

National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board

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DRAFT MINUTES Executive Committee Conference Call

Friday, March 1, 2013, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. EST.

Executive Committee Members Present: Dr. Steven Hamburg (Vice Chair, Acting Chair), Dr. Charles Boyer, Dr. Carrie Castille, Dr. Nancy Childs, Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen, and Dr. Milo Shult.

Executive Committee Members Absent: Leo Holt

Ex Officio Members: Dr. Catherine Woteki (REE, Under Secretary)

NAREEE Board Staff: Robert Burk (Executive Director) and Shirley Morgan Jordan (Program Support Coordinator)

Others Present: Dr. John King (Acting Director of the Office of the USDA Chief Scientist)



I. Roll Call of Executive Committee Members and Other Attendees

- Rob Burk conducted a roll call of the Executive Committee as members signed on to the conference call.

II. Comments from the Under Secretary of USDA REE

Budget: USDA is beginning to implement sequestration plan. USDA has to absorb an additional \$2B reduction in addition to cuts enacted since 2010. Approximately 1/3 of the workforce is exposed to furloughs (although none in REE). REE is subject to 5% across-the-board cuts; agencies with high salary-to-appropriations ratios have less flexibility to meet these cuts. Reductions in program fund notifications will be going out to contractors, LGUs, etc. The effects will not be felt immediately, but over time.

President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) Reports

November 30, 2012 report, *Transformation and Opportunity: The Future of the US Research Enterprise*, calls for renewed National focus on basic research to sustain innovation and create jobs.

The December 7, 2012, report called for a new innovation ecosystem for agricultural research calling for the Federal Government to launch a coordinated effort to boost American agricultural science by increasing public investments and rebalancing USDA's research portfolio. The proportion of Federal funding for agricultural research allocated through competitive grants is below the proportion of funding for other fields of research in other science agencies. The report also calls for the creation of a network of public-private agricultural "innovation institutes" that would leverage the strengths of government scientists and commercial interests. A new agricultural research enterprise should be centered on competitive intramural and extramural research efforts that bring together scientists from traditional agricultural fields and those from the biological and physical sciences. Also recommended was an increase in US research investment by a total of \$700M/year to nurture a new "innovative ecosystem." This would include an increase in the National Science Foundation (NSF) budget for basic science relevant agriculture from \$120M to \$250M per year. By expanding the use of competition in allocation of research funding within intramural and extramural programs of USDA, and increasing the NSF budget, the result would be an expansion of the role of competition in agricultural research funding. Other relevant PCAST recommendations included: the creation of six large, multidisciplinary innovation institutes focused on emerging challenges to agriculture, which would be supported by public-private partnerships at an initial new Federal investment of \$150M per year to create the six institutes at a funding level of \$25M per year for no less than 5 years and the establishment of an implementation committee to act on these recommendations; and create a permanent, independent science advisory committee to advise the Chief Scientist of the USDA.

Parts of these recommendations are beginning to be implemented, though there is a need to temper and accommodate these recommendations with current budgetary reality. It would be ideal to work with the NAREEE Board on the science advisory committee. USDA is already working with NSF on ecosystem development. There is some question as to whether the NTSC be the proper home should the President deem it so.

Infrastructure

There was a recent report mandated to congress, with analysis of existing infrastructure and recommendations for a capital investment plan. Best guidance is the most recent NSF study in 2009; which concluded that agricultural facilities are in greatest need compared to all other disciplinary fields: over 25% in need of repair or replacement. REE has authority to let competitive infrastructure grants through NIFA in Farm Bill but the initiative hasn't been funded since 1987. Dr. Hamburg suggested that the infrastructure issue should have a big part of the May (Spring) meeting. There should be separate conference calls and information exchange before that meeting.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

With public-private partnerships (PPP), there is mixed funding shared between public and private professional association contributions for some services where the benefits are shared. The question arises: does PPP lead to additional players or does it hijack some players and take away their voice?

Example of PPP might include the situation where some states have experience integrating commodity boards in research, with tremendous, if not too much, stakeholder input. But some areas (e.g. N-cycling) will never gain that level of industry support. Sometimes a group will jump at a random solution and that becomes "the solution." A foundation approach can address a broader portfolio of science/problems, and a broader range of strategies within those portfolio elements.

PPP could very well be the focus of the 6 new institutes mentioned in the PCAST notes above. Foundations should be a part of the "P" [private] in PPP acronym. The time might be right in those foundations for "something pretty bold." Dr. Milo Shult stated that the Executive Committee should engage the full Board ASAP, because this matter is complex. Dr. Bartuska also added that community colleges have some creative solutions for engaging the agricultural sector.

Arrange a briefing for the full board ahead of the May meeting; that reserves time for making decisions, without requiring time getting the members up to speed.

III. NASS Update by Dr. Cynthia Clark, NASS Administrator

Agricultural Census

The February 4th deadline has passed for respondents to return their census forms in the mail, but returned forms will continue to be collected and summarized until later in the summer. Response rate is 2 weeks ahead of the rate at this time during the 2007 census, which indefinitely bucks the trend toward lower response rates on most surveys. There have been more than 180,000 calls. As far as electronic data, 14% of responses were online, up from 3% of the responses during the 2007 census. NASS did receive a \$19M bump up ("an anomaly") despite the sequester. Census completion methods (ranging from least expensive to costliest) include web, mail, telephone, follow up, and field follow up).

NASS Reorganization

NASS received Departmental and Congressional approval to proceed with the regionalization in mid January, 2013. To date, 11 of 12 regional offices are staffing up. The new NASS structure creates opportunities for promotion and cross-training.

IV. Executive Committee Operations in the Coming Months

It was decided that the Executive Committee needs to develop an action list heading into the May meeting. There should be a matrix of reports and a matrix of topics for discussion.

V. Executive Director's Report

Reports

Rob circulated a spreadsheet of reports which showed their status, the recommendations, and notes. This spreadsheet will help with focusing on completing reports and assist in tracking the status of reports. It is a tracking mechanism to help meet deadlines.

The Extension report will go forward to the Secretary and the Under Secretary for their review.

Relevancy and Adequacy report needs clearance to move to the whole board for review. This report did not make it out before the Farm Bill lapse induced the Board hiatus. Motion carried to send it to the full board.

Specialty Crop letter led to a discussion of stakeholder participation. It included a distinction between advisory and advocacy roles. An example that some (not all) states have stakeholder review of formula funds. There are many other funding mechanisms, and review processes. The Board could do a great service by assessing the role of stakeholder review, what it should be, and what its impact on the science might be. Best science practices and principles are responsive to stakeholders.

Topics Not Discussed

- 2013 Board Meeting
- General Operating Procedures
- Budget Update

The next Executive Committee conference call will be Friday, April 5, 2013 at 11:00 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John King

Dr. Steve Hamburg
Acting Chair

Rob Burk
Executive Director

APPROVAL BY ADVISORY BOARD:

Date

Initials
Chair

Initials
Executive Director