



United States Department of Agriculture

DEC 31 2014

Office of the
Assistant Secretary
for Administration

Office of
Human Resources
Management

1400 Independence
Avenue, SW
Washington, DC
20250-9600

Mr. Timothy Curry
Deputy Associate Director for Partnership and Labor Relations
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20415

Dear Mr. Curry:

This letter transmits the FY 2014 Metrics Report for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Labor-Management Forum. This report is submitted in furtherance of the requirements of Executive Order 13522 -- *Creating Labor-Management Forums to Improve Delivery of Government Services*, and in compliance with guidance from the National Council on Federal Labor-Management Relations (National Council).

Any questions or comments regarding this submission should be forwarded to Mr. Bryan M. Knowles, Director, Employee and Labor Relations Division, Office of Human Resources Management via email at Bryan.Knowles@dm.usda.gov or telephone at (202) 720-6784.

We look forward to the National Council's review of USDA's report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Roberta Jeanquart". To the left of the signature, there is a small, stylized blue mark that appears to be the initials "for".
William P. Milton, Jr.
Chief Human Capital Officer

Enclosure

Cc: Bryan M. Knowles, Employee & Labor Relations Division, Director, OHRM
Daniel M. Kline, Labor Relations Branch, Team Lead, OHRM

**United States Department of Agriculture
Labor-Management Forum
Metric Progress Report
December 31, 2014**

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. With all individual submissions received by the Employee and Labor Relations Division having been processed, the Department is pleased to submit its final FY 2014 report containing highlights of accomplishments from the 53 individual agency-level EO 13522 labor-management forums operating across the USDA.

II. Metric Reports Summary

81 -- Total number of metrics-eligible bargaining units

67 -- Total number of bargaining units currently participating in metrics

14 -- Total number of bargaining units not currently participating in metrics

To date, labor and management maintain 53 subordinate forums throughout the USDA. Nine (9) forums continue to be comprised of multiple bargaining units, and all of the USDA's mission areas hosted forums during the reporting year. Forums now cover 27,651 of the approximately 34,449 bargaining unit employees within USDA, leaving 6,798 bargaining unit employees not covered by a forum(s). As a consequence, the total percentage of bargaining unit employees covered by forums has decreased to 80%.¹

III. Progress of Forums

A. Labor-Management Relationship Metric

Based on the CY 2014 metric reports received to date, a number of the forums reported progress in reaching their respective goals for this metric. A common response from the forums has been the success in the use of the pre-decisional involvement (PDI) process to resolve challenges posed in relocation efforts and areas where Labor possesses no substantive statutory right to

¹ The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and the National Joint Council of Food Inspection Locals (NJC) have been unable to reach agreement on terms to effectuate an operational labor-management forum despite previous assistance from the Department's Employee and Labor Relations Division and the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. At the behest of the National Council for Federal Labor-Management Relation's Problem Resolution Subcommittee following NJC's request for assistance during the July 2014 National Council meeting, the issue was elevated. No metric report was submitted by FSIS and NJC for 2014.

bargain, e.g., budget allocations. Yet, there exists a misunderstanding among a limited numbers of forums as to the benefit and logistical exercise of PDI, which PDI governance documents could potentially address. Individual metric highlights for CY 2014 include:

- The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) -- Plant Protection & Quarantine (PPQ) Management and its Unions – National Association of Agriculture Employees (NAAE) and National Association of Plant Protection and Quarantine Office Support Employees (NAPPQOSE) – sought to determine the benefit of PDI. To that end, the parties jointly developed a form that will serve as a baseline in measuring the effectiveness of PDI. (APHIS-PPQ, NAAE and NAPPQOSE)
- Rural Development (RD) -- Puerto Rico and American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 55 developed a survey to monitor and improve trust issues between the parties. The survey was conducted and the results presented by the LM Forum to the State Director. Four meetings were conducted during the year in Juana Diaz, Morovis, Caguas, and Utuado. (RD-Puerto Rico and AFGE Local 55)
- Management and Labor representatives of the Risk Management Agency (RMA) jointly resolved to create a non-monetary award and recognition program using the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) results. Through their joint efforts, the parties successfully implemented the award program in FY 2014. (RMA and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3925)
- Management and Union representatives of the National Appeals Division (NAD) determined it was necessary to respond to Question #36 of the FEVS Results. This dealt with employee preparation in the event of a security threat. The parties engaged in PDI to collaborate on initiatives to increase employee preparation. (NAD and AFSCME Local 3020)
- RD Management and the Union committed to identifying a written understanding of PDI between the parties. Although they have yet to complete their defined written process, the parties are committed to continuing to work on the completion of a written understanding of PDI between the parties in 2015. (RD-Arkansas and AFGE Local 108)
- Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) Management and its two Unions noted a need to build a deeper level of trust and understanding of each other's interest. Accordingly, the parties utilized interest-based problem solving techniques to resolve labor-management issues for 2014. Their success measured about 75% for all issues. (FAS, American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), and AFSCME Local 3976)

Again, the majority of reporting subordinate forums affirmed that they continue to make significant progress even though some individual forums have not met all of their annual goals for the Labor-Management Relationship Metric.

