



for immediate release

contact: Richard Hirn 202-255-3141

Plant Inspectors sue President, Agriculture Secretary to regain collective bargaining rights

Washington, D.C. August 13 - The union that represents 1,500 employees of the Department of Agriculture who inspect and eradicate plant pests and diseases filed suit today challenging the President's revocation of its collective bargaining rights on national security grounds.

On March 27, President Trump issued Executive Order 14251 which excluded these plant inspectors as well as two-thirds of the entire civil service from coverage of the statute that grants Federal employees the right to unionize and collectively bargain with their employing agencies under a provision of the statute which permits the President to exempt those agencies whose "primary function" is "national security" work if he determines that collective bargaining at those agencies is not "consistent with national security requirements and considerations." On August 13, the Administrator of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service notified NAAE that it was no longer going to recognize the union and cancelled its collective bargaining agreement.

The suit, *National Association of Agriculture Employees v. Trump et al*, which was filed in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., is the sixth lawsuit that challenges Executive Order 14251.

According to NAAE President Cole Austen Gandy, "none of our work involves national security. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 which transferred that responsibility, as well as 3000 agriculture inspectors who inspect international passengers, luggage and cargo at ports of entry, from the Agriculture Department to Customs and Border Protection in the Department of Homeland Security." The complaint notes that the agriculture inspectors who were transferred to Homeland Security retain their collective bargaining rights because Customs and Border Protection was excluded from the Executive Order.

The plant inspectors' complaint also alleges that they protect the nation's crops from natural threats posed by plant pests and diseases and not from espionage, sabotage, subversion, foreign aggression as "national security" is defined by the Supreme Court and the Federal Labor Relations Authority. According to the complaint, the plant inspectors receive no training in bioterrorism or agroterrorism.

NAAE is being represented by Washington, D.C. labor attorney Richard Hirn, who is the union's General Counsel, as well as Keith Bolek of O'Donoghue & O'Donoghue.