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APHIS in Action: APHIS Customer Service Reps Rise to the Challenge



Want to travel internationally with your pet but aren’t sure of the requirements? Is wildlife damage happening in your community and you don’t know who to talk to? Are you a poultry producer looking for more information on keeping your birds healthy and reducing the risk of avian influenza? Do you work for a company with an

international shipment on hold at a U.S. port of entry? If you have questions about these or a wide variety of other agriculture-related issues, you may call the APHIS Customer Service Center for help.

Every day, members of the public, industry, and other stakeholders call the APHIS Customer Service Center to have a problem solved or a question answered. And every day, four APHIS Customer Service Center employees do just that for the callers.

Adrianne, Jeremiah, Rocky, and Susan are on the phone every workday, providing every caller with guidance, reassurance, and outstanding customer service. The team needs to be able to answer questions about issues and regulations from across APHIS—everything from pet travel to agricultural pests and diseases, or the import or export of fruits and vegetables, and much more.

Answering the Call

It is relentless—but rewarding—work for the small team. The team looks into and answers inquiries directly, clarifies information, and if needed, connects customers with subject matter experts. Many callers are not familiar with APHIS and its broad mission, so for the public, the Center is often a first point of contact with the Agency.

The Center answers approximately 2,500 calls a month, which doesn’t include the many callbacks to voicemails from customers after hours. During the Center’s busiest seasons, this number increases to more than 3,500 calls answered per month. The team not only answers the phone, but also helps respond to hundreds of emails from the public each month.

Along with providing timely and helpful information to APHIS customers, the Center allows program staff, especially APHIS veterinarians, to focus on their day-to-day work. The Agency’s veterinary and animal health staff serve on the frontlines, responding to animal health emergencies. The Center’s team answers questions about avian influenza, New World screwworm, and pet travel, which allows APHIS to be responsive to the public’s needs and ensures veterinarians and others focus on emergency responses.

Pet Travel

While the Center answers questions about all APHIS programs and activities, many callers want to know more about traveling with their pet. The Center's busiest times of year are the summer and winter holidays when people plan to travel internationally and want to take their pets with them but aren't sure what's required.

Preparing to take your pet out of the United States is a complicated process. Almost every country has their own specific rules, and you need to be sure to leave plenty of time to complete the entire process before you travel. Many people want to speak to someone so they know they are following all the correct procedures or to discuss issues they may encounter during the process. When they call the Center, they may be frustrated or have questions about a step in the process. The specialists from the APHIS Customer Service Center help them by researching the specific issue that the traveler, or their private veterinarian, is facing and developing solutions to ensure they have all the right paperwork and approvals they need to take their pet with them on their trip.

Solving Problems, Putting a Face on Government

The APHIS Customer Service Center employees are a crucial resource for APHIS customers, helping them travel safely with their pets, protect U.S. agriculture and their communities from the introduction of invasive pests and diseases, and get their APHIS-related questions answered. These four employees serve as APHIS personal ambassadors, educating the public and fulfilling the Agency's mission every day. One of the team members notes, "We have a strong commitment to public service, which has a positive impact on customers who seek guidance and additional information on APHIS programs. Our motto is that the customer comes first. We are the face of APHIS, and we want to provide exceptional service."

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