

**NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH, EXTENSION,  
EDUCATION, AND ECONOMICS ADVISORY BOARD**

**MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING AND FOCUS SESSIONS**

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**CONTENTS**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 1**

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8**

**ADVISORY BOARD GENERAL SESSION**

    Welcome and Introductions ..... 2

    Board Business..... 2

    Remarks by the Secretary of Agriculture..... 3

    Remarks by the Executive Director, Cooperative Extension Service..... 3

**FOCUS SESSION – IMPACTS OF NASS REPORTS ON GRAIN MARKET  
VOLATILITY**

    Introduction to NASS Commodity Reports ..... 2

    Advisory Committee on Agricultural Statistics Perspective ..... 3

    Panel Discussions.....

    Board Discussion ..... 3

**FOCUS SESSION – REE COMPONENTS OF THE FARM BILL AND THE  
STRATEGIC APPROACH OF USDA TO THE FARM BILL**

    USDA Perspective ..... 5

    Congressional Perspectives..... 5

    APLU Perspective.....

    Stakeholder Perspectives ..... 8

    USDA Perspective ..... 8

    Board Discussion ..... 8

**EVENING SESSION**

    Nomination and Election of Chair, Vice-Chair and Executive Committee.....

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 9**

**ADVISORY BOARD GENERAL SESSION**

    Board Business ..... 8

    Introduction to the Duties of the USDA Office of the Chief Scientist.....

    Closing Remarks from the Deputy Under Secretary for REE.....

    Board Business.....

**ACTION ITEMS..... 10**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board (the Board) met in public session on November 7-9, 2011, in Washington DC. During a half-day orientation session, new members of the Board heard presentations on the mission and activities the department's research agencies from: Dr. Edward Knipping, Administrator, Agricultural Research Service (ARS); Dr. Mary Bohman, Acting Administrator, Economic Research Service (ERS); Dr. Cynthia Clark, Administrator, National Agricultural Statistical Service (NASS); and Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young, Acting Director, National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA); as well as the Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Dr. Catherine Woteki; and Dr. Simon Liu, Director, National Agricultural Library (NAL). The Board also heard greetings and remarks from the Secretary of Agriculture the Honorable Tom Vilsack, Krysta Harden, Chief of Staff, USDA, Dr. Ann Bartuska, Deputy Under Secretary, REE, and Dr. Jill Auburn, Acting Director, Office of the Chief Scientist, as well as Dr. Jane Schuchardt, Executive Director, Cooperative Extension Committee on Organization & Policy (ECOP).

During a focus session on the impacts of NASS reports on grain market volatility, the Board heard reports from NASS, the Advisory Committee on Agricultural Statistics and several stakeholder groups. These presentations made it clear that NASS produces a wide array of statistical reports and that the timing of some of these reports can have a significant influence on both their accuracy and their market impacts, especially in times of tight supply. NASS has plans to discontinue some of its minor reports, and stakeholders asked that NASS modify the timing and methodology of other reports to render them more accurate and less inflammatory.

During a focus session on the REE components of the 2012 Farm Bill, the Board heard presentations from the perspective of the House and Senate committees of jurisdiction, the Association of Land Grant Universities, and several stakeholder groups, as well as USDA. The Board heard that budget cuts, rather than policy decisions, will determine the future direction of agricultural research. As a result, the Board can make itself more useful to the Congress and to the Secretary by giving advice from the strategic level by identifying research priorities for REE and evaluating the effectiveness of existing programs, such as competitive grants. In its discussion, the Board appeared to agree that three additional issues deserve special attention: cooperative extension; support for new farmers and ranchers; and rural economic development.

The Board reelected Jean-Mari Peltier as its chair and elected Dr. Steven Hamburg as vice chair, as well as seven members to serve on the Executive Committee. It also organized committees to produce its three mandated reports: Relevancy and Adequacy, Renewable Energy and Specialty Crops. The Board agreed to conduct an in-depth review of the special challenges and opportunities in Cooperative Extension at its spring meeting. The Executive Committee will continue to work on clarifying the Board's mandate and authorizing legislation, in particular:

- *Priorities (Relevance)* – Develop thoughtful responses to the priorities raised by six white papers and action plan that constitute REE/USDA's strategic plan, with input from industry.

