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October 22, 2016

Osama El-Lissy,
Deputy Administrator
USDA APHIS PPQ
Washington DC

Dear Osama:

The ability to safeguard agricultural resources in each state depends on effective communication and collaboration with USDA APHIS PPQ. The membership of the National Plant Board appreciates our close working relationship with USDA APHIS PPQ at both the state and national levels. Achieving effective communication, however, is a process that requires active and thoughtful participation by all parties. The joint decision to prioritize communication within the Strategic Alliance document emphasizes communication's central role in any coordinated plant health response. Examining case studies where communication succeeded and where it failed, as is being done by the National Plant Board/USDA APHIS PPQ interagency communication committee, is critical in developing effective communication protocols for the National Plant Board and USDA APHIS PPQ. We greatly appreciate your efforts and the efforts of your staff on this initiative.

As stated in the Strategic Alliance document:

In many cases, we will reach consensus on how best to address issues of national scope and importance. In cases where we do not reach consensus, we will, nonetheless, strive to understand, accept, and articulate our differences clearly and constructively. When we cannot reach agreement, we can still be united and clear in communicating our differing perspectives and what each of us can or will do in our respective roles. Regardless of the outcome of our discussions, effective and proactive communication is essential to the success of the strategic alliance.

We agree that optimal communication should be:

- specific and proactive;
- timely in sharing of appropriate information;
- clear in articulating expectations, realities, and limitations;
- focused on dialog to produce alignment and results when circumstances indicate a collaborative response is needed;
- consistent with agreed upon protocols in each organization and across organizations;
- unified in messaging to each organization about agreements, decisions, and areas where agreement cannot be reached.

To sustain optimal communication, we believe that:

- there is an ongoing need to provide orientation to NPB and PPQ staff, at all levels, to ensure the importance of the communication alliance is understood;
- we will sometimes need to develop a broader understanding of decisions and agreements within each organization;

- there will sometimes be a need to elevate issues appropriately and transparently;
- a desire for a true alliance/partnership in which the organizations work side-by-side and engage early on issues of mutual importance exists
- a consultative relationship with a commitment to communication and resolution of issues produces favorable results

The alliance will also ensure that USDA APHIS PPQ:

- maintains clear and timely communication with SPROs and SPHDs regarding identification of pest concerns which may enter their state;
- promotes the Strategic Alliance Document to work together and utilize federal and state authorities, assets and expertise to safeguard plant health and enable safe trade;
- assists new and/or temporary program managers to master a clear understanding of the importance of states' working knowledge of pest threats for the industries of agriculture and forestry within their states;
- and ensures that effective communication is emphasized as an agency priority

We look forward to working with you towards the common goal of improved communication between our organizations. If you would like to discuss further, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Joe Collins, President
National Plant Board

CC:

Paula Henstridge, Assistant Deputy Administrator, USDA APHIS PPQ
Matt Royer, USDA APHIS PPQ
Matt Rhodes USDA APHIS PPQ
Ron Sequeira, USDA APHIS PPQ
NPB Board of Directors