

NERA Meeting Minutes

March 15-16, 2023

APLU Conference Room, Washington, DC

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

In attendance: Puneet Srivastava (Chair-Maryland), Matt Wilson (Past Chair-West Virginia), Margaret Smith (Cornell AES), Jason Hubbart (West Virginia), Dwane Jones (District of Columbia), Anton Bekkerman (New Hampshire), Calvin Keeler (Delaware), Jason White (Connecticut-New Haven), Wendy Fink (APLU), Sandy Ruble (APLU), Suzette Robinson (APLU), Caron Gala (APLU), Diane Miller (Cornell), Rick Rhodes (NERA), David Leibovitz (NERA)

Call to Order and Meeting Administration – Puneet Srivastava, Chair

- Agenda modification (Additions/Deletions) and approval
 - Doug Steele was not able to join the first session. Wendy Fink will attend in Doug's stead to present on the APLU.
 - **The agenda with modification was approved by acclamation.**
- Approval of the minutes of the December 15, 2022, NERA Business Meeting
 - **The minutes of December 15, 2022, were approved by acclamation.**

NERA Executive Committee Report – Puneet Srivastava

- The 2022-23 NERA Executive Committee is: Puneet Srivastava (Chair), Anton Bekkerman (Incoming Chair), Wendie Cohick (Officer-at-large), Matt Wilson (Past Chair)
- Puneet shared a report of the Chair's and Executive Committee's interim actions taken since the last NERA meeting. Highlights include:
 - NERA signed on to a letter to be submitted by the APLU to the leadership of the House and Senate Ag Committees on March 22. The letter seeks \$5 billion in mandatory funding through the Research Facilities Act within Title VII of the next Farm Bill.
 - NERA greenlighted the signing of a similar letter to Congress drafted by NCFAR. (NERA is a member of NCFAR.)
 - NERA opted not to support a \$50M ask in support of AGARDA, the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (Ag's presumptive counterpart to DARPA)
 - The Executive Committee unanimously supported the nomination of Dr. Jan Nyrop as NERA's nominee for the Northeast's 2023 Excellence in Leadership award winner. Jan will be recognized at the ESS meeting in September in Grand Rapids.

All Things APLU – Wendy Fink, Sandy Ruble, Suzette Robinson

- APLU represents over 250 public and Land-grant universities across North America.
- APLU consists of Councils (organized by position titles) and Commissions (organized around issue areas).
- Within APLU Commissions there are Boards (e.g., Board on Agricultural Assembly) with Sections (e.g., Experiment Station Section, Cooperative Extension Section, Academic Programs Section, Administrative Heads Section, International Agriculture Section).

