The Pest Detection Program supports APHIS’ goal of safeguarding U.S. agricultural and environmental resources by ensuring that new introductions of harmful plant pests and diseases are detected as soon as possible, before they have a chance to cause significant damage. The program uses a multi-pronged strategy to accomplish its mission, involving a structured, transparent assessment process to identify pest threats, the development of scientifically sound pest diagnostics and survey protocols, conducting the actual pest surveys, and the timely reporting of pest survey results through the National Agricultural Pest Information System (NAPIS). These efforts are accomplished by involving stakeholders and the scientific community, and leveraging efforts by other Agencies in USDA, government entities, State departments of agriculture, universities, and industry partners. The Agency and its State cooperators carry out surveys for high-risk pests through the Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey (CAPS) Program, which is funded through the Pest Detection line item. The Pest Detection Program also leverages funding through the Farm Bill Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention Program, Goal 1 Survey, to accomplish its goals.

The mission of the Pest Detection/CAPS program is to provide a survey profile of plant pests in the United States deemed to be of regulatory significance to USDA-APHIS-PPQ and our cooperators by confirming the presence or absence of plant pests impacting the domestic and international movement of plants and plant products; and establishing and maintaining a comprehensive network of cooperators and stakeholders to facilitate our mission and to safeguard our American plant resources.

The National Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey (CAPS) Committee (NCC) meets annually to review and discuss the performance of the Pest Detection/CAPS program, and to discuss and update the CAPS National Survey Guidelines. The NCC also will discuss the implementation of any changes that may be needed to the Program and Guidelines based on issues raised during the previous survey year as a result of discussions with the various representatives’ constituency.

A major portion of the meeting will focus on the proposed consolidation early pest detection activities currently managed in three different processes (CAPS, Farm Bill, and internally funded surveys) into a single unified National Pest Surveillance Program. If the proposed changes are accepted by the PPQ MT, then significant changes in CAPS and Farm Bill processes and procedures will need to occur. Regardless, the similarities between CAPS, Farm Bill, and internally funded surveys exist and discussion with state partners and the Farm Bill Management Team at this meeting will help to implement efficiencies across all three pest surveillance avenues.

The second major part of this meeting will be to discuss the National CAPS Meeting. The approval process for this important meeting ran into a paradigm change, and the NCC will need to re-evaluate the purpose and outcomes of the meeting to be in-line with current thinking.

The NCC also will need to address a wide variety of other Program-related issues, including further development of program management tools, such as the Survey Summary Form and CAPS Accountability Report, to be compatible with new data entry fields and pest naming conventions in NAPIS, tracking surveys and projects funded by Pest Detection, implementing a new pest prioritization model, among others.

As the Farm Bill Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention Program matures, it is time that discussions among the Pest Detection and Farm Bill Management Teams occur with stakeholder and cooperator input. The resolution on how these two Programs interact and leverage each other to complete their missions, especially regarding early detection surveys under Goal 1 of the Farm Bill Implementation Plan, is important to the well-being of both Programs moving forward. Thus, it is vitally important that the Farm Bill Management Team attend the NCC meeting to discuss these issues and obtain stakeholder and cooperator perspective on the management of these Programs. They will be needed for successful outcomes of the discussions noted above.

The annual meeting provides a forum to obtain input on the direction of the CAPS Program from those in the field, is an avenue to inform the States of new initiatives and survey and data guidelines, and is a means to alert our state cooperators of any plant pest threats and PPQ policy direction that may be on the horizon. The annual meeting also provides a forum for discussions among PPQ and State personnel and the Farm Bill Program that may well lead to major changes in the CAPS and Farm Bill Program’s business models. The results of this meeting will have important and wide implications. This meeting will develop recommendations, prioritize, and institute action items with milestones and deadlines. Discussion of these items will begin before the meeting, and relevant material distributed in advance, but a 2-full-day, face-to-face meeting with discussion is needed to prioritize, assign responsibilities, and continue to move the CAPS and Farm Bill Programs forward. A draft agenda is attached.

The meeting will be held at a PPQ facility. The CPHST Phoenix lab and the Arizona SPHD office in Phoenix, AZ, have graciously offered to host the meeting at no charge to APHIS for meeting space. Meeting dates are February 2 – 3, 2016, with travel on February 1 and 4, 2016. There will be 22 attendees, 13 of which are APHIS employees. The total estimated travel cost for the APHIS attendees is $16,945.50 (excluding salary calculations), with an average of $1,303.50 per person. A cost estimate worksheet with a list of travelers is attached.

The National CAPS Committee (NCC) consists of both state and federal personnel from different parts of the country working together to develop, improve, and guide the CAPS Program.  When planning this annual meeting, we look for locations that highlight the safeguarding continuum in order to give the members a broader perspective.  In past years we have held this meeting at the PPQ offices in Raleigh, the National Detector Dog Training Center in Newnan, GA, the Plant Inspection Station in Miami, the Texas SPHD office in Austin, and for the last two years at the Florida DPI offices in Gainesville and then the CDFA offices in Sacramento. This meeting in Phoenix, AZ, will highlight the support CPHST brings to the safeguarding continuum and the challenges surveying a southern border state.