



Participating government agency ambassador profile: Cornelia Mueller

After 31 years at the Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Cornelia Mueller says, “There is never a dull moment. I have a lot of ‘war stories’ from working at the ports of entry, including one where a woman tried smuggling 36 mangoes into the country inside her undergarments.” Mueller has worked in a variety of positions with APHIS, which have included plant protection and quarantine officer, smuggling interdiction and trade compliance officer and agriculturalist. Throughout much of her career, she has worked closely with U.S. Customs and Border Protection to prevent animal and agricultural pests and disease from entering the United States.

With years of front-line experience at U.S. ports of entry and knowledge of CBP electronic systems, Mueller feels she is in a unique position to help the agency develop its latest commercial trade processing system, the Automated Commercial Environment. APHIS is one of 46 participating government agencies in the International Trade Data System, the mechanism for coordinating intergovernmental involvement with ACE. Mueller was the impetus for a program to raise awareness among ITDS PGAs and provide support during the transition to ACE. She says, “I noticed that there were no ACE ambassadors that addressed the specific needs of the PGAs, so I suggested a program be started. I see it as a way for PGAs to help each other, especially those with joint regulatory functions, build ACE to satisfy our needs.”

As a PGA ambassador, Mueller has introduced ACE from a PGA perspective to top-level APHIS management, various programs within APHIS and at the September meeting of the Trade Support Network. Of that experience she says, “I think the most relevant comment came from a trade representative who told me he was less nervous about PGAs becoming a part of the ACE process after learning that APHIS really was aware of the entire import process as it relates to the trade.”

APHIS employees currently use ACE primarily for the system’s reporting capabilities. The agency uses the new ad hoc reporting tool to run recurring and aggregate reports. These reports give a quick snapshot of a product and details on its path to importation. In addition, APHIS personnel can run reports to determine the volume of products that might be involved in a recall. Mueller says APHIS is looking forward to full ACE operational capabilities and the ability to identify questionable cargo, which may pose an agricultural risk before it reaches the United States.

Mueller’s career with APHIS has mirrored her personal interest in ships and ocean travel. She has traveled to nearly every major shipyard in the world, and, in her personal life, has made several trans-Atlantic crossings on classic ocean liners, including the Queen Elizabeth 2, the Norway and the Rotterdam. She has a collection of ship memorabilia, which includes a deck chair from the S.S. Bremen, the ship that carried her mother to the United States in 1935. Mueller has no plans to slow down professionally or personally, adding, “When this stops being fun, it’s time for retirement.”