- APLU provides direct connections to university central administrators (e.g., President, Provost, VPR) and government affairs staff.
- APLU is a “President’s organization” – University Presidents are one of the organization’s primary audiences. Presidents and Provosts frequently discuss issues from the Chronicle of Higher Education at an institutional level. The council of Presidents meets 3 times each year.
- The Commission on Food, Environment, & Renewable Resources (CFERR) is led by Noelle Cockett (President, Utah State University).
- APLU’s priority budget numbers to target are determined by the Council on Government Affairs – this decision is made outside of the BAA.
- APLU does not make requests or comment below the top line or dip down into budgets of agencies other than NIFA (e.g., NSF) to make requests.
- With members consisting of both Land-grant and non-Land-grant, Ag and non-ag institutions, APLU has to balance its priorities and target areas.
- The Budget and Advocacy Committee (BAC) is a standing committee of the BAA. Representation comes from 5 sections (ESS, CES, AHS, APS, IAS) as well as LGU and non-LGU ag programs. The BAC takes requests from voting committee members on priorities for the upcoming year.
- BAA voting members must have university membership with APLU or be grandfathered in.
- By Joint COPs (~July) there needs to be a strong sense of what requests/priorities will be.
- For USDA programming, the BAA gets to set the request numbers so that there is no competition between institutions.
- In a Farm Bill year, sometimes a single issue can become contentious within the BAA (e.g., the administration of SNAP-Ed or the inclusion of Central State as an 1890s APLU member).
- The BAA is supporting the ask for \$5 billion in mandatory funding through the Research Facilities Act within Title VII of the next Farm Bill.
- **“The Drivers of U.S. Agricultural Productivity Growth” 2020 report by Pardey and Alston (Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City) is posted on the NERA website ([Workroom/Reports/Whitepapers](#)).** Highlights include:
 - Ag productivity increases when Ag research activity increases.
 - China, India, and Brazil have eclipsed the USA in publicly funded ag R&D.
 - Over a period of ~50 years there have been marginally increasing returns on research projects.
 - State agricultural experiments stations perform ~75% of the publically funded agricultural R&D.
- The APLU BAA assessment invoice includes line items for AHS assessment, ESS assessment, ECOP assessment, SNAP-ED assessment, and CARET assessment.
 - The BAA pays for Lewis Burke Associates (Government Affairs consultant), salaries of Doug Steele, Suzette Robinson, and portions of other salaries (Kelly Dalton-BoHS Exec Dir, Caron Gala-CARET Exec Dir).
 - BAA assessments are calculated at a 3-year rolling average of 60% capacity portfolio / 40% competitive portfolio for each institution.
 - APS assessment: Total college enrollment (Graduate + undergraduate) x (specific per-student factor)
 - One of the services provided upon payment of the APLU assessment is direct support for planning meetings (e.g., contract negotiation, bill payment).

- APLU advocacy efforts include Lewis Burke Associates (consultant), APLU Council on Government Affairs, and Caron Gala (CARET Executive Director) – 3 interchangeable pieces, but not the same.
 - Lobbyists (Lewis Burke) are 100% Government Affairs – they focus beyond agriculture.
 - APLU CGA (Institutional) – some representatives are employed by colleges, some are employed by the President/Provost offices.
 - Caron Gala works directly with FANR to deeply understand requests and translate/articulate the value of requests to our audiences. Caron also works directly with CARET delegates.

Connecting Northeast Experiment Stations with Government Affairs – Caron Gala, Director, Agriculture and International Development, Governmental Affairs and Dianne Miller, Senior Director, Federal Relations, Cornell University

- What is successful lobbying? What illustrates that our money was well spent on lobbying?
 - Lobbying is relationship-based. It is best to approach congressional delegations with *good information*. They are representing people with good problems and are being called upon to solve problems.
- It's important to translate the impact of science for non-scientist audiences. Legislators, lobbyists, and staffers in Washington are frequently not scientists by trade; often they have a legal background.
- Communicating with legislators – it is important to illustrate local relevance to a legislator's district. Lead with a point that is locally impactful, then jump into telling an expanded story.
- Creating a sense of urgency is important, in particular around issues that are not directly impactful on a legislator's district (e.g., RFA/Infrastructure ask).
- Modern ag research isn't what it used to be – today it is more data driven, computer intensive, requires different equipment, adequate facilities. Try to make connections with needs like better electrical systems or computing capacity for evolving methods in ag research.
- For legislators, a regional voice should have a “big picture,” high-level perspective. (e.g., “_____ is the big picture regionally, and _____ is what it means for your state/district.”)
 - Support for a high-level request on Specialty Crops funding might mean local impact on a specific crop's industry (e.g., strawberries).
- President's Budget doesn't include a great increase in capacity funds. Where does APLU sit with respect to the capacity funds total budget? What can ESS Directors do to support an increase in capacity funds?
 - APLU is the only major group in Washington who discusses capacity funds.
 - Document local impact in any way possible.
 - Create one-pagers for legislators to demonstrate impact.
 - Template: “_____ wouldn't have happened, but for capacity funds.”
- Consider hosting Experiment Station on-site tours for legislators, district representatives, or even staffers. Use touring as an opportunity to discuss gaps in what could have been done with increased funding.

