

Shelley: Thank you for joining today's conference call, the NAREEE Advisory Board Meeting. I would now like to introduce Michele Esch. Michele, please go ahead.

Michele: Thank you very much. This is Michele Esch. I'm the executive director of the NAREEE Advisory Board. Welcome you to the meeting of the National Agricultural Research Extension Education and Economics Advisory Board. This meeting is being held in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act, Section 1408 of the National Agricultural Research Extension and Teaching Policy Act of 1977, and the Agricultural Act of 2014. Thank you very much to the members of the NAREEE Advisory Board, the Animal Handling and Welfare Review Panel, REE staff, and the general public for attending this meeting today.

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the report from the Animal Handling and Welfare Review Panel, and to discuss the findings, and to provide any additional advice and guidance to USDA on the topic. The final report from the panel can be found on the NAREEE Advisory Board website under meetings, or on the REE website at ree.usda.gov. This meeting is open to the public and the board will hear public comments at the end of the meeting. Written comments can be submitted to the NAREEE Advisory Board through close of business today. All verbal and written comments will be entered into the public record and will be kept on file in the REE Advisory Board office.

Real quickly, I want to provide a brief overview of the call today. An agenda has been posted on the NAREEE Advisory Board Web page, but otherwise we will have a quick roll call of the members, some welcoming comments from our chair, an introduction of the panel members, and a brief overview of the report, and the charge, sorry, to the Animal Handling and Review panel, then a presentation of the report, and some board discussion, and then finally a public comment period.

With that being said, I'm going to turn the call over to Dr. Milo Shult, the chair of the NAREEE Advisory Board.

Dr. Shult: Thank you, Michele. You covered a number of things that I think it's important for us to talk about at the beginning of the meeting, but I would echo your thanks to the members of the board and the panel, and also the members of the public and the REE staff for being here. It's sometimes difficult to get a lot of folks together for a meeting like this, and we very much appreciate everyone's participation.

The NAREEE board was asked by the secretary and the undersecretary to provide any comments and recommendations on the review panel's final report, and

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what we will do during our meeting is specifically we'll make some observations on the charge that was given to the committee on the makeup of the committee, and especially, and with most emphasis, on the findings and the recommendations in the final report. Michele already said after we complete that there will be public comment, as there always is, with the NAREEE board meeting.

Now, we're going to be submitting our comments to the secretary by April 21st. That's a week from today, so I guess I would say to my fellow NAREEE board members, as we go through our discussions and if you have anything that you want to get to Michele in e-mail after the conversations, please do so, and we will probably be going back and forth with you quickly, as we [inaudible 00:03:52] final submission together to submit it to both the secretary and the undersecretary.

One other thing I might just point out, and I think all the NAREEE board members are aware of this, but we are authorized as an advisory board under the Farm Bill and so we are required to submit our reports clearly to the secretary, but I think it's also important that everyone know that it will also be submitted with our submission to the secretary, this report will be submitted to the chairs of the Senate and the House Ag Committee, and the Senate and House Agriculture subcommittees. That's in the enabling legislation, and so it will be a report that [inaudible 00:04:39] that kind of attention.

With that, let me close any welcoming comments and, Michele, I think my agenda says that you are going to provide an introduction of the panel members. Is that correct?

Michele: Sure. You know, one thing that we neglected to do was to do a quick roll call of the members on the call. I'd like to do that real quick.

Dr. Shult: Sure.

Michele: I know we have, I believe, 13 or 14 members on the call, so I can go ahead, and I'll just go through, by category. I know several folks couldn't join us today.

Wathina Luthi?

Wathina: Yes.

Michele: All right. Govind Kannan?

Govind: Here.

Michele: Great. Robert Taylor?

Robert: Here.

Michele: Mark McLellan?

Mark: Here.

Michele: Patsy Brannon? I thought I heard that Patsy was on the line.

Patsy: Yes. Here.

Michele: Okay, lovely. Hi, Patsy.

Patsy: Hi.

Michele: Adriana Campa? Okay. Milo? I know you're here. Chandra Reddy?

Chandra: Hi. I'm here.

Michele: Chad Waukechon?

Chad: Here.

Michele: Charles Boyer? I believe he's [inaudible 00:06:08]. Agnes Mojica?

Agnes: Here.

Michele: Wonderful. Neil Olson? Leo Holt? Nancy Childs? Julia Sabin?

