

**United States Department of Agriculture  
Labor-Management Forum  
Preliminary Metric Progress Report  
January 4, 2012**

## **I. Introduction**

Executive Order (EO) 13522, “*Creating Labor Management Forums to Improve Delivery of Government Services*” calls for the establishment of forums through which labor and management will collaborate for the purpose of delivering “... the highest quality of services to the American people.” In order to evaluate the efficacy of labor-management collaborations in improving government efficiency, the EO requires the application of metrics to the work of forums. Agency-level forums were tasked with submitting FY12 metric reports to the USDA by February 28, 2012, to be followed by the monthly submission of metrics progress reports throughout the year. Because FY 2012 L-M Forum Metrics Progress Reports must be reviewed and approved by both labor and management forum members, and given that there are 62 individual forums participating in metrics, not all forum metrics reports have been received for analysis by the USDA L-M Forum as of the December 31, 2012 reporting deadline. Consequently, this report is preliminary and comprises the findings obtained from the USDA Forum’s Metric Progress Reports received to date for FY 2012.

## **II. Metric Reports Summary**

- 80** Total number of metrics-eligible bargaining units
- 65** Total number of bargaining units currently participating in metrics
- 15** Total number of bargaining units not currently participating in metrics
- 27** Of 65 bargaining units currently participating in metrics, the total number that have not submitted a December 2012 Forum Metrics Progress Report

To date, labor and management parties throughout the USDA have created 48 subordinate forums, an increase of 3 from FY 2011’s total of 45. The addition of these subordinate forums has resulted in providing approximately 6,747 additional bargaining unit employees into an LM-Forum to address workplace conditions. Of the additional forums created, two of the three have developed metrics and increased our forum participation percentile from 2011’s total of 78% percent to 81%. This 3% percent increase is positive movement despite of the fact that fewer forums have submitted their December 2012 Forum Metrics Reports.

Nine (9) forums continue to be comprised of multiple bargaining units, but in contrast to last year, all of the USDA’s mission areas hosted a forum for FY 2012. Currently, forums now cover 36,889 of the approximately 39,917 bargaining unit employees within USDA, leaving only 3,028

bargaining unit employees not covered by a forum, as opposed to last year's total of 8,500. As a positive consequence, total percentile of bargaining unit employees covered by forums has increased more than 17%, to 92.4% from last year's total of 75%.

### **III. Progress of Forums**

#### **A. LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONSHIP METRIC**

Based on the FY12 metric reports received to date, many of the forums are reporting steady progress towards reaching their respective goals for this first metric. A common response from the forums has been the success in the use of the pre-decisional involvement (PDI) process to resolve many of the challenges posed in budget shortfalls and lapse of appropriations scenarios. Individual metric highlights for FY 2012 include:

- Success in drafting language for a pilot program for monitoring plant personnel using USDA Beef Grading Standards. (AMS and AFGE Council #200)
- Labor and management conducted joint labor-management training on June 7-8, 2012 with approximately 40 managers and union representatives participating. Pre and post testing conducted at the training showed that 65% of the participants increased their overall testing scores, resulting in a substantial growth of knowledge in labor-management roles and responsibilities. (APHIS and AFGE Local 2315)
- Labor and management successfully engaged in eight (8) PDI opportunities including the reorganization of Veterinary Services and changes to APHIS Policies and Directives. (APHIS and AFGE Local 3106)
- Labor and management successfully engaged in PDI on 55 separate occasions during 2012, with the agency providing subject matter experts for briefings when requested by the union. (APHIS-PPQ and NAAE)
- The parties increased the level of satisfaction with communication between employee and supervisor from 81.8% to 89.3% over the 2012 improvement period. (ARS and AFGE Local 43)
- The parties increased suggestion box updates to employees from 16% to 66% over the 2012 improvement period. (ARS and AFGE Local 43)
- The parties successfully developed a non-binding alternative grievance review committee to resolve work place issues quickly, inexpensively, and at the lowest level possible. (ARS and AFGE Local 1657)

Again, the majority of subordinate forums reporting affirm that they continue to make significant progress even though some individual forums have fallen short of their respective goals for the L-M Relationship Metric.

