

United States Department of Agriculture  
Research, Education, and Economics

**ARS CSREES ERS NASS**

***Bulletin***

**Title:** Use of Restricted Fares

**Number:** 05-312

**Date:** September 29, 2005 **Expiration:** September 28, 2006

**Originating Office:** Financial Management Division, ARS/AFM

**Distribution:** All REE Employees (Please distribute to all employees who may not have access to electronic mail.)

This Bulletin provides REE policy on the use of restricted fares for travel, and includes a statement of responsibility that authorizing officials and employees of ARS, ERS, and CSREES must sign prior to using a restricted fare. NASS has established internal procedures for the use of restricted fare and NASS employees will follow those procedures when purchasing restricted fares.

## **Introduction**

Research, Education, and Economics (REE) employees and invitational travelers are required to use Government contract fares for official travel. The airfares offered under this program provide deep discounts off comparable unrestricted commercial fares and annually result in substantial savings to the Federal government. In addition to the price savings, the General Services Administration Airline City Pair Program has many features which allow government travelers flexibility when planning official travel, including:

- Fares priced on one-way routes permitting agencies to plan multiple destinations;
- No advance purchase required;
- No minimum or maximum length stay required;
- Tickets fully refundable;
- Last seat availability;
- No blackout periods;
- Stable prices enabling travel budgeting; and
- Dual fares availability.

The Federal Travel Regulations (FTR) do allow the use of reduced fare penalty tickets when the use of such fares:

- Are approved by the agency;
- Result in a cost savings to the agency; and
- The travel, when using such fares, is certain to occur.

Such fares are commonly offered as restricted and/or non-refundable fares.

## **Coverage**

The requirements in this Bulletin are applicable to employees and invitational travelers of the Agricultural Research Service, Economic Research Service, and Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service. The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) has established internal procedures for the use of restricted fares and NASS employees will follow those procedures when purchasing restricted fares.

## **Policy**

REE travelers may use restricted and/or non-refundable fares when the requirements contained in the FTR for such use are met. Authorizing officials/fundholders that approve the use of such fares must do so with understanding that once ticketed, penalties are incurred when a ticket must be re-issued due to a change in travel. If the ticket is non-refundable, there may be no residual value should the travel be canceled.

To ensure that the restricted and/or non-refundable tickets are used in accordance with REE policy, both the employee requesting such use and the authorizing official/fundholder approving such use must sign the “Acknowledgement of Responsibilities for the Purchase of Restricted/Non-refundable Common Carrier Transportation” (see Attachment 1). This statement

must be included with the employee's travel file. This statement must be signed on a case-by-case basis for each request for the purchase of restricted/non-refundable fares.

### **Authorizing Official/Fundholder Responsibilities**

- Authorizing official must consider the risks associated with the use of penalty/non-refundable tickets, and approve their use only when the use will result in a benefit to the government. The authorizing official/fundholder must carefully consider the risk of the cancellation of travel and the effect on their budget of paying for a ticket that may have no residual value.
- The authorizing official must approve the reimbursement of charges incurred for changes to a restricted ticket or for the cost of an unused on-refundable ticket when:
  - Changes are made to travel plans that are officially ordered by the authorizing official and are not made for the convenience of the employee.
  - When changes are made to travel plans due to emergency situations beyond the control of the employee, and where the employee has consulted with their authorizing official.
  - The authorizing official cancels travel.
- When travel is canceled, the authorizing official must ensure that procedures are in place to account for the residual value of a non-refundable ticket and ensure that the residual value is used to purchase common carrier transportation for future official travel.
- Authorizing officials must sign the “Acknowledgement of Responsibilities for the Purchase of Restricted/Non-refundable Common Carrier Transportation” (see Attachment 1), when approving the use of restricted/non-refundable common carrier transportation. Authorizing officials may not verbally approve the use of restricted/non-refundable common carrier transportation tickets.

