



United States Department of Agriculture

National Food and Agriculture Council

APR 20 1995

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Food and Agriculture Councils

FROM: Gregory L. Carnill, Executive Officer
National Food and Agriculture Council

SUBJECT: Service Center Implementation Problem and Dispute Resolution

During the planning and implementation phases of the USDA Service Center Implementation Initiative, problems and disputes have occurred and are likely to occur in the future. All organizational levels are in need of a procedure or mechanism that will aid in the timely and satisfactory resolution of problems and disputes. Without a procedure, the problems are sometimes prematurely raised to the next level, or raised to an inappropriate level. When this occurs, the conflicts are not assured of being resolved in a timely or satisfactory manner.

The National FAC Subcommittee on USDA Service Centers has adopted a procedure (see Attachment 1) for resolution of problems and disputes that includes:

- resolution at the lowest possible organizational level, preferably at the level where the conflict exists;
- resolution by consensus, using professional techniques and facilitators when needed; and,
- elevation of problems, when needed, from the Service Center level to the State FAC to the National FAC Subcommittee (the final decisionmaking level).

The procedure will assure resolution of problems in a timely and satisfactory manner. Resolution will occur at the appropriate organizational level, and, most importantly, it fully empowers the employees to resolve problems.

A Problem Resolution Worksheet (see Attachment 2) is available to document the problem and to elevate it to the next organizational level. Copies of the worksheet should be made locally.

Please distribute this memorandum with attachments to all USDA Service Centers.

Attachments

USDA Service Center Implementation Problem and Dispute Resolution Procedure

The following procedure will be used to resolve problems and disputes that arise concerning the USDA Service Center Implementation Initiative.

Resolve at Dispute Level -- All problems and disputes will be resolved at the lowest possible organizational level, preferably at the level where the conflict exists. Conflicts at the service center level are best resolved by the parties at the service center. Likewise, problems and disputes occurring at the State Food and Agriculture Council (FAC) or National FAC Subcommittee level are best resolved at their respective levels.

Gaining Consensus -- When developing solutions to conflicts that are agreeable to all parties, professional techniques should be used that result in consensus of the parties. Consensus is more than mere voting where the majority vote wins. Consensus involves solution development whereby all parties' concerns are considered and addressed.

To assist disputing parties develop consensus solutions, the services of professionally trained facilitators in dispute resolution should be obtained. These skilled professionals should be used to help facilitate the use of proven techniques to aid the parties with solutions; they should not arbitrate or determine the solution(s).

Elevating Disputes -- Problems and disputes are expected to be resolved at the level in which they occur. In the event the disputing parties cannot agree to or develop a consensus solution, even with the assistance of trained employees, the problem or dispute will be elevated to the next highest organizational level, in the following order: Service Center to State FAC to National FAC Subcommittee. The National FAC Subcommittee is the final decision maker. When elevating a dispute to the next level, a Problem Resolution Worksheet will accompany the request for assistance that fully describes and articulates the problem/dispute, the alternate solutions considered, the reasons these alternatives are not satisfactory, and the recommended solution of each party.

For disputes elevated from the State FAC to the National FAC Subcommittee, the USDA Service Center Implementation Team will coordinate and aid in the investigation of the dispute and development of a consensus solution recommendation with the agencies' regional coordinators, area directors, and regional conservationists, and with the deputy administrators and deputy chiefs responsible for the subject of the dispute.

When resolving disputes, the State FAC and the National FAC Subcommittee will use the resources and existing lines of authority of their respective agencies to assist in the resolution. For instance, if the problem concerns office space, the management or administrative officers of the agencies should be involved with evaluating the problem and developing alternative solutions. These responsible management/administrative officers will make a consensus solution recommendation to the FAC, who will make the decision.

Problems and disputes that are prematurely elevated to another level without fully complying with this procedure will be returned to the originating level.

Attachment 2
(April 1996)

PROBLEM RESOLUTION WORKSHEET

Enter the following information about the problem or dispute that needs to be resolved. Use additional pages, as needed.

Location:	State:	Service Center:
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Problem: [Concisely describe the problem.]

Alternative Solutions Under Consideration:
[Include Pros and Cons for each alternative.]

Is the problem at an impasse at this level ? [Please explain]

Recommendations to resolve problem:

Worksheet submitted to:

Worksheet completed and submitted by:

Date:

Name

Title

Address

Phone

[This part to be completed by the organizational level to which the problem is elevated.]

Recommended Action:

Recommended Action Approved By:

Date: