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Leadership

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Dr. Michael Watson, Administrator



Dr. Michael Watson was appointed the Administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service in December 2023 after serving as Acting Administrator for 10 months. As Administrator, Dr. Watson carries out the Agency's multiple missions of protecting the health and value of American agriculture; mitigating the impact of human-wildlife conflict to protect agriculture, the environment, and human health and safety; ensuring the safe and timely availability of new genetically engineered technologies; and administering the Animal Welfare and Horse Protection Acts.

Before being named as Acting Administrator, Dr. Watson served as Associate Administrator since January 2018 where he oversaw the Agency's day-to-day operations. Prior to joining the Administrator's office, Dr. Watson served as the Associate Deputy Administrator for the Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Services (MRPBS), where he also spent time as the Director of the Human Resources Division, leading the delivery of human resource services for APHIS, the Agricultural Marketing Service, the Foreign Agricultural Service, and the Merit Systems Protection Board.

Dr. Watson has a wealth of Federal experience having worked for several different Departments. He began his federal career in 1994 at USDA's Agricultural Research Service where he worked as a plant pathologist for three years. He went on to hold positions with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration, before beginning his APHIS career with Biotechnology Regulatory Services in 2003. After serving in several BRS roles over 7 years, Dr. Watson moved to Plant Protection and Quarantine where he served as the Associate Executive Director and Executive Director for Plant Health Programs and the Associate Deputy Administrator for Policy Management during his 5 years with the program.

Dr. Watson received his bachelor's degree in microbiology from the University of Maryland, College Park in 1987 and his doctorate in plant pathology from the University of California, Davis in 1994. A Maryland native, Dr. Watson resides in Davidsonville, MD.

Dr. Donna Lalli, Associate Administrator



Dr. Donna Lalli was appointed Associate Administrator in October 2023. In this role, she works in partnership with Administrator Dr. Mike Watson to carry out the Agency's day-to-day operations, represent APHIS on Department-level and cross-Agency working groups, and oversee the activities of every APHIS program area and support unit on behalf of employees and stakeholders.

Prior to being appointed as Associate Administrator, Dr. Lalli acted in this role for more than 8 months since February 2023. From January 2021 until her joining the Office of the Administrator, Dr. Lalli served as the Associate Deputy Administrator for Wildlife Services, providing executive leadership to the Agency's National Feral Swine Damage Management Program, the National Rabies Program, and the Airport Wildlife Hazards Program.

For 10 months she served on a temporary assignment as Senior Policy Advisor in the Executive Office of the President, Office of Science and Technology Policy, after serving as the APHIS Science Advisor from 2017-2020. Dr. Lalli started her APHIS career with Biotechnology Regulatory Services as a biotechnologist and then as the program's chief of staff. Before joining APHIS, Dr. Lalli worked for USDA's Agricultural Research Service where she worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the Appalachian Fruit Research Station in Kearneysville, WV. Dr. Lalli has a Ph.D. in genetics and a bachelor of science degree in biochemistry from Clemson University.

Michelle Wenberg, Associate Administrator



Michelle Wenberg was appointed Associate Administrator in February 2024. In this role, she works in partnership with Administrator Dr. Michael Watson and fellow Associate Administrator Dr. Donna Lalli to carry out the Agency's day-to-day operations, represent APHIS on Department-level and cross-Agency working groups, and oversee the activities of every APHIS program area and support unit on behalf of employees and stakeholders.

Prior to being appointed as Associate Administrator, Ms. Wenberg was APHIS' Deputy Administrator for Policy and Program Development (PPD) since 2021, providing leadership for the overall planning and direction of policies at APHIS. She was responsible for leading the Agency's budget and regulatory development processes; economic, risk, and environmental analyses related to proposed regulations and other APHIS program actions; and strategic planning, program reviews, and process improvements to advance program performance across APHIS.

From 2019 to 2021, Ms. Wenberg served as Chief of PPD's Planning, Evaluation, and Decision Support unit, where she was responsible for providing management consulting services such as strategic and operational planning, business process improvements, workload analysis, and other analytical products and services for developing and improving APHIS programs. From 2005 to 2019, she was the APHIS Budget Officer/Chief of PPD's Budget and Program Analysis Staff and led the development, justification, and monitoring of the Agency's \$2.5 billion annual operating budget that supported approximately 8,000 employees and mission activities around the world.

Earlier in her career, Ms. Wenberg held positions in Wildlife Services, Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Services, and Plant Protection and Quarantine, and served on a yearlong detail with the U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations.

Ms. Wenberg received a Bachelor of Science in Business and Management from the University of Maryland. She also is a graduate of the American University's School of Public Affairs KEY Executive Leadership Program, and USDA's Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program.

