

Marketing & Regulatory Programs
HR BROADCAST

Quarter 1 – FY 2015 Issue

**DIRECTOR'S
CORNER**



Dear HRD Employee,
As I don't get the chance to say it often enough, thank you, to each and every one of you for the outstanding job you do every day. We have had many challenges here in HRD over the past year and because you are always willing to put in that extra effort and look for better ways to do business, we are working to resolve those challenges and move our organization forward. During the upcoming holiday season I want you to know that I am grateful to lead this organization and have a great staff of managers and employees that value their work and love what they do. My focus for the new calendar year will be on you – the employee. I am looking to hear from you on how we can continue to improve our services to you and also improve our organization. Do you have access to the right services for your wellbeing; are we managing our resources the best we can; do we have enough resources and are we recognizing you in a meaningful way are just some of the questions I will be asking you and looking for your feedback and input.

You are what makes this organization what it is today - the best HR shop in USDA.
I wish you and your families a safe and happy Holiday Season and a Happy New Year!

Sincerely,

Marsha Wiggins, HRD Director

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We hope that the HR Broadcast is meeting your needs and communicating topics of interest, but if there are items you would like to see included in future issues, please contact our HR Broadcast Layout Editor, Christina Furnkranz, at Christina.S.Furnkranz@aphis.usda.gov



MEET HR

“MEET HR” is a new feature in the HR Quarterly Broadcast. We hope you find it helpful in learning about the variety of work carried out in HRD and the staff members who provide services to you.

APHIS/AMS Labor Relations Branch

This month’s HRD staff spotlight is on the **APHIS/AMS Labor Relations Branch (LR)**. The staff of five is responsible for ensuring compliance with Statutory Obligations, Collective Bargaining Agreements and maintaining effective relationships with the unions of APHIS, AMS, and FAS.

The three Agencies have collectively eight (8) National unions, 27 local unions and a combined 2,176 bargaining unit employees, which have 94 active contracts, agreements or memorandums of understanding.

The LR staff is responsible for providing training to Agency managers/supervisors, providing guidance and advice to hundreds of managers dealing with bargaining unit employees, negotiating collective bargaining agreements and other changes implemented that impact working conditions of bargaining unit employees and representing the Agency in third party proceedings.

The Labor Relations staff has a never ending job dealing with the union related obligations and could not be successful without the entire HRD team.

How does having bargaining unit employees impact HRD?

- When management is bargaining with the unions or responding to grievances, in many instances, HRD employees are called upon as **subject matter experts** for their technical expertise.
- When agency representatives talk to bargaining unit employees concerning changes in Policy or working conditions. These are called **Formal Discussions**. Examples include – Reasonable Accommodation interactive process, EEO depositions, Mediation or EEO settlement talks, town hall meetings with Agency leaders and working groups.
- If the Agency is considering a change, Executive Order 13522 provides the unions be engaged pre-decisionally before final decisions are made. This is known as **Pre-Decisional Involvement (PDI)**. This applies to most anything; most common would be changes to the HRD Guide, MRP/APHIS Directives, use of new technology, etc.
- When a decision is made to implement a change effecting working conditions. We are required to provide **notice and negotiate** if requested, prior to implementing changes. This also applies to decisions made outside of APHIS’s control, including changes from the Department, OPM, DOT or legislation (EOPF, Transit Benefits, Security changes, GOV Trip, WEB/TA, etc..)
- When interviewing bargaining unit employees who may be subject to discipline. This is known as the **Weingarten Rights**. Employees may ask for a union representative to be present during the interview.

If we don’t meet our obligations listed above, the Agency is subject to **Unfair Labor Practice charges or Grievances** from the union or the employees.

