

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

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## MINUTES Executive Committee Conference Call

Friday, July 13, 2012, 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. EST.

**Executive Committee Members Present:** Jean-Mari Peltier (Chair), Dr. Charles Boyer, Dr. Carrie Castille, Dr. Nancy Childs, Dr. Steve Daley-Laursen, Dr. Milo Shult, and Dr. Mary Wagner

**Executive Committee Members Absent:** Dr. Steve Hamburg (Vice Chair), and Leo Holt

Ex Officios: Dr. Catherine Woteki (REE, Under Secretary), and Dr. Ramaswamy (NIFA Director)

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

**Others Present:** Carol Keiser-Long, Benjamin Young (USDA Office of the General Counsel), and Mark Garrett.



### 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 and Welcome

Jean-Mari Peltier welcomed everyone on the conference call.

### III. Comments from the Under Secretary of USDA REE

Dr. Catherine Woteki thanked everyone for joining the conference call. She stated that it had been an action packed week. The House Agriculture Committee completed its mark-up of the Farm Bill.

The National Research Council will issue a report on the need for the replacement of the facilities at Plum Island. The facility studies infectious diseases in livestock, and the majority of control of operations had previously transferred from ARS to Homeland Security.

Dr. Woteki introduced Benny Young from the USDA Office of the General Counsel to the call. She asked him to attend to discuss the legally allowed interaction between the USDA/NAREEE and Congress. Dr. Catherine Woteki discussed a letter supplied to her by the Specialty Crop Committee of the Board, and some comments made previously during meetings with the leadership of the Board. She said that there were 3-4 points of concern and asked the Office of the General Counsel to weigh in. The points included:

- Discussion related to the Board and Congress in priority setting for the Department;
- Congressional staff setting “tasks” for the Board to complete; and
- The role/method of an Executive Branch federal advisory committee (FAC), like NAREEE, in communicating with Congress.

Dr. Catherine Woteki stated that first REE read through the enabling authority of the Board, and the Secretary. She pointed to her request for the Board to review the REE Action Plan and OCS White Papers as an example of the Board’s role in providing review and advice to the Secretary as it relates to REE. She also noted that they reviewed the general responsibilities of a FAC.

Mr. Benjamin Young stated that FAC provide consultation to the President and other Executive Branch Officers. Federal advisory committees provide external stakeholders a structured, transparent, way to share the opinions and perspectives, study issues, and develop recommendations in a unified manner. He stressed the importance of the separation of powers of the three branches of Government, and noted that the NAREEE Advisory Board is an entity of the Executive Branch. The NAREEE Advisory Board has specific responsibilities and has more authority than normal FAC. Notably the Board has the role of advising the Secretary, and for that advice to be related to related agricultural committees in Congress, as well as land grant institutions. The Secretary is also required to respond to the recommendations of the Board. He stressed that all consultation and advice should go through the Secretary first. This assures that a unified executive branch voice is maintained. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-19 states that sufficient time must be provided for their review and coordination of any information to Congress prior to clearance. Circular A-19 also recommends that technical assistance may be provided by agencies of the executive branch, but that information should not stray into policy.

Dr. Nancy Childs questioned if this meant that NAREEE cannot make comments on budget memos. Benjamin Young stated that on budget levels, yes. We are required to live within the Presidential budget levels. Any formal response to the President’s budget should be channeled through OMB.

Jean-Mari was surprised that the reviews needed to go through OMB and asked whether the Board's annual report on the relevance and adequacy of funding, required by statute, needs to go through OMB also. Benjamin Young stated that review is different than commenting on the President's budget in the appropriations process. The Board can look at the past years budget(s) and say that there is a shortfall of funding and that it needs to be changed in "these" ways.

Dr. Milo Shult stated that he doesn't remember NAREEE taking a position contrary to the President's budget in the past. Benjamin Young echoed the statement.

A discussion ensued regarding permissible content in NAREEE reports. Benjamin Young indicated that given the information supplied to him the Board's productivity report from 2011 and the report on public, private, and university collaboration contained permissible content.

Dr. Milo Shult asked if this subject overview of the Board's responsibilities would be appropriate to add to the agenda at the NAREEE Fall Meeting so the full Board could discuss it further. He suggested that congressional representatives could also be invited. Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen agreed with Dr. Shult and noted that the Board seems to be in a "triangle" between the USDA and Congress, and more clarity is needed on the role of the Board.