- *Assessment (Adequacy)*. – Examine whether the REE mission area is addressing the right combination of short and long term research needs, and what work is best funded with capacity, formula and competitive funding.
- *Communication*. – Develop a strategy to effectively communicate the value and benefits of USDA funded research.

## **TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8**

### **ADVISORY BOARD GENERAL SESSION**

#### **Welcome and Introductions**

Jean-Mari Peltier, Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. and asked the participants and observers to introduce themselves. Peltier explained that the Board had held an orientation session the previous afternoon for new members, who were given an introduction to the core operations of USDA’s Research, Education and Economics (REE) division by representatives of the mission agencies – the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), Economic Research Service (ERS), National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), and National Agricultural Library (NAL).

#### **Board Business**

Peltier recognized the contributions of former members of the Board who have continued to work beyond their terms on mandated reports:

- Dr. Dennis Heldman (Research and Adequacy);
- Terry Wolf (Renewable Energy);
- Carol Keiser-Long (Renewable Energy); and
- Dr. Walter Armbruster (Specialty Crops).

By unanimous voice votes, the Board approved the minutes of the March meeting and the agenda for the current meeting, as revised. Peltier announced that rosters and ballots for Board elections were included in members’ briefing books. Elections for Chair and Vice-Chair would be held after lunch, and elections for Executive Committee during the evening session.

Carol Keiser-Long summarized the recommendations of the Renewable Energy Committee (REC), which focus giving a larger role to the Chief Scientist and on fleshing out the “strategic approaches” recommended in the USDA white paper on this topic:

- In funding, avoid duplication and emphasize accountability;
- Identify the strengths and weaknesses of all proposed feedstock systems, particularly with reference to land use and regionalization;
- Develop a comprehensive database for use as a benchmark and assessment tool;
- Develop a public relations strategy;
- Continue to explore emerging feedstock systems, such as algae; and
- Develop and validate decision-making tools.

REC also heard a call during its July listening session for further study of factors explaining recent spikes in commodity prices; this will be the topic for the first focus session. Other topics for future REC meetings include benchmarking, return on investment, and alternative feedstocks. Plans are being made for site visits and regional listening sessions.

Dr. Walter Armbruster reported that the Specialty Crops Committee held two listening sessions in Michigan and that their report, which has only recently been approved, will be distributed to Board members as soon as available. Specialty crops now represent 25 percent of the revenue of U.S. agriculture, but this contribution is divided among a large number of industry sectors, both large and small. Priorities for the industry include research funding and the 2012 Farm Bill; recommendations in the forthcoming report include:

- Authorize competitive research at least at current levels;
- Evaluate proposals for their national impact, perhaps considering proportional funding for projects which are relevant on a smaller scale, or regional basis;
- Seek greater industry input and participation on review panels;
- Regularly seek input and modify priorities to increase relevance to specialty crops;
- Make marketing boards eligible for research funding; and
- Modify or remove the 100-percent match, especially for smaller sectors.

SCC has identified a number of problem areas that should be the focus of USDA research, including mechanization (sensor and mechanization technology), pollinator issues (e.g., colony collapse syndrome), invasive species, and compliance with regulatory requirements (e.g., labor, environmental, food safety). In addition to its comments on the SCRI, the SCC also recommends that USDA coordinate its intramural research on these topics with the research being done by land-grant universities.

### **Remarks by the Secretary of Agriculture**

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, welcomed participants and thanked the Board for its contributions. He characterized research as a forward-looking activity and added that REE faces a number of major challenges, including food security, nutrition and climate change. Unfortunately, the current budget proposal would cut USDA funding by 13 percent in FY 2013, in addition to the 10-percent cut it has already taken in FY 2011. Whatever the outcome of the current Super Committee negotiations, there will be fewer resources in the future, and this necessitates a reassessment of USDA's plans and activities. It's never good to cut all programs, across the board, but which programs can USDA and its clients do without? For example, does the department really need 19 different civil rights offices, or 28 FSA offices that have no employees? And does it really need all of its 45,000 vehicle fleet of cars and trucks, or to turn that fleet over every two years? NASS has already taken a first step by identifying 14 periodic reports that could be cut, and other cuts will be required of other agencies.\*

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\* While initially reported by NASS, several of the proposed cuts to NASS reports were not enacted.

