

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250**

DEPARTMENTAL MANUAL		Number: 2300-001
SUBJECT: Agriculture Travel Regulation	DATE: June 15, 2010	
	OPI: Office of the Chief Financial Officer	

1. PURPOSE

This manual, commonly referred to as the Agriculture Travel Regulation (ATR), is the primary source of United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) policy on managing temporary duty travel. The ATR supplements the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) issued by the General Services Administration (GSA). All provisions of this manual shall abide by applicable federal regulations including the FTR.

This manual applies to travel of Departmental employees, and to travel of individuals either employed intermittently by the Department or not employed, but carrying out official activities of the Department. This includes consultants or experts paid on a daily “when-actually-employed” basis; and individuals, who are not contractors, serving without pay or at \$1 a year when they are acting in a capacity that is directly related to, or in connection with, official activities of the Department.

This manual does not apply to employees on loan or detail to another Department or agency; contractors; or Departmental Foreign Service employees. The Department or agency paying for the travel is responsible for policy and procedures for preparing and controlling the travel documents.

2. CANCELLATION

This manual cancels and replaces Departmental Manual 2300-001, dated May 1, 2008. Several chapters and part references have been renumbered.

3. MAJOR POLICY CHANGES

This update of the ATR, which addresses recent issues regarding travel, incorporates relevant updates, and revises the format of the document for ease of use. The update includes the following changes:

- a. Allows agency heads to delegate the approval of blanket travel authorizations.
- b. Expands the authority of agency heads to approve actual expenses and delegate approval up to 150 percent.

- c. Increases threshold for conference and training events requiring Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) approval to \$75,000. Clarifications of both approval and reporting requirements added.
- d. Aligns mixed official and personal travel with the FTR and provides specific procedures for most common types of mixed travel.
- e. Allows locations to be designated as being committed to Government vehicles.
- f. Expands the use of non-refundable tickets.
- g. Approving officials are authorized to approve emergency travel and to extend the definition of family when appropriate.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

As management officials are delegated authorities under this manual, there must also be corresponding accountability. The delegated officials will be required to maintain necessary records to respond to any internal audits or external inquiries from the Congress, the Office of Inspector General, the Government Accountability Office, and other agencies regarding these approvals. Management officials are required to timely report any violation of these regulations to the Chief Financial Officer.

a. Delegation from the Administrator of General Services to the Secretary of Agriculture.

The Secretary is delegated authority by the Administrator of General Services (GSA), through the FTR, to implement policies for travel by employees and others authorized to travel at USDA expense. The Administrator of General Services promulgates the FTR to:

- (1) Interpret statutory and other policy requirements in a manner that balances the need to assure that official travel is conducted in a responsible manner with the need to minimize administrative costs.
- (2) Communicate the resulting policies in a clear manner to Federal agencies and employees.
- (3) The Secretary and Deputy Secretary may authorize, within the requirements of the ATR and FTR, all types of travel for any traveler, including themselves.

b. Delegation from the Secretary to the Chief Financial Officer.

The CFO is delegated full responsibility for Departmental travel policy as contained in this regulation. The CFO also has the authority to approve all forms of travel for special situations including, but not limited to, pandemics, natural disasters, and acts of terrorism, in order to ensure the safety of Government employees, continuity of Government operations, and the safety of the general public.

c. Delegation to General Officers.

General Officers may authorize, within the requirements of the ATR and FTR, all types of travel, including premium class travel for their employees, and other individuals traveling for their office on Departmental business.

- (1) General Officers (except the Deputy Secretary) may not authorize premium class travel for themselves.
- (2) General Officers are authorized to approve payments for expenses incurred as a result of the death of an employee while the employee was in a travel status as specified in this manual.
- (3) General Officers are authorized to approve payments for expenses incurred as a result of the illness or injury of an employee while the employee was in a travel status as specified in this manual.
- (4) General Officers may not delegate the authority to approve premium class travel.

d. Delegation from the Secretary to Agency Heads.

Agency Heads may authorize, within the requirements of the ATR and FTR, all types of travel for their employees and other individuals traveling for their agencies, except premium class travel.

- (1) Agency Heads may approve all foreign and domestic travel, unless specifically restricted by this document.
- (2) Agency Heads are authorized to approve payments for expenses incurred as a result of the death of an employee while the employee was in a travel status.
- (3) Agency Heads are authorized to approve payments for expenses incurred as a result of the illness or injury of an employee while the employee was in a travel status.
- (4) Agency Heads are authorized to approve or disapprove the general use of non-refundable fares across their agencies, and are to notify OCFO of their decision. Individual travel authorizations requesting use of these fares shall be routed and approved through USDA's e-travel system.

e. Delegation from Agency Heads to Approving Officials.

In view of the authority granted to Agency Heads, Agency Heads are instructed to use special care to ensure that delegations of authority are held to a sufficiently high level to ensure proper review and control of travel. Delegations must be in writing and be contained in agency internal regulations. Agency Heads may delegate their authority, except for the following:

- (1) Authority to approve payment of subsistence and transportation expenses for threatened law enforcement/investigative employees. The Office of Inspector General (OIG) must be notified of all instances where threatened individuals are moved into temporary living accommodations either at or away from the official duty station.
- (2) Authority to designate the specific award ceremonies for which employees (and one individual related by blood or affinity of the employee's choosing) may be reimbursed for travel expenses.
- (3) Authority to approve reimbursement of actual expenses above 150 percent.

f. Authorization and Approval of Travel.

Except as noted above, General Officers are authorized to approve their own travel, but are encouraged to have his or her travel authorized by a subordinate. Specific approval for premium class travel must follow the procedures outlined in section 9.i(3)(a) of this regulation. No employee of the Department, other than the Secretary and General Officers may authorize or approve his or her own travel; or have his or her travel authorized or approved by a subordinate employee.

g. Annual Review of Agency Travel Regulations.

Agency travel regulations are encouraged to be procedural interpretations and are a supplement to the ATR. A USDA agency travel regulation cannot grant additional benefits or adjust processes defined in the FTR or ATR.

To ensure agency policies and procedures are consistent with the FTR and ATR, agencies are required to submit their travel regulations to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer for review, no later than June 30th of each year.

5. DEFINITIONS

- a. Agency. For purposes of this policy an agency is an organizational unit of the Department, whose head reports to an Under Secretary; or a staff office as defined below.
- b. Agency Head. The head of an organizational unit of the Department who reports to an Under Secretary; the head of an administrative staff office who reports to the Secretary; and the Inspector General.
- c. Approving Official. USDA official who has been delegated the authorize travel and payment of travel vouchers for a traveler by an Agency Head.
- d. Committed driver. Traveler whose average yearly mileage reimbursement equals or is greater than the cost of operating a Government-furnished vehicle.

- e. General Officers. The work of the Department is under the supervision and control of the Secretary who is assisted by General Officers as described in 7 CFR Part 2 Subpart A §2.4.
- f. Non-refundable fares. A fare offered by a private-sector supplier of air, rail or bus transportation that will not be refunded if a trip is cancelled.
- g. Premium travel. Any class of accommodations above coach-class, *e.g.*, first-class or business-class.
- h. Rest period. A break of more than 23 hours, but less than 24 hours.
- i. Staff Office. A Departmental administrative office whose head reports to the Secretary.
- j. Viable city. A city with an available conference facility that a prudent person would consider to be a cost-effective location and is reachable by standard methods of transportation.

