

ARS □ CSREES □ ERS □ NASS

Policies and Procedures

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This P&P provides the basic eligibility criteria and peer review, recruitment and/or appointment, pay setting, performance appraisal, incentive award, disciplinary, and removal procedures for Senior Scientific Research Service members in the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area.

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1. Introduction

The Senior Scientific Research Service (SSRS) was created by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, Public Law 107-171, Section 7219, which authorized the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to establish the Service.

The SSRS is designed to provide USDA with a cadre of up to 100 experienced and talented researchers who are exempt from the competitive aspects of Title 5, U.S. Code, to conduct outstanding research in the field of agriculture or forestry.

2. Purpose

This Policy and Procedure (P&P) provides the basic eligibility criteria and peer review, recruitment and/or appointment, pay setting, performance appraisal, incentive award, disciplinary, and removal procedures for SSRS members who are employed in the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area. This policy will be supplemented with the “REE Human Resources Operations Handbook for the Senior Scientific Research Service”.

3. Policy

The Secretary of Agriculture shall serve as the Appointing Official and will approve the pay level of all SSRS members, based on the recommendations of the agency Administrators. The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), USDA, shall serve as executive agent to the Secretary and provide Departmentwide policy. OHRM shall serve the Secretary in an advisory capacity, recommending allocations by agency, reviewing the operations of the Service, ensuring consistent application of regulations, policies, and procedural guidelines throughout the USDA, and recommending changes to the Secretary, as necessary.

The Administrators of the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and the Economics Research Service (ERS) will nominate candidates for SSRS membership and recommend the level of pay to the Secretary, using procedures established in this P&P. Once members are appointed to SSRS, the REE agencies will manage their employees in accordance with applicable Federal laws, USDA regulations, and this P&P.

4. Authorities

USDA Departmental Regulation 4090-920, dated March 7, 2003, implements the SSRS. Members of SSRS are to be appointed by the Secretary and must be individuals who conduct outstanding research in the fields of agriculture or forestry. Candidates for SSRS will be evaluated by a peer-review process and recommended for appointment by the agency Administrator, through the Under Secretary, REE and OHRM, to the Secretary.

Appointments to the Service shall be made without regard to provisions of Title 5, U.S. Code, for the following areas:

- All provisions regarding appointments;
- Subchapter 1 of Chapter 35 (relating to retention preference in the event of reduction in force);
- Subchapter 43, Performance Appraisal (and actions based on performance);
- Subchapter 51 (relating to classification);
- Subchapter III of Chapter 53, the General Schedule; and
- Chapter 75, Adverse Actions.

Other provisions of Title 5 will apply to members of the SSRS unless specifically excluded by the Secretary.

5. Allocation of Positions

Legislation has allowed for the filling of up to 100 scientific positions in the Service. The Secretary will determine the allocation of slots to be awarded to each participating agency.

SSRS slots will be requested by the agency Administrators, through the REE Under Secretary and OHRM, to the Secretary, in writing. Agencies should not undertake recruitment or other actions on a requested slot until it has been approved.

6. Agency SSRS Review Board

Agency Administrators will establish a SSRS Review Board (SRB) to provide advice and counsel on matters related to SSRS in their agencies. The SRB's functions may include, but are not limited to, recommending initial and subsequent levels of pay, reviewing of performance appraisals and incentive awards, and concurring in disciplinary actions and removals.

The number of members, membership characteristics, and appointing procedures to the SRB will be at the discretion of each agency Administrator.

7. Eligibility

To be eligible for appointment in SSRS, an individual must have a doctoral-level degree in a field of agriculture or forestry, and must meet the qualification standards prescribed by the Office of Personnel Management for appointment to a position at GS-15 of the General Schedule. In addition, the individual must be conducting outstanding research in a field of agriculture or forestry, as determined by the peer-review process described in Section 9.

“Outstanding in a field of agricultural or forestry research” means that an individual is actively engaged in peer-reviewed original research and whose work in this area is considered by international peers to be outstanding. In order to meet the eligibility criteria, an individual must have conducted original peer-reviewed research resulting in highly-cited publications in peer-reviewed journals of high stature. In addition, the individual should be the recipient of major prizes and awards, and other indicators of high scientific stature accorded by elements of the scientific community in recognition of original contributions to research.

8. Recruitment and Selection Procedures

External Recruitment: The primary purpose of SSRS is recruitment. SSRS provides REE with a mechanism to attract a needed complement of outstanding scientists with doctoral-level degrees in fields that support agricultural and forestry research. Use of SSRS slots for outside recruitment is intended to ensure the agency’s ability to attract new talent into REE at the senior level.

External candidates for the Service (applicants who are not on the permanent rolls of an REE agency) may be selected through competitive procedures if the agency Administrator determines such procedures should be used. All candidates for SSRS positions, whether recruited externally or internally, will be required to submit or curriculum vitae, proof of doctoral degree, and a SSRS Professional Recognition Documentation Form (See REE Human Resources Operations Handbook).

