



## **USDA Labor-Management Relations Update (LMRU)**

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### **Mission**

*The Mission of the USDA Office of Human Resources Management Labor Relations program is to provide expert advice and assistance to all levels of USDA staff and management, especially Labor Relations practitioners, so they are better able to meet their LR obligations while accomplishing the program goals of their Mission Areas and Offices.*

### **Departmental Administration Focuses on Labor Relations Program**

As reported in the March 31, 2003, LMRU, one of the outcomes from the March 26 briefing given to Deputy Secretary Moseley and the Subcabinet, was the formation of an ASA-led task force of Mission Area and staff office representatives to identify and offer recommendations on crosscutting LR issues facing USDA. The task force, chaired by Clyde Thompson, Associate Assistant Secretary for Administration, has since met and completed its work. The group's findings and recommendations were incorporated into an informational memorandum to the Deputy Secretary, from Assistant Secretary Gallegos.

Three key cross-cutting USDA initiatives containing significant labor-management issues were identified, including;

- Competitive Sourcing
- IT Convergence under OCIO
- Implementation of Labor Relations Strategies contained in USDA Human Capital Plan

A number of recommendations were offered to address issues associated each of the initiatives, most of which focused on the need for improved intra-management communication and involvement by the labor relations staffs in agency and USDA staff office activities related to these initiatives.

### **Cross Cutting USDA Labor Relations Issues – Update**

In an effort to provide readers an update on the previously identified significant issues facing the USDA LR community in 2003, the following table offers a summary of the most recent developments. Highlighted portions of the "Status" blocks in the table contain updated information since the previous LMRU.

Project/Issue	Status
<i>South Building Renovations</i> – strengthen USDA-Mission Area coordination to identify and resolve LR issues timely	USDA Office of Operations has provided update on Phase 3 of the renovation – affected Mission Areas notified – no significant LR issued reported
<i>Establishing a USDA LR strategy/protocol</i> – ensuring USDA’s LR strategy/protocol is developed giving appropriate consideration to Mission Area interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ ASA-led task force identified this as a key USDA LR initiative and recommended ASA take the lead in developing the strategy</li> <li>□ DA-OHRM to form a USDA team of LR staff and managers to draft the strategy</li> </ul>
<i>USDA LR services contract</i> – ensuring understanding and consistent use of the procedures of this new contract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ BPAs have been established with three firms – information on BPA use has been distributed to Mission Area LROs.</li> <li>□ To date, BPAs have not been used by Mission Areas – reason to be determined</li> </ul>
<i>Competitive Sourcing (CS)</i> – meeting LR obligations of CS consistently within USDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Program Manager for LR is on the OCFO competitive sourcing team.</li> <li>□ Joint OHRM-OCFO guidance on MEO and Union costs issued on 5-23-03.</li> </ul>
<i>Pay equity for journey-level LR practitioners</i> – how to address the apparent pay disparity between LR positions in USDA and other agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Task force being formed and expected to begin work in June ‘03</li> </ul>
<i>OCIO Reorganization and the Field Service Agencies (FSA, NRCS, and RD)</i> – dealing with the potential representation issues associated with the planned reorganization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ OCIO beginning transition process.</li> <li>□ CIO and staff briefed on LR issues.</li> <li>□ OHRM recommendations offered for cooperative approach between OCIO, OHRM and Mission Areas to address LR issues</li> </ul>
<i>USDA Human Capital Plan implementation</i> – cooperatively identifying and resolving LR issues associated with planned activities in the Plan (Note: The USDA Human Capital Plan contains the Department’s Human Capital goals for the next 5 years, in response to assessment and accountability guidelines set forth in the President’s Management Agenda for Human Capital Management.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ HC and AP are posted on the USDA OHRM website at <a href="http://www.usda.gov/da/employ.html">http://www.usda.gov/da/employ.html</a></li> <li>□ Objectives for the automated labor relations tracking and reporting system distributed to Mission Area LROs for comment.</li> <li>□ First quarterly HC Scorecard results reported to OMB and OPM, including ULP data. Total of 55 ULPs charges filed (Jan-Mar ‘03).</li> </ul>

