

**NERA Business Meeting Minutes**  
**September 25-26, 2023**  
**DeVos Place, Grand Rapids, MI**

**September 25, 2023**

In attendance: Puneet Srivastava (Chair-Maryland), Anton Bekkerman (Vice Chair-New Hampshire), Wendie Cohick (Officer-at-large-New Jersey), Matt Wilson (Past Chair-West Virginia), Lynne McLandsborough (Massachusetts), Margaret Smith (Cornell AES), Chris Smart (Cornell AgriTech), Blair Siegfried (Pennsylvania), Beth Gugino (Pennsylvania), Kevin Kephart (USDA NIFA), Elizabeth Stulberg (Lewis-Burke Associates), Rick Rhodes (NERA), David Leibovitz (NERA)

Meeting administration (Puneet Srivastava, NERA Chair)

- The [NERA meeting agenda](#) was approved by acclamation.
- The [minutes of August 10, 2023](#) were approved by acclamation.

Multistate Activities Committee (MAC) Report and Recommendations (Matt Wilson, MAC Chair)

- The Directors reviewed the [MAC report and recommendations from September 21, 2023](#).
- Recommendations to Approve Peer Reviewed Multistate Activities
  - NECC\_TEMP29: *Northeastern Corn Improvement Conference, 10/2023 – 09/2028* [Renewal of NECC29, AA: Margaret Smith – Cornell]
    - The MAC unanimously recommended to NERA the approval of NECC\_TEMP29.
    - The conference focuses on corn issues broadly – beyond breeding, beyond entomology. Papers and scientific presentations are delivered and roundtable state-by-state discussions are also held.
  - NE\_TEMP2332: *Biological control of Arthropod Pests and Weeds, 10/2023 – 09/2028* [Renewal of NE1832, AA: Jason White – Connecticut-New Haven]
    - The MAC unanimously recommended approval of the NE\_TEMP2332 proposal, conditional upon the drafting of an outreach plan which was yet to be uploaded into the proposal.
    - On September 25, the technical team submitted an outreach plan which includes the participation of multiple Northeast stations and their communicators to distribute information to external audiences. The project will also employ the IPM Program centered at Cornell University. The IPM Center has extensive resources to help both growers and the general public practice conservation-based biocontrol.
    - **Matt Wilson amended the MAC's recommendation on NE\_TEMP2332 to recommend full approval, because the outreach plan was submitted, and the condition recommended by the MAC had been met.**
  - **Matt introduced a motion for NERA to approve the MAC's recommendation to approve NECC\_TEMP29 and NE\_TEMP2332. The motion was approved unanimously. The OED will fully approve these activities in NIMSS after the meeting.**
- NERA Administrative Adviser Assignments
  - There are several multistate activities which are seeking new/replacement Administrative Advisers. NERA Directors are encouraged to serve or nominate designees to serve as AAs for these activities.

- Jessica Leahy (changed position at UMaine)
  - NE2101: *Eastern White Pine Health and Responses to Environmental Changes*
  - NE2231: *Collaborative Potato Breeding and Variety Development Activities to Enhance Farm Sustainability in the Eastern US*
- Olga Padilla-Zakour (changed position at Cornell AgriTech)
  - NE9: *Conservation and Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources*
  - NE1839: *Development and Evaluation of Broccoli Adapted to the Eastern US*
- Rick Rhodes (serving as interim AA)
  - NECC1901: *Integrating Genomics and Breeding for Improved Aquaculture Production of Molluscan Shellfish*
- **Chris Smart volunteered to serve as Administrative Adviser for both NE9 and NE1839; replacing Olga Padilla-Zakour.**
- **Margaret Smith volunteered to serve as the Administrative Adviser for NE2231, replacing Jessica Leahy.**
- **Wendie Cohick introduced a motion to approve the AA volunteers as listed above. The motion was approved by NERA unanimously.**
- For consideration: 1890s Climate Research Initiative
  - ARD institutions have established a multistate Climate Research initiative. There has been some interest in housing that initiative in NIMSS to track participation and annual meeting engagements. From a technical perspective, this activity can be added to NIMSS with help from the technical team at Clemson. From a policy/programmatic perspective, this will be discussed with the NRSP-1 Review Committee.

