



USDA Labor-Management Relations Update (LMRU)

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Mission

The Mission of the USDA 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.

Official Time Census Taking Returns

Although the subject of official time use by union officials is not new, an annual reporting requirement of official time is. On June 17, 2002, OPM Director **Kay Coles James** issued a letter to all Department and Agency Heads mandating that the total hours of official time used to perform representational functions required by the Federal Service Labor Relations Statute and collective bargaining agreements be reported to OPM at the end of each fiscal year. Some of you may remember gathering official time and cost information for Congress in past years, which reflects an ongoing interest of this subject by various members. Apparently, OPM has received enough of these inquiries to determine it would be wise to maintain this information to be more responsive and for program assessment purposes. USDA's request for official time data was sent to Mission Area in a memo from Acting OHRM Director **Joe Colantuoni** on July 11, 2002, with a reply due on October 12. Guidance on coding official time for representational purposes was issued separately to Mission Area LROs and is posted on the USDA LR web site at <http://www.usda.gov/da/employ/LR.htm>.

Labor Relations Officers Met and Plan to Meet Again

The last quarterly meeting of the USDA LROs (6/25/02) took place after the last LMRU was issued, so I feel an obligation to provide a brief summary what may be old news by now. I'll keep it short:

- **Ray Fisher**, Team Leader from the USDA OPPM Operations Division, gave a overview of procurement options and obligations for those seeking to acquire LR services. He pointed to a number of advantages of having a centralized contract such as the one being developed at USDA. (*See an article on this project below*)
- **Jean Lenderking**, retired LR Program Manager at DOT and contractor for GRA, talked about the need for LR programs to build capacity internally and through outside resources as well as doing strategic planning in determining work priorities.
- Updates were given on:

- Competitive Sourcing – including information sources on USDA CFO website and at the July 23 Procurement Executive Council-sponsored training. (Handouts from the session are available on www.pec.gov)
- USDA/OHRM-OGC Litigation Protocol – posted on LR website. Feedback on Mission Area experiences welcomed.
- Homeland Security Bill and USDA implications – focused on APHIS-PPQ and ARS Plum Island. Many potential LR issues to be addressed.
- Union Dues Allotments and BUS Codes – a LMRU Advisory, dated June 20, 2002, was discussed. Intent is to alert Mission Areas on potential liabilities when dues allotments are continued erroneously. Advisory is posted on the LR web site.
- LR Training Sessions – both the USDA and Interagency Labor Relations Forum (ILRF) are planning to offer basic LR training for practitioners this fall (*See separate article below*).

The next quarterly LRO meeting will be September 17, 2002, in Room 0348 of the South Agriculture Building at 1:30pm.

Contracting for LR Services – How do you spell R-E-L-I-E-F?

If all goes according to plan, Mission Area LROs will have another resource to augment their program capacity later this year as USDA-OHRM continues to work with OPPM in developing a Department-wide LR services contract. The Statement of Work, after several refinements, is nearly complete. When established, Mission Areas will be able to contact contractors directly from those who have successfully competed to provide a variety of LR services. Because of prior competition, contractors able to perform specific LR services will be readily available at the lowest price possible. The intent is to save time and money, while affording the flexibility for Mission Areas to select from amongst “pre-qualified” vendors.

Labor Relations Training – Good Learning at Bargain Prices

If you have the time... we have the opportunity... in fact, two opportunities.

1. **USDA Basic Labor-Management Relations** – Modeled after the highly touted DOD Field Advisory Services, this will be a 4 ½ day course taught by Mission Area level LR specialists. It will be offered the week of November 18-22, 2002, in the Washington DC area (tentatively set to be given in Rosslyn, VA). Training modules include: an LR overview, Union representation, bargaining obligations, negotiated grievance procedures and arbitration, ULPs, bargaining principles and practices (including a mock negotiation session), and LR strategies. This session is targeted at LR management practitioners and other HR specialist having substantive LR responsibilities. Look for course registration information in the near future. No tuition will be charged. Attendance limited to 30 participants.

2. **Introduction to Federal Labor-Management Relations** – Developed and taught by a consortium of senior Federal LR practitioners of the Interagency Labor Relations Forum, this 4 ¾ day course will offered the week of October 21-25, 2002, and be held at the EPA Headquarters Building in downtown DC. The course is targeted at the same audience as the USDA session and covers a lot of the same subject areas, but will end with a unique “in box” exercise to re-enforce covered material. Registration information will be available later in August. No tuition will be charged. Attendance limited to approximately 35 participants.

SOELR CDs Available

A big thank you goes to **Becky Cash**, an LR Specialist in Rural Development, for taking the initiative and time to burn copies of the CD she obtained at the March 2002, OPM-sponsored Symposium on Employee and Labor Relations. The CD contains the hand out materials from SOELR. A copy of the CD will be sent to each Mission Area on request. Requests should be sent to peter.rockx@usda.gov.

LER Update – Better Later than Never

By now you should be enjoying the August 2002, edition of the LER Update. Access to this first edition of the second year of USDA’s subscription was delayed a few days due to a procurement “glitch”. Actually, the purchase order got temporary lost between OHRM and OPPM. Once recognized, the problem was resolved and the access “switch” turned back on by FPMI. The URL and access procedures remain the same as last year.

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.