

## **Strategic Alliance Background**

**What is a strategic alliance?** A strategic alliance is a recognized relationship between two (or more) entities that share common goals, but do not necessarily share all the same organization, culture, or oversight. The strategic alliance relationship allows for the organizations to work together to achieve mutual goals by identifying that shared projects benefit both organizations. The strategic alliance goes beyond the stated desire to work together and provides the framework to do so. Strategic alliances show weaknesses when partners struggle with the organizational differences between the partners. A strategic alliance, in its best form, allows each organization to bring their strengths to the table, and to understand where the limitations are within each organization. Being able to work together, if not seamlessly, at least striving for that, allows the organizations in the alliance to work together, despite differences, to mutual benefit.

### **Defining the strategic alliance between the NPB and PPQ.**

**The IRC (2008).** The NPB and PPQ have always been in an alliance, but it took some time to determine how to use the organizational principles of strategic alliance to work together more effectively. The two organizations obviously share common goals in terms of protecting plant health, from the federal and state perspective. But there have always been challenging areas – the amount and distribution of funding for survey and emergency response activities, the ability to respond to pests that are not federally regulated, the exact nature of the relationship between states and the USDA, coordinating activities, and the release of information to states relative to new interceptions. One iteration to address the relationship was the IRC – Interagency Relations Committee. (This is not to be confused with the series of Strategic Alliance Initiatives that later had the same name.) This was created in 2008. The goal was to improve communication between the two organizations, recognizing that would benefit both partners. Outcomes included: 1) strengthening the relationship between SPHDs and SPROs; 2) twice monthly meetings between NPB and PPQ leadership, and biennial meetings face to face meetings; 3) creation of the liaison position to do some troubleshooting before issues escalated; 4) the simultaneous communications protocol to SPHDs and SPROs; and 5) a standardized process to communicate new pest detections.

**The Strategic Alliance (2014-current).** Between 2008 and 2014, there were some challenges that showed some strain on the early achievements of the IRC. These resulted in a meeting between PPQ leadership and NPB leadership in May at the Los Angeles Plant Inspection Station. The meeting goal was to better define the nature of the relationship and determine how to maximize efforts to better coordinate plant health protection activities. A meeting outcome was the recognition that PPQ and NPB were already in a strategic alliance relationship, and that the business principles of a strategic alliance could be beneficial to strengthen and formalize the relationship. Key players in the NPB and PPQ had later in- person meetings to determine the Strategic Alliance Framework, which was then presented and accepted by both organizations. Some early initiatives to streamline the alliance were also identified and implemented. The

framework was finalized in early 2015. It has been reviewed, clarified, improved, and readopted by both organizations at least twice between 2015 and 2023. In addition to the framework, several strategic alliance strategic initiatives (SASIs) have been completed.

**Early Strategic Alliance Initiatives.** The first initiative was to communicate about the federal funding cycle so that states had a better understanding about the timing and availability of funds. Other early initiatives included coordinating state and federal responses while maintaining a focus on the SPHD/SPRO relationship as the linchpin in any response. This is where the SPHD/SPRO dialogue came from, with the goal of the SPHDs and SPROs in each state having a full understanding of the regulatory tools and authorities that each partner in the relationship brought to the table. There were also some compliance and enforcement planning tools that were developed.

**A latter-day IRC.** Despite the newly identified Strategic Alliance, there were some incidents in 2016 that brought some communication challenges into a clear light. There had also been significant turn over within both the NPB and PPQ, and many newer members were unaware of the requirements of the IRC. A Strategic Alliance meeting identified that the simultaneous communication protocol and the notifications to states were not being implemented as originally intended in the IRC, and a strategic alliance focused on communication and named the “IRC” was born.

The IRC was a huge effort with 5 goal areas. There was significant participation by membership of both PPQ and the NPB. Direct results from this effort include the hotwash protocol, the NPB’s mentoring committee, and posting updated PPQ org charts and position descriptions on the NPB website to make them readily available to NPB members. NPB 101 was re-born of this effort, including a NPB training for new PPQ staff. PPQs PPA training was modified and periodically provided to the NPB membership because of this initiative. This effort was completed in 2018 with the hotwash protocol finalized in 2019.

**Other Strategic Alliance Initiatives.** The RDPPEC committee is a direct result of the Strategic Alliance, incorporating NPB participation in periodic review of regulated domestic pest programs. The resource sharing initiative was the result of a strategic alliance initiative, as was a review of domestic data sharing, and the export certification program.

**Recent Strategic Alliance Initiatives (2023).** 1) An effort to retrain new membership of both organizations about the strategic alliance, past initiatives, and how to find tools that were developed from the sweat equity of both organizations; 2) revisiting communication protocols about new pest finds to ensure that they are consistent with strategic alliance goals, and identification of any communication gaps that need clarification and a process; and 3) enhancing coordination and communication about natural spread of pests across international borders.

**When considering developing a new Strategic Alliance Strategic Initiative (SASI).** There isn’t a requirement to develop a SASI if there does not appear to be an area that needs

strengthening. The strongest SASIs have been developed when there is mutual identification of a need, or in other words, mutual frustration by both organizations around an issue. The focus of any SASI is to support and strengthen the strategic alliance. The result of the effort may be improved response to plant pests, but to be successful, the SASI needs to be focused on how to enhance the organizations working together. There are other options besides the Strategic Alliance to address specific pest risks that might be a better fit for on the ground problem-solving.

Successful initiatives are those that are:

- 1) Focused on strengthening the relationship.
- 2) Mutually and enthusiastically supported by both organizations.
- 3) Specifically focused, with expected outcomes defined.
- 4) Achievable and realistic given current funding and personnel from both organizations.
- 5) Assigned to co-champions from each organization that are responsible for moving the SASI forward, meeting deadlines, and reporting on progress.

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