Veterans’ preference will apply to all instances in which SSRS positions are advertised.

Internal Recruitment: While used mainly for recruiting scientists who have conducted outstanding research with demonstrated mission relevance and impact, SSRS may also be used in certain instances as a means of retaining outstanding scientists already on the rolls and in demand elsewhere. SSRS provides REE with an opportunity to retain outstanding scientists who are in demand by other Federal agencies and institutions outside the Federal sector, by enabling the agency to offer pay at a rate higher than the rates offered in the General Schedule. The selection

of internal candidates for SSRS is a two-stage process consisting of determination of eligibility and selection for nomination.

Eligibility Determination: The Human Resources (HR) specialist performs a basic screening of applications to determine that the candidates have a doctoral degree in an appropriate field and citizenship of the United States or a nation that is on the State Department's list of approved nations. Resultant candidates will be referred to the SSRS Qualifications Assessment Board (QAB; see section 9, "Peer Review") for eligibility determination.

A determination by the ARS Supergrade Panel or the ERS Economist Position Classification System panel that a scientist exceeds GS-15 criteria may, as an alternative to the QAB process, satisfy the basic requirements in qualifying for the SSRS, providing the individual possesses the requisite doctorate degree. Evaluation by a QAB is not required if the agency Administrator chooses to appoint an individual under such circumstances.

Selection Determination: Upon a positive eligibility determination, the Administrator, ARS, or the Administrator, ERS, may refer the candidate for appointment in the SSRS through the Under Secretary, REE, and OHRM, to the Secretary.

The Secretary retains final approval authority for appointments to the SSRS.

9. Peer Review

Purpose: As peer review is the hallmark of any research evaluation system, its use is essential to the integrity of selection and ongoing evaluation of SSRS candidates and employees.

SSRS Review Board: (See Section 6, "Agency SSRS Review Board" and Section 13, "Performance Management," for SRB functions and responsibilities). The SRB provides assistance to the agency Administrator in the ongoing evaluation of SSRS employees.

Qualifications Assessment Board: Consideration of nominees for appointment or conversion into SSRS, based on the eligibility criteria established in this P&P, is determined by an appointed SSRS QAB. A new QAB will be selected for each SSRS recruitment, unless the agency Administrator determines that an assigned QAB may be used for a subsequent recruitment.

Each QAB will consist of the following individuals:

- For ARS, Area Director or equivalent position; for ERS, Division Director or equivalent position;
- For ARS, the applicable Associate Deputy Administrator on the National Program Staff (by program); for ERS, an equivalent designee determined by the ERS Administrator;

The agency Administrator will identify the QAB Chair from either of the individuals listed above.

- Three (3) subject matter experts (to be determined by the agency Administrator); GS-15s or above;
- A representative from the HR Division (HRD), Administrative and Financial Management (AFM). The HRD representative will serve as the administrative assistant to the QAB chair, ensuring that all members have all materials and pertinent instruction as to their function. The HRD representative will not have a vote.

QAB Requirements and Procedures: Applications meeting basic eligibility criteria, e.g., doctoral degree in the applicable field and U.S. citizenship or that of nations approved by the Department of State, as confirmed by HRD, will be forwarded to all QAB members for review by the HRD representative.

The QAB Chair will schedule and preside over all QAB meetings.

Evaluation of the scientist will be based on the individual's achievements, impact, and status/recognition, as provided in the curriculum vitae and SSRS Professional Recognition Documentation Form (see REE Human Resources Operations Handbook). Eligibility for SSRS will be determined by the QAB, using the REE Guide for Assessment of Candidates for the USDA Senior Scientific Research Service (see REE Human Resources Operations Handbook). While administrative and managerial responsibilities may be present in the ultimate assignment, such considerations shall not be a primary criterion for selection, as SSRS was established for researchers.

An individual may not be considered for appointment to SSRS unless his or her qualifications have been reviewed by the QAB and recommended to the agency Administrator. (Note: Exception to this requirement may be found in Part 8, "Recruitment and Selection Procedures"; Eligibility Determination, paragraph 2.)

The QAB will recommend the candidates meeting SSRS criteria, identified as those positively meeting both factors in the evaluation standard, to the agency Administrator, along with the applications and a narrative evaluation report. If only one candidate is presented by the QAB, and the agency Administrator concurs, the package will be sent forward, through the Office of the Under Secretary, REE, to OHRM. If more than one candidate is presented by the QAB, the agency Administrator will select the candidate whose application will be forwarded for approval.

10. Compensation

SSRS is a non-graded system, with a single, flexible pay range to include all members.

Pay for a member of SSRS shall be no less than the minimum rate payable for a position at GS-15/Step 1 of the General Schedule, and shall not exceed the rate payable for Level I of the Executive Schedule, unless a higher rate of pay is expressly approved on an individual basis by the President, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. Section 5377(d)(2).

