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ADC in the U.S. Department of Agriculture¹

Gerald J. Fichtner²

ADC transferred to the U.S. Department of Agriculture by Public Law 99-190. Parameters of ADC in USDA are that the program is biologically sound, environmentally acceptable, and economically feasible. Major program components are cooperative operational control, education and information, and research. The National Animal Damage Control Advisory Committee is being formed. The American Society for Testing and Materials is helping on research priorities. A line-staff organization has been put in place within the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service in USDA.

INTRODUCTION

I'm most pleased to join you today to talk about national perspectives on animal damage control in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. As you know, USDA has only recently acquired the ADC program from the Interior Department. But the program had its beginnings at USDA, and we're very glad to have it back after a 46-year absence. ADC is alive and doing very well under the auspices of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. I welcome this challenge to work with you and our cooperators in animal damage control.

I've spent most of my working career in USDA's Animal Health Programs--first with Agricultural Research Service and then with APHIS after it came into being in 1971. APHIS has its roots in the old Bureau of Animal Industry created in 1884 to combat serious animal disease outbreaks.

It was also in the 1880's that USDA first began studies to control agricultural losses caused by rodents, birds and other wildlife. The ADC program, as we know it, came into being with passage of the 1931 Animal Damage Control Act. Eight years later, it was transferred to Interior as part of a general realignment of agency functions during Franklin Roosevelt's era.

In recent years, however, it became increasingly important to the agricultural community that the ADC program's mission should be directed towards

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protecting U.S. Agriculture, and it was returned to USDA by Public Law 99-190 in December 1985. By April 1986, transfer of all personnel and resources had been effectively completed.

Few would deny that depredating animals--such as blackbirds, rodents and coyotes--still present a serious threat to agricultural production. Figures developed through various studies show predators still kill significant numbers of lambs born in the United States. Blackbirds, starlings and migratory waterfowl are causing increasingly significant damage to crops such as corn, small grains, rice, sunflowers, fruits and vegetables. Rodents also damage crops and pastures and chew up huge volumes of stored grains.

ADC is already fitting in very well with the overall APHIS mission of "protecting American agriculture." It has become a third major program area of the Agency, the other two being Plant Protection and Quarantine and Veterinary Services.

SOME GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF APHIS

All three major programs of APHIS are dedicated to protecting crops and livestock from pests or disease, and all three involve cooperative working relationships and cost-sharing with States and the agricultural community.

Incidentally, I'm pleased to report that four Eastern States have entered into cooperative agreements with USDA. This means additional resources coming into the program in those States.

Unlike VS and PPQ programs, ADC is not a regulatory program. It's also different in that it has its own methods development and research facility. This gives APHIS a management role in research it hasn't had before. Except in the

area of field trials, Agricultural Research Service handles all such matters for our other programs.

All three APHIS programs are based on sound research and valid scientific criteria. I personally believe that continued research is vital to an effective and efficient ADC program in the future.

Let's turn our attention now to how USDA, APHIS, plans to manage this program. First, be assured that we're determined to implement an ADC program that is both cooperative and beneficial.

When I say "cooperative," I mean cooperative at the State, county, farm community, and individual rancher levels. We inherited more than 700 cooperative agreements from Fish and Wildlife Service. APHIS has no intention of taking over jobs already being well-handled at the State, county, and community levels. Program structures within each State will remain largely intact.

When I say "beneficial," I mean the program provides a direct public service to:

- raisers of sheep, goats, poultry, hogs, and cattle
- operators of granaries and feedlots
- growers of grains, forage, fruit, nuts, flowers, melons and timber.

In other words, our emphasis in the future will be on protecting agriculture. You'll not see us initiating urban ADC programs; but we will cooperate, as appropriate, with ongoing urban efforts that are funded at State or local levels. Such cooperation usually takes the form of technical or advisory assistance.

Of course, we'll always respond to emergencies or situations where public safety is at risk and USDA-ADC expertise is needed to help overcome dangerous situations. And we'll continue to respond, as appropriate, to Federal or State efforts to protect endangered species.

All program efforts, however, must pass the scrutiny of being biologically sound, economically feasible, and environmentally acceptable. Applicable statutes are the National Environmental Policy Act; the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act; and the Endangered Species Act. Also, USDA-APHIS, administers various humane laws as they apply to warm-blooded animals, so we're sensitive to public concerns in that area.

The ACT program under APHIS consists of the following components:

- a cooperative operational program that's responsive to needs
- an applied research program that supports the operational program

- an information/education program based on both APHIS initiatives and field services in cooperation with the Extension Service.

The Extension Service has been involved in ADC since 1914. Its aim is to help landowners and agricultural managers help themselves. Emphasis is on prevention and control--stressing the most practical, safe, effective and humane procedures available. Extension programs are implemented primarily through county extension agents who provide demonstrations and group training for producers. It is anticipated that ADC will become more pro-active in the development and dissemination of training and informational materials structured for use with modern day audio-visual materials.