Julia: I'm here. Thanks.

Michele: Lovely. Hi, Julia. Twilya L'Ecuyer?

Twilya: Here.

Michele: Rita Green?

Rita: Yes, I'm here.

Michele: Steven Daley-Laursen?

Steven: I'm here.

Michele: Carrie L. Castille?

Carrie: I'm here.

Michele: Hamburg? Thilmany?

Thilmany: Here.

Michele: Paige? James Goodman? Chalmers Carr? And Jeremy Liley?

I knew they weren't going to be there today. I believe that we have, I believe 16 folks on the call today, so we definitely have a quorum, so that's wonderful. Thank you all for being here. Real quick, I wanted to give an introduction of the panel members, and if you all just want to say that you're here, also, that would be great.

Dr. Aaron Olsen, he's the chair of the Animal Handling and Welfare Review Panel, and also the director of the Laboratory Animal Research Center at Utah State University.

Dr. Olsen: Here.

Michele: Dr. Lonny Dixon, the director and attending veterinarian of the Office of Animal Resources, University of Missouri.

Dr. Dixon: Present.

Michele: [Inaudible 00:07:51] Ford, endowed professor at University of Wyoming.

Mr. Ford: Here.

Michele: Salman, the professor and director of the Animal Population Health Institute at Colorado State University.

Mr. Salman: Here.

Michele: Wonderful. Thank you all so much for being here. Lastly, our ex-officio member, Dr. John Clifford, I don't believe is with us today. Thank you all very much.

I wanted to just provide a brief overview of the charge that was given to the Animal Handling and Welfare Review panel. Just so the dairy board has an understanding of what they were actually charged to do for the review, the panel was established by the secretary to review ARS's research animal care and

well-being policies, procedures, and standards for agricultural livestock and ARS research. There were two phases of this charge.

Phase one required an immediate review of the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, Nebraska, which included a review of the ARS, the research, education, and economics, and the USDA policies and procedures which provide the requirements and guidance for care and well-being of livestock animals used in research, a site visit to the USMARC facility in Clay Center, Nebraska, an inspection of the facility's pens and fields where animals were housed or involved in experimentation, a review of the composition of the location's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, the IACUC, records of its meetings and evidence of compliance with agency P&Ps, a review of the processing views to select topics and evaluate experimental designs and protocols under the IACUC, an assessment of the care and well-being training needs for staff having responsibility for handling animals, and then to prepare a report for the secretary of agriculture and to the REE undersecretary, which included a summary of findings, conclusions as to whether the care and handling of animals and the capacity of facilities and staff at USMARC were in compliance with P&Ps and industry standards, taking into account that ARS and USMARC have a research mission, not a production mission, and then any specific recommendations to the CUSMARC to improve compliance with institutional P&Ps and industry standards.

The panel held a public meeting on March 18th to present the report and [inaudible 00:10:28] comments, and that final report was then submitted to the secretary and to the undersecretary. Then the final part of that phase one of the charge was then for the panel to provide the report to the NAREEE advisory board for further public deliberation and for the board to provide additional advice and guidance.

Phase two of the review for the Animal Handling Welfare Review Panel was to expand the review to approximately three to five additional ARS facilities where live stock research is conducted to make site specific and ARS-wide recommendations on the research animal care, handling, and well-being policies, procedures and standards. That phase two will be happening in the next few months and is set to be completed within 100 days of the secretary's initial announcement in January.

That's a little bit about what the panel was actually charged to do, and next I will turn it over to Dr. Aaron Olsen who will present a brief overview of the report and the findings and recommendations.

Dr. Olsen: Thank you, Ms. [Hill 00:11:39]. This is Dr. Olsen and it's my opportunity to give a brief overview of the report that we've published.

Briefly, our panel members arrived and visited the site on February 24th through the 26th of this year. During that time, a couple of points I'd like to emphasize is that we had free access to all facilities and areas of the research center there. We determined while on site what areas, specifically, we wanted to visit, and we made our best effort to select representative samples and especially to pick areas where we knew animals would be handled on the days that we were there. As a result, we inspected and observed several different facilities and the handling of animals that were ongoing at the research center at that time. With that, we would like to emphasize that we found in our observations that the animals were, without question and without exception, to be very well-cared for. The animals appeared to be well-fed, and there were no visible signs of neglect or misuse or abuse of animals. We didn't see any evidence of common signs of animal neglect such as overgrown hooves or injuries or evidence of malnourishment to the animals.

