

For: FSA Offices

**Extending Temporary Key Program Technician (KPT) Pilot Program**

Approved by: Administrator



**1 Overview**

**A Background**

Notice PM-2783 established CO-8 KPT positions for a 1-year pilot program. KPT's established serve as the program expert for 2 or more commodity program areas for their assigned County Offices within their assigned district(s). KPT positions provide a central resource for program expert guidance, coordination, and assistance at the County Office level with district(s)-wide collaboration for assigned programs. States that participated in the pilot program provided DAFO with an evaluation of the effectiveness of the KPT position. The KPT position was evaluated as having been very effective and the overwhelming recommendation from the participating States was to continue the KPT position. Approximately 50 percent of the participating States wanted to extend the pilot program for an additional year, and 50 percent recommended making the KPT position permanent, with only 1 State reporting no intention to continue to use the KPT position. A large percentage of the participating States also requested that the pilot program be expanded, allowing an increase in the number of KPT positions that could be established, as warranted.

The decision has been made to extend the existing pilot program for an additional year, pending further evaluation after the new farm bill provisions are known and any potential office consolidations are completed. States that are not currently participating have another window in which they may request to participate.

**B Purpose**

This notice provides:

- notification of the determination to extend the pilot program for another 1-year period
- policies and procedures for extending or establishing KPT's positions
- guidance for filling and using KPT positions.

**Note:** These KPT positions will remain or be filled by **temporary promotion** during the additional 1-year trial period. The KPT position will be evaluated at the end of the trial period to determine the effectiveness and benefit of the KPT position.

<b>Disposal Date</b>	<b>Distribution</b>
August 1, 2012 2-28-12	All FSA Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices

## Notice PM-2849

### 2 Extended Trial Period and Process Procedures

#### A Length of Extended Trial Period

The trial period is being extend 1 additional year and is valid through July 2013.

States **must** notify DAFO and HRD by **March 9, 2012**, if they have extended the temporary promotions of existing KPT's for the additional 1-year period.

To establish new KPT positions, State Offices **must** notify DAFO and HRD by **April 30, 2012**. To establish a new KPT, DAFO approval is **required**. This applies if States lost their KPT during the first year and did not refill, or if they intend to begin participation in the extended KPT trial period by establishing new KPT's.

E-mail notification and approval is acceptable and must be submitted to both the following:

- [barbara.boyd@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:barbara.boyd@wdc.usda.gov)
- [lori.owens@tx.usda.gov](mailto:lori.owens@tx.usda.gov).

#### B Extending Existing KPT Temporary Promotions

Each existing KPT position was filled as a temporary promotion, not-to-exceed 1 year. The temporary promotions for existing KPT's may be extended for an additional 1-year period without further competition.

#### C Recruitment Process for New KPT's

Each KPT position **must** be filled as a temporary promotion, not-to-exceed 1 year. For new KPT positions, all:

- vacancy announcements **must** open by **May 15, 2012**
- selections **must** be effective by **June 30, 2012**.

All KPT positions shall:

- be filled using merit selection principles and EEO guidelines
- be filled within current ceiling and budget
- continue to be headquartered at the employee's current County Office.

### 3 Filling KPT Vacancies

#### A Establishing KPT Positions

State Offices are **not** required to establish KPT positions; using the KPT position is at management's discretion. FSA has determined that all KPT positions established will be at the CO-08 KPT position level **only**. For the extended trial period, State may have 1 KPT position; however, States with 8 or more districts may have up to 2 KPT positions.

**Note:** All KPT positions **must** be filled within established ceilings and budgets for the State.

#### B Advertising KPT Vacancies

After receiving approval from DAFO to establish any new KPT positions, State Offices shall request a vacancy for the KPT temporary promotion positions to be posted to USAJOBS by adding the request to the County Office Vacancy Request Tracker found on the DAFO sharepoint at

**<https://fsa.sc.gov.usda.gov/mgr/DAFO/Lists/County%20Office%20Vacancy%20Request%20Tracker/AllItems.aspx>**

The area of consideration will be for current full-time permanent County Office employees **only**. State Offices must notify each County Office of the vacancy, including the USAJOBS vacancy number by e-mail when the vacancy has posted.

**Note:** The e-mail can include a link to the USAJOBS vacancy announcement.

#### C Application Review Process

An interview panel shall be established to review applicants. The membership shall include CED's who do not supervise any of the applicants, DD, and any others deemed appropriate as panel members. The panel shall provide their recommendations to SED. SED's will make the selections.

### 4 Actions After Selection

#### A MOU's

All selected applicants and applicable approving officials are **required** to sign an MOU **before** the official start date of the temporary promotion to document the nature of the temporary promotion (Exhibit 1). SED's will send MOU to DAFO after all other signatures are obtained.

**4 Actions After Selection (Continued)**

**B Performance Element**

A specific performance element about the duties of the KPT position will be added to the performance plan for all selected KPT's (Exhibit 2).

