



Office of the Deputy
Administrator - Plant
Protection and Quarantine
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To PPQ All
cc
bcc
Subject Holiday Greetings and an Update from the Deputy
Administrator

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Dear PPQ Colleagues:

As we move forward to the close of 2009, I would like to thank each of you for the positive efforts you put forth every day. I am continually reminded of your accomplishments, especially when I travel throughout PPQ's regions. I often say the best part of my job is getting out to see and learn about the work you all do.

Over the past few months, I have had the opportunity to travel to Texas, Florida, Raleigh, and Fort Collins to present the Safeguarding Awards. In addition, I have visited and toured the new the National Detector Dog Training Center in Newnan, GA, and the Asian longhorned beetle program in Worcester, MA. While touring each of these work units, I not only was able to learn about the daily operations, but, more importantly, I was able to meet with the staff and engage in thoughtful discussions. I enjoy occasions such as these when I can personally talk with PPQ employees and recognize the extraordinary efforts you all do in your jobs. In 2010, I hope to continue visiting other work units and getting to know our dedicated employees.

I am aware that the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Customs and Border Protection (CBP) recently announced an upgrade to a GS-12 journeyman for front-line personnel including Agriculture Specialists, which is scheduled to occur during the first quarter of calendar year 2010.

Naturally we are concerned about the potential impact this action may have on our own workforce. CBP is basing their justification for the upgrade of the Agriculture Specialists on the increased complexity, scope of duties, and risk of the job for CBP Officers, which have changed since September 11, 2001. Given the increased complexity of the position due to the myriad of laws that must be enforced and the skill and judgment that must be exercised by an officer operating at the full performance level, the job has been classified to be a journeyman GS-12.

We have contacted key DHS Human Resources personnel to seek more information and a copy of the upgrade justification that was prepared by DHS. Because DHS is still finalizing some of this material, we will have to wait to receive final copies of the material that was prepared by their Human Resources Department.

We are always seeking to find ways to enhance program delivery so that we can better serve the public. I welcome receiving your comments on ways we could enhance our mission and provide

increased services in a way that may have a positive impact on the scope and complexity of the job that you perform. In this regard, I am open to any comments you may have on this subject. Additionally, I will convene a work group to further review mission enhancement strategies and how that might impact the scope of the work performed by our Plant Health Safeguarding Specialists and other associated positions. We will invite representatives from National Association of Plant Protection and Quarantine Managers, National Association of Agriculture Employees, and National Association of Plant Protection and Quarantine Office Service Employees to be a part of this review process.

I have established the following Lotus Notes mailbox for the receipt of your comments, PPQ Mission Enhancement@aphis.usda.gov. We will receive comments and suggestions until March 1, 2010. Following, my office will respond to comments, in a general way, that arise in common themes and ideas. Moreover, we shall keep you informed regarding the outcomes concerning this initiative.

Finally, I would like to share some updates from Washington, D.C. As the role of information technology and information systems become increasingly important in APHIS, and the PPQ Deputy Administrator's office must be more involved in IT issues, I have asked John Payne to coordinate IT related activities for the Deputy Administrator's office while working closely with Dan Stoltz, PPQ's IT Manager, and the PPQ Information Technology Data Coordination group to communicate our IT successes and overcome our challenges. Dan and the PPQ IT professionals have done an outstanding job, and we believe John's role will enhance their efforts and help elevate issues when needed.

Edward Avalos joined Marketing and Regulatory Programs the week of October 26 as our new Under Secretary. He is learning more about what we do and is beginning to travel to different work stations to see APHIS' work first hand.

The APHIS Administrator's office welcomed a new addition to their team. Greg Parham, who is now serving as an APHIS Associate Administrator, assists in running day-to-day operations in OA. To fill Greg's position, Joanne Munro will act as Deputy Administrator for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Services. Additionally, since Dan Sheesley's retirement, Ron Hicks has taken the position of Deputy Administrator for International Services.

On behalf of my office, I would like to wish you and your family a safe and joyful holiday season. As we enter into a new year, I look forward to working with you to engage in innovative thinking and see our goals come into fruition. I am honored to be a part of such a superior team. Thank you for making PPQ an outstanding organization.

Happy holidays,

Rebecca A. Bech
Deputy Administrator
Plant Protection and Quarantine