As part of our oversight there, we did identify and made a number of findings, and I'll take this opportunity to overview those findings and the recommendations that come from those. One of our first findings is that, although we didn't see evidence of animal misuse or abuse, we did find that there was a certain lack of clarity in regards to lines of authority, both for oversight and in reporting at USMARC. This is derived in part from the somewhat unique nature of the research operation that goes on at USMARC. The operation there includes two distinct but highly integrated components. Specifically there is an ongoing animal production component which is used, in turn, to support the research efforts.

As a general rule, the production component is operated almost exclusively under the authority of the University of Nebraska Lincoln, and by the individuals that are most directly associated with the production of animals are University of Nebraska Lincoln, or UNL employees, that, in turn, then integrates closely with the research which is being conducted by the USMARC individuals there. Because of this integrated approach, we found that there was opportunity for miscommunication or, more accurately to put it, that there was a lack of clarity of the lines of communication for oversight and communication between the different units. However, we do want to emphasize that, although the lines of authority, perhaps, were not clearly delineated, we did find evidence of very good and close communication between both the University of Nebraska Lincoln employees and the USMARC employees.

From that, our first recommendation would be that the USMARC should develop and implement written agreements with the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and any other research or teaching partners to ensure that optimum lines of responsibility for oversight of animal care and use in research activities is implemented. In regards to the physical facilities at the USMARC, we found that

the facilities were adequate and we felt that they were appropriate for the research and the work that was being conducted. In regards to the animal handling and veterinary care, we find that there is, in regards to training of the individuals there, the individuals that we observed working with animals appeared to be competent in their work. We noted and found significant the fact that the individuals and the animals they were working with appeared to be calm individuals. The personnel working there worked in a very professional manner, and that was reflected in the behavior of the animals that we observed, meaning that the animals did not appear agitated and they were very calm, and they moved through the processing and the animal handling very easily.

However, we also did find that, with that, although we find that the individuals displayed good handling techniques, there is not evidence for a clearly defined animal handling training program, and the associated documentation that goes with that. Although we do want to emphasize that we saw animals to be well-cared for, that the handling of the animals that we observed was appropriate and done by individuals clearly with the appropriate skills, we would recommend that the USMARC should develop and implement an appropriate training and [doctation 00:16:23] program for all individuals involved with the handling and use of animals in research.

An explicit component of this training should be clear directions on how to report concerns regarding animal welfare. There are various available national training components which can be used for this, and although we do not intend to prescribe these specific methods by which that training would be implemented, we do want to emphasize that individuals should be informed of ... about whistleblower policies and other methods in which they may feel to report any concerns about animal welfare. In addition to that, copies of the whistleblower policy and any appropriate contact information should be clearly posted at all of the diverse sights associated with USMARC.

Along with that we did note that there was a very robust electronic medical record keeping system that covered the swine and the beef units at USMARC, and a follow-up recommendation would be to fully extend that record keeping ability to the sheep units, as well. This would help and assist in ensuring that the proper medical care and oversight is provided. In regards to the selection of research topics and research oversight in regards to the animal care and use committee, we did find that there was a properly constituted and properly appointed institutional animal care and use committee at USMARC. At least there was immediately prior to our arrival there. We did note that, as they informed us, that one of the individuals at that point had to recuse himself from performing his duties on the committee, the person that we refer to as our unaffiliated committee member, due to a potential conflict of interest with a

family member that had taken employment with the University of Nebraska Lincoln.

Although there was an opportunity for change there, we do want to emphasize that the IACUC was properly constituted immediately before our arrival at USMARC. However, we do want to emphasize that, although there was a committee there, that there were deficiencies in regards to the functioning of the committee. It was one of our findings that the institutional animal care and use committee at the USMARC was not accurately fulfilling its intended role for providing oversight by reviewing and approving, requiring modifications, and/or denying proposed research activities. This is not compliant with either the ARS policies and procedures that call for the facility to follow the standards outlined in the Ag Guide, or the Guide for the Care and Use of Animals in Agricultural [inaudible 00:18:57].