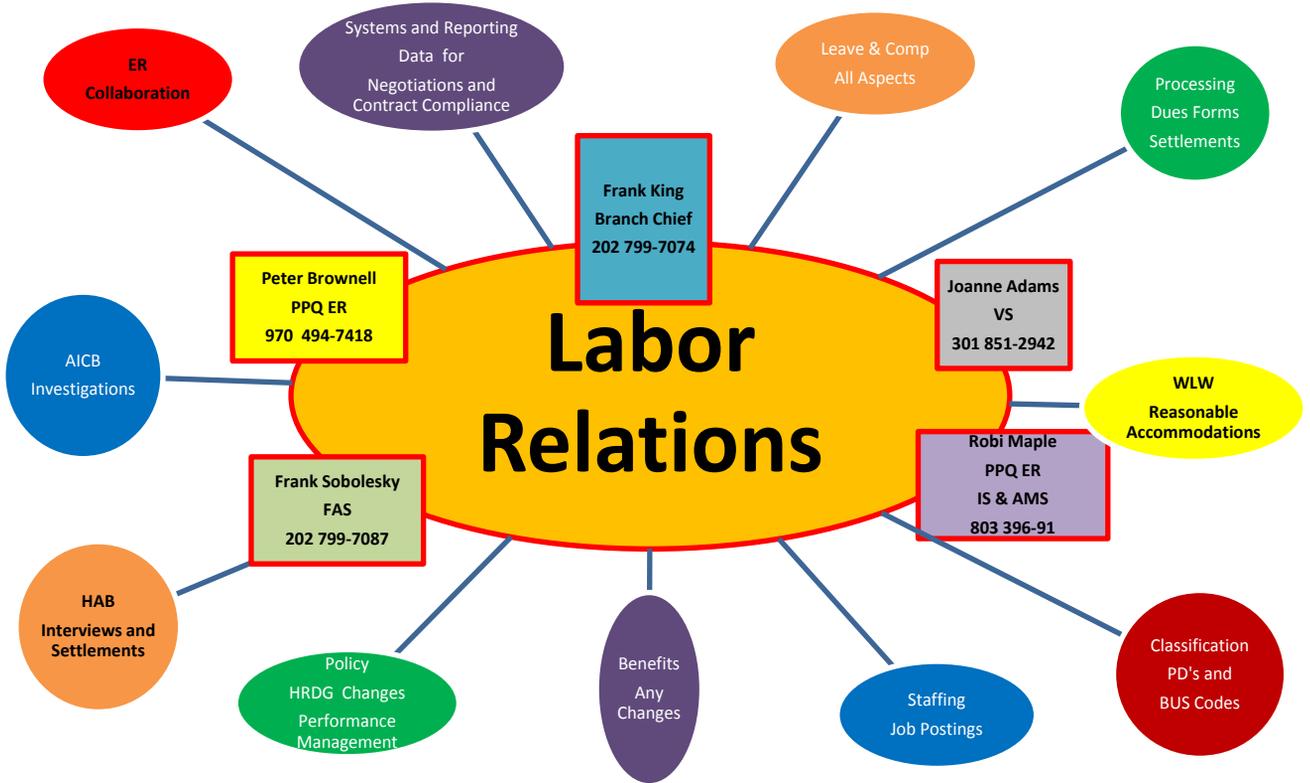
The team members of the Labor Relations Branch look forward to working with you!

See our Labor Relations graphic image on the next page (page 3)...



MEET HR

One Mission - One Team - Center of Excellence



**Joanne Adams * Peter Brownell * Frank King *
Robi Maple * Frank Sobolesky**



Persons with disabilities who need program information in alternate formats (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY).



Work Life Wellness Program – Managing Holiday Stress

By *Tara Coker* (Tara.L.Coker@aphis.usda.gov, 301-851-2883) and
Carol Griffith (Carol.A.Griffith@aphis.usda.gov, 202-861-2938)

Have you ever wondered how to have a hassle-free holiday season? Here are some tips that may make it a bit easier to enjoy the holiday season without feeling stressed out.

- ❖ Manage holiday stress by getting organized early. Make and use a “to-do” list. Be careful not to overcommit your time or your money. Use down time to your advantage. Simplify tasks as much as possible, and don’t be afraid to ask for help. Most importantly, enjoy time with your loved ones.
- ❖ Holiday travel can be a hassle. Make travel plans early. Allow plenty of travel time and anticipate traffic jams.
- ❖ Don’t let holiday shopping and gift giving take away your holiday spirit. Shop early, and wrap gifts as you buy them. Write out holiday cards in advance, and mail presents and cards early. Be creative and stay within your budget.
- ❖ Take care of yourself getting plenty of sleep. Strive to be healthy by sticking to your normal diet and exercise routines. Eat well. (Ok, let’s be realistic... you can have the goodies, just in moderation.)

Learn to recognize your stress signals and try to alleviate contributors. If stress turns into severe anxiety and/or depression, seek professional help immediately. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a professional counseling and referral service that can help employees with personal and professional problems such as emotional, family, marital, alcohol, or drug use/abuse, relationship problems, and other issues.

It is free, confidential within the limits of the law and voluntary. EAP is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and they can be reached at 1-800-222-0364.

Source: “Managing Holiday Stress.” Copyright LifeCare, Inc.