In response to questions from the Board, Vilsack added that USDA needs new and better ways to leverage the resources it still has, for example by partnering with the private sector in conservation, or partnering with state and local governments in community development. By the same token, Vilsack has no plans to cut back on the Agricultural Extension Service, and no plans to “balance the budget on the backs of the 1890s and 1994s.” There are opportunities for greater efficiency and economy in “mandatory” programs, but in Vilsack’s words, “It isn’t the line items that sink a budget, it’s the riders.” He agreed that USDA needs to do more to communicate its successes, but he pointed out that the mission of USDA is so broad that it can’t be captured in a single message. Who knows, for example, that USDA has made 435,000 home loans in the last 30 months? Or that it is working to address the strong regional differences in the school lunch program, or to more equitably include black and Latino communities in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi where only 40 percent of eligible households receive food support from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Vilsack called for a new paradigm of public-private partnership to address these issues, and he welcomes the Board’s ideas on how the department can do its job and tell its story.

### **Comments by the Executive Director, Cooperative Extension Service**

Jane Schuhardt, executive director, Cooperative Extension Service (CES), said that CES’ network of state, regional and county offices traditionally have served as “transformational educators,” working to put the results of agricultural research into the hands of real users. Current programs place special emphasis on the information needs of new farmers, ranchers and foresters and on the needs of limited-resource families and producers. Funding is a long-standing problem – most Southern states don’t match the federal contribution to 1890s, and counties have never matched the federal contribution to local CES offices. This is not the time to cut back on these vital activities, which are the envy of other nations. Even in this time of limited resources, CES seeks to become the educational and outreach agency for other research programs, such as nutrition. CES has also expanded its online presence at [www.extension.org](http://www.extension.org), with “ask an expert” services in 60 different communities of practice and a strong emphasis on local connections.

### **FOCUS SESSION – IMPACTS OF NASS REPORTS ON GRAIN MARKET VOLATILITY**

Terry Wolf introduced the session by outlining recent trends in crop prices– a steady increase from 2002 to 2006, followed by a sudden spike in 2007-2008, and another surge in 2010-2011. For the most part, these trends are the result of a familiar set of variables: demand from emerging economies, especially in China and in India, growth in per capita incomes in these emerging economies, depreciation of the U.S. dollar, slower growth in U.S. agricultural productivity, and the growth of the biofuels industry. In the recent crop reports, the predictions of NASS reports on the acres planted and crops harvested have been so far off the mark that many in the agricultural community have begun to question both the validity of the reports and their influence on commodity prices.

## **Introduction to NASS Commodity Reports**

Joseph Prusacki, director, Statistics Division, NASS, noted that NASS currently produces 500 official statistical reports each year, plus another 9000 state-level reports from its 46 field offices. This information facilitates the operation of domestic and international markets; it also supports programs such as crop insurance and price supports. Most of these are voluntary, and some farmers choose not to participate, making the data potentially biased and likely more variable. In addition, the timing of NASS data collection and the release of the official statistical reports are driven by officially determined and published survey schedule and release dates not by realities on the ground (e.g., late planting, early harvest). Nevertheless, the NASS estimates and forecasts are the official USDA numbers and questions are bound to arise when those numbers deviate from trade expectations or real world outcomes. This happened in June 2011, when the NASS estimate for corn plantings was higher than market expectations, while the estimate for soybean plantings was lower. By the end of the growing season, however, the discrepancies reversed: the NASS estimate for corn stocks was higher than expectations, while the estimate for soybean stocks agreed with most market forecasts. These discrepancies no doubt contributed to price volatility.

## **Advisory Committee on Agricultural Statistics Perspective**

Doris Mold, chair, Advisory Committee on Agricultural Statistics (ACAS), agreed that NASS reports can contribute to volatility when there are disparities between official estimates and public expectations. Market impacts were not a topic of the 2011 ACAS meeting, although forecasts and/or the topic will be revisited in 2012. Mold also noted, however, that NASS reports and private forecasts are developed from different sources, using different techniques, and for different purposes. ACAS was created in 1962, when the Census of Agriculture was transferred from the Department of Commerce, to advise USDA on the conduct and content of its surveys and statistical reports on U.S. agriculture. In the current environment, NASS is facing severe cuts in funding and manpower, ACAS recommended that NASS reduce the frequency of its statistical reports, rather than eliminating them. It also recommended that NASS do whatever it can to reduce the burden on respondents, who already provide a lot of sensitive information and may find even a two-hour survey data collection onerous. ACAS also wants NASS to pay particular attention to the confidentiality of data, the loss of agricultural land, and to the special needs of Native American and Alaskan Native farmers and ranchers.