6. OFFICIAL PURPOSE

Approving officials and travelers are reminded that they are traveling for official Government purposes at taxpayer expense. Accordingly, they shall ensure that their activities are prudent in terms of cost, location, appropriateness, and public perception.

7. CONTROLS

Each agency and OIG is expected to maintain effective controls over travel and travel payments. Essential elements of such controls include but are not limited to:

- a. Reviewing all proposed travel to determine its necessity.
- b. Limiting the authorization of payment of travel related expenses to only those that are necessary to accomplish the agency's and Department's mission in the most economical and effective manner.
- c. Determining the method of travel most advantageous to the Government. Special consideration should be given to minimize travel time and cost to the Government.
- d. Monitoring travel obligations and expenditures.

8. RECORDS RETENTION

Records relating to reimbursing individuals, such as travel authorizations, travel vouchers, and all other supporting documents relating to official travel by officers, employees,

dependents, or others authorized by law to travel should be maintained for a period of 6 years and 3 months from the date the final claim is paid.

9. POLICY AND PROCEDURES

a. Travel Authorizations.

- (1) A travel authorization is the official approval to perform temporary duty travel. The travel authorization must specifically itemize, in detail, the travel to be performed and the expenses to be incurred. This will minimize disagreements over travel reimbursement. All authorizations must have a written or electronic signature by an authorized official.
- (2) Except for the Secretary, the Deputy Secretary, and General Officers, no travelers may authorize their own travel or have a subordinate authorize their travel. General Officers (except the Deputy Secretary) may not authorize premium class travel for themselves. Each travel authorization prepared should be detailed to allow improved reporting to oversight agencies and to clearly communicate with travelers what expenses are authorized and are not authorized.
- (3) Each travel authorization must provide a purpose of the travel. This key element must be completed correctly and reported to oversight agencies. Travelers, who normally use a blanket travel authorization and need to travel for a different purpose, must prepare a new travel authorization with the correct purpose of travel identified.
- (4) Travel authorizations for premium class travel must follow the procedures as detailed in this regulation. A blanket travel authorization cannot be used for premium class travel.

b. Open or “Blanket” Authorizations.

(1) Use of Open Authorizations.

Travel may be authorized by a trip-by-trip authorization or an open authorization. Open travel authorizations can authorize multiple trips that can then be booked at a later date by the traveler without further authorization from an approving official. Trip-by-trip authorizations require an approving official to authorize each trip before expenses are incurred. Trip-by-trip authorizations are the Departmental preference due to their improved accountability and ability to provide detailed reporting. However, open travel authorizations may be used for frequent, routine travel with consistent restrictions and travel purpose. Open authorizations should be made as specific as possible and list locations, dates, methods of transportation and approved miscellaneous expenses whenever possible. The Federal Travel Regulations requires several types of travel expenses to be specifically approved in the open authorization.

(2) Travel Arrangements Requiring Specific Approval. Open authorizations that will include the following types of travel arrangements must be specifically authorized in the comments or as an attachment to the open authorization. If special approvals, specific justifications or additional documentation is required by the Federal Travel Regulation, Department of Agriculture regulations or agency regulations, additional documentation will need to be added to the travel authorization.

- (a) Premium class travel;
- (b) Use of a rental car;
- (c) Travel expenses related to attendance at a conference;
- (d) Use of a foreign air carrier;
- (e) Use of charter arrangements;
- (f) Use of a Government aircraft;
- (g) Use of cash to pay for common carrier transportation;
- (h) Travel by ship;
- (i) Payment of a reduced per diem rate. The specific rate being authorized must be listed in the authorization;
- (j) Payment of actual expense. The specific rate being authorized must be listed in the authorization;
- (k) Transportation expenses related to threatened law enforcement/investigative employees and members of their families;
- (l) Travel expenses related to emergency travel;
- (m) Travel expenses related to travel to a foreign area;
- (n) Acceptance of payment from a non-Federal source for travel expenses; and
- (o) Due to an employee's medical requirements or religious beliefs, payment of the full meals and incidental expenses allowance even though meals are furnished by the Government either directly or through a registration fee or other payment for a conference or other event.

c. Travel Vouchers.

- (1) Travel vouchers submitted in connection with authorized travel must be approved for payment by the traveler's designated approving official. For General Officers, a subordinate may approve the travel voucher except for premium travel. The official approving the travel voucher determines that the travel was for official purposes and the travel voucher claims are in compliance with the FTR; Departmental travel regulations and manuals; and applicable agency travel policy. In addition, an appropriate official at a traveler's duty station may be authorized to approve travel vouchers for an employee whose supervisor is located at a different geographic location. All travel vouchers are subject to post payment audit by the OCFO.
- (2) Travelers must submit a travel voucher to their designated approving official, as required by the FTR, within 5 working days after completion of the trip or period of travel. Travelers in a continuous travel status must submit a travel voucher, at a minimum, every two weeks.

d. Actual Expense.

Authority to approve reimbursement of actual expense up to 150 percent of authorized expenses may be delegated by the Agency Head. Requests for actual expenses above 150 percent must be approved by the Agency Head and may not be delegated.

A request for authorization for actual expense reimbursement should be made, to the fullest extent possible, in advance of travel. Actual expense reimbursement may also be approved after travel is completed (“post-approval”) when the approving official determines that one of the following has occurred: Emergency situations in which requests for prior travel authorization were not possible; or unanticipated, unusual, and exceptional circumstances resulted in the incurrence of actual and necessary expenses that were much greater than the authorized per diem allowance.

e. Receipts.

- (1) Receipts must be electronically attached to the travel voucher in the travel system. Receipts electronically attached to the travel voucher are considered to be the official copies and hard copy duplicates may be discarded at the traveler’s discretion.
- (2) For audit purposes, USDA may request a hard copy of any receipt that is not electronically attached to the travel voucher.
- (3) As required by the FTR, travelers must provide a lodging receipt and a receipt for every authorized expense over \$75. In addition, approving officials may require receipts for miscellaneous expenses less than \$75. The approving official must document the requirement for additional receipts (expenses less than \$75) in the travel authorization.

f. Conference and Training Events.

(1) General Guidelines.

All conference and training events shall be held at the most cost-effective location, considering such factors as per diem, transportation, and rental of conference rooms. A cost comparison of at least three geographically diverse viable cities must be conducted. However, no cost comparison is required if more than 50 percent of the participants are from the location of the conference. A contracting officer should be used to assist in finding the most cost-effective conference facility. FTR Part 301-74, Conference Planning and FTR Appendix E to Chapter 301, Suggested Guidance for Conference Planning, must be followed when planning a conference.

(2) Location.

Consideration must be given to less costly locations to conference and training events, whenever possible. The order of preference, for USDA-sponsored conference and training events, is:

- (a) Local USDA facilities.
- (b) Other Federal, State, and local Government facilities.

(3) Requests for Approval.

Agencies are to submit proposals to conduct events (conferences and training) which have a total agency cost in excess of \$75,000 to the OCFO for prior approval. Proposals to conduct events with a cost in excess of \$100,000 also require approval from the Assistant Secretary for Departmental Management. OCFO will automatically seek Departmental Management approval for all proposals over \$100,000 that have not already been approved by the Assistant Secretary. OIG proposals must be submitted to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary for prior approval.