ORGANIZATION

At the national level, ADC is headed by a Deputy Administrator's office with a small staff in downtown Washington, D.C. Our responsibility is to set program priorities and goals, help in acquiring resources for program implementation, and marshal a coalition of support necessary for program continuation and growth.

The program also has a National Technical Support Staff in nearby Hyattsville, Maryland. This small staff, under a director, has the responsibility of assuring the program's overall technical excellence.

As part of a streamlining effort, APHIS has organized the cooperative operational program under two regional directors. The program used to function under seven regional directors of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service.

Our Eastern Director, responsible for 31 States, is headquartered in Brentwood, Tennessee. Our Western Director, responsible for 19 States, is headquartered in Denver. Primary responsibility for conduct of field program activities and management of field resources is delegated to the Regional Directors.

There's an ADC director for each State with some of the larger States having a number of district offices. In New England, however, there's one director for three of the small States.

Regional and State offices and other field stations now receive administrative support services from our APHIS Field Servicing Office in Minneapolis. In theory, this allows them to concentrate their energies on the job of program management. Although there are several advantages to this system, a complete review is needed to make resource management at the regional and State levels more effective.

The Western regional headquarters shares facilities with the Denver Wildlife Research Center, now under APHIS. This facility is the hub of most of the ADC applied research pursued in this country and several overseas locations.

The Center's nearly 100 scientists seek practical solutions to field problems:

- they explore the use of repellents, attractants, surfactants, and biological controls such as reproductive inhibitors
- they investigate coyote behavior and predator-prey population dynamics
- they examine toxicants, developing guidelines for their safe use in the natural environment and performing studies needed for EPA registration.

One of their most perplexing projects has to do with finding a safe toxicant for blackbirds that is environmentally safe. But don't expect instant results.

We're now in the process of reassessing our ADC research priorities. You'll see more effort going into applied research. We must put more effective tools into the hands of the operational side of the program.

The ADC Supply Depot at Pocatello, Idaho, continues to formulate and distribute baits, traps, and toxicant supplies needed by the ADC program. The director of this facility reports to the director of the National Technical Support Staff in Hyattsville, Maryland.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

We've begun an internal training program to increase the professional and managerial competence of all ADC personnel in a variety of program activities. Our initial efforts will be concentrating on:

- technical training
- executive/managerial and supervisory training
- techniques to enhance the exchange of knowledge between regions, States, and cooperators and the agricultural community

Recognizing a general need for highly trained staff, our Management Team has recommended an intensive two-year program to train newly recruited employees for eventual supervisory positions.

The first class of 20 highly qualified men and women will begin training under specialized individual development plans. These plans are designed to give each trainee a broad range of technical and supervisory training in both the Eastern and Western Regions, according to the trainee's prior professional background and needs.

INFORMATION

We also plan to design, develop and implement a nationwide automated data system that'll greatly expand our data base related to ADC. Specific needs are now being assessed before proceeding with the purchase and modification of computer software to meet our unique requirements. Once in place, this computer system should become an invaluable tool for making management decisions and for the rapid dissemination of information. The system will be designed to interface with other important data bases within USDA.

SPECIAL GROUPS

To assist in program management, a Management Team for ADC has been developed. Members include the Deputy Administrator, Associate and Assistant Deputy Administrators, the two Regional Directors, and Directors of the Denver Wildlife Research Center and the National Technical Support Staff.

This Team takes a direct hand in recommending policy and direction for ADC operations, research, education, and related matters and, hopefully, become stakeholders in program and resource management policy.

At the Department level, an Intra-departmental Policy Committee has been formed. Its members include top officials of Agricultural Research Service, Cooperative State Research Service, Economic Research Service, Extension Service, Forest Service, and APHIS. Our APHIS Administrator is Chairman. This Committee helps delimit the roles of various USDA agencies in ADC, and it influences the direction of ADC's cooperative operational programs and research.

Recently, the USDA intra-agency committee asked the American Society for Testing and Materials to assist in reassessing the program's research priorities. ASTM has agreed to review past, present, and proposed ADC-related research. It will prepare a summary review and provide us with recommendations on a continuing basis. To accomplish this, ASTM has established an ADC Task Force Group. The Group will have broad representation from the scientific community.

Of great importance is the recent approval to establish a Secretary's Advisory Committee on ADC with representatives from environmental groups, agricultural groups, and the academic-scientific community. Now that the preliminaries are completed, we can begin selecting about 20 such members. With one exception, members will come from private or non-Federal organizations. Congress has indicated that Fish and Wildlife Service should also be represented. This group will advise the Secretary of Agriculture on ADC operational and research questions and--more importantly--serve as a public forum.

There will be no mysteries about what we're doing or how we're going about it.

CONCLUSION

In summary, USDA has inherited an ADC program which has several good things going, including a clear mission, personnel who are competent and have high morale and good cooperative relationships with Federal, State and industry. We're taking steps to enhance:

1. a high level of professional performance,

2. increase information, and

3. seek outside expertise.

In a few years, I hope that you and the public you serve will have every reason to be proud of the legacy you built as part of APHIS's role of "protecting American agriculture."