



Animal and Plant
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Service

Plant Protection and
Quarantine

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January 8, 2016

Mr. Joe Collins and NPB membership
President, National Plant Board
Department of Entomology
S-225 Ag. Science Center North
University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY 40546-0091

Subject: Phytosanitary Issues Management (PIM) Unit Concerns

Dear Mr. Collins and National Plant Board membership:

Thank you for your recent letter outlining the concerns of some of your members regarding the responsiveness of PIM staff on market access requests and other trade issues that directly impact individual states. I have spoken directly with some of your members regarding their concerns and have addressed those issues with the appropriate Supervisors and Trade Directors. Specific guidance has also been provided to all of PIM regarding the need for better engagement with our state regulatory partners, as well as other PPQ staff, in the market access and retention process.

Your concerns are very much on our minds as we know that more than half of the PIM staff is eligible to retire within the next 5 years. Eligibility does not necessarily mean retirement, but we need to be prepared regardless. In 2015, I hired one new Deputy Director and four new Trade Directors. In 2016, I plan to hire two new Assistant Trade Directors to increase service to the exporting community. These positions are difficult to fill with qualified individuals. The ideal Trade Director has a strong technical foundation in agriculture and regulatory programs. They also must have exceptional interpersonal skills for working with state and industry partners, PPQ staff and representatives for other government agencies. They also must have the savvy and personal awareness to engage foreign trading partners where politics challenges biology.

With the likelihood of continued turnover, PIM supervisors and I are working on knowledge management to minimize the impact to our stakeholders. Specifically, an Associate Director position has been created to provide coaching to staff to increase the overall level of technical and interpersonal skills to improve the communication with internal and external partners and develop a better understanding of production and regulatory challenges to exports. Staff are making site visits to become more familiar with field/grove production and packing house procedures. We have been developing a desk guide that describes the roles and responsibilities of Trade Directors. This will include information on communicating with state and industry partners. We are implementing improved project tracking systems to better monitor progress on import and export issues and capture correspondence and technical information. This will allow us to keep on top of changes and inform stakeholders in a timelier manner.

Mr. Joe Collins

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PIM posts information about upcoming bilateral meetings with foreign trading partners [here](#). The page provides brief information about upcoming bilateral meetings and a contact name for more details.

I welcome the opportunity to work with NPB members to address perceived and real challenges in our market access processes. Information sharing both ways will help us understand each other's challenges and concerns as we work toward identifying ways to better support each other. I suggest we start with a call between key NPB members and the PIM Management Team to scope out a path forward. Please provide me with the names of the NPB representatives and I will reach out to facilitate the initial conversation.

Sincerely,



Alan K. Dowdy, Ph. D.
Acting Associate Deputy Administrator for Policy

cc:

Osama El-Lissy, Deputy Administrator

Paula Henstridge, Assistant Deputy Administrator

Michael Guidici Pietro, Acting Assistant Deputy Administrator for PIM

Aurelio Posadas, National Plant Board