NAFV Meeting with APHIS Leadership
Monday, September 30, 2019
11:00 AM
--FINAL--

NAFV Delegates:
Dr. Joe Annelli, Exec. Vice president
Ms. Mariana C. Barros, Associate Exec. Vice President

APHIS Delegates:
Mr. Kevin Shea, Administrator
Dr. Mark Davidson, Associate Administrator
Dr. Burke Healey, VS Deputy Administrator
Dr. Betty Goldentyer, AC Associate Deputy Administrator

Introduction:
NAFV met with APHIS Administration for the first time since their introductory meeting on March 1, 2019. Mainly, this meeting was a mini consultation as an introduction to the new people in leadership positions in both NAFV and APHIS.

AGENDA:

NAFV:
History of NAFV and its designation as an Association of Supervisors and Managers was presented. It was stressed that we are considered an Association of Supervisors and Managers as defined by 5CFR 251, USDA DR 4020-251, and OPM Memorandum for Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies on Relationships with Manager and Supervisor Organizations was presented. NAFV highlighted that this codified relationship between NAFV & USDA is meant to serve as a partnership which allows for a direct feedback-channel for field perspectives to reach key agency executives who can then rectify or provide support for issues and topics brought forth as appropriate. Through this partnership, we aim to strengthen the communication channel between the agency’s leadership and their veterinary workforce, both up the chain of command and vise-versa.

In this new paradigm allows for NAFV leadership and APHIS leadership to have a more synergistic relationship. NAFV would like to take the opportunity to reinforce this partnership to make our relationship with APHIS an effective tool for management and its veterinary workforce who we serve. The purposes of consultation and communication are: (1) the improvement of agency operations, personnel management, and employee effectiveness; (2) the exchange of information; and (3) the establishment of policies that best serve the public interest in accomplishing the mission of the agency.
Consultation Procedure letter dated 2013 – Letter
NAFV brought a copy of a 2013 agreement signed by Mr. Kevin Shea, so that we can revisit the official structured laid out for APHIS/NAFV consultations.

**Action Item:** It was agreed that this document will be re-drafted to illustrate the changes in APHIS organizational structure, its leadership changes, and NAFV leadership changes. And allow for more appropriate coordinator-representation changes. NAFV will redraft and present a copy to be reviewed and hopefully approved and signed by Mr. Shea. Members with first-hand knowledge of the current organizational structure and its realities will be engaged to help develop this document. It was also agreed that two formal consultations a year (with APHIS covering travel and per diem for appropriate NAFV Leadership and technical experts) would be appropriate with more frequent communications on an as needed basis.

- It was pointed out that the last official consultation was in 2015. This was due to the reorganizations in APHIS and changes in NAFV EVPs. It was decided that a schedule of twice a year consultation would be adequate. Additionally, APHIS leadership stressed that we should not “wait 6 months” to bring up issues, but rather we should keep communications open and address issues as they arise. NAFV’s EVP intends to honor this request and looks forward to nurturing that communication.

**Discussion/Consultation topics:**
NAFV reviewed the new website and benefits, programs and services provided to members and as appropriate non-member APHIS employees. We also discussed using the web site and NAFV in general to help with recruitment and retention of employees. We extended the invitation to allow Saul T. Wilson Scholars to join NAFV as “Affiliates” with no dues until they become full time employees.

**Action Item:** NAFV will explore adding the APHIS Gipson scholars to this effort.

**Completed:** Instructions have been added to the application form to use “Member” for current federally employed veterinarians and use “NAFV Affiliate” for veterinary students enrolled in the Gipson, Wilson or Malick Scholarship Programs. An email asking for those in attendance to extend our invitation to those students and remind them “Affiliates” are free but when they become full time employees their dues will be $9 per pay period.

- Discussed providing career development seminars expressing the difficulty of field employees to obtain leadership skills because of the vacancies and distance between duty stations and detail opportunities. NAFV discussed our new programming initiatives that include the starting of a career development program and encouraging our members to use leadership positions in NAFV to improve their skills. We also planted the seed to explore having APHIS
provide key presenters to discuss career development opportunities for veterinarians.