As USDA, through the Animal Agricultural Research Services has established that guide, the Ag Guide, as its standard for animal care, we also use that as our standard in regards to reviewing the functions of the IACUC. We did find that, although there was a review process in place, it was primarily an administrative review that was [inaudible 00:19:22] at the director of the facility in conjunction, in close conjunction, with the veterinarian, and in close conjunction with the different unit managers. Having said that, we want to emphasize that this review, while it does provide a degree of oversight, and while it does provide a great deal of value to the oversight process, we cannot minimize the role that a properly functioning IACUC should fulfill.

One of our primary recommendations would be that the USMARC should develop and implement processes that promote a very robustly functioning IACUC that is consistent with the Ag Guide and with current practices in the field of animal research. We want to emphasize that important components of complying with this recommendation include appropriate training for IACUC members, that they can meet the requirements and expectations placed upon them, that they have properly convened meetings held at regular intervals, and that criteria can be developed for what types of research proposals should receive additional review within a convened meeting versus other appropriate and approved review processes, that they develop a consistent review process that will review and evaluate topics related to animal welfare as indicated by the Ag Guide, and with that, that all individuals associated with animal care, and by this we mean to emphasize that not just the members of the committee, but we want to ensure that all people associated with animal care receive training in regards to the important role that the IACUC performs in animal welfare and oversight, and finally that IACUC members should inspect all areas where animals are held, handled, or used, even if animals are not present at the time of the inspection.

Some correlated recommendations were that, as previously noted, the IACUC at USMARC was in a position of transition, a state of transition, and we wanted to emphasize that no new research reviews should be reviewed by that committee until they had reconstituted a properly constituted IACUC. We also made a suggestion, that the attending veterinarian who had previously served and was serving as the chair to IACUC, should, ideally, not serve in that position. We want to emphasize that there are no regulatory prohibitions against the attending veterinarians serving as an IACUC chair, but we find that the Division of Labor is both helpful, as well as it helps minimize potential conflicts of interest for the IACUC serving as the veterinarian. Then, finally, a recommendation that all vertebrate animals at USMARC should receive oversight of the IACUC. This includes the various small number of rodents that were used at USMARC.

In conclusion, we want to emphasize that we did not, as a panel, observe evidence of animal misuse or abuse. The animals that we observed and the handling of those animals was very appropriate. We saw healthy and well-cared for animals, and we saw individuals with obvious skill and professionalism working with those animals, and that our primary recommendations are to improve the oversight process by strengthening and enhancing the role of the IACUC there at USMARC. Thank you.

Michele: Thank you, Aaron. Really appreciate your leadership to the panel and your time and energy in moving all this along.

I will now turn it over to our board members and, to Milo, for our board discussion.

Dr. Shult: Thank you very much, Michele, and Aaron, thank you. That was ... By the way, can you hear me? My phone was muted and I wanted to be sure ...

Male: Yes.

Dr. Shult: Okay. [Crosstalk 00:23:03].

Male: [Crosstalk 00:23:03].

Dr. Shult: Aaron, I appreciated that very much, and I thought it was an excellent presentation, and very consistent with the panel report. As a board, now, we need to discuss the panel report, and provide our thoughts or inputs, that we will put together for what we send to the secretary. Now, I'm going to, first of all, just simply open it up and ask the board members for any specific comments that you may have that you'd like to make at this point in time, and then as a way of just making sure we cover everything ... You know, we said we were going to talk about the topics of the charge, and then each of the recommendations,

all I thought we might do is just go and I can call something on each of the recommendations, and if there are any specifics on those. If you're comfortable with that as a procedure, let me just open it up right now to any of the members of the NAREEE board for general comments about the panel report, or specifics that you believe should be pointed out at this time.

Agnes: Milo, this is Agnes.

Dr. Shult: Yes, ma'am?

Agnes: Yes. I want to congratulate the panel because this is a very comprehensive analysis just to ... I would like for us to [inaudible 00:24:29] including under the finding in the last paragraph of the finding. They want to start there, appears to be excellent communication. At the end of the paragraph it says, "Topics for consideration to be included in reaching agreement, include." I would like to recommend that we include procedures for animal care and you have to be adequately documented.

Dr. Shult: Okay. A comment from ...

Agnes: Because the ...

Dr. Shult: Go ahead. I'm sorry.

Agnes: It would be reaffirming what they ... they finding, what, so that it's not left out. Even though in one of the recommendations they go back to the [inaudible 00:25:21], I feel that it should be there, too.