The format for requesting approval will be provided by the OCFO. Before submitting a proposal, the event must pass the following evaluation:

- (a) The conference will help further the agency's or the Department's mission;
- (b) The information cannot be effectively shared through another means such as a teleconference or the Internet;
- (c) The number of employees attending is justified;
- (d) The location is appropriate and justified, and a prudent person would not think it a waste of their tax dollars for this conference in this location. The request must indicate whether the conference will take place at a non-USDA government facility, commercial facility, or a combination of facilities;
- (e) The meeting location is near where most attendees are stationed. If not, the detailed cost analysis is to include cost comparisons to locations near the majority of attendees;
- (f) The conference or training event is "must-do" considering the limited budget of the agency; and
- (g) Vendors providing supplies or services for the conference were selected through a competitive contracting process. Conference requests involving a sole source contract or no contract must include additional justification.

(4) Timing.

All requests for approval must be submitted at least 21 days before conference arrangements must be finalized.

(5) Reporting.

Agencies and OIG are to submit quarterly conference/training data to the OCFO within one month of quarter's end. The format for the report will be provided by the OCFO.

(a) Conferences meeting the requirements of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-246) must be reported. These are events that:

- 1 are held for consultation, education, awareness or discussion;
- 2 include participants from at least one USDA agency; and
- 3 involve costs associated with travel and lodging for some participants.

(b) Events that do not have to be reported are:

- 1 training programs that are continuing education or a curriculum-based educational program, provided that such training programs are held independent of a conference; and
- 2 events conducted entirely within a USDA facility.

(c) Due dates for the quarterly submissions are outlined below:

QUARTER	PERIOD	REPORT DUE DATE
First	October 1 st – December 31 st	January 31 st
Second	January 1 st – March 31 st	April 30 th
Third	April 1 st – June 30 th	July 31 st
Fourth	July 1 st – September 30 th	October 31 st

(6) Events Less than \$75,000.

General Officers are authorized to approve conference and training events that have a total cost of less than \$75,000. General Officers may not delegate the authority to approve events that have a total cost of more than \$40,000. For reporting purposes, supporting documentation related to these events must be retained for 6 years and 3 months after the date of the event by the requesting office. The report format and requirements will be provided by the OCFO.

g. Mixed Official and Personal (Leisure) Travel.

(1) When mixing personal (leisure) travel with official travel, the following procedures must be used:

- (a) Receive written approval from the delegated approving official to mix official business and personal travel. Written approval can be provided electronically through comment fields in the travel system, email or through paper methods. The written approval should clarify what expenses are authorized by the government, how they will be calculated and should be attached to the travel authorization. Official travel must be in the best interest of the government. Approving officials should not authorize mixed travel when there is an appearance that the focus of the trip is personal rather than official. General Officers, through the delegation of authority, may approve their own mixed travel;
- (b) The travel authorization must reflect only what is being authorized by the Government for official business (i.e., travel to and from official destination points by the usually traveled route). Alternate starting locations, extra stops and unauthorized transportation methods should not be listed in the travel authorization;
- (c) The Government issued charge card is required to be used for authorized expenditures. Personal travel expenses are to be paid through means other than the Government issued travel card; and
- (d) Reimbursement is limited to the constructive cost of the authorized method of transportation (i.e., the sum of per diem and transportation expenses the employee would reasonably have incurred when traveling by the authorized method of transportation). Employees must request leave for any duty hours missed because of personal travel.

h. Transportation Expenses.

(1) Rental Car.

Travelers should select the rental car most advantageous to the Government. The Departmental preferred class of car is economy using the lowest cost vendor. Travelers using the eTravel System will be prompted to provide a justification for all rental cars larger than an economy size. The determination of most advantageous to the Government is determined by discussions between the traveler and authorizing official after considering factors such as cost, number of passengers, security, location of rental facilities, office hours, and wait times.

(2) Committed Driver

Agency Heads or their designees may committee drivers to the use of Government-furnished vehicles for official travel on either an individual or location basis.

- (a) Individuals may be committed to the use of Government-furnished vehicles. An analysis must be completed to determine whether an individual should be

designated a committed driver. At a minimum, consideration must be given to current commercial lease costs, fuel costs, expected mileage charges, and privately-owned vehicle (POV) reimbursement rates. Therefore, travelers who will drive more miles per month than the number of miles for which reimbursement would equal lease and operating costs shall use Government-furnished vehicles.

- (b) Locations may be designated as committed to the use of Government-furnished vehicles. There must be a sufficient number of Government-furnished vehicles readily available for use.
- (c) Annually, by May 15th, all employees committed to the use of Government-furnished vehicles on either an individual or location basis must be informed in writing.
- (d) While the commitment is normally intended to cover a fiscal year period, the date of Government vehicle availability may require that 12 months other than a fiscal year be used. The actual commitment period begins when the vehicle is delivered and runs for 12 months thereafter.

(3) Agency Use of Government Contract and Non-Refundable Fares.

USDA has determined that non-refundable fares are cost effective in many instances and has delegated the authority to authorize their use to the Agency Heads.

- (a) Government Contract Fares: These fares are the USDA preference. The General Services Administration (GSA) has provided both capacity controlled fares and regular contract fares. The lower cost capacity controlled fares should be used whenever they are available unless the traveler anticipates frequent changes to the travel plans. The FTR mandates the use of these government contract fares unless travelers meet one of the exceptions listed below:
 - 1 Space on a scheduled contract flight is not available in time to accomplish the purpose of your travel, or use of contract service would require you to incur unnecessary overnight lodging costs which would increase the total cost of the trip;
 - 2 The contractor's flight schedule is inconsistent with explicit policies of your agency with regard to scheduling travel during normal working hours (a copy of the applicable agency policy should be attached to the travel authorization with a reference to where it can be found in your agency's official published regulations); and
 - 3 A non-contract carrier offers a lower fare to the general public that, if used, will result in a lower total trip cost to the Government (the combined costs of transportation, lodging, meals, and related expenses considered).

(b) Non-Refundable Fares: If the Agency Head authorizes the use of non-refundable tickets, they can be made available in USDA's travel systems. (Reserving non-refundable fares outside of USDA's travel systems is not allowed by the FTR.) In making such authorizations, Agency Heads must consider the potential cost savings and risks of using these fares. If authorized, non-refundable tickets should be used in the following circumstances:

- 1 The traveler meets one of the Federal Travel Regulation's exceptions to the mandatory use of government contract fares;
- 2 The traveler must know or reasonably anticipate that the ticket will be used as planned (e.g. the travel is not likely to be cancelled due to either business or personal reasons); and
- 3 Interim travel vouchers must be done for all tickets purchased more than 5 days before the start of the trip.

Additional costs due to official travel being curtailed, canceled or interrupted for official purposes or for other reasons beyond the employee's control that are acceptable to the agency may be fully reimbursed.

(c) Agencies that allow their employees to use non-refundable tickets must implement the following internal controls over the non-refundable ticket process.

