



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Office of the
Assistant Secretary
for Administration

1400 Independence
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Washington, DC
20250-0103

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TO: Subcabinet Officials
Agency Heads

FROM: Karen A. Messmore
Director
Office of Human Resources Management

SUBJECT: Sixty-Third Annual Secretary's Honor Awards Program

NOMINATIONS DUE MAY 23, 2011

The Secretary of Agriculture invites agencies to submit nominations for the 63rd Annual Secretary's Honor Awards. The ceremony will be held late summer, in the Jefferson Auditorium, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC. Additional seating will be available in Room 107-A, Jamie L. Whitten Building.

The Secretary's Honor Awards are the most prestigious awards presented by the Department of Agriculture (USDA). Employees at all grade levels are eligible for recognition. Our theme this year is "A Modern Workplace with a Modern Workforce" which represents and ensures USDA attracts and retains a high-performing workforce, well-equipped for today's mission, and well prepared for tomorrow's challenges. The 2011 Honor Award categories reflect Secretary Vilsack's key priorities:

The award categories for 2011 are:

- *Secretary's Award for assisting rural communities to create prosperity so they are self-sustaining, repopulating, and economically thriving*
- *Secretary's Award for ensuring our National forests and private working lands are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to climate change, while enhancing our water resources*
- *Secretary's Award for helping America promote sustainable agricultural production and biotechnology exports as America works to increase food security*
- *Secretary's Award for ensuring that all of America's children have access to safe, nutritious, and balanced meals*
- *Secretary's Award for Management Excellence – A Modern Workplace with a Modern Workforce*

- *Secretary's Award for Personal and Professional Excellence*
- *Secretary's Award for Support Service*
- *Secretary's Award for Heroism and Emergency Response*
- *Secretary's Award for Diversity*

The attached document provides additional criteria for each of these award categories.

Each Agency may submit a maximum of four nominations, and Departmental Staff Offices may submit two nominations. Group nominations are limited to a maximum of 35 employees. It is important to include only those individuals who have significantly contributed to the group's accomplishments. The instructions and Honor Award Nomination form AD-495 for submitting an Honor Award nomination are available online at http://www.ocio.usda.gov/forms/ocio_forms.html. Please submit nominations no later than **May 23, 2011**, to the Office of Human Resources Management, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Jamie L. Whitten Building, Room 302-W, Washington, D.C. 20250-0103.

For additional assistance, you may contact Anna Johnson-Yeargins, Office of Human Resources Management, at (202) 690-5991 or via email at anna.johnson-yeargins@dm.usda.gov, or Teresa Hunt via email at Teresa.hunt@dm.usda.gov, or call 202-720-6151.

Attachment

cc: Mission Area Human Resources Directors
Employee Recognition Program Coordinators
Deputy Administrators for Management

SECRETARY'S HONOR AWARDS CATEGORIES
"MODERN WORKPLACE WITH A MODERN WORKFORCE"

The Secretary's Honor Awards will recognize accomplishments that contribute to the advancement of USDA strategic goals, mission objectives, and overall management excellence. Nomination submissions will be evaluated based on the criteria outlined below:

CATEGORY 1 - Secretary's Award for assisting rural communities to create prosperity so they are self-sustaining, repopulating, and economically thriving

Criteria: The award recognizes contributions that enhance quality of life for rural residents by improving their economic opportunities, community infrastructure, environmental health, and the sustainability of agricultural production.

- ***Enhance rural prosperity*** – increasing access to broadband and continuous business creation; facilitating sustainable renewable energy development; developing regional food systems; capitalizing on climate change opportunities; and generating and retaining jobs through recreation and natural resource restoration, conservation, and management.
- ***Create livable communities*** - the USDA uses 21st century technology to rebuild the infrastructure of small communities, ensuring that rural residents have decent housing and home-ownership opportunities, clean water, adequate systems for handling waste, reliable electricity and renewable energy systems, and vital community facilities, including critical health-care centers, schools, faith-based initiatives, and public safety departments.
- ***Support a sustainable, competitive agricultural system*** - the economic vitality and quality of life in rural America and the U.S. economy at large depends on a financially healthy agricultural system. Ensuring that American farmers and ranchers are prosperous and competitive, have access to new and international markets, can manage their risks, and are supported in times of unusual economic distress or disaster.

CATEGORY 2 – Secretary's Award for ensuring our National forests and private working lands are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to climate change, while enhancing our water resources

Criteria: This award recognizes contributions in protecting and restoring America's forests, farms, ranches, and grasslands while making them more resilient to threats and enhancing our natural resources.