Employee Assistance Program

By **Tara Coker** (Tara.Coker@aphis.usda.gov, 301-851-2883)



EAP is a professional counseling and referral service to help APHIS employees with personal and professional problems. It is free, confidential within the limits of the law, and voluntary. EAP can assist you with emotional, family, marital, alcohol or drug use/abuse, relationship problems, and other issues.

Services covered:

- Up to 6 free confidential counseling sessions, per problem. Immediate family members (spouse/significant other, children living in household) may also use EAP.
- Elder/child care referral services. Information regarding elder or child care resources i.e., summer camps; before/after care; special needs; private schools; adult day care centers; home health care; case management, etc.
- Management consultations. Direct assistance and advice on employee interventions.
- Critical Incident Stress Debriefings. Counseling sessions and debriefings after a critical incident has occurred.
- Employee and Supervisory orientations to EAP services. Group orientations to the EAP contract and the services provided.
- Financial Services - ½ hour free advice per issue, on financial matters.
- Legal Assistance - ½ hour free advice per issue, on legal matters.

Obtaining services:

Call 1-800-222-0364 and identify yourself as an USDA/APHIS employee. You can call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The telephone will be answered by a certified counselor who will ask you several questions about why you are calling (triage). If it is an emergency, you will be directly connected to a counselor. If it is not deemed an emergency, you will be contacted by a counselor within 24 hours, who will begin working directly with you.

If you are calling for elder/child or personal care services, you will be transferred to LifeCare.com after being initially triaged. LifeCare.com will then provide you with elder/child or personal care resources.

For additional information:

If you need more information about these services or experience problems contacting EAP, please contact Tara Coker, EAP Program Manager at (301) 851-2883 or via e-mail at tara.l.coker@aphis.usda.gov. Confidentiality will be maintained.





Guidance for Weather Emergencies

By *Tara Coker* (Tara.L.Coker@aphis.usda.gov, 301-851-2883) and
By *Nella Roberts* (Nella.Roberts@aphis.usda.gov, 301-851-2910)

Hurricane season is over and now most of the country is moving into the winter weather. Snow, sleet, and ice, oh, my! No matter what the weather emergency, it is important to be prepared to continue to carry out the Agency's mission. Being prepared means knowing what the emergency weather announcements, such as "Federal Offices are OPEN under Unscheduled Leave / Unscheduled Telework" or "Federal Offices are CLOSED to the Public," mean and how they apply to you. For MRP employees, a "Federal Offices are **OPEN** under Unscheduled Leave / Unscheduled Telework" announcement means that you may either take leave or telework instead of reporting to the office. This type of announcement covers employees who do not telework on a regular basis. However, if you opt for unscheduled telework and your power goes out, you must either report to the office or take leave for the remainder of your workday. An announcement of "Federal Offices are **CLOSED** to the Public" means that all employees who have approved telework agreements must telework. This includes regularly scheduled telework, ad hoc telework, etc. In these cases, employees will receive 2 hours of administrative leave on the day of the closure to take care of personal needs related to the closure, such as shoveling snow, etc. The leave may be taken at any time during the day. If the office is closed and your power goes out while teleworking, you will be granted administrative leave. However, if your power returns during your regularly scheduled workday, you are required to resume work. In either of the above scenarios, please adhere to the following:

- Contact your supervisor to advise that you are safe;
- Inform your supervisor of your choice to telework or take leave;
- Ensure you have your laptop and any other necessary equipment, paperwork, etc. at home with you. If you are out of the office, e.g., on leave or it is your day off prior to one of the above announcements, you may need to go to the office to pick up your equipment so that you can telework when bad weather is affecting your area.
- If you are not prepared to telework, i.e., you do not have your laptop or other necessary equipment or supplies, you must take leave. This includes situations where you have elder care or child care responsibilities. If your child is small and cannot care for him/herself, you may not telework; you must take leave. With supervisory approval, a personal computer may be used to complete AgLearn courses or other web-based programs that are not accessed through the APHIS network.