The following factors will be used in establishing an appropriate level of pay:

- Impact of the individual on the scientific field;
- Recognition of the individual by the scientific community;
- Originality of the individual's past and current ideas and work products;
- Criticality of the program to the missions of the Department;
- Range and/or extent of technical considerations;
- Potential impact of anticipated scientific findings;
- Specific skills of the individual which are of benefit to the agency and which are in addition to basic scientific achievements;
- Current earnings and benefits;
- Salary surveys of pertinent markets in academia and industry; and
- Agency assessment of the sufficiency of salary, along with other appointment and pay authorities, for recruiting or retaining a particular candidate.

Annual cost-of-living increases will be in the same amount as the increases established for the Senior Executive Service (SES). Increases above those granted to the SES will be determined, on an annual basis, by the Secretary. Pay adjustments in excess of annual increases, as well as any other pay actions, will be recommended by the Area Director, endorsed (or revised, as appropriate) by the SRB, requested by the agency Administrator, and approved by the Secretary.

SSRS members will not receive locality pay.

Pay adjustments for SSRS members in excess of approved cost-of-living increases must be based on performance and contributions. This includes factors such as originality or importance of research or product research evaluation, and internal and external comparability.

Downward adjustments in pay may be recommended, in some cases, for performance that is less than expected for a member of SSRS.

11. Ethics

All members of SSRS will be subject to all applicable laws, regulations, and policies regarding ethics, at time of appointment and during the course of membership in the SSRS. All proposed appointments to SSRS must be reviewed by the REE Ethics Officer. The Ethics Officer will determine whether a candidate will be identified as a "Confidential Filer" or a "Public Filer," in accordance with ethics policies, whether divestiture of any personal assets will be necessary

before appointment, and advise the member, on an ongoing basis, on ethics requirements and considerations.

12. Probationary Period

All members of SSRS must serve or have completed an initial probationary period.

A member appointed from outside the Federal service shall serve a 1-year probationary period. A member appointed from within the Federal service who is serving an initial probationary period will be required to continue serving the probation until it has been completed.

A member's appointment to SSRS shall become final only upon satisfactorily completing the required probationary period, as determined by the agency Administrator.

13. Performance Management

The forming legislation requires the Secretary to develop and utilize a performance management system for the SSRS to "... provide for the systematic appraisal of the performance of members, and encourage excellence in performance by members." Accordingly, members of SSRS will be subject to the performance appraisal system utilized by their agencies, and provide for their periodic and systematic approval.

Annual Cycle: ARS Area Directors and ERS Division Directors will be responsible for establishing performance standards and recommending a performance rating for members of the SSRS, and will complete performance appraisals on all members annually. Appraisals will be forwarded to the SRB for peer review and concurrence. The agency Administrator or designee will serve as the Reviewing Official.

A performance rating of "Unsatisfactory" reflects a very serious condition. Such a rating will ordinarily come as the result of a period of consultation and review. Once administered, an Unsatisfactory rating will usually lead to recommendation by the agency Administrator to the Secretary that the employee be removed. Conditions may warrant that removal action be mitigated; this will occur only when such action is ordered by the Secretary. In such instances, the employee will be provided formal opportunity to improve to a satisfactory level. Failure to meet a satisfactory level at the end of the opportunity period will result in removal (see Section 15, "Disciplinary Action/Removal:).

5-Year cycle: At 5-year intervals, the SRB will evaluate the research of each SSRS member to determine the impact of the member's contributions. The SRB will notify the agency Administrator of instances in which a member's contributions are determined to be

unsatisfactory. Based on the information provided by the SRB, the agency Administrator will determine whether to recommend to the Secretary that the member be removed.

14. Awards and Recognition

Members of SSRS may be eligible for awards and recognition, in accordance with appropriate Departmental Regulations and Directives, and agency Policies and Procedures, providing that the aggregate pay for the year does not exceed Level I of the Executive Schedule. Nomination for awards will be made by the supervisor and reviewed by the SRB. Award nominations approved by the SRB and agency Administrator will be submitted to the Secretary, through the Under Secretary, REE, and OHRM.

15. Disciplinary Action/Removal

A member of SSRS may be subject to disciplinary action, including removal, for unsatisfactory performance, misconduct, reasons of national security, or other reasons as determined by the Secretary.

A member for whom disciplinary/performance action is proposed is entitled to:

- Written notice of the proposed action and the basis therefore);
- A reasonable opportunity to answer the notice or proposed action, both orally and in writing;
- The right to be represented by an attorney or other representative in making such an answer;
- A written decision on the proposal, with appeal rights.

The decision will be made by an official with delegated authority to take such action, but in no case may the official be at a level below the agency Administrator where the member is assigned. Members may appeal such actions to the Merit Systems Protection Board, complain to the Office of Special Counsel, or file an Equal Employment Opportunity complaint.

