

# Position Classification Standard for Agricultural Program Specialist Series, GS-1145

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## SERIES DEFINITION

This series includes positions involving work in developing, reviewing, administering, and coordinating programs for direct farmer producer participation in production adjustment, price support, land conservation, and similar programs. The work requires a knowledge of agricultural stabilization, conservation, and related programs; farming customs and practices; crop cultivation; production and marketing methods; and related agricultural activities.

This series is appropriate for positions of agricultural program specialists at the national office level, and for positions of program specialists at the State office level responsible for the agricultural stabilization and conservation programs of the Department of Agriculture. This series is also generally appropriate for other related program specialist type positions concerned with agricultural programs having similar operations and objectives and requiring similar qualifications.

## COVERAGE OF STANDARD

The standard covers the key positions of program specialists at the State office level. The following kinds of related positions, which are classified in the series but are not specifically described in the standard, may be evaluated by reference to the criteria provided for the key program specialist positions:

- (a) Positions of program specialists at the national level;
- (b) Positions of full assistants to State office level program specialists;
- (c) Positions responsible for "program segments" rather than "primary program areas."

The criteria described for key program specialist positions may be extended in evaluating other program specialist positions or similar positions. Consideration should be given to differences in the scope, complexity, and importance of programs and program segments, degree of responsibility, and extent of participation in program development and administration.

Supervisory positions should be evaluated by reference to the [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#).

## EXCLUSIONS

1. Positions primarily responsible for management inspection and review of county office operations. Positions of this kind should be classified in the series which is appropriate by application of the criteria for classifying mixed-series positions.

2. Positions involving management, research, analytical, regulatory, or other specialized work concerned with the marketing of one or more agricultural commodities or products, requiring a practical knowledge of marketing functions and practices, are classified in the [Agricultural Marketing Series, GS-1146](#).
3. Positions involving purchase, acquisition, storage, and disposition of agricultural products when the primary requirements are knowledge of management of inventories, selection of appropriate storage sites and facilities, and related functions, are classified in the appropriate series in the [Supply Group, GS-2000](#); or in the [Agricultural Marketing Series, GS-1146](#), if the primary knowledge required are characteristic of positions in that occupation.
4. Positions involving administering, supervising or performing the work of the Federal Crop Insurance program in an assigned area or territory are classified in the Crop Insurance Administration Series, GS-0027.
5. Positions involving planning, developing, and preparing operating procedures, instructions, and related handbooks, when these do not require the specialized program knowledge characteristic of this occupation, are classified in the [Management Analysis Series, GS-0343](#), the [Management Technician Series, GS-0344](#), or other appropriate series.

## TITLES AND SPECIALIZATIONS

The title for nonsupervisory positions in this occupation is *Agricultural Program Specialist*. Supervisory positions are titled *Supervisory Agricultural Program Specialist*.

There are no specializations established in this standard. Staff-type positions frequently are set up on the basis of some specialized area of work; for example, by program function, geographic area, etc.; but these change from time to time. The absence of formal specializations in the standard does not preclude specialized assignments when necessary because of workload, organization of the State office, program fluctuations, or national policy requirements.

## OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION

### *Nature of Programs*

The primary stabilization and conservation action program areas of the Department of Agriculture covered in this standard are:

*Production adjustment* - to help bring the production of certain commodities in line with demand.

*Price support* - to stabilize the farmers' income and to promote more orderly marketing of commodities on a year-round basis.

*Conservation* - to encourage soil, water, woodland, and wildlife conservation practices through Federal cost sharing.

Primary supporting programs of ASCS are:

*Storage management* - to provide for storage and sale of Government-owned grain and other commodities in bin-site storage.

*Compliance* - to determine whether farmers are carrying out their responsibilities under the various programs.

Related programs are:

*Disaster relief, emergency assistance, or defense readiness*- to give direct assistance to farmers and ranchers in disaster situations and emergencies, and to insure continuity of the nation's food resources and supplies.

### *Administration of agricultural stabilization and conservation programs*

The Congress of the United States, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the Administrator responsible for stabilization and conservation programs determine national programs and policies. Program specialists at the national level interpret statutory provisions and policy decisions through regulations, operating policies, and plans relating to individual programs. A State committee and a State executive director administer the programs at the State level. The State committee looks to the program specialists, through the State executive director, for staff assistance in carrying out the programs on a statewide basis. At the county levels, each county committee is responsible for the day-to-day program operations in its area through a county office manager and office staff.