For more information about operations during a weather-related emergency, either within the DC metro area or in the field please see: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wps/portal/aphis/ourfocus/business-services?1dmy&urile=wcm%3apath%3a%2Faphis_content_library%2Fsa_our_focus%2Fsa_business_services%2Fsa_publications%2Fsa_hr_desk_guide%2Fsa_hrdg_4630%2Fct_4630_sub_d_sec_b%20-%20who



Scheduling Use or Lose Annual Leave

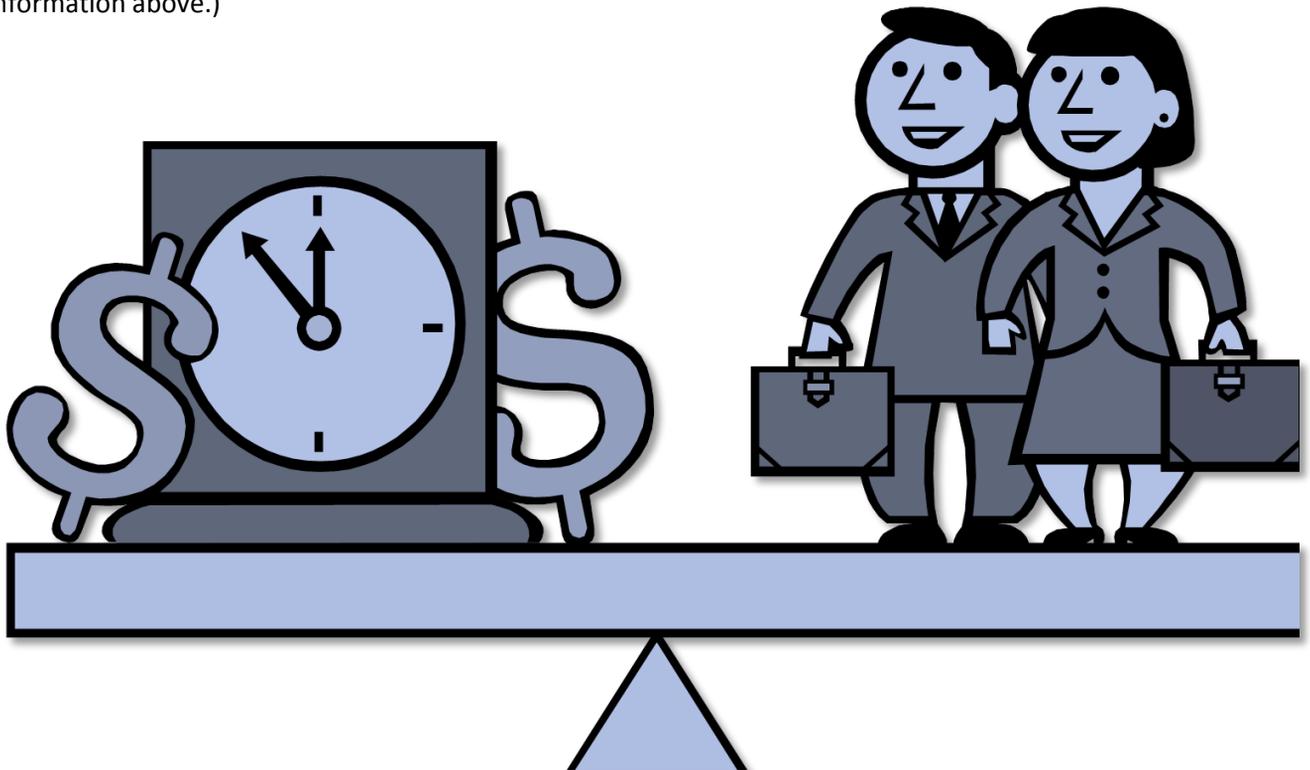
By *Nella Roberts* (Nella.Roberts@aphis.usda.gov, 301-851-2910)



While the end of the leave year is not yet here, it is fast approaching! Now is the time to plan ahead and schedule your use/lose annual leave. The 2014 leave year ends January 10, 2015 (pay period 26). Use or lose annual leave must be scheduled by November 29, 2014, which is the end of pay period 23. While the leave must be scheduled by the end of pay period 23, you have until the end of pay period 26 to use it. This means that the leave must either be scheduled electronically, i.e., through email or WebTA, or in writing, e.g., a memo or OPM Form 71. If the leave is not properly scheduled and it is lost at the end of the leave year, it cannot be considered for restoration because it did not meet the scheduling requirement. So, when planning your fall/winter vacation, pay particular attention to your leave balances. Remember to work closely with your supervisor to schedule and use any use/lose annual leave.

And lastly, if you have any questions, contact your servicing Leave and Compensation Team Specialist or Nella Roberts (contact information above.)

So, when planning your fall/winter vacation, pay particular attention to your leave balances. Remember to work closely with your supervisor to schedule and use any use/lose annual leave. And lastly, if you have any questions, contact your servicing Leave and Compensation Team Specialist or Nella Roberts (contact information above.)