16. Non-Disciplinary Removal

A member of SSRS may be removed from the assigned position involuntarily and without cause by the Secretary. Possible reasons for such removal include changes in program, loss of funding, and staff reductions. SSRS members are not subject to Reduction in Force procedures established in Title 5.

A member who is separated from SSRS involuntarily and without cause and who, immediately prior to appointment in SSRS, was a career employee in the Federal Service or the SES, may be appointed to a position in the competitive Civil Service at grade GS-15 of the General Schedule. Such an appointment may be made by the Secretary, without regard to provisions of Title 5, U.S. Code, regarding appointments in the Civil Service.

A member who is separated from SSRS involuntarily and without cause and who, immediately prior to SSRS appointment, was not a career employee in the Federal Civil Service or the SES, may be appointed to a position in the excepted service at grade GS-15 of the General Schedule for a period not to exceed 2 years.

The Secretary may, at the Secretary's discretion, review an action taken under this section and reduce, suspend, or overrule the action taken.

Detailed procedures on disciplinary actions and non-disciplinary removal are found in the REE Human Resources Operations Handbook.

17. Reports and Records

All records regarding SSRS processing and management will be maintained in accordance with Federal laws and Departmental regulations. Required reports will be filed in the same manner.

The REE Policy Branch, HRD, AFM, will be the custodian for all REE records and submit all required reports.

18. Glossary

Appointing Official: The individual who renders final approval of a nominee to SSRS, e.g., the Secretary of Agriculture.

Appointment: For purposes of this P&P, the time at which an individual officially becomes a member of SSRS.

Economist Position Classification System (EPCS): ERS peer process by which the impact and recognition of researchers in the General Schedule are evaluated to determine the appropriate pay grade, or that the researcher exceeds the criteria for GS-15, using the Economist classification standard.

Executive Schedule: The 5-level pay system, Level I being the highest, Level V the lowest, used for Members of Congress, Cabinet officials, and other high-ranking political appointees.

External Candidate: Applicant for SSRS who is not on the rolls of the USDA agency filling the vacancy.

General Schedule: The 15-grade system through which most Federal government “white collar” positions are assigned and classified.

Internal Candidate: Applicant for SSRS who is on the rolls of the USDA agency filling the vacancy.

Outstanding Research: Communicated work product establishing a candidate for SSRS as an internationally-recognized authority and leader in an area of widespread scientific interest and investigation. The work will have resulted in honors and awards from major international organizations, and service as an advisor and consultant on scientific and technological programs and problems that extend well beyond the candidate’s own field. The candidate’s reputation as a scientific leader will serve as a recruiting attraction for recent graduates and collaborators, and is likely to be a major consideration in agency sponsorship of research programs in his/her field.

Peer Review: Impartial analysis of the contributions and recognition of a scientist by a group of professional individuals from the same or a similar field of endeavor, as embodied in the SSRS Review Board and Qualifications Assessment Board.

Probationary Period: Time immediately after an appointment during which an employer has an opportunity to assess, on the job, an employee’s overall fitness and qualification for continued employment, and which permits the removal, without formal procedures, of an employee whose performance or conduct does not meet acceptable standards.

Qualifications Assessment Board (QAB): Ad hoc committee appointed for each SSRS recruitment. The QAB evaluates the qualifications of SSRS candidates and recommends those who meet established criteria to the agency Administrator.

Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEG): Functional classification standard published by the Office of Personnel Management used to determine the pay grade of research scientist positions.

Research Position Evaluation System (RPES): ARS peer process by which the impact and recognition of research scientists in the General Schedule are evaluated to determine the appropriate pay grade, or that the scientist exceeds the criteria for GS-15, using the RGEG.

Senior Scientific Research Service (SSRS): A cadre of no more than 100 experienced and talented scientists/researchers, separate from the competitive Federal Service, who conduct outstanding research in the field of agriculture or forestry.

Slot: A SSRS position, allocated to an agency in USDA by the Secretary.

SSRS Review Board (SRB): A group appointed by the agency Administrator to provide advice and counsel on decisions pertaining to SSRS, i.e., use of SSRS slots, pay setting, pay adjustments, performance appraisal review, incentive awards, and disciplinary actions/ removal; as described in Section 6 “SSRS Review Board”.

Subject Matter Expert: Individual who is recognized by peers, nationally and internationally, as a scientific expert in a field of science related to the fields of agriculture and forestry sufficient to evaluate the qualifications of a candidate for SSRS.

Susan Offutt
Administrator
Economics Research Service

Edward B. Knipling
Acting Administrator
Agricultural Research Service

Exhibit 1

SEC. 750B. SENIOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH SERVICE.

Subtitle B of title VI of the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (7 U.S.C. 7651 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

SEC. 620. SENIOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH SERVICE.

(a) In General.--There is established in the Department of Agriculture the Senior Scientific Research Service (referred to in this section as the `Service').

(b) Members.--

(1) In general.--Subject to paragraphs (2) through (4), the Secretary shall appoint the members of the Service.