## **B. EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION & ENGAGEMENT METRIC**

To achieve the goals of the Employee Satisfaction & Engagement Metric, several forums concentrated efforts on improving effective communications between labor and management. Individual metric highlights during 2012 include:

- Labor and management exceeded their FY 2012 goal of increasing the use of a jointly developed SharePoint website for communicating workplace issues and soliciting employee suggestions and feedback. (APHIS and AFGE Local 2315)
- Labor and management successfully implemented an exclusive L-M Forum email account for all of its forum members which is being used to rapidly share union recommendations on proposed management initiatives, distributing survey results, LM training materials and providing access to other useful links (APHIS-PPQ, NAAE and NAPPQOSE)
- Labor and management met their goal of increasing interpersonal communication training by over 50% during the 2012 improvement period. (ARS and AFGE Local 43)
- The parties increased the employee response rate to OPM's Employee Viewpoint Survey from 30% in 2011 to 65% in 2012. (FSA and AFGE Local 2831)

A review of FY 2012 progress reports received to date suggests that where the parties have been successful in improving communications and addressing work life issues, there is improved morale and a perception of increased responsiveness of management by employees.

## **C. MISSION & SERVICE DELIVERY METRIC**

A review of FY 2012 reports for the Mission and Service Delivery metric continues to indicate that this particular metric is often left unaddressed by the parties. However, where forums have addressed the Mission and Service Delivery metric, they report labor-management cooperation in addressing important mission accomplishment issues. Individual metric highlights during 2012 include:

- The parties achieved success in meeting 87.5% of their jointly developed research project milestones for FY 2012. (ARS and AFGE Local 43)
- The parties achieved significant operational cost savings and improved morale with the closure of 32 field offices and the concomitant offer and acceptance of 40 employees in the closing facilities to become full-time teleworkers. (Food, Nutrition and Consumer Service, NTEU and AFGE Local 2735)

- The parties increased loan participation rate to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers (SDA) from 41.4% in FY 2011 to 53.9% in FY 2012. (FSA Kansas City and AFGE Local 3354)
- The parties increased their FY 2011 baseline metric for improving customer service by 30%, realizing a 75% customer satisfaction rate for FY 2012. (FSA NJ and AFGE Local 2831)

The substantive issues that agencies and their unions are collaborating on continue to hold much promise for important improvements in agencies and staff offices accomplishing their respective missions.

#### **D. NON-PARTICIPATING BARGAINING UNITS**

There remain (15) bargaining units that currently are not participating in the forum/metrics process, and one (1) bargaining unit that, while participating in a forum that conducts PDI, is still working on developing metrics and a governance document. To that end, the parties representing these units give one of three explanations as to why they choose not to participate in a forum:

- Labor and management are working through obstacles and expect to develop metrics once they are resolved (**1**);
- Labor and management are working on setting up their forum and/or developing metrics but require additional time (**7**);
- The labor-management relationship is working well and the union sees no added value to the forum/metrics process (**8**).

The Labor Relations Officers of agencies and staff offices continue to be instructed to continue working with their labor counterparts in order to bring more of the bargaining units under the E.O. LM forum process. The on-going success of these efforts is reflected in the number of bargaining units participating in forums and metrics, including tri-partite forums (e.g., FNCS, NTEU and AFGE Local 2735; FAS, AFSCME Local 3976 and AFSA; and APHIS-PPQ, NAAE and NAPPQOSE).

### **IV. Conclusion**

With 47 forums having been formed covering approximately 90% the union organized workforce USDA is making significant progress with the implementation of the E.O. Though work remains to be done, there can be no doubt that measurable progress is being made within USDA to improve the labor-management relationship. Where the parties have addressed mission accomplishment, they are involved in substantial work with positive, cost effective impacts to the federal government. The USDA Labor Relations Program will continue to work with all of its subordinate forums to establish measurable, objective, and achievable goals within the defined E.O. metrics. Correspondingly, individual forums will continue to work, adjust, and readjust their action plans,

just as labor-management parties will continue their efforts to bring more bargaining units under the EO.