- 1 Agencies must notify OCFO in writing of their decision to allow use of non-refundable tickets, as well as if they subsequently decide not to use them.
- 2 Non-refundable tickets often require immediate ticketing and USDA's travel system will not issue tickets until the authorization is fully approved. For these reasons, travel approvers should be prepared to immediately approve authorizations with non-refundable tickets. The ticket should complete a travel voucher for the expense within five days.
- 3 Agencies must track and report to OCFO within 30 days after each quarter, all costs incurred in the use of non-refundable tickets, including change fees charged by the airlines and the cost of all unused tickets which expired, were lost or which USDA cannot use because the traveler departed from Federal service. OCFO will recommend system reports to assist with this process.

(d) OCFO will use the agency reports on the extra costs, reports from the travel system and GSA reports to calculate the net costs/savings achieved from the use of non-refundable fares. OCFO will also perform periodic reviews of non-refundable fare use to verify applicable FTR requirements are being followed.

i. Premium Class Travel.

(1) General.

(a) Coach class travel is the USDA preference. Authorization can be requested for the use of premium class (i.e., first class and business class) travel. Authorization

is not needed when Frequent Travel Benefits are used to upgrade to premium class from coach class; or for business class service on AMTRAK Acela or Metroliner trains.

- (b) Requests for Approval. Travelers must meet one of the justifications listed in section (2) below and provide the required supporting documentation. General Officers may add additional requirements. Appendix B provides a checklist that may be useful in determining whether premium class travel should be approved.

(2) Justification for Approval

(a) First Class Travel

- 1 No space is available in coach class accommodations in time to accomplish the mission, which is urgent and cannot be postponed. Supporting documentation must be provided to: document that coach class accommodations are not available within 24 hours of the proposed departure and arrival times (screen prints of available flights or certification from the travel management center are examples of acceptable documentation); explain why flight is so urgent, why the traveler's schedule cannot be adjusted, and/or why the meeting cannot be adjusted.
- 2 Use of premium class is required to accommodate a disability or special need. In accordance with Departmental Manual 4300-002, Reasonable Accommodation Procedures, the disability must be substantiated in writing by a medical authority and provided to the supervisor. Certification from the supervisor must indicate other than coach travel is required. Documentation must be dated within the prior six months of travel or must be a permanent disability. The documentation also needs to indicate that the disability cannot be accommodated using a cheaper alternative method (example: two coach seats).
- 3 Security Purposes. Security purposes are determined by the approving official and should only be authorized up to the minimum accommodations necessary. Full documentation of the security purposes must be provided explaining the security issue. These security purposes may include, but are not limited to:
 - a Use of coach-class accommodations would endanger your life or Government property;
 - b You are an agent on protective detail and you are accompanying an individual authorized to use other than coach- class accommodations; or
 - c You are a courier or control officer accompanying controlled pouches or packages.
- 4 Agency Mission. Agency mission is not an acceptable justification for first class travel.

(b) Business Class Travel

- 1 No space is available in coach class accommodations in time to accomplish the mission, which is urgent and cannot be postponed. Supporting documentation must be provided to document that coach class accommodations are not available (screen prints of available flights or certification from the travel management center are examples of acceptable documentation); explain why flight is so urgent, why the traveler's schedule cannot be adjusted, and/or why the meeting cannot be adjusted.
- 2 Use of premium class is required to accommodate a disability or special need. In accordance with DM 4300-002, disability must be substantiated in writing by a medical authority and provided to the supervisor. Certification from the supervisor must indicate other than coach travel is required. Documentation must be dated within the prior six months of travel or must be a permanent disability. The documentation also needs to indicate that the disability cannot be accommodated using a cheaper alternative method (example: two coach seats).
- 3 Security Purposes. Security purposes are determined by the approving official and should only be authorized up to the minimum accommodations necessary. Full documentation of the security purposes must be provided explaining the security issue. These security purposes may include, but are not limited to:
 - a Use of coach-class accommodations would endanger your life or Government property;
 - b You are an agent on protective detail and you are accompanying an individual authorized to use other than coach- class accommodations; or
 - c You are a courier or control officer accompanying controlled pouches or packages.
- 4 Regularly scheduled flights only provide business class accommodations. Documentation must be provided showing that no coach seating is offered on that flight and an alternative flight is not available. Screen prints of available flights or certification from the travel management center are examples of acceptable documentation.
- 5 Use of business class results in cost savings to the Government. A cost comparison must be provided showing cost savings to the Government.
- 6 Where the origin and/or destination are outside the continental United States (OCONUS), and the scheduled flight time, including stopovers and change of planes, is in excess of 14 hours. Rest periods may not be taken during or immediately following the flight. Lodging expenses incurred during stopovers and change of planes will not be reimbursed. Documentation of flight time must be provided. A travel schedule showing the traveler reporting for work within 23 hours of arrival is also required.
- 7 Exceptional circumstances. Full documentation of the exceptional circumstances must be provided. This justification includes the Federal Travel Regulation justifications for foreign flight sanitation, payment from a non-federal source and mission criteria. USDA anticipates very few instances where the mission criteria would be applicable.

(3) Approving Officials.

- (a) General Officers (and those officially acting in the position), are authorized to approve the use of premium travel within their area of authority. The CFO is authorized to approve premium travel for General Officers (except the IG). The Chief of Staff is authorized to approve premium travel for the CFO. The Secretary or Deputy Secretary will approve premium travel for the IG.
- (b) When the Deputy Secretary or relative General Officer (and those officially acting in the positions) is on travel or leave or is otherwise not available at the primary duty location, the authority to approve premium class travel may be exercised by the Chief Financial Officer. If the Chief Financial Officer or the Acting Chief Financial Officer is on travel or leave or is otherwise not available at the primary duty location, any General Officer may authorize premium class travel within the requirements of this regulation.

(4) Timing.

All requests for premium class travel should be submitted, to the approving official, at least 72 hours before the commencement of travel and approved in advance of booking travel. Requests are approved on an individual trip basis.

(5) Reporting.

Agencies and OIG will report quarterly to the OCFO on use of premium class travel using the format provided by the OCFO. Reporting will include first class and business class travel.

j. Local Travel.

- (1) Travelers may be reimbursed for travel expenses incurred in the performance of official duties in and around their duty station. When the expense appears reasonable and necessary to conduct business, the traveler should be reimbursed for out of pocket expenses. Local travel expenses must be claimed within the fiscal year the expenses were incurred. However, a traveler may not be reimbursed for their normal commuting expenses, except under the Commuter Transit Subsidy Benefits Program.
- (2) Local travel expenses may include such things as the cost of subway, bus, train, taxi, mileage, tolls and parking. Local travel expenses could be incurred in a variety of work related situations including, but not limited to, required attendance at meetings, conferences, other official functions, training, periodic work assignments at alternative duty locations in or around the duty station. Per diem expenses, including lodging costs, cannot be authorized.

(3) Approval for local travel expenses shall be made on a case by case basis. It is the responsibility of the traveler seeking reimbursement to clearly illustrate and justify that local travel costs incurred were additional out of pocket expenses and not part of their normal commuting expense.

(4) Local travel may be reimbursed using one of three methods:

- (a) an SF 1164, Claim for Reimbursement for Expenditures on Official Business, processed through a Departmental time and attendance system;
- (b) an SF 1164, Claim for Reimbursement for Expenditures on Official Business, processed through the accounting system; or
- (c) through a local travel authorization through an official travel system, if available.

Agency Heads or their designees are responsible for determining which of the three methods are appropriate for their employees.