### **Employee Responsibilities**

- Employees must read and sign the “Acknowledgement of Responsibilities for the Purchase of Restricted/Non-refundable Common Carrier Transportation” (see Attachment 1), and obtain their authorizing official's signature on the statement **prior** to ordering restricted/non-refundable common carrier transportation tickets.
- All common carrier transportation tickets must be reserved through the agency approved travel management service (currently EDS FedTraveler) and must be paid using a Government contractor-issued travel charge card. Employees **may not** use an unauthorized travel service to obtain restricted/non-refundable tickets, nor may they pay for such tickets using a personal credit card.
- Employees are responsible for paying any penalty charges or the cost of an unused ticket when changes are made that are not necessary to accomplish official travel or for the

convenience of the employee, or the travel is canceled for a reason that is not acceptable to the authorizing official.

- When non-refundable tickets are authorized and the ticket is not used, the government must refund the traveler for the cost of the ticket, if the authorizing official approved the use and signed the statement contained in Attachment 1 of this Bulletin. When the Government reimburses the cost of an unused ticket, it remains government property and must be used for future official travel, even if the ticket is issued in the traveler's name. Employees may not use the residual value from canceled tickets, where the Government has reimbursed the cost of the ticket, for personal travel.

Please contact Diane M. Eggert, Chief, Travel and Relocation Services Branch, on 301-504-1260, if you have questions.

/s/

S. M. HELMRICH  
Director  
Financial Management Division

**Research, Education and Economics  
Acknowledgement of Responsibilities for the  
Purchase of Non-refundable Common Carrier Transportation**

\_\_\_\_\_ is requesting purchase of non-refundable ticket for travel from \_\_\_\_\_  
(origin)

to \_\_\_\_\_, on \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(destination) (dates of travel)

**Government Contract Airfare:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**Restricted Airfare:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**We have read and understand the following:**

- Government contract fares, where available, are to be used unless an exemption applies.
- The ticket requested is non-refundable/restricted and that there may be service charges and additional costs that must be paid if changes are made after the tickets are issued. The traveler and authorizing official/fundholder recognize the potential financial risk to the agency should the agency cancel the above listed travel after the purchase of a non-refundable ticket.
  - If changes to travel are ordered by the agency, any additional costs are paid from the authorizing official/fundholders budget.
  - The traveler is responsible for any costs that result from cancellation or changes to the ticket that are not related to official travel or that are made for personal convenience. The traveler is responsible for any costs associated with this ticket if this form is not signed by the fund holder/authorizing official.
- Non-refundable tickets must be used in accordance with REE Policy.
- Non-refundable fares require immediate ticketing, upon request to the travel agent.
- Non-refundable tickets, upon issuance, are charged immediately to the travel charge card account used for payment.
  - If this ticket is charged to the traveler's individually-billed travel charge card account, the traveler recognizes the responsibility to pay the ticket cost when the travel charge card bill is due, and realizes that this bill may be due prior to the end of travel or before reimbursement of the cost of the ticket.
  - If this ticket is charged to the agency GVTS account, the authorizing official/fund holder recognizes that the cost of the ticket may be obligated and paid from their organization's fund balance and realizes that this obligation and payment may occur prior to or before the end of travel. (Fares may only be charged to the GVTS account for foreign travel or if the traveler does not have an individually billed Government travel charge card.
- The traveler recognizes the responsibility to understand the fare restrictions and rebooking rules for the ticket being requested. Some airlines require cancellation, rebooking and reissue of tickets PRIOR to the departure of the original outbound flight and/or continuing flights. Failure to do so may result in the entire ticket value being lost.

**I have considered the government contract airfare for this travel and request a nonrefundable/restricted fare because \_\_\_\_\_. I understand the above responsibilities and authorize my travel office to purchase non-refundable common carrier ticket for the travel listed.**

**Employee (Traveler) Signature**

**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**I authorize the use of non-refundable/restricted fare for the travel and traveler listed above. I understand the agency responsibilities for the use of this ticket and the risk to the government if the travel is canceled or changed.**

**Authorizing Official/Fundholder Signature**

**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_