## **USDA Labor Relations Training – Class is Set to Start**

The five-day course: *Labor-Management Relations for Human Resources Practitioners*, will be offered June 9-13, 2003 in Washington D.C., at the Farm Service Agency Training facility. This will be the second offering of this tuition-free program, which was developed and is taught by senior USDA Labor Relations specialists. Twenty-four USDA employees, mostly LR practitioners and a few “inquirers” from six USDA Mission Areas and two staff offices are registered. A second class is planned for this fall.

## **USDA Labor-Management Relations Website Redesigned**

If you’ve not been to <http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/LR.htm> recently, check it out. With the assistance of OHRM’s webmaster, the site has taken on a new look with improved functionality. Information on the site is frequently updated, including collective bargaining agreements being reviewed and national consultations taking place. Recent postings include: copies of the FSIS LERD Coaching/Mentoring Program\*, MRP’s BUS Code Guide\*, and a powerpoint program featuring information on USDA LR best practices. (Note: \* denotes a USDA best-practice).

## **Cybersecurity and Telework – USDA Guidance Being Prepared**

On April 29, representatives from OHRM and OCIO met to discuss the legal and regulatory restrictions involving remote access to the USDA IT networks and their impacts on the USDA teleworking program. Specifically discussed was whether employees approved for teleworking may use their PCs to access the network, and if so under what conditions. Given security obligations associated with current laws and governmentwide regulations on computer security, substantial implications on personal PC use for teleworking were recognized. Pending USDA OCIO directives on the subject are likely to have further impacts. The participants agree that communication and closer coordination between OHRM and OCIO was necessary to address this issue and agreed to the following actions:

- At present, no action was necessary to disturb existing telework agreements
- OCIO and OHRM would jointly prepare an advisory for both the agency IT and HR offices (including telework coordinators and labor relations officers), containing existing cybersecurity-related legal and regulatory obligations to be addressed when establishing telework agreements. (Note: This document has since been drafted and is currently being reviewed)
- OCIO and OHRM would coordinate with each other during the draft stage of any forthcoming directives on or related to telework to ensure mutual interest issues are adequately addressed.

## **Interagency Labor Relations Forum (ILRF) Web Site Launched**

The ILRF, a formal network of Federal labor relations practitioners, put up its website at <http://ilrf.net/>, last month. The site contains a number of features and information designed to promote professional development and information sharing within the labor relations community. One feature, the “discussion forum”, enables ILRF members to post questions and offer responses. The ILRF has nearly 600 members from throughout the Federal sector on its mailing list, who receive informational updates like OPM’s Significant Cases and Case Listings when they are released.

## **Reminder – *Labor and Employee Relations Update* Available to USDA Employees**

Since August 2001, USDA-OHRM has been underwriting a Department-wide e-subscription to the *LER Update* as a service primarily for the labor and employee relations practitioners. This monthly publication, written in a easy-to-read (an sometimes humorous) style is available to any USDA employee interested in staying abreast of case law and other developments in the Federal labor and employee relations professions. New issues of the *Update* are available at the beginning of each month at <http://www.fpml.com/login.shtml>. User name is: usdadc and password is: ler2001.

The USDA LMRU is issued periodically by the USDA Office of Human Resources Management's (OHRM) Program, Policy and Partnership Division as a “method and means” to highlight significant events occurring in the federal Labor Relations profession within the Department. It will also contain what we believe to be useful LMR information received by the USDA from other federal agencies and outside sources that may not be readily available to the Mission Area Labor Relations community. Readers are encouraged to submit questions, suggested topics and LMR “news” to improve the utility of the LMRU. Queries and comments should be sent to [peter.rockx@usda.gov](mailto:peter.rockx@usda.gov).