Dr. Shult: Michele, did you capture those [inaudible 00:25:33]?

Michele: I think so. Was that the last finding in finding three?

Agnes: Yes, it was on page four, page four, before recommendation number one. There are four lines that say, "Topics for consideration to be included in recent agreement include," and it goes there to [inaudible 00:25:59] and research [inaudible 00:26:00] financial responsibilities. I would recommend to include procedures for animal care and use, as to be adequately documented.

Dr. Shult: Okay. Any comments? That would be included in our report that we recommend that type of an inclusion. Thoughts from any of the other ...

Female: Correct.

Dr. Shult: ... members of the board?

Wathina: Yes, this is Wathina Luthi. If I understand, she wants the statement procedures for animal care to be included?

Michele: To be adequately documented in the written agreements between USMARC and the University of Nebraska Lincoln. There are some agreements between those two entities, and so Dr. Mojica is just recommending that we add a statement that between the two entities that there is procedures for animal care and use to be adequately documented.

Wathina: Okay.

Mark: Michele, this is Mark. The idea of standard operating procedures, I think, is a great idea. It's used all over the place. Whether you could build up front that kind of detail in the actual partnership between USMARC and UNL, I'm not sure it makes sense it goes there, but as far as having standard operating procedures, it does make sense and that's good to put in place.

Dr. Shult: All right. What you're suggesting is that we simply add that modification to the recommendation, and we put that into our report, that way, Mark. Right?

Michele: I think that's what Mark ...

Dr. Shult: Michele [crosstalk 00:28:05].

Michele: Yeah, I think that was what Mark was saying, as well.

Dr. Shult: Yeah, you captured that well. Okay, very good. Very good. Thank you, Agnes. Other comments that are of a general nature or specifically on certain things that you would like to emphasize before we just go down the line on some of these?

Male: I'd like to just mention the finding three.

Dr. Shult: Okay, and this is ... Who ...

Chad: This is Chad Waukechon.

Dr. Shult: Hey, Chad. Okay, sorry. Just want to make sure everybody know who it was.

Chad: No problem. I am very concerned with the fact that the IACUC was not adequately fulfilling their responsibilities. I feel like this is something that is very significant, and I think that in whatever we send forward, there should be some follow-up on this to make sure that it's happening. This seems to keep the door open for some really sloppy practices to happen. I'm not accusing anyone of

sloppy practices, but this certainly opens the door to it, and I think this opens the door to a lot more problems than just what was in the report. I think this is a really big red flag that should not be overlooked, and I think it warrants follow-up to make sure that they take this serious in a meaningful way over the long term.

Dr. Shult: I appreciate the concern. Do you see that reflected in the recommendations that ... For example, recommendation four is, to me, a very encompassing recommendation that speaks to the organization structure of the IACUC and their activities. Are you comfortable that it also talks about follow-up?

Chad: I really think it needs follow-up to show that they're doing it. I feel like ARS and the committee should be held accountable for this. This really could, potentially, create some big problems.

Dr. Shult: You're suggesting that, in our recommendations, we simply encourage that not only the recommendation four on the IACUC structure and its activities, but that we also recommend that strong consideration be given to follow-up to assure that that is the case. Correct?

Chad: Yes.

Dr. Shult: Okay. Okay. Did someone ...

Chad: Thank you.

Dr. Shult: ... else start to say something? I didn't mean to interrupt anybody.

Mark: Milo, this is Mark again. I'm sorry. One neat thing, Chad, we might do is point to the secretary's statement where he was really crystal clear that IACUC had to be up and operating before things moved forward. I mean, I think you can take a lot of solace with that statement by him after he received this report. We could certainly point to that with appreciation.

Chad: Noted. Thank you.

Dr. Shult: Agree. Recommendation five, I think, speaks to that, also. If there are no [inaudible 00:31:32] propose your [inaudible 00:31:33] facility inspection to be conducted unless, or until, a properly constituted IACUC is in place.

Any other thoughts from members of the committee in general?

Mark: Milo, one more time, Mark here. I guess one thing that is left unstated is follow-up. While you might ...

Male: [Crosstalk 00:32:11].

Mark: ... [crosstalk 00:32:11] discuss an appropriate follow-up, I don't think you should leave it unstated, and it might be worth saying, you know, in six month or a year, whatever's appropriate, that, maybe not a full review, but certainly an appropriate follow-up is done.

