

Building the Case for Increased Attention to Interdependence

Interdependence is defined by Webster as multiple dependencies, while being dependent is defined as being contingent on something or someone else for support or relying on the aid of another.

A goal of regional multistate research is to strengthen the collaborative nature of research between scientists, and disciplines in the state experiment station system (SAES). This was clearly the intent of Congress when regional research allocations were mandated at the level of 25% of the Hatch allocation. Furthermore, the specificity of the integrated accounts further encourages multistate, multidiscipline, multi-institutional research activity.

Specifically, the multistate research portfolio is designed to encourage and increase multistate collaborations on critical issues which have a national or regional priority, and in working collaboratively we can reduce duplication and further the areas of science while resolving issues and providing answers to important stakeholder driven questions in the regional or national interest. Given the current fiscal climate, increasing integrated multistate efforts to meet local, regional and national research goals is critical and will likely increase. Individual states can not continue to do all things, meet all needs, and are increasingly dependent on multistate, multidisciplinary approaches to research and outreach activity. Indeed many of the problems that today's scientists face require this multistate, multidisciplinary approach. Within the framework of the above, it is clear that many regional research projects are not as interdependent as one would expect or anticipate.

It is clear that greater demonstration of the level of interdependence in impact and annual reports of project activities is required. Many regional research projects objectives are singularly acted upon by individual investigators and do not demonstrate the level of interdependence that is desired or anticipated at the time of the conception of the regional, multistate research project, nor do multistate research activities report a level of interdependence that would suggest that the activity could not be completed unless there is collaborative activity. While the sharing of research information and research protocols around single topical areas of research within the multistate research project activity is laudable, this in and of itself does not constitute interdependence. In many cases, the objectives and level of activity appear to be well-designed individual experiments conducted by individual investigators, but often without any interdependency or relationship with others investigators working on the project objective.

Regional multistate research should strive to achieve a level of interdependence within the orientation of the project activity. All projects should attempt to demonstrate this interdependence within each objective at the time of preparation of their annual report and when projects seek renew and revision. Without some level of prescribed interdependence, one has to question the continuing commitment of multistate research funding to the proscribed activity.