

United States Department of Agriculture  
Research, Education, and Economics

## **ARS \* CSREES \* ERS \* NASS**

### ***Policies and Procedures***

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Title:</b>              | Performance Planning and Appraisal                    |
| <b>Number:</b>             | 435.1-CSREES  |
| <b>Date:</b>               | May 26, 1999  |
| <b>Originating Office:</b> | Human Resources Division; REE Policy Branch; AFM, ARS |
| <b>This Replaces:</b>      |   |
| <b>Distribution:</b>       | All CSREES Employees                                  |

This P&P outlines procedures for establishing performance elements and standards and for rating employee performance. It applies to all employees in the CSREES except members of the Senior Executive Service and employees holding certain temporary and/or excepted service appointments.

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# [1. Introduction](#)

Performance appraisal is a management tool designed to encourage communications in the office, improve the quality of work produced, and promote individual accountability. This is the concept underpinning the legal requirement that all agencies evaluate employee performance.<sup>1</sup> Just how a supervisor is expected to do this is addressed in some detail below.

## [2. Coverage](#)

The information applies to **all employees** assigned to the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) **except** the following:

- members of the **Senior Executive Service**;<sup>2</sup>
- employees in the **excepted service** who are not expected to serve more than 120 calendar days in a consecutive 12-month period; and
- **temporary employees** with appointments not to exceed 1 year, providing they agree--in writing--to serve without a rating and are aware of the consequences of that agreement (i.e., employees will not be considered for reappointment or for an increase in pay based in whole or in part on performance).

In addition to these three general exceptions which are covered by law,<sup>3</sup> USDA's Office of Human Resource Management (OHRM) has also obtained exemptions for a number of specific positions, among them:

- **students** employed as trainees under a work-study program or under temporary appointments; and
- **nontemporary** intermittent or part-time employees whose appointments carry **salary limitations** (i.e., excepted service Schedule A (g) authority appointments).

For further information on these and other exempted positions, see USDA's Performance Management System, issued via memorandum dated June 12, 1996.

The fact that certain employees are excepted from the formal aspects of the appraisal process does not mean they are, therefore, exempt from performance related scrutiny, criticism, and praise. The supervisor should still maintain records of performance for all non-ratable employees and recommend and take administrative action as required.

### 3. Annual Appraisal Period

In most cases, the supervisor will evaluate each employee once every 12 months. The annual [appraisal period](#) may begin and end on any date convenient for the agency, but the dates must be communicated to employees in writing.

### 4. Minimum Appraisal Period

An employee must have been in the position with elements and standards in place for at least 90 days before an [advisory rating](#) or [rating of record](#) may be completed.

### 5. Establishing and Communicating Performance Plans

Upon an employee's assignment to a position (normally within 30 days) and at the beginning of the appraisal period thereafter (again within 30 days), the [rating official](#) will meet with the employee to discuss and develop a written [performance plan](#) (elements and standards). Remember, elements and standards are required for details and temporary promotions **in excess of 120 days**.

If one or more major duties and/or responsibilities of a position change, the performance plan should be reviewed. Changes to performance plans must be in writing and must be approved by the rating and [reviewing officials](#) prior to implementation. If changes are made during the last 90 days of the annual appraisal period, the employee must be given an opportunity to perform in the element(s) before being rated. In these cases, the rating period is extended for the length of time necessary to meet the minimum appraisal period (90 days), after which the employee may be rated.

A performance plan is considered to be "in place" (e.g., effective) when the employee and the rating and reviewing officials have signed and dated the plan. Signature by the employee indicates receipt of the performance plan. Final authority for establishing performance plans rests with the rating and reviewing officials.

Preparation and receipt of the performance plan is documented on form AD-435A and B. The supervisor will record the proposed elements and standards on form AD-435A, Performance Plan, [Progress Review](#) and Appraisal Worksheet (see Appendix A), and its Continuation Sheet, form AD-435B (see Appendix B), and will discuss them with the employee occupying the position. The supervisor and the employee will then sign the AD-435A, and the supervisor will forward the documents to the reviewing official for approval and signature. Once the documents have been approved and signed, the supervisor will forward a copy to the employee. The supervisor keeps the original.

### 6. Performance Elements and Standards

Standardized elements and standards that adopt similar elements for similar positions will be used wherever logical. However, this does not preclude the use of nonstandard elements and/or standards. Employees, employee groups, and/or employee representatives will participate in the development of performance plans. All performance plans must align performance expectations with strategic plans and the Department's customer service philosophy.

