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

REE Advisory Board Office
South Building Room 3901
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250-2255

Mailing Address:
STOP 0321
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250-2255
Telephone: 202-720-3684
Fax: 202-720-6199

**MINUTES**
**Executive Committee Conference Call**

**Friday, August 5, 2011 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. EST.**

**Executive Committee Members Present:** Jean-Mari Peltier (Chair), Dr. Mary Wagner (Vice Chair), Dr. Carrie Castille, Dr. Nancy Cox, Dr. Nancy Childs, Dr. Steve Daley-Laursen, Leo Holt, and Terry Wolf

**Executive Committee Members Absent:** Dr. Dennis Heldman

**NAREEE Board Staff:** Robert Burk (Executive Director)

**Others Present:** REE Under Secretary Dr. Catherine Woteki, Dr. June Henton, and Carol Keiser-Long

**Others Absent:** Walt Armbruster

## I. Roll Call of Executive Committee Members and Attendees, and Previous Meeting Minutes

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

## II. Comments and Welcome from Chair and Review of Previous Meeting Minutes

- Jean-Mari Peltier welcomed the Committee and thanked Dr. Catherine Woteki for joining in on the call.

## III. Comments from the Under Secretary of Research, Education, and Economics

- Dr. Catherine Woteki apologized for not being able to attend the NAREEE Executive Committee conference calls as often as she would have liked. She stated that she wanted to take this opportunity to update the Board on the status of the federal budget as it relates to the REE agencies. She also stated that she was willing to address any questions of the Board.
- Jean-Mari Peltier noted that she has heard rumors that the Farm Bill will be written in the next three months. She stated that she wanted to make sure that the Board did everything it could to support the REE agencies during that process.
- Dr. Catherine Woteki indicated that the federal budget deal that was just struck is the first step towards gaining clarity on the budget. There has been no word as of yet from the Senate on the USDA allocation, or each of its individual agencies. The House has finished its budget preparation and that budget would imply a 15-16% cut to the Department. She indicated that:
    - The Department was actively engaged in a planning exercise, not knowing the final budget implications, which would prepare the Department for a 25% cut over FY2011. The evaluation of the core priorities of the agencies are being looked at in much the same way that a grant evaluation process is conducted. She stated that in the case of ARS they are evaluating the research facilities so that an educated, forward thinking approach can be taken with regard to program priorities. They are analyzing which facilities are generic in their setup and which are program specific so that they are able to systematically identify the program priorities and where they will be conducted.
    - At this time there will be no concrete budget comments until the appropriations are clarified. The possibility exists that there could be a continuing resolution for FY2012. Normally FY2013 budget plans would be well underway.
    - The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) called a meeting last Friday at which Dr. Catherine Woteki was in attendance. The purpose of the meeting was to provide verbal guidance, however no formal written guidance has been provided as of yet. The sub-cabinet leaders were told to plan for a 10% cut for FY2013 (based off of the FY2011 budget).
    - The Administrations priorities for USDA in FY2013 include:
        - clean energy;
        - technological transfer;
        - supplemental science;
        - "Big Data" (i.e. making large data sets available to researchers); and
        - advanced manufacturing.
    - OMB anticipates that Congress will place special emphasis on having the Department clarify the efficiency of the research programs, with a particular focus on eliminating overlaps between other Departments/Agencies.
- In response to Jean-Mari Peltier's question regarding the status of the Farm Bill, Dr. Catherine Woteki indicated that she has not heard any defined plans for the time table to be moved up. She noted that the REE Agency Administrators testified this past week at a House Agricultural Sub-Committee hearing. The hearing is termed an "audit." She is anticipating meetings in the Fall to follow up on policy review, and at that point the USDA Under Secretaries would become involved.

