

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

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL 2014 MEETING

October 21-23, 2014
The Loews Madison Hotel
1177 15th St NW, Washington, D.C.

The National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board (hereafter “the Board”) met in public session on October 21-23, 2014, in Washington, D.C. The meeting welcomed one new Board member.

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

The Under Secretary for USDA Research, Education and Economics (REE) updated the Board regarding: the status of reports submitted by the Board to the Under Secretary’s office; implementation of the 2014 Farm Bill; appropriations for the 2015 and 2016 fiscal years; ongoing USDA activities regarding antibiotic resistant bacteria; and a review undertaken by the National Research Council (NRC) of the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). Since neither the House nor the Senate has had Floor consideration of the 2015 appropriations bills, the REE agencies will be conservative in their spending over the coming months. It was noted that the Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research is now incorporated, with a Board, elected officers, by-laws, and transfer of funds to a bank account. It was also noted that the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is still developing guidance materials for granting waivers and exceptions to the requirement for matching funds in NIFA’s competitive grants program beginning in the 2015 fiscal year. Due to biosafety concerns about select agents in some national laboratories, the USDA undertook an inventory of its laboratory holdings and appropriately dealt with substances of concern. Government funding for dual use research of concern has temporarily been paused while new policy is developed to minimize the risks of such research. However, it was noted that the USDA does not fund or conduct any ‘gain of function’ research. Regarding concerns over Ebola management, the USDA’s role is as part of an interagency working group focused on bush meat imports. Within the USDA, an Ebola working group has been formed to focus on food safety and health concerns for companion animals and livestock.

The Deputy Under Secretary for USDA REE briefed the Board on agency activities related to the President’s memorandum *Creating a Federal Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators*, which called for the creation of a multi-agency Pollinator Health Task Force. The Task Force is charged with creating a research action plan and public education plan, developing public-private partnerships to promote pollinator health, and increasing and improving pollinator habitat. The USDA is co-chair of both the research action plan and public education plan. It was noted that the public education plan has expanded to include extension and outreach work. Listening sessions will be held in early November to get input from stakeholders on the research action plan. Initial drafts of these plans are due on November 28, with final plans to be submitted to the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) by December 20, 2014.

REE Agency administrators and directors presented updates to the Board regarding mission area activities and budget proposals for the 2015 fiscal year. It was noted that the agencies are operating under a Continuing Resolution at last year's funding levels, with funds available through December 11, 2014. The REE mission areas are all actively participating in the Pollinator Health Task Force efforts, and are investing in research on the issues of pollinator health and antimicrobial resistance. The agencies, particularly the ARS and NIFA, are implementing Six Sigma-style approaches to process improvement and investing in IT infrastructure to enable better data access, use and storage. It was also noted that there is currently an issue of training the next generation of scientists and workers in the agricultural and food systems, to ensure that the supply of qualified individuals meets the job demand.

The Board heard a presentation from the Data Management Working Group, which was formed at the May 2014 meeting in response to concerns and questions about the USDA's Open Data Initiative. The working group convened in July and established areas to focus on. In September, the working group held discussions with each of the REE mission areas, the Office of the Chief Scientist, the Office of the Under Secretary, and the Office of the Chief Information Officer. The working group has compiled a list of ten recommendations in four areas: share planning information; expand stakeholder engagement; expand inter-departmental and inter-agency collaboration; and initiate collaborations with universities. These recommendations and an accompanying report will need to be reviewed by the Board before submitting to the USDA.

The Board heard a presentation from the Balance of Crop Research Working Group describing the *Report on the Re-balancing of the Research Portfolio: Private vs Public Investments*. The report provides guidance to the USDA as to how it may proceed in addressing the re-balancing concern as stated in the 2012 report by the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST). The report lists a series of considerations and questions that should inform the USDA's response, and provides three recommendations for USDA action. It was noted that perhaps the most impactful recommendation is for an annual research roundtable to encourage information sharing within and between the private and public sectors.

The Board heard a presentation from the Agricultural Experiment Station (AES) Working Group describing the report it was tasked to develop in reviewing the AES system. The report provides three broad recommendations to the USDA to: 1) enhance research partnerships, with universities, other federal departments and agencies, and industry; 2) increase formula and competitive funding to improve returns on investment, particularly focusing on research relevant to the priority areas, while maintaining the correct balance between formula and competitive funding; and 3) focus the AES system research on foundational issues. The report noted that the new Centers for Excellence and the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research provide opportunities for enhancing the research and impact of the AES system.

