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Osama El-Lissy
Deputy Administrator for Plant Protection and Quarantine
USDA APHIS PPQ
Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

July 7, 2017

Dear Mr. El-Lissy,

The Central Plant Board believes the need for clear and timely communications is imperative to the development of programs and policies which further the safeguarding of agriculture in the United States. Communication is essential between federal, state, and tribal governments, and other cooperators. The Central Plant Board recognizes the resources in personnel and attention that APHIS PPQ has invested in the last year in a shared effort to improve communication between APHIS PPQ and the National Plant Board members by reactivating the Interagency Relations Committee (IRC). The Central Plant Board encourages APHIS PPQ to continue in this joint effort to ensure effective communication in order to enhance shared federal and state plant protection responsibilities.

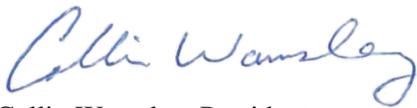
The Interagency Relations Committee (IRC) was originally assembled in 2008 to explore how Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) and the National Plant Board (NPB) could strengthen their relationship at all levels. The need for a strengthened relationship was recognized through several incidents resulting from less than optimal communication. In some instances, these communication-related incidents were elevated to the State Commissioners of Agriculture who in turn reached out to the Administrator of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to recommend improvements in communication between the state and federal plant protection agencies. In response, the original IRC evaluated these incidents and explored the root causes. The resulting action items from this analysis emphasized strengthening the relationship between the State Plant Regulatory Official (SPRO) and the State Plant Health Director (SPHD) as well as establishing more frequent communication between PPQ and NPB leadership through twice monthly calls and biannual face-to-face meetings. The IRC also established protocols to ensure: (1) a standardized process for notifying States of new pest identifications, and (2) that information communicated by PPQ leadership be delivered simultaneously to SPHDs and SPROs. Furthermore, PPQ assisted the NPB in strengthening their Regional and National meeting design to improve communication and coordination between states. Additionally, PPQ established the position of

State Liaison to provide a point of contact to troubleshoot issues and provide advice and guidance to PPQ employees who interact with the NPB. These steps were effective in strengthening the SPHD-SPRO relationship and in providing a clearer, more effective framework for communicating between the organizations.

More recently, the partnership between PPQ and the NPB was formalized in a Strategic Alliance document signed by the PPQ Deputy Administrator and the President of the NPB. However, in 2015, the leadership of PPQ and the NPB recognized that significant turnover in both organizations and repeated restructurings within PPQ had resulted in a loss of operational knowledge of communication protocols and their purpose resulting in barriers to effective communication and engagement. To address this, the leadership of PPQ and the NPB agreed to reinvigorate the Interagency Relations Committee. In 2016, enhancing communication between the two organizations became the top Strategic Alliance priority.

The Central Plant Board encourages the IRC to continue to make this effort to improve interagency communications a priority. The Central Plant Board recognizes that communication is a shared responsibility which requires a continued commitment by both parties. The Central Plant Board appreciates the focus and resources that PPQ has put toward improving communication and would like to recognize the positive outcomes that have and will continue to result from this mutual commitment to enhanced communication between state and federal partners.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Collin Wamsley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Collin Wamsley, President
Central Plant Board

CC:

Matt Rhoads, Executive Director, Policy Management, USDA-APHIS-PPQ

Alan Dowdy, Associate Deputy Administrator, USDA-APHIS-PPQ

Paula Henstridge, Assistant Deputy Administrator, USDA-APHIS-PPQ

Joe Collins, National Plant Board President

Dana Rhodes, Eastern Plant Board President

Larry Nichols, Southern Plant Board President

Brad White, Western Plant Board President