



Healthy Plants • Healthy World

March 8, 2011

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I am writing to you as the current President of the American Phytopathological Society (APS) regarding the 17 December 2010 memo from Dr. John P. Holdren, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology and Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, on “Scientific Integrity” and the recommendation regarding professional development of government scientists such that they are allowed “full participation in professional or scholarly societies, committees, task forces and other specialized bodies of professional societies, including removing barriers for serving as officers or on governing boards of such societies.”

The APS recently requested that **Dr. Walter F. Mahaffee**, A USDA-ARS scientist in the Pacific West Area be allowed to serve on the Financial Advisory Committee (FAC) of the American Phytopathological Society (APS). The FAC consists of the APS Treasurer and five other APS members. The role of this committee is to work with the professional financial staff at APS headquarters to ascertain the financial health of the Society, and then advise the APS Council on the current and future financial needs of the Society. This committee has no fiduciary responsibility strictly playing an advisory and planning role for APS. The FAC makes recommendations to Council for discussion and any implementation is the responsibility of the APS Council. The FAC is primarily concerned with maintaining the financial health of APS activities related to member services, publication of books and journals, and scientific meetings.

Unfortunately, we have been informed that this request has been denied and Walt will not be able to serve APS in this capacity. Walt has been an active member of APS and provided leadership across a broad, but constrained, spectrum of APS activities. Hence, his knowledge would be of great benefit to the APS FAC committee. The USDA-ARS exerts significant resources in the development of leaders of its organization, as does the APS, and I believe both organizations would greatly benefit by Dr. Mahaffee serving in this capacity within APS.

While I cannot expect your office to intercede on this single event, it is my understanding there has been an atmosphere of lack of support of USDA-ARS scientists, particularly those in the Pacific West Area, serving in leadership roles in scientific organizations such as APS. Thus, I hope your office will encourage USDA-ARS to “remove barriers for serving as officers or on governing boards” of professional societies. USDA-ARS scientists are highly valued members

of APS. Some have been nominated repeatedly for office in the APS presidential lineage. My colleagues and I would welcome the opportunity for USDA-ARS scientists to be allowed to share their vision and leadership as APS officers. It is also my understanding that active participation in professional societies is an important consideration in the promotion process for USDA-ARS scientists, yet they are not allowed to fully participate in these societies.

I hope your schedule will permit you to address this issue and encourage USDA-ARS to begin permitting scientists such as Dr. Mahaffee to fully participate in the governance of APS and other scientific societies. I have also brought this concern to the attention of Dr. Holdren at this time in hope to facilitate discussion of this important issue. Thank you for your time and please let me know if additional information is needed.

Sincerely,



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cc: Dr. Catherine Woteki, Undersecretary for REE, USDA
Dr. Andrew Hamond, USDA-ARS Pacific West Area Director
Dr. Robert Matteri, USDA-ARS Pacific West Area Associate Director.
Dr. Edward Knipling, USDA-ARS Administrator