KEY ISSUES AND DISCUSSIONS

Relevancy and Adequacy Annual Report

The Board engaged in a substantial roundtable discussion about the required annual report on Relevancy and Adequacy (R&A). Key points of discussion were:

- 1) *Content and Format*. Three types of assessments could be included:

- Issues that the USDA brings to the Board, e.g. PCAST Balance of Crop Research charge.
- Issues that the Board identifies internally, e.g. Data Management.
- Work on R&A themes as part of other specific reports completed by the Board.

The R&A report could include long-term issues of general importance to USDA activities, e.g. cultural diversity of program support, as well as emerging issues that arise or attain higher priority in certain years, for example a cross-agency program that the USDA would like feedback on. The R&A report should focus on USDA activity over the previous 12 months rather than look at the history of USDA activity, but could rollover topics of concern and/or recommendations from year to year. When special topics of interest arise – e.g. the current work on antimicrobial resistance – that draw resources away from regular USDA activities, the R&A report should not assess the work done on that topic but could assess the impact of that work on the R&A of the rest of the USDA’s mission.

- 2) *Required Inputs.* Several types of information are required as input for the R&A report:
 - REE mission areas should report to the Board at the annual Fall meeting on progress over the previous year, specifically stating how recommendations made in the last R&A report were or were not addressed, and include discussion of their own impact measurements.
 - REE mission areas should also report to the Board on how each agency is working to address a cross-agency issue of concern, e.g. the human health-agriculture relationship.
 - Under Secretary’s office should provide a formal response to the report, collating feedback from each REE area on if / how the Board’s recommendations are addressed.
 - REE mission areas should provide the Board with any other relevant review documents related to their activities, including those issued by other departments or organizations.
- 3) *Working Group.* The R&A report will be completed by a working group of volunteers drawn from the Board, with a member of the Board’s Executive Committee to serve as Chair. Smaller subgroups can be formed to work on specific topics as needed.
- 4) *Timeline.* The Board’s annual Fall meeting will be used to draft issues of importance that are to be included in the next R&A report. The Board’s annual Spring meeting will be used to discuss the draft report and to make requests for information from the REE agencies.
- 5) *Metrics.* It was noted that the R&A report should use targeted metrics to assess USDA progress, which could be drawn from existing USDA metrics or determined by the Board.

The discussion emphasized the need for continual improvement in communications between the Board, the Under Secretary’s office and each of the REE mission areas to provide feedback on the Board’s recommendations and ensure that the Board’s reports are useful to the USDA.

Data Management

The Board engaged in a significant discussion about the issue of data management following the working group’s presentation. Key issues that still require resolution include:

- 1) *Cost.* An appropriate cost model for data management has still not been developed. Questions to be answered include: for how long should the direct cost of data management be paid, by whom, and how can the projected future cost of data management be calculated?
- 2) *Compliance.* A question was raised as to the obligation for data management that should be borne by projects who receive only a small portion of federal funding compared to those fully funded by federal sources. Hence clear definitions of the requirements are needed.

- 3) *Data Use and Interpretation.* Concerns were raised that publicly-funded and publicly-available data may be used or interpreted in ways that were not intended and/or for commercial purposes. Hence some oversight of data access and IP protection is required.
- 4) *Institutional Differences.* Concerns were raised that some institutions may not be fully aware of the requirements for data management, and that others may be approaching the issue in a non-strategic manner or lack the necessary resources to meet the requirements. It was suggested that increased collaboration among universities and federal agencies would provide for more efficient and cost-effective data management.
- 5) *Cross-agency Consistency.* A question was raised as to how the mandate for data management will be implemented consistently between different federal agencies and departments. It was suggested that the Office of Management and Budget and OSTP could play roles in coordinating the rules that are developed.

It was agreed that the working group's recommendations and accompanying report should be submitted to the USDA as soon as possible to ensure that the Board's concerns are incorporated into the USDA's planning process on this issue.

Agricultural Experiment Station System Review

The Board engaged in significant discussions regarding the AES system review and the recommendations that should be made to the USDA. Key issues of discussion included:

- 1) *Equity and Diversity.* It was suggested that the recommendations could be revised to include discussion of an equitable balance of funding between institutions, ensuring that the need for cultural diversity is being achieved, for example in the area of workplace training and development. This could be included either in recommendation 1, with respect to partnerships, or recommendation 2, with respect to the balance in funding. With regard to the larger issue of equitable funding and state matching, it was decided to examine the issue more thoroughly in a separate forum from the AES report.
- 2) *Balancing Competitive and Formula Funding.* Concern was raised as to whether the recommendation to increase both competitive and formula funding would be welcomed by different programs and institutions. It was also noted that many programmatic and funding decisions are made at the state level. Hence it was suggested that the responsibility of REE should be to maintain balance within the REE portfolio across the AES system as a whole and to work with state directors of AES on state-based decisions.
- 3) *Relationship with Extension.* It was noted that the work of AES depends on a productive relationship with the extension network. Hence it was suggested that a new recommendation be added as number 3b to describe the link between AES and extension work.
- 4) *Language.* It was noted that the Hispanic-serving institutions are not land grant universities, and therefore do not fall under the AES umbrella, and that AFRI is the competitive grants program of NIFA and does not provide capacity funding. Hence it was suggested that the language used in the recommendations be revised to be more specific and clear.