#### Performance Elements

**General.** Departmental guidance requires that the rating/reviewing official(s) identify **no fewer than three**, but **not more than ten**, performance elements for each position . **at least one** of which must be identified as **non-critical**. Performance plans may include both individual and team performance; however, **at least one critical element** must address individual performance. The agency Administrator may determine the number of critical and [non-critical elements](#), within these parameters. The rating/reviewing official(s) will consult with the employee (or employee groups) in developing the performance plan and in determining which elements are critical and which are non-critical. The rating/reviewing officials are ultimately responsible for the decisions made. To simplify the process, the supervisor should attempt to standardize the elements as much as possible, adopting similar elements for similar positions.

**Appraisal Units (or Point Value).** In the rating process, critical elements are double weighted; that is, they are assigned two points (referred to as appraisal units), while non-critical elements are assigned one point (see Section 8 for further details on appraisal units).

**Civil Rights.** At least one critical element must give the supervisor an opportunity to assess the employee's performance in the area of civil rights.

For **supervisory** positions, a separate critical element must be established to specifically and exclusively address civil rights responsibilities.

For **non-supervisory** positions, a separate civil rights element is not required. However, civil rights goals and responsibilities must be included within the context of at least one element; and any element in which civil rights goals and objectives occur must be a critical element. Including civil rights responsibilities with an element that describes customer service functions or an element that focuses on internal working relationships are excellent

examples of opportunities to measure an employee's support for diversity and ability to interact with coworkers from different backgrounds and ethnic groups.

In certain unusual instances, the elements established for the duties of a non-supervisory position may not lend themselves to a discussion of civil rights issues. This may occur if the work is extremely technical or scientific in nature and if the work is performed in a very independent or isolated manner (i.e., without opportunity to interact with other people). Certain research positions might fall into this category. In such cases, the supervisor and the employee may formulate a separate element addressing the position's civil rights responsibilities.

In the rarest of cases, the supervisor and the employee may determine that the duties of a non-supervisory position simply do not provide a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to civil rights or work force diversity. Should this occur--and it should seldom, if ever, occur in CSREES--the Department requires that the second-level supervisor review the case. If the second-level supervisor agrees that civil rights goals cannot be addressed within the context of the position, the second-level supervisor will forward a **written** request for an exception to Administrative and Financial Management's (AFM) Human Resources Director, who will appoint an ad hoc panel to study the request. The panel will be composed of at least three members: (1) the agency's Civil Rights Director (or designee), (2) AFM's Human Resources Director (or designee), and (3) a representative of the mission or program area of the position under review. The panel will forward a recommendation to the Administrator, who will either grant or deny an exemption. All exemptions will be reported to the Department's Office of Civil Rights Enforcement within 30 days following approval.

**Supervision.** Performance plans for all supervisors and managers must include a critical element(s) that measures these attributes.

## Performance Standards

For each performance element, the supervisor--again soliciting comments from the employee occupying the position--will prepare a statement describing how a reasonably effective employee would perform the work, addressing, as appropriate, the quantity and quality of the work produced, its timeliness, any customer service expectations, and the amount of supervision required. This description will become the [performance standard](#) for that particular element at the Fully Successful rating level (see Section 8 for more information on rating levels). The supervisor will use this standard as a yardstick for measuring employee performance.

## 7. Progress Reviews

At some point during the appraisal period, usually at the midpoint of the rating year, the supervisor must meet with each employee to discuss performance and performance-related issues. This meeting, officially labeled a progress review, but frequently referred to as an **interim appraisal** or **mid-year review**, is intended to assess the employee's current level of performance as measured against the standards established for the work and to offer advice. As necessary, this review will identify problems and formulate remedies. It urges the supervisor and the employee to confront performance deficiencies in their early stages, when treatment is easier and before formal action becomes necessary. For marginal employees, it would be wise to conduct these reviews on a quarterly (or more frequent) basis.

While trouble-shooting is perhaps its primary purpose, the progress review should not be seen in a negative light. For the successful, effective employee, it should provide an occasion for positive reinforcement, the supervisor encouraging the employee to keep up the good work or to accept increasingly ambitious challenges.