#### Evaluation of the Office of the Executive Director (NERA)

- The group reviewed the accomplishments report of the office of the Executive Director. Rick and David left the room, and the Directors held a closed session to discuss the NERA Executive Director's office.

#### Station Profile: University of New Hampshire AES (Anton Bekkerman)

- Anton delivered an overview of the New Hampshire Agricultural Experiment Station, its areas of excellence, collaborations, challenges, and opportunities. [Slides from Anton's presentation are posted on the NERA website.](#)

#### **September 26, 2023**

*In attendance:* Puneet Srivastava (Chair-Maryland), Matt Wilson (Past Chair-West Virginia), Anton Bekkerman (Vice Chair-New Hampshire), Wendie Cohick (Officer-at-large-New Jersey), Blair Siegfried (Pennsylvania), Beth Gugino (Pennsylvania), Lynne McLandsborough (Massachusetts), Chris Smart (Cornell AgriTech), Margaret Smith (Cornell AES), Rick Rhodes (NERA), David Leibovitz (NERA), Dionne Toombs (USDA NIFA)

#### A Conversation with Dionne Toombs, Associate Director for Programs, USDA NIFA

- Dionne looks forward to being more involved programmatically with AES Directors.
- NIFA's learning and development team has helped to facilitate better training over the past year.
- Grants modernization initiative is underway; NIFA is working with NIH and has elected to move to the ERA system for grant submission. Grants.gov and ASAP will not go away until 2025.

- NIFA staff is returning to capacity; 363 staff currently on board.
- Kal Kalavacharla will serve as acting Deputy Director, Institute of Food Production and Sustainability.
- NIFA is increasing its international engagement under Dr. Manjit Misra's direction.
- Strategic Priorities under Dr. Misra (these do not conflict with the Farm Bill priorities)
  - "Food as Medicine"
  - "Ag as an engine for economic growth/jobs"
  - "Focus on SBRI and STTR"
  - "Cultivate the next generation ag workforce – Communicate better internally and externally – Collaborate with Land-grant partners"
- [USDA Science and Research Strategy 2023-2026](#) was released in the spring, a longtime spiritual successor to the REE Action Plan. There will be listening sessions offered to gather feedback on the strategy document.
- NIFA launched a pilot program to build capacity with 1890s Land-grant institutions. Fort Valley State and Arkansas Pine Bluff are both in line for hosting workshops under this pilot program.
- October 17 – NIFA will hold a webinar for grantees. Registration for webinars will be posted at <https://nifa.usda.gov/events>, and the NERA community is all invited to attend.
- In the event of a government shutdown, NRS - the electronic reporting system will remain open.
- NIFA is developing a contact list of all current National Program Leaders and will distribute that to NERA.
- Directors are frequently asked to share stories from the ag experiment stations. Stories should be shared with NIFA Communications Director Faith Peppers ([Faith.Peppers@usda.gov](mailto:Faith.Peppers@usda.gov)) and/or Northeast NIFA Communications representative Lori Gula ([lori.gula@usda.gov](mailto:lori.gula@usda.gov)).
- Interagency collaborations are forming: NIFA-NSF initiative on artificial intelligence, NIFA-NIH initiative on precision nutrition.

#### Institutional Budget Models – Matt Wilson and Anton Bekkerman

- Matt delivered an overview of West Virginia's modernization plan, budget model, and current challenges regarding "right sizing." Matt and Anton led a discussion with the Directors about institutional budget models, which had an emphasis on challenges operating under Responsibility Centered Management.
- [Slides from Matt's presentation are posted on the NERA website.](#)

#### Changing of the Guard

- **Anton Bekkerman rotated into the NERA Chair position. Puneet Srivastava was presented with an award for his service as Chair and will now serve as the Past Chair. Wendie Cohick will serve as Vice Chair. NERA will work with the Directors to nominate and appoint an Officer-at-large for 2023-24.**

#### Meeting with agInnovation West (formerly Western Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors) –

- The two regional associations gathered and held a brief discussion led by Puneet Srivastava (NERA Chair), Scot Hulbert (agInnovation West Chair), Rick Rhodes (NERA Executive Director), and Bret Hess (agInnovation West Executive Director).

- Discussion centered around institutional relationships with USDA ARS, the development of regional agendas (Northeast Agenda and Western Agenda), and a comparison of the outputs and organization of regional communications groups.

*The meeting adjourned at 10:00 am Eastern Time.*

DRAFT