Dr. Shult: Okay, very good.

Agnes: Milo, one thing that I ... This is Agnes again. One thing that I don't know how many [inaudible 00:32:38] I did an oversight of it, but I was looking to see if there were periodic reports that [crosstalk 00:32:48] ...

Dr. Shult: [Crosstalk 00:32:48].

Agnes: ... have the department understand what was going on and if any further training needed to be put in place or something needed to be corrected. I didn't see them in the report. I don't know. Maybe I lose.

Dr. Shult: Okay, so that's again in the account building area?

Agnes: Exactly. Periodic reports, what the requirements would be aware of what's going on.

Dr. Shult: Okay. Accountability, I think accountability statements, based on the last remarks, can be a key point that we could make in our recommendations that go to the secretary. I am confident that there's going to be some real attention within REE and certainly from the secretary's office on that, but I think it's appropriate, based on your inputs, that we include that in our statements coming from the NAREEE board.

Patsy: Milo, this is Patsy. I, too, want to thank the review panel for their thoughtful and excellent work. It strikes in listening to this discussion about accountability that perhaps we might make some comment in our remarks about the appropriateness of them to address accountability, ongoing accountability, as they do their phase two report and review. Because they're supposed to go to three to five more ARS locations.

Dr. Shult: Ah, okay. As the panel [inaudible 00:34:36], okay.

Patsy: Yes, this is the ...

Dr. Shult: [Crosstalk 00:34:38].

Patsy: ... phase one report and they have a phase two that has to be completed, and I'm assuming there's a report that will come from that. I think that, in addition to the other remarks that have been made, that raising this issue of their thoughts about ongoing accountability as they do their phase two might be helpful to us, and to the agency.

Dr. Shult: Very good. Karen, you're still there? Are you comfortable with the ... Well, we will put that into our report, but you've heard the discussion and so you would understand the rationale behind it.

Male: Let me just make sure I understand, the question is about doing a follow-up visit or some follow-up with USMARC as well as incorporating some of those discussions in our phase two report. Is that correct?

Dr. Shult: Yes. Yes. You're going to be, as I, part of your charge, I think, is you're going to be visiting three to five, I believe it was, other facilities. Is that correct?

Male: Yes. Those plans are in motion right now, and we're hoping to finalize them soon.

Dr. Shult: Great. I think what I heard from our board members is what we will put in our recommendations that would go to the secretary, but really it's ... I'm glad that you had the chance to hear the conversation to just request that the accountability measure be strongly included in the subsequent reports that you might submit.

Male: I think that's a good recommendation. We'll definitely take that into consideration as we write up the follow-up report that will come from our additional visits.

Dr. Shult: Good. Very good.

Govind: This is Govind. Is it my understanding that we do not have any research or teaching activities currently going on at the facility?

Dr. Shult: You mean that there is no research going on now, or ...?

Govind: Ongoing research. Is there something going on there at all, or everything came to a standstill?

Cathie: This is Cathie Wotecki. No, things did not come to a standstill. Research projects that were approved were ongoing. What was halted was any new research or any changes to protocol that would require the IACUC approval while ARS reconstituted the IACUC and trained the new members. That has occurred. The

IACUC has been reconstituted. It has 11 members. The training has been conducted, so the IACUC is now ready to review new research projects that will be brought to it, or changes to protocols that require the IACUC approval.

Govind: Okay, thank you.

Cathie: if I might, since I've got the floor right now, on the question of accountability and follow-up, I ... just some pieces of information you should be aware of, I am, at my request, receiving monthly reports from ARS about how they are implementing the recommendations of the expert panel. There are conversations that are underway at this point between ARS and APHIS about APHIS assuming greater responsibility for inspections at ARS research facilities. That is just at this point in the discussion stage. From the NAREEE's board perspective, I think an important point for your consideration in how you craft a recommendation about accountability and follow-through in responding to the expert panel's recommendations, there are clear responsibilities that management has, and there are clear areas in which an external advisory committee and, either the NAREEE board or the panel, that conducted the MARC inspections and reviewed all of ARS's policies and procedures, and it's been a continuous [inaudible 00:39:28] in which they could play a role.

I think it's important to keep in mind that there are clear management responsibilities and we are moving forward and fulfilling those, and we're happy to provide regular reports to the NAREEE board as we're moving forward.