**C Position Description (PD)**

An example PD (Exhibit 3) is provided for KPT activities; additional duties from existing PD related to KPT's specific work in the local County Office may be added.

**D Communications**

Ensure that expectations and methods of communication between applicable State Office employees and KPT's are established and communicated to have effective collaboration.

**E Evaluation Feedback**

Feedback from PT's and CED's who receive assistance from KPT's is needed for the supervisory CED to evaluate the success and workload demands of the employees in KPT positions. An example evaluation sheet is provided in Exhibit 4. This evaluation should be completed and provided to the supervisory CED after receiving assistance from KPT. If routine and regular assistance is received, then a monthly or quarterly evaluation may be sent, rather than sending an evaluation for each instance of contact. Evaluations may be transmitted by e-mail or FAX, an original signature is **not** required.

**F Terminating KPT Temporary Promotions**

KPT positions are **not** temporary appointments, they are temporary promotions. The employees selected for KPT positions retain permanent status. KPT's will be returned to their original PT position of record at the end of the trial period. The temporary promotion does **not** entitle the employee to grade retention or pay retention. Unless the temporary promotion is extended beyond 1 year, highest previous rate will **not** apply when setting the step when returning to their former PT position. The employee returns to the grade and step they were in before the temporary promotion. If a within-grade step increase was due during the period the employee was on the temporary promotion, then they return to the step they would have held had they **not** received the temporary promotion.

**Temporary KPT Positions**

All selected applicants and applicable approving officials shall sign the following MOU **before** the official start date of the temporary promotion to document the nature of the temporary promotion.

**Memorandum of Understanding**

The following named employee will be given a temporary promotion to a higher grade as a Key Program Technician, CO-08, by the USDA, Farm Service Agency (FSA). FSA will process an SF-52, Request for Personnel Action, effective \_\_\_\_\_ and; thereby, pay this employee for the duration of the competitive temporary promotion. The action will not exceed one year and will end with an SF-52 for change to lower grade processed by FSA. However, an agreement could be reached to terminate the temporary action at an earlier date or to extend for an additional year. Extending the appointment must be a mutual agreement between the employee, their supervisor, the Deputy Administrator for Field Operations, and the Human Resources Division.

It is understood that at the end of this temporary action, the employee will be returned to their permanent position at the same grade and tenure in the same FSA County Office with any increases that would have been received if not temporarily promoted. The signed copy (scanned) of this MOU and all SF-50's will be placed in the employee's electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Program Technician  
Farm Service Agency

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
County Executive Director  
Farm Service Agency

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
District Director  
Farm Service Agency

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State Executive Director  
Farm Service Agency

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Performance Element**

The following specific performance element shall be added to the performance plan for all selected KPT's.

<b>Non-Critical Element</b>	<b>Individual Program Contributions to the State</b>
	<p>ELEMENT: This employee serves as an initial contact point for Program Technicians within the State for resolving operational and policy program questions and problems in their assigned program areas. Develops and contributes creative ideas and solutions to program operations and/or issues resulting in added value to the State's products and services. Works with County and State Office coworkers to appropriately implement decisions. Collaborates with Program Technicians throughout assigned County Offices to ensure consistency with programs' execution. Willingly accepts and acts on constructive criticism.</p>
	<p>STANDARDS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Regularly cooperates with coworkers and others in meeting commitments and accomplishing assigned work on time; such as, sharing information freely with no more than one to two exceptions.</li> <li>2. Responds constructively to feedback within 24 hours, seeking ways to improve with no more than one to two exceptions.</li> <li>3. Updates records that affect other programs in the office within timeframes established by management with no more than one to three exceptions.</li> <li>4. Monthly initiates contact with County Executive Directors of assigned County Offices to proactively assess programs' status with no more than one to two exceptions.</li> <li>5. Fosters productive and cooperative working relationships by showing understanding, courtesy, tact, and politeness to others with no more than one to two valid complaints.</li> </ol> <p><b>Note:</b> Zero exceptions alone for these standards does not mean that you "exceed fully successful" for this element. In order to obtain "exceeds fully successful" for this element, there must be additional supporting evidence that shows you excelled beyond the fully successful requirements.</p> <p>RESULTS: The achievement of these standards will result in increased cooperation and cross training between employees fostering a harmonious and productive work environment. This aligns with "Crosscutting Management Objectives Supporting FSA Strategic Goals".</p>

PD

The following example PD is provided for KPT activities; additional duties from existing PD that are related to KPT’s specific work in the local County Office may be added.

**Title:** Key Program Technician

**Grade:** CO-8

A. INTRODUCTION

Five to thirty percent of the time, the incumbent provides assistance to multiple County Offices by serving as the initial contact point for Program Technicians within the State resolving operational and policy program questions and problems. In addition, the incumbent serves as a program expert for two or more programs. This is the full performance level of the position. The position is FLSA nonexempt.

