

# NERA

Northeastern Regional Association  
of  
State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors Meeting

**June 10, 2020, 1:00 – 3:00 PM EDT**

Zoom teleconference

## Minutes

In attendance: Jon Wraith (UNH), Anton Bekkerman (UNH), Brad Hillman (Rutgers), Wendie Cohick (Rutgers), Bob Goodman (Rutgers), Laura Lawson (Rutgers), Jan Nyrop (Cornell), Carol Thornber (URI), Fred Servello (Maine), Mark Hutton (Maine), Puneet Srivastava (Maryland), Jason White (CAES), Eric Wommack (Delaware), Matt Wilson (WVU), Jody Jellison (UMass), Kumar Venkitanarayanan (UConn), Rick Rhodes (NERA), David Leibovitz (NERA)

1. Call to order and introductions – Carol Thornber, NERA Chair
2. Meeting administration – Carol Thornber
  - Agenda modification (additions/deletions) and approval
    - Fred Servello requested inserting an NRSP RC discussion after the MAC report.
    - **The agenda with modification was approved by acclamation.**
  - Approval of March 24, 2020 NERA Meeting Minutes
    - **The minutes from March 24, 2020 were approved unanimously.**
3. Preparing for Fall: Strategies for Navigating the New Normal – Jan Nyrop
  - Cornell University decided critical research should be allowed to continue
  - CALS had to develop a new operating plan for each farm and facility. There was some pushback – space in one building was segregated to isolate staff who were there regularly from researchers who used facilities intermittently.
    - Four bathrooms in the facility: Staff used south building bathrooms, Faculty used north building bathrooms.
    - Several graduate students expressed that segregation of bathrooms using these criteria was inappropriate.
  - What happens if a Field Research Unit at Cornell AES reports a positive COVID antibody test?
    - Cornell developed a decision tree and followed it.
    - The individual did get a PCR-based test.

- Since the individual had to isolate until results came back, the field operation was shut down for three days.
  - What has Cornell been learning?
    - **Jan Nyrop will share the CALS COVID-19 decision tree doc and set of COVID-19 Best Practices with NERA.**
    - Cornell CALS decision tree was influenced by State public health guidance and Institute for Food Safety. There is not a university-wide decision tree.
  - Additional discussion
    - University of Delaware notes if returning students with positive cases of COVID-19 cannot trace their recent contacts, the university could go back into shutdown.
    - UD has also been using Google Sheets to manage approved personnel in its facilities.
    - Cornell is required by NY State to keep a log of who goes in and out of its facilities.
    - WVU has a Qualtrics form to complete for anyone entering farms and facilities, using a QR code at entrances. Unsure if people will be comfortable having a public document track how all of their time is spent.
    - UMass is giving access to facilities by categories of employees – some buildings allow faculty more access than staff. They are considering banning undergraduate research workers. UMass guidance is based on UC Berkeley guidance which defines undergrads as students first, researchers second.
    - At Rutgers, undergrads are not allowed to participate in summer lab, campus, field research activities.
    - URI has undergraduate workers taking care of farm animals and in some structured research programs in labs (small numbers, requiring approval by Dean and Office of Research)
    - WVU requires faculty returning to campus after conducting field research to take a COVID-19 test.
    - Cornell CALS will be testing all faculty and staff in the college in a voluntary program (~1,200 datapoints).
    - Rutgers is requiring anybody returning to campus to take a COVID-19 test
    - **Rick asked the group to share further questions and comments via email and NERA will continue the conversation electronically.**
4. Multistate Activities Committee Report and Recommendations (May 28, 2020) – Brad Hillman
- Requests to approve peer-reviewed multistate research projects
    - NE\_TEMP2001: Harnessing Chemical Ecology to Address Agricultural Pest and Pollinator Priorities [Jan Nyrop AA]
      - One reviewer didn't understand the intent of the multistate program, all other reviews were positive.
      - This is the second iteration of the project.