Jean-Mari Peltier stated that there has been a significant amount of external "chatter" about the Board's role in determining the USDA's research agenda. The Board responded to the REE Under Secretary's request for the Board to provide input on the REE Action Plan and white papers. She noted that Congress had requested that NIFA provide info on the competitive grants distributed by the agency. Jean-Mari had also received a request directly from congressional staff to have the Board review the information compiled by NIFA. This also sparked a discussion by members of Congress related to the role of the Board in the priority setting process. She referred to a "colloquy" between Representatives Peterson and Lucas on the floor of Congress. Some members of Congress have been stating that the Board has a deeper role in the USDA REE priority setting process. Dr. Woteki was unaware of the colloquy referenced by Jean-Mari, and asked for more information. Jean-Mari noted that the discussion was related to the uniform requirement on matching funds, and the suggestion that the requirement may be waived in areas highlighted as priorities by NAREEE. There was a discussion on priority areas, and Drs. Woteki and Ramaswamy pointed to the five priority areas identified in the 2008 Farm Bill.

Dr. Catherine Woteki stated that this topic needs to be discussed further. Dr. Woteki made a series of points, she suggested:

- that the Board continue its engagement with REE staff;
- that she would review the "colloquy" noted by Jean-Mari;
- that the next full meeting of the Board include a session discussing the role of the Board with the Office of the General Counsel;
- that this discussion continue on future Executive Committee conference calls; and
- that NIFA will continue to work on its analysis of the AFRI data supplied to Congress, that she would be happy to have their findings shared with the Board at the next meeting, and she is interested in the Board's input on any additional items that they would like NIFA to analyze.

Dr. Woteki indicated that she had invited Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy (Director, USDA NIFA) to speak about the efforts under way to analyze the AFRI data supplied to Congress. Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy, in response to the Board's report on the public, private and university partnerships stated that there are several curi programs in NIFA that enable the sort of partnerships identified by the Board. As a result, NIFA does not believe that a new program is necessary. Dr. Ramaswamy also stated that the NIFA review of the AFRI data was an opportunity for them to review if they have adhered to the Farm Bill priorities, and will also allow the agency to compare the outcomes of successive years. He also noted that the agency would be happy to incorporate questions presented by the Board. He suggested that those questions be forwarded to Rob Burk for compilation, but also stated that he would be happy to have them sent directly to him.

There was a discussion regarding how the Board develops its reports, and how the USDA responds to those reports. Dr. Catherine Woteki stressed the importance of allowing an adequate amount of time for the Secretary to respond back to the NAREEE regarding its recommendations before that information is sent to Congress. She noted that there is the potential that the Secretary reads the reports/recommendations of the Board and has had thoughtful comments in the past in response. His comments might generate additional advice from the Board that should be incorporated into the report. Rob Burk stated that there is a need to formalize the process for the Secretary's review of the reports of the Board. Dr. Ramaswamy stated that it would be great to have a more formal response process to the Board.

Dr. Steve Daley-Laursen stated that in looking at the statutory charge the Board is supposed to also provide advice/recommendations to the land-grant institutions. He asked Dr. Woteki if she had any advice on how the Board could relate information to the APLU so that they won't be left out. Rob Burk stated that sending a report just isn't enough. Dr. Sonny Ramaswamy stated that perhaps the Board could seek some time to meet the Director of APLU and Deans and engage in a conversation on regular basis. Dr. Milo Shult noted that the APLU leadership had asked him to serve as an ex-officio member of their leadership body because of his position on the NAREEE Board. He indicated that he didn't believe that the land grant institutions were being left out.

Dr. Catherine Woteki stated that she looks forward to having this discussion at the Fall NAREEE Meeting. She stated that in this review, we've had internal discussions also and need to do a better job of responding to NAREEE on recommendations made. We need to provide a response on what's been acted on and what hasn't. She pointed to the recent letter from Dr. Ramaswamy sent to directly respond to the Board's report on public, private, and university partnerships.

Dr. Milo Shult clarified the point that these topics should be added to the agenda for the Fall meeting of the Board for further discussion. Jean-Mari Peltier confirmed that they should add the meeting to the agenda. Dr. Shult suggested that it would be good to have a panel with representatives from USDA REE, the USDA General Counsel, and representation from the Congressional committees so everyone is on the same page. Dr. Steve Daley-Laursen reiterated that we need all parties represented on the panel. Rob Burk questioned when the best time to hold this discussion would be, and the membership indicated that it should be a time when the maximum possible attendance is possible.