B. MAJOR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Receives, researches, and responds to assigned programs policy and operational problems, questions and issues originating in assigned County Office in the State. Such matters may include, but are not limited to, those involving program policies and legal, regulatory or policy requirements; contracts and other program documents and forms; program calculations and payments; GIS issues; and automated procedures ranging from those related to major software releases to individual error messages.

Identifies specific nature of problem or question and determines appropriate action to effect problem/question resolution. Provides clarification of handbook materials and detailed instructions for completing specific tasks. Issues verbal or written instruction and guidance and follows up to assure problems were correctly resolved. Keeps appropriate officials informed of problems and questions received as well as solutions provided. Refers questions for which an answer cannot be found to the County Executive Director, District Director, or appropriate State Office specialist.

Promotes consistent and uniform program interpretation and operations within the State. Issues e mails to Program Technicians within the State to provide guidance on commonly recurring questions, citing handbook references when available. Conducts conference calls with Program Technicians within the State to share questions, comments and concerns. As needed, travels to other County Offices to provide assistance with complex problems and hands-on training.

Interprets and applies draft procedures. Determines actions needed for implementation when final procedures are issued. Participates with State Office specialists in developing and testing operating instructions, State notices, checklist and similar issuances. Recommends changes to clarify instructions, identifies better ways to accomplish program tasks and assures consistency of operations. Notifies appropriate officials of repetitive or recurring problems. Consults with State Office specialists to resolve conflicts between program notices and handbooks based upon personal experience and problems and questions referred by others.

## PD (Continued)

Serves as the training specialist for assigned programs within the assigned County Offices in the State. Leads training sessions and/or travels to specific County Offices to provide onsite training. Recommends training for new procedures and for refresher courses. Maintains awareness of knowledge and experience levels of Program Technicians in the State so as to provide guidance and assistance and to assess training needs.

Performs other duties as assigned.

**C. EEO AND CIVIL RIGHTS RESPONSIBILITIES**

The employee is responsible for knowing and supporting equal opportunity and civil rights policies; performing assigned duties in full compliance with the letter and spirit of equal opportunity and civil rights laws and regulations; ensuring bias-free written and oral communications; and respecting and valuing differences of other employees and clients.

**D. SUPERVISION RECEIVED**

Assignments outside the incumbent's headquarters County Office are coordinated with the County Executive Director, who keeps the District Director informed on issues of district-wide concern. Because one of the major objectives of the position is to provide assistance to multiple County Offices by responding to technical program issues, the employee works with a high degree of independence, setting assignment priorities, exercising judgment and initiative to research and respond to problems and questions, and referring to a higher level only those matters which are unusually complex.

**E. KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED**

The work requires thorough knowledge of assigned programs policies and regulations, operating procedures and precedents and skill in applying this knowledge to a wide variety of complex problems and issues referred by Program Technicians within the State. Such knowledge may have been gained through additional training and/or extensive practical experience in the assigned program areas. The incumbent must have the knowledge and skills to accurately identify the nature of problems presented, conduct necessary research to determine the appropriate means for resolving the problems and communicate the necessary procedures for problem resolutions to Program Technicians with varying levels of expertise.

The incumbent must also have excellent communication skills to work with State Office Specialists and to provide training to Program Technicians within the State.

**Example Evaluation Sheet**

The following example evaluation sheet is a method for receiving feedback from PT's and CED's who receive assistance from KPT's. This information is needed for the supervisory CED to evaluate the success and workload demands of the KPT positions.

Mail, e-mail, or FAX to the supervisory CED of KPT's headquarters County Office.

<b><u>Key Program Technician Evaluation</u></b>						
Key Program Technician name: _____						
County Office from: _____						
Who (individual or group) helping: _____						
At which County Office: _____						
Why requested KPT: _____						
_____						
_____						
_____						
When (date) and how long (days/hours) worked together: _____						
Please circle to indicate if the help was: <span style="margin-left: 100px;">In Person</span> <span style="margin-left: 50px;">or</span> <span style="margin-left: 50px;">By Phone</span>						
On a scale of one (1) to five (5), please rate the following. One indicates complete disagreement with the statement as situation not addressed, two is dissatisfied, three is acceptable, four is fulfilled/addresses issue, and five is excelled.						
Problem/Confusion Addressed	1	2	3	4	5	
Adequate Time Spent	1	2	3	4	5	
Clear Communication	1	2	3	4	5	
Came Prepared	1	2	3	4	5	
Preparatory Conversation (before onsite)	N/A	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of Topic	1	2	3	4	5	
Did the Key Program Technician check-back 2-5 days later to ensure that they were understood and/or issue was resolved? <span style="margin-left: 150px;">Yes</span> <span style="margin-left: 50px;">or</span> <span style="margin-left: 50px;">No</span>						
Any other comments regarding this Key Program Technician and their expert knowledge and/or guidance: _____						
_____						
_____						
_____						

Example Evaluation Sheet (Continued)

Comments/Suggestions regarding the Key Program Technician position trial in general:

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Program Technician  
Farm Service Agency

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
County Executive Director  
Farm Service Agency

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date