Summary and Action Steps – Puneet Srivastava

- Puneet thanked attendees and speakers for their engagement and adjourned the meeting.

Thursday, March 16, 2023

In attendance: Puneet Srivastava (Chair-Maryland), Matt Wilson (Past Chair-West Virginia), Jason White (Connecticut-New Haven), Jason Hubbart (West Virginia), Calvin Keeler (Delaware), Margaret Smith (Cornell AES), Dwane Jones (District of Columbia), Anton Bekkerman (New Hampshire), Doug Steele (APLU), Rubella Goswami (USDA NIFA), Josh Stull (USDA NIFA), Elizabeth Stulberg (Lewis Burke Associates), Rick Rhodes (NERA), David Leibovitz (NERA), Anna Katharine Mansfield (Cornell AgriTech-via Zoom), Olga Padilla-Zakour (Cornell AgriTech-via Zoom), Erica Mirich (PIVOT Creative and Consulting-via Zoom)

APLU update from Doug Steele

- Climate Horizon Scan / Climate Research Roadmap is underway.
- Climate Summit will be held in Washington DC, May 8-10 2023, hosted by USDA and State Department and supported by Foundation for Food and Agricultural Research (FFAR).
- Workforce development initiative is underway at NRCS (APLU and AHS are partners).
- Within the communications office there is a push to replicate “Retaking the Field” (SOAR) print publications for showcasing our work.

Updates from the Office of the Executive Director – Rick Rhodes/David Leibovitz

- David Leibovitz completed LEAD21 as part of Class 18 in February. David thanked the Directors for their support of his participation in the program.
- On behalf of the NERA Directors, Rick and David expressed gratitude to the APLU for hosting this 2023 NERA Spring Meeting.
- 2023 Summer Meeting planning is underway (June 5-7, Annapolis, MD). The theme for the meeting is “Build Back Better, Together.” **NERA Directors are encouraged to submit session and speaker topic ideas to the OED.**
- NERA is in great financial shape. Carryover is tracking at a healthy amount and there is capacity in our budget to invest in new opportunities.

Appropriations, Farm Bill, and Research Infrastructure: An Insider’s View – Elizabeth Stulberg, Principal, Lewis Burke Associates

- Lewis Burke Associates connects academic and science communities with policymakers, promoting the policy agenda of scientific organizations.
- Authorizations – what the government is allowed to fund (e.g., Farm Bill).
- Appropriations – how much discretionary money agencies get to spend (e.g., FY2024 requests)
- Politics – who decides who gets what (e.g., Congress)
- Advocacy – knowing your audience (e.g., research infrastructure)
- Guide to approaching legislators: Establish trust > Present a Challenge > Make THEM the hero
- President’s Budget highlights: Climate, MSIs, Cancer Moonshot/Precision Nutrition
- **Elizabeth’s slide deck is available for view/download on the NERA website ([Workroom > Reports/White Papers](#)).**

Connecting to NIFA Programs – Josh Stull, Stakeholder Affairs Officer and Rubella Goswami, Division Director, Division of Plant Systems-Protection

- Stay tuned – NIFA will hold RFA webinars throughout the year to provide applicants with opportunities to ask questions.
- Check it out – NIFA website houses a listing of NPL by NIFA Programs (<https://www.nifa.usda.gov/about-nifa/who-we-are/organizational-structure/national-program-leaders>).
- Sign up – NIFA Weekly Updates are released via email every Wednesday (https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDANIFA/subscriber/new?qsp=USDANIFA_2).
- Recruit reviewers – Faculty interested in volunteering to serve as NIFA Panel reviewers can fill out a panelist recruitment form (<https://prs.nifa.usda.gov/prs/volunteerPrep.do>).
- Engage in multistate activities – familiarize faculty with multistate activities and encourage more multistate project participation.