- Dr. Catherine Woteki indicated that the search for a new NIFA Director was well underway. She noted that this is a 6 year Presidential appointment that is not subject to Senate confirmation. They have contacted 10 candidates and she is please with the quality of the candidates. She stated that she feels the first cut will be made before the end of the month. She hopes to interview all of the candidates by the end of the month.
- Dr. Catherine Woteki indicated that they are beginning to recruit for the ERS Administrator's position vacated by Dr. Kitty Smith. The closing date for the position will be September 15, 2011. She intends for her office to prepare an executive review well in advance of that the process can proceed quickly. She wants to make sure that the word about the position availability is transmitted to as many interested candidates as possible.
- Jean-Mari Peltier questioned whether the hearings with Congress had been positive or antagonistic. Dr. Catherine Woteki indicated that they had been positive, and that the members of Congress had asked some very substantive and informed questions.
- Terry Wolf commented that it seems disproportionate that the federal budget has increased and yet the agricultural budget has been proposed to be cut by 15%. Dr. Catherine Woteki indicated that they are still waiting on the 302(b) allocations to be outlined to gain more clarity. Dr. Woteki generally agreed that the current budget projections appear to be a "historic disinvestment in agricultural research."
- Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen spoke regarding the relationship between the current REE planning process, the preparation of the REE White Papers, and the OMB process of review/planning. He asked for Dr. Woteki to elaborate on the connections. Dr. Catherine Woteki indicated that there are numerous connections. The process of preparing the REE White Papers has enabled the mission area to clarify the priorities of the agencies. Dr. Woteki thanked the Board for its assistance with the process.
- Carol Keiser-Long noted that one priority of the Administration is clean energy. She questioned how past efforts would be changed, and how that would affect REE. She also questioned how the Renewable Energy Committee can assist in reviewing the efficiencies and duplications within the area of renewable energy. Dr. Catherine Woteki spoke regarding the importance of biofuels to the USDA, and in developing the budget focus will be placed on them. She suggested that the Board provide guidance to REE regarding how it has assisted with the evaluation of efficiency and duplication in the past.
- Carol Keiser-Long noted that she feels that there may be some duplication of efforts between Departments, and that the USDA should have a position of prominence on the topic of bioenergy.
- Terry Wolf stated that he believes that the USDA is working hard, perhaps as hard as any Department, to define its roles and to eliminate duplication.
- Dr. Catherine Woteki discussed the Feed Stock Readiness Tool and the efforts to plug the current research programs of the USDA into that model, from "farm to fuel." She stated that this will facilitate research and advancement, and reduce duplication of efforts on the part of public or private institutions.
- Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen noted that "big data" and algorithms are one area where efficiency and duplication can be addressed. He questioned if these efforts to gain efficiency and reduce duplication confined to the USDA or do they include other Departments. Dr. Catherine Woteki discussed the work of Dr. Simon Liu and NAL as it relates to "big data," and work on sustainability. She stated that the goal is to have a

repository of data, for use in "slide chain analysis." She indicated that no other agency was trying to pull together these tools. NAL would develop the architecture for the environment and the requirements for entering data so that it would be more accessible for researchers.

- Dr. Catherine Woteki indicated that she would relate additional budget information to the Board as it becomes available.
- Jean-Mari Peltier indicated that the Board stands ready to preserve the valuable programs of REE and they are ready to help. She questioned if Dr. Catherine Woteki thought that Congress would be better off fixing/updating individual titles, like the SCRI. Dr. Catherine Woteki indicated that this was an interesting idea but she stated that " as the Secretary often states, Congress writes the bills."
- At this point Dr. Woteki stepped away from the conference call to attend an alternate meeting.
- Jean-Mari Peltier asked the members of the Committee to discuss the comments made by the Under Secretary.
- Terry Wolf questioned whether other agencies/mission areas of the USDA were having their budgets reduced as much as REE. Jean-Mari Peltier requested that Rob Burk identify a budget breakdown of how all of the USDA Mission Areas are being potentially impacted by budget cuts.
- Jean-Mari Peltier noted her "surprise" by the sustainability efforts of the USDA.

