

For: FFAS Employees

**59<sup>th</sup> Secretary's Honor Awards Program**

Approved by: Deputy Administrator, Management



**1 Overview**

**A Background**

The Secretary's Honor Awards Program was established in 1947 to recognize outstanding contributions in support of the USDA mission. During 2005 the program was suspended as a committee of senior level employees across the Department considered proposals to streamline the program. The committee recommended a revitalized program that enhanced the significance of the program to the overall mission of USDA, and follows the President's Management Agenda to link honors and incentives to the achievement of goals. The Secretary approved these recommendations. The Secretary's Honor Award is the most prestigious Departmental award presented by the Secretary of Agriculture.

The Honor Award categories for 2006 reflect the goals of the USDA Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2002 through 2007. The plan focuses on the Department's major programmatic goals and objectives along with other management initiatives.

**B Purpose**

This notice informs all offices of the opportunity to submit nominations for the 59<sup>th</sup> Secretary's Honor Awards Program. All nominations must be submitted by COB **Friday, June 9, 2006**.

**C Equal Opportunity/Workforce Diversity Policy**

In keeping with the Secretary's initiative to promote equal opportunity in employment and programs, agencies are encouraged to consider nominations from all segments of the workforce. All nominees are eligible for the same level of recognition.

It is the Department's policy and practice to prohibit discrimination against any employee on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, marital status, political affiliation, national origin, or sexual orientation.

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| <p><b>Disposal Date</b></p> <p>August 1, 2006</p> | <p><b>Distribution</b></p> <p>All FFAS Employees; State Offices relay to County Offices</p> |
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**1 Overview (Continued)**

**D Labor-Management Obligations**

Where exclusive representation exists, bargaining may be requested to the extent allowed by applicable statutes. Where contract language already addresses these policies and procedures for bargaining unit employees, contract language prevails.

**2 Criteria**

**A Nominations**

Each Under/Assistant Secretary may submit a maximum of 4 nominations. Group nominations should be limited to a maximum of 35 employees. It is important to include only those individuals who have **significantly** contributed to the group's accomplishments.

**B Nominations Allocation**

The Under Secretary's office has requested the following to be forwarded to his office for consideration:

- **Risk Management Agency - 1 primary and 2 alternate nominations**
- **Foreign Agricultural Service - 1 primary and 2 alternate nominations**
- **Farm Service Agency - 2 primary and 4 alternate nominations.**

**C Categories**

A list of categories is in Exhibit 1. Offices should review highly successful programs and management improvements to identify potential nominees for awards. Consideration should also be given to nominating those who have earned recognition through receiving an Administrator's Award, outstanding performance ratings, promotions, cash awards, or special awards within or outside the Department.

**D Evaluation Period**

Contributions must have been made, or the results realized within the **past 3 years**. Heroic acts should have occurred within the **past year**.

**E Eligibility**

Employees at all grade levels and private citizens are eligible to receive these awards.

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**3 Nomination**

**A Completing AD-495**

Each nomination will consist of a completed AD-495. AD-495 is available from the Office of the Chief Information Officer, Forms Management Web site at [http://www.ocio.usda.gov/forms/ocio\\_forms.html](http://www.ocio.usda.gov/forms/ocio_forms.html). Read and comply with the instructions on AD-245, page 2.

**Note:** The instructions state to include 9 copies of the nomination package. Do **not** forward the 9 copies. HRD will make the copies of the nominations packets before forwarding them to the Under Secretary/Assistant for endorsement.

**B Nomination Content (Narrative)**

All nominations **must** clearly describe:

- the significance of the contribution being recognized
- how the quality of performance substantially exceeds normal job expectations
- the measurable or non measurable benefits achieved, or both.

Nominations shall contain adequate background information to establish the context and scope of each nominee’s contribution.

**Note:** Every word must be spelled out throughout the narrative. Do **not** use acronyms or abbreviations.

**C Photographs**

Photographs of individuals are required. Ensure that 2 black and white 5” x 7” portrait photographs (showing the head and shoulders only) are included in the nomination packets.

**Note:** Scanned photographs are **not** acceptable.

**D Submitting Nominations**

Mail nominations packets to Audrey Armstrong, HRD, Performance Management, Benefits, and Awards Branch (PMBAB) using either of the following addresses.

| US MAIL   | FEDEX   |
|---|---|
| AUDREY M. ARMSTRONG<br>USDA/FSA/HRD/PMBAB STOP 0595<br>1400 INDEPENDENCE AVENUE, SW<br>WASHINGTON DC 20250-0595 | AUDREY M. ARMSTRONG<br>USDA/FSA/HRD/PMBAB<br>1280 MARYLAND AVE SW RM 487<br>WASHINGTON DC 20024 |

**Nominations must be received by HRD by COB June 9, 2006.**

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### 4 Reviewing Committee

#### A Committee

HRD will establish committees within each Agency (RMA, FAS, FSA) to review their nominations.

#### B Committee Members

Committee members shall:

- review all the nominations from their Agency based on the criteria set forth in AD-495 and category description
- select nomination to be forwarded for the Under Secretary's endorsement for the 59<sup>th</sup> Secretary's Honor Award.

### 5 Contact Information

#### A Contact

If there are questions or additional information is needed, contact Audrey Armstrong by either of the following:

- telephone at 202-401-0695
- e-mail to [Audrey.armstrong@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:Audrey.armstrong@wdc.usda.gov).