Jean-Mari Peltier and Dr. Milo Shult had an additional discussion regarding what she believes the role of the Board to be in the priority setting process, and the matching funds.

#### **IV. Updates on Standing Committee Activities and/or Reports**

##### **Specialty Crop Committee – Jean-Mari Peltier**

The committee has been working to hold a listening session in the Bakersfield area around August 6<sup>th</sup>. She noted that the committee members were hoping to have participation from Congressman McCarthy's office. However, Congress McCarthy will not be available for that week. If Congress doesn't take action the funding for specialty crop research will be \$0.

##### **Renewable Energy committee – Carol Keiser-Long**

Carol Keiser-Long stated that the REC Committee members had a great meeting July 9<sup>th</sup> in Washington, DC and some members attended the Biomass Conference presented by DOE. The committee has made changes to its report and there are six main recommendations that the group is developing. The report should be completed within the next month. The Biomass Conference had about 1000 participants.

Jean-Mari Peltier asked if the committee had reviewed the NRI Report. Jean-Mari felt that the NRI report identified a significant expansion of biofuel related projects. She stated that the committee may want to look at the NRI report and incorporate some of the information into the REC report. Carol Keiser-Long indicated that the committee would consider it, but she noted that funding was not a part of the REC charge, which only includes the effectiveness of programs and scope of work. Jean-Mari also suggested that a request to NIFA could be to have the data for biofuels broken out from the full data set.

##### **Citrus Disease Research & Development Advisory Committee – Rob Burk**

Rob Burk stated that the Citrus Committee met in Riverside, California June 18-19, 2012. On Monday, June 18, 2012, the Citrus Committee participated in a tour of National Clonal Germplasm Repository for Citrus and Dates, the California Citrus Clonal Protection Program (the state citrus certification program), the citrus variety collection, the University of California Riverside citrus breeding program, and the Citrus Research Board diagnostic lab and had the meeting on Tuesday June 19 at the ARS Salinity Lab in California. Rob stated that the Citrus Committee is in the process of formulating a draft report.

#### **V. Updates from Work Groups/AD Hoc Subcommittees**

##### **Relevancy and Adequacy – Dr. Carrie Castille and Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen**

Dr. Carrie Castille stated that she was excited to see data from NIFA. She believes that the group can use this information to finish crafting their report.

Jean-Mari stated that she would like to see ARS evaluate its research funding/outcomes in much the same way as NIFA.

Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen reported that the penultimate version of the relevancy section of the report was ready to be reviewed by the Committee. Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen suggested that we should talk about formatting. He noted that the report currently uses bullets to highlight the recommendations. Jean-Mari stated that she felt bullets were great as long as there is content behind the recommendations. Dr. Carrie Castille stated that she did not have an Adequacy section finalized at this time, just guiding principles for the report.

#### **NASS Report / Extension Report / Ag. Research Title Review – Dr. Milo Shult**

The NASS Report has been reviewed by Terry Wolf and Jean-Mari Peltier. Dr. Shult reported that he will send the report to Rob Burk this weekend for distribution to the Executive Committee and then to full Board. Jean-Mari felt that the report was a good report and ready for distribution to the Board.

Dr. Shult reported that the Extension report working group was being chaired by Rita Green and that the report is progressing.

Dr. Shult also reported that the review of the ag. research title has taken a detour and that he had tabled work on it until a later date.

#### **Brainstorming Session – Dr. Mary Wagner**

Dr. Mary Wagner stated that she and Rob Burk have been exchanging emails, and that she would like to schedule a meeting with Dr. Catherine Woteki to discuss the outcomes of the session.

#### **IV. Executive Directors Report – Rob Burk**

Rob Burk stated that, due to time constraints, he will give a status of the budget on the next Conference Call.

The NAREEE Advisory Board Office will send out a “Save the Date” notice to the Board for the Fall NAREEE Advisory Board Meeting on Oct 23-25, 2012. The meeting will be at the Phoenix Park Hotel in Washington, DC.

***The next Executive Committee conference call is scheduled for Friday, August 3, 2012 at 11:00 a.m. Eastern Time.***

The meeting was adjourned at 12:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Shirley Morgan-Jordan

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Jean-Mari Peltier  
Chair

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Rob Burk  
Executive Director

APPROVAL BY ADVISORY BOARD:

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Date

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Initials  
Chair

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Initials  
Executive Director