



REMARKS

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Remarks as Prepared for Administrator Dr. Gregory Parham
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA)
Animal and Plant Industries Committee Meeting

(SALT LAKE CITY, UT, Sept. 17, 2011) Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here today.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the recent hardships presented by weather in many States. Flooding in the Midwest and Northeast, Southern hurricanes and tropical storms, and Western wildfires this summer continue to have devastating effects. I understand the incredible difficulties many of you have been facing, and I appreciate that you are here.

As I'm sure you know, former Administrator Cindy Smith handed me the reins in April when she moved on to a new role as APHIS' Chief Advisor for Government, Academia, and Industry Partnership.

For those of you who don't know much about me yet, please know that although I am new to the role of Administrator, I'm not at all new to APHIS or to the agricultural issues that are important to you.

I look forward to continuing APHIS' relationship with NASDA – sharing information and facing our mutual challenges in safeguarding American agriculture.

I am pleased to have with me a number of other APHIS officials, including: John Clifford, Deputy Administrator for Veterinary Services; Rebecca Bech, Deputy Administrator for Plant Protection and Quarantine; Mike Gregoire, Deputy Administrator for Biotechnology and Regulatory Services; and Andrea Morgan, Associate Deputy Administrator for Animal Care. They'll each be speaking with you a little later.

I think three words—noble, mobile, and global—sum up the work everyone in this room does every day to protect our Nation's agriculture. Our overlapping missions to protect the health of U.S. agriculture and the environment are noble. The new technologies we deploy in our work enable us to be more mobile and responsive. And the challenges we face, as well as the impacts of our actions, are global in nature.

Our shared commitment to meeting and overcoming challenges, and our flexibility and innovation in doing so, will serve us well as we operate in the current fiscal climate.

Obviously, both State and Federal budgets—including APHIS' budget—are shrinking significantly, and yet our core mission areas and responsibilities are not.

For those of you who are new to APHIS, I want to give you a brief overview of who we are and what we do. We're one of seventeen agencies that make up the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). APHIS falls under USDA's Marketing and Regulatory Programs.

Our mission is to protect and promote the health of U.S. animal and plant resources. This covers a lot of territory, but to name just a few of the things we do, APHIS:

- regulates the import of agricultural products to prevent the entry of foreign diseases and pests;
- administers disease- and pest-specific programs domestically;
- stands ready to respond to emergencies such as disease or outbreaks, or natural disasters;
- works to resolve conflicts between wildlife and agriculture; and,
- administers the Animal Welfare and Horse Protection Acts.
- We also regulate genetically engineered (GE) crops under our Plant Protection Act (PPA) authority.

At the last NASDA meeting in February, we all knew budgetary changes were coming, although the extent of the reduction was unknown.

We now have some budget reduction estimates and a plan for prioritizing those reductions. I would like to highlight a few of those plans for you.

APHIS Modernization Plan

Many of you have already dealt with particularly difficult budget constraints for several years. APHIS has been lucky to be in a position during that time to assist you through cooperative agreements, Farm Bill funding, and budget increases for programs that significantly affect your States.

However, current APHIS budget forecasts call for unprecedented reductions—potentially \$80 million or more next year, and even greater reductions are probable after that.

With a fiscal forecast like that, APHIS must change the way we do business. And, as Secretary Vilsack has indicated, this change will be occurring throughout the Department. Rather than ignore the inevitability of change, the Secretary is committed to seeing our upcoming budgetary challenge as an opportunity to build a stronger Department that better serves the American people.

As part of this effort, USDA and APHIS will be refocusing and concentrating on our core mission areas; redesigning and streamlining processes to find efficiencies; and evaluating restructuring our organization.

While we don't yet know what these changes will look like – both at the Department and in APHIS – it is our shared responsibility to ensure change does not manage us. We intend to move forward collaboratively, creatively and with transparency with the goal of creating a leaner, more efficient organization that is able to maximize every dollar while refocusing on its core mission.

There is no doubt that some of our decisions or future changes will impact our stakeholders, but we will do our best to reduce the overall impact on States caused by the expected budget reductions. And, we will strive to keep you all informed as we go forward of actions we are considering to address our budgetary challenges.

NASDA Funding

I assure you that whatever funding choices we make at APHIS, our commitment to carrying out mission priorities is unchanged.

And I think APHIS' funding of meetings like this is an indicator of how important NASDA collaboration is within our mission priorities. Our partnership with you is invaluable.

APHIS intends to continue providing funding to support NASDA's regional, mid-year and annual meetings, like we have done for the past few years. However, as our FY2012 budget is not yet final, we can't say with certainty what those levels will be.

We hope that this funding helps to ease some of the financial burden on NASDA members.

Farm Bill Funding

I would like to thank NASDA members for your direct and ongoing participation in evaluating and implementing Farm Bill section 10201 activities. Through Section 10201, APHIS has partnered with numerous States, Tribes, universities, nonprofit organizations, and communities to strengthen and expand the scope of our pest and disease prevention activities.

In FY2011, 539 suggestions were received which would total over \$124 million—far exceeding the \$50 million provided.

Funding was obtained late in FY2011, and we are extremely busy obligating funds to cooperators in more than 300 projects in 50 States and 2 territories.

This influx of Farm Bill funding enabled us to, among other things, eradicate Plum Pox virus in Pennsylvania and enhance California's ability to detect dangerous pests entering the State through mail and freight. Farm Bill funding also helped us eradicate 13 separate Mediterranean fruit fly outbreaks—without using emergency funding—and work with States across the country to survey for plant pests.

We will be talking with NASDA, the National Plant Board and the specialty crop Farm Bill Alliance in the near future about how we may approach FY2012.

Closing

Clearly, we have some leaner times ahead of us. However, APHIS will continue to provide the best possible service to our cooperators and stakeholders.

We have heard from many of you about the programs and services you consider to be of great importance, as well as suggestions for how to move forward, and we are taking those suggestions seriously.

We have some difficult choices to make.

The mission of protecting American agriculture during emergencies, as well as routine operations, has always been unpredictable. The nature of the mission requires flexibility.

That is why we are better suited than most for meeting the challenge ahead of us.

We at APHIS know that sharing information with all of you is essential to a good working relationship and is the cornerstone of success. The more we keep the lines of communication open, the better we are able to fulfill our mission of ensuring the Nation's agricultural health.

The immediate fiscal challenges that we face have now, to a fair extent, been identified.

Our mission is noble. Our technology, responsiveness, and ability to adapt make us more mobile than ever before. Our challenges are global.

We can now begin the process of overcoming these challenges together.

Thank you again for your support and for inviting me to be here today.

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