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

***Renewable Energy***

- Carol Keiser-Long reviewed the July 14, 2011 meeting of the Committee. She noted that it was an insightful meeting and perhaps the most exciting portion of the meeting was the introduction of the Feed Stock Readiness Tool. It pulls together all of the biofuel efforts into one analytical tool.
- Carol Keiser-Long noted that every REE Agency was represented at the meeting. She stated that Deputy Under Secretary Dr. Ann Bartuska met with the committee and was candid and open with her comments and answers. She discussed the "valley of death", wherein there is difficulty in moving research findings into production.
- Carol Keiser-Long noted that the annual report of the committee was in its final stages, and she anticipates that it will be forwarded to the Board in the next two weeks.
- Dr. Carrie Castille indicated that she appreciated the participation of the REE Agencies in the meeting. She noted that there needs to be better coordination with DOE, as the agencies need to be on the same page to avoid duplication.
- Dr. Carrie Castille noted that the Feed Stock Readiness Tool needs to be put in place "quickly."
- Dr. Carrie Castille stated that she feels one of the most important goals of the Committee should be to host a roundtable conference on bioenergy as key partners and producers can learn a lot from sitting down with the REE agency leads on bioenergy. Jean-Mari Peltier questioned whether other committees exist within the USDA that could conduct this effort. She questioned if the Renewable Energy Committee is the right entity to do this.

Dr. Carrie Castille indicated that the Committee is not in that position as of yet, but she feels it could be.

- Carol Keiser-Long noted that the industry is taking this valuable information and turning it into a profitable form. On duplication she stated that the USDA is doing vital work on agronomics. She noted that the BRDI TAC is the industry group.
- Dr. Carrie Castille noted that in all of these discussions the USDA must be mindful of the rural economy, and efforts should be made to make sure that rural economic health is factored in. Jean-Mari Peltier noted that she believes there are faults with the federal definition of what is "rural."

***Specialty Crop Committee***

- Jean-Mari Peltier and Rob Burk reviewed the July 19, 2011 listening sessions of the Specialty Crop Committee which were held in East Lansing, and Grand Rapids, MI.
- Jean-Mari Peltier discussed the difficulty associated with dealing with the "pest of the month" and the associated shifts in funding.

## V. Updates from Work Groups/Subcommittees

***Competitive Grants***

- Dr. June Henton (Subcommittee Chair) discussed a letter that was drafted by the Sub-committee for the Under Secretary. Jean-Mari Peltier requested a minor edit be made to the letter, which Dr. Henton was open to discuss. Dr. Nancy Childs requested similar edit regarding to the tone of the letter. Jean-Mari Peltier indicated that the letter was relevant to the foundation of the subcommittee, but she felt that perhaps the purpose of the Committee should change given occurrences since its establishment. Jean-Mari Peltier stated that she felt that:
    - since the second RFA release by NIFA for the AFRI program improvements have been made;
    - the purpose of the subcommittee should be to look into how the peer review panels are organized and run as issues might have arisen since the dramatic expansion of the program; and
    - perhaps herself and Dr. Nancy Childs could meet with Dr. Henton to discuss the letter further.
- Dr. Nancy Cox indicated that she felt that during the NAREEE meeting in March the commodity representatives panel had expressed disenfranchisement with the review process. There was a general feeling that what was most important to the stakeholders was not factored in to the extent expected in the grant decision making process. Jean-Mari Peltier indicated that this should be addressed. She also questioned how NIFA determines relevancy and expresses that to the review panels.
- Dr. June Henton asked for more clarity on whether the Executive Committee members would like the questions to Dr. Woteki to be more generic and less specific. Jean-Mari Peltier discussed the fact that she sees it as two issues:

1. In the creation of the NIFA and the initial NIFA AFRI RFA, she felt there was very little industry input taken into account, but much of that was rectified with the 2011 AFRI RFA;
2. In the competitive grants system there seemed to be a focus on obtaining geographic and ethnic diversity on the peer review panels but that other areas of importance had been neglected.

- Jean-Mari Peltier suggested that perhaps the committee should no longer focus on AFRI.
- Rob Burk will set up a conference call between Jean-Mari Peltier, Dr. Nancy Childs, and the Competitive Grants Committee to discuss the letter to Dr. Woteki further.

***Spring 2011 Meeting Report Status***

- Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen reported that a draft report was distributed to the other members of the working group (Drs. Heldman, and Childs). He indicated that he would like to make some adjustments to the report recommendations based on the discussion with Dr. Catherine Woteki and then circulate the report to the Executive Committee for review.

## VI. Executive Director's Report

***Budget Review***

- Rob Burk discussed the current budget of the Board. He reported that in a recent budget submission from the office managing the NAREEE budget, and with estimates from Shirley Morgan-Jordan the Board is quickly approaching its annual appropriation limit. He indicated that as a result he is recommending against any additional meetings which include travel. He noted that he has asked a series of questions to both Shirley, and the budget office to clarify some accounting concerns. He noted the full staffing of the Board over the previous year, and an increase in the amount of meetings of the Board as a reason for the increase in spending by the Board.

