

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

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## **REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH, EXTENSION, EDUCATION AND ECONOMICS ADVISORY BOARD – SPECIALTY CROPS COMMITTEE**

### **Fiscal Year 2014 Consultation of the Specialty Crops Committee on the Relevancy Review Process for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative**

**February 2014**

#### ***Background***

The Specialty Crop Committee (SCC) was established as a subcommittee of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board by the Farm Bill in 2004. The committee was initially charged to study the scope and effectiveness of research, extension, and economics programs affecting the specialty crops industry. Within the recently passed Agricultural Act of 2014, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) was required to establish a relevancy review process for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI), a granting program, and to consult with the SCC on this process.

In the first year, the SCC is required to provide the Secretary recommendations for conducting the relevancy reviews and in subsequent years, the SCC will provide an assessment of the relevancy review process and provide comments on grants awarded by the SCRI Program.

This requirement establishes a new role for the NAREEE Advisory Board and its subcommittees and is precedent-setting. In the development of these recommendations by the SCC, it will be important to look toward establishing a clear delineation of the specific roles and responsibilities of the SCC and the SCRI.

The SCC met via teleconference on February 13, 2014 with the SCRI program managers and relevant National Program Leaders. The purpose of the teleconference was to perform the inaugural consultation of the proposed relevancy review process for the FY2014 grant cycle.

The program managers for SCRI presented the following major themes to be considered in the SCRI relevance evaluation criteria:

- The issues and challenges being address are significant on a state, regional or national scale.
- The stakeholders are involved in identifying and developing project goals and objectives.

- Plans are in place for stakeholders to remain actively engaged in project activities.
- Information developed by the project team will be delivered to stakeholders in ways that allow them implement new and/or improved practices.
- Stakeholders are involved in the evaluation of the program.
- The project team has at least some members who worked with target stakeholders in the past and have experience with the described research approach. And that the described research approach will result in an outcome that is important to the target stakeholders.

Applicants will submit their stakeholder relevance statement, which will include problem, rationale, significance and hypothesis, prior to the submission of the full proposal. The stakeholder relevance statement will be provided to stakeholders for review and only those applications that score highly enough will be invited to submit full applications.

The SCC supports the proposed approach for the FY2014 SCRI grant cycle.

### ***Additional Recommendations from the SCC***

During the teleconference members of the SCC provided the following additional recommendations for consideration by the SCRI program managers:

- Instructions on the relevancy review process should be provided to all of the relevancy reviewers as well as the scientific reviewers in order to ensure that the scientific reviewer understands the basis for the relevancy review. The instructions should include clear definitions and delineation of relevancy and impact. The major themes, as described above, and the associated point values, as assigned during the reviews, should be complete described.
- The stakeholder relevance statement should include information on the anticipated impact of the project (e.g. number of acres/tons/boxes).
- Concerns were expressed that the relevancy reviews are being done ‘independently’ and without a panel. While there is a time factor in year one, it is recommended to have a ranking of the projects from industry relevancy review panel(s). Panels could be convened by a conference/video conference in year one. Panels for the relevancy reviews will ultimately be helpful for the scientific review panels and the final selection of the winning proposals.
- The relevancy review panels should be assembled according to the specialized commodity/crop or related commodities/crops. The relevancy review panels should be encouraged to comment on the appropriateness of any grouping of crops to which they are assigned.
- The relevancy reviewers should provide written comments for the scientific panel. This will help the scientific panel with more than just a numerical score. The relevancy reviews should carry equal weight as the scientific reviews. NIFA should report to the relevancy review panels in those cases that the scientific merit panel reverses the recommendations of the industry’s recommendations, including detailed rationale for that decision.

- The relevancy reviewers should provide feedback about the relevance and impact review process to the SCC of the NAREEE Advisory Board.
- The scientific review panel should be encouraged, especially after year one, to provide feedback to the SCC on the significance and helpfulness of the relevancy statements included with the proposal.

The members of the SCC thank the SCRI personnel for this initial consultation and look forward to future consultations and assessments of the SCRI program.

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## **REPORT DEVELOPED BY THE NAREEE ADVISORY BOARD – SPECIALTY CROP COMMITTEE**

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