

National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education and Economics Advisory Board

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MINUTES

Specialty Crop Committee Conference Call Tuesday, July 1, 2014, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. EDT.

Committee Members Present: Dr. Charles Boyer (Chair); Mike Aerts; Barry Bedwell; Henry Giclas; Rita Green; Charles Hall; Leo Holt; Phil Korson; and Mary Wagner

Committee Members Absent: Terrill Nell

NAREEE Board Staff: Michele Esch (Executive Director) and Shirley Morgan-Jordan (Program Support Coordinator)

Others Present: Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy, Director, NIFA; Dr. Tom Bewick, National Program Leader, NIFA; and Mike Fisher

I. **Roll Call of the Executive Committee Members and Meeting Attendees**

Michele Esch conducted a roll call of the Specialty Crop Committee (SCC) once members signed on to the conference call.

II. **Welcome from the Co-Chair**

Dr. Charles Boyer welcomed the members and stated that the purpose of the call was to receive an update on the status from NIFA on the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) and to plan for our face-to-face meeting this fall.

III. **Status of the Specialty Crop Research Initiative, including a Discussion on the Matching Requirement**

Dr. Tom Bewick provided an overview of the status of the SCRI. They are in the final stages of the review. The relevancy review is complete and 70% of the applications were invited to submit complete proposals for the scientific merit review. The panel will be in DC the last week of July. The awards must be made by the end of the fiscal year (September, 30, 2014).

There were a number of glitches in the relevancy review, which they expected, but they have already documented those and are working to improve the process. The most prominent issues were panelists who ultimately did not submit their reviews. This was due to emails not being received and some of it personal (time) issues. Dr. Bewick told the committee that the report on this year's activities and awards

will be ready by the end of August for review and comment by the Committee.

Dr. Bewick then provided the committee with an update on the changes to the matching requirement for SCRI. The 2014 Farm Bill revised the matching requirement language for most competitive grant programs. An organization applying for a competitive grant needs to provide dollar for dollar matching, unless:

- They are a USDA research agency (ARS, ERS, etc.);
- They are eligible to receive funds from one of our capacity programs (in other words, a land-grant or another one of our capacity funded partners, using the most obtuse possible angle for consideration);
- They partner with one of those organizations above (definition of “partnering” pending) or;
- The Secretary waives the match requirement because the grant involves research or extension activities that the NAREEE Advisory Board has determined are national priorities.

The committee turned the discussion back to the relevancy review process. One of the Board members wanted to know how the relevancy review process went from an applicant as well as for the actual relevancy reviewers. Dr. Bewick and Dr. Ramaswamy reiterated the confidential nature of the names of the reviewers and the proposals that they receive. The proposals are considered intellectual property and are treated with very strict confidentiality so as to not jeopardize a potential patent down the road. If individuals want to discuss their own project, they can do that. He stated that he would like to the Board to focus on the process and that is the discussion that he is interested in.

In addition, NIFA will not disclose the names of relevancy reviewers but if the individual relevancy reviewers want to come forward to speak to the committee, they could do so. This would provide the committee with firsthand knowledge of the process.

One of the members on the SCC was concerned about letters of support being submitted that were not wholly agreed to by the submitting organization. Dr. Bewick was aware of these letters and made sure that the information was not submitted with the proposal package. There was further discussion about the submission of letters of support with the relevancy review. Originally, these letters were not allowed in the pre-proposal package. Dr. Bewick indicated that the Committee could suggest to NIFA that letters of support be included in the relevancy review process if they so agreed.

Dr. Bewick stated that because of the delay with the Farm Bill he is trying to set the process for the SCRI granting program on a normal schedule.

Dr. Bewick thanked the SCC for their support and stated after the first conference call, changes were made that were suggested by the Board. He wanted to reassure

the SCC that their voices are being heard and changes are being made.

IV. Membership

Michele Esch spoke on the assigned term limits to the committee. After reviewing the General Operating Procedures and the USDA Departmental Regulation on Committee Management, committee members can serve two consecutive 3-year terms. Ms. Esch asked for members to indicate to her via email or phone their interest in rotating off the committee or staying on the committee.

A question was asked if someone that rotated off the committee can come back and serve. Michele Esch stated that she would check some information and get back with them. (Update: committee members may be reappointed after rotating off of the committee. Members can serve no longer than two consecutive terms; a total of 6 consecutive years. SCC members serve at the discretion of the Executive Committee of the NAREEE Advisory Board.)

V. Discussion on the Agenda and Logistics for a Face-to-Face Meeting

Dr. Charles Boyer outlined the goals of the face to face meeting in the fall. The main goals are:

- To stay current on FACA and ethics rules
- Proceed with the development on the 2nd report on the SCRI process
- Hold a strong discussion on where we go in terms of meeting the broader charges of the committee (see committee charge)
- Provide information and/or recommendations back to the NAREEE Advisory Board regarding the major and minor crops discussion.

Dr. Boyer reminded the committee that they do have the ability to hold listening sessions as part of their charge so we need to discuss that in further detail.

A question was asked to Dr. Bewick if the report/data on the SCRI program would be ready the week of August 18 and if the date was feasible. He indicated that he could have some data available but the final grants would not be made by that date. The committee was also reminded to think about what additional information they want from NIFA and other REE agencies in order to make recommendations.

VI. Other Business

Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy thanked the committee for being available and for their input into the SCRI process.

The meeting adjourned at 12:45 pm

Dr. Charles Boyer
Chair

Michele Esch
Executive Director, NAREEE

APPROVAL BY ADVISORY BOARD: _____
Date

Initials following Advisory Board Approval