### *Responsibilities of the key program specialists at the State level*

Key program specialists in all State offices have the following responsibilities in common in their specialized program areas and in their essential roles in program administration on a statewide basis:

- (1) developing and recommending programs to fit the agricultural economy peculiar to the State and its various geographic subdivisions;
- (2) serving as the statewide specialist on as signed programs for farmers, the agricultural trade, farm organizations, other Federal agencies, State agencies, and others participating in, or having an interest in, the programs;

- (3) directing and coordinating agricultural programs on a statewide basis through county committees and county offices;
- (4) reviewing and appraising State and county program needs and operations;
- (5) providing specialized staff advice on programs to the State executive director, through him to the State committee and the national office staffs, and to farmer fieldmen and to county offices, to Government and private organizations and the public;
- (6) cooperating in carrying out activities to insure that participants are complying with program requirements;
- (7) conducting training meetings with State and county office employees. These responsibilities are elaborated upon, but not specifically treated, in the grade-level descriptions.

A key program specialist in a State office works under the general supervisory control of an executive director and other responsible State program officials. Because of his role as a technical program specialist, the individual responsible for the program area is expected to make decisions independently on day-to-day operating program matters originating in the State office or in the county offices. He is authorized to overrule an action of a county office if there is failure to comply with instructions, regulations, or policy. The State program officials and the State executive director as a matter of law and policy requirements, are responsible for approving certain programs, plans, and actions, but rely heavily in these matters on the program specialist's recommendations for technically sound and competent proposals. The program specialist's accomplishments are reviewed at both the State and national office levels essentially in long-range terms of degree of State program success within a State, extent of conformance with regulations and policy, and effectiveness of contributions to meeting national goals.

Depending upon the scope of programs and the workload in a State office, the key program specialist may supervise one or more program specialists in lower grade who may have responsibility for program segments<sup>1</sup> or individual projects or assignments. However, since the primary responsibility of the key program specialist does not hinge on supervisory functions, the presence or absence of other program specialists to assist in the administration of the statewide operations does not usually affect the evaluation of the key position.

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<sup>1</sup> A "program segment" is a subdivision of a primary program area. This subdivision may be based on commodity, function, geographic location, crop year, or other classification. Program segments may be major or minor depending upon the scope, importance, and relationship to the total primary program area. Below the program segment level, the work of a program specialist usually takes the form of individual assignments, projects, cases or problems.

## CLASSIFICATION FACTORS

The classification factors are *Nature of Assignments* and *Level of Responsibility*.

### *Nature of assignments*

This factor measures the scope and complexity of programs, the scope of commodity area or variety of commodities involved, the variety and extent of agricultural practices in operation, the degree of farmer participation in the programs, the variations in methods of administering programs, and other related elements. The degree of difficulty ranges from that associated with a small program area, limited commodities or agricultural practices, minimum program participation, and relatively uncomplicated administration, to that associated with a primary program area with a major commodity or variety of commodities or agricultural practices, high percentage of program participation, and complex methods of administration.

A key program specialist has overall responsibility for a primary program area, i.e., for the complete price support, production adjustment, conservation, storage or compliance program, in his State. Each of these primary program areas, in turn, may consist of program segments for specific commodities, functions, crop years, agricultural practices, or other program components.

### *Level of responsibility*

This factor measures the degree of authority and responsibility the program specialist has for developing and administering the programs in a particular State. The program specialist's responsibility and authority range from that associated with responsibility for day-to-day operations in keeping the program going and solving minor problems of nonparticipation or questions concerned with the needs of individual farmers, to that requiring long- and short-range planning for a major commodity area or for a variety of commodity areas or agricultural practices, determining overall compatibility of programs with the agricultural potential of the State, explaining policy and regulatory framework of the programs to groups and organizations, making major adaptations in basic programs to accommodate the State situation, and recommending action in emergency situations.

Although key program specialists in all State offices have the same kinds of responsibilities, the particular level of responsibility is affected by the circumstances of program operations, scope and magnitude of programs, and problems of administration in a particular State.

## QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED

The kinds and levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities required are not treated separately in the grade-level descriptions, since they are reflected in the discussions of other classification factors.

Program specialists are required to have:

- (1) knowledge of the laws and regulations governing stabilization and conservation programs and of the particular application of national policies and objectives in the State;
- (2) understanding of farming practices and customs, and of the economic needs of farm communities of the State;
- (3) knowledge of related programs, both State and Federal, and current agricultural trends;
- (4) ability to establish and maintain effective relationships with representatives of public and private organizations, farmer associations, and others to interpret regulations, programs, and policies;
- (5) ability to write and speak effectively;
- (6) ability to analyze situations and propose solutions to problems;
- (7) sound technical judgment.

## **NOTES TO USERS**

1. The grade-level structure applicable to the key program specialist positions at the State level begins at GS-11. This is considered to be the minimum level at which program demands are such as to require sufficient experience, skill, and knowledge to be able to carry out basic statewide operations effectively.
2. Where program operations are so limited that they do not warrant full time performance in a given primary program area, it is sometimes desirable to combine two or more program areas in one position.

Positions constituted in this manner and under these circumstances should be evaluated on the basis of the responsibility for combined program areas by comparison with the criteria in this standard.

3. Examples of program areas described at the various grade levels are provided to highlight the grade-level characteristics, and are intended as an aid in interpreting and applying the standard. The examples included are illustrative only of the grade level with which they are associated, and are not meant to be comprehensive in details of program characteristics or coverage, nor are they meant to be used as substitutes for the total grade-evaluation criteria on which the standard is based.

4. The standard does not describe positions above the GS-13 level or below the GS-11 level. The absence of such criteria, however, does not preclude the evaluation of individual positions in higher or lower grade levels than those described in the standard, provided the nature of the assignment and the level of responsibility clearly exceed, in important features, the grade-level characteristics described at GS-13, or clearly fail to meet, in important features, the grade-level characteristics described at GS-11.

## **AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM SPECIALIST, GS-1145-11**

### *Nature of assignments*

The program area for which the Agricultural Program Specialist GS-11 is responsible is at the basic level of difficulty and complexity because it has the following characteristics:

- (1) the program or programs cover a commodity or a few agricultural practices;
- (2) Agricultural products of the State make a small contribution to the national economy or national agricultural income;
- (3) participation in the programs is light;
- (4) program administration involves direct application of guidelines to situations for which they are clearly applicable;
- (5) there is little or no significant disagreement among farmers or other groups involved in program activities or in carrying out program adjustments resulting from changes in legislation or national planning.

### *Examples of program areas at this level:*

*Production adjustment:* Program area of production adjustment covers a commodity or a few commodities. Participation in program represents some activity in most counties of the State over a period of time, but on the average is not high. Guidelines and instructions for program administration are clear-cut. There is occasional local controversy, usually on individual farmer relationships or individual farm yields.

*Conservation:* Program area for conservation includes agricultural conservation, emergency conservation and cropland conservation. Practices are limited in number and are designed primarily for interim soil protection and long-lasting protective cover. State has few serious problems of conservation. There are relatively few changes in basic requirements or limitations, and only occasional adjustments in individual cost-shares, etc. Administration of programs involves small number of participants.

*Price support:* Program area generally covers commodity loans and wool Incentive payments. Farmers make some use of loans, but overall rate of program participation is very low. Some



part of total agricultural income of the State comes from wool and feed grains, but neither is a major commodity in the State.

### *Level of responsibility*

The program specialist at this grade level has the basic responsibility which characterizes work at the State level. He plans State programs which are part of the national plan for stabilization and conservation, based on the agriculture of the particular State. This usually does not require consideration of such factors as differences in normal State growing seasons among commodities, climatic conditions, fluctuating commodity demands, impact of natural disasters, and other factors.

At this level, national policy guidelines can be adapted to the State programs without serious problems of coverage, determination of intent, or major modification. The employee has continuing responsibility for reviewing local operations and program achievements, and evaluating the balance between program demands and program limitations. He studies proposals for current and future years, carrying out occasional contacts with local businessmen, farmers, and farmers' organizations. He maintains contacts with employees at both the State and local levels to assure that program plans and changes in regulations and policies are understood and carried out.

