

National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics Advisory Board

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National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board's – Specialty Crop Committee (SCC) Conference Call Minutes

Monday, June 4, 2012, 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

Committee Members Present: Mike Aerts, Barry Bedwell, Dr. Charles Boyer, Rita Green, Charles Hall, Leo Holt, Phil Korson, Terril Nell, Jean-Mari Peltier, and Dr. Mary Wagner.

Committee Members Absent: Dr. Mark Bender, and Henry Giclas.

NAREEE Board Staff: Rob Burk (Executive Director).

Others Present: None.



I. Roll Call of Committee Members

Rob Burk recorded attendees as they signed on the conference call.

II. Comments and Welcome from the NAREEE Advisory Board Chair.

Rob Burk introduced the group to the basic function and history of the group and reviewed the agenda.

Jean-Mari Peltier discussed the official roll of the Board and its establishment by Congress. She noted that the charge of the Board differs from the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) language. She reviewed the charge of the committee and noted that the committee is mandated to annually produce a report. Jean-Mari stated that SCRI was scheduled to expire at the end of the 2012 fiscal year, and that without congressional action it won't be extended into 2013. She stated that it was important to note that in addition to reporting to the Secretary of the USDA, the group also reports to Congress. She noted that approximately one year ago NAREEE did a review of collaborative research activities between public, private, and university entities. Jean-Mari discussed the background of the USDA REE Deputy Under Secretary with regard to forestry research and similar cooperative programs. The Board looked at a number of different research arrangements including the forestry cooperatives funded through the National Science Foundation (NSF), Agricultural Research Service (ARS) – Cooperative Research and

Development Agreements (CRADAs), and unique research cooperatives of the Department of Defense. Jean-Mari expressed her feeling that these need to be considered ever since Congress has transitioned away from earmarks. Jean-Mari indicated that Dr. Ann Bartuska has indicated that the SCC should consider the question of whether “SCRI should be competitive or merit based.” Jean-Mari noted that this concept was addressed in the NIFA’s External Review of the SCRI.

Jean-Mari noted that typically the SCC will hold a field hearing, and she noted that they are currently planning to hold the field hearing in Washington, D.C. this summer. Dr. Mary Wagner noted that when the SCRI was first started they pulled together representatives of numerous specialty crop boards. Farmers were intermingled with congressional members so that the congressional representatives could get a feel for the issues impacting specialty crop producers that need to be addressed through specialty crop research grants. Terril Nell indicated that through the review of SCRI they indicated that more industry input was needed to strengthen the program. Terril noted that there is a need to obtain an industry feel of what is working and not working. He stated that he believes in strong science, but felt that to date the SCRI program might be neglecting the highest priority topics.

Jean-Mari noted that some members of Congress have suggested that the SCC should have a first “cut” review of SCRI project relevance. Charles Hall noted that NIFA has indicated that it has difficult obtaining or retaining industry participation on grant review panels. Panel members are required to commit a large amount of time to the process. Charles noted that he would serve again as a panelist, but only because he understood the need for industry participation. Charles also discussed the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance (SCFBA). Jean-Mari noted that the SCFBA had developed language that would require for the industry to review the grant proposals. She noted that in the proposal SCRI grants would be reviewed in a two step process: 1) grant proposals would be reviewed for the potential industry impact; and 2) they would be reviewed for the strength of their science. Jean-Mari felt that the SCC should consider three different models: 1) SCRI process remains as is with no change; 2) the proposal as suggested by the SCFBA; and 3) the concept proposed by members of Congress which would require for the SCC to review grants for the level of potential impact.

III. Other Topics

Jean-Mari spoke of the relevancy of projects. She noted that panels have selected highly relevant, but low impact projects. Terril Nell concurred with her suggestion. Phil Korson spoke of the need for an improved feedback mechanism to provide input on the process, and he referred to the administration of the block grants. Jean-Mari felt that the state block grant programs (Florida was noted) seem to better address this issue than the SCRI program. It was noted by members of the group that the effectiveness of the state block grant programs varied from state to state.

Jean-Mari reiterated the topics discussed in the meeting, and the need for further inquiry into:

- 1) The issue of grant impact;
- 2) The issue of the review process; and
- 3) Dr. Bartuska’s suggestion.

Phil Korson spoke of the issue of crop insurance in areas where specialty crops have no ability to acquire crop insurance. Those producers can’t buy insurance, and as a result there is a huge

economic impact without adequate risk management tools. He noted that this was a huge macroeconomic issue. Jean-Mari put the topic in context of the charge of the committee. She suggested that perhaps the Economic Research Service could evaluate/research the cost to benefit of establishing adequate special crop insurance protections. Members noted concurrence and stated that there needed to be more analysis, “before and after” changes occur.

Jean-Mari stated that congressional staffer Dr. John Goldberg had been heavily involved in drafting NAREEE related statute. She felt that a meeting of the group in Washington, DC would allow the committee to get more input from Dr. Goldberg, Dr. Woteki, other congressional staff including that of Senator Stabenow, and Dr. Bartuska. She questioned Rob Burk whether there were adequate funds available to conduct such a meeting. Rob stated that he would need to take a closer look at the budget including current and future obligations. Dr. Mary Wagner felt that two meetings (one listening session, and one meeting in Washington, DC) would be ideal.

Jean-Mari discussed the status of the Farm Bill in relation to the timing of the meeting. Barry Bedwell noted that there are night and day perspectives on the differing congressional Farm Bill versions. He noted that many were happy with the Senate version, but that the House attitude is that cost cutting is the primary concern. He noted that the industry needed to know which leaders would be willing to stick their necks out, and he stated that the closer the industry can come to relating the practical aspects is very important. Jean-Mari felt that the relevance of research was key. She questioned if the committee had an opinion on whether the House would do anything on the Bill this year. A member stated that clearly the roles of the House and Senate have been reversed. He noted that the next few weeks will show the truth. They also noted that congressional members like Kevin McCarthy (CA-22) in strong specialty crop districts are key.

Jean-Mari Peltier noted several action items established so far:

- 1) As previously noted, review 3 different concepts to obtain stakeholder input on the impact of research projects chosen for funding;
- 2) Competitive versus merit based (feedback on review process itself);
- 3) Risk management;
- 4) Review of terms(???) relevance and impact; and
- 5) Communication of importance.

She noted potential meetings in Bakersfield in early August and another meeting in Washington, DC. She felt that these needed to be working committee meetings. They have asked us to do a lot of work, and this is a volunteer group so this may be the best way to obtain the necessary input. The SCC will report to the Board the finding of its report on “does ERS do a review of market outlook for fruit and vegetables?” She noted that ERS and NASS could be invited to report on what reports they conduct for specialty crops and advise on whether they are relevant and adequate. She noted that they should look at the whole set of data and advise on whether the reports are actually used by the industry.

Jean-Mari allocated the following tasks to the SCC members:

- 1) Barry Bewell could work on....???
- 2) Phil Korson could look at risk management;
- 3) She tasked Mike Aerts with preparing at that(???) review;
- 4) Charles Hall would send her a copy of the Specialty Crop Research Alliance recommendations to her.

Jean-Mari stated that she would like regular calls of the committee, and suggested a meeting 2 weeks from the current meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 1:15 p.m.

TBD
Chair

Rob Burk
Executive Director

APPROVAL BY COMMITTEE:

Date

Initials
Chair

Initials
Executive Director