The progress review also provides an opportunity to review the performance elements and standards and make any necessary adjustments. (Note: Changes cannot be made within 90 days of the end of the appraisal period. If changes are proposed within that window, the length of the appraisal period must be extended to give the employee a minimum of 90 days to perform under the revised elements and standards.)

Progress reviews do not require written, narrative comments by the supervisor. If desired, the supervisor may attach a memorandum to the AD-435A, but this is entirely optional. The only written requirement is for the employee and the supervisor to initial and date the block at the bottom of the form verifying that the progress review discussion(s) did take place. [4](#)

## 8. Annual Appraisals

### Element Rating Levels

At the end of the rating period, the supervisor will evaluate each performance element and determine which of the following three rating levels is most appropriate. In each case, the supervisor will compare the employee's performance with the Fully Successful performance standard established for that element.

- **Exceeds Fully Successful:** The employee's performance was significantly better--in terms of quantity, quality, timeliness and/or customer service--than one would normally expect from an individual assigned to the position (i.e., the performance **exceeds** the Fully Successful standard for the element being evaluated).
- **Fully Successful:** The employee's performance was as good as, but not necessarily better than, one would normally expect from an individual occupying the position (i.e., the performance **meets** the Fully Successful standard for the element being evaluated). This level generally describes the performance of the solid, effective employee whose work meets normal expectations in terms of quantity, quality, timeliness, and customer service.
- **Does Not Meet Fully Successful:** The employee's performance has failed to fulfill the basic expectations for the work (i.e., the performance **does not meet** the Fully Successful standard for the element being

evaluated). Should this occur, the supervisor should contact an employee relations specialist in HRD for guidance on how to proceed. With assistance from HRD, the supervisor must prepare a written statement describing the employee's deficiencies for all elements rated at this level (the supervisor may record this statement on either the AD-435A and/or B or on a separate sheet of paper).

After determining the level for each element, the supervisor will record the decision by checking the appropriate block on the AD-435A and B (i.e., block 4, "[Element Rating](#)").

## [Appraisal Units](#)

As noted above, all performance elements are not of comparable nature: some of them are critical; some are non-critical. To recognize the difference--and give extra credit where extra credit is due--the supervisor will assign points: two points (usually referred to as appraisal units) for critical elements and one point (i.e., one appraisal unit) for non-critical elements.

To calculate the number of appraisal units for each employee and thereby arrive at a total score and a final rating, the supervisor will transfer the individual element ratings (see preceding section) from the AD-435A or B to the final rating document, form AD-435P, Performance Appraisal (see Appendix C). The supervisor will record either one or two points in the appropriate blocks (i.e., block 15B, 15C, or 15D) and add up the points (i.e., appraisal units) awarded at each level. The supervisor will then translate this total score into the summary rating level for the employee.

## [Summary Levels](#)

The number of appraisal units earned for each element will determine the [summary level](#) for the employee. The summary level reflects the appraisal (rating) of each element and the associated (adjective) rating level that summarizes the employee's overall performance. There are five such adjectives (or summary levels) that the supervisor may use which are based on specific criteria:

- **Outstanding:** All appraisal units for critical and non-critical elements were earned at the *Exceeds Fully Successful* level. For each Outstanding rating, the supervisor must prepare a written narrative outlining the employee's accomplishments.
- **Superior:** More appraisal units for critical and non-critical elements were earned at the *Exceeds Fully Successful* level than at the *Meets Fully Successful* level, **and** no appraisal units were earned at the *Does Not Meet Fully Successful* level (i.e., no critical or non-critical elements were rated *Does Not Meet Fully Successful* level).
- **Fully Successful:** More appraisal units for critical and non-critical elements were earned at the *Meets Fully Successful* level than at the *Exceeds Fully Successful* level, **and no critical element** was rated *Does Not Meet Fully Successful*.
- **Marginal:** More appraisal units (for non-critical elements only) were earned at the *Does Not Meet Fully Successful* level than at the *Exceeds Fully Successful* level, **and no critical element** was rated *Does Not Meet Fully Successful*.
- **Unacceptable:** One or more **critical elements** were rated at the *Does Not Meet Fully Successful* level. Should this occur, the supervisor must contact an employee relations specialist in HRD for guidance on how to proceed.

The supervisor will identify the summary level for each employee by checking the appropriate block on the AD-435P.

