



Research, Education, and Economics (REE) -- Office of the Chief Scientist (OCS)
National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board

May 24, 2022

Shefali V. Mehta
Deputy Undersecretary and Acting Chief Scientist
Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Mission Area
US Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

RE: The NAREEE Board's Response to the REE's Research Priorities for FY2022

Dear Dr. Mehta:

The Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972 (amended by subsequent Farm Bills) established the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board (hereafter referred to as the Board), whose primary role is to “make recommendations, review, and provided consultation to the Secretary, land-grant colleges and universities, the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate, the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives, and the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate on:

- A. Long-term and short-term national policies and priorities consistent with the –
 - (i) Purposes specified in section 1402 for agricultural research, extension, education, and economics; and
 - (ii) Priority areas of the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative specified in subsection (b)(2) of the Competitive, Special, and Facilities Research Grant Act (7 U.S.C. 3157 (b)(2));
- B. The annual establishment of national priorities that are in accordance with the priority areas of the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative specified in subsection (b) (2) of the Competitive, Special, and Facilities Research Grant Act (7 U.S.C. 3157 (b)(2)).”

The Board also evaluates the results and effectiveness of the Research, Education, and Economics (REE) mission area, and makes recommendations to the Under Secretary for the REE portion of the draft strategic plan required under section 306 of USC title 5.



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The Board met on February 9-10, 2022, via videoconference, to provide their annual consultation with the USDA on REE programs and related agencies. Members of the Board were presented the five REE Science Priorities of the USDA by Deputy Secretary Jewel Bronaugh and Deputy Under Secretary Shefali Mehta. This letter is being provided to convey the Board's response and current activities related to the annual research priorities with respect to the REE mission area for FY2022.

USDA REE Science Priorities

1. Climate Change
2. Racial Equity and Environmental Justice
3. Market Opportunities
4. Food and Nutrition Insecurity
5. Great Workplace

Climate Change

Prior members of the Board developed a Relevancy and Adequacy (R&A) Report FY2020 on Climate Change. Due to changes in administration and the COVID-19 pandemic, the final review and approval are pending. With a 2-year gap in development and review, a Relevancy and Adequacy ad hoc committee will update and finalize the report for FY2022.

Racial Equity and Environmental Justice

The Board appreciates the USDA's urgency in developing the Equity Commission. We see an intersection in recommendations that both groups will be providing the USDA. The Board has developed a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) ad hoc committee to provide recommendations on racial equity efforts with the USDA as they relate to the REE programs and initiatives.

Market Opportunities

The Board fully supports and encourages the efforts of the USDA in creating funding programs that build resilience in rural communities by providing stable jobs and opportunities within specialty crop, local and organic markets.

Food and Nutrition Insecurity

Food and nutrition security continue to be critical issues, and the Board is fully supportive of the USDA's continued efforts to address these challenges in our communities. We look forward to learning more regarding the Blueprint for Nutrition Security (released Thursday, March 17, 2022) -- assisting in any way possible in crafting recommendations for REE programs to support these initiatives.



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Great Workplace

As the agriculture, natural resources, food and nutrition, and related sciences pipeline of graduates continues to grow and strengthen through funded research opportunities, the USDA will be well-positioned for the ever-changing labor market with emphasis on wellness, DEI, and continual learning.

Discussion with REE Leadership

In our conversation with Dr. Mehta, it was noted that REE is further evaluating the above science priorities, for inclusion in the USDA science blueprint of 2020. We feel this to be appropriate, with the acknowledgement that these priorities are in place only as of 2020. The ongoing reporting on these outcomes will be critical for us, the Board, to better serve the needs of the USDA REE by advising on changes in scientific direction, establishing priorities for funding and aligning activities with stakeholder needs. We welcome the opportunity to provide this insight.

The panel discussion with the Research, Education, and Economics Leadership Team was extremely useful and informative. We very much appreciated the willingness of the Administrators/Directors to provide overviews and to share updates and visions for the future of REE activities. These types of open discussion are critical and enable this Advisory Board to refine areas of focus and develop our message to support REE activities nationally. Some of the other key themes that were discussed in more detail by the Board are as follows:

- Funding for research, development and translation of science

As a committee, we strongly support the USDA's continued investment in research and development and the essential need to foster innovation and technology that supports food security and provides our industries a competitive advantage in a global economy. Considering the decline in public agricultural research and development spending relative to other nations, it is essential to champion efforts to enhance funding proportional to the needs of Americans. We support continued efforts to increase base funding both for intramural research with ARS and extramural research through NIFA. This includes critical needs within land-grant universities which have been underfunded for research and extension efforts. Continued efforts by NIFA to enhance individual investigator awards and collaborative efforts (ARS, ERS and NIFA) with broader academic research community and other agencies remains critical to tackle complex problems impacting agriculture, food, nutrition and health.

We support the strategies already in existence across the ARS, ERS and NIFA that look to partner with NIH and NSF on the intersection of agriculture, food and health. More opportunities such as these that align with translation can serve to broadly impact US consumers and also engage and prepare the next generation of scientists. We remain



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supportive of strategies to enhance funding and effectiveness of such programs.

We also support the continued leveraging of public private partnerships that are meaningful for both the partners and the stakeholders. This strategy, which the USDA has engaged in historically, can improve innovation and adoption of new technology to meet demands in the agricultural space. Continued evaluation of best practices and guiding principles for these partnerships is key and the NAREEE Advisory Board stands ready to provide guidance in such endeavors.

- Data transparency and scientific integrity

The USDA has been a leader in fostering scientific integrity across federal programs. A key aspect of this is data accessibility and transparency. We encourage REE to continue to work on strategies that make data more accessible, uniformly, to a broader community of scholars in order to facilitate high-quality research in agriculture, with confidentiality. Another component of this is the need to ensure that REE's competitive grants (e.g., NIFA) continue to be reviewed in a fair and balanced manner. The committee stands ready to review and provide insights into opportunities to support the current scientific review process to enhance transparency, fairness and equity across programs, while protecting the confidentiality of individual producer data.

We ask that you provide us with the specific request for consideration that you feel are most critical and actionable for our deliberation and consideration. This will enable us to develop recommendations focused on your most strategic needs. If you have any questions or require additional information about this correspondence, please contact Kate Lewis, Executive Director of the NAREEE Advisory Board at 202-631-1434 or kate.lewis@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edmund R. Buckner".

Dr. Edmund R. Buckner
Chair, NAREEE Advisory Board

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kenrett Jefferson-Moore".

Dr. Kenrett Jefferson-Moore
Vice Chair, NAREEE Advisory Board