## **Panel Discussion**

Mike Mock, a risk management consultant with The Andersons Inc., blamed market volatility on the “black box” of electronic trading, which is based in large part on rumors rather than data. At the same time, some NASS statistical reports may be ill-timed and holding off for a few days or weeks could result in more accurate estimates. Some reports might be dropped (e.g., August intentions). New technologies might also help – surface areas planted could be effectively sampled with new satellite imagery. In addition, there are ongoing changes in the market that can have outsized effects on prices: the growth in ethanol production (and storage capacity)

seems to be driving the price of corn, and the proposed biodiesel mandate would certainly change the mix at refineries, and thus the demand for soybeans.

Dave Lyons, vice president for government relations at the Dreyfus Group, agreed that price volatility is the result of market conditions, but tighter stocks and other market changes can exaggerate that volatility. The collection and dissemination of accurate data is a proper role for government, and the market – producers, processors and buyers alike – depend on real numbers. If necessary, advocacy should be employed to protect this vital activity. At the same time, however, there are some NASS statistical reports that might be eliminated (or rescheduled), and others that might be transferred to other performers. For example, Lyons believes that the Wool Board would produce a statistical report on wool production even if there were no NASS report. Lyons believes that weather has more influence on prices than sample bias in NASS reports.

Dr. Harry Vrooman, vice president for economic services, The Fertilizer Institute, confirmed that the entire planet uses NASS yield data, and that those estimates can drive price changes. But NASS estimates are repeatedly corrected, and for the past 12 years there has been a pretty good match between forecasts and outcome. The recent discrepancies are a deviation from the trend, and to avoid such discrepancies in future, NASS should adjust its yield forecast more frequently (more than monthly) using trend data, while remaining objective and defensible. Dr. Vrooman reported the volatility of the grain markets is seven times higher on days when NASS Crop Production reports are released. Externalities include low production (or low productivity growth), which drives stocks down and prices up, along with speculation..

Marv Wilson, director of ag-biotech operations, Pioneer Hi-Bred, provided some historical perspective. From 1900 until 1935, the average price of corn (all of it open-pollinated) was 65 cents per bushel. Between 1940 and 1969, using double-hybrid seed, fertilizer and herbicides, the average price was \$1.20/bu. Between 1970 and the present, corn reached a new plateau of \$2.20/bushel, but today the price is suddenly \$4.00 (or more). Farmers respond to higher prices by planting more acres, and other changes follow. Seed research has reduced the breeding cycle to about seven years, and the industry has responded by expanding the geographic range of both corn and soy in the United States; it will be a challenge for NASS to track new producers. Admittedly, weather has an even greater impact on new, marginal growing areas; given the additional variable of climate change, this will further complicate the job of NASS. Nevertheless, Pioneer Hi-Bred needs reliable data to make its research decisions and financial investments.

## **Board Discussion**

In response to questions from the Board, Wilson agreed yields become more volatile as corn and soy are planted in marginal areas, largely to the north and west of their current range. Pioneer has responded by developing 50 “local” or regional hybrids, where they used to have only 15 seed varieties. This has led to hybrids that will successfully produce ears despite bad weather and late planting. Temperature is more of a challenge than drought or submersion; there is little native diversity to use in breeding for heat stress.

Prusacki and Mold agreed that NASS is unlikely to launch new statistical reports on topics such as foreign production or herbicide resistance. In a time of limited resources, it is a challenge to continue all the reports it already produces. However, ERS has a number of foreign-country specialists, and NASS has collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organization to produce international studies for the World Bank.

## **FOCUS SESSION – REE COMPONENTS OF THE FARM BILL AND THE STRATEGIC APPROACH OF USDA TO THE FARM BILL**

### **Congressional Perspectives**

Dr. John Goldberg, senior professional staff member, House Committee on Agriculture, reported that events (in the form of the deficit debate) have overtaken the plans and timing for the new Farm Bill. Leaders of the House and Senate committees presented a bipartisan, bicameral proposal to the so-called “Super Committee,” which had already cut \$23 billion from the USDA budget. He anticipates that the research title will contain no new programs, and that while some existing programs will be reauthorized, others (especially those that have never been funded) will be repealed, and others will be allowed to expire.