Following these discussions, the Board agreed to postpone review of the report until further revisions were made, and to review a revised report electronically.

Equity and Diversity in USDA Funding and Programs

During several Board discussions, concerns were raised as to whether or not the USDA's programs and funding adequately support cultural equity and diversity, especially with regard to capacity funding for minority-serving institutions and tribal colleges, required matches in state funding, and support for workplace training and development. Suggestions were made that the USDA could provide some measures by which states would be penalized for not fulfilling their matching obligations or that the USDA could provide some other compensation beyond waivers to those institutions that do not receive fair funding.

However, it was determined that more information is needed about the current state of equity and diversity in USDA activities before any further discussion can be meaningful. It was also noted that this issue is very complex and the Board will need to be mindful of staying within the bounds of its charge with respect to the advice it can provide to the USDA.

It was suggested that the Board could create a working group to work on this issue across the whole of REE's portfolio, including education, extension and research. The working group could determine the best mechanism by which the Board can review the issue and provide recommendations to the USDA. As part of an evaluation of USDA activities, the Board may create a set of targeted metrics by which equity and diversity can be measured, for example the number of students being supported in different diversity classes. It was also suggested that the annual R&A report could include an assessment of equity and diversity in USDA funding and programs. It was agreed that this topic will be revisited at the Spring 2015 meeting.

SUMMARY OF BOARD BUSINESS

The Board voted to retain the current Executive Committee, Chair and Vice Chair to the Board for the new fiscal year. The Board asked for volunteers for four new representatives to the Specialty Crops Subcommittee, bringing the total Board representation on that committee to six members plus one Board member serving as Subcommittee Chair. The Executive Committee will approve the new members at their next teleconference.

The Board heard updates from the National Genetic Resources Advisory Council (NGRAC), the Specialty Crops Committee, and the Citrus Disease Subcommittee. Notes and recommendations from the last NGRAC meeting will be passed to the Board once they are finalized and approved. The Specialty Crops Subcommittee is revising its recommendations to NIFA regarding the 2014 Farm Bill's requirement for relevancy reviews of grant applications, to be issued with Requests for Applications in November.

RESOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Board agreed to retain the Data Management Working Group as the NAREEE Ad Hoc Committee on Data Management, for continuing work on the issue and providing updated recommendations to the USDA as needed.
- The Board approved the report of the Balance of Crop Research Working Group for forwarding to the Under Secretary, with the amendment that the phrase on page 3,

‘intellectual property remaining in the public realm **might seem** of value to society’, be changed to read ‘intellectual property remaining in the public realm **is** of value to society’.

- The Board agreed to table the review of the Report on the Agricultural Experiment Station System until further revisions can be made.
- The Board recommended that information be gathered on the current state of equity and diversity in USDA programs and funding to inform further discussions on the issue.
- The Board agreed that the Specialty Crops Subcommittee’s revised recommendations to NIFA on relevancy reviews would be reviewed by the Executive Committee and submitted to NIFA to ensure consideration for inclusion in the FY 2015 Request for Applications. The full Board will review the final report before being formally submitted to USDA.
- It was suggested that the Spring 2015 Board meeting be held in Beltsville, MD, to allow for site visits to ARS intramural programs and conversations with agency staff.

ACTION ITEMS

- REE agency staff will work with the Relevancy and Adequacy Subcommittee to gather the necessary inputs for the 2015 report and further refine the reporting process.
- Relevancy and Adequacy Subcommittee will produce a draft report using the structure described above for review at the Spring 2015 meeting.
- Ad Hoc Committee on Data Management will organize a meeting with the OSTP.
- Ad Hoc Committee on Data Management will finalize a list of recommendations based on the discussion described above as soon as possible and write an accompanying report for submitting first to the Board’s Executive Committee and then to the entire Board for review and approval, before sending to the USDA as a living document.
- AES Working Group will revise its report based on the discussion described above and circulate to the Board electronically for review before the Spring 2015 meeting.
- REE administrators and directors will provide an in-depth briefing to the Board at the Spring 2015 meeting about equity and diversity within the USDA’s programs and funding.