## [Discussing the Appraisal](#)

Once the summary level has been identified, the supervisor will sign and date the AD-435P and forward it to the reviewing official for signature. It is important that this review take place **before** the employee sees the rating or is engaged in any discussions concerning the rating. After the reviewing official has signed and returned the form, the supervisor will discuss the rating with the employee. The employee will then sign the form. Should the employee refuse to sign for whatever reason, the supervisor will annotate the form with the following statement: "Employee received rating, but chose not to sign."

## [Document Distribution and Retention](#)

The supervisor will distribute copies of the completed appraisal (forms AD-435A, AD-435B, and AD-435P) as follows:

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| ● Original | Employee  |
| ● Copy 1   | HRD for data input and filing in Employee Performance File (EPF)                      |
| ● Copy 2   | Extra copy (discard, retain, or distribute in accordance with individual preferences) |

- Copy 3 Supervisor
- Copy 4 Extra copy (discard, retain, or distribute in accordance with individual preferences)

The official EPF includes all documents relating to performance appraisal and is under the control of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).<sup>5</sup> The EPF includes all forms AD-435P, AD- 435A, and AD-435-B for the most recent **4 years** and any other supporting documentation. When an employee transfers, resigns, or separates, supervisors must forward advisory ratings to HRD for inclusion in the EPF prior to transfer of the Official Personnel Folder (OPF). If an employee moves to another position within CSREES or if there is a change in supervisors, the advisory ratings from the losing supervisor must be forwarded to the gaining supervisor.

## 9. Special Situations

### Advisory Performance Ratings

In unusual circumstances, an employee may receive one or more “advisory” performance ratings during a given rating year. Each advisory performance rating must be in writing and it must address performance in each element. It need not be accompanied by form AD-435P, nor must it include the identification of a summary level (i.e., adjective rating). The employee should be given a copy of all advisory ratings. The gaining (or new) supervisor must consider these advisory ratings when preparing the employee's final rating of record. The supervisor may exercise individual discretion in reviewing these advisory documents, providing the supervisor is able, to explain how the final rating was achieved and how the advisory rating was factored in, should the question ever be asked. Advisory ratings are called for in the following situations:

- **Details and Temporary Promotions in excess of 120 days.** The supervisor of an employee who is detailed or temporarily promoted for more than 120 days must establish performance elements and standards for that position, as outlined in Section 6. At the conclusion of the detail or temporary promotion, the supervisor will prepare a narrative performance (advisory) rating documenting the employee's accomplishments and forward it to the employee's permanent supervisor. (Note: Details or temporary promotions of 120 days or less do not require elements and standards. The supervisor should, however, prepare some written documentation of the employee's performance and forward it to the permanent supervisor.) This guidance applies to any employee detailed within USDA. When an employee is detailed outside the Department, the permanent supervisor should make a reasonable effort to obtain information regarding the employee's performance prior to completing the annual appraisal (rating of record).
- **Change of Supervisor within the agency.** Each individual who supervised the employee for 90 days or more during the rating year must prepare a narrative advisory rating and forward it to the current supervisor.
- **Change of Position and Supervisor within the agency.** When an employee who has occupied a position for at least 90 days leaves that position, the supervisor should prepare a narrative advisory rating and forward it to the new supervisor, along with the ratings of record for the past 4 years.
- **Change of Position Without Change in Supervisor.** When an employee changes position but retains the same supervisor (e.g., the employee was promoted or reassigned within the same organization), the supervisor is not required to prepare an advisory rating, since there is really no third party to “advise” in such a case. Some written documentation of the employee's performance might, however, be recommended since the supervisor must consider the entire rating year, including the work in the previous position, in the employee's final rating of record. A memorandum to the record or an advisory rating kept in the supervisor's own files might provide a helpful reference at the end of the rating year.

### Inability to Rate/Extension of Appraisal Period

When the rating year ends before an employee has been in the position for the minimum 90 days or before an employee has been on standards for the minimum 90 days for any other reason, the supervisor will normally extend the appraisal period for the length of time needed to meet the 90-day requirement. When the new target date is reached, the supervisor will prepare a rating of record for the employee.

### Assisting Employees in Improving Performance

When serious performance deficiencies develop, the supervisor should not be bound by the normal appraisal schedule. Rather than wait for the regularly scheduled progress review or final appraisal, the supervisor should immediately contact an employee relations specialist in HRD and take appropriate action whenever an employee's performance in one or more critical elements slips below the Fully Successful level.