(5) Agencies should issue guidance on the definition of local travel and how to calculate the additional out of pocket expenses not part of the employee's normal commuting expense. If no agency guidance exists, the following guidelines should be used:

- (a) Local travel – Any travel lasting less than twelve hours, within 35 miles of the duty station, or within 35 miles of the employee's residence.
- (b) Method of calculating out of pocket expenses – The practice of automatically deducting the cost of an employee's daily commute will not be used. Employees must justify out of pocket expenses and the employee's supervisor (or designated approving official) will determine whether those expenses are reasonable and should be reimbursed.

k. Use of Paper Tickets.

There are only two situations where paper tickets are allowed: 1) Foreign travel, or 2) when electronic tickets are not available. Travelers are responsible for all transportation tickets and other transportation documents for official travel issued to them. Travelers are personally responsible for any additional cost for official travel resulting from improper safeguarding of these transportation documents. For example, travelers may be personally responsible for any airline fee to reissue a lost or stolen airline ticket for official travel. Travelers must return any unused tickets, coupons, or other evidence of refund to their Travel Management Center.

l. Disputed Charge Card Transactions.

As noted in Departmental Regulation (DR) 2300-001, Government Travel Card Regulation, section 6.f(8), it is the traveler's responsibility to dispute, within 60 days of first appearance, any charge on the billing statement not made by the traveler. This includes unused tickets awaiting a refund. For centrally billed accounts, the primary point of contact for the account is responsible for disputing transactions.

m. Emergency Travel.

Approving officials are authorized to make payments for travel expenses incurred as a result of an illness or injury of an employee while the employee was in a travel status away from his official station in the United States or while performing official duties outside the continental United States or in transit to or from the temporary duty station. For specific instructions, refer to the FTR Section 301-30.

Additionally, approving officials may authorize emergency travel related to the death or serious illness of a member of the traveler's family. For the purposes of emergency travel, the approving official may extend the definition of family when appropriate. The relationship between the employee and the family member shall be taken into consideration for the extension of the definition of family and may include such relationships as same sex partnerships, adult children, a relationship where the person has been considered as an extension of the family (such as a live-in nanny), or a grandparent. These are only examples and should not be considered all inclusive. The approving official must use best judgment in extending the definition of family.

n. Expenses Incurred Due to the Death of an Employee In Travel Status.

(1) Agency Heads are authorized to make payments for expenses incurred as a result of the death of an employee while the employee was in a travel status away from his official station in the United States or while performing official duties outside the continental United States or in transit to or from the temporary duty station. For specific instructions, refer to the FTR.

(2) The appropriation or fund available for the activity in which the deceased employee was engaged shall be charged with the allowable expenditures.

o. Miscellaneous Expenses.

Miscellaneous expenses may be authorized for official travel if the approving official deems them appropriate. Approving officials should evaluate the need to reimburse miscellaneous expenses on a case by case basis and disallow any expenses that are not in the best interests of the Government. Many of these expenses can often be avoided with proper planning or use of Government provided alternatives. Travelers and approving officials should discuss and establish a clear understanding of which miscellaneous expenses are authorized for a specific trip. Travelers should itemize each miscellaneous expense with its estimated cost on the travel authorization.

(1) Personal telecommunications.

Personal telecommunications may be authorized for travel lasting more than one night. Personal telecommunications expenses may be authorized for official travel if the approving official deems them appropriate. Personal telephone calls, Internet

access for personal use and all other methods of personal communications (personal telecommunications) are covered by this policy. Personal telecommunications may be made to any location on any day of travel, but reimbursement is limited to \$5 a day in the 50 states, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands; and \$15 a day outside of the 50 states, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands. The total telecommunication cost may exceed the daily limit on a particular day, but the total reimbursement cannot exceed the daily limit multiplied by the number of lodging nights.

(2) Hotel Taxes.

The Federal Government, generally, is exempt from local and State taxes. However, not all States and localities offer tax exemption and some locations do not specify a particular form on which to claim the tax exemption. When available, travelers should complete the necessary documentation required to waive State and local hotel taxes. In locations where these taxes cannot be waived, the taxes may be reimbursed as a miscellaneous expense. Additional information can be found on the General Services Administration Web site (www.gsa.gov). Search: State Tax Exemption Forms.

p. Expenses Not Authorized.

Expenses related to office supplies, conference fees, training fees, shipping costs, conference/meeting rooms, and light refreshments are not travel expenses. They may not be authorized or paid through the Department's travel system.

q. Travel Allowances for Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) Assignees.

(1) Overview.

The InterGovernmental Personnel Act (5 U.S.C. § 3371) provides for temporary exchanges of personnel between the Federal Government and State or local Governments, institutions of higher education, Indian tribes or tribal organizations, and any other eligible organization. Each such exchange is carried out under the provisions of a specific agreement that states the purpose and duration of the exchange, the places, hours, and conditions of work, and the methods of financing the individual's pay and allowances.

(2) Coverage.

State or local Government agency employees assigned to USDA under IPA appointments and USDA employees assigned to State and local Government agencies may be paid travel and transportation allowances. Department appropriations may be used to pay for all or part of these expenses. The type and extent of expenses to be authorized are based on an administrative determination by an authorized official and must be set forth in a written IPA Agreement. IPA assignees may receive either

certain change of official duty station allowances or per diem for each assignment, but not both.

(3) Service Agreement.

Expenses for either per diem or change of official duty station allowances may not be authorized unless the IPA assignee has agreed, in writing, to complete the entire period of assignment or one year, whichever is shorter, unless separated or reassigned for reasons beyond the assignee's control and acceptable to USDA. If the IPA assignee violates the agreement, the money spent for expenses other than those for official travel while away from the assignment location is recoverable from the assignee as a debt due, unless waived in whole or in part by the head of the agency in which the assignee is located.

(4) Assignments where change of official duty station allowances are not involved.

The following travel allowances are authorized for the IPA assignee only:

- (a) Between home and assignment location. Travel between assignee's home and the assignment location to include coach transportation or mileage as allowed in the FTR for use of POV plus the standard CONUS per diem rate during travel when initially reporting for duty and when returning to original duty station upon completion of the assignment.
- (b) While at assignment location:
 - 1 Assignment of 30 days or less. The applicable maximum per diem rate (standard CONUS or locality rate from FTR Chapter 301, Appendix A) will be paid to the assignee for the first 30 calendar days after reporting for duty.
 - 2 Assignment greater than 30 days. For the first 30 calendar days of an assignment, per diem, as shown in (1) above, may be paid to the assignee. During this 30-day period, the assignee shall seek long-term residence accommodations. After the first 30-day period, a lower per diem rate of up to 55 percent of that paid during the initial period may be authorized for the remainder of the assignment. If the reduced rate is not known at the time the travel authorization is prepared, state that a Travel Authorization Amendment will be issued during the first 30 days of the assignment which will specify the reduced rate. A travel authorization must be issued before the start of the assignment and must specify exactly what travel allowances are approved.

(5) Dual per diem rates.

An IPA assignee, who is receiving per diem at the assignment location, is authorized receipt of an additional per diem allowance while on official temporary duty at another location (except as noted above). The additional per diem is allowed only if the assignee is occupying long-term residence accommodations and is limited to the increased expenses resulting from the temporary duty travel.