Dr. Shult: I hear what you're saying, and I agree, Cathie. I don't think, in the conversations, that we were hearing specific recommendations on how. That obviously is the responsibility of the department on how, but I would assume our position and our recommendation would be supportive of saying that we believe that the things that you're doing right now and will be doing in the future are within that area will be important.

Cathie: Yep. [Inaudible 00:40:24] that, Milo.

Dr. Shult: I'm sorry?

Mark: Cathie, just a follow on, this is Mark speaking. I think the idea of a follow-on checkup, if you would, accountability, is worthy, because a lot of the attention on this, but I do want to point out that, truly, if the IACUC is functioning the way it should be, in a very robust review manner, not only looking at protocols, but looking at installation and operating independently as it should, boy, you've got a very robust review happening there, and you should actually be able to see that document [inaudible 00:41:06] from the IACUC.

Cathie: Yeah, I agree, Mark.

Dr. Shult: Okay, are we all comfortable with ... I think it's a good discussion and is one that the NAREEE board obviously has a keen interest in, and I think, in hearing Aaron's remarks, the panel's, as well. We will put together language that supports exactly that, but again, Cathie, as ... I think it's correct, that becomes the responsibility of the agencies to actually execute.

Other thoughts, in general thoughts?

We've had some good comments. Do you want to just open and go through and ask about each recommendation, if there's anything specific, or are you comfortable, as a board, with where we are right now?

Carrie: Hello, this is Carrie. I'm comfortable as a board, for me, going from where we are.

Dr. Shult: Okay.

Julia: This is Julia Sabin. I'm comfortable, as well, and I appreciate all the comments, too.

Dr. Shult: Very good.

Wathina: This is Wathina. I'm the same.

Male: [Inaudible 00:42:46].

Dr. Shult: All right, and I ... Without objection, unless someone thinks we need to, I don't think we're going to go through recommendation by recommendation, because I think you brought out the key points. We didn't say anything about the charge, particularly. Frankly, it appeared to me to be a broad charge, and I'm assuming that the board is basically comfortable, especially with the follow-up implications.

If that's true, and where we are, are you all comfortable that if we put the comments together, as they've been made, that we can proceed with a communication back to the secretary and to Cathie, that simply expresses our appreciation of the panel work and the appreciation of their report, put in the specifics that we talked about here, and use that for our submission back to their office and, of course, the ones that will go to the [inaudible 00:43:59] required Congressional offices? Anyone have an objection to that or feel that we need to expand any further?

Carrie: This is Carrie. No objections on my end, Milo. Do we need that in the form of a motion?

Dr. Shult: That would be fine. I think we're comfortable. Let's do it. Let's go ahead and have a formal motion that we're prepared to go forward. [Crosstalk 00:44:28].

Carrie: [Crosstalk 00:44:28].

Dr. Shult: Okay, thank you, Carrie. A second?

Female: Second.

Dr. Shult: All right. All in favor please signify by saying, "Aye."

Group: Aye.

Dr. Shult: Opposed? All right. With that, I think, we can say that it's now time to invite public comment and I will turn that back to our moderator to accomplish that.

Michele: Real quick, Shelley, before you give your instructions, I just want to thank the board for the conversation and to the panel members for being a part of the call today and providing your input. I really appreciate it. Just a quick note on the public comment period, please be reminded that this is for public comment. The board won't respond directly to any questions or comments made during the public comment period. Any specific questions should be sent in writing to USDA or to the NAREEE advisory board for a response. Contact information can be found on the NAREEE website and in the federal register notice that was posted for the call.

I will now turn the instructions over to Shelley.

Shelley: Thank you so much, Michelle. As a reminder to our public if you'd like to make a comment, please press star one on your phone. It'll place you in the queue. You'll hear a notification when your line is unmuted. Then we'd ask you to state your name and organization, and make your comment. If you decide not to make a comment before your turn comes up in the queue, pressing star one a second time will take you out of the queue.

It does look like we have some questions, or some comments coming in. I'll go ahead and start opening up the line.

Mr. Powell, your line is open. It looks like we lost that caller. Sorry about that. One moment. Ms. Conlee, your line is open. Please go ahead.