Kickstarting the NE Urban Ag Multistate Research Project – Matt Wilson and Dwane Jones

- West Virginia has a faculty member interested in urban/non-traditional space ag research.
- There is no existing urban agriculture focused multistate research project in the regional or national portfolio.
- West Virginia and Rutgers have considered drafting a NERA Planning Grant to kickstart an urban agriculture initiative.
- University of the District of Columbia (the only 1862 institution with its main campus in an urban setting) is the most active NERA institution in the urban agriculture space.
- Broad research dimensions within urban ag include: Growing techniques (e.g. controlled environment), food transportation, food insecure populations (some live in ‘deserts’, some not. Section 8 housing has been diffused throughout DC), immigrants with specific food/dietary interests, soil quality in urban spaces.
- Urban ag research also presents opportunities for strong Extension participation. Recent ECOP conversations have acknowledged social research questions such as the framing of growing food as “agriculture” being off-putting to marginalized groups. (Maybe “urban food and plants”?)
- **Matt Wilson introduced a motion to pursue the use of NERA Planning Grant funds to hold a facilitated workshop to bring together a group of scientists to draft a multistate research project proposal around “urban ag.” (Identify key objectives, develop a title/label for the initiative, identify the scope and scale of the project within or beyond the NE region). Dwane Jones agreed to co-lead the workshop and explore hosting at University of the District of Columbia. The motion was approved by acclamation.**
 - Additional opportunity to pursue: NIFA Conference Grants (up to \$50k).

The Northeast Agenda – Erica Mirich, PIVOT Creative and Consulting

- Initial discussions held during the 2022 Summer meeting in Portland, ME identified the need for work on the Northeast Agenda, to create a unified voice and guiding principles for NEED and NERA. How do we get NEED and NERA on the same road, moving in the same direction?
- Currently copywriting the final draft of the NE Agenda. On track to have a printed copy and collateral materials prepared in April 2023.

- We intend to use the NE Agenda broadly within NERA and NEED as guideposts for discussion, programming, and goal setting.
- Directors commented that generally speaking, their institutions' interests are properly reflected in the NE Agenda.
- Concurrent national activity: ESS Brand development (creation of agInnovation brand identity)
- **Erica's slide deck is enclosed with these minutes and is posted on the NERA website ([Workroom > Reports/White Papers.](#))**

Multistate Activities Committee – Matt Wilson, MAC chair

- The MAC met on February 7, 2023. Matt Wilson assumed the Chair's role and Blair Siegfried joined the committee. Matt encouraged the NERA Directors to consider serving on the MAC going forward.
- NE Multistate project proposals under peer review:
 - NE9: *Conservation and Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources*
 - NE_TEMP2334: *Genetic Bases for Resistance and Immunity to Avian Diseases*
 - NE_TEMP2335: *Resource Optimization in Controlled Environment Agriculture*
- NE Multistate project proposals ready for MAC "ready check" review:
 - NE_TEMP2333: *Biological Improvement of Chestnut through Technologies that Address Management of the Species and its Pathogens and Pests*
 - NE_TEMP2336: *Improving Quality and Reducing Losses in Specialty Fruit and Vegetable Crops through Storage Technologies*
- NRSPs (seeking NERA recommendations on NRSP8 renewal; NRSP11 new project proposal)
 - NRSP_TEMP8: *National Animal Genome Project (Capacity/Core)*
 - NRSP_TEMP11: *Building Collaborative Research Networks to Advance the Science of Soil Fertility: Fertilizer Recommendation Support Tool (FRST)* (New/Emerging Innovation NRSP)
 - **Rick will draft recommendations on NERA's behalf and circulate to NERA for reactions before providing to the NRSP RC.**
- NERA voted to confirm the following slate of Administrative Adviser assignments:
 - NE9: *Conservation and Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources* – renewing 2022-23 – Olga Padilla-Zakour
 - NE1835: *Resource Optimization in Controlled Environment Agriculture* – renewing 2022-23 – Puneet Srivastava
 - NE1839: *Development and Evaluation of Broccoli Adapted to the Eastern US* – Olga Padilla-Zakour
 - NE1943: *Biology, Ecology & Management of Emerging Disease Vectors* – Jason White
 - NE2001: *Harnessing Chemical Ecology to Address Agricultural Pest and Pollinator Priorities* – Blair Siegfried
 - NE2045: *Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems: Assessing the Impact of Soil Variability and Climate Change* – Lisa Townson
 - NE2101: *Eastern White Pine Health and Responses to Environmental Changes* – Jessica Leahy
 - NE2202: *The Equine Microbiome* – Calvin Keeler

