



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

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**MEMORANDUM FROM THE CHIEF OF STAFF**

TO: Under and Assistant Secretaries  
Departmental Staff Offices  
Agency Heads

SUBJECT: USDA Policy – Awards for Political Appointees

This memorandum clarifies the USDA policy for awards to political appointees including non-career Senior Executive Service employees and Schedule C employees. USDA has established the policy that political appointees should not receive performance based and other awards unless otherwise approved via the clearance process outlined in this policy memorandum. It is regarded as a distinct privilege to serve in one of these politically appointed positions. Therefore, these incumbents should be evaluated under stricter standards than other federal employees.

Exceptions to this policy will be handled on a case-by-case basis and must be approved by the Secretary's Chief of Staff. Any awards that might be granted will be based on substantial work achievements that go well beyond the performance of routine duties.

**General Provisions**

- Non-career Senior Executive Service employees, and Schedule C employees at GS-13, 14, and 15 levels will not be eligible for USDA performance-based awards.
- Non-career Senior Executive Service employees, and Schedule C employees at GS-13, 14, and 15 levels will not be eligible for USDA incentive awards unless an exception to this policy is specifically approved by the Secretary's Chief of Staff.
- Schedule C appointees at the GS-12 level and below are eligible for case-by-case considerations to receive monetary and non-monetary performance-based awards. All such awards, including cash, quality-step-increases, and time off, are subject to the approval process as outlined in this memorandum.
- During Presidential election periods (June 1 in a calendar year in which the popular election of the President occurs, and ending on January 20 following the date of such election), no non-career appointee at any grade level is eligible to receive either a monetary or a non-monetary award. (Title 5, USC, Part III, Subpart C, Chapter 45, Subchapter I, Section 4508.)
- The Secretary's Chief of Staff must approve all awards for political appointees.

- Any award nominations for non-career appointees will follow the normal procedure for awards, but will be subject to the following approvals before the award can be granted:
  - **Review and Approval.** The form AD-287-2, Recommendation & Approval of Awards (found on the USDA website at <http://dab.nfc.usda.gov/forms/ad287-2.pdf>) requires the signature of the Immediate Supervisor, the Senate Confirmed Appointee for whom the employee works, and the Secretary's Chief of Staff.
  - **Submission of Forms.** If approval is granted, the completed and approved forms shall be forwarded to the Office of Human Resources Executive Resources and Services Division for processing.

For forms, procedures and general information please follow the guidance as outlined in the Guide for Employee Recognition, which is available from your servicing personnel office, or on the USDA website at <http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/recog.htm>. Questions concerning this policy as it applies to political appointees should be directed to Marilyn Caul, Executive Resources and Services Division, 202-720-2101.