(2) Qualifications.--To be eligible for appointment to the Service, an individual shall--

(A) have conducted outstanding research in the field of agriculture or forestry;

(B) have earned a doctoral level degree at an institution of higher education (as defined in section 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001)); and

(C) meet qualification standards prescribed by the Director of the Office of Personnel Management for appointment to a position at level GS-15 of the General Schedule.

(3) Number.--Not more than 100 individuals may serve as members of the Service at any 1 time.

(4) Other requirements.--

(A) In general.--Subject to subparagraph (B) and subsection (d)(2), the Secretary may appoint and employ a member of the Service without regard to--

(i) the provisions of title 5, United States Code, governing appointments in the competitive service;

(ii) the provisions of subchapter I of chapter 35 of title 5, United States Code, relating to retention preference;

(iii) the provisions of chapter 43 of title 5, United States Code, relating to performance appraisal and performance actions;

“(iv) the provisions of chapter 51 and

subchapter III of chapter 53 of title 5, United States Code, relating to classification and General Schedule pay rates; and

“(v) the provisions of chapter 75 of title 5, United States Code, relating to adverse actions.

“(B) Exception.--A member of the Service appointed and employed by the Secretary under subparagraph (A) shall have the same right of appeal to the Merit Systems Protection Board and the same right to file a complaint with the Office of Special Counsel as an employee appointed to a position at level GS-15 of the General Schedule.

“(c) Performance Appraisal System.--The Secretary shall develop a performance appraisal system for members of the Service that is designed to--

“(1) provide for the systematic appraisal of the employment performance of the members; and

“(2) encourage excellence in employment performance by the members.

“(d) Compensation.--

“(1) In general.--Subject to paragraph (2), the Secretary shall determine the compensation of members of the Service.

“(2) Limitations.--The rate of pay for a member of the Service shall--

“(A) not be less than the minimum rate payable for a position at level GS-15 of the General Schedule; and

“(B) not be more than the rate payable for a position at level I of the Executive Schedule, unless the rate is approved by the President under section 5377(d)(2) of title 5, United States Code.

“(e) Retirement Contributions.--

“(1) In general.--On the request of a member of the Service who was an employee of an institution of higher education (as defined in section 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001)) immediately prior to appointment as a member of the Service and who retains the right to continue to make contributions to the retirement system of the institution, the Secretary may contribute an amount not to exceed 10 percent of the basic pay of the member to the

retirement system of the institution on behalf of the member.

“(2) Federal retirement system.--

“(A) In general.--Subject to subparagraph (B), a member for whom a contribution is made under paragraph (1) shall not, as a result of serving as a member of

the Service, be covered by, or earn service credit under, chapter 83 or 84 of title 5, United States Code.

“(B) Annual leave.--Service of a member of the Service described in subparagraph (A) shall be creditable for determining years of service under section 6303(a) of title 5, United States Code.

“(f) Involuntary Separation.--

“(1) In general.--Subject to paragraph (2) and notwithstanding the provisions of title 5, United States Code, governing appointment in the competitive service, in the case of an individual who is separated from the Service involuntarily and without cause--

“(A) the Secretary may appoint the individual to a position in the competitive civil service at level GS-15 of the General Schedule; and

“(B) the appointment shall be a career appointment.

“(2) Excepted civil service.--In the case of an individual described in paragraph (1) who immediately prior to appointment as a member of the Service was not a career appointee in the civil service or the Senior Executive Service, the appointment of the individual under paragraph (1)--

“(A) shall be to the excepted civil service; and

“(B) may not exceed a period of 2 years.”.

Exhibit 2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

DEPARTMENTAL REGULATION		Number:
SUBJECT:	DATE:	

1 PURPOSE

This regulation establishes the policy and framework for implementing and administering the Senior Scientific Research Service (the “Service”).

2 AUTHORITY

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, Public Law 107-171, Section 7219 authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to establish the Service.

3 REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- a Public Law 107-171, Section 7219, The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, May 13, 2002
- b Public Law 105-185, Subtitle B of title VI of the Agricultural Research, Extension and Education Reform Act of 1998, June 23, 1998, codified as 7 United States Code (U.S.C.), Section 7651, et. seq.

4 SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS/CANCELLATION

This is a new issuance and remains in effect until modified or superseded.

5 RESPONSIBILITIES

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The Director, Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), is responsible for setting Departmental policy and providing overall technical guidance and direction for the Service.

6 DELEGATIONS OF AUTHORITY

Authority to develop policies and procedures for implementing the Service at the Agency level consistent with this Departmental Regulation, is delegated to Agency heads.

7 POLICY

Members of the Service shall not be covered by the following provisions of Title 5 U.S.C.:

- a Those governing appointments in the competitive service;
- b Chapter 35, Subchapter I, Retention Preference;
- c Chapter 43, Performance Appraisal and Actions Based on Unacceptable Performance
- d Chapter 51, Classification;
- e Chapter 53, Subchapter III, General Schedule Pay Rates; and
- f Chapter 75, Adverse Actions.