B. Employee Satisfaction & Engagement Metric

To achieve the goals of the Employee Satisfaction & Engagement Metric, several forums concentrated their efforts on improving effective communications between Labor and Management. Individual metric highlights during 2014 include:

- FAS, working with AFSA and AFSCME Local 3976, sought improvement in Leadership Communications in view of their previous scoring. The parties agreed to implement a 360° feedback program pertaining to expanded use of SharePoint, improved intra-agency communications – including enhancing the use of the “Administrator’s Corner” – and increasing the transparency of the Management Council. (FAS, AFSA and AFSCME Local 3976)
- RD Headquarters LMF determined to increase the social interaction between management and its workforce. They established an off-site major league baseball game social. The event was reportedly a success as the attendees watch the Washington Nationals battle the Philadelphia Phillies. (RD and AFSCME Local 3870)
- The U.S. Forest Service (FS) and the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) decided to improve communications of collaborative labor-management relations within the agency. The Forest Service Partnership Council (FSPC) recognized two unit level labor-management forums with the FSPC Award. The recognition comes in a variety of forms: letter of recognition, nationally publicizing accomplishments, receipt of a keepsake award and a \$10,000 grant for the furtherance of partnership activities. (FS and NFFE)
- The Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Oklahoma and the Union jointly identified a need to improve training in the State. Management made available additional training to employees in 2014 on topics including Farm Loans Program, Debt and Loan Restructuring System, and Appraisal & Environmental Training. (FSA-Oklahoma and AFGE Local 3354)
- RD Management and Labor in New Mexico acknowledged a need to improve communications in the State, identifying this within the context of Labor-Management Relationships and Mission and Service Delivery. The result was increased communication opportunities in the form of holding monthly meetings. The parties report that their relationship, operations, and trust are improving in light of the meetings. (RD and AFGE Local 1032)
- Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Management, the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) and AFGE engaged in working groups to develop a *Career Path Guide* for employees. Management credits Labor for providing what it deemed as “subject matter expertise” in the development of the prototype. The guide provides career information on

positions in the agency, including competencies necessary to advance from one grade to the next within an established path. (FNS, NTEU and AFGE Local 2735)

A review of CY 2014 progress reports received to date suggests that where parties have been successful in improving communications and addressing work life issues, there is improved morale and a perception of increased responsiveness on the part of management by employees. However, there is more progress needed as is evident from the recent FEVS results for 2014.

C. Mission & Service Delivery Metric

A review of CY 2014 reports for the Mission and Service Delivery metric continues to indicate that this particular metric at times goes 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 2014 include:

- NAD Management and AFSCME jointly identified a few items of interest from its Hearing Officer Customer Service Survey. The forum agreed to establish a baseline in the areas of decision readability, listening skills, and general courtesy. The survey results will measure NAD adjudicator's effectiveness in each of these areas. Results are expected to lead to additional training or modifying script language and facilitating the assurance an adjudicator noticeably maintains a neutral persona during hearings. (NAD and AFSCME Council 26, Local 3020)
- APHIS International Services worked with AFSA to identify and implement cost savings directly in support of the Screwworm Action Program Rearing Facility situated in Pacora, Panama. Collaborating with Panama, all parties jointly engaged in business process reengineering to reduce the cost. Ten enhancements were implemented that resulted in a 5% reduction in energy consumption. (APHIS and AFSA)
- RD – New Mexico and AFGE Local 1032 agreed that the number of customer complaints in the Value-Added Producer Grants Program was too high; typically 5 to 10 complaints annually. Because of improved communications between management and employees in New Mexico, only two customer service complaints were reported for the year. (RD and AFGE Local 1032)
- Forest Service Management and NFFE identified safety as an imperative concern for collaboration. The Parties established a new "Coordinated Response Protocol," a process that will be used to address serious accidents. Management determined a need to study and develop a tool to review accident investigation processes to learn more thoroughly from each accident with the intent of garnering employee trust and reducing accidents and fatalities. This work is ongoing and widely inclusive of regional offices within the agency. (FS and NFFE)

- FSA decided to address the limited participation and eligibility of telework in its headquarters location. Management and Labor also identified this issue under the Employee Engagement & Satisfaction Metric, to illustrate its importance to the parties. Because of PDI, employees permitted to telework increased an additional 6%. (FSA and AFSCME Local 3925)

The substantive issues that agencies and their unions are collaborating on continue to hold significant promise for improving how agencies and staff offices accomplish their respective missions.

D. Non-participating Bargaining Units

There remain 14 bargaining units that currently are not participating in the forum/metrics process, and three (3) bargaining units that, while participating in a forum that conducts PDI, are still working on developing metrics and governance documents. The most prevalent explanations provided by the parties representing these units as to why they choose not to participate in a forum are: 1) labor and management are working on setting up their forum and/or developing metrics but require additional time to address obstacles; 2) the labor-management relationship is working well and the union sees no added value to the forum/metrics process; and 3) labor and management are unable to establish a forum due to irreconcilable differences maintained by one party.

The Department continues to instruct subordinate agency and staff office Labor Relations Officers to continue engaging and working with their labor counterparts in order to bring more of the bargaining units under the EO labor-management forum process. The on-going success of these efforts is reflected in the number of bargaining units currently participating in forums and metrics, including tri-partite forums (e.g., FNCS, NTEU and AFGE Local 2735; Foreign Agricultural Service, AFSCME Local 3976 and AFSA; and APHIS-PPQ, NAAE and NAPPQOSE).

IV. Conclusion

With 53 forums created and covering approximately 80% of its union organized workforce, USDA is still working towards complete implementation of the EO. Though work remains, there can be no doubt that measurable progress and a determination to improve the labor-management relationship exist within USDA. 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 within the ELRD will continue to work with all of its subordinate forums to establish measurable, objective, and achievable goals within the defined EO metrics. Correspondingly, individual forums will continue to work, adjust, and revise their action plans, just as labor-management parties will continue their efforts to bring more bargaining units under the EO.