Ms. Wenberg resides in Northern Virginia with her husband and two children.

Dr. Roxanne Mullaney, Deputy Administrator, Animal Care



Dr. Roxanne Mullaney was appointed Deputy Administrator in July 2023. In this role she leads Animal Care's many employees in protecting and ensuring the welfare of millions of animals nationwide that are covered under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) and Horse Protection Act (HPA). Dr. Mullaney has proudly been with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service for more than 30 years and brings a wealth of veterinary knowledge, hands-on experience, and managerial savvy to her position. Prior to becoming AC's Deputy Administrator, she served as AC's Associate Deputy Administrator for a year. Before joining AC, she was the Associate Deputy Administrator in Emergency and Regulatory Compliance Services (ERCS) and served as the Director of ERCS' Emergency Management, Safety and Security Division from 2019 to 2022. Dr. Mullaney also led Marketing and Regulatory Program's COVID-19 response as deputy pandemic coordinator from 2020-2022.

Earlier in her career, Dr. Mullaney served in Veterinary Services (VS), where she gained emergency response and preparedness experience at the local and national levels. She also managed VS import, export, and domestic program operations at the state, regional and national levels. Dr. Mullaney joined APHIS in the early 1990s through the Public Veterinary Practice Career program, where she initially worked to eradicate swine disease at the farm level as a field veterinarian. She also served as an Area Veterinarian in Charge in both New York and New Jersey and held several other regional and national field management positions.

Dr. Mullaney has a passion for collaboration and has focused on improving organizational infrastructure throughout her career.

Bernadette Juarez, Deputy Administrator, Biotechnology Regulatory Services



Bernadette Juarez was appointed Deputy Administrator in August 2019. In this role, she provides leadership and direction to ensure the safe development and introduction (importation, interstate movement, and field testing) of genetically engineered organisms.

Prior to this appointment, Ms. Juarez served as Deputy Administrator for Animal Care since 2016, where she led the program's many employees in protecting and ensuring the welfare of millions of animals nationwide that are covered under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) and the Horse Protection Act (HPA). She also oversaw the collaborative work done to assist pet owners and regulated facilities prepare for natural disasters and emergencies.

Ms. Juarez joined APHIS in 2009, first as Investigative and Enforcement Services' Deputy Director for nearly 5 years and then as Director starting in 2013. As Director, Ms. Juarez was responsible for leading investigations of alleged violations involving APHIS-administered laws and pursuing enforcement actions where warranted. Before coming to APHIS, Ms. Juarez was a trial attorney in USDA's Office of the General Counsel from 2002 to 2009.

In 1999, Ms. Juarez completed her bachelor's in business administration from the University of New Mexico. She went on to earn her juris doctor from American University, Washington College of Law, in 2002.

Although originally from New Mexico, Ms. Juarez currently resides in Silver Spring, MD, with her husband Brian and two children, Concetta and Miles.

Sarah Helming, Deputy Administrator, Emergency and Regulatory Compliance Services

Sarah Helming was appointed Deputy Administrator in October 2023. In this role, Ms. Helming oversees APHIS' select agents and toxins, investigative and enforcement, biodefense, and emergency management, safety and security programs.

Ms. Helming joined APHIS in 2014 and has held various positions throughout the Agency including Associate Deputy Administrator for Emergency and Regulatory Compliance Services and Chief of Staff for the Office of the Administrator. She also served in roles in APHIS International Services, Veterinary Services and Legislative and Public Affairs. In 2021, Ms. Helming served as USDA's Supply Chain Coordinator overseeing the \$4 billion USDA received from the American Rescue Plan Act to transform the U.S. food system.

Prior to joining APHIS, Ms. Helming worked for various government entities, including as a congressional staffer in the U.S. Congress, counsel in the Nevada Legislature, and in Nebraska Health and Human Services, focusing on bioterrorism and public health emergency law. Sarah holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Indiana University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Nebraska. She is an Indiana native and currently resides in Alexandria, Virginia.

Cheryle Blakely, Deputy Administrator, International Services



Cheryle Blakely leads a 300-person staff domestically and overseas, directing cooperative efforts with foreign governments to prevent the introduction of high-risk pests and diseases into the United States. She is also responsible for protecting and expanding overseas markets for U.S. agricultural goods, supporting rural incomes and jobs. Through APHIS' International Services (IS) capacity building programs, Ms. Blakely helps broaden APHIS' safeguarding system by leading work in developing regions to improve their infrastructure to detect and respond to emerging pest and disease threats. Before assuming this role in 2018, Ms. Blakely served as IS' Associate Deputy Administrator since 2012, directing the operations and objectives of 28 IS posts worldwide and acting as a key liaison between IS, other USDA agencies, international organizations and other non-governmental organizations.

