

NERA Business Meeting Minutes
September 28, 2021 (12:00 pm – 2:30 pm ET)
Palisades Tahoe, Olympic Valley, CA
and Virtual (via Zoom)

In attendance: Matt Wilson (Chair-West Virginia), Mark Hutton (Officer-at-large-Maine), Jody Jellison (Past Chair-Massachusetts), Darrell Donahue (West Virginia), Margaret Smith (New York – Ithaca), Jason White (Connecticut – New Haven), Diane Rowland (Maine), Jan Nyrop (New York – Geneva), Wendie Cohick (New Jersey), Blair Siegfried (Pennsylvania), Jane Kolodinsky (Vermont), Rick Roush (Pennsylvania), Anton Bekkerman (New Hampshire), Kumar Venkitanarayanan (Connecticut – Storrs), Puneet Srivastava (Maryland), Carrie Castille (Director-NIFA), Bill Hoffman (Chief of Staff-NIFA), Faith Peppers (Communications Director-NIFA), Rick Rhodes (NERA), David Leibovitz (NERA), Fred Servello (formerly Maine, 2021 Excellence in Leadership Awardee)

Call to Order/Meeting administration – Matt Wilson

- Attendees introduced themselves and congratulated NE Excellence in Leadership Award winner Fred Servello (former Dean, UMaine), who was in attendance in-person at Palisades Tahoe.
- **The agenda for this meeting was approved unanimously.**
- **The minutes of the June 23, 2021 NERA meeting were approved unanimously.**

Evaluation of the Office of the NERA Executive Director, Rick Rhodes and David Leibovitz – Matt Wilson

- The accomplishments report of the NERA OED was enclosed with meeting materials.
- Rick and David left the room and NERA Directors discussed the 2020-21 activities of the OED.
- NERA Directors were supportive and reacted positively to the accomplishments report of the OED. **The NERA Executive Committee will draft written feedback for the OED.**

Multistate Activities Committee Report – Jan Nyrop

- The fall 2021 MAC meeting report was enclosed with this meeting's materials.
- As of this meeting, Jason White will be joining the MAC and Eric Wommack's term will expire.
- Beginning in 2021, the MAC will conduct a mid-term review for projects/committees who have completed three years of activity. This allows NERA and AAs to stay engaged with multistate activities during a project's life cycle. This also provides an opportunity for a project to either sunset or re-engage prior to renewal.
- Request to write NE_TEMP2202: The Equine Microbiome, 10/1/2022-9/30/2027 (new project proposal), proposed AA and primary reviewer: Eric Wommack, second supporting Director: Kumar Venkitanarayanan.
 - **Approved with request to flesh out the research questions and craft the multistate project proposal.**
- Request to write NE_TEMP2201: Mycobacterial Diseases of Animals, 10/1/2022-9/30/2027, (formerly NE1701), AA and primary reviewer: Matt Wilson.
 - **Tabled until the technical team explains the lack of reporting activity and accomplishments over the current project cycle.**
- The Northeast is determined to win an Excellence in Multistate Research award (it has been ten years since the NE won).
 - Anton Bekkerman suggested including excellence award criteria in the rubric for mid-

term review.

- Jody Jellison serves on the ESCOP Science and Technology Committee who judges the award nominations and has some suggestions on how to craft our nomination.
- Mark Hutton suggested nominating NE1731 (Potato Breeding), they are up for renewal this year.

Changes to the Rules of Operation – Matt Wilson

- Redline version of the Rules of Operation and rationale for the changes were shared with NERA on August 24, 2021 and enclosed with this meeting's materials. These changes are a refresh to largely reflect NERA's current operating processes.
- **A motion to approve the revised NERA Rules of Operation as distributed was introduced, seconded, and approved unanimously.**
 - **There is a small typo in Article V - "on" should be "in"**

Q/A Session: Carrie Castille, NIFA Director (also Bill Hoffman, NIFA Chief of Staff and Faith Peppers, NIFA Communications Director)

- How to best support small local/regional food systems at the rural-urban interface?
 - Specialized agriculture systems in the NE (e.g. aquaponics, controlled environments) should be considered to support regional food systems.
 - Research plays a role in small business innovation.
 - Large conventional agriculture is not the only player in ensuring our food supply.
 - NERA Directors are invited to engage with Carrie Castille in dialogue about the unique characteristics of the NE food systems.
- Is there a chance that ag infrastructure support money embedded in the Build Back Better plan will be approved by congress in the face of no republican support?
 - There is no clear answer and the NIFA Director has been delivering talking points in support of this funding.
 - NIFA was not part of the conversation when the last large federal infrastructure bill was drafted. Former NIFA Director Sonny Ramaswamy brought a team together at NIFA to ensure the institute would be prepared to weigh in on the next infrastructure ask.
 - In 2021, NIFA is part of the conversation around infrastructure, an encouraging sign, but still does not guarantee the level of support that will be approved.
- UMaine has been trying to horizon scan for issues in the state of Maine. What's the best way to have a discussion about state issues with the NIFA Directors about state issues?
 - NERA Directors are invited to contact Bill Hoffman or Faith Peppers to set up a meeting with Carrie.
- Cornell AES/AgriTech Directors have conceptualized writing a specific Hatch project that provides support to research support endeavors. *Example: using Hatch dollars to support personnel at a state of the art research facility, whose activities cut across multiple research projects.*
 - NIFA is interested in looking into that type of idea.
- NERA is interested in leveraging its communications resources to support ag research infrastructure and amplify the media coverage of NERA institutions. Individual institutions do a great job of telling stories. NIFA also supports the idea of telling stories with a regional focus.
- NIFA is bringing in communications experts representing all regions, who have experience working with AES and CES organizations.
- Carrie Castille complimented NERA for branding itself and carving out a unique niche for itself in

the LGU system. Carrie intends to visit Northeast LGUs over the next year.

