

United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources Conservation Service  
210 Walnut Street, Room 693  
Des Moines, IA 50309-2180

September 6, 2013

IOWA BULLETIN NO. IA360-13-29

SUBJECT: PER – FISCAL YEAR (FY) 2013 PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS AND 2014  
PERFORMANCE PLANS

**ACTION BY: OCTOBER 4, 2013  
OCTOBER 9, 2013  
OCTOBER 11, 2013  
OCTOBER 14, 2013  
OCTOBER 15, 2013  
OCTOBER 16, 2013  
OCTOBER 22, 2013  
OCTOBER 25, 2013  
OCTOBER 28, 2013**

**PURPOSE.** To provide guidance and information about closing out Fiscal Year 2013 performance appraisals and to provide guidance for setting up Fiscal Year 2014 performance plans.

**EXPIRATION DATE.** September 30, 2014

All NRCS employees' current Performance Appraisal Plans have been aligned to the NRCS Strategic Plan. A great deal of effort has been expended to ensure that performance goals cascade from the goals established for the Senior Executive Service (SES) employees to all employees at each level of the agency. In addition, we have ensured that all performance plans contain standards that are specific, measurable, aligned, realistic/relevant, and time-bound, also referred to as SMART.

It is now time to rate our employees' performance by completing the summary appraisals for FY2013. To assist you in preparing for and conducting your appraisals, the following tools and resources may be found on the [NRCS People SharePoint site](#). I encourage you to take a look at these if you have not already done so.

- Checklist for Completing the Rating of Record
- Conducting, Determining and Processing the Rating of Record
- Step by Step Instructions on the EmpowHR Rating of Record Process
- Steps for Conducting the Rating of Record
- Steps for Preparing for the Rating of Record
- Tips for Giving Effective Feedback
- Tips for Processing the Rating of Record in EmpowHR
- Tips for Recognizing Rater Bias
- Tips for Writing Performance Narratives

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## FY2013 Performance Appraisal Cycle:

The rating period for most employees is October 1, 2012 through September 30, 2013.

## FY2013 Performance Appraisal Year-end Processing:

To close out the FY2013 Performance Appraisal Cycle, Rating Officials (supervisors) will need to review their employees' current performance plans that have been established in EmpowHR.

Every employee will need to have an electronic NRCS Form AD-435, Performance Appraisal, and NRCS Forms AD-435A and AD-435B, Performance Plan Worksheet. Performance discussions should be held with employees during the month of September. Final summary ratings should not be conveyed to the employee, nor should they be entered into the EmpowHR system prior to October 1, 2013. All employees should receive a narrative response from their supervisor for each element of their performance plans which will be recorded in the block for Accomplishments. The Rating Official (supervisor) must have this completed by October 4, 2013. ***Again, ratings may not be communicated to employees prior to approval by the Reviewing Official.*** Reviewing Officials will complete their reviews by October 9, 2013. Once the Reviewing Official signs off in EmpowHR, the employees will receive notice that their performance appraisal is available for review and approval. Because of this, it is important that the supervisor have open discussions with their employees about their performance before the rating has been determined. Documentation is required for each element, but it must be especially thorough for those in which the employee receives a rating of "Exceeds Fully Successful" or "Does Not Meet Fully Successful." Documentation must show how the employee's performance exceeded or failed to meet the fully successful standard.

*In the past, Iowa had chosen to have the Reviewing Officials for some occupational disciplines be someone other than the second level supervisor. That will no longer be the case. All performance appraisals will be entered into the EmpowHR system and will flow to the second level supervisor of record for review.*

The employees' review of their appraisals must be completed by October 11, 2013.

This means that employees *must review the rating and complete EmpowHR processing by checking off in the "Employee Box" that they have "viewed and discussed" or "refused rating" and then hit the "save button" by the due date.*

To meet this performance review due date, the following timeline must be followed:

Timeline (due date)	Action	Responsible Employee
September	Collect employee performance data	Supervisor (Rater)
September	Meet with employee to discuss performance	Supervisor and Employee
October 4, 2013	Enter Summary Rating in EmpowHR (cannot enter prior to Oct 1)	Supervisor (Rater)
October 9, 2013	Complete review of Summary Ratings	Second Level Supervisor (Reviewer)
October 11, 2013	Review Summary Rating in EmpowHR Mark as reviewed and hit "Save"	Employee
October 14, 2013	Review EmpowHR to ensure all signatures are in place on subordinate employee Performance Appraisals	Supervisor (Rater) (see Example A)

## There are five possible summary rating levels:

**Outstanding** – *performance of very high quality.* Employee produces *exceptionally* high quality work; employee produces work that is *significantly* ahead of established schedules or deadlines, and employee completes work with little or no supervision. Performance for each element exceeds the "Fully Successful Level."

**Superior** – *performance of unusually good or excellent quality.* Employee produces high quality and/or quantity of work ahead of established schedules or deadlines and with less than normal supervision.

**Fully Successful** – *performance is of good quality.* Employee produces the expected quantity and/or quality of work and meets deadlines or schedules for completion of work.

**Marginal** – *performance needs improvement to achieve the “Meets Fully Successful” level.* Employee demonstrates the need for close supervisory review, discussion, and/or correction of work products. Performance does not require that an Opportunity to Improve (OTI) be issued.

**Unacceptable** – *performance fails to meet established “Meets Fully Successful” performance standards in one or more critical elements of the employee’s position. Corrective action is necessary.* An OTI must be initiated.