Kathleen: Hi. My name is Kathleen Conlee and I'm providing comments today on behalf of the Humane Society of the United States and our members and supporters. Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide comment today on the report regarding the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center. I provided similar comments directly to USDA on March 18th. There has been overwhelming public outcry in response to the New York Times [inaudible 00:47:45] piece regarding USMARC, which unveiled the suffering of thousands of animals using experiments at that facility. We appreciate Secretary Vilsack's quick action to assemble a panel to investigate matters at USMARC, although we do have concerns about the process that was undertaken.

The panel, which made a preannounced visit, didn't investigate specific allegations brought forth by the New York Times, or examine historical records. It is apparent from the report, however, that USDA's own policies weren't being followed, and the panel identified some root problems, including willfully inadequate Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, the lack of a formal training process and whistleblower policy ... Excuse me, and unclear lines of authority regarding animal welfare between USMARC and the University of Nebraska Lincoln.

We do want to express our support of the panel recommendations laid out in the report. We do look forward to the Office of the Inspector General audit of USMARC and hope that it will be a forensic look at the facility and will provide recommendations for significant change. Today we ask the NAREEE advisory board to use its unique position to advise the USDA to take the following five steps. Apply the basic protections of the Animal Welfare Act to all animal research activities at USDA's own facilities. Require each USDA facility to submit an annual report of animal research activities, as research institutions are required to do under the Animal Welfare Act. This will add much needed transparency at these taxpayer funded facilities.

A number of your comments today pertain to follow-up and accountability. One way to address this is for Secretary Vilsack to appoint APHIS to ensure that all panel recommendations are properly implemented and followed into the future. APHIS should carry out rigorous, unannounced inspections, and I'm glad to hear that these discussions are already underway between ARS and APHIS.

We'd also like to see adoption of a peer review process for each research project that is undertaken at the center with taxpayer funding, taking into consideration public demand for humane agricultural practices and a rejection of factory farming practices, and finally, to clearly identify for the public the process that the agency is taking to review and update its animal welfare policies and associated timelines for agency actions. We have submitted these comments in writing, as well, and thank you for the opportunity to comment. We do hope you

will advise Secretary Vilsack to take further action as we've requested. Thank you.

Shelley: Our next commenter is coming online. Mr. Powell, your line is open. Please go ahead.

Mr. Powell: [Inaudible 00:50:26] nutritious, high-quality muscle protein for the world's food supply. AMSA members share a commitment to proper animal care and handling, and strive to maintain optimal animal care with the latest information and best practices in this crucial area. We support the implementation of the recommendations put forward by this panel regarding animal care and well-being at the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center. The recommendations effectively address the key findings of the panel, and will strengthen the center's standing with the scientific community, the meat industry, and the public.

USDA needs to work closely with the scientific community, particularly the scholarly journals, to ensure that the scientific integrity of the body of work from MARC remains intact. Much of the valuable scientific work conducted at MARC and its scientists, have gone through the peer review process to ensure scientific rigor. MARC scientists have provided significant contributions to field of meat science. Here's a few prominent examples. We've been working on elucidating the mechanisms and measurement of consistent tenderness, color, and flavor of meat. We've been working to understand the biology of food pathogens and developing effective interventions to prevent harm to the consumer, and have been working to develop effective and efficient production practices that result in enhanced animal well-being, and [inaudible 00:51:46] environmental impact.

This body of work is foundational to us securing a sustainable, safe, high-quality food supply for our nation. AMSA commends USDA for its decisive actions in reviewing allegations raised, and we support the maintenance of this vital research institution and its ongoing research. Thanks again for this opportunity to provide comments. AMSA will be providing written comments, as well. Thank you.

Shelley: Thank you, Mr. Powell. At this time there are no further commenters online.

Mr. Shult: All right. No other commenters, Shelley?

Shelley: That is correct, sir.

Mr. Shult: Then, I believe, I will submit to the NAREEE board that the chair would entertain a motion to adjourn the meeting. Michele, before I say that, is there anything that we need to attend to?

Michele: I don't believe so. If there are no additional comments from the board or from the public, then that can be entertained.

Mr. Shult: All right. I would accept a motion to that effect.

Female: I'll make the motion.

Mr. Shult: Okay. Second?

Female: I second it.

Mr. Shult: All right. Thank you. All those in favor please signify by saying, "Aye."

Group: Aye.

Mr. Shult: Opposed? With that we will stand adjourned. Thank you all very much.

Michele: Thank you all very much.

Female: Thank you.

Female: Thank you.

Michele: Have a great afternoon.