Ms. Blakely first joined APHIS in 2006 as IS' Chief of Staff. She then served as U.S. General Director of the U.S.–Panama Bi-Lateral Screwworm Commission before returning to Washington, D.C., in 2010 to serve as the Administrative Director for IS. In 2011, she detailed to the U.S. Agency for International Development in their Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program, where she worked on agricultural business investments as part of the Presidential Grow Africa G8 Task Force for Markets and Partnerships in Tanzania, Africa.

Before joining APHIS, Ms. Blakely had a long and successful career with the military. Following six years of active duty service in the U.S. Air Force, Ms. Blakely embarked on a distinguished civil service career at the Department of Defense while continuing ten years of active reserve military duty. During her civilian career, Ms. Blakely served as Head of Business Operations and Marketing for the Morale, Welfare and Recreation enterprise at Yokota Air Base, Japan, and as Director of Acquisitions for the Air Force Wargaming Center in Montgomery, AL.

Ms. Blakely has a bachelor's degree in occupational education from Eastern Illinois University-Carbondale, IL, and a master of science in public administration from Russell Sage College, Albany, NY. She is a native of New York and has 2 children.

Dr. Mark Davidson, Deputy Administrator, Plant Protection and Quarantine



Dr. Mark Davidson was appointed Deputy Administrator for Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) in May 2022 after acting in the position since January 2022. In this position, he leads and directs a nationally dispersed staff that safeguards U.S. agriculture and natural resources against the entry, establishment, and spread of economically and environmentally significant pests and diseases and facilitates the safe global trade of agricultural products.

Prior to becoming PPQ's Deputy Administrator, Dr. Davidson served as an APHIS Associate Administrator since August 2019, where he worked in partnership with the Administrator to carry out the Agency's day-to-day operations, represent APHIS on Department-level and cross-Agency working groups, and oversee the activities of every APHIS program area and support unit on behalf of employees and stakeholders.

From February 2018 to August 2019, Dr. Davidson served as the Deputy Administrator for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Services, where he was responsible for providing human resource management; financial management; acquisition and asset management; as well as support services, such as information technology; emergency management, safety, and security; and investigative services to APHIS and the Agricultural Marketing Service.

Before joining APHIS in 1998, Dr. Davidson spent two years with USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service. Then, after joining APHIS, he spent 19 years with Veterinary Services (VS) in various positions in the field, their regional office in Fort Collins, CO, and in Riverdale, MD. From November 2013 to February 2018, Dr. Davidson served as VS' Associate Deputy Administrator, where he provided planning, policy, program, and regulatory oversight and implementation for VS' National Import Export Services activities focusing on safeguarding U.S. animal health and facilitating trade in animals and animal products.

Dr. Davidson received his D.V.M. and master's degree in veterinary pathology from Auburn University and his bachelor's degree in agriculture from Western Kentucky University.

Dr. Rosemary Sifford , Deputy Administrator Veterinary Services, and Chief Veterinary Officer



Dr. Rosemary Sifford began her career with USDA as a Saul T. Wilson Scholar in 1997. Since that time, she has served APHIS in a variety of positions, crossing policy and operations in Veterinary Services, Plant Protection and Quarantine and Animal Care. She has served in the field and in a variety of management positions, most recently as the Associate Deputy Administrator for Animal Care.

Dr. Sifford received undergraduate degrees in Animal Science and Agricultural Business Management from NCSU in 1996 and her DVM from NCSU in 2000. She has completed several leadership development programs within USDA including completing the SES Candidate Development Program in 2014.

Dr. Sifford is married to the Reverend Stephen Sifford. They have three daughters, Madison, Salem, and Sedona. As a family they enjoy all things livestock and raise Hereford and Holstein cattle.

Janet Bucknall, Deputy Administrator, Wildlife Services



Janet Bucknall is responsible for the overall planning, coordination and direction of Wildlife Services' (WS) national operational and research programs. Prior to assuming the role of Deputy Administrator in 2018, she served as WS' Eastern Regional Director where she led WS' activities in 31 states as well as Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Ms. Bucknall, a wildlife biologist, joined APHIS in 1987 as part of a WS' Supervisory Training Program.

Although Ms. Bucknall has spent most of her career with WS, from 2014 to 2016 she served as the Associate Deputy Administrator for APHIS' Biotechnology Regulatory Services (BRS), where she handled the international and emerging issues portfolios. Before moving over to BRS, Ms. Bucknall spent 7 years as the Deputy Director for Wildlife Operations with WS' Operational Support Staff headquartered in Riverdale, MD.

Prior to moving to APHIS' headquarters, Ms. Bucknall was the State Director of WS' New Jersey, New York City and Pennsylvania program. She served in this role from 1991 to 2007 focusing on migratory bird damage management, predation management to protect rare and endangered shorebirds and airport wildlife hazards management.

