



United States Department of Agriculture

Departmental
Management

Office of the
Assistant Secretary
for Administration

Office of Human
Resources
Management

1400 Independence
Avenue, SW
Washington, DC
20250

DEC 30 2015

Mr. Timothy Curry
U.S. Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415

Dear Mr. Curry:

This letter transmits the FY 2015 Metrics Report for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Labor-Management Forum as required by the 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 on this submission should be forwarded to Mr. Bryan M. Knowles 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,

Roberta Jeanquart
Chief Human Capital Officer

Enclosure

Cc: Marsha A. Wiggins, Deputy Director, OHRM
Bryan M. Knowles, Employee & Labor Relations Division, Director, OHRM
Daniel M. Kline, Supervisory HR Specialist (Labor Relations), OHRM

**United States Department of Agriculture
Labor-Management Forum
Preliminary Metric Progress Report
December 31, 2015**

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 efficiency of labor-management collaborations in improving government efficiency, the EO requires the application of metrics. All individual reports have been processed. The Department is pleased to submit its final FY 2015 report containing the highlights of accomplishments from the 53 individual agency-level labor-management forums across the United States Department of Agriculture (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 forums are comprised of multiple bargaining units, and all of the USDA's mission areas hosted forums during the year. Forums cover 27,651 of the approximately 34,449 bargaining unit employees, leaving 6,798 bargaining unit employees without a forum.

III. Progress of Forums

A. LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONSHIP METRIC

Based on the FY 2015 metric reports, 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 possess little right to bargain, e.g., budget allocations. There exists a misunderstanding among some forums as to the benefit and exercise of PDI. Individual metric highlights for FY 2015 include:

- Management and Labor representatives of the National Appeals Division (NAD) worked collaboratively with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to successfully develop a new performance standard and position description for the "Administrative Judge" work series. Through their joint efforts, the parties successfully implemented a transition plan from the "Hearing Officer" to the "Administrative Judge" position classification. (NAD and AFSCME Council 26, Local 3020)
- Rural Development (RD) Management and the Unions successfully completed a defined written process for accomplishing PDI and have incorporated this process within its Labor Management Relations process. (RD – Arkansas and AFGE Local 108)

- The Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS) and its Union addressed information sharing through the use of PDI. In 2015, the parties successfully collaborated on 31 initiatives covering a wide variety of issues (e.g., office renovations, awards, career enhancement, and Partnership for Public Service) which is a marked increase from the nine PDI initiatives accomplished in 2014. (FAS, AFSA and AFSCME Local 3976)
- The Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and its Union sought to improve the Labor-Management Relationship by undertaking a three-pronged approach: completing negotiations on its new agreement, presenting joint training for its managers and bargaining unit employees on the terms of the new agreement, and ensuring all members of its Labor-Management Forum receive PDI training by close of FY 2015. As a result of the parties' concerted efforts all three goals were successfully achieved. (ARS and AFGE Local 2315)
- The Farm Service Agency (FSA) and its Union addressed information sharing between management and employees. To that end, the parties achieved their FY 2015 goal of conducting a Labor-Management Forum meeting every quarter. (FSA and AFSCME Local 3354)
- Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Plant Protection & Quarantine (APHIS-PPQ) division and its Union improved its efforts to increase the awareness and understanding of PDI at the field level. The parties achieved their goal by both modifying and increasing the training to nine locations for 2015. This more than doubled the PDI training accomplished in 2014. (APHIS-PPQ, NAAE and NAPPQOSE)

The majority of subordinate forums' report 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 efforts on improving effective communications between labor and management. Individual metric highlights include:

- NAD working with AFSCME Council 26, Local 3020 sought to improve its Leadership Satisfaction and Communications Employee Viewpoint Scores in light of their previous scoring. The parties agreed to implement a 360° assessment survey for all leadership positions and ensured all supervisors completed the courses "Maximizing Employee Engagement" and "Difficult Conversations" before the end of FY 2015. As a result, NAD significantly increased scores on the Employee Viewpoint Survey in 9 out of the 10 questions related to supervisory satisfaction. (NAD and AFSCME, Council 26, Local 3020)
- RD – Arkansas and AFGE, Local 108 jointly developed a program for increasing employees' opportunities for personal development through Aglearn access. As a result, RD agreed to allow each employee up to two hours of duty time per month for accessing Aglearn training programs on an as requested basis. (RD – Arkansas and AFSCME Local 108)