If at any time the supervisor determines that an employee's performance in any critical element or the overall performance is less than *fully successful*, the employee should be counseled by the supervisor and specific deficiencies identified. Performance elements and standards and performance expectations must be thoroughly explained to the employee. Assistance provided may include closer supervision, on-the-job training, formal training, etc. All counseling sessions should be documented.

At any time the supervisor identifies any critical element(s) for which performance is at the *unacceptable* level, the employee must be informed in a timely manner of the performance standards that must be reached in order to attain *fully successful* performance. The supervisor should work with the employee relations specialist to develop a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). Although the employee does not receive an *Unacceptable* rating of

record at this time, the supervisor must issue the PIP (documenting unacceptable performance) in writing and the memorandum must:

- Identify the specific critical element(s) in which the employee is deficient.
- Describe the types of improvements (specific work or projects to be completed, steps or procedures to be followed, etc.) that the employee must demonstrate to attain fully successful performance.
- Offer assistance to the employee in improving to the *fully successful* level. This assistance may include formal training, on-the-job training, counseling, and closer supervision.
- Provide the employee a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate *acceptable* performance, commensurate with the duties and responsibilities of the employee's position.
- Inform the employee that, at the conclusion of the PIP, if performance has continued to be *unacceptable*, the employee may be reassigned, reduced in grade, or removed. A written notice will be provided to the employee explaining the action to be taken, the effective date of such action, and the employee's appeal rights.
- If an individual is placed on a PIP during the last 90 days of the annual appraisal period, the rating decision will be delayed until completion of the PIP.
- Upon completion of the PIP, the supervisor will work with the employee relations specialist to prepare documentation of the employee's level of performance.
  - If the employee's performance is *fully successful*, the rating prepared at the conclusion of the PIP will become the new rating of record for purposes of WGI's and future personnel actions. If the employee's performance remains *unacceptable* after having completed the PIP, the supervisor may propose a reassignment, reduction-in-grade, or removal action.
  - If the employee's performance reverts back to *unacceptable* on any element(s) included in the PIP at any time up to 1 year from the effective date of the PIP, action to reassign, reduce-in-grade, or remove can be taken without giving the employee another opportunity to perform; i.e., a new PIP is not required.
  - If the employee has performed acceptably for 1 year from the beginning of a PIP in an element(s) for which the employee was afforded an opportunity to improve and the employee's performance again becomes *unacceptable*, the employee must be given another opportunity to demonstrate acceptable performance before determining whether to propose a reduction-in-grade or removal.

## Employee Dissatisfactions

If an employee is dissatisfied with the critical elements, non-critical elements, and/or performance standards to include the number or type of critical and non-critical elements, the designation of an element as either critical or non-critical, or the substance of their standards (including the criteria against which performance will be measured), the issue must initially be raised and discussed with the rating official. If the issue(s) cannot be resolved with the rating official, the employee may informally discuss the concern(s) with the reviewing official. If the issue(s) remain unresolved after discussion with the rating and reviewing officials, the employee has no other avenue of review or redress. Final authority for establishing performance plans rests with the rating and reviewing officials.

If the dissatisfaction is due to performance (or summary) ratings or ratings of record, the issue(s) must initially be raised with the rating official, and if unresolved, with the reviewing official. If, after discussion with both the rating and reviewing officials the employee fails to resolve the issue(s), the employee may file a grievance.

## Grievances

An employee may **not** grieve the **substance** of the performance elements and standards established for the position. Since management assigns work, management may determine the manner in which it should be performed. In other words, an employee may not grieve the content of the performance plan; i.e., the assignment of an element, whether or not the element is critical or non-critical, or the manner in which the work is to be performed (the expectations or performance standard).

The employee may, however, grieve the improper **application** of those standards (i.e., the element and/or performance rating, the method by which the rating/reviewing official derived the element and/or performance rating, or violations of this P&P).

Should a grievance or potential grievance situation arise, the employee and the supervisor should immediately contact an employee relations specialist in HRD for assistance. All grievances will be handled in accordance with administrative grievance procedures.

## 10. Impact on Other Personnel Actions

An employee must receive a rating of record of *Fully Successful* or better to be eligible for a within-grade increase, a performance award, or a promotion. Performance ratings may also affect the employee's selection for specialized or competitive training opportunities and will help determine service credit in the event of a reduction in force.