Prior to Rating Officials assigning a summary rating level of “Unacceptable,” they should contact the Human Resources Officer immediately through the proper supervisory chain. The Human Resources Officer will provide guidance on appropriate action to be taken.

Multiple Appraisals: Performance discussions and ratings should occur at the time of each position change or supervisory change if the employee has served under standards for the minimum appraised period (90 days). This rating must be provided to the gaining supervisor to be considered at the time the rating of record is issued.

### 1) Supervisory Change

The rating official is the employee’s supervisor of record or acting supervisor at the end of the performance appraisal period. There is **no minimum time period for the supervisor to have been in the position before becoming the rating official.** If the rating official has not supervised the employee for the full appraisal period, the rating official should assign a rating of record that takes into consideration interim reviews, mid-year progress reviews and feedback from previous supervisors for the appropriate time period. The supervisor of record is responsible for preparing the final rating of record.

**Departing Supervisor** - Discuss the employee’s performance with the employee, prepare feedback comments on the employee's performance in an interim appraisal with an advisory rating, and forward them to the new supervisor and local Human Resources servicing office.

**Current Supervisor** - Prepare the rating of record; collect and include input on the employee from previous supervisors, including interim performance appraisals. The current supervisor should make every effort possible to obtain input from the departing supervisor for inclusion in the rating of record.

### 2) Position and Supervisory Change

When an employee who has occupied a position for at least 90 days leaves that position, the former supervisor or rating official should prepare an interim appraisal (advisory rating) of the employee's performance and forward it to the new supervisor/rating official.

### 3) Position Change without a Supervisory Change

When an employee changes position but retains the same supervisor (e.g., the employee was promoted or reassigned within the same organization), the supervisor must prepare written documentation of the employee's performance. This information must be considered in the employee’s rating of record.

#### 4) Details and/or Temporary Promotions.

For an employee on a detail and/or a temporary promotion at the end of the appraisal period, the supervisor of record is responsible for the rating of record, with input and consideration from interim performance appraisals, mid-year progress reviews, and other persons who have supervised the employee during the appraisal period.

#### Establishing Performance Plans for FY2014:

The rating period for most employees is October 1, 2013 through September 30, 2014.

Performance Plans are documents that should be periodically changed and improved to reflect changes in agency goals and objectives. I have not yet received a copy of the State Conservationist's Performance Plan for FY2014, however, I anticipate receiving it soon. I will provide guidance that will ensure that performance goals cascade from the State Conservationist's Performance Plan to all members of the state's Leadership Team (LT). Once that is completed the LT members will cascade performance goals to their employees. The LT is also working to update the generic performance plans for use by supervisors and managers in Iowa. Employees will be provided additional notification when this process is completed and ready to use. In order to ensure that FY2014 Performance Plans are in place by the national deadline of October 30, 2013, the following timeline must be followed:

Timeline (due date)	Action	Responsible Employee
October 16, 2013	FY2014 Performance Plans input into EmpowHR	Supervisor (Rater)
October 22, 2013	Complete Review of FY2014 Performance Plans	Second Level Supervisor (Reviewer)
October 25, 2013	Employee reviews Performance Plan in EmpowHR. Mark as reviewed and hit "Save"	Employee
October 28, 2013	Review EmpowHR to ensure all signatures are in place on subordinate employee FY2014 Performance Plan	Supervisor (Rater)

In addition, National Bulletin 360-13-22, PER – Performance Planning for Fiscal Year 2014, dated August 22, 2013, provides specific guidance that we will use in preparing our FY2014 performance plans. Please note that all employees' must now have measurable standards for "Safety and Health" and "Ethics."

#### Summary

Each employee must have a completed appraisal in place as of October 11, 2013. Each Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations will certify to me by noon on Tuesday, October 15, 2013, completion of this task within his/her Area. Each employees must have a completed FY2014 Performance Plan in place by October 25, 2013.

**NOTE:** A spot review of Iowa employees' performance appraisals showed that one of the most common problems was that employees did not finalize their performance appraisal. Employees must check the block that indicates they have reviewed and provided any comments on the performance appraisal (with supervisory comments and summary rating). **They must hit "save" at the bottom in order to have their electronic signature recorded.**

Jay T. Mar  
State Conservationist

Enclosure

Example A: The following is an example of how a completed appraisal will show in EmpowHR (with all signatures).

**Summary Rating** | **Elements and Standards**

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EmpID:

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Performance Plan Start Date: 10/01/2011      Next Performance Plan By: 10/01/2012  
Performance Plan End Date: 09/30/2012      Perf Plan Reviewed Date: 10/30/2012  
Review Type: Summary Rating      Summary Rating:

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**Employment info when plan was established**

Rating Scale: H      5 Tier Performance      Dept: 914556      Management Staff  
Agency: AG      16      NRCS      Position:      Pay Plan:  
Job Code:

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Supervisor: [dropdown]      KNUDSEN,CHRISTOPHER E      [Save Draft](#)      [Create Printable Form](#)  
\*Eval Type: Supervisor  
Reviewer  
Comments:  
[Add More Comments](#)

All three of the se blocks must be checked and a date must be shown. If not have the appropriate person go back into EmpowHR and ensure they have checked off on the appraisal and hit save.

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<b>Employee</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Viewed/Discussed      10/30/2012 <input type="checkbox"/> Refused Rating	<b>Supervisor</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Created Review/Rating 10/30/2012	<b>Reviewer</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concurred Rating 10/30/2012
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