

Leaders' Alert

*A newsletter for Executives, Managers, and Management Officials
of the Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services*

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The Manager Excellence Resource Center (MERC)

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As HRD transforms, we continue to review and assess ways to improve service delivery and achieve excellent customer service. The Leadership and Employee Development Branch is focused on leadership development and is adopting a corporate-wide approach to employee development to ensure continuity of leadership and enhancement of mission-critical competencies.

The Leadership and Employee Development Branch is pleased to present the Corporate Leadership Council's Manager Excellence Resource Center (MERC) to FFAS Supervisors and Managers. The Corporate Leadership Council is a membership of Senior Executives with a shared commitment to monitor learning and development. MERC is available through their website and designed to help supervisors and managers better meet the needs of their employees and their own careers. For example within MERC, new supervisors will find a guide titled "Making the Transition to First Line Management." This guide features "Tips for Transitioning from Peer to Boss" as well as "Questions to Ask Your New Manager, Direct Reports, and Peers." MERC also provides guidance for new as well as existing supervisors in the development of their employees.

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Past issues of this and other internal communications publications are available from
<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/hrdapp?area=hrdhome&subject=landing&topic=landing>

YOUR FEEDBACK IS IMPORTANT TO US!

Send any comments, questions, and/or suggestions about this issue to whilemenia.duncan@kcc.usda.gov or fax to **816-926-1825**, Attention: Editor, Leaders' Alert



The New HRD
*Where Our Customers
Experience Our Value Everyday*

The Manager Excellence Resource Center (MERC) (Continued)

To access the MERC System:

- Go to: www.merc.executiveboard.com

Note: the MERC is also accessible via the HRD Intranet site at:

<http://fsaintranet.sc.egov.usda.gov/ffas/hrd/default.htm>

- Under **Getting Started**, click on "[Get a Username and Password](#)"
This link will prompt you to fill out a short form to establish membership.
Please make sure to use your business email address. This will be your user name.

Note: All FFAS Employees should select "Farm Service Agency"

- Check "Remember me" to directly log into the site for future visits
- Once you have completed this form, please click submit

In the months to follow, resources to specific leadership competencies will be featured in the *Leaders Alert*. Please be on the lookout for them. Our goal is to develop new services to help you and to help you manage your human capital more strategically.

Leadership Development Channel

Mark Nelson, Human Resources Specialist
Leadership and Employee Development Branch

By logging in to the AgLearn catalog and browsing the Leadership Development Channel, Leaders will discover a wealth of resources and access just about any leadership curriculum you require to assist you in meeting your particular goals. AgLearn is USDA's Learning Management System (LMS) and has over 1,087 free online courses available under the Leadership Development Channel; 296 of these courses focus specifically on Management and Leadership.

Supervisors have recognized that AgLearn allows them to stay intellectually current in addition to assisting them in meeting mandatory supervisory training requirements. We encourage you to utilize this convenient and free learning resource as you all deal with competing priorities, limited resources, and the art of supervision. Follow this link and use the LMS to your benefit

<https://aglearn.usda.gov/plateau/user/catalog/browseCatalog.do>



Preparing for End of the Year Performance Ratings

David Simmons, Employee and Labor Relations Specialist
Employee/Labor Relations and Benefits Branch

As we near the end of the performance year (October 1 to September 30) it is important that supervisors prepare now for the end of the year performance ratings. The performance rating period ends September 30. Supervisors are to issue performance ratings to employees by October 31. Performance ratings must be based upon the work expectations provided in the employee's Performance Work Plan (PWP) which was given to the employee at the beginning of the rating period.



At this point of the year supervisors should have a pretty good idea of how the employee is performing and should begin preparing the performance rating. This means supervisors should be gathering documentation to support the rating that will be given. Supervisors can also be drafting the written justifications that must be provided with the rating. The supervisors would then only need to supplement the documentation and justifications for performance through the end of the rating period.

If it appears an employee is not performing at an acceptable performance level the supervisor should be contacting his/her servicing Employee and Labor Relations Specialist to work on developing a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), also known as an Opportunity to Improve (OTI). There is no reason to wait until the end of the rating period to place an employee whose performance is unacceptable on an OTI.

Every employee is entitled to a performance rating as long as they have been on a PWP for at least 90 days. If an employee has had more than one supervisor during the rating period, prior supervisors should have prepared an interim assessment detailing the employee's accomplishments. The rating supervisor must then consider this interim assessment as part of the employee's annual rating of record.

The end of one rating period is also the beginning of another rating period. This means that employees are to be given new PWPs. The PWP sets forth the supervisory expectations for that position. Supervisors should be reviewing the current PWP now to see if the employee in the position is performing duties not set forth in the current PWP. If that is the case, the PWP needs to be revised to reflect the actual duties the employee is performing. Supervisors must involve the employee in establishing or revising PWPs. Your servicing Employee and Labor Relations Specialist is available to answer questions supervisors may have concerning establishing or revising PWPs. PWPs must be given to employees within 30 days of the beginning of the rating period. However, the best practice is to give the employee the PWP at the beginning of the rating period, i.e. October 1.