## 11. Savings Provision

Administrative actions (e.g., action against unacceptable employees under 5 U.S.C. 4303) initiated prior to the effective date of this issuance must continue to be processed consistent with the procedures and requirements that were in place at the time that the action was initiated.

## 12. Communications/Training

To ensure effective implementation, the essential provisions of this program will be communicated to all covered employees through formal and/or informal training. The HRD will provide guidance and assistance in developing these programs.

## 13. Recognizing Performance

Criteria that establishes eligibility for performance awards and other forms of performance recognition are included in the USDA "Guide for Employee Recognition" and in guidance issued by the REE Policy Branch, HRD. The Administrator may direct the development of awards programs within CSREES in keeping with this guidance.

## 14. Evaluation

This performance program will be periodically evaluated by CSREES and HRD officials to determine the effectiveness of the program including, but not limited to, such issues as improvement of organizational performance or employee satisfaction with the process. Modifications may be made in accordance with the parameters of the USDA Performance Management System. However, any modifications to coverage, length of appraisal period, or summary level pattern require departmental approval. Information about the program, as well as related reports, will be provided to the Department upon request.

## 15. Summary of Responsibilities

### **Administrator**

- Ensures consistency in the application of appraisal procedures throughout the agency.
- Ensures alignment of employee/team performance plans with organizational strategic plans.

### **Reviewing Officials**

- Review and approve proposed elements and standards for specified positions and review and approve the final ratings of employee performance.

### **Rating Officials (Supervisors)**

- Develop performance elements and standards for all positions supervised.
- Notify employees whenever their performance on a critical element slips below the *Fully Successful* level and take whatever measures may be needed to effect improvements. Assistance offered might include, but is not limited to, formal or on-the-job training, counseling, and closer supervision.
- Conduct at least one progress review per year for all employees.
- Conduct an annual performance appraisal for all employees.
- Discuss completed appraisals with the employees and offer suggestions as to how performance might be improved.
- Complete the necessary appraisal forms and retain all documentation for 4 years.
- Recognize employee/team accomplishments appropriately.

### **Human Resources Division, AFM**



- Employee relations specialists will advise and assist supervisors and employees on employee performance problems.
- Personnel management specialists will advise and assist supervisors and employees on various procedural issues related to performance appraisal (e.g., the development of elements and standards, filing and submission of completed forms, etc.).
- The REE Policy Branch will:
  - provide guidance and assistance to supervisors and employees, as well as HRD on the interpretation of law, regulation, or agency policy governing performance management;
  - assist the Administrator in communicating performance management requirements and arrange for or provide training in these areas; and,
  - be responsible for program development, implementation, operation, evaluation, and preparing information and reports to the Department (upon request).

## Employees

- Assist supervisors in developing elements and standards for their positions (e.g., discuss proposed elements and standards with management and offer comments).
- Cooperate as fully as possible in the overall rating process.

## 16. Glossary

**Advisory Rating.** A rating which addresses work performed for 90 days or more, but not the entire rating period. An advisory rating applies to an employee on detail or who has changed jobs or supervisors during the rating year. The supervisor must consider these ratings in preparing the final rating of record. An employee may have more than one advisory rating in a given appraisal period.

**Appraisal Period.** Normally, a 12-month timeframe during which an employee's performance is evaluated; frequently referred to as the **rating year**.

**Critical Element.** A work assignment or responsibility of such importance that *unacceptable* performance (or a rating of "Does Not Meet Fully Successful") on the element would result in a determination that an employee's overall performance is unacceptable.

**Element Rating.** The rating level assigned to each performance element, determined by comparing the employee's accomplishments with the established performance standard. There are three **element rating levels**: Exceeds Fully Successful, Fully Successful, and Does Not Meet Fully Successful.

**Non-Critical Element.** A dimension or aspect of individual, team, or organizational performance, exclusive of a critical element, that is used in assigning a summary level. Such elements may include, but are not limited to, objectives, goals, program plans, work plans, and other means of expressing expected performance.

**Performance Plan.** A written (or otherwise recorded) document indicating all of the performance elements that set forth expected performance. The performance plan includes all critical and non-critical elements and associated performance standards. A performance plan is documented on forms AD-435A and B.

**Performance Standard.** A statement describing the performance threshold(s), requirement(s), or expectation(s) that must be met to be rated at a particular level of performance. Standards are usually written at the fully successful level; however, they may also be written at other levels. (See **Element Rating**.)

