



PERSONAL SERVICES QUESTIONS – 2007 SESSION

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

1. Has the agency implemented a broad band pay plan, agency-wide or for selected jobs?

No.

If so, when was it implemented and what were the estimated cost increases in the year of implementation?

n/a

How were these costs funded (by holding vacant positions open, appropriations for other purposes that were unexpected, etc.)?

n/a

2. At what percentage of market are new employees paid?

Our Agency, currently under pay plan 060, pays employees new to state government the minimum rate for the grade of the position being filled. Given the fact that many job openings have resulted in recruitment and retention challenges, we have paid up to market.

How do employees progress to market rate for their position?

Advancement avenues for an employee are limited to:

- (1) Legislative Increases; and*
- (2) Retention Exceptions approved by the Director.*

What is the agency's target percent of market?

Our target minimum percent of market for the broad band pay plan will be at least 80% for all employees.

What is the agency average percent of market in FY2006?

91.79%. Over 50% of our Agency's employees have been employed in state government for more than 5 years and of those, over 25% have been employed for over 10 years. These long term employees have progressed to market or beyond and therefore bring the agency's overall average up.

3. Did the agency have vacant positions for a significant portion (6 months or more) of FY 2006?

Yes.

If yes, how many and why were these vacant?

Two, not counting our temporary hail, state grain lab, and commodity inspectors who are hired to meet peak seasonal workload demands and traditionally work less than six months in any fiscal year.

One permanent full-time chemical technician position was open for more than six months. A long time employee left the Bozeman Analytical Laboratory for more dollars in the private sector. We then experienced recruiting and selection issues due to the high cost of living in the Bozeman area, pay inequities, and competition for chemists in the Bozeman area.

A vacant position in the Agricultural Development Division for the Agricultural Statistics Service had been open for over a year due to reduced workload and the need for vacancy savings. It was determined that this position would better serve the Agency if moved to the Central Services Division to hire a human resource officer.

How did vacancies impact agency operations?

Existing lab staff put in the additional hours necessary to meet established deadlines and workload protocols. Turnover increased, morale was low, potential new hires were not willing to accept our posted entry salary and bringing new hires in at over entry level was not an option because of low salaries for existing staff. To restore stability in the lab workforce, we requested and received a multi-position pay plan exception for all Chemist positions, in October 2006.

Due to the limited number of employees in the Agency, our supervisors are actually hands on scientists who spend hours on the road and in the field. They found personnel issues to be extremely time consuming. In July of 2006, we hired a human resource officer to provide guidance and assistance. She is available to address critical functions in a timely manner including recruitment, safety, classifications, performance appraisals, training, union issues, and the conversion and ongoing maintenance that will be required as we move to the broad band pay plan.

4. Did the agency have authorized pay exceptions for pay plan 060 positions?

Yes.

If yes, why?

Retention of experienced employees.

5. Did the agency have authorized position upgrades or downgrades for pay plan 060 positions?

Yes, six reclassification upgrades were authorized and no, the Agency did not have any downgrades.

If yes, why?

One of two reasons:

(1) A change in duties initiated by the Agency based on current business needs; and

(2) At the employee's request if he/she felt the position description did not accurately reflect current duties.

6. What challenges does the agency face in recruiting and retaining staff?

Recruiting:

- 1. Attracting a qualified pool of applicants due to;*
- 2. Pay.*

Retention:

- 1. Existing state employees find it much easier to move to other agencies for much higher pay; and*
- 2. We provide an excellent training ground for other agencies.*

What actions has the agency taken to address recruitment and retention issues?

Recruitment:

- 1. We have greatly expanded our contact base for position openings by providing agricultural organizations, tribal councils, colleges, universities, and technical schools with job posting notices;*
- 2. We review all positions prior to posting to ensure that we are not inadvertently missing potentially qualified applicants by setting the minimum requirements too high;*
- 3. We are offering more training assignments;*
- 4. We have expanded our recruiting efforts to include the web, newsletters, and career fairs; and*
- 5. In order to mitigate recruitment problems, we have authorized individual pay plan exceptions that have enabled the Agency to set starting salaries for individual positions within a range from the entry rate to the market rate for the applicable grade level.*

Retention:

- 1. We strive to offer our employees a professional, productive, challenging, and team orientated environment where we work daily to protect producers and consumers, and to enhance and develop agriculture and allied industries.*

Is the agency competing with other state agencies or the public sector for staff?

Both. Our employees are well educated and experienced in business, agronomy, and animal science. We provide a training ground for federal, state, and local agencies, as well as agricultural industries across the state of Montana.

7. Are agency staff members represented by collective bargaining units?

Yes.

How many of the agency staff are impacted by collective bargaining unit agreements?

69 MPEA union positions or 70% of all permanent positions.

What provisions are included in bargaining unit agreements?

All wage increases must be negotiated.

Methods used in determining pay-for-performance must be negotiated.

How often are those agreements negotiated?

Every two years coinciding with the legislative biennium calendar (FY 2005-2007; FY 2008-2010; etc.).