- ***Restore and conserve the Nation's forests, farms, ranches, and grasslands*** - interacting with private landowners and managers to restore vegetative cover, rehabilitate streams and other water bodies, transition marginal or highly erosive lands to sustainable production levels, and apply conservation measures to enhance and maintain the quality of soil, water, and related natural resources.
- ***Lead efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change*** - reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing carbon sequestration on farms, ranches, and forest lands by encouraging a number of practices that include conservation tillage and precision nutrient management; reducing energy and fertilizer use and improving efficiency; growing perennial grasses; planting trees on marginal farmlands, fire impacted landscapes, and built landscapes; minimizing deforestation; building methane digesters; facilitating gains in energy efficiency in agriculture and rural development; and using renewable sources of energy.
- ***Protect and enhance America's water resources*** - ensuring a clean and abundant supply of water for people and the environment which provides technical and financial assistance for on-the-ground conservation, protect the headwaters of municipal water supplies in our National Forests and Grasslands, protect and restore wetland ecosystems, support scientific discoveries, and engage in collaborative partnerships to maximize the benefits from public expenditures.

- **Reduce risk from catastrophic wildfire and restore fire to its appropriate place on the landscape** - Restoring fire to natural areas that are fire-dependant ecosystems will help reduce fuel loads, lessen the risk of damaging fires, enhance wildlife habitats, and restore ecological and watershed function and resiliency.

CATEGORY 3 – Secretary’s Award for helping America promote sustainable agricultural production and biotechnology exports as America works to increase food security

Criteria: This award recognizes contributions that ensure U.S. agricultural resources contribute to enhanced global food security; enhance America’s ability to develop and trade agricultural products derived from new technologies; and promote sustainable and productive agricultural systems that enable food-insecure nations to feed themselves.

- **Enhanced global food security** - Working to promote enhanced food security include ongoing activities in Iraq and Afghanistan, such as training local populations in state-of-the-art food preservation techniques, helping village populations develop local food supply chains from producer to consumer, and working with local populations to teach them how to restore their watersheds.
- **Enhance America’s ability to develop and trade agricultural products derived from new technologies** - utilizing a science-based regulatory system that allows for the safe development and use of agricultural goods derived from new technologies that provide increased production options to agriculture producers.
- **Promote sustainable and productive agricultural systems that enable food-insecure nations to feed themselves** - promoting training and capacity-building programs for agricultural scientists, extension agents, and educators, as well as agricultural policy and regulatory programs that increase food safety and enhance a country’s ability to take advantage of new trade and marketing opportunities.

CATEGORY 4 – Secretary’s Award for ensuring that all of America’s children have access to safe, nutritious, and balanced meals

Criteria: This award recognizes contributions in supporting and protecting the Nation’s agricultural system and the consumers it serves, by safeguarding the quality and wholesomeness of meat, poultry, and egg products; providing nutrition assistance to children and low-income people who need it; and proactively addressing and preventing loss and damage from pests and disease outbreaks.

- **Increasing access to nutritious food** - providing benefits to every eligible person who wishes to participate in the major nutrition assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Child Nutrition Programs, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), by providing funding and implementing statutory program standards, procuring and distributing USDA foods used in these programs, and working with State and local partnering organizations to deliver benefits effectively.
- **Promoting healthy diet and physical activity behaviors** – reducing the rate of childhood obesity in the United States by working with Governmental partners at all levels, the medical community, and industry to develop and implement integrated, holistic strategies to reduce overweight and obesity among our children.
- **Protecting public health by ensuring food is safe** - reducing and preventing foodborne illness by investing in its workforce and data infrastructure to prevent harm to consumers by reducing the prevalence of food contaminants and quickly identifying and preventing outbreaks.
- **Protecting agricultural health by minimizing major diseases and pests to ensure access to safe, plentiful, and nutritious food** - preventing the entry and establishment of agricultural pests and diseases and minimizing production losses. Eradicating or managing existing agricultural pests and diseases and wildlife damage, as well as develop and apply more effective scientific methods to prevent, detect, eradicate, or manage pests and diseases.

CATEGORY 5 – Secretary’s Award for Management Excellence – A Modern Workplace with a Modern Workforce

Criteria: This award recognizes accomplishments in transforming USDA into a model organization through management efficiencies and workforce strength, diversity, and talent.

- **Engage USDA employees to transform USDA into a model agency** - engaging employees to transform USDA into a high-performing, inclusive department that benefits from leadership at all levels will require a pointed and comprehensive effort. USDA will continue to generate opportunities to listen to employees' concerns and ideas and to design and implement beneficial systemic changes to processes that affect employee satisfaction and human resources. Develop USDA leadership skills and enhance Employee Development programs.
- **Provide civil rights services to USDA employees and customers** - to be successful, all USDA employees must be committed to making USDA a model in the Federal Government for respecting the civil rights of its employees and constituents. The USDA will change the direction of equal employment opportunity, civil rights, and program delivery through a comprehensive approach to ensure fair and equitable treatment of all employees and applicants as well as to improve program delivery to every person entitled to its various services. This effort will assist the Department to address past errors, learn from its mistakes, and move forward to a new era of equitable service and access for all.
- **Coordinate outreach and improve consultation and collaboration efforts to increase access to USDA programs and services** - coordinating and measuring the performance of strategic outreach efforts to ensure that all Americans have equal and fair access to key USDA programs and services. By promoting USDA values and priorities in efforts such as the Peoples' Garden, the Department hopes to enhance the public's knowledge of sustainable growing practices and the importance of the American farm community. USDA will develop or expand enterprise-wide, results-driven initiatives and coordinated efforts. This collective work will increase the viability and profitability of small farm operators and beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. The Department will coordinate various USDA services for priority populations, such as farm workers, and improve its compliance with Executive Directives requiring consultation and improved collaboration with tribal governments.
- **Leverage USDA Departmental Management to increase performance, efficiency, and alignment** - maintaining effective financial controls so that program dollars achieve the outcomes for which they were intended. USDA, led by Departmental Management, will implement strategies to strengthen the Department's financial management by improving internal control systems and by implementing electronic systems that permit real-time reporting. These systems will allow USDA to optimize the use of Recovery Act funding in the creation of jobs and economic opportunities across the country.