***Fall Meeting***

- Rob Burk indicated that the Board had not yet clarified what topics it would like addressed during the Fall meeting. He reviewed a number of the suggestions that have been posed by members of the Executive Committee including:
    1. nutrition, and obesity;
    2. a discussion related to studies by NASS;
    3. farm bill;
    4. holding another panel with stakeholder/commodity groups; and
    5. reviewing and providing recommendations on the core priorities of the REE programs, from the point of view of the stakeholder groups.
- Rob Burk stated that he will be requesting the Agency Administrators to discuss what they view as the core operations of their agencies during the orientation session.
- Dr. June Henton indicated that she would like a report on the international programs of NIFA from Dr. Hiram Larew as they are relevant to food security. She noted that the

USDA is in a unique position focusing on national and international food security issues. Leo Holt noted that the USDA APHIS had recently brought in approximately 40 international inspectors to visit his operations.

- Jean-Mari Peltier stated that she sees the program as having at least two questions. She questioned whether the meeting can handle topics on NASS, as well as REE international efforts.
- Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen stated that he felt some integration of the topic mentioned by Dr. Catherine Woteki involving the historic disinvestment in agricultural research was necessary. He noted that we should be providing some direction on where the USDA is going with some connection to the Farm Bill. He felt that NAREEE would fall short if it did not take this up in some way. He cited the timing of the meeting of November as a prime time to address the topic. Jean-Mari Peltier noted that she feels that if the Board isn't providing Farm Bill input before November then "we may miss it."
- Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen requested for a small group of the Executive Committee to work with Rob Burk and Dr. Catherine Woteki's office to meld together this agenda.
- Terry Wolf indicated that the Farm Bill needs to be on the Fall meeting agenda to engage with players from Congress on the topic.
- Jean-Mari Peltier requested a group of Committee members to visit D.C. and address these topics. She noted that they need to move forward this year with input on the research title. She questioned Rob Burk on whether the budget would permit this travel. He indicated that under the current budget it would be difficult, but it would depend on the size of the group and the outcome of his efforts to clarify the status of the Board budget.
- Jean-Mari Peltier reviewed the process of the 2008 Farm Bill.
- Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen reiterated that a key group of members should interact with the Under Secretary and Congressional staff. Jean-Mari Peltier indicated that Krysta Harden should also be included in on those discussions.
- The group noted a number of Congressional staffers that would be key to the discussions including Dr. John Goldberg (House – Majority), Anne Simmons (House – Minority), Jacqlyn Schneider (Senate – Majority), and Betsy Bina (Senate – Minority).
- Jean-Mari Peltier requested that Leo Holt, Dr. Steven Daley-Laursen, Terry Wolf, Dr. June Henton, and herself be a part of a working group on a yet to be named working group on the topic.
- It was requested for Rob Burk to set up a meeting for the group. Rob Burk indicated that he would set it up.
- Rob Burk reiterated that clarity is still needed for the Fall meeting agenda. Jean-Mari Peltier indicated that she felt the meeting should be organized as follows:
    1. Orientation for new and returning members with Agency Administrators providing input on the core functions of the REE Agencies;
    2. Farm Bill discussion for half of the day;
    3. A discussion specific to NASS reports on the second half day; and
    4. Strategy and set-up on the final half day.
- Jean-Mari Peltier requested for Rob Burk to work with Terry Wolf to determine speakers for the NASS related portion of the meeting.
- Jean-Mari Peltier also requested for Rob Burk to send her any information he has on the REE Communications Plan as discussed by Rick Borchelt at the Fall 2010 meeting of the

Board.

***The next Executive Committee conference call will be Friday, September 2, 2011 at 11:00 a.m. Eastern Standard Time.***

The meeting was adjourned at 12:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rob Burk

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| Jean-Mari Peltier<br>Chair | Rob Burk<br>Executive Director |

APPROVAL BY ADVISORY BOARD: _____

Date

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| Initials<br>Chair | Initials<br>Executive Director |