

DEPARTMENTAL REGULATION		Number: 4040-451-02
SUBJECT: Criteria for Secretary's Annual Honor Awards	DATE: September 9, 2002	
	OPI: Office of Human Resources Management	

SECTION

1 PURPOSE	1
2 SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS/CANCELLATIONS	1
3 BACKGROUND	1
4 ELIGIBILITY	1
5 CRITERIA AND CATEGORIES	2
6 PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS	2
7 REVIEW PROCESS	3
8 AWARDS PRESENTATION	3

1 PURPOSE

The Secretary's Annual Honor Awards are the most prestigious awards given at the Department of Agriculture (USDA). The purpose of Honor Awards is to provide high-level recognition to deserving USDA employees at all grade levels and private citizens who have made outstanding contributions supporting USDA's mission.

2 SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS/CANCELLATIONS

This regulation replaces Department Personnel Manual, Chapter 451, Incentive Awards, Subchapter 7-3, Honorary Recognition, Appendix H, Secretary's Honor Awards Program, dated August 12, 1981, which is cancelled.

3 BACKGROUND

- a The Honor Awards Program was created in 1947. These awards are presented by the Secretary of Agriculture. They recognize outstanding contributions in support of the mission of USDA.
- b Members of the Secretary's Honor Awards Evaluation Committee created the Plow Honor Award in 1999. The purpose of this award is to recognize exceptional leadership, contributions, or public service by individuals or groups receiving the highest consolidated ratings.

4 ELIGIBILITY

All USDA employees, as well as private citizens, are eligible for an honor award based on contributions to USDA. Awards may be granted posthumously. Individuals and groups (2 or more) may be nominated.

- a Nominations for these awards should be made from among individuals who are considered to have performed truly distinguished service.
- b Nominations should be based on contributions and not on long and faithful service, or as a retirement testimonial.
- c The Honor Awards Evaluation Committee recommends approval of nominations that clearly describe the significance of the contribution being recognized, the goals achieved, the exceptional quality of performance, and the measurable or non-measurable benefits.
- d The contribution must have occurred (or the results realized) within the last 3 years. Acts of heroism must have occurred within the last year. Heroism is normally job related life-saving attempts or rescues performed in spite of considerable personal risk.
- e Nominees who have previously received an honor award may be recognized again based on a new achievement.

5 CRITERIA AND CATEGORIES

The contribution must focus on qualitative and quantitative performance measures based on the USDA's Strategic Goals which are identified in the yearly announcement.

6 PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

- a USDA employees and agency copartners whose achievements constitute a notable, outstanding contribution to agriculture or to the public service may be eligible for a Secretary's Honor Award nomination.

Agency copartners would include other USDA agencies, Federal and state government departments, academia, nonprofit organizations and private sector entities (e.g., National Association of States Departments of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, 4-H Club, Wheat Export Council, etc.).

- b Agency Heads are responsible for submitting only those individuals and groups which have made exceptional contributions and which are truly deserving of high honor.
- c Agency Heads must also ensure that nominations are nondiscriminatory from the standpoint 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).
- d An employee may be nominated for more than one Honor Award as long as the nominations are not based on the same or related contribution.
- e An employee may be nominated in more than one group, but may not be nominated as both an individual and as a member of a group based on the same or related contribution.
- f Each nomination must describe clearly, in nontechnical language, the contribution to be recognized, and its impact on the operating agency or Department mission, and the degree to which the contribution exceeds normal job responsibilities. The justification should specify which of the categories the contribution meets, as only one category may be selected.
- g For nominations of groups, a brief description identifying each individual's contribution to the group's achievement must be included in the detailed basis for nomination.
- h Each nominating agency must verify internally that there is no information that would negatively affect the nominations (i.e., disciplinary action, pending discipline, equal employment opportunity actions taken against the nominee) prior to submitting nominations to the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM).
- i Nominations must be submitted using Honor Awards Nomination Form, AD-495, dated 9/00. **Link to Form** www.hqnet.usda.gov/ocio/irm/forms/download/ad-495.doc
- j Nominations not selected in previous years, may be resubmitted. Resubmitted nominations must be updated to reflect current achievements.
- k Nominations of employees from other agencies must include the concurrence of their Agency Head and Under/Assistant Secretary or Director.
- l The Agency Head's transmittal of nominations will be sent to the Director, OHRM through the appropriate Under/Assistant Secretary or Director.
- m OHRM must receive nominations by the due date established each year.

7 REVIEW PROCESS

- a The Evaluation Committee is appointed annually by the Secretary to review nominations for these prestigious USDA awards. The Committee is composed of distinguished USDA and other Federal Government officials. Travel and per diem will be authorized and paid in accordance with the Agriculture Travel Regulations. The members of the USDA Incentive Awards Office will serve as facilitators. The Committee recommends those nominations that warrant Honor Award recognition to the Secretary for approval.

- b In addition to reviewing the accomplishment, the Committee will determine that each individual or group nomination has demonstrated qualities of leadership, integrity, and trust.

8 AWARDS PRESENTATION

The Secretary presents awards annually (generally in late spring or early summer) at the USDA Honor Awards Ceremony.

9 PROGRAM MONITORING

Agency Heads are responsible for monitoring and ensuring that nominations reflect the broad spectrum of employees in their workforce. All employees are to be given equal consideration, regardless of duty station, grade level or other non-merit factors.

-END-