New Honor Awards Structure
Guidance from CHCO to Agencies

Overview
The traditional USDA Honor Awards program has been redesigned. The new program emphasizes substantial and noteworthy recognition at the agency and Under Secretary levels, and awards at the Secretary’s level will focus on the most significant accomplishment in support of each of the Department’s strategic goals.

Tier 1: Agencies
Agency
Connection to Strategic Plan
Awards at this level will primarily recognize accomplishments in support of the USDA strategic goals and objectives, and the agency’s own strategic goals and objectives.

General Structure
1. The Administrators’/Chief’s Offices will define the specific criteria and parameters for the awards, and will make the award selections.
2. Selections will reflect the highest levels of achievement in support of the strategic goals and objectives.
3. Agencies will determine the number of awards given at this level.
4. Recognition for accomplishments in support of strategic goals and objectives will be designated as “Administrator’s [or Chief’s] Award” (the descriptor “Honor Award” is reserved for the Secretary’s awards).

Flexibilities
1. Agencies will determine the maximum number of team members and team leaders for these awards.
2. Agencies are encouraged to include team members from other USDA and/or external partners, such as other Federal agencies and Departments, university partners, etc.
3. Agencies may attach monetary and/or time off awards at this level.

Additional Awards
1. Administrators and Chiefs may also present awards for accomplishments or contributions that are not directly tied to strategic goals or objectives, provided the
awards recognize very substantial accomplishments and contributions that demonstrate innovation and initiative, well beyond the normal expectations of the employee(s)' positions.

2. The agency-level Federal Customer Service Awards will be presented as part of this recognition.

3. Agencies will also manage recognition of employees’ volunteer service via the President’s Volunteer Service Awards (these may be presented outside the Administrator’s awards ceremony at the agency’s discretion).

**Logistics**

1. Agencies may present the Administrator’s awards in a single ceremony, or locally, depending on their funding and logistics.

2. Agencies may enhance their ceremonies with a cake and punch-type reception.

3. Agencies may also choose to present these awards in a combined ceremony with the Under Secretary awards.

**Timeline**

Agency ceremonies will generally take place in April of each year.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 2: Under and Assistant Secretary</th>
<th>Connection to Strategic Plan</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Awards at this level will focus entirely on accomplishments in support of the USDA strategic goals and objectives.</strong></td>
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</table>

**General Structure**

1. The Office of the Secretary will determine the specific criteria for awards at this level.

2. Administrators/Chiefs will nominate significant accomplishments that were recognized at their level for the Under/Assistant Secretary’s consideration.

3. The Under and Assistant Secretaries will select 3-7 accomplishments for recognition (depending on the number of agencies and the size of the overall organization).

4. Selections will reflect the highest levels of achievement in support of the strategic goals and objectives.

5. Team awards may recognize up to 20 team members, including two team leaders.

6. Recognition will be designated as “Under [or Assistant] Secretary’s Award”.

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January 25, 2018
7. Awards at this level are honorary, and no monetary awards will be attached.

8. Awardees will receive an engraved plaque and certificate signed by the Under Secretary.

Additional Recognition

Flag recognition for employees lost in the line of duty will occur at this level.

Logistics

1. Under Secretaries will identify funding for plaques and a reception with light refreshments.

2. The Office of Human Resources Management will furnish guidance on options for the plaques to ensure general equivalency at this level.

3. Ceremony planning will be led by the Under Secretary’s office, with policy and logistical support from their respective Human Resources and Procurement offices.

4. A description of the contributions and a list of the team members being recognized will be provided to the Office of Communications to be placed on a web page at the respective Under Secretary’s level.

Timeline

These awards will generally be presented in July of each year.

Tier 3: Connection to Strategic Plan

Awards at this level will recognize the most significant accomplishments in support of USDA’s strategic goals and objectives.

General Structure

1. There will be one award for each of USDA’s strategic goals.

2. Nominations will be developed from the awards at the Under/Assistant Secretary level. The number of nominations to be considered and the selection process will be determined by the Office of the Secretary.

3. The awards will prioritize cross-agency collaboration in support of the strategic goals, and may represent the amalgamation of two or more awards granted at the Under Secretary level.

