



# Strategic Alliance



# Document

An agreement between the National Plant Board (NPB), Board of Directors (BOD) and the Plant Protection and Quarantine Management Team (PPQMT)

June 2016

**Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ)** safeguards U.S. agriculture and natural resources against the entry, establishment, and spread of economically and environmentally significant pests, and facilitates the safe international trade of agricultural products. PPQ's commitment is to ensure healthy plants and safe trade for a strong and prosperous America.

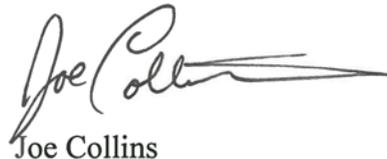
**The National Plant Board (NPB)** provides national representation for each of the regional plant boards; fosters effective and harmonized plant health programs; acts as an information clearinghouse on plant pest prevention and regulatory matters; provides for a discussion of principles, policies and methods; and promotes efficiency, harmony and uniformity in and among the states in the field of plant pest prevention and regulation.

Together, **PPQ and the NPB** agree to work together to utilize our respective federal and state authorities, assets, and expertise to safeguard plant health and enable safe trade.

Signed:



Osama El-Lissy  
PPQ Deputy Administrator



Joe Collins  
President, National Plant Board

## Introduction

In June 2014, leadership from the NPB and PPQ came together to discuss the longstanding partnership between the two organizations, our shared priorities, and the benefits of a collaborative effort to develop effective solutions. Through discussion, we recognized that our partnership is a strategic alliance with a continuum of engagement from basic sharing of information, to coordination of complementary activities, to full collaboration where plant health safeguarding efforts are fully integrated.

Our respective authorities and capacities will result in varying levels of interdependence on different plant health issues. Through effective communication we will build a better understanding of the needs and issues that exist locally and identify the regional and national context and political landscape in which those needs and issues can be addressed. In this context, we may work together at these organizational levels:

- the individual state level between the State Plant Regulatory Official and the State Plant Health Director
- the regional level between the Regional Plant Board leadership and Field Operations leadership
- the national level between the leadership of the National Plant Board and Plant Protection and Quarantine

Diversity in plant health risks may require varying responses to threats and the coordination of efforts across organizational levels must be flexible to respond to each unique situation. It is important that we clearly communicate about the level of integration on each issue or project to determine the appropriate role for each organization. In addition, we will consider the level of participation and informational needs of other stakeholders like the public, industry, tribes, and non-profit organizations.

The NPB and PPQ view the soybean rust initiative as a model of successful collaboration reflecting the effectiveness of the strategic alliance. Together, the NPB and PPQ developed a successful non-regulatory response to the imminent approach of soybean rust through frequent communication among PPQ, NPB, other federal and state agencies, growers, industry organizations, and the research community. Through communication, a plan was developed and vetted in which the roles of all parties were clearly articulated. The planned response was rehearsed and tested. When soybean rust arrived in the United States, all parties effectively fulfilled their roles resulting in no disruption to production or commerce. This is an example of the desired outcome that we strive for in the strategic alliance.

As a result of the June 2014 discussions, the PPQ Management Team and the NPB Board of Directors decided to document the strategic alliance for the current and future mutual benefit of both organizations. The agreements outlined in this document are between the NPB BOD and the PPQ MT and reflect the organizational commitment to communication and coordination. The agreements outlined in this document do not change the relationship that exists between PPQ and individual states or regions or supersede any local agreements.

## **Shared Purpose**

PPQ and NPB will work together to utilize federal and state authorities, assets, and expertise to safeguard plant health and enable safe trade.