- (a) Full per diem at a temporary duty location will be paid to assignees who will not incur dual lodging costs or who received change of official duty station allowances instead of per diem. Assignees are authorized the same allowances as USDA employees.
- (b) In computing dual per diem allowances, the lodgings portion of the authorized per diem rate at the assignment location will be paid. For the first and last days of travel, only a proportionate share of the amount allowed for meals may be paid.

r. International Travel.

- (1) Specific authorities and rates pertaining to foreign travel are contained in the FTR. The requirements in this part are in addition to those generally applicable to all travel. Please refer to the Appendix, International Travel Procedures for guidance.
- (2) International travel will be authorized when it is in the interest of the work of the Department and the expenses to be incurred can be justified in the furtherance of its programs. International travel may also be performed for the benefit of another Department, a foreign Government, an international organization, etc., subject to such laws and regulations as may be most appropriate under the circumstances involved. The most careful administrative consideration should be given to all authorizations for international travel and to the costs involved. Before issuance of each authorization for such travel, it is the responsibility of the authorizing official to exercise prudent judgment as to its necessity and to determine that the purpose of the travel:
 - (a) relates directly to the accomplishment of authorized programs or functions of the Department and, therefore, that the expenses may be properly paid from funds appropriated or otherwise available to the agency;
 - (b) concerns the authorized program or functions of another Federal agency and that the expenses are chargeable to the funds of that agency; or
 - (c) is for the joint benefit of the Department and some other Federal agency, a foreign country, an international organization, etc., and that such benefit warrants a sharing of expenses by the parties involved.

(3) General.

When international travel is necessary, careful consideration must be given to the following:

- (a) A determination of the number of persons necessary to accomplish the mission.
- (b) Selection of the best qualified person for the job.
- (c) Careful planning of itineraries to avoid duplicate travel and to assure effective use of resources.
- (d) Selection of the most economical means of transportation.
- (e) The possibility that Department travelers, either stationed in a foreign country or traveling on other official business, could handle matters for Department agencies other than their own agencies.

APPENDIX A INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL PROCEDURES

Are these procedures applicable to USDA Foreign Service Employees?

No, these procedures do not apply to USDA Foreign Service Employees. The U.S. Department of State Foreign Assistance Manual applies to travel by Foreign Service Employees.

What are the administrative requirements related to international travel?

Agencies involved in international travel shall appoint an International Travel Coordinator who is responsible for assuring that all the requirements of this section are met, in particular, the return of official and diplomatic passports. General information not included in the regulation may be obtained from the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), International Travel Section.

What is an international travel country clearance?

International travel must be cleared in the country of destination to ensure that all post responsibilities, including official traveler support, can be carried out effectively and to protect your health and welfare while in official travel status. Your agency is responsible for obtaining the country clearance from the Agricultural Counselor/Attaché (AC/A) well in advance of the proposed visit. If no AC/A resides near the country to be visited, the clearance must be obtained from the post nearest the country to be visited. An information copy must be sent to the country where the AC/A resides. Clearance of the communication by the appropriate FAS Area Director, Office of Foreign Service Operations is mandatory.

The country clearance approval by the overseas post is required before you depart the U.S. The importance and requirement of obtaining proper country clearance is to:

- Obtain needed post support
- Accomplish traveler responsibilities
- Protect travelers and inform post of U.S. Government employees in official travel status

How do I obtain a country clearance?

USDA FAS cable or State cable are the official means of communication with overseas posts. The following cable format shall be used:

SUBJECT: COUNTRY CLEARANCE REQUEST: [*Last Name, First Name*]

Note: If request is for a group traveling together for the same purpose, then use the word "GROUP" instead of traveler's name.

1. COUNTRY CLEARANCE IS REQUESTED FOR: *[Full Name], [Position Title], [Agency Name]*.

Note: If request is for a group traveling together for the same purpose, enter info for each traveler.

2: TO VISIT: *[city or cities, country and dates - see examples below]*

PRETORIA 11/02 TO 11/05

CAPETOWN 11/06 TO 11/10

3. PURPOSE OF VISIT: *[Provide a detailed explanation of the official business, to be conducted in each city (if more than one), requiring this country visit]*

4. EMBASSY OR FAS SUPPORT REQUIRED: *[If none, so state; otherwise, see various examples below]*

- a. LODGING: PLEASE MAKE APPROPRIATE HOTEL RESERVATIONS IN *[cities]* AND ADVISE ON RATES TO INCLUDE ALL TAXES.
- b. TRANSPORTATION: PLEASE ADVISE ON TRANSPORTATION FROM AIRPORT TO HOTEL OR OFFICE.
- c. ITINERARY: Note: For security reasons, travelers should fax specific information concerning flight numbers instead of including it in the cable.
- d. Identify and request any other support requirement, such as;
 - Request arrangements be made with security office to allow for entry into embassy of specified items and for customs clearance at airport as necessary.
 - Request arrangements with security office to allow entry of laptop PC, video camera, etc., into the Embassy offices where working/visiting.

5. SECURITY CLEARANCE: *[i.e., TOP SECRET, SECRET, NONE]*

[If clearance request is for more than one person, list persons name and respective clearance]

6. CONTACT POINTS WHILE IN COUNTRY: *[List cities, telephone numbers and persons that could reach you at that location. See examples below]*

[Pretoria - Hilton Hotel, tele #] and/or [SA Food Aid Conference, Jim Jones, tele #][Capetown - Marriott Hotel, tele #]

7. TRAVELER CONTACT POINT PRIOR TO DEPARTURE: *[Name, telephone number]*

8. EMERGENCY CONTACT AT HOME OFFICE: *[Name, telephone and fax numbers]*

When do I need a Department of State clearance?

Travel to Taiwan and China requires the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Department of State, clearance. You should contact the FAS, International Travel Section to obtain copies of the clearance forms required for travel to these countries.

Who are my diplomatic contacts when I travel internationally?

When traveling to a foreign country on official business you must comply with the following requirements regarding U.S. diplomatic contacts abroad:

- Contact foreign consular officers for information regarding any additional requirements for entry into a foreign country
- Contact the Agricultural Counselor/Attache upon arrival in the foreign country and before transacting business with officials of Foreign Governments
- Cooperate with any directions given by U.S. representatives during the visit
- Consult the American Embassy or consulate if itinerary changes after arrival in the country

Do I need security training when traveling overseas?

If you are traveling to an overseas post for temporary duty (TDY) for 30 days or more, you are required to complete overseas personal security training prior to your travel. The Department of State's Foreign Service Institute (FSI) conducts the approved four-day training class, *Serving Abroad for Families & Employees (S.A.F.E.)*. The S.A.F.E. course includes two Department of State courses, the "Security Overseas Seminar" and "Working in an Embassy." Your agency must provide the Chief of Mission certification that training will be completed prior to travel. This can be included in the country clearance cable. If time or urgency of your mission does not allow for the completion of this mandatory security training, the country clearance request should note the circumstances and request a waiver from the Chief of Mission. You can contact the Department of State, FSI Office of the Registrar for additional information.

Are there any special requirements if I am traveling to a High Risk Security Post?

