



EASTERN PLANT BOARD

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Laboratory Accreditation/Authorization

USDA-APHIS currently has, and is proposing more, accreditation programs, certification programs, and or approval/authorization processes for laboratory testing and diagnostic work for programs such as phytosanitary certification, regulatory compliance activities and exotic pest surveys. The National Seed Health Accreditation System (NSHS) is an example of an accreditation program and the recently established National Plant Pathogen Laboratory Accreditation Program (NPPLAP) is an example of an authorization system for non-federal stakeholders. *Accreditation* programs can be generalized as resource-intensive, regularly audited, costly programs that are the “top-notch” oversight system employed to verify that uniform methodologies and practices are employed by all entities. Whereas, *certification* and *authorization* processes are also employed to ensure that uniform methodologies and practices are used by qualified stakeholders to verify or diagnose specific insect and disease complexes as part of the safeguarding process. Using the words ‘accreditation’ and ‘authorization’ interchangeably causes unnecessary confusion about the expectations and goals of the diagnostic or verification activity.

As the NSHS was created to accredit private laboratories, there was an understanding that state laboratories would not need to be accredited under this 3rd party system, but should utilize the same methodologies and standards as the NSHS accredited entities. Since that time, due to the demands of international trade, it has become evident that accreditation or some type of *credentialing* of state laboratories would facilitate negotiations and trade agreements. States favor a USDA-managed, voluntary, laboratory *credentialing* process that would meet these needs.

Perhaps, one overarching system needs to be created, with a menu of possible ‘tracks’ stakeholders can choose to pursue. A state, or stakeholder, can chose an accreditation track, such as NSHS; or the NPPLAP authorization process as needed. Within an institution, agency or other stakeholder industry, different menu items can be chosen for different individuals, groups or sections, while reducing the duplication associated with similar, but slightly different, accreditation and authorization programs.

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Resolved, by the Eastern Plant Board at its 81st annual meeting in Rehoboth Beach, DE, on April 6, 2006, to recommend that USDA articulate the differences between *accreditation* programs and *authorizations* and clarify specific state requirements under these programs.

Be it further resolved, that USDA establish a comprehensive management program and assign a management team for oversight of all accreditation and authorization programs within USDA-APHIS to reduce duplication of effort and thus consolidate efforts within the agency.

Distribution:

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