

Optimizing the Subsistence Supply Chain and Sustaining Readiness

Lt. Col. Abel Young, USA, Director of Subsistence, DLA Troop Support



Young

Government Food Service: Please tell us a little about yourself and how you came to be director of subsistence at DLA Troop Support. Also, talk about how your experience has prepared you for the challenges ahead.

Lt. Col. Abel Young: I've been in the military, including West Point, for 26 years. My father was a WWII Quartermaster Veteran who inspired me to apply to West Point and later select Quartermaster as my branch of specialty. Over the last two decades, I have been fortunate enough to serve in many logistics positions and deployments that granted me the opportunity to support our warfighters.

I can recall my first job as a young lieutenant. I was the dining facility manager, and I just wanted to provide the best-tasting food for our soldiers, similar to mom's cooking. Just prior to my current assignment, I served in Liberia, where I worked hand-in-hand with DLA to coordinate the supply of fresh fruits and vegetables, operational rations, holiday meals and bottled water.

It was these experiences that gave me the competency and confidence that led to my selection to the Subsistence director position.

Government Food Service: Tell us a little about how your tour is unfolding. Discuss your plans and any challenges that lie ahead.

Young: Being the director of DoD's lead agency for subsistence comes with a tremendous amount of responsibility. In this position, every success and failure directly impacts the readiness of the Total Force.

It took me a while to grasp the idea that Subsistence feeds hundreds of thousands of America's warfighters and civilians three times a day, 365 days a year, in every continent, and in every country. It opened my eyes to the magnitude of what we do.

The capability and capacity of our prime vendor network, our operational rations, and our passionate, dedicated workforce enable our ability to enhance the lethality

and sustained readiness of the warfighter. Although at DLA, we emphasize "warfighter first" as our primary objective, I always add "people always" to never forget why our troops fight. We fight for the American people's freedom and liberty.

My focus within the next six to nine months is to operationalize our business operations and optimize the Subsistence supply chain to increase our responsiveness, predictability and agility through process improvement projects, research and development projects, such as drones and artificial intelligence, the establishment of the Global Subsistence Operations Cell and continued strong partnerships with the services, combatant commands and industry.

Government Food Service: Subsistence prime vendor contract solicitations and awards are a constant challenge, particularly outside the continental United States. Discuss and update us on the revisions planned for the Manufacturer Pricing Agreement (MPA) and National Allowance Pricing Agreement (NAPA) programs.

Young: The Manufacturing Pricing Agreement (MPA) is being updated to improve the transparency of pricing. We aim to improve product quality under the new program by requiring that each new item proposed for introduction into the PV [prime vendor] program meets the DoD Menu Standards and the individual Services' Buyer's Guides by evaluating the specification and label for compliance with these standards. These changes have been briefed to industry and the feedback we received has been used to make minor modifications; however, the basic framework remains unchanged. Protein items will require review and coordination with USDA prior to being added to the program to ensure the products meet the customer's needs prior to shipment overseas. It's too late if we only rely on a PV audit to catch quality problems. Having USDA conduct



A culinary specialist assigned to 3rd Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment, 25th Division Artillery, 25th Infantry Division, places breakfast steaks on a grill inside a field kitchen at Fort Polk, La. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Armando R. Limon, USA, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division.)



Inspired by his father, a WWII Quartermaster Veteran, Young, left, applied to West Point, selected Quartermaster as his specialty and served in many logistics positions, culminating in his current tour as director of subsistence, DLA Troop Support. (Photo by DLA Troop Support)

random inspections will help keep manufacturers on track. USDA will also inspect records of products they

don't observe being inspected and can prevent nonconforming products from being shipped. This change represents a move away from the National Contracts concept, which allows all businesses, including small businesses, to have a greater opportunity to sell their products to the PVs, as long as they meet the quality requirements specified in the item description.

Additional requirements for the automated submission of MPA pricing by manufacturers are in the design phase and are intended to simplify the evaluation process and improve the timeliness and accuracy of our output.

Our focus is on making improvements to the MPA program first before making changes to the NAPA program.