Lauren Sturgeon, professional staff member, House Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, presented some preliminary budget figures:

- \$86 million for ERS;
- \$165 million for NASS;
- \$1.15 billion for ARS;
- \$1.2 billion for competitive grant programs; and
- \$605 million for extramural capacity and formula programs.

She added that Congress is likely to reauthorize the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) at NIFA, it is also likely to reorganize the program with greater emphasis on assuring the relevance of competitive grants.

Goldberg said that congressional members and staff appreciate the contributions of the NAREEE Board in the past, particularly their comments on the major goals of the USDA “roadmap.” At the same time, however, there was a feeling that the Board sometimes operated too much “in the weeds” of program management and not enough at the level of the “big picture.” He challenged the Board to make itself more useful to USDA and the Congress by addressing the larger goals of agricultural research. For example, he knows that his committee will be asking USDA for more information on how to achieve more transparency and accountability in competitive grants; the Board could be of great help to the department in this area.

In response to questions, Goldberg said that Congress doesn’t want to dictate how the competitive grant money will be spent, but it does want to know in advance how USDA will allocate the money. Not necessarily at the RFA level, but at a level finer than the budget line item. This isn’t how NIH or NSF operates, of course, but “they have enough [research] money

that it's not a problem." Congress would also like to see greater transparency, especially with regard to duplication of effort between ARS and NIFA.

Board members suggested that Congress rename the title "Research and Extension," to demonstrate their continued support for CES. Goldberg responded that this will be a "streamlined" research title. With regard to earmarks, Goldberg noted that an item isn't called an earmark if it's in the President's budget request, so now all the earmarking goes on at that level. He could not comment on rural development, which is the responsibility of another staffer. With regard to matching requirements, he suggested that matching funds are the best or only surrogate for industry support, but that Congress would consider alternatives if USDA or APLU were to propose them.

Senate staff representation was scheduled, but unable to attend due to scheduling conflicts.

### **Association of Public Land-Grant Universities Perspective**

Vernie Hubert, Cornerstone Government Affairs, spoke for the Association of Public Land-Grant Universities (APLU), which is asking USDA to explain and justify the place of budgets (and farm bills) in the face of looming budget constraints. APLU has committees on (1) budget and adequacy and (2) legislation and policy, and together they have generated some 300 proposals at the policy level that will be reduced to perhaps 50 or 60 suggestions for inclusion in the Farm Bill; there will be a meeting in San Francisco next week to vote on the final slate.

In response to questions from the Board, Hubert said that it was probably too late to change the APLU's agenda for this Farm Bill. They don't hold much hope for the Super Committee, which is only looking for things to cut. Nor do they think that a single line-item budget for all of agricultural research is going to happen – the agricultural research lobby doesn't work that way, unlike the lobby for NIH, in part because so many crops are regional. Consolidation of land grant activities – for example, reducing the number of pork research programs – can only go so far without desertions; there must be absolute consensus and unity before any such efficiencies are pursued. At a later point in the discussion, Hubert added that USDA has plenty of *authority* for its mission; what it needs help with is *appropriations*, and with the *implementation* of its authority.

### **Stakeholder Perspectives**

Scott Faber, vice president for government affairs, Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA), noted that food and agriculture make a huge contribution to the U.S. economy – 1.5 million jobs in manufacturing, 15 million jobs overall, and huge exports. This sector provides American consumers with a high level of nutrition, and a wide array of choices, for a low percentage of their disposable incomes. In the industry's view, the major challenges for the future are:

- Nutrition (obesity, salt content);
- Commodities (declining productivity growth, impact of bio-fuels);
- Food safety (standards, imports);

- Sustainability (packaging, sourcing, water, environmental impacts); and
- Growth (production, imports, changing definition of “food”).

In response to questions from the Board, Faber added that food and agriculture industry is not lacking college graduates as much as it needs graduates of high school and technical schools. Industry would like to keep these jobs at home and send the products abroad, but this may require fine-tuning to some of our marketing rules and bilateral trade agreements. GMA is in a position to help the Board and the department with some of their challenges, such as telling their story better. For example, USDA doesn't get enough credit for its nutrition programs, such as school lunches and food stamps. At the same time, however, USDA needs to take another look at some of its other programs, asking whether these activities really need public funding. As to whether GMA supports the research title of the Food Bill, Faber said, “You're the first to ask.”