Yes, all U.S. Government employees traveling overseas to certain sensitive destinations are REQUIRED to have a special briefing by the Department of State before traveling. Your International Travel Coordinator should contact the USDA's Personnel and Document Security Division, within the Office of Security Services, IMMEDIATELY upon notification of an trip to a high risk security post. The Coordinator shall indicate the country or countries that you are traveling to and they will be told if you must have this special briefing.

How do I obtain information related to Travel Warning and Advisories?

Travel Warnings and Public Advisories are available at the following Web site:
www.travel.state.gov.

Do I need a medical clearance for international Travel?

If you are going to be TDY overseas for 60 days or more then you must obtain a medical clearance. Medical appointments may be made through the Department of State Medical Unit or through your private physician if located outside the Washington, D.C. area.

What are the requirements for a Government passport?

Diplomatic, Official, and Personal passports are issued by the Department of State. FAS, as the lead Foreign Affairs Agency within USDA, has been designated as the USDA agency responsible for requesting Diplomatic and Official passports for all USDA employees.

Who needs a Government Passport?

If you are an employee who is a U.S. citizen traveling to a foreign country to conduct official business you will travel using either an Official or Diplomatic passport. *You are not permitted to use your Personal passport to travel overseas (except when traveling to Taiwan), including Canada, to conduct official Government business.*

Are there different types of passports?

Yes, *Official passports* are issued by the Department of State to employees of the U.S. Government proceeding, traveling, or on assignment abroad and have a maximum validity of five years. *Diplomatic passports* are issued to Foreign Service officers, persons in the diplomatic service, or persons who have diplomatic status either because of the nature of their foreign mission or by reason of the office they hold. Diplomatic passports also have a maximum validity of five years.

What type of passport do I use if I am traveling to Taiwan?

If you are a Government employee traveling to Taiwan, you must use a Personal Passport. If your agency pays for the Personal passport, it remains the property of the U.S. Government and the passport must be returned to the FAS International Travel Section within 5 working days after returning from the trip.

What are the prohibited uses of an Official or Diplomatic Passport?

You cannot use an Official or Diplomatic passport, in any capacity, if you are travel abroad on personal (leisure) travel or, if you are detailed to a private or international organization. The fact that your salary is still being paid by the employing agency does not constitute a reason to use an Official or Diplomatic passport.

Are there any provisional uses for Official or Diplomatic Passports?

There are 3 provisional uses for Official and Diplomatic Passports. They are:

1. If you are assigned overseas in an official capacity you may use your Official or Diplomatic passport for personal travel during your tour.
2. If you are traveling abroad on official business (TDY) you may use your Official or Diplomatic passport for Agency approved personal stops incident to the official trip.
3. If you are traveling abroad on military travel orders to countries requiring a passport. A copy of the signed military travel order must be presented to FAS, International Travel Section.

What forms are required to obtain a passport?

1. Electronic International Passport and Travel Tracking System (IPATTS)/Visa Request - this form must be completed in conjunction with the appropriate DSP form listed below. Failure to use the proper form will result in a delay in the issuance of your passport.
2. DSP-82, Application for Passport by Mail - This form should be used for renewing a previously issued U.S. passport. There are four criteria for using Form DSP-82. Use the following checklist to see if you are eligible to apply with form DSP-82:
 - I can submit my most recent passport
 - I was at least 16 years old when my most recent passport was issued
 - I was issued my most recent passport less than 15 years ago
 - I use the same name as on my recent passport, OR, I have had my name changed by marriage or court order and can submit proper documentation to reflect my name change.

If you answered NO to any of the above.....STOP! You cannot use form DSP-82!! You must apply on application form DSP-11.

The DSP-82 is available for downloading from the Web site at:

www.travel.state.gov/passport/forms/ds82/ds82_843.html.

3. DSP-11, Application for Passport - this form must be presented to and signed in person of an authorized passport agent. If you have never had a passport or if your most recent passport was lost or stolen, you must use this form. The DSP-11 can be downloaded from the Web site at: www.travel.state.gov.

What is the application process for a passport if I am in the Washington, D.C. Metro Area?

After your International Travel Coordinator submits the request through IPATTS, you must submit the following:

1. Completed, but unsigned, DSP-11, Application for Passport. (This form can be downloaded from the Web site at: www.travel.state.gov);
2. Birth evidence; and
3. Two Passport Photos.

What is the application process for a passport if I am outside the Washington, D.C. Metro Area?

You must appear in person and present a complete passport package. You can apply for a passport at many Federal and State courts, probate courts, and some post offices. More than 2500 courts and 900 post offices accept passport applications. To locate the closest facility, refer to the following Web site: <http://iafdb.travel.state.gov>.

NOTE: If you are using form DSP-11, DO NOT sign the form until instructed to do so. You must also have a form AD-121 signed by the Director, International Services Staff, attached to your passport package.

What is acceptable birth evidence?

A previous U.S. passport (if the passport is less than 15 years old use form DSP-82), or if you were in the U.S., a certified copy of your birth certificate issued by the State, city, or county of your birth. A certified copy will have a registrar's raised, embossed, impressed or multicolored seal and the date the certificate was filed. If you have neither a passport nor a certified birth certificate, submit a notice from the registrar of the State of your birth that no birth record exists. If born abroad, submit a Certificate of Naturalization, Certificate of Citizenship, Report of Birth Abroad of a U.S. Citizen, or a Certificate of Birth issued by the Department of State.

How can I request a birth record?

The Federal Government does not maintain copies of birth records of persons born in the U.S. or its Territories. Therefore, if you must obtain your birth record, you can request a copy in writing from the State vital statistics office or the city, county or other local office where the birth occurred. The addresses of all States and Territories are listed and the fees that each State or Territory charges for a copy(s) of birth records and additional information needed to obtain birth records is available on the following Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/w2w.htm>.

Are there special requirements for passport photos?

Two identical photographs are required to be attached to the passport application. Photos must be 2x2 inches in size and taken within the past six months.

For Washington, D.C.-based employees: Photos are taken daily in the International Travel Section between 9:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Appointments should be scheduled, in advance.

For field office employees: You are responsible for obtaining your own photos, which must be attached to the passport application. Photos must be clear, front view, full face, normal street

attire without a head covering (unless a signed statement is submitted indicating that the head covering is worn daily for religious or medical reasons), and/or without dark glasses, unless they are normally worn for medical reasons (a statement from a doctor must be submitted supporting this). Photos must be printed: 1) on thin paper; 2) with a white or off-white background; 3) in black and white or color, and; 4) capable of withstanding a mounting temperature of 225 degrees Fahrenheit. Photographs that are retouched so that your appearance is changed are unacceptable, as are snapshots. MOST vending machine print magazines or full-length photos are unacceptable.

When should I submit my application for a passport?

For Washington, D.C.-based employees: You must submit the required forms to obtain a new or renewal passport 15 working days prior to the date of departure. Forms submitted less than 15 working days in advance of departure will require a letter of justification for expedited handling. Travel to more than two countries or to Russia, China, or Vietnam will require additional working days.

For field office employees: You must submit the required forms to obtain a new or renewal passport 40 working days prior to the date of departure. Forms submitted less than 40 working days in advance of departure will require a letter of justification for expedited handling. Travel to more than two countries or to Russia, China, or Vietnam will require additional working days.

My passport is ready to expire - what do I need to do?