Government Food Service: *The plan involves transitioning both programs to a Global Pricing Agreement (GPA). How are these plans progressing? How would the GPA work? Would GPA replace both programs? Would MPA and NAPA be merged?*

Young: In an effort to strengthen warfighter readiness and lethality in a cost-conscious manner, we are currently making improvements to the MPA program. Once the improvements are made, we will review feedback from industry on the planned changes to the NAPA program. Based on the comments received to date, changes for the NAPA program may vary from those planned for the MPA program. Once completed, we anticipate the changes to the NAPA and MPA program will lead to the new GPA program. The resultant program is intended to focus on having the manufacturer put its "best price" forward for the benefit of the warfighter and our other customers.

Government Food Service: *Any changes in strategy or terms? In responses last year, prime vendor contracts would be awarded in 2017 on the basis of best value tradeoff. Explain what that is and how it is working?*

Young: For CONUS acquisitions, we continue to work solicitations that were issued in late 2016 and 2017 using best-value tradeoff procedures. Tradeoff procedures differ from Low Pricing Technically Acceptable (LPTA) procedures in that tradeoff procedures allow the government to accept proposals other than the lowest priced proposal or other than the highest technically rated offer. Under LPTA procedures, the best value to the government is considered to be the proposal that is technically acceptable and provides the lowest evaluated price. Using tradeoff procedures results in a longer evaluation process, since it permits tradeoffs among the non-price and price factors to determine the competitive range for negotiations and, ultimately, the contract award.

Going forward, as we relentlessly pursue customer satisfaction, our expectation is that CONUS will use both methods to solicit proposals. The determination to use LPTA or best value procedures is based on individual factors to be considered, region by region.

We've made numerous enhancements to the follow-on Subsistence OCONUS prime vendor solicitations. These enhancements are intended to ensure the warfighters' requirements are met in uncertain contingency environments.

Government Food Service: *Also, instead of structuring contracts with a base period and options, solicitations will utilize tiered-pricing periods. Explain how this works and is this just OCONUS or CONUS, as well?*

Young: It is anticipated that both types of approaches will be used in upcoming CONUS solicitations. The recently awarded Utah region contract included a four-year tiered performance approach, with two performance periods of two years each. The determination to use tiered performance periods, or base and option periods, will be based on individual factors to be considered region by region.

Government Food Service: In preparation for a soon-to-be-published Joint Services Buyer's Guide, DLA Troop Support requested subsistence manufacturers identify items that contain certain ingredients that are becoming prohibited from foods served in a dining facility or aboard ship. Please discuss how this decision came about and any details about implementation.

Young: During the selection process, the food labels are reviewed and analyzed to ensure that products meet the services' quality and nutrition standards. The DoD quality and nutrition standards are derived primarily from guidance provided by government agencies and expert consensus documents. Additionally, the DoD examines scientific evidence that establishes military specific and unique nutritional requirements when developing the military dietary recommended intakes.

Input from industry is sought and considered when selecting the foods for inclusion in military food catalogs and in construction of food service preparation practices. To this end, the military services work with vendors to understand the products available in the commercial marketplace and define viable products to construct menus that achieve the optimal balance between quality considerations and nutrition guidelines within the cost constraints imposed by the Basic Daily Food Allowance. The military services work with vendors on products that the vendors present to them based on current nutrition and DoD Go for Green standards. The military services may consult with subject matter experts within the Military Nutrition Division of the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine (USARIEM) to validate industry's positions on their products.

The decision to reduce or eliminate specific food ingredients may be based on scientific evidence indicating a health or allergy concern. For example, the FDA determined that partially-hydrogenated oils are not generally recognized as safe and mandated their elimination from all foods by the summer of 2018. It is important to note that DLA does not determine what food ingredients should be reduced or eliminated. Those determinations are

based upon recommendations from subject matter experts within the military services and by DoD.

DLA Troop Support's Subsistence Prime Vendor (SPV) contracts are commercial, best value regional contracts that cover an array of customer requirements for multiple items in support of the respective services' menus. The dietary guidelines referenced above and the services' requirements drive the procurement process by identifying for the SPVs the specific nutritional and quality parameters of items to be sourced, procured, and distributed to military customers. Based upon many considerations, each of the military services decides which products to include in their food service programs and which ingredients should be disallowed. Economic considerations, consumer preferences, quality and balanced nutrition all play a role in determining requirements for the services. Decisions to include or exclude certain categories of product or ingredients are made by the services on a case-by-case basis. The Army Buyer's Guide, Air Force Buyer's Guide, Navy Buyer's Guide and Marine Corps Buyer's Guide will align with the Joint Services Buyer's Guide, when it is issued.