Jim Wiesemeyer, a consultant for Pro Farmer, stated that the outlook for large-scale production agriculture and ranching is rosy, and this can only lead to more concentration: 1/4 of 1 percent of all farms produce 30 percent of all crops; the top 2.5 percent of farms produce over half of all farm sales; and the smallest 95 percent of farms produce less than 30 percent of all crops. Top producers dominate, but they are not the target of policy or research. As a result, further cuts in the USDA budget are inevitable unless GDP rises by more than 4 percent. Budget cuts, not the Farm Bill, will drive policy in future years, and there is a lack of political leadership to do otherwise. In the face of \$2 trillion in infrastructure needs, agricultural research needs a public relations firm just to get its message heard. Support for Title 7 (Research) is a mile wide but only an inch deep; USDA was completely left out of the stimulus package; it lags badly behind NIH and NSF; and 70 percent of the USDA budget goes to SNAP.

In response to questions from the Board, Wiesemeyer added that subsidy cuts are only the “low-hanging fruit” of reform; more cuts are inevitable, especially in direct payments. Pro Farmer is a strong supporter of programs for beginning farmers, but USDA needs more success stories to build support for these programs, and the programs themselves have to be sustainable. At the same time, however, there must be some way to squeeze a few dollars out of “nutritional support” for the benefit of small and starting farmers. On the other hand, Pro Farmer doesn't necessarily support conservation programs – there are too many of them, many of which protect nothing; they need less money and better program management. Almost all farmers, large and small, are prudent stewards of the land, but it's estimated that even the best farmers are putting down 25 percent more reactive nitrogen that justified by their yields. This problem will be resolved by the seed companies, which are hard at work on nitrogen fixation. Despite its impacts on commodity prices, ethanol is a national security issue, rather than an agricultural or even an energy issue, and if Europe goes bust (or China cuts back on its imports), the ethanol reserve requirement may actually go up.

## **USDA Perspective**

Krysta Harden, chief of staff, USDA, reported that the department is doing what it can to stay up with budget cuts and prepare for future cuts. This includes personnel buyouts, early retirements,

program consolidations, new rules, new partnerships. In this environment, research may not be the biggest or most pressing issue, but the Advisory Board can nevertheless contribute to the transition. Most importantly, don't hold back; the Secretary needs and values your advice, but he'll be forced to act whether he gets it or not. The biggest problems facing USDA today have to do with size, vision and direction; the most relevant advice will bear on those questions.

In response to questions, Harden added that there is a continuing need for (1) Extension programs that support job-creating microbusinesses in rural communities and (2) other programs that support beginning farmers, who tend to be minority, disadvantaged, female, and/or veterans. She warned against comparisons that pit farmer vs. farmer, but agreed that large and small operators are different cultures with different needs. In Ohio, for example, large farmers want to talk directly to university researchers or seed company reps; small farmers have to depend on their Extension agent, or e-Extension. Extension may have an identify problem, however, with the 1862 land grants serving landowners and the 1890s serving microbusinesses. USDA can't be either/or, however; it has to find a way to address the needs of both sets of constituents. Perhaps this could be to topic of a dialogue between large and small operators, just as there have been dialogues in the past between traditional and organic growers.

## **Board Discussion**

In the discussion that followed, Board members returned to several themes that had emerged during the focus sessions. USDA is a large and complex organization that pursues a few crucial missions – feed the world, protect the environment, support rural communities – but faces a number of major challenges, notably the prospect of severe and sustained budget cuts. The NAREEE Advisory Board, for its part, represents a wide range of constituencies and sometimes has trouble finding common ground. At the same time, USDA has challenged the Board to make its advice more relevant and strategic, addressing the big questions of focus and direction, rather than the details of program management. The Board can best do this by focusing on a few core topics and crucial issues, constituting smaller subcommittees and/or conducting listening sessions as needed to accomplish its work.

The Board recognizes that its congressional mandate, as amended, includes the requirement for three subcommittees and three mandated reports: (1) Relevance and Adequacy, (2) Renewable Energy , and (3) Specialty Crops.

Some members expressed the opinions additional sub-committees may be necessary to address the education and extension components of the NAREEE mission. Education is implicit in everything the Board discusses and needs to be made explicit, and Extension has also emerged as an essential function that deserved more attention, particularly in view of the upcoming 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CES.