Before being named State Director, Ms. Bucknall spent two years with the New York WS program, and her WS career started in Wisconsin where she helped dairy farmers resolve damage caused by Canada geese and removed beavers and beaver dams to protect and rehabilitate trout streams. Ms. Bucknall has bachelor of science and master of science degrees in wildlife management from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry and the University of Minnesota, respectively.

Bethany Jones, Deputy Administrator, Legislative and Public Affairs



Bethany Jones provides leadership and guidance to effectively communicate APHIS policy developments and program accomplishments. Ms. Jones is responsible for the overall planning and direction of Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA) activities, which include media and industry outreach, legislative analysis, Freedom of Information and Privacy Act requests, production of informational materials, and response to media, congressional, intergovernmental, and citizen inquiries about APHIS programs.

Ms. Jones began her career with APHIS in 1990, after graduating from Randolph Macon Woman's College with a bachelor of arts degree in English. She accepted a position as a writer/editor with LPA's Executive Communications program and has been with LPA ever since. Ms. Jones spent 11 years in LPA's Public Affairs office where she served in various positions including editor of the Agency's newsletter, outreach campaign coordinator, international trade public affairs specialist and Deputy Director of Public Affairs. In 2000, she was named Director of Public Affairs

with responsibility for managing the Agency's media, outreach, publications, web, and audio-visual functions. In 2003, Ms. Jones was selected as Associate Deputy Administrator for LPA and then in 2007 as Deputy Administrator.

Melissa A. Tharp, Deputy Administrator, Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Service and Chief Operating Officer, Marketing and Regulatory Programs



Melissa A. Tharp is Marketing and Regulatory Programs' (MRP) Chief Operating Officer and the Deputy Administrator for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Business Services (MRPBS) within the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). This follows her appointment in February 2019 as MRPBS' Associate Deputy Administrator. In her role, Ms. Tharp leads MRPBS' Acquisition and Asset Management Division, Financial Management Division, Human Resources Division, and Information Technology Division with a workforce of more than 725 administrative management professionals who provide a wide range of business services to the MRP Mission Area and several customer agencies.

Previously, Ms. Tharp served as the Associate Deputy Administrator for the Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) Management and Analysis Program (MAP) for 6 years responsible for their Budget, Compliance, Performance and Administrative Management Activities. Accomplishments in this role include a unified user fee formula for the Agency, the development of the first AMS Human Capital Plan, the Agency's Strategic Plan, and Agency Head Assessment Report. During this time, Ms. Tharp completed two 6-month details in 2018 as the acting APHIS' Associate Deputy Administrator for MRPBS and AMS' Deputy Administrator for Science and Technology

(S&T) where she focused on customer service, outreach, and technology innovations to both the domestic and international communities.

Melissa began working in USDA's AMS Tobacco Program in 1987. During her tenure with the Agency, she served in several leadership positions including AMS' Budget Officer and Deputy Associate Administrator.

Melissa grew up in Northern Virginia and attended George Mason University and Lord Fairfax Community College. She is married to husband Charles and has two children - daughter Catherine who is 26 and son Charles or 'Chuckie' who is 24. In her free time, she enjoys cooking, gardening, reading, and spending time with her family. Melissa and her family reside in Warrenton, Virginia.

Sherron Jernigan, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Diversity and Inclusion



Sherron Jernigan was appointed as the Director of the Office of Civil Rights, Diversity and Inclusion in July 2021. In this role, she ensures APHIS and its clients are in compliance with the provisions of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Civil Rights laws, workforce diversity programs, Federal regulations and Departmental/Agency-wide policies.

Before assuming this role, Mrs. Jernigan was Director of the Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Employment Office (EEO/AEO), where her responsibilities included providing regulatory guidance and oversight for the 162 EEO Programs within the Administration. From 2011 -

2018, she served as a national EEO Manager in VHA's Central Office, where among other things, she redesigned the EEO/AEO dashboard to interface measurable EEO principles into VHA's daily operations.

Though she started her VA Career in 1995 as a Low Vision Rehabilitation Specialist, she quickly moved into the Diversity and Inclusion arena by serving as a collateral duty Special Emphasis Program Manager. For 10 years she held a distinguish career as an EEO Manager at the Veteran Affairs Medical Center, by creating EEO tools, innovative Diversity and Inclusion initiatives and implementing conflict resolution programs.

Mrs. Jernigan earned a bachelor of science degree in biology from Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, AL, and a master of science in Low Vision Rehabilitation from Pennsylvania College of Optometry in Philadelphia, PA. She is a native of Tennessee and now resides in Southern Maryland.

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