- NECC1901: *Integrating Genomics and Breeding for Improved Shellfish Aquaculture Production of Molluscan Shellfish* – Rick Rhodes
- *National Plant Germplasm Coordinating Committee (NPGCC, an ESCOP Standing Committee)*: Margaret Smith as NE Administrative Adviser representative
- **The slate of Administrative Adviser assignments and new volunteers above was approved by acclamation.**
- Reminder: NERA is still seeking AAs for the following multistate activities and committees:
 - NE1832: Biological Control of Arthropod Pests and Weeds – set to renew in 2022-23 (formerly Jan Nyrop – Cornell AgriTech)
 - NE1944: Management of the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug – renewing 2022-23 (formerly Mark Hutton – Maine)
 - Northeast Multistate Activities Committee – seeking a new member to replace Matt Wilson (term slated to end Fall 2023)
 - Northeast IPM Center Steering Committee – seeking a replacement for Jan Nyrop (retired)

Station overview (University of Maryland AES) – Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Respect Plan: A Strategic Approach – Amanda Shaffer, Diversity Officer, University of Maryland

- **Amanda’s slides are posted on the NERA website ([Resources > NEED-NERA Civil Rights Review Materials](#)).**

Experiment Station Section, ESCOP, and NERA: Alignment of Issues, Wants and Needs – Matt Wilson (Chair, agInnovation) and Anton Bekkerman (Chair, ESCOP Budget and Legislative Committee)

- agInnovation (Experiment Station Section) rebranding effort continues, including website (<https://www.aginnovation.info/>). Moving into rollout phase of the agInnovation brand identity.
- Matt and Anton have been involved and have represented northeast interests in the ag infrastructure request concept.
- The Northeast has traditionally led the charge to change NRSP philosophy, including pushing for the rollback of off-the-top funding support and the designation of two classifications of NRSPs (New/Emerging initiatives and Capacity/Core).
- The Northeast has great influence in national discussions because of its participation and engaged leadership. Caron Gala (APLU) and Bridget Krieger (LBA) call out NE examples frequently in national committee conversations.
- The BAC Chair wants to assemble a small task sub-group with BLC/ESCOP representation to examine appropriations and budget priorities.
- As a heads up, NERA will need to identify an incoming ESS Chair in two years.
- We cannot overcommunicate with our directors on national issues. There should be no surprises for Directors at agInnovation business meetings.
- Meetings held in our region give us great visibility. Facetime in Washington DC is important.
- Matt Wilson and Ami Smith (VP, West Virginia State University) co-chair the agInnovation Ag Infrastructure subcommittee. Ag Infrastructure is a priority now because this is a farm bill year.
- In the coming years, our priority will shift to capacity funding. The Northeast can be a leading voice in the capacity funds discussion.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 pm ET.

Future Meetings

- Northeast Joint Summer Session (NEED/NERA) – Annapolis, MD, June 5-7, 2023
- Joint COPS, Kansas City, MO, July 18-20, 2023 (ESCOP meets during Joint COPS)
- ESS Annual Meeting – Grand Rapids, MI, September 25-27, 2023 (NERA meets during the ESS meeting)

DRAFT