Official and Diplomatic passports issued by Department of State (DOS) are valid for 5 years from the date of issuance. If you have a passport on file which is expiring just before or during a proposed trip, you must allow adequate time for renewal. Some embassies will not put a visa in a passport which has less than six months of validity and/or less than three months of validity beyond the end of the visit to that country. Passports are the property of the U.S. Government and when they expire they must be returned to DOS for cancellation or destruction. The FAS, International Travel Section generates a report each month that lists the passports which will expire during the next 90 days which is provided to your International Travel Coordinator (ITC) notifying them of the date the designated employee's passport will expire. It is also your responsibility to take action in conjunction with your ITC to renew your passport if required.

What happens if I lose my passport or it is stolen?

Form DSP-64 is required when your passport has been lost or stolen. The information on the form should be as accurate as possible and include date and location of loss or theft. You should also document what efforts were made to recover the passport. You should indicate whether or not the loss was reported to the police and if so, the police report number. The completed form should be submitted to the FAS, International Travel Section for processing, NOT to the Department of State. The DSP-64 is available for downloading from the following Web site: www.travel.state.gov.

What should I do if I change my name?

The following Web site explains the process for a name change on your passport; however, the required forms and supporting information are to be sent to the FAS, International Travel Section instead of the Department of State (www.travel.state.gov).

Who is accountable for my passport?

Your Responsibility

In compliance with 2 CFR 51.9, a passport shall at all times remain the property of the U.S. Government and shall be returned to the Government upon demand. In order to maintain continuous accountability of the Official and Diplomatic passports, passports must be returned to the FAS, International Travel Section within 5 working days after completion of the trip for which it was used. DO NOT return your passport via a chain messenger envelope or any mail envelope as these are Government accountable documents.

International Travel Section Responsibility

The FAS, International Travel Section has been delegated the authority by the Department of State to manage procurement, execution, control, and distribution of Official and Diplomatic passports for all USDA employees. Passports are released to travelers with the understanding that all proper clearances are in order. As noted above, passports must be returned to ITS within 5 working days after completion of trip.

How do I obtain a visa?

Visa requirements are different for each country and it is recommended that you check the following Web site when making travel plans to help determine how long it may take to obtain the necessary visa(s): http://www.fas.usda.gov/admin/visa_requirements/default.asp.

The FAS, International Travel Section has no control over the timing in which foreign embassies will issue visas. Most foreign embassies require that the passport be left for at least 24 hours to obtain a visa. A number of embassies only accept visa applications and allow the pickup of visas between specified hours on specified days. Countries such as China, Russia, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, and Cuba require from 7 to 20 working days dependent on the purpose of the trip. In addition, most foreign embassies observe their country's holidays as well as U.S. holidays, which may increase the time requirements to obtain visas.

Are there any restrictions on obtaining visas?

Yes, only the FAS, International Travel Section has the signature authority to request visas. No other USDA agency, organization or individual employee is authorized to acquire visas from foreign embassies. You should not attempt to contact embassies unless asked to do so by ITS. You must not try to pick up passports/visas directly from embassies/consulates unless directed to do so by ITS. Failure to follow this requirement may jeopardize authority for the trip to occur.

APPENDIX B EMPLOYEE CHECKLIST FOR PREMIUM CLASS TRAVEL

This employee checklist provides a detailed list of the documentation required before premium class travel can be used. A separate checklist of required documentation is provided for each justification for premium class travel. The most commonly used justifications are listed first. Premium class travel is not properly authorized until documentation of both General Officer approval and documentation supporting the justification are attached to the travel authorization. Documentation can be electronically attached to authorizations in the E-Gov Travel Service systems or hardcopy documentation must be attached to a printout from the legacy TRAVEL system.

1. Premium Class Travel required to accommodate a disability or special need justification. This justification is applicable to both first and business class travel.
 - a. Was medical documentation provided to appropriate agency approver?
 - b. Does the documentation require premium class instead of two coach seats?
 - c. Is the documentation dated within the last 6 months or indicate a permanent disability?
 - d. Did the appropriate agency approver provide a statement certifying they reviewed the documentation and that premium class travel is required?
 - e. Has the statement from the agency approver been attached to the travel authorization?
 - f. Has documentation of General Officer approval been added to the travel authorization? Electronic approval by the appropriate General Officer in the travel system is acceptable documentation.

2. Flight (including layovers less than ten hours) over 14 hours justification. This justification is only applicable to business class travel.
 - a. Is the flight (start, finish or both) outside of the continental United States?
 - b. Will the traveler report for duty within 23 hours of landing?
 - c. Has documentation of the flight time and when you are reporting for duty been attached to the travel authorization?
 - d. Has documentation of General Officer approval been added to the travel authorization? Electronic approval by the appropriate General Officer in the travel system is acceptable documentation.

3. Coach seats not available justification. This justification is applicable to both first and business class travel.
 - a. Do you have documentation (system screen print or travel agent's written certification) of no coach seats?
 - b. Have you fully explained (in writing – email or note to the file is acceptable) why the trip cannot be delayed until coach seats are available?
 - c. If requesting first class, do you have a travel agent's certification that no business or coach seating is available for at least 24 hours?
 - d. Has the documentation been attached to the travel authorization? Has documentation of General Officer approval been added to the travel authorization? Electronic approval by the appropriate General Officer in the travel system is acceptable documentation.

4. Business class travel cheaper than coach justification. This justification is only applicable to business class travel.
 - a. Has a cost comparison been completed?
 - b. Does the cost comparison show business class travel being the lower cost option?
 - c. Has this documentation been attached to the travel authorization?
 - d. Has documentation of General Officer approval been added to the travel authorization? Electronic approval by the appropriate General Officer in the travel system is acceptable documentation.

5. Flight only offers premium class travel justification. This justification is only applicable to business class travel.
 - a. Do you have a statement or other documentation from the travel agent or airline documenting that only premium class travel is offered?
 - b. Has this documentation been attached to the travel authorization?
 - c. Has documentation of General Officer approval been added to the travel authorization? Electronic approval by the appropriate General Officer in the travel system is acceptable documentation.

6. Premium class required for security reasons justification. This justification is applicable to both first and business class travel.
 - a. Has documentation describing the security reasons been attached to the travel authorization?
 - b. Has documentation of General Officer approval been added to the travel authorization? Electronic approval by the appropriate General Officer in the travel system is acceptable documentation.

7. Other exceptional circumstances justification. This justification is only applicable to business class travel.
 - a. Is a Non-Federal Source funding the travel?
 - b. Has this been approved by the Office of Ethics or an Ethics Officer?
 - c. Has the approval from the from the Office of Ethics or an Ethics Officer been attached to the travel authorization?

8. Premium class needed due to sanitation issues justification. This justification is only applicable to business class travel.
 - a. Have the flight's sanitation issues been fully documented in writing?
 - b. Has the documentation been attached to the travel authorization?
 - c. Has documentation of General Officer approval been added to the travel authorization? Electronic approval by the appropriate General Officer in the travel system is acceptable documentation.

9. Premium class travel needed to support the agency's mission justification.
 - a. Has a detailed explanation of why the agency mission cannot be completed using coach seating been prepared for management's review?
 - b. Has the detailed explanation been attached to the travel authorization?
 - c. Has documentation of General Officer approval been added to the travel authorization? Electronic approval by the appropriate General Officer in the travel system is acceptable documentation.