



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.

USDA Well Represented at SOELR

The OPM-sponsored 2003 SOELR held March 18-21 in Los Angeles, California, was attended by over 1,100 employee, labor and dispute resolution practitioners representing 72 agencies throughout Government. Seventy-three USDA employees from six Mission Areas, OGC, and Department Administration attended SOELR, which offered a variety of 1-day pre-conference workshops and nearly 50 breakout sessions addressing current competency-related topics. The USDA attendees met as a group one afternoon for introductions and a general discussion of current issues facing the employee, labor relations and alternative dispute resolution programs. From the discussion and messages written on flip charts provided to record issues and requests for Departmental assistance, several themes were event. These were: the need to address systemic problems with the EEO complaint process, improving dialogue and information sharing within the ER and LR communities, issuing a updated Administrative Grievance System, and dealing with the volume of work especially competitive sourcing impacts

Deputy Secretary and Subcabinet Briefed on USDA Labor Relations Program

On March 26, Deputy Secretary Moseley and several members of the Subcabinet were provided an over view of the Department's labor-management relations program. The briefing included statistical information on labor organizations who represent USDA employees, Departmental LMR obligations, recent history and LR trends, and current program issues including LR action strategies contained in the USDA Human Capital Plan. One of the meeting outcomes was the establishment of a Subcabinet level group, led by the Assistant Secretary for Administration's office to examine crosscutting LMR issues facing the Department.

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.

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"> ❑ Establishment of a USDA LR strategy is an action strategy within the USDA Human Capital Plan which has been approved. ❑ Deputy Secretary and selected Subcabinet briefed on USDA LR program, including the need to proceed with establishing a Departmental LR strategy.
<i>USDA LR services contract</i> – ensuring understanding and consistent use of the procedures of this new contract	BPAs have been established with three firms – information on BPA use has been distributed to Mission Area LROs.
<i>Competitive Sourcing (CS)</i> – meeting LR obligations of CS consistently within USDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Program Manager for LR is on the OCFO competitive sourcing team. ❑ Subcabinet level team being formed to examine cross-cutting LR issues including CS.
<i>Pay equity for journey-level LR practitioners</i> – how to address the apparent pay disparity between LR positions in USDA and other agencies.	Task force of LR practitioners from three Mission Areas established. No progress to report.
<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"> ❑ OCIO beginning transition process. ❑ Updated BU data requested. ❑ OHRM, OCIO, RD, FSA, and NRCS officials are discussing representation issues. ❑ CIO and staff briefed on LR issues.
<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"> ❑ USDA Human Capital (HC) Plan and associated Accountability Plan (AP) have been approved by the Secretary and were submitted to OMB on 12-31-02. ❑ HC and AP Plans, and associated reporting requirements discussed at USDA March LRO meeting. ❑ HC and AP are posted on the USDA OHRM website at http://www.usda.gov/da/employ.html

LR and ER “Tips and Updates” at the Human Capital Conference

In an effort to promote ways to capitalize on the collective “genius” within the USDA Labor and Employee Relations Mission Areas, Keith Prue and Pete Rockx shared 13 “best practices” during their presentation at the OHRM-sponsored Human Capital Conference (March 24-26). Most of the practices are currently in use and available throughout USDA. The presentation featured a briefing from FSIS on their MSAccess-based dispute record and tracking system, which under consideration as model for Departmental use. The development of a standardized electronic dispute record system is one of the action strategies in the USDA Human Capital plan. Another outstanding best practice in the recently developed FSIS Coaching and Mentoring Program for labor and employee relations practitioners. Information on the LR and ER “best practices” along with an invitation for others to submit yet undiscovered “best practices” can be found on the USDA LR web site at <http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/LR.htm>.

USDA Labor Relations Training Announced

The five-day course: *Labor-Management Relations for Human Resources Practitioners*, will be offered June 9-13, 2003 in Washington D.C. This will be the second offering of this well-received program, which was developed and is taught by senior USDA Labor Relations specialists. A course announcement and registration form is posted on the USDA Labor Relations web site. The deadline for registration is May 2, 2003. A second class is planned for November 17-21, 2003. The class is open to USDA specialists, tuition-free.

Interagency Labor Relations Forum (ILRF) Web Site to be Launched

In a continuing effort to serve the professional development needs of the Federal Labor Relations community, the ILRF plans to launch its web site on April 10, 2003. The site will feature LR resources, web links and a password controlled (member only) discussion section. One excellent resource posted to the site is the presentation made by Dennis Reischl and Mike Wenzler at SOELR on I&I (aka procedures and arrangements) bargaining. Over 400 Federal LR practitioners are ILRF members, with over 100 who joined at the recent SOELR. Those interested in finding out more about the ILRF should check out the web site.

Society of Federal Labor and Employee Relations Professionals (SFLERP) Symposium set for May 15-16, 2003

Registration is underway for the annual SFLERP Symposium to be held May 15-16, 2003, at the Crystal City Hilton in Arlington, VA. The Symposium includes a general session that will look at the last 30 years. Moderated by Attorney Joseph Kaplan, there

will be a panel including Former FSIP Executive Director Linda Lafferty, Former SFLERP President Dolph Sand, and Mark Roth, AFGE. In addition, Eileen Hoffman, Commissioner with FMCS, will moderate a general session that will address the current status of the labor program. With her on the panel will be Lucy Vargas, IRS; Jeff Friday, NTEU; Steve Sharfstein, EPA; and Don Wasserman, Former Chair, FLRA. In addition, there will be 18 workshops on a variety of topics from overarching topics covering "New Developments in Employee Relations" to specific in-depth workshops such as "Penalty Setting: Douglas and the Portable Standard of Reasonableness" taught by Michael Bogdanow with MSPB. To register, go to the SFLERP web site at <http://www.sflerp.org/>.

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.