8 DEFINITIONS

- a Agency-convened Peer Panel: A panel of research scientists convened by agencies specifically to assess the impact, stature, and recognition of Service candidates.
- b Departmentally-approved Peer Review Process: Any process that the Department determines to be suitable to measure Service candidates' contributions objectively and qualitatively, applying the similar standards used for any member of the national/international scientific community.
- c Outstanding Research: Research which establishes the candidate as a nationally and internationally recognized authority and leader in an area of widespread scientific interest and investigation. The work will have resulted in honors and awards from major national organizations, and service as an advisor and consultant on scientific

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and technological programs and problems that extend well beyond the candidate's own field. The candidate's reputation as a scientific leader will serve as a recruiting attraction for recent graduates and collaborators, and is likely to be a major consideration in agency sponsorship of research programs in his/her field.

- d Senior Scientific Research Service: A cadre of no more than 100 experienced and talented scientists, separate from the competitive Federal service, who conduct outstanding research in the field of agriculture or forestry.

9 ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for appointment to the Service, an individual shall:

- a have conducted outstanding research in the fields of agriculture or forestry as determined by a Departmentally-approved peer review process;
- b have earned a doctoral level degree at an institution of higher education [as defined in section 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001)];
- c meet the qualification standards prescribed by the Director of the Office of Personnel Management for appointment to a position at grade 15 of the General Schedule (GS);
- d be recommended by their Agency head and concurred on by the Director, OHRM; and
- e be approved by the Secretary.

10 CITIZENSHIP

Non-citizens may be hired subject to the same limitations as members of the excepted Civil Service.

11 PROBATIONARY PERIOD

An individual's initial appointment to the Federal service shall become final only upon completion of a probationary period of uniform length determined by the Secretary and an assessment of the appointee's performance as satisfactory during the probationary period.

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Individuals who have already completed an initial probationary period of Federal service will not be required to serve any additional period.

12 PAY AND COMPENSATION

- a The Service is an ungraded system, with a single, flexible pay range, to include all members.
- b The rate of pay for a member of the Service shall not be less than the minimum rate for a GS-15 and not more than Level I of the Executive Schedule, unless a higher rate is approved by the President.
- c Annual adjustments to pay rates will be made effective on the first day of the first pay period on or after January 1 of each calendar year.

13 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Members of the Service will be covered by a performance management plan developed by their respective agencies and approved by the Director, OHRM.

14 PEER REVIEW PROCESS

- a All positions included in the Service will be professional research positions. After favorable determinations as to the outstanding quality of their research by a Departmentally-approved peer review process as set out in subparagraph 9a of this Departmental Regulation, candidates will be considered for Service membership as set out in subparagraphs 14b, 14c, and 14d below.
- b Agency-convened peer panels then will evaluate candidates.
- c Agency-convened peer panel determinations will be documented by a narrative evaluation report.
- d The narrative evaluation report and other case material for candidates passing Agency review by the Agency-convened peer panels and recommended for appointment into the Service by their Agency heads will be forwarded to OHRM for concurrence or non-concurrence by the OHRM Director. Candidates whose recommended appointments are concurred in by the OHRM Director will be forwarded to the Secretary for appointment into the Service.

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15 DISCIPLINARY ACTION FOR CAUSE AND NON-DISCIPLINARY SEPARATION WITHOUT CAUSE

a A member of the Service may be subject to disciplinary action, including reprimand, suspension from pay and duty, or removal from the Service, for misconduct, performance, national security considerations, or other cause determined by the Secretary or his/her designee. A member may also be involuntarily separated for non-disciplinary reasons without cause.

b Employee Rights

A member of the Service shall have the same right to appeal to the Merit Systems Protection Board and the same right to file a complaint with the Office of Special Counsel as an employee appointed to a GS-15 position.

c Involuntary Separation For Non-Disciplinary Reasons Without Cause

(1) A member of the Service who is separated from the Service involuntarily and without cause and who, immediately prior to appointment to the Service, was a career appointee in the civil service or the Senior Executive Service, may be appointed by the Secretary to a GS-15 career position in the competitive civil service.

(2) A member of the Service who is separated from the Service involuntarily and without cause and who, immediately prior to appointment to the Service, was not a career appointee in the civil service or the Senior Executive Service, may be appointed to a GS-15 position in the excepted civil service for a period not to exceed two years.

16 REPORTS AND RECORDS

a Each agency will record the number of appointments, the source of the appointees, their earnings immediately prior to appointment, and their Service pay at appointment.

b Each fiscal year, OHRM will request Race, Sex, National Origin, and Disability information from the National Finance Center database. This information will be reviewed and evaluated to determine if there are any disparities or issues related to protected groups.

c All records pertaining to the Service will be maintained in accordance with the National Archives and Records Administration records schedule.

