

## Ensuring Accountability for Liability Findings Against the USDA

USDA takes complaints of discrimination very seriously. As a testament to this, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration has established an Equal Opportunity Accountability Unit. This is the direct result of Secretary Vilsack's commitment to a zero tolerance for discrimination policy in response to the information personnel shared at the listening sessions.

The EO Accountability Unit, which is part of the Office of Human Resources Management reviews all settlement agreements and decisions finding liability against the Department,

whether they are individual, employee, or program complaints of discrimination. Employees can rest assured that USDA leaders are committed to fostering a workplace free from all forms of unlawful discrimination- where employees can feel safe performing the important duties they are charged with each and every day.

Under this initiative, agencies are now required to forward copies of all settlement agreements or decisions in which there is a finding of liability against the USDA. This includes copies of all Reports of Investigation or Fact Finding Reports drafted as a

result of personnel misconduct investigations, which touch on or concern allegations of discriminatory conduct.

The EO Accountability Unit is analyzing every action—or inaction—leading to the determination of agency liability. Agency personnel at all levels including employees, supervisors, managers, and executives whose actions or inactions are determined to have resulted in the finding of liability against the agency are being held responsible and accountable for their actions or inactions.

To date, disciplinary and adverse actions have been initiated, including training, in all cases where we have concluded the action or inactions of personnel contributed to the liability against the Department.



## Improving Recruitment & Retention Through the Veterans Employment Program

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On November 9, 2009 the President signed an executive order to enhance employment opportunities for veterans in the Federal workforce. In response, the USDA Veterans' Employment Manager, David Dissinger, wrote an operational plan focusing on four goals: establishing a structure dedicated to employing veterans; providing employment counseling and skills training to transitioning service members; implementing a marketing campaign to inform veterans about opportunities at USDA; and building a mechanism to provide timely employment information and resources to veterans.

Because USDA's percentage of veteran new hires is below 10%, the Department is in-

creasing its total new hires of veterans by 5-6 percentage points and increasing the number of disabled veterans by 2 - 3 percentage points. Dissinger says the Department is beginning to see the numbers go up. "In the past year, USDA has seen a 1.2 percent increase in the number of veterans hired and a 0.8 percent increase in the number of disabled veterans hired. That's an improvement, and with the new Veteran's Employment Program underway, we're committed to moving those figures much higher."

Dissinger says future plans include taking advantage of Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs training programs targeting recruitment

efforts to fill high-demand and high-turnover jobs with veterans, increasing use of non-competitive hiring authorities for veterans and disabled veterans, and developing an effective marketing strategy showing USDA to be the employer of choice for veterans, transitioning service members and their families.

