

**Plant Protection and Quarantine
Management Team Meeting
Washington, DC
July 18-19, 2000**

Opening Remarks Review of Agenda Dr. Dunkle provided an overview of the Executive Team's approach to reviewing the organization's effectiveness and "tweaking" the structure to enhance delivery of services and build capacity and infrastructure. They will begin by looking at the executive level only and will focus on the following goals:

- preserving the attributes of the current structure;
- improving capacity for safeguarding;
- ensuring consistency in program delivery while allowing for local creativity;
- improving accountability;
- developing future leaders;
- enhancing technical capacity;
- strengthening relationships with stakeholders;
- allowing for growth; and
- having maximal impact with minimal change.

Review of Recruitment Plan/Structure/Strategies Data were provided on the numbers of PPQ employees eligible for retirement in the next 10 years. Given the number of potential retirements, two needs are evident: position management will become a critical focus for PPQ and we need to take a more strategic look at workforce planning. The general consensus was that the organization was made too flat during the down sizing efforts of the early 1990's. Identified needs include:

- Reinstatement of the annual "needs analysis" in the 436 series to ensure appropriate recruitment efforts. A template has been developed for large locations on the southern border, but it needs to be developed for other locations.
- Attention needs to be given to improving the supervisor employee ratio and to supervisory recruitment. Some work has been done in the Western and Central Regions. Problems with supervisory recruitment include lack of pay parity, lack of retirement incentives, and lack of relocation bonuses.
- Senior staff needs to be strengthened. A start has been made with the approval of 8 senior science positions at headquarters and two regional smuggling interdiction and trade compliance coordinators. It was noted that PPQ, an organization of about 3700 employees, has 7 SES positions while ARS, an organization roughly twice the size of PPQ has 37 SES positions and 18 super grades (GS 16 and above). PPQ has 15 employees at the GS 15 level, while ARS has 250. Only 8 percent of PPQ is at the GS 12 or above level.

Discussion ensued on strategies for recruitment from inside and outside of PPQ and incentives for recruitment and retention. It was agreed that we would look into special salary rates, establishment of a continuous open register, and establishment of a lateral list for supervisors.

Since recruitment efforts are currently focused on officers, we will probably have to identify more recruiters and train them specifically for supervisory recruitment.

In addition, a discussion was held about the possibility of using pre-testing as part of the recruitment process. Such an approach would have to be discussed with the Administrator and would have to go through impact and implementation with the Union. It would also require contracting for development of tests specific to PPQ's needs.. Customs and INS both use pre-testing. A discussion was also held on whether to reinstate the degree requirement for officers, but no changes were made to the requirement.

Action: Dr. Dunkle agreed to sign decision memos approving a hiring plan (see option 3) and the adoption of structured interviews using trained interviewers.

Action: The management team decided that one copy of the new recruitment handbook would be provided to each office and it will be loaded on the web as well.

Examination of Pay Differential Issues During Dr. Dunkle's recent trip to California, the issue of pay differentials and public transit subsidies came up in San Francisco because of serious difficulties recruiting the requisite number of new PPQ employees to staff the new international air terminal at San Francisco Airport. PPQ has a special pay rate at JFK because of recruitment and retention problems.

Action: The management team agreed to review available options for high-cost areas with recruitment and retention problems.

Training and Employee Development At the management team meeting in Raleigh last year, PDC was asked to develop a comprehensive training/employee development plan. PDC is proposing an integrated, holistic approach that includes the current range of training services as well as new services that include coaching and mentoring, learning contract development, continuing education, and officer recertification. Sources for some training would be off-shelf or from MRP-BS; PDC would serve as a coordinator in these cases.

The NPB member present expressed the thought that some State cooperators might be interested in obtaining training for their staffs through the PPQ program. Those who obtained such services would pay a fee such as they now pay for training services obtained from the private sector. Depending on the success of this kind of collaboration, the PPQ would be helped to fund its own program.

Action: The concept of the proposed training plan was supported and the Executive Team will develop a proposal to share with MRP-BS and the Administrator to ensure appropriate coordination.

Update on New Position Descriptions

Action: The management team agreed to forward three positions descriptions (port analyst, risk management specialist, risk communications specialist) that are ready to be reviewed for possible classification at the GS 11 level. PPQ will contract with OPM for classification services to facilitate the development and review of new position descriptions that meet the needs of a redesigned PPQ workforce.

Plant Health Conference An update was provided on the Plant Health Conference to be sponsored by CPHST in Raleigh October 24-25. The purpose of these conferences is to work within the scientific community to bring awareness of critical scientific issues of importance to PPQ. This year's topic is "Strategies for Early Detection of Invasive Species." There will be 10 invited speakers and the proceedings will be published. An estimate of costs and attendees is to be developed along with a justification for the location so appropriate approvals can be obtained. It was proposed that those involved in the CAPS program, both State and Federal be encouraged to attend and that CAPS funding be used for travel.

Information Technology Update

PIN-Ops Testing of the system began in December 1999 in Laredo, Jacksonville, Denver, and Phoenix. Beta testing is scheduled for July and August 2000, in Houston, Detroit, Boston, San Francisco, Long Beach, Blaine, San Diego, Nogales, and Pharr. Other locations will be added in 2001. PIN-Ops will be combined with ATS in the long term with a PPQ-wide information steering team to guide management and access to all AQI-related information, data, and systems and address further development issues.

Automated Targeting System (ATS) ATS is in development. Plans call for conducting testing of the system between October and December of 2000. Implementation is scheduled for 2001.

Phytosanitary Certificates A new project to automate the issuance of phytosanitary certificates has been approved. Planning and development will begin in August.