REE

Human Resources Operations Handbook

Senior Scientific Research Service

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(Part I: Human Resources Processing)

<To be added later.>

(Part II: Sample Vacancy Announcement)

RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE

ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement Number: REE-SSRS-05-01

Senior Scientific Research Service

Position/Title/Series/Grade:

Chief Scientist, Carnivorous Worms Project Office
RS-0401-00 (Permanent/Full time)

Location of Position: USDA, ARS, Henry A.

Wallace Beltsville Agricultural Research Center
Beltsville, MD

Who Can Apply: ALL QUALIFIED PERSONS

Opening Date: 09/01/2005

Closing Date: 11/01/2005

For additional information regarding
Employment opportunities, please visit
<http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/divisions/hrd/homepage/apply.htm>.

Applications must be received, e-mailed, or faxed by the closing date of the announcement. Applications sent in Government envelopes will not be considered.

About the organization: The Carnivorous Worms Project Office has been established to study and mitigate the spread of carnivorous worms throughout the U.S. agricultural system. The Office will collaborate closely with other research organizations within the Agricultural Research Service, the Department of Agriculture, other Federal agencies, and research organizations organic to state governments and elements in the private sector.

Major Duties:

- Plans, develops, and directs research involving emergent strains of carnivorous worms;
- Interprets, synthesizes, and communicates significant research findings which impact national policy, the needs of agriculture, industry, and the public safety; and provides counsel to the ARS Program Staff, the ARS Administrator, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the heads of other Federal agencies;
- Leads, directs, and conducts research to 1) track the origin, development, and spread of new species of carnivorous worms; 2) develop new technologies to stem the spread of, and eradicate, these species; 3) consult with scientists in other countries to promote international efforts to study and control the negative aspects of these species.

Qualification Requirements:

-Must meet the basic qualification requirements for GS-15 of the Federal service General Schedule, in the field of helminthology;

Human Resources Specialist

Ms. Jill Smith
(301) 504-1408

**DC Relay Service:
202-855-1234 (TDD)**

Send Applications to:
USDA, Agricultural Research Service
Human Resources Division
REE Policy Branch
ATTN: Ms. Jill Smith
5601 Sunnyside Avenue
Beltsville, MD 20705-5106

Fax: 301-504-1587

E-mail: scirecruit@ars.usda.gov

-Have been conferred a doctoral level degree in the field of helminthology;

-Be actively engaged in outstanding, peer-reviewed research or evaluation and translation of research in the field of helminthology;

-National or international recognition within the scientific community as an authority in the agricultural aspects of helminthology as demonstrated by invited manuscripts, presentations, and consultations; receipt of honors and awards; or the number and quality of original contributions to the literature;

-Knowledge of and experience working on large and highly complex studies that are based on current theory, science, and state-of-the-art practice;

-Experience that indicates the ability to collaborate effectively with high-level governmental officials, the scientific and academic communities, national or international scientific organizations, diverse community and non-governmental groups, and the public at large.

In addition to the above, candidates who are interviewed for the position should expect to address the following characteristics:

1. Ability to lead and accomplish work through others (i.e., team building, conflict management, cultural awareness, strategic thinking, decisiveness, technology management, and political savvy.
2. Ability to communicate with individuals or groups from diverse backgrounds in a variety of situations.

Evaluation Methods:

Applicants must meet the qualification requirements as outlined above to be eligible for further consideration, and must provide detailed evidence of the experience, knowledge, skill, ability, and other personal characteristic requirements and show how and when they were used. This evidence must include clear, concise examples that show level of accomplishments and degree of responsibility. Qualification determinations will be based on the information supplied by the applicant.

Required Forms:

Applicants may submit Curriculum Vitae or resume. In addition, applications must include the following:

- announcement number and title of the job for which applying;
- full name, mailing address with zip code, and day and evening telephone numbers (including area codes);
- job title for each position held, duties and accomplishments; employer's name and address, supervisor's name and telephone number; starting and ending dates; and annual salary;
- proof of doctoral level degree in the applicable field, by the granting institution;
- SSRS Professional Recognition Documentation form (may be obtained at the address and telephone number listed below).

**REE Human Resources Operations Handbook,
Senior Scientific Research Service**

Applications from candidates being considered for inclusion in the Senior Scientific Research Service (SSRS) will be reviewed and evaluated by a panel of senior scientists and scientific managers. Finalists will be asked to provide names of references for evaluation of contributions.

How to Apply:

Submit all forms and attachments, described above, to:

USDA, Agricultural Research Service
Human Resources Division
REE Policy Branch (ATTN: J. Smith)
5601 Sunnyside Avenue
Beltsville, MD 20705-5106

FAX applications to 301-504-1587

Veterans Preference:

Applicants who served on active duty in the United States military and were separated under honorable conditions may be eligible for veterans' preference. To claim such preference, attach a DD-214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, or other proof of eligibility. For further details, call the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) at 912-757-3000. Select "Federal Employment topics", then "Veterans," or visit OPM's VetGuide website at www.opm.gov/employ/html/vetguide.htm.