Government Food Service: Do you have an update on MRE availability? DLA began working with industry partners and R&DA following a 2015 Government Accountability Office minimum sustaining rate report.

Young: DLA Troop Support extends its capability to acquire best-value products and services to non-defense government agencies. FEMA's hurricane relief efforts in Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico led to a surge in demand for MREs and other Subsistence supply chain products. MRE availability continues to increase month by month in response to this surge. Our MRE industrial partners have done us proud by accelerating production on MRE 37, as well as MRE 38. All things being equal, we expect to be at our MRE supply chain objective by the summer.

Culinary specialists assigned to the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, prepare breakfast inside a field kitchen at Fort Polk, La. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Armando R. Limon, USA, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division.)



Soldiers eating breakfast served up by culinary specialists assigned to the 25th Infantry Division at Fort Polk, La. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Armando R. Limon, USA, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division.)





Culinary Specialist Seaman Clarence Stephen pours sugar cookie mix into a mixer in the galley of the dock landing ship USS Oak Hill (LSD 51). (Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Taylor A. Elberg, USN.)

Government Food Service: *Is DLA continuing to evaluate national contracts for outside the continental United States? A national contract for chicken OCONUS was awarded in 2014. Plans for a national beef contract OCONUS were extended indefinitely in fall 2016. Plans to renew the chicken contract also include turkey. Please update us on these.*

Young: At this time, DLA has decided to focus on incorporating protein items into the MPA/GPA program. The National Contract for Chicken has expired and there are no plans to re-solicit. The National Beef solicitation was cancelled.

Government Food Service: *Is DLA still considering national contracts in the continental United States?*

Young: At this time, DLA does not intend to pursue National Contracts for protein items in CONUS; however, we have active national contracts in the Continental United States and including Alaska, Hawaii and Guam for carbonated/non-carbonated bag-in-box (BiB) beverages.

The awardees include Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Star and Gate CFV. The companies provide the equipment/machine, installation, maintenance and CO2 gas as well as the BiBs.

Government Food Service: *DLA achieved savings by purging "thousands of unique stock numbers," and noted that use of remaining numbers was being monitored. Are deletions continuing? Is this contributing the desired level of cost savings? Is there a count of the numbers deleted?*

Young: DLA Troop Support strives to strengthen supply chain performance in a cost-conscious manner. Purging superfluous stock numbers is one way we accomplish this effort.

The last big purge happened sometime around 2008. Roughly 40,000 LSNs were removed from the system. More than 95 percent of those LSNs were NAPA numbers. Cataloging has been more careful not to add duplicate items into the system. Each item request for an item to be added is reviewed, and will use an existing number if possible.

To date, deletions in the MPA program are approximately 1,500 LSNs. These items were deleted after a determination was made that there was no usage on the items. We will continue to monitor both NAPA and MPA LSN usage and delete items with no demand history.

The desired level of cost savings is achieved by not creating superfluous stock numbers that duplicate items already in the system and by not maintaining LSNs with no usage.

Government Food Service: *DLA Troop Support most recently held the Subsistence Customer Conference in 2010 and 2011. Are there any plans to hold this conference again in the future?*

Young: Yes. We are currently in the planning stages to hold a comparable Subsistence Worldwide Customer Conference. Customer conferences contribute to DLA Troop Support's efforts to support the warfighter, foster strong partnerships and improve supply chain performance. Our goal is to have our next conference in the summer of 2019.

Government Food Service: *Would you like to add any other comments about DLA Troop Support and its role in military subsistence and morale?*

Young: The Subsistence Supply Chain Delivers optimal, global supply chain solutions to ready, lethal warfighters and our other valued partners through:

- Dedicated, experienced workforce
- Focus on processes and costs
- Contingency support & war reserve management
- Customer relationships
- Tried-and-true industrial base
- Service-wide systems and processes from planning to consumption.

—GFS