USDA will expand the use of performance metrics to track areas of success and those needing improvement across the Department. This information will allow agency decision makers to align resources to achieve the highest outcome. In addition to using these metrics to improve program delivery, USDA will use performance management strategies, including Project Labor Agreements, to improve the effectiveness of USDA contracting and procurement activities across the country.

- **Optimize information technology (IT) policy and applications** - the Department is working to improve the effective delivery of programs and services to its constituents, applicants, and customers by deploying broadband, creating an enterprise platform that enables open communication channels, ensuring the protection of mission-critical operations and customer data, and supporting portfolio views for managing across organization and geographic boundaries. USDA plans to prioritize key technology investments through a re-engineering of the IT Capital Planning and Investment Control process; ensuring open, transparent, and collaborative avenues for easy access to USDA information and protecting the privacy of information collected in service delivery; and modernizing foundational elements to consolidate and streamline core IT processes.
- **Optimize USDA "green" or sustainable operations** - establishing an integrated strategy to work towards sustainability and to achieve reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. As a steward of natural resources, USDA is committed to achieving these goals and will focus its efforts towards sustainable operations by decreasing energy intensity; increasing renewable energy use; conserving water; promoting pollution prevention, waste reduction, and recycling; implementing sustainable building design, construction, and operation; increasing green procurement; promoting electronic product stewardship; and embracing environmental management systems to achieve sustainable operation goals.
- **Enhance USDA homeland security and emergency preparedness to protect USDA employees and the public** - enhancing homeland security and emergency activities to provide a coordinated national effort to

protect American agriculture and rural communities from intentional harm. USDA will ensure the Nation's quality of life through continuance of a secure and reliable food supply. The Department will lead these efforts by protecting the food supply, maintaining security of USDA resources, securing infrastructure, and supporting emergency response and program operations nationwide.

- **Enhance the USDA human resources process to recruit and hire skilled, diverse individuals to meet the program needs of USDA** - reforming the hiring process to ensure a streamlined, user-friendly environment for both the applicant and the hiring manager, which will lead to the identification and selection of the most talented and competent workforce possible. In doing so, the Department will experience increased diversity while addressing current and future skills gaps. USDA is evaluating its human resources policies relative to talent management and, where necessary, realigning them to further support the Department's transforming recruitment and retention initiatives. Additionally, USDA is addressing the gap between employee engagement and performance expectations. Fully utilize applicable hiring authorities; increase recruiting and utilize interns; improve and enhance efficiencies in the recruitment process; improve employee recognition programs; and promote a USDA culture that recognizes high-performing, results-focused employees, employee wellness, and work/life balance.

CATEGORY 6 - Secretary's Award for Personal and Professional Excellence

Criteria: This award recognizes individuals who, over time, consistently demonstrate an outstanding level of accomplishment in furthering the mission of USDA. This category includes notable achievements in scientific research, economic analysis, soil conservation, risk management, farm program delivery, food program delivery, administrative management, improvements to the safety, health, and well being of others, or any mission-related activity of USDA. This category also includes significant accomplishments in improving customer service, both internal and external to USDA.

CATEGORY 7 - Secretary's Award for Support Service

Criteria: This award recognizes employees who demonstrate an outstanding level of accomplishment in providing support. This category includes employees in administrative and clerical occupations, usually GS-9 or equivalent and below, whose dedication and contributions enhance management excellence. Achievements may reflect dollar savings, system benefits, increased productivity, or improved procedures or techniques.

CATEGORY 8 – Secretary's Award for Heroism and Emergency Response

Criteria: This award recognizes USDA employees who perform acts of unusual selflessness of heroism in the line of duty. The category also recognizes those who demonstrate an outstanding level of accomplishment in responding to floods, fires, storms, earthquakes, disease outbreaks, or other conditions requiring emergency response.

CATEGORY 9- Secretary's Award for Diversity

Criteria: This award recognizes employees who demonstrate outstanding commitment to the value of diversity in USDA and furtherance of USDA workforce diversity objectives. This category includes demonstrating significant progress in the workforce demographics of an Agency. Contribution(s) should be described so as to specify its impact on the particular agency and USDA and furtherance of workforce diversity objectives. Nominations will be based on several areas, including the ability to create a welcoming and inclusive work environment, success in leading and enhancing diversity and inclusion efforts, actively promoting and enhancing cultural transformation, effecting positive change where the contributions serve to benefit the entire USDA workforce.