## **AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM SPECIALIST, GS-1145-12**

### *Nature of assignments*

Assignments at this level differ from those at the GS-11 level primarily in the scope and difficulty of programs administered. Positions at the GS-12 level require broader program knowledge, both with respect to basic national objectives, and the programs administered at the State and local levels. The higher rate of participation among farmers and counties eligible to be in the programs requires greater skill and judgment in solving the more varied and difficult problems of administration of programs and interpretation of policies and regulations.

The program area for which the Agricultural Program Specialist GS-12 is responsible is difficult and complex because it has the following characteristics:

- (1) the program or programs cover a major commodity or commodities or agricultural practices;
- (2) the State is a significant producer in terms of the national economy or national agricultural income;
- (3) participation in the programs is moderate to heavy;
- (4) administration of the programs involves extensive interpretation and adaptation of national guidelines;

- (5) there is significant variation in attitudes on the part of farmers or other groups toward program operations, and changes in program scope or operations are sometimes strongly contested at the local level.

*Examples of program areas at this level:*

*Production adjustment:* Program area of production adjustment for separate programs and program segments covering a major commodity or commodities. The high rate of participation in programs creates problems of coordinating county activities. Program administration and policy interpretation are difficult e.g., because of variations in growing sea sons and program priorities. Programs are frequently controversial because of attitudes of producer groups and other groups, and because of effect of program operations on nonagricultural as well as agricultural interests.

*Conservation:* Program for conservation includes agricultural conservation program, and land-use adjustment programs. Some programs are more active than others, but the overall participation is medium to high. Several major groups of conservation practices are in operation and special practices are developed occasionally to meet special problems. Variety of conservation programs and practices create problems of administration, e.g., in terms of overlaps, cost sharing bases, and relations hip to planting seasons.

*Price support:* Program area for price support includes activities for community loans and purchase, farm storage facility loans, and mobile dryer loans. Rate of participation is very high in some programs, relatively low in others. The State's economy depends in substantial measure on agricultural income.

*Level of responsibility*

The responsibility for program administration at the GS-12 level is substantially greater than at the GS-11 level because of the larger number, greater importance, or wider variety of commodities, practices or operations involved. Because national policies and programs have less specific application to individual areas at the GS-12 level than at the GS-11 level, it is necessary for the Program Specialist GS-12 to use greater initiative and resourcefulness in adapting or modifying basic policies and programs to local situations, and greater skill in coordinating programs for counties, including those having dissimilar agricultural conditions and economic needs.

The program specialist at this level frequently adapts, amplifies, and modifies national policy, instructions, and procedures, sometimes in major respects, to fit the pattern of agricultural operations in the State. The program specialist at the GS-11 level, by comparison with the GS-12 level, adapts national policy guidelines without significant modifications. The program specialist at the GS-12 level may be assigned as a member of special task forces with responsibility for studying problems having particular application in program administration, leading to revision of national policies, or amended regulations.

Program planning and development of operating policies is complicated by unanticipated shifts in emphasis on commodities as marketing conditions change locally and nationally. Therefore,

the program specialist is required to design plans of operation which will provide alternate objectives, depending upon trends, patterns, or developments between crop seasons, particularly in the commodities most sensitive to changes of this nature. By comparison with the GS-12 level, the program specialist at the GS-11 level ordinarily does not have to consider fluctuating commodity demands, climatic conditions and other factors.

Responsibility for program administration at the GS-12 level requires evaluation of operations in all areas of the primary assignment, with special attention to equalizing emphasis among varied programs and program segments, and with other program areas. The program specialist must

give particular consideration to proposals growing out of successful State level experience which may have national application or implications; the program specialist at the GS- 11 level, for example, is concerned principally with State and local operations.

The Program Specialist GS-12 applies a broad view of program objectives and accomplishments, looking toward improvement of administration at both the State and local levels. Administration of the various programs is complicated by the continuing need to keep county and local participants and employees up to date on pro gram changes, often in those program elements which are not universally understood or accepted because of innovations in program requirements or in techniques of administration. The Program Specialist GS-11, by comparison, is primarily concerned with the basic character of the programs in the State, and with day-to-day contacts on operations. Furthermore, in the case of the Program Specialist GS-11, these program operations are carried out without significant disagreement among farmers or other groups on program activities or adjustments.

