA_Ergonomics_Program
Target Center	http://www.targetcenter.dm.usda.gov/
CAP website	http://www.tricare.mil/cap
Frequently Asked Questions	http://www.targetcenter.dm.usda.gov/content/frequently-asked-questions
USDA South Building Health Unit	http://www.dm.usda.gov/oo/health.htm
USDA Headquarters Employee Emergency Response Guide	http://www.dm.usda.gov/beprepared/docs/USDA_Employee_Emergency_Response_Guide.pdf
USERRA	http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/userra/
Merit Systems Principles	https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/performance-management/reference-materials/more-topics/merit-system-principles-and-performance-management/
Classification appeals	https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/classification-qualifications/appeals-decisions/
Fair Labor Standards Act	https://www.opm.gov/services-for-agencies/classification-job-design/fair-labor-standards-act/
US OSC Know Your Rights When Reporting Wrongs Brochure	http://www.usda.gov/oig/webdocs/oscbrochure.pdf
Office of Ethics, Political Activities	http://www.ethics.usda.gov/rules/political.htm
HRDG, Subchapter 4630	https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/business-services/forms_publications/hr_desk_guide/hrdg_4630/4630_toc
USDA Travel Policy	http://www.ocfo.usda.gov/travel/travelpolicy.html
Per Diem Rates	http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104877

MRP Motor Vehicle Manual	http://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/motor_vehicle_manual.pdf
New Employee Brochure	http://www.ocfo.usda.gov/travel/docs/Travel%20Steps%20for%20New%20Employees.pdf
Travel Card Information	http://www.ocfo.usda.gov/travel/docs/Travel%20Charge%20Card%20Dos%20and%20Donts.pdf
Federal Travel Regulation	http://www.gsa.gov/portal/ext/public/site/FTR/file/FTR301TOC.html/category/21868/hostUri/portal
Agriculture Travel Regulation	http://www.ocfo.usda.gov/travel/docs/DM_2300-001_061510.pdf
US Bank online access	https://www.usbank.com/online-banking/internet-banking.html
electronic Official Personnel Folder	http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/eopf/eOPF%20FAQs.docx
eOPF registration	http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/eopf/; https://eopf.nbc.gov/landing/
Employee Personal Page	https://www.nfc.usda.gov/epps/
Access to WebTA	https://wtausda.nfc.usda.gov/usda/