## **The Importance of the Alliance:**

The alliance between PPQ and the NPB is important because neither PPQ nor the states alone have the authorities, assets and expertise to safeguard plant health and enable safe trade. The states need PPQ for:

- International trade agreements
- Creating the national regulatory framework for interstate and international issues/commerce
- Issuance of the federal export certificate based on state needs and inspections
- Obtaining the national perspective/input of industries and other national organizations
- Technical and scientific expertise
- Funding
- Emergency response
- Relationships with other Federal agencies (e.g. CBP)

Likewise, PPQ needs the states for:

- Local knowledge and relationships with industry, other units of state and local government, and other stakeholders
- Consensus building among the states
- Perspective across the states/regions
- Exercise State authority
- Initial rapid mobilization for emergency pest response
- Resources to conduct local operations
- Technical and scientific expertise

## **Nature of the Relationship**

The NPB and PPQ have a strong working relationship with common goals on issues with national and international impact characterized by:

- a desire for a true alliance/partnership in which the organizations work side-by-side and engage early on issues of mutual importance
- a consultative relationship with a commitment to communication and resolution of issues
- a willingness to use each other's strengths
- support from affected stakeholders

## **Communication/Information Sharing**

In many cases, we will reach consensus on how best to address issues of national scope and importance. In cases where we do not reach consensus, we will, nonetheless, strive to understand, accept, and articulate our differences clearly and constructively. When we cannot reach agreement, we can still be united and clear in communicating our differing perspectives and what each of us can or will do in our respective roles. Regardless of the outcome of our discussions, effective and proactive communication is essential to the success of the strategic alliance. We agree that optimal communication is:

- specific, proactive, and timely;
- clear in articulating expectations, realities, and limitations;
- timely in sharing of appropriate information;
- focused on dialog to produce alignment and results when circumstances indicate a collaborative response is needed;
- consistent with agreed upon protocols in each organization and across organizations;
- unified in messaging to each organization about agreements, decisions, and areas where agreement cannot be reached.

To sustain optimal communication, we believe that:

- there is an ongoing need to provide orientation to NPB and PPQ staff to ensure the importance of the alliance is understood;
- we will sometimes need to develop a broader understanding of decisions and agreements within each organization;
- there will sometimes be a need to elevate issues appropriately and transparently.

## **Decision Making and Planning**

We agree that effective decision making involves several steps and should have a mechanism for each party to address concerns about any aspect of the decision making process. A robust decision model includes:

- Identification of the trigger—what is precipitating the need for a decision?
- Identification of the specific issue that needs to be addressed—what is the need for action and the scope of the issue, who can act, who are the stakeholders?
- Analysis of the issue—what are the objectives, what options are available, what do stakeholders think?
- A decision—choose an option and develop a communication plan
- An implementation plan that identifies barriers to success, performance metrics, a compliance monitoring plan, and roles and responsibilities
- Monitoring and review of outcomes--were the objectives met, was the solution responsive to needs/concerns, what were the intended and unintended impacts, was the desired level of compliance achieved, is there new or changing information that would trigger a new process?

Within the context of a decision model, we agree on the following fundamentals:

- In making decisions that affect both PPQ and States it is important to have the right people involved from both parties early in the process. There will be regular outreach with each other, including a regular time to meet, so that each can alert the other of upcoming decisions and planning. Outreach includes:
  - Information sharing
  - Stakeholder meetings
  - Consultations
  - Communication regarding pending issues including upcoming decisions about budget, policy and programs
- Everyone cannot be part of every decision made by each organization. When decisions impact both PPQ and the States, every effort will be made to include one another in the discussions.
- After decisions are made, they will be communicated to PPQ and the States appropriately.
- Once decisions are made and communicated, the PPQ MT and the NPB BOD will make every effort to see that the decisions are carried out while recognizing the limits that the NPB may have in influencing state members.
- When either party is concerned about any part of the process, the issue will be discussed between the NPB and PPQ. Every effort will be made to resolve the issue and prevent similar issues in the future.
- When agreement cannot be reached and either the NPB or PPQ believes an issue needs to be elevated, each party should have the opportunity to make their respective leadership chains aware (NASDA and USDA). Effective communication to this point will mean that both parties are aware that leadership chains will be involved.

## **Evaluation and Metrics**

NPB BOD and PPQ MT agree to assess this alliance at least annually and to use that opportunity to assess progress on identified strategic priorities, as well as to identify new strategic priorities

that require a joint effort. The NPB BOD and the PPQ MT will conduct the annual assessment based on the metrics outlined in work plans around each strategic priority. The NPB BOD and PPQ MT will discontinue projects that are completed or no longer relevant.

Even though we will review the alliance annually, it is important to maintain open lines of communication and address issues and grievances with each partner as soon as possible.