4. Up to five people may be recognized in each award (those who were most pivotal to the accomplishment; others who contributed would have been recognized at the agency and Under Secretary level).
5. Non-career SES, Schedule C employees, and Administrators/Chiefs are not eligible.

6. Awards at this level are honorary, and no monetary awards will be attached.

7. These seven awards will be designated the Secretary's Honor Awards.

Additional Recognition

Presidential Rank Awards will continue to be recognized at the Secretary's ceremony.

Logistics

1. Ceremony planning will be led by the Office of the Secretary, with policy and logistical support from the Offices of Human Resources Management, Procurement and Property Management, and Operations.

2. A description of the contributions and a list of the team members receiving the awards will be provided to the Office of Communications to be placed on a web page dedicated to the Secretary's Honor Awards.

Timeline

The ceremony will generally be around the end of October, beginning of November of each year.
SUBJECT: New Honor Awards Structure

TO: All Farm Production and Conservation Employees

Secretary Perdue has announced the new structure for the honor awards program (see attachment). The traditional honor awards program has been redesigned into a three-tier structure. All awards are honorary with no financial remuneration. The new design provides a significant amount of flexibility for leadership to tailor the Tier 1 awards to best suit the agency’s mission and culture. The new program emphasizes substantial and noteworthy recognition at the agency and Under Secretary levels. Awards at the Secretary’s level will focus on the most significant accomplishment in support of each of the Department’s seven strategic goals. The timeline for the 2018 program will be slightly compressed to allow for a shift in ceremony dates. The Tier 2 awards must be identified no later than July 31, 2018, and they may be presented after that date. This information pertains to the new honor awards structure in the Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area.

**Tier 1: Agency Level – (Administrator’s Award):**

Based on the Secretary’s guidance, the Agency Heads for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA), Risk Management Agency (RMA), and FPAC Business Center (FBC) will define specific criteria and parameters for awards, and make award selections that recognize very substantial accomplishments and contributions that demonstrate innovation and initiative that reflect the highest levels of achievement in support of the FPAC strategic goals and objectives.

Because of the time constraints associated with the announcement of the new structure, senior leaders from NRCS, FSA, RMA, and FBC will provide a comprehensive FPAC-level perspective needed to ensure consistent application of awards criteria and make recommendations for consideration at the Tier 2 level. Three to seven submissions will be considered for the Under Secretary’s Award.

**Tier 2: Under Secretary Level – (Under Secretary’s Award)**

Awards at this level will focus entirely on accomplishments in support of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) seven strategic goals and objectives. The Office of the Secretary determines the specific criteria. Winners from Tier 1 serve as nominations for this Tier. The Under Secretary will select three to seven individuals or groups for recognition. The selections will reflect the highest levels of achievement in support of the strategic goals and objectives.
Team awards may include up to 20 team members, including two team leaders. Awardees will receive an engraved plaque and certificate signed by the Under Secretary, and a description of the contributions and listing of team members being recognized will be placed on a web page at the Under Secretary’s level. These awards are intended to be presented in July of each year.

**Tier 3: Secretary Level – (USDA Honor Awards)**

Awards at this level recognize the most significant accomplishments in support of USDA’s strategic goals and objectives. There will be one award for each of USDA’s strategic goals. Nominations flow from Tier 2. The awards will prioritize cross-agency collaboration in support of the strategic goals, and may represent the amalgamation of two or more awards granted at Tier 2 (Under Secretary level). Up to five people (those who were most pivotal to the accomplishment) may be recognized in each award; others who contributed would have been recognized at the agency and Under Secretary level. Non-career, SES, Schedule C employees, and Administrators/Chiefs are not eligible. These seven awards will be designated as the Secretary’s Honor Awards. A description of the contributions and a list of the team members receiving the awards will be placed on a web page dedicated to the Secretary’s Honor Awards. The ceremony will generally be held around the beginning of November each year.

![Signature]
Bill Northey
Under Secretary
Farm Production and Conservation

Attachment

**cc:**
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Joy Harwood, Deputy Chief Operating Officer for Enterprise Services, FPAC, Washington, D.C.
Melissa Drummond, Acting Chief Human Resources Officer, FPAC, Washington, D.C.