



United States Department of Agriculture

Research, Education, and Economics (REE)
National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory
Board

Specialty Crop Committee (SCC) Meeting Notes – Thursday, March 16, 2023

SCC Members Present: Gregory Goins (Chair), Carlos Iglesias, Jim Tuinier, and Donnell Brown – 4

SCC Members Absent: Marguerite Green - 1

NAREEE Board Staff Present: Kate Lewis, NAREEE Board Executive Director/Designated Federal Officer (DFO) and Michele Simmons, Program Support Specialist

I. Welcome, Roll Call, Approval of February 2023 meeting minutes

DFO Lewis welcomed the group and attendance was taken of Members. A quorum was established amongst the SCC Members. The February 2023 meeting minutes were approved by consensus and will be posted to the NAREEE Advisory Board Webpage.

DFO Lewis gave an update on the FY23 nomination package. The package that includes the SCC candidate slate is with the Secretary's office for review. As soon as we get the candidate selection from the Secretary, she will inform the Chairs of the new Members.

DFO Lewis gave a breakdown on how many Members should be on the SCC Committee at a given time. SCC is the smallest Committee, but going forward the number of Members will most likely increase. Each Member has a particular term associated with them. It's either 1, 2, or 3 years. Members can serve 2 terms up to 6 years total. DFO Lewis structures the terms according to the law that indicates that 1/3 of the Members have to have the ability to turn over every year. Dr. Iglesias and Mr. Tuinier's terms expires the end of September 2023. DFO Lewis will email Dr. Iglesias and Mr. Tuinier the website with the application details if you wish to reapply. She is available by phone or email if you have any questions. Applications are due by May 31, 2023.

Question from Ms. Brown - When a Committee Member's term expires and they wish to reapply, do they have to compete with new applicants?

DFO Lewis answered yes - If applicants are applying for that same slot category they will be competing.

She asked if there were any more questions. There were none.

II. Statement from Chair:

Dr. Goins thanked Ms. Brown for the great job she did at the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) Virtual Project Director (PD) Meeting held March 9, 2023. There was a lot of deep discussion amongst researchers. The role of the SCC Members that participated was to sit back and listen. He thanked DFO Lewis for inviting the SCC Members to attend.

The Secretary announced some initiatives of the small and mid-sized operations in parts of the USA. I think this will be good for specialty crops. He suggested that the Members take a look at that initiative.

III. Discussion About SCRI Virtual Grant PD Meeting Held March 9, 2023, and SCC Work Plan” for 2023.

Dr. Goins – Ms. Brown was there anything from our work plan that you saw come out of the SCRI PD Meeting that was held March 9th?

Ms. Brown - I did hear afterwards there was a real value of integrating stakeholder input and feedback into SCRI’s planning, ongoing work, and conversations.

Dr. Goins asked DFO Lewis to please go over the timeline for SCC’s next report of recommendations.

DFO Lewis - Last year at this time, you all were starting to define the FY23 plans and recommendations for the SCRI program. Given the Charter, the vision, and work document of this Committee, you have a responsibility to do that on an annual basis. It is a Farm Bill year. These National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) lead programs all require reauthorization in the Farm Bill to continue to operate. Maybe the work plan for FY23 should be to continue to deep dive recommendations for SCRI programs this fiscal year. Should you improve upon improvements given your engagements in the grant PDs? Do you think the program is on target? That might be this Committee’s feedback to SCRI this year.

Ms. Brown - There are 5 focus areas for SCRI grant programs. Could we weigh in on these priorities? They are legislatively determined; we wouldn’t be able to change them. A lot of these advocacy groups advocate for increasing funding in certain parts of the Farm Bill. We could determine a new focus area, but only Congress could determine those things.

Dr. Goins – How much of the prior recommendations did they actually invoke for instance the cost sharing.

Ms. Brown – The non-federal match to support grant projects is also legislatively set. They wouldn’t be able to adopt that, but Congress could take the recommendations into consideration.

