



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 Labor Relations Training Gets a Big Thumbs Up

Based on the feedback and critiques from the Instructors and 22 students who completed the first offering of “Labor-Management Relations for Human Resources Practitioners,” (November 18-22, 2002) the course was a hit. Here’s a summary of student critique forms, based on a five-point scale (1 = poor to 5 = excellent), with the number being the average score:

1. 4.4 Overall, how effective was this training in preparing you to deal with basic labor relations issues at your organization?
2. 4.6 What rating would you give in recommending this basic labor relations training to other personnel management specialists and/or management officials?
3. 4.8 How useful were the prepared materials?

Many thanks to the cadre of instructors: Cutberto (Bert) Castro (APHIS), Debra Donnelly (FFAS), Wilson (Ed) Fisher (Forest Service), Chris Kunz (RD), Steve Martin (NRCS), Dennis McPeters (APHIS), and Pete Rockx (OHRM), for their excellent work. Plans are to offer the same training twice in 2003 – in June and November.

Cross Cutting USDA Labor Relations Issues – Update

From all indications FY 2003 will be an active year for USDA LR practitioners. As noted in the October 2002 LMRU, a number of significant projects and program issues are underway that will have multi-agency LR implications. Following is a status report on those project/issues:

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
<i>Establishing a USDA LR strategy/protocol</i> – ensuring USDA’s LR strategy/protocol is developed giving appropriate consideration to Mission Area interests	Establishment of a USDA LR strategy is an action strategy within the USDA Human Capital Plan which has been approved.
<i>USDA LR services contract</i> – ensuring understanding and consistent use of the procedures of this new contract	BPA has been established with three firms – information being distributed to Mission Areas.
<i>Competitive Sourcing (CS)</i> – meeting LR obligations of CS consistently within USDA	Program Manager for LR is on the OCFO competitive sourcing team. LR guidance being incorporated into USDA CS Guidebook.
<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.
<i>OCIO Reorganization and the Field Service Agencies (FSA, NRCS, and RD)</i> – dealing with the potential representation issues associated with the planned reorganization.	OCIO Reorganization pending management decision.
<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 will contain 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.)	USDA Human Capital Plan and associated Accountability Plan have been approved by the Secretary and were submitted to OMB on 12-31-02

Interagency Labor Relations Forum (ILRF) Plans for 2003

In a recent memo to its members, the new Chairperson of the ILRF outlined previewed activities to be sponsored by the Forum in 2003. Monthly meetings will be held in the USDA’s South Building cafeteria and feature presentations on current topics of interest to the Federal LR community. On January 16, David Childs from OMB will be taking about

proposed changes to A-76 process and the associated LR implications. In February, the FLRA will be providing a case law update addressing some its most recent decisions. The Forum maintains an extensive mailing list of its members that is used to distribute LR news, including recent FLRA decisions and OPM case summaries. Those interested in becoming a member and being added to the ILRF mailing list should contact Pete Rockx at peter.rockx@usda.gov. The ILRF is a dues-free professional association.

Reminder on Collective Bargaining Agreement Submissions

During the last couple of months the Department's LR office has received a surge in the number collective bargaining agreements (CBA) for agency head review under 5 U.S.C. 7114(c) and DR 4070-711, Section 9. Some were received within five workdays after execution as required in the DR. Others were not. In some cases, there were misunderstandings between the Department and Mission Area over when the CBA was executed, especially in the cases when contract ratification took place. Normally, agency head review does begin until after ratification is completed. See 35 FLRA No. 119. The lessons to be learned appear to be need to ensure timely Departmental notification takes place after contracts are executed, and for the Department to routinely follow up with Mission Areas to verify the date of execution.

Homeland Security Department and USDA

Now that legislation to establish the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has been enacted and will become effective January 24, 2003, the focus has shifted to implementation of this new large organization. The Administration's reorganization plan calls for the transfer of many of the affected employees from their current agencies to DHS on March 1, 2003. Within USDA, represented employees in both APHIS (portions of PPQ) and ARS (Plum Island Research Station) will be directly affected, being slated to become part of DHS. LR practitioners from both Mission Areas and OHRM will be working with OPM and other impacted agencies to identify and address LR issues associated with the transition process.

USDA-OHRM is an Organizational Member of SFLERP

Since June 2001, USDA-Office of Human Resources Management has been an organizational member of the Society of Federal Labor and Employee Relations Professionals. Two aspects of SFLERP's mission are: to enhance the value and stature of the federal labor and employee management relations program, and improve the professional expertise of its practitioners. In support of these mission goals, SFLERP and its Chapters offer a number of developmental opportunities for its members, including an annual symposium, educational luncheons and periodic newsletters. As an organizational member, USDA-OHRM can sponsor up to five LR practitioners permitting them to join SFLERP at a significantly reduced annual membership rate. Currently, USDA has 3 slots

available on a first come basis. Please contact Pete Rockx if interested in using one of these slots. More information on SFLERP is available on their website at <http://www.sflerp.org/>. In addition to the USDA-OHRM, several USDA Mission Areas including FS, FSIS, RD and FNS are organizational members of SFLERP.

SOELR Registration in Progress

Registration for the 2003 OPM-sponsored Symposium of Employee and Labor Relations (SOELR) to be held in Los Angeles, CA, March 18-21 is now open. Details are available on OPM's web site at http://www.opm.gov/er/soelr/soelr_2002/how_to_regis.asp.

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.