- The APHIS-PPQ Management and the Unions sought to create a process for allowing employees to offer excess uniforms to other employees in need. The parties jointly developed a process which now allows for the exchange of excess uniforms. (APHIS – PPQ, NAAE and NAPPQOSE)

- ARS and its Union sought to decrease the use of sick leave utilization by improving the work-life balance within the Agency. Based on the parties' analysis, there appeared to be an opportunity to revise work schedules to better reflect the employees' difficulties in scheduling outside activities. As a result, the parties agreed to implement a new 12-hour work schedule which has led to improved leave balances and an increase in employee satisfaction as reflected on the Employee Viewpoint Survey. (ARS and AFGE Local 2315)

- FAS and its Unions worked with APHIS's Center for Training & Organization Development to encourage managers to complete the Maximizing Employee Engagement course. Unions have been engaged in FAS-wide Action Plans as a result of Partnership for Public Service Employee Engagement Project. The parties' effort resulted in a 13 percent increase in score for Leadership in the 2015 OPM Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. (FAS, AFSA and AFSCME Local 3976)

A review of FY 2015 progress reports 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 on the part of management by employees. However, there is more progress needed as is evident from the recent OPM Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Results for 2015.

C. MISSION & SERVICE DELIVERY METRIC

A review of FY 2015 reports for the Mission and Service Delivery metric continues to indicate that this particular metric 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 2015 include:

- The NAD and AFSCME forum agreed to continue monitoring Administrative Officers' decision readability, listening skills, and general courtesy. The survey results were shared with the Union and the parties agreed to continue monitoring these customer service areas in FY 2016. (NAD and AFSCME Council 26, Local 3020)

- RD and AFGE Local 108 agreed on the need to accelerate delivery of financial assistance and essential health care services for rural communities. As a result, the parties participated in a series of discussions for the purpose of developing strategies for targeting the counties most in need of these services and increased outreach by holding no less than four conferences per year in these communities. (RD – Arkansas and AFGE Local 1032)

- The APHIS-PPQ and its Unions agreed to jointly identify employees that would be considered exempt and/or excepted for purposes of a lapse of appropriation furlough. As a result, the parties drafted a comprehensive shutdown plan explaining the process for identifying the employees designated to work through a furlough. (APHIS-PPQ, NAAE and NAPPQOSE)

- RD – Colorado and AFGE Local 3499 worked collaboratively on centralizing the Single Family Housing Direct (SFHD) program in Colorado in order to ensure consistency in underwriting and service practices. To that end, the SFHD Colorado program staff underwent weekly SFHD training sessions, and as a result of centralizing operations and additional training, for FY 2015, total customer complaints decreased,

positive customer feedback increased, and SFHD loan processing increased 20%. (RD – Colorado and AFGE Local 3499)

- RD – Montana and AFGE Local 1585 agreed on the need to significantly improve customer service for FY 2015. Accordingly, the parties identified customer service areas needing improvement and developed a customer service training program through Aglearn courses. As a result, RD – Montana received no Congressional inquiries, implemented an innovative “Receipt for Service” program, and provided a continuity of services procedure which resulted in increased program use. (RD – Montana and AFGE Local 1585)

- FSA and its Union committed to increase FSA program participation rates for FY 2015. By working collaboratively, the parties increased the percentages of loans made to Socially Disadvantaged Applicants to 14.2%, which exceeded the USDA national goal of 11%. (FSA and AFSCME Local 3354)

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 remains 14 bargaining units that currently are not participating in the forum/metrics process, and three bargaining units that, while participating in a forum that conduct PDI, are still working on developing metrics and governance documents. The following are the most prevalent explanations provided by the parties representing these units as to why they choose not to participate in a forum:

- Labor and management are working on setting up their forum and/or developing metrics but require additional time to address obstacles;
- The labor – management relationship is working well and the union sees no added value to the forum/metrics process; and,
- 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 engage and work 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., Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services, NTEU and AFGE Local 2735; FAS, 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 working to complete implementation of the EO. Although work remains, measurable progress exists 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 within the Employee and Labor Relations Division 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 revise their action plans, just as labor-management parties will continue their efforts to bring more bargaining units under the EO.