## Secretary's Honor Awards Categories

### 1. Enhancing Economic Opportunities for Agricultural Producers

This category recognizes contributions which support expanding markets for agricultural products which are critical to the long-term economic health and prosperity of our food and agricultural sector. United States (US) farmers have a wealth of natural resources, cutting edge technologies, and a supporting infrastructure that result in a production capacity beyond domestic needs. This capacity can be used in expanding global markets and in the development of new uses for agriculture in industrial and pharmaceutical markets.

### 2. Supporting Increased Economic Opportunities and Improved Quality of Life In Rural Areas

This category recognizes contributions which support the enhancement of Rural America (RA), which is home to one fifth of the Nation's population, and is a collage of people and economic activity. Seven out of eight rural counties are now dominated by varying mixes of manufacturing, services, and other non-farming activities. While the majority of rural residents are not dependent on agriculture for their income, many small family farmers rely on local, off-farm employment to supplement their farm income.

Of the 60 million people who live in RA, only 2 million are directly engaged in production agriculture. A diversity of other enterprises, including support services for agriculture, forestry and mining, recreation, and manufacturing, provides most of the jobs and income in RA. The Department of Agriculture's (USDA) role is to enhance the economic opportunities and quality of life for rural residents by providing financial and technical assistance for business and industry, water and waste disposal and other essential community facilities, advanced telecommunications, electric utilities, and housing. Our objective is to ensure that rural residents have equal opportunity to share in the Nation's prosperity and technological advancement.

USDA takes a leadership role in fulfilling Presidential initiatives, such as increasing minority homeowner-ship by the end of the decade and encouraging the production of renewable energy. We will work with other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and the full range of private sector interests to achieve a coordinated effort for the realization of Presidential initiatives, as well as other activities important to RA.

**Secretary's Honor Award Categories (Continued)****3. Enhancing Protection and Safety of the Nation's Agriculture and Food Supply**

This category recognizes contributions which support USDA's unique and critical responsibilities to help ensure the safety of the US food and fiber supply chain and the security of the US agricultural production system. The Department will continue to assess current systems and develop countermeasures against threats to farms and ranches, in coordination with the private sector, other Federal agencies, and State governments. Research programs are essential to an effective US agricultural biosecurity program to develop methods of early detection, rapid and accurate assessment, and immediate responses that prevent spread and control harmful agents. USDA facilities and operations must also be secure from external and internal threats.

**4. Improving the Nation's Nutrition and Health**

This category recognizes commitment by endorsing America's health through food and nutrition education, guidance and promotion to the general public and to targeted groups. We teach, inform and motivate Americans to use this information to improve their diets and physical activity patterns. We expand research and scientific knowledge about public health. By promoting better diets, reaching children early and ensuring access to healthy food, we make a major contribution to the Nation's health.

USDA is seeking to contribute to significant changes in the US population's nutrition status, and in management of the nutrition assistance programs for 2007. We are targeting:

- Reductions in overweight and obesity that are consistent with the Nation's *Healthy People 2010* objectives published by the US Department of Health and Human Services;
- A 30 percent decrease in hunger among low-income people;
- A 15 percent increase in the participation rate among eligible people in the Food Stamp Program, a 12 percent increase in the participation rate in the National School Lunch Program, and continued high participation rate in the Women Infants and Children Program;
- Five point increases in the Healthy Eating Index (HEI) scores of children and low-income people, and a 2-point increase among the general public (HEI uses food intake data to measure the quality and variety of the American diet.).

**Secretary's Honor Award Categories (Continued)****5. Protecting and Enhancing the Nation's Natural Resource Base and Environment**

The category recognizes contributions supporting the management of our natural resources, both public and private, which is a continual balancing act between sometimes contrary and competing concerns. In maintaining this balance, it is imperative that a portfolio approach be utilized that incorporates various conservation management tools including technical assistance, cost-share, incentive, land retirement, easement and regulatory assistance programs. In ensuring these program funds are spent effectively and leveraged wisely, continued and increased cooperation with State, local, and Tribal governments, as well as private for-profit and not-for-profit partner organizations is needed.

**6. Supporting the President's Management Agenda and Civil Rights**

This category recognizes individuals who demonstrate a commitment by working to strengthen USDA's management through vigorous execution of the President's Management Agenda. Better management will result in more efficient program operations that offer improved customer service and more effective stewardship of taxpayer funds. This goal may be accomplished by:

- Ensuring an efficient, high-performing, diverse, competitively sourced workforce, aligned with mission priorities and working cooperatively with USDA partners and the private sector.
- Enhancing internal controls, data integrity, management information, and program and policy improvements as reflected by an unqualified audit opinion and a reduction of erroneous payments by USDA programs.
- Implementing business processes and information technology needed to make our services available electronically.
- Linking budget decisions and program priorities more closely with program performance, and recognize the full cost of programs.

**7. Heroism and Emergency Response**

This category recognizes USDA employees who perform acts of unusual selflessness or heroism in the line of duty. This 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.

**In making nominations, agencies must give equal consideration to all employees regardless of duty station or grade level. Agencies must also ensure that nominations are nondiscriminatory on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, protected genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal or source of income (public assistance).**