**Progress Review.** A meeting with an employee to discuss actual performance compared to the performance standards. This communication is generally held at the mid-point of the rating year. **Interim appraisal** and **mid-year review** are frequently used as informal synonyms.

**Rating of Record.** The final official rating of employee performance for a given rating year. The annual performance rating of record must consider performance over the entire period and is the **only** appraisal document filed in the employee's EPF. It is used as the basis for various other personnel actions (e.g., performance awards, the calculation of service credit during reduction in force, training opportunities, etc.).

**Rating Official.** Usually the employee's immediate supervisor.

**Reviewing Official.** An individual senior to the rating official (i.e., senior to the employee's supervisor) in the organizational chain of command who reviews and approves both the proposed elements and standards and the employee's final rating. In most cases, the reviewing official is the employee's second level supervisor.

**Summary Level.** The record of the appraisal of each critical element and the assignment of an overall rating level.

-Sd-

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[Appendix A](#)

| UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE   |  |                 |  |
|---|--|-----------------|--|
| PERFORMANCE PLAN, PROGRESS REVIEW AND APPRAISAL WORKSHEET   |  |                 |  |
| (Instructions on reverse)   |  |                 |  |
| 1. Name (Last, First, M.I.)   | Pay Plan, Series, Grade  | Agency/Division | APPRAISAL PERIOD<br>From _____ To _____  |
| Position Title _____  |  |                 |  |
| <b>2. PERFORMANCE ELEMENT</b>   |  |                 |  |
| No. <input type="text"/>  | (Describe below the duty or responsibility for which the employee is accountable and responsible. Indicate if the element is critical or noncritical.) | ➔               | <input type="checkbox"/> CRITICAL <input type="checkbox"/> NONCRITICAL   |
|   |  |                 |  |
| <b>3. STANDARD</b> (Describe the level expected for "Fully Successful" performance. Include appropriate indicators of quality, quantity, cost efficiency, or timeliness, where applicable.)   |  |                 |  |
|   |  |                 |  |
| <b>4. ELEMENT RATING</b> (At the end of the rating period, compare the employee's performance with standard and assign an element rating. For instructions about documentation, see reverse.) |  |                 |  |
|   |  |                 | <input type="checkbox"/> EXCEEDS <input type="checkbox"/> FULLY SUCCESSFUL<br><input type="checkbox"/> DOES NOT MEET |
| <b>ACCOMPLISHMENTS</b>  |  |                 |  |
|   |  |                 |  |
| <b>5. CERTIFICATION OF DEVELOPMENT AND RECEIPT OF PLAN</b>  |  |                 |  |
| Signatures certify discussion with the employee and receipt of plan which reflects current position description.  |  |                 |  |
| Employee's Signature _____  | Date _____   |                 |  |
| Supervisor's Signature _____  | Date _____   |                 |  |
| Reviewer's Signature _____  | Date _____   |                 |  |

**6. PROGRESS REVIEWS** (at least one must be completed)

|                              |                                |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Employee's Initials and Date | Supervisor's Initials and Date |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|

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[Appendix B](#)

**CONTINUATION SHEET**

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
**PERFORMANCE PLAN, PROGRESS REVIEW AND APPRAISAL WORKSHEET**

|                             |                         |                 |                         |    |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|----|
| 1. Name (Last, First, M.I.) | Pay Plan, Series, Grade | Agency/Division | <b>APPRAISAL PERIOD</b> |    |
| Position Title              |                         |                 | From                    | To |

**2. PERFORMANCE ELEMENT**

No.  (Describe below the duty or responsibility for which the employee is accountable and responsible. Indicate if the element is critical or noncritical.)  CRITICAL  NONCRITICAL

---

**3. STANDARD** (Describe the level expected for "Fully Successful" performance. Include appropriate indicators of quality, quantity, cost efficiency, or timeliness, where applicable.)