- The NIFA representatives had to leave, and there were questions that went unanswered due to time:
 - *How can we increase the NIFA competitive funding programs so that more of the proposals that directly support our stakeholders can be funded? With increasing pressure from the university administration to increase CoAg research portfolios, more and more of our faculty are doing basic research funded by NSF and NIH that, although have potential to help our stakeholders in the long-term, tend to take us a little away from ag research.*

Issues discussion: Budget, Face-to-Face Meetings, Communications, Climate Change and Other Stuff in the Northeast – Matt Wilson

- Face-to-face NERA meeting; what does NERA want to do in the spring/summer, 2022?
 - Spring 2022 meeting: **there is interest in planning a face-to-face NERA meeting in late March 2022.**
 - **NERA OED will explore some potential meeting locations and run scenarios by the Directors.**
 - **Philadelphia was chosen previously because it was convenient for air travel, but many attendees could be driving.**
 - **NERA OED will also explore purchasing some technology to facilitate hybrid meetings.**
 - Heads up on the 2022 Summer Meeting: UMaine has a placeholder at the Portland, ME Regency during the first two weekends in June; drop dead date February/March.
- FY'21 NERA budget closeout (informational, attached)
 - NERA closed out FY2021 with full assessments received and expenses coming in under the approved amount.
 - We are in a financial position to entertain a discussion about a temporary assessment reduction in future years.
- Northeast Communications Network update
 - A NERA Communications subcommittee has formed (Matt Wilson, Darrell Donahue, Lindsey Willey, Lori Gula, Erin Miller, Rick Rhodes, David Leibovitz) and met twice.
 - The group is currently assessing the communications resources around the region and exploring how to support NIFA's priorities and the ESS priorities of ag research infrastructure funding.
 - NERA Directors will receive a "Northeast Needs Assessment" survey from the NE Communications experts sometime in the next month to guide our communications effort moving forward.
- Climate change and the Northeast
 - The NE is unique in that we have a significant amount of both working and non-working lands.
 - Jan suggested creating regional research and demonstration projects that focus on climate mitigation through the stewardship of working lands – and monetizing these activities. (e.g. rock dust amendments, soils, increasing productivity of woody plants). Anton was supportive of this regional focus.

- Puneet suggested each NERA institution conducts a Climate Vulnerability Assessment of State Agriculture. This could aid us in determining common themes and drafting our regional research agenda. (Example climate vulnerability assessment from USDA NE Regional Climate Hub: <https://www.climatehubs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Northeast%20Regional%20Hub%20Vulnerability%20Assessment%20Final.pdf>)
- Carrie Castille emphasized linking producers to consumers. NIFA will be funding translational research in the future and we should seize the opportunity to link ecosystem services with mitigating climate change.
- Diane Rowland has experience at University of Florida working with Climate Smart Ag, a subsidiary of Solutions from the Land (Turner Foundation). Climate Smart Ag goes state to state discussing climate change with stakeholders across the ag supply chain. In partnership with UF, an idea was conceived to set up a monitoring network using AI to monitor ecosystem services. Monitoring is ongoing and Diane is still involved, hoping to help UMaine to participate. There is interest at the national level to expand this effort (Diane has engaged with Senator Debbie Stabenow). New England can be a center for preparing, predicting, and training producers/professionals/students in how to monitor and deliver ecosystem services.
 - **Diane shared Advancing Resilient Agriculture: Recommendations to Address Climate Change, a report from the Tri Societies** (<https://www.soils.org/files/science-policy/issues/2021-acs-climate-solutions-statement.pdf>)
- ESCOP Budget and Legislative Committee has been exploring a Climate Change “moon shot” ask, similar to the Ag Research Infrastructure Advocacy (ARIA) effort. A discussion about this ask will be held tomorrow 9/29 in conjunction with the hybrid ESS Meeting in Olympic Valley, CA.
- As a reminder, NERA and NEED jointly funded two fellows to assess Ecosystems Services across the region. The assessment will be used to inform a listening session and symposium to come.
- Anton suggested we fund a set of scholars to conduct a similar assessment on climate vulnerability and climate change mitigation resources.
- Build Back Better (BBB) bill and Ag Infrastructure ask
 - Rick Roush asked PA Congressman Glenn Thompson about the \$11.5B infrastructure ask in the BBB bill. Congressman Thompson assured Rick that the government is too polarized to have confidence in that ask being approved.
 - There are no legislators of “strong Ag influence” who are champions of this ag infrastructure ask. It appears that the only funding level we can confidently secure for ag infrastructure support is the original \$2.7B, if democrats can ensure this commitment remains intact.
 - Can NERA lead a grassroots effort to rally AES Directors around this ask and present it to key Democrat influencers? If so, can we influence other regional associations to get on board?
 - One key question from legislators we need to be able to answer is “what’s in it for my home state?”

- **NERA Directors are invited to contact Rick Roush about this topic.**

Summary Comments, Passing of the Gavel and Adjournment – Matt Wilson

- Chair Matt Wilson (West Virginia) passed the gavel to Incoming Chair Eric Wommack (Delaware)
- Rick Rhodes thanked Jody Jellison (Massachusetts) for her service on the NERA Executive Committee, serving an additional year as Past Chair.
- Puneet Srivastava (Maine) will rotate on as the Officer-at-large.
- Matt Wilson will serve as the Chair-elect of ESCOP, rotating on to the ESCOP Executive Committee in 2021-22.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm Eastern Time.