EEO Statement:

USDA prohibits discrimination in all of its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. Persons with disabilities who require alternate means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice or TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). **USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.**

Contact:

For a copy of this vacancy announcement, application forms, or further information, call Ms. Jill Smith at (301) 504-1408.

(Part III)

Senior Scientific Research Service Professional Recognition Documentation Form

Name of Applicant: _____ Date: _____

Criterion 1: List honors and awards received from major national or international organizations for accomplishments.

Criterion 2: List recent instances in which you have been sought as an advisor and consultant on scientific and technological programs or problems well beyond your field.

Criterion 3: List evidence of your having served as a recruiting attraction for recent graduates or visiting researchers.

Criterion 4: Describe how your recent research accomplishments have had an impact on domestic or international programs, policy, practices, or funding in the public or private sectors.

(Part IV)

**REE GUIDE FOR ASSESSMENT OF CANDIDATES
FOR THE
USDA SENIOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH SERVICE (SSRS)**

April 2003

Guide for Assessment of Candidates for the USDA Senior Scientific Research Service (SSRS)

This guide is a statement of approach and criteria for use in assessing candidates for SSRS.

Objectives

This guide has the following objectives;

- C Provide guidance in the systematic assessment of SSRS candidates.
- C Ensure the qualification, achievements, and professional stature of the candidates is fully considered.
- C Facilitate qualifications determinations and candidate selection.

Factors for SSRS positions

FACTOR 1: Qualifications, achievements, and professional stature of the candidate

This factor is concerned with the knowledge, abilities, personal qualities, professional stature, continuing growth, contributions, active engagement in research, creative achievements, productivity, and attainments of the candidate.

The candidate must have conducted outstanding research in the field of agriculture or forestry and have earned a doctoral level degree at an institution of higher education.

The candidate must demonstrate outstanding achievement that has shaped and impacted the course of the area of research. The complexity and precedent-setting evaluation of issues must be apparent as well as the impact on the scientific community.

Examples of this level of attainment include:

- C Accomplishments and attainments in the field or fields of endeavor include theories or concepts evolved, techniques and methods developed, inventions, patents and developments accomplished, technical criteria developed, projects conceived and/or executed. The general impact or influence of the work is defined as outstanding and impacts the state of the art.
- C Publications in professional journals and books, considering the quality, recency, and impact of these as evidenced by reviews, citations, and further developments in the field. This further includes a steady and current record of highly cited publications in peer-reviewed journals of high stature. (Undue weight should not be accorded to mere number of publications.)
- C Recognition and general reputation in professional, academic, and government communities as a leader and authority, including the extent sought as a consultant and advisor by peers; the reliance placed on the candidate's advice and recommendations; and major awards and honors received from national, or

- international organizations or institutions. (This further includes invitations to speak or to chair major international meetings and symposia; membership on scientific/professional committees with international impact; editorship of peer-reviewed journals of high stature; and/or elected membership in professional societies of high stature.
- C The candidate is a nationally or internationally recognized authority and leader in a broad or narrow but intensely specialized field of widespread interest. The candidate will typically have authored fundamental papers which are widely used and cited and will have received one or more major honors and/or awards from major national/international organizations for accomplishments and contributions. The candidate serves as advisor and consultant on highly complex problems, which will extend beyond the area of specialty. The reputation of the candidate serves as a recruiting attraction.
 - C Reputation as a scientific leader is such that the candidate serves as a recruiting attraction for promising recent graduates.
 - C The candidate has created a new level of capability in an area of science and technology through mastery of the field and personal creative contributions such that, in the judgment of knowledgeable scientific authorities, the accomplishments warrant recognition as noted above.

FACTOR 2: Work Situation

This factor is concerned with the nature and effect of studies undertaken, consultative and advisory services, and participation in program planning, coordination and evaluation. Incorporated are the scope and importance of programs affected by the candidate's recommendations and advice, and the role and significance of the candidate's contributions.

Examples of this level would include:

- C Responsibility for formulating and guiding a broad-scale attack on problems in frontier areas which are of critical importance to major national issues, or are subject to widespread public and Congressional concern and scrutiny.
- C Responsibility for attacking problems of such novelty, importance and extraordinary difficulty that (1) there have been numerous attempts to explore area and gain fundamental understanding of the processes and phenomena; (2) new hypotheses, concepts and techniques must be developed for attack, analysis, and interpretation; and (3) the successful performance of the work will lead to new theory, major modification of current theory, or a new level of scientific or technological capability.
- C Extensive use as a consultant by the professional community and other entities for critical evaluation and advice on proposed new projects, new approaches, and complex problems on a broad or intensely specialized area of investigation at the frontiers of science and technology.

Overall Assessment

Candidates must fully meet the criteria in Factor 1 **and** Factor 2 to be eligible for appointment in the SSRS.

(Part V)

Disciplinary/Removal Procedures for SSRS

<To be added at a later date.>