## **AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM SPECIALIST, GS-1145-13**

### *Nature of assignments*

Assignments at this level differ from those at the GS-12 level primarily in responsibility for a commodity area having national impact, or for a greater variety of programs and program segments, or for more diverse commodity groups or agricultural practices. Most of these programs, commodities or practices are tied closely to major national policy decisions on agricultural production, pricing, or conservation.

The program area for which the Agricultural Program Specialist GS-13 is responsible is very difficult and complex because it has the following characteristics:

- (1) the programs and program segments cover a major commodity or a variety of commodities or practices which importantly influence national agricultural policies;
- (2) the State is one of the primary producers of a major commodity or a group of commodities, and these programs have a critical impact on both the State and the national economy;

- (3) participation is very heavy in major programs;
- (4) administration of the programs involves a high degree of innovation and extension of guidelines to unprecedented or critical situations;
- (5) strong critical attitudes toward program operations and program changes are demonstrated, and often involve major farm organizations with important influence throughout a State or a geographic region.

*Examples of program areas at this level:*

*Production adjustment:* Program area includes a major commodity or a variety of commodities (e.g., feed grain, wheat, and sugar beets) and includes difficult farm reconstitution and record programs. Rate of participation is very high in all active programs. Program administration is very difficult because of the impact of the programs, the need to balance degree of participation with requirements of national production policies, and the differences among programs which require separate regulations and operating instructions. Critical interests in the programs is longstanding among individuals, groups, and organizations in the private and public sectors of the economy.

*Conservation:* Program area consists of the basic agricultural conservation program, and land-use adjustment programs. Programs include all major groups of practices for long-lasting protective cover, interim soil erosion protection, improvement of outdoor recreation and farmland rehabilitation. Rate of potential participation is near the maximum level in major programs. Program administration is unusually complicated because of the difficulties of coordinating large varieties of program operations with resources available, techniques prescribed, and individual county requirements.

*Price support:* Program area consists of a major commodity of national significance or a variety of commodities, and a potential for direct purchase program for perishable commodities. The major commodity or variety of commodities are of critical importance in the national effort to obtain stability and balance in the agriculture of the State. Degree of achievement in major programs is at a very high rate. Program administration is complicated by the existence of organizations in the geographic area having important and influential interests in the production and distribution of agricultural commodities.

### *Level of responsibility*

Responsibility for program development and administration is greater at the GS-13 level than at the GS-12 level because of the need to balance very heavy participation in critical programs with the requirements of overall national policy guides and directives. The program specialist at this level is responsible for a primary program area in a State which has a number of active trade and farm organizations. These have dominant interest in county programs, and in the producers and rate of production of major agricultural commodities. Because of the critical nature of the programs at this level, the program specialist has significant responsibility for giving frequent technical advice and policy interpretations to individual participants, producer organizations, and others, and for obtaining the views on major program changes or policy issues. The large number of producers and the high rate of program activity in the State requires continuous contact with county offices, county committeemen, farmer fieldmen, the State Executive Director and the State committee on complex matters of overall program design, and coordination with other Federal and State agencies. By comparison with the GS-12 level, at the GS-13 level the diversity of activities or the wider scope of program operations involve more frequent and more complex problems in the review and coordination of individual county and statewide programs, and in the need to deal with organizations and groups holding strong and influential opinions on program operations and objectives, or who vigorously debate program changes.

The program specialist at this level must be particularly sensitive to national policy implications in the expression of State attitudes and needs. This is important not only from the standpoint of stabilizing commodity supplies and prices in the State, but also from the point of view of the relative importance of these supplies in the domestic economy and, in some cases, in international trade. The Program Specialist GS-12, on the other hand, is principally concerned with equalizing and improving operations on a broad State level.

The Program Specialist GS-13, because of his specialized skill in the interpretation and administration of technically complex programs, is often consulted by the national office on proposed national programs or program changes. The breadth or variety of programs administered at this level require that the program specialist exercise a high degree of program knowledge and technical judgment in dealing with complex problems of administration. His responsibility is to obtain results which are in conformity with the overall aims of commodity stabilization policies, and which maintain proper balance between national needs on the one hand, and local production, pricing, and conservation capabilities on the other.