Dr. Iglesias - There’s a clause that it may be required.

Mr. Tuinier – Should we push some of those agendas we had in our recommendations to be included in this year’s Farm Bill?

Dr. Goins - That’s a good suggestion.

Ms. Brown - There was an article that many people are skeptical that the Farm Bill won’t pass this year. It had something to do with how Senator McCarthy is introducing bills like maybe one at a time.

DFO Lewis – Dr. Jacobs-Young is testifying next week.

Dr. Goins - Will her testimony be public?

DFO Lewis - She will find out and will let the Members know.

DFO Lewis - I can reforward the focus area and priorities. She will also talk to Tom Bewick and Jessica Shade to see what SCC each year would do to possibly see if there’s another opportunity to look at other programs or other aspects of specialty crops. DFO Lewis will pull this information together prior to the next SCC meeting in April.

DFO Lewis - REE agencies and NIFA National Program Leaders have to respond to your FY23 SCRI recommendations. The recommendations have gone up to the Secretary’s office for review. You all haven’t seen the responses yet. This could also be additional strategic discussion for this Committee’s next steps.

Ms. Brown - That’s a good suggestion for what other topics we could talk about. She’s interested in talking about the Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR). They’re looking at long term research. I think the climate hubs is a part of that as well. I don’t know if its specialty crop related, but what else could we talk about?

Dr. Iglesias - He agrees with Ms. Brown regarding a focus on LTAR for this Committee. Let us know our role and find a more meaningful way for the Committee to use their time.

I came back from Taiwan and visited the World Vegetable Center. I found a thing that relates to specialty crops. The future of food production depends on availability and accessibility of specialty crops. The average collection area for one farmer in Taiwan is 2 ½ acres. The average age for farmers is 67 years old. I see in 30 to 40 years that fruits and vegetables are going to be more expensive. Labor shortage will affect small companies in specialty crops. We need to start raising concern about that.

Ms. Brown – Specialty crops in the Farm Bill alliance mechanization is a priority for us for SCRI. Need to be careful around the wording of labor. Some taxpayers perceive the government as trying to take labor out of the way.

Dr. Iglesias – There’s a high rate of population of growth and aging. It’s a reality in the world that not many young people want to have careers in agriculture related to food production.

Dr. Goins – There’s other career options for young people.

Mr. Tuinier – People that don’t go to college don’t want to go into agriculture. They don’t want to do the hard work to harvest cucumbers, and tomatoes for greenhouses. There’s mechanization for production.

Dr. Goins - In the breakeven point, how many years would it take to recoup the benefits of the machine.

Dr. Iglesias - I notice in the U.S., in the pool of applicants, we’re not getting the cream of applicants that other careers are getting.

Dr. Goins - One thing North Carolina has is the Ag Institute. Most people that attend the Ag Institute are from affluent land owning backgrounds. They inherit the equipment and the infrastructure.

One thing that the Covid pandemic did, it made us refocus on where our food is coming from.

Dr. Goins – There are property issues where a lot of people who are inheriting this land are not only going to the field, but they’re also selling the land.

Dr. Iglesias –In Brazil they have these mega farms. Here in the U.S., it took some time, but now there’s conservation. In the U.S. the average farmer is 60-61 years old. With extensive crops, and more mechanization, one person can run the show. That’s not possible with specialty crops.

Dr. Goins - States like North Carolina have relatively poor soil compared to the mid-west. It’s cropped up by irrigations. This gets into the climate stuff we were talking about earlier.

DFO Lewis - This was a very valuable discussion. She appreciates the sharing of information of the different portfolios. DFO Lewis will send Dr. Goins the draft agenda for next steps prior to the monthly meeting in April. She will pull some information for you to review to discuss.
1. What is the future of this Committee and 2. What are your FY23 goals going forward.

Dr. Goins - Encouraged Dr. Iglesias Mr. Tuinier to fill out the application for the SCC vacancies.

IV. Wrap-up/Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:53 p.m. EDT.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, April 13, 2023, 2pm EDT.