As general guidelines the Board agreed that REE needs a larger, unified identity; that it needs to get its message out and link itself more deeply with society; that language and vocabulary are

important to this communication process; and that everything should connect with jobs and the new economy.

It was moved and seconded to reelect Jean-Mari Peltier as Chair, and as there were no other candidates put forward, the board approved this motion by unanimous voice vote.

There being no public comment, the Board recessed at 5:00 p.m. pending an evening session.

## **EVENING SESSION**

The Board met from 6:00 until 8:00 p.m. in informal session to continue its discussion. Three people were nominated for the position of vice chair and by paper ballot, the Board elected Dr. Steve Hamburg to serve as Vice Chair. In addition, the Board elected the following members to the Executive Committee:

Dr. Charles Boyer  
Dr. Carrie Castille  
Dr. Nancy Childs  
Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen  
Leo Holt  
Dr. Milo Shult  
Dr. Mary Wagner

## **WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 9**

### **ADVISORY BOARD GENERAL SESSION**

#### **Board Business**

The Board reconvened at 8:00. Peltier outlined the duties of the Board's subcommittees and asked members to indicate, now or later, which committees they wished to join. The newly mandated Citrus Disease Committee, with its own budget of \$9 million to investigate citrus greening disease, will report to the Specialty Crops Committee.

Several individuals indicated a willingness to serve on the Relevance and Adequacy (R&A) Committee: Drs. Boyer, Castille, Childs, Cox, Henton, Holt, as well as Chad Waukechon.

Dr. Cyril Clarke volunteered to serve on the Competitive Grants Committee. Competitive grants now represent half of the USDA research portfolio, and both Congress and USDA have indicated that this program will receive increased scrutiny in the coming year. Consequently, this committee, or at least its report, will be a natural and important complement to the R&A report.

Members suggested that, for this year at least, the Board should simplify its approach to Renewable Energy and Specialty Crops, in favor of putting more effort into R&A and Competitive Grants. A member also suggested that the Board establish a committee on communicating the benefits of agricultural research, with recommendations for action by USDA.

### **Introduction to the Duties of the USDA Office of the Chief Scientist**

Dr. Jill Auburn, acting director, Office of the Chief Scientist (OCS), USDA, reported that the mission of OCS is to position USDA a research agency. The office currently operates with detailees from mission agencies and senior scientists on loan. Auburn thanked the Board for its input on the OCS white papers, which have been through another review to compare them with the USDA and REE “core areas” and are now being circulated to the relevant professional societies for further comment. After another revision, the resulting documents will be posted to the OCS website. Conceptually, these are all complementary documents, although the greatest details will reside in the final Action Plan.

In response to questions, Auburn added that OCS’ greatest policy emphasis is on scientific integrity, communication of results, and professional development of government scientists. She welcomes the Board’s ideas about communicating the results of research and increasing public understanding of the benefits of agricultural research. Auburn admitted that USDA isn’t doing much on this topic as yet; it has been relying on the professional societies to play that role. In future, however, the department’s Communications Office, and its four Public Affairs Offices, will be taking on this issue, beginning with science literacy at the K-12 level.

Board members suggested that USDA might take greater advantage of the AAAS Science Fellows program, which brings outstanding young scientists to Washington to “leaven” the science policy process. They also suggested that the Office of Scientific Integrity at NIH would be a good model for OCS efforts in this area. Auburn agreed to follow up on both suggestions. When a member asked why there was no REE white paper for agricultural productivity, Auburn said that the Action Plan couldn’t have twelve topics, but she believed productivity will be addressed under food security.

### **Closing Remarks from the Deputy Under Secretary for REE**

Dr. Ann Bartuska, Deputy Under Secretary for REE, USDA, summarized what she saw as the high points of the meeting. First of all was the visit from the Secretary, who seldom spends a whole hour talking to any group but showed that he really listens to the Board and values its input. Second was the topic of science, technology, mathematics, and engineering (STEM) education, which is getting more attention from the White House and offers a great opportunity for the 1890s and 1994s to play a larger role. USDA’s STEM programs are extensive but somewhat fragmented; how can they be better coordinated? A third and related topic is the recruitment of student interns and faculty fellows to learn more about what USDA does and carry that knowledge back to their home institutions.