HRO Aligns Around Program-Based Service Teams

By *Mavis Harrison* (Mavis.Harrison@aphis.usda.gov, 612-336-3319)

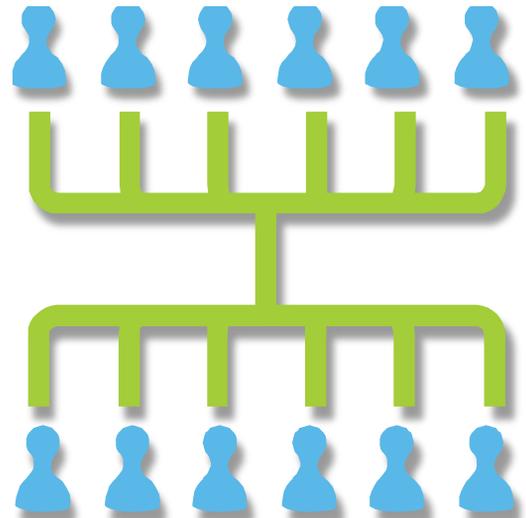
In an effort to provide greater support to its customers, Human Resources Operations (HRO) in Minneapolis is changing its organizational alignment. HRO service providers in the Classification, Staffing and Processing functions have moved to a program-based organizational model in November.

This means that employees in the three functions identified will coalesce to provide dedicated service to particular programs or Agencies. Four cross-functional teams will replace the current functional-based sections. Each team will be led by a Customer Service Representative who will act as the team supervisor, but who will also facilitate discussions with a program POC to outline the Human Resources Management strategies and priorities needing support from HRO.

The cross-functional, program-based model has been used in HRO for the past few years in its servicing of the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) National Headquarters and, most recently, the Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS). More recently, HRO partnered with Wildlife Services to pilot this model in Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP). This program-based model has proved to ease communication and increase understanding of program/Agency HRM requirements from a more strategic perspective allowing the team to better focus its efforts where, and when, they are most needed.

This new alignment may result in some HRO service providers in Classification, Staffing and Processing providing support to a different customer base. HRO will ensure customers are notified regarding changes in service providers.

Service support will continue as it is currently for Benefits, Leave, Compensation, including time and attendance, and Personnel Security.



FY2015 Individual Development Plan (IDP) Guidance

By CTOD (301-851-2947)



Individual Development Plans (IDPs) are an effective career development tool. For example, as part of a career planning strategy, employees, supervisors and managers can use IDPs to outline appropriate training, and help close competency gaps related to work currently performed. Equally important, IDPs help to engage employees, encouraging them to take on stretch assignments in preparation for promotional opportunities or just new responsibilities. In this way, IDPs are an important component of both Agency succession and workforce planning efforts. The information below will help you create your own IDP for this year.



What is the deadline for completing an IDP?

IDPs are based on the fiscal year cycle; therefore, IDPs must be completed at the beginning of each fiscal year (October 1). For FY2015, IDPs should be in place by December 31, 2014.

Who is required to have an IDP?

USDA Directive 4040-410 requires that supervisors offer employees an opportunity to have an IDP. The intention of the policy is to promote ongoing developmental discussions between employees and supervisors. Supervisors should assist the employee with aligning competency-based development activities with career goals. The IDPs are intended to benefit the employees and provide development opportunities. There are some employees who do not desire to have an IDP. If that is the case, they can opt out. For employees who desire to opt out, there is a required step they must take for compliance purposes. Keep in mind that supervisors and managers can make this policy more strict. If your supervisor, manager, or program area has mandated the use of IDPs, you must follow the guidelines set forth in your office policy.

What is required for an employee to be able to opt out of an IDP?

Employees must document opting out of an IDP in AgLearn. Instructions for completing this step can be found [here](#).

Are employees required to create IDPs in AgLearn?

The use of AgLearn is strongly encouraged. Instructions for completing an IDP can be found [here](#). We understand many employees are located in remote areas and have limited access to computers. In those cases, employees are required to use the form [AD-881](#), Individual Development Plan. Employees are required to document the use of a paper-based form in AgLearn by following these [instructions](#).

What types of activities can I include on my IDP?

Activities such as on-the-job-training, self-study, job shadowing, detail or task force assignments, creating job aids, mentoring, coaching, participation in leadership development programs, webinars, and classroom training may be included in your IDP. Visit the [Center for Training and Organization Development \(CTOD\) SharePoint site](#) to learn more about available developmental opportunities. If you are having difficulty deciding what to put into your plan, you may consult with your Program Liaison. A list of Program Liaisons can be found [here](#). In addition, a tremendous amount of information related to personal and professional development is available in the [APHIS Leadership Development Toolkit](#).

If you have questions about IDPs, please contact CTOD at (301) 851-2947.

