

Basic Facts about USDA Senior Science and Technology Service

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, Public Law 107-171, Section 7219 established the Senior Scientific Research Service and authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to appoint members of the Service. The Service shall be further known as the Senior Science and Technology Service (SSTS). No more than 100 individuals may serve as members of the SSTS at any one time.

Appointments to the SSTS may be made without regard to:

- a. The provisions of title 5 U.S.C., governing appointments in the competitive service;
- b. The provisions of subchapter I of chapter 35 of title 5 U.S.C., relating to retention preference;
- c. The provisions of chapter 43 of title 5 U.S.C., relating to performance appraisal and performance actions;
- d. The provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of title 5 U.S.C., relating to classification and the General Schedule pay rates; and
- e. The provisions of chapter 75 of title 5 U.S.C., relating to adverse actions.

Other provisions of title 5 U.S.C., including certain provisions that apply to the excepted service will apply to members of the SSTS unless specifically excluded by the Secretary.

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

- (1) have conducted outstanding research in the fields of agriculture or forestry, as determined by a Qualifications Assessment Board (QAB);
- (2) have earned a doctoral level degree at an institution of higher education [as defined in section 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001)]; and
- (3) meet the qualification standards prescribed by the Office of Personnel Management for appointment to a position at GS-15 level of the General Schedule.

An individual may not be considered unless his or her qualifications have been reviewed by a QAB and has been referred for appointment to the SSTS. The QAB provides the peer review that is essential to the integrity of the selection and ongoing evaluation, as appropriate, of SSTS candidates.

The rate of pay shall not be less than the minimum rate payable for a GS-15 and not more than Level I of the Executive Schedule, unless a higher rate is approved by the President. Annual adjustments to pay rates will be made effective on the first day of the first pay period on or after January 1 of each calendar year. Eligibility to receive a base salary increase will be based on a performance rating of Fully Successful or above.

USDA's SSTS performance evaluation system was established to encourage excellence in performance and ensure consistency and fairness in rating and rewarding performance for members of the SSTS. Performance plans are required for all members of the SSTS.