- Financial Literacy Program (Onsite for all employees) we discussed the relationship we have started with the Prudential Financial Group to provide on-line materials, webinars and in-person seminars for members. We extended this “Financial Wellness” program of on-site seminars to all APHIS employees in areas where these seminars will be held. We suggested that these one-hour seminars be deliver of the lunch hour by providing employees 30 min of admin leave combined with their 30 min lunch period to attend these seminars. We provided documents on what would be covered in these seminars and that they would be sponsored by NAFV but open to members and non-members alike.

**Action Item:** Follow up with Mark Davidson on whether we will need to go through an ethical approval process to host these. In general, Mr. Shea was in favor of allowing for extra 30-min admin leave to attend such seminars at lunch time (30 min lunch and 30 min admin leave). All seminars will be made available to all employees, though webinars & online tools are reserved from members.

- American Association of Veterinary Preventative Medicine CE webinars
  Through its AAVPM sub-organization, NAFV has begun to provide CE webinars to its membership and the general public. Our hope is to be able to fill the gap from the programming currently available to employees. For example, providing financial literacy seminars, foreign animal disease webinars, etc.

**Legislative Issues:**
NAFV pointed out the legislative issues we are following and the section of the website where this could be found. We pointed out the most current targets for NAFV Policy position statements:

- Emergency Preparedness through One Health Act of 2019
  NAFV is seeking to ensure equity in the distribution of funding made available to the animal health components proposed through this effort.

- Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Enhanced Act (for critical vacancies)
  AC Deputy Administrator mentioned that in their experience, student loan debt is one of the biggest issues that applicants and interviewees are concerned with. NAFV emphasized the critical role that the VMLRP & Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) programs play towards the recruitment of employees to public service. To this end, NAFV continues to engage in efforts to preserve & enhance both programs and will continue to update the membership and agency leadership as these efforts progress.
Force Readiness:
Survey of issues in APHIS can be attributed to critical vacancies leading to poor moral and perception of overwork/unfair practices and deployment fatigue (vND over 500 days).

- We discussed that there should be a baseline number of veterinarians in VS to be ready for disease outbreaks. Currently there are 611 veterinarians in the 701 series with 50 leaving per year due mostly to retirements. Replacement of these vacant positions was also discussed coming down to a shortage of HR people available to announce these positions. It was noted that the current 611 veterinarians is the lowest number of VMOs since early-2000s.

- Emergency Veterinary hires, temp conversions and new hires were discussed. As was other ways of making up for a reduced number of VMS such as the NAHERC talent pool and using non-veterinarians appropriately in positions that requiring VMOs. The discussion was that NAHERC was not very effective, as the nature of emergency response is generally tough-work and retirees had trouble being able to adequately respond. As such, it is not being utilized.

- We asked for MRPBS hiring updates and the single level grade announcements that were being done with GS-11 starting positions. Dr. Davidson responded to this concern and provided additional context, the Department as a whole is having issues filling all job series. As such, perhaps this presents NAFV an opportunity to interact with coalition partners and address public-service-wide hiring initiatives. Mr. Shea asked us to explore ways APHIS can nor effectively use non veterinarians in outbreak structures (i.e. non-veterinary epidemiologist doing GIS and other analysis, non-vets in logistics etc.). It was also mentioned groups of 5 veterinarians were on a single premises doing depopulation, something that could be done by 4 AHTs and a supervisory veterinarian. It was also discussed that while the employment levels are at an almost all time low, even if APHIS increased by 100 VMOs it would still not be enough to handle outbreaks, so we need to think about how to use the wider workforce.

Action: Mr. Shea asked us to do a survey of the membership that were deployed to vND in California to solicit suggestions for how it could be done better in the future.

- Reimbursable overtime at real time and a half? We are aware that the environment is not ripe, but nonetheless wish to pursue it and keep it in front of them to be able to act upon it when the environment allows.
Next steps:
How can we help you achieve your goals? This really got folks thinking about us being a partner in employee development and program delivery. So much so that Dr. Goldentyer called after the meeting to suggest a few projects she would like to see us coordinate.

Mr. Shea asked us to survey our membership who has been deployed, to discern whether all of the duties being performed absolutely need to be performed by veterinarians. Appreciating the “deployment-exhaustion” as it has been brought forth, leadership is beginning to explore diversifying the teams that are being deployed, to include AHT’s and other staff members to support a smaller number of veterinarians.

The meeting ended on a very positive note with commitment to schedule the next meeting in January and to work together to accomplish the tasks discussed.