



Executive Summary

With overall job satisfaction at 49%, ARS is below the national and industry norms and well below the recommended target level (65%) for an engaged workforce. The survey results indicate that this score is due to a mixture of positive responses in some areas that are being counterbalanced by lower scores in others. Additionally, in both areas of its strengths and weaknesses, there is some variation in scores among employee groups along the lines of gender, ethnicity and disability status. This suggests that not only does ARS need to build on its strengths and address its weaknesses, it needs to make sure that any improvements are experienced by all employees.

The work itself is a major positive element for ARS, as most employees feel their work is respected (62%), interesting (89%) and challenging (86%). Views of the organization's immediate supervisors tend to be positive (63%), although scores are less strong for higher management levels. These favorable ratings are supported by employees' own comments, many of which feature positive statements about the value and enjoyment of ARS' work.

In contrast, ARS receives relatively weak ratings in a number of areas relating to its policies, practices and day-to-day work environment. The organization is below the U.S. and industry norms in terms of its effectiveness of communications (23%), in having well-defined job roles (60%), offering opportunities for advancement (24%), in reward and recognition (26%) and in training and development opportunities (31%). Write-in comments support these quantitative findings, painting a picture of an organization that is highly bureaucratic, and that many employees view as offering little or no room for advancement. Workloads are also especially heavy, which likely contributes to at least some feeling of dissatisfaction among employees.

Not surprisingly, the Loyalty Matrix analysis reveals that the organization has far too many *Dissatisfied Compromisers* (36%), employees who are not happy with their jobs but who nevertheless intend to stay. Open-ended responses show that many of these employees feel trapped, unable to move up and without reasonable prospects of a similar job elsewhere. Employees with these feelings tend to lower the organization's productivity and negatively impact the morale of those around them.

The issues that are impacting overall satisfaction levels at ARS are, for a number of measures, somewhat worse among women, employees of color and those with disabilities. In addition, while ARS' diversity efforts achieve positive scores overall, employees in these groups are generally less certain that the diversity efforts are effective or that policies and promotional opportunities are administered fairly.

A correlation analysis of the factors that drive job satisfaction at ARS, combined with the comments made by employees, do not suggest that discrimination is the primary source of the organization's lower-than-desirable employee scores. Rather, it appears that the organization's systemic issues of lack of training, poor advancement opportunities, weak communication and limited rewards and recognition may be more keenly felt by these groups, while still being felt by most employees. Even though ARS should address any instances of bias and should take steps to make sure all Agency policies are fairly administered, taking action to correct the organization's more fundamental problems should, in turn, help alleviate these issues among underrepresented groups as well.

The following slides list some specific actions that ARS may wish to consider to improve overall employee satisfaction and engagement.

Areas of Opportunities—Culture

- All levels of management have room to improve in terms of better two-way communications, improving rewards and recognition programs, increasing training opportunities and supporting employees' career development.

Senior Management

- Make sure any programs to address fundamental organizational issues are implemented and administered fairly across the Agency.
- Commit to creating a culture of employee recognition, with effective use of both formal and informal methods of acknowledgment and reward.
- Seek ways to better manage employee workloads.
- Take action to ensure that ARS provides all employees with the opportunity to develop and use their full expertise toward meeting the Agency's goals by championing the development of effective and realistic career paths and by encouraging promotion from within the Agency when possible.

Manager's Manager

- Improve efforts to recognize employees and to encourage their career development.

Immediate Supervisors

- Where needed, encourage additional training and support for better managerial and interpersonal skills, including more effective use of IDPs.
- Make sure all employees have well-defined jobs roles and coaching and guidance regarding career paths.
- Include specific training and development opportunities as a regular part of employee feedback.
- Make sure that good work is rewarded and recognized on a regular basis.

Areas of Opportunities—Culture (continued)

Work Environment

- Examine policies and traditions that may be producing perceptions of unfairness and lack of career opportunities.
- Look for opportunities to reduce bureaucracy and improve the effectiveness of decision-making.

Performance Review

- Create a performance review process that provides all employees with regular feedback, career discussion and identification of needed training.

Areas of Opportunities—Commitment

Training and Development

- Make sure all employees are aware of, and have access to, training resources and support.

Reward and Recognition

- Review current policies and recent changes to identify weaknesses in the implementation and administration of these programs.

Areas of Opportunities—Communications

- Evaluate the current communications channels and policies to identify ways in which communications can be more relevant, accessible, timely and two-way.

Areas of Opportunities—Compensation and Benefits

- Review elements of the compensation and benefits programs to ensure they are being administered fairly.



Background and Methodology

This report presents the results of an organization-wide climate survey conducted on behalf of Agricultural Research Services (ARS). ARS commissioned Insightlink Communications to conduct an employee survey in order to gauge employees' satisfaction on a number of issues, with a particular emphasis on determining the overall climate of the organization, assessing which factors are contributing to employee satisfaction and which are detracting from their satisfaction.

To collect the information contained in this report, 8,448 employees were invited by email to complete the online survey and a total of 2,790 employees completed the survey, which represents a participation rate of 33%.

All Insightlink reports are structured on the basis of our "4Cs" model of Employee Satisfaction, which categorizes most survey results into one of four factors that influence and sustain employee involvement. These four factors are: Culture, Commitment, Communications and Compensation.

Key benchmark norms have been included in this report to give context for ARS' performance against a norm for all U.S. employees and against a combined representative norm from the Federal Government and Science industry.

These benchmark norms are derived from an independent Insightlink study conducted annually among employees in the U.S. This study is based on representative samples of employees that is rigorously designed to match the most recent U.S. Census demographics and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics industry distribution.