Joint Permit System The remainder of the PPQ permits, including those for plants and plant products as well as plant pests and biotechnology will be fully automated during FY 2001. When complete, the public will be able to apply for permits online. A contract award is anticipated by September.

Risk Based AQI Staffing System An expert system is being developed to identify and support AQI staffing needs. The system will use a subset of PIN 309 data initially.

Digital Imaging Digital imaging is in the final project phase, which calls for implementation at 10 sites. Five of the ten sites are complete; the rest will be completed by Fall 2000. A possible pilot project linking PPQ digital imaging with State identifiers to improve collaboration and leverage existing skills was proposed.

PIN309 Redesign Existing software needs to be upgraded and redesigned to increase the functionality of the system. It will be redesigned to be run against the PIN-Ops database in FY 2001. A contract award is anticipated by September.

Remote Dialup OASIS should be replaced by December 1. Options are currently being reviewed.

PPQ Data Communications Infrastructure Project A plan and statement of work have been developed to establish the data communications infrastructure at PPQ sites. The statement of work is with the vendor and a waiver is being secured from the Department to proceed. Project completion is estimated within 1 year.

APHIS Wide-Area Network The APHIS network is currently being designed. A draft of the design will be available the week of July 24.

IT Budget A final proposed budget will be developed for review by September in preparation for October allocations.

Preclearance Roster Dave Reeves provided an update on staffing for preclearance. PPQ is currently meeting its preclearance TDY needs, and all regions are providing staff. In a short-term attempt to bolster available staffing, Port Operations recently sent a letter to about 100 recent retirees inviting them to participate in preclearance programs. There have been three positive responses to date. Compensation limitations are an issue. The bulb preclearance program and the Brazilian mango program are both scheduled for reviews. As part of that review, we will explore the possibility of using foreign service nationals. We will also review how we are accepting preclearance requests, how many more we can support, and what the guidelines should be for accepting new requests. The mechanics of the process also need to be worked out so we can balance our day-to-day operations with preclearance needs. One possibility is the use of industry-drive quality measures as an alternative. The report is due in October. In addition, we plan to separate the supervisor and officer rosters.

“Bounty Payments” Policy A presentation was given on a proposed policy for the payment of monetary rewards to private citizens. Guidelines will be developed and the policy will be implemented for 1 year. After that, it will be evaluated for possible expansion and will be brought before the Executive Team for decision. Discussion on possible development of “good citizenship” awards to be used for detection information was deferred to a future discussion on performance awards.

Action: A decision was made to rewrite the policy, limiting it to information provided to the smuggling interdiction and trade compliance program.

Implementation of the Plant Protection Act A plan and timeline has been developed to implement new provisions of the Plant Protection Act, including new provisions concerning risk assessment, subpoena authority, civil penalties, noxious weeds, regulation of biocontrol, and recovery of costs for remedial measures PPQ has to take when importers abandon cargo. Plans have also been developed to respond to questions from staff about the new authorities. As guidelines are developed on implementation of each new provision, they need to be communicated to employees and incorporated into training of new employees.

Update on Workplace Violence Prevention Training FSO has a statement of work and is proceeding on obtaining required approvals to contract for training. Target date for award of contract is by the end of FY 2000. The training contract is written to cover three tiers: (1) train TART members (80-85 people nationwide); (2) managers and supervisors; and (3) non-supervisory employees. Only the first tier will be mandatory. The APHIS Handbook on Workplace Violence Prevention and Response is in development and scheduled for publication later this year. Guidance from the Department has not been provided yet.

Update on NAPPO Potato Standard Update on NAPPO Potato Standard. U.S. industry wants us to impose a requirement for a phytosanitary certificate for seed potatoes from Canada. The basis is trade between Canada and Mexico and the possibility that Mexican potatoes would

end up in the United States. Bill Callison as the PPQ's representative and chairman of the NAPPO Seed Potato Committee expressed concerns about whether the effort complies with established international standards including the WTO/SPS; the NAPPO potato standard, ongoing work on technical justifications and trade in minitubers; and the pending issues of "Official Control" and the new IPPC "Regulated Non-Quarantine Pest" category. Many pest risk assessments are pending; so, there is concern that requiring phytosanitary certificates be risk-based.

Budget Update The House has passed the Agriculture Appropriations bill, but the Senate has not yet acted. An attempt was made to significantly increase the PPQ budget on the House floor. The attempt was unsuccessful, but the Chairman and the Ranking Member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture have committed to pursue additional funds during the conference between the House and Senate. It is anticipated that the minimum Federal pay raise, which will be absorbed, will be 3.7%. Current revenue projections for AQI user fees are solid and revenue is increasing. PPQ is supporting the establishment of 8 new senior science positions to meet risk assessment needs, as well as a new emergency program coordinator position, a senior regulatory writer, and two smuggling interdiction and trade compliance coordinators. PPQ is also proposing to support new staff for regulatory analysis and development. A total of 316 new positions are being established in the field and at headquarters. The next step in deploying the new user fee revenue will be to address the need for additional supervisors. Dr. Dunkle will seek more support from MRP-BS for employee relations and labor-management relations.

Performance Awards In moving to the pass/fail performance review system, performance awards were to be de-emphasized in favor of special act awards. Guidelines exist APHIS-wide to do this. These guidelines need to be modified or new guidelines developed. Incentives need to be built in to encourage supervisors to provide awards.

Action: The policy on awards needs to be reiterated by PPQ management and recommunicated along with the agency guidelines.

PDC Open House It was agreed that the November meeting would be held in Frederick, Maryland, in conjunction with an Open House for the Professional Development Center.