



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

Specialty Crop Committee (SCC) Meeting Notes – Thursday, July 11, 2024

SCC Members Present: Dr. Gregory Goins, Ms. Donnell Brown, Mr. Casey Foster (joined a few minutes late), Dr. Lorin Harvey, Dr. Carlos Iglesias, Mr. Jack Karlin (Chair), and Mr. Jim Tuinier – 7

SCC Members Absent: - Dr. Charlie Messina – 1

Guest from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA): Dr. Tom Bewick, National Program Leader, Division of Plant Systems-Production, Ms. Megan O'Reilly, Program Specialist, Division of Plant Systems-Production, and Ms. Ann Stapleton, National Program Leader in the Institute of Food Production and Sustainability, Division of Plant Systems – Production - 3

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

I. Welcome, Roll Call,

DFO Lewis welcomed the group and attendance was taken. A quorum was established amongst the SCC Members to have the meeting.

The prior minutes from the June 2024 meeting were approved after a motion and a second motion. All approved the minutes, and none opposed. Ms. Simmons will post the June agenda and minutes to the SCC website.

II. Statement from Chair:

Mr. Karlin welcomed the group. He thanked the NIFA guest for taking time out of their schedule to attend the meeting. He looked forward to their presentation and for the information they were going to provide to the SCC.

DFO Lewis asked Dr. Bewick, Ms. O'Reilly, and Ms. Stapleton to introduce themselves to the SCC before the start of their PowerPoint presentation.

III. New Business

SCRI (Specialty Crop Research Initiative) Program Presentation

Dr. Bewick gave a presentation to the SCC on updates for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI). He and his team went over the SCRI's program information, SCRI's funding by crop category (2019-2023), SCRI's Funding by Region (2019-2023), and potential future directions for SCRI.

Program Information

- Five legislatively mandated focus areas
- Plant breeding and genetics
- Pest and disease management (includes pollinator health)
- Improve production efficiency, handling and processing, productivity and profitability
- New innovations and technology
- Potential food safety hazards
- Focus areas are addressed by funding projects that use systems-based, transdisciplinary approaches
 - [Transdisciplinary Approaches Webinar Series \(2023\) | National Agricultural Library \(usda.gov\)](#)
- Currently around \$75 million per year for awards
- Historically, 20 to 25 projects are funded
 - 17 recommended for funding in FY2024 – none have been awarded yet
- Have been adjusting timeline to facilitate both relevance and scientific merit reviews
- Tentative schedule for FY2025
 - Sept 1, 2024 – Request for Pre-applications released
 - Feb 10, 2025 – Request for full applications sent to invited applicants
 - Sept 1, 2025 – Funds released to awardees (FY2026 cycle begins)
- Given this schedule, best time for SCC consultation for FY2026 would be in Nov of 2025

SCRI Funding by Crop Category (2019-2023)

Berries – 9%	Potatoes – 4%
Cucurbits – 5%	Solanaceae – 3%
Fruiting vegetables – 6%	Tree Fruit – 9%
Controlled Environment Ag 6%	Tree nuts – 5%
Grapes – 7%	Turf grass – 4%
Nursery Crops – 8%	Unique crops – 8%
Food Safety – 5%	Leafy vegetables – 6%
Pollinators – 2%	Underground vegetables – 7%

SCRI Funding by Region (2019-2023)

Midwest – 22%	South – 35%
Northwest – 11%	West – 32%

Potential future directions

- House Ag Committee passed proposed 2024 farm bill

- \$175 million in mandatory funding beginning in FY2025
 - \$25 million reserved for Emergency Citrus Disease Research and Extension
 - \$20 million reserved for new Specialty Crop Mechanization and Automation Research and Extension
- Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry has much more modest increases proposed
 - Specialty Crop Mechanization and Automation Research and Extension included but capped at \$10 million/year
- Potential for funding increase has prompted SCRI team to start looking at some program enhancement options.

Dr. Bewick asked if there were any questions.

Dr. Iglesias stated some of the focus on the SCRI is to introduce cost effective specialty crops. He doesn't see that there's much in terms of improvement of nutritional quality.

Dr. Bewick stated that nutritional quality is in the authorizing legislation. It's not very noticeable, but it's in the legislation.

Dr. Iglesias stated that in the presentation that Dr. Bewick noted that this year's awards are 17 which is lower than previous years of 20-25 awards. What percentage of the 75 million would you award?

Dr. Bewick said 100%. If we have a big project like an 8 or \$9 million project, we'll give that project's team one year's worth of money. The next four years we must give the projects additional increments of funding.

Ms. Brown asked is there a regular schedule of award deadlines as well and do you know the deadline date yet?

Dr. Bewick stated that he couldn't give a deadline date yet because the Request for Pre-applications (RFP) hasn't been published. The minimum is 45 days, but they normally allow 60 days from the start of accepting pre-applications until the deadline.

Ms. Brown asked if the 17 funded projects could be identified by name?

Dr. Bewick said that information is not public knowledge because the projects haven't been awarded yet. Once Secretary Vilsack's office has cleared the awards, the announcement to the public will be made around September 1, 2024, and usually, no later than mid-November. The awards will also be announced on the SCRI website [here](#)

DFO Lewis thanked the NIFA guest for being available and providing information about SCRI.

Mr. Karlin thanked Dr. Bewick and his team for their review role of the SCRI to the SCC. He would like to discuss that with the rest of the committee and see if they had additional

question and possibly invite Dr. Bewick and his team to another SCC meeting.

DFO Lewis suggested that they devote some time on the August agenda to discuss the SCRI presentation and next steps. She asked if there were any questions. There were none.

IV. Wrap-up/Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:59 p.m. ET.

The next meeting is scheduled for August 8, @ 2pm ET.