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**4. ELEMENT RATING** (At the end of the rating period, compare the employee's performance with standard and assign an element rating. For instructions about documentation, see 435A.)  EXCEEDS  FULLY SUCCESSFUL  
 DOES NOT MEET

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

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[Appendix C](#)

| <b>United States Department of Agriculture<br/>Performance Appraisal</b>   |                 | 1 Social Security No.             | 2 Position Number   | 3 Pay Plan                                  | 4 Occup. Series                             |  |
|--|-----------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| 5 Name (Last, First, Middle Initial)   |                 | 6 Grade/Step or Pay Level         |   | 7 Appraisal Period<br>From _____   To _____ |   |  |
| 8 Official Position Title  |                 | 9 Organization Structure Code     |   |   |   |  |
| 10 Duty Station  | 11 Funding Unit | 12 Agency Use                     |   | 13 NFC Use                                  |   |  |
| <p><b>Instructions</b></p> <p>Blocks 1 through 10, completed by NFC, should be reviewed and, if necessary, corrected.</p> <p>Block 11. Enter funding unit number.</p> <p>Block 14. Enter brief description of performance elements.</p> <p>Block 15A. Check performance elements identified as critical.</p> <p>Blocks 15B, 15C, 15D. Rate actual performance by entering 2 for critical elements and 1 for non-critical elements in appropriate column.</p> <p>Blocks 15E, 15F, 15G. Enter total of each column.</p> <p>Block 15H. Enter total from 15E, 15F, and 15G.</p> <p>Block 16A. Check off the correct summary rating described in decision table (16B).</p> <p>Blocks 17 through 22. Self-explanatory.</p> |                 |                                   |   |   |   |  |
| 14<br>Performance Elements   |                 | 15A<br>Critical<br>Element<br>(✓) | 15B<br>Exceeds<br>Fully<br>Successful   | 15C<br>Meets<br>Fully<br>Successful         | 15D<br>Does Not<br>Meet Fully<br>Successful |  |
| 1)   |                 |                                   |   |   |   |  |
| 2)   |                 |                                   |   |   |   |  |
| 3)   |                 |                                   |   |   |   |  |
| 4)   |                 |                                   |   |   |   |  |
| 5)   |                 |                                   |   |   |   |  |
| 6)   |                 |                                   |   |   |   |  |
| 7)   |                 |                                   |   |   |   |  |
| 8)   |                 |                                   |   |   |   |  |
| 9)   |                 |                                   |   |   |   |  |
| 10)  |                 |                                   |   |   |   |  |
| <p>16B Decision Table (check off Summary Rating in block 16A)</p> <p>Rating of Outstanding if 15E equals 15H.</p> <p>Rating of Unacceptable if any critical element is rated in 15D.</p> <p>Rating of Superior if no element is rated in 15D; 15F is greater than zero; and 15E is greater than 15F.</p> <p>Rating of Marginal if 15G is greater than 15E, and no critical element is rated in 15D.</p> <p>Rating of Fully Successful if none of the above apply.</p>  |                 |                                   | 15E Exceeds   | 15F Meets                                   | 15G Does Not Meet                           |  |
|  |                 |                                   | 15H Enter total _____   15H<br>15E + 15F + 15G = 15H  |   |   |  |
|  |                 |                                   | <p>16A Summary Rating (See Decision Table in 16B)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Outstanding</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Superior</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Fully Successful</p> |   |   |  |
| <p>17 Employee - Standards of Conduct and Ethical Responsibilities (Check off appropriate boxes)</p> <p>a I have a copy of the Governmentwide standards of ethical conduct and any USDA and agency _____ <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO</p>  |                 |                                   |   |   |   |  |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <small>supplemental requirements governing conduct.</small><br>b I attended the required annual ethics training. <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Marginal<br><input type="checkbox"/> Unacceptable |
| 18 Employee's signature   | Date<br>If employee did not sign, state reason. |  |
| (Instructions for resolutions of disputes are on the reverse of employee copy.)   |   |  |
| 19 Supervisor's Signature   | Date  | 20 Reviewer's Signature   Date   |
| 21 Approving Official's or Funding Unit Manager's Signature (optional)  |   | Date   |

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[Footnote: 1](#) Title 5, United States Code, Chapter 43.

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[Footnote: 2](#) The Senior Executive Service is covered by a separate performance appraisal system which will **not** be discussed in this P&P.

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[Footnote: 3](#) Title 5, United States Code, Section 4301 (1) and (2).

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[Footnote: 4](#) Since the AD-435A also functions as a worksheet used in determining the employee's final rating of record, it will, at this point, be returned to the supervisor's working files. Once the final appraisal has been completed, the form will be filed and retained along with other documentation pertinent to the rating process. See Section 8 for further information on document handling and retention.

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[Footnote: 5](#) 5 CFR, Part 293, and OPM Operating Manual, "The Guide to Human Resources Record Keeping," include instructions relative to distribution of performance appraisal documents.