Finally, Bartuska sees opportunities for the Board to make a greater contribution in several areas. Strategic advice: She challenged the Board to evaluate the revised white papers and REE action plan. Evaluation of new initiatives (in particular, she asked that the Board expand its review of competitive grants to include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the restructured National Institute of Food & Agriculture). Is the research funded advancing the science agenda? She asked the Board to evaluate whether the Specialty Crop Research Initiative should be purely competitive, or whether it should be initiative-based). Finally, she noted the role of Board in advocacy for agricultural research. The third area is particularly important – at present, the science conversation in Washington doesn't include agricultural research; people talk about food and water and energy but they never mention USDA. How can the department raise its profile and strengthen its links with the scientific community?

In response to questions, Bartuska acknowledged that USDA gets strategic advice from the Board, and the role of the Board to advocate on behalf of the USDA must not run against the Federal Advisory Committee Act, so the principal area for new input will be in evaluating REE, NIFA and competitive grants. Members suggested that if USDA wants to raise its research profile, it should convene major conferences on important topics, rather than merely participating; “Feed the Future” is an example. If the department has an image problem, however, perhaps it should outsource these activities. There is no public relations function in the regional offices, where the science gets done, and USDA's central public relations agencies don't seem to be up to the job; this is an area that's ripe for outside-the-box action. Bartuska replied that the Communications Office recently did an external review that resulted in a number of good recommendations, but the director of that office left and the new director has yet to re-launch the effort. To prime the pump, Bartuska challenged each member of the Board to identify one strong success story, demonstrating the benefits of agricultural research, and bring it back to REE or get it into the local media. Needless to say, the best examples will not only feed the nation and the world, but also strengthen the U.S. economy.

## **Board Business**

Jean-Mari Peltier closed the meeting by reviewing the issues that have been presented to the Board and reading from the statutory language creating the NAREEE Advisory Board. The statute outlines that the REE mission must develop ways to identify agricultural research *priorities*. The NAREEE Advisory Board is to help develop research priorities, as well as evaluate whether the work REE conducts, or funds, is *relevant* to the priorities, and whether the funding is *adequate*. She summarized the challenges presented over the past several days:

- *Legal*. – The Board needs to work with REE and Congress to clarify and refine its authorizing and enabling legislation.
- *Priorities (Relevance)*. – The six white papers reflect the challenges identified as priorities by USDA, but are they the core principles or activities of REE? Is there anything missing? The Board will review the REE action plan and white papers. The Board might want to organize outreach sessions to bring additional expertise to bear on these questions. There was agreement that there should be industry input on these questions. And there was agreement that this topic should be addressed from the “30,000-

foot level.” Daley-Laursen, Boyer, Campa, Childs, Clarke, Ishii, and Wolf volunteered to work on this issue.

- *Assessment (Adequacy)*. – Has the creation of NIFA improved the complementary nature between intra-mural and extra-mural research funding? How can REE sort out the right balance of short and long term research needs, and whether they should be funded through capacity, formula or competitive funding? How do we assure we are moving forward the scientific agenda for food and agriculture? Castille, Bender, Clark, Greene, Shult , Heldman, Cox, Holt, Henton, and Waukechon agreed to work on this project.
- *Advocacy (Communications)*. – *The need for* better communication comes up at every Board meeting. Perhaps there should be a process for evaluating, *not the research, but its impacts*. USDA needs a better channel from those who *do* (research) to those who *use* (the results). Every sector seems to want a better voice in setting research priorities, *and* when they don’t find it, they fall back on earmarks. Childs, Ishii, and Peltier agreed to work on this issue.
- *Extension*. – Part of the problem is that there are so many programs, at so many levels, that the money (and the impact, or at least the recognition) *gets* diluted. Interestingly, NIFA’s new competitive grants have extension or translation functions. In the end, however, the Board recognized that the issue of Cooperative Extension this is an extremely complicated ; perhaps for the present the Board should stick to reviewing the REE Research priorities, evaluate the relevance and adequacy of funded research (with a special review of the role of NIFA in advancing the agricultural research agenda) and communications. Instead, the Board agreed to focus a special review at its spring meeting on Cooperative Extension, its evolving role and challenges.

An author for the report of the NAREEE Fall meeting was not identified, nor was a working group assembled to develop it.