



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

Specialty Crop Committee (SCC) Meeting Notes – August 8, 2024

SCC Members Present: Mr. Jack Karlin, (Chair), Ms. Donnell Brown, Mr. Casey Foster, Dr. Gregory Goins, Dr. Lorin Harvey, and Dr. Carlos Iglesias – 6

SCC Members Absent: Dr. Charlie Messina - 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,

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

II. Statement from Chair:

Mr. Karlin welcomed the group. Mr. Karlin stated that he was currently attending the Alliance for Water Efficiency Symposium. He mentioned that the focus of the symposium is reducing urban water consumption. The work that happens at the symposium can impact the design of cities and reimagine how food is produced. He asked if there were any questions. There were none.

III. New Business

Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) Program

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) SCRI staff asked that the SCC watch a webinar titled “Specialty Crop Research Initiative 2024 Request for Pre-Applications | NIFA (usda.gov)” (program review) versus compiling the recommendations because of this program review. It was mentioned that NIFA might not take the SCC’s FY25 SCRI’s recommendations into consideration because of the program’s adjusted timeline in FY25.

DFO Lewis stated that the NIFA SCRI staff realizes that half of the SCC members are new. They thought it would be helpful for the new members to understand the SCRI program

better by reviewing the webinar and to bring them up to speed on the program processes. She was also informed that there wasn't much time left for the NIFA SCRI staff to review the SCRI recommendations for FY 25 due to changes in their processes and timeline. The NIFA SCRI staff is recommending that the SCC review the webinar and then set up a virtual meeting for two days in November to get a sense of the strategy of their grants and which research priority their grants referenced. The staff would also like to get the SCC's input and insight into the SCRI program evaluation including stakeholder needs.

Mr. Karlin asked is the NIFA SCRI staff proposing that the SCC help them develop their stakeholder needs assessments?

DFO Lewis stated to her understanding that is correct. Based on the presentation that the NIFA SCRI team discussed at the July SCC meeting, they would like the SCC to assist with the SCRI program evaluation, Stakeholder needs assessment, and consultation on the SCRI Targeted Agricultural Projects (TAP) for FY 25. If the SCC takes on these projects, they wouldn't be performing the same work products that was done for FY 21, FY 22 and FY 23. There needs to be time for the SCRI program to see if the SCC's recommendations provided are making a difference.

Ms. Brown stated that the SCC is statutorily mandated as stated in the Farm Bill (FB) to provide feedback on the SCRI program, which is one of the main charges of the subcommittee. If the timeframe is too short for the NIFA SCRI team et al to review our FY25 recommendations, it's still in the regulation for us, the SCC, to provide them annually.

Mr. Karlin asked when the timeline change was implemented?

DFO Lewis stated that the NAREEE staff didn't receive a formal notice regarding the timeline change. She suggested to email the NIFA SCRI team in August or September 2024, a final document that incorporated all of the SCC's suggestions and recommendations for their review. If the final document can be approved quickly, the NAREEE staff will route them to the NAREEE Advisory Board for their approval and then to the NIFA SCRI staff for their consideration. This will demonstrate that the SCC made an effort to close the loop on the SCRI program for FY25.

Ms. Brown suggested that the SCC members frame their SCRI feedback for FY 25 into the program evaluation that the NIFA SCRI staff is doing. Would that help with the timing?

DFO Lewis mentioned that she's not aware when the NIFA SCRI staff is starting their program evaluation. If the SCC's final SCRI recommendations document is completed, voted on, and approved by the NAREEE Advisory Board by October 2025, the recommendations can be discussed at the SCC November meeting.

Mr. Karlin asked who would like to volunteer to work on drafting the final FY25 SCRI recommendations?

Ms. Brown and Dr. Harvey said they would volunteer.

DFO Lewis stated that all the SCC members have a role and can also add their input on the draft.

Mr. Karlin mentioned that he can reach out to the Subcommittee of specialty crop experts at the Turfgrass Water Conservation Alliance for their help if it's needed.

The SCC checked their calendars for availability for a November meeting. The majority stated they were available November 19-20, 2024. Ms. Simmons will send a calendar invite to save the date.

Dr. Goins asked if the SCRI recommendations from last year was made public? It would help the new SCC members see what the recommendations were and the tone of the letter.

DFO Lewis said she will email last year's SCRI recommendations and the suggestions and recommendations that Ms. Simmons aggregated for FY25 to the SCC.

Mr. Foster asked if the NIFA SCRI staff et al implemented the recommendations that the SCC provided last year?

DFO Lewis mentioned that the SCC received a written response about the recommendations and the level of implementation. We can look at the last 3 years of the SCC SCRI's recommendations and discuss with the NIFA SCRI staff what were the outcomes of those recommendations.

Mr. Karlin asked if there were any more questions or comments. There were none.

IV. Wrap-up/Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m. ET.

The next meeting is scheduled for September 12, 2024 @ 2pm ET.