- Jan Nyrop (AA) confirmed that this is an engaged and productive multistate project team that justifies a broad umbrella project.
  - **The MAC through Brad Hillman introduced a motion to approve NE\_TEMP2001. The motion was seconded by Fred Servello and the proposal was approved unanimously. NERA will rename to NE2001 and move the proposal to NIFA for final approval.**
- NECC\_TEMP2001: Sustainable Farm Energy Production and Use, [Gary Thompson AA]
  - The coordinating committee is supported by Gary Thompson, but not with intent to evolve into a research project.
  - Coordinating committees are intended to foster meetings for its members, only travel funds can be dedicated to coordinating committees.
  - Coordinating committees are approved by NERA and do not require NIFA approval.
  - **The MAC through Brad Hillman introduced a motion to approve NECC\_TEMP2001. The motion was seconded by Fred Servello and the proposal was approved unanimously. NERA will rename to NECC2001 and make final approval in NIMSS.**
- NE\_TEMP2045: Onsite Wastewater treatment Systems: Assessing the Impact of Soil Variability and Climate Change [Adel Shirmohammadi AA]
  - Broad participation throughout the Northeast. Almost all NERA stations have participants on the predecessor project NE1545.
  - Adel Shirmohammadi confirmed this is an active group and he wishes to continue as Administrative Adviser.
  - Six positive reviews were received for this proposal.
  - **The MAC through Brad Hillman introduced a motion to approve NE\_TEMP2045. The motion was seconded by Jason White and the proposal was approved unanimously. NERA will rename to NE2045 and move the proposal on to NIFA for final approval.**
- Approval of regional off-the-top budget for NE59 (Northeastern Regional Center for Rural Development; \$40,788)
  - Stephan Goetz has been the Director of NERCRD for many years.
  - The center has had a strong regional impact and is valued by NERA.
  - The budget request has been consistent for many years.
  - Rick reminded the group that “off-the-top funding” comes off the top of regional allocations of the Hatch Multistate Research Fund. Prior to the time an institution receives its allocation, off-the-top money is designated to support regional projects like NE59 and NE9, and National Research Support Projects (NRSPs). Each region supports a germplasm and rural development center.
  - **The MAC through Brad Hillman introduced a motion to approve the NE59 budget request. The motion was seconded by Jon Wraith and approved**

**unanimously. NERA will notify Gary Thompson and Stephan Goetz of the budget approval, and forward the figure on to NIFA.**

- Approval of regional off-the-top budget for NE9 (Regional Germplasm Center, Geneva; \$275,468)
    - This project is in year three of a five-year approval. The proposal was initially submitted with an escalating budget, but NERA decided to hold the project to a level amount of \$275,468 for each of the five years.
    - NERA has been supportive of this project, reflecting a great partnership with ARS and Cornell, both contributors to the effort.
    - **The MAC through Brad Hillman introduced a motion to approve the NE9 budget. The motion was seconded by Jon Wraith and approved unanimously. NERA will forward the OTT allocation figure o NIFA.**
  - Administrative Adviser Assignments:
    - NE1943: Biology, Ecology & Management of Emerging Disease Vectors, 10/2019 – 09/2024 [formerly Ted Andreadis] Mark Hutton – Maine, willing to serve.
    - NE1944: Management of the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug, 10/2019 – 09/2024 [formerly Ted Andreadis] Mark Hutton – Maine, willing to serve.
    - NE1727: Influence of Ovary, Uterus and Embryo on Pregnancy Success in Ruminants, 10/2017 – 09/2022 [formerly Gary Thompson] Dave Townson – UVM willing to serve.
    - NECC\_TEMP2001: Sustainable Farm Energy Production and Use, 10/2020 – 09/2025 [formerly Gary Thompson; Renewal of NECC1501.]
    - NE1701: Mycobacterial Diseases of Animals, 10/2017 – 09/2022 [formerly Gary Thompson.]
    - **The Administrative Adviser discussion was tabled for this meeting. NERA will assemble a list of projects that need AAs and circulate an electronic ballot to Directors for voting.**
5. NRSP Discussion – Fred Servello
- The NRSP Review Committee would like to gather comments from regional associations on items discussed at the annual NRSP RC meeting.
  - NRSP RC recommends implementing a strong statement requiring clear business model transition plans.
  - **Two major changes being proposed by the NRSP RC:**
    - **Approval of new NRSP Guidelines; reduced in length and much more definitive.**
    - **Creating two categories of NRSPs: “Capacity or Core” (ongoing) and “New and emerging competitive innovations” (with intent to transition off)**
  - Fred Servello provided a summary of NRSP discussion and decision items to NERA.
  - Generally the only “Capacity or Core” NRSPs are NRSP1 (NIMSS) and NRSP4 (The IR-4 Project), all others fall into “New and emerging competitive innovations”

- There is growing support nationally (and reflected in the deliberations of the NRSP RC) for strict requirement of funding transition plans. Conversations about transition off of OTT funds have been going on for over a decade. NERA is no longer the only region pushing back against ongoing NRSPs.
- **NERA will wait to hear from the NRSP RC to call for a vote on the two proposed changes listed above. Jon Wraith suggested that Rick and Fred draft a joint statement on behalf of the region on NERA's stance on these proposed changes.**

6. NERA Leadership in transition – Rick Rhodes, Carol Thornber

- Nomination of the slate of NERA officers FFY2021 (per NERA Rules of Operation)
  - Four members accepted nominations to serve on NERA Executive Committee including:
    - Jody Jellison (UMass), Outgoing Chair
    - Matt Wilson (WVU), Chair
    - Eric Wommack (Delaware), Incoming Chair
    - Mark Hutton (Maine), Officer-at-large
    - No additional nominations were received from the floor.
  - **A motion to approve this slate of NERA Officers was introduced by Carol Thornber, seconded by Brad Hillman, and approved unanimously. The officers listed above will serve as the NERA Executive Committee through the end of FFY2021.**
- NERA Committees
  - Multistate Activities Committee, need 2 new members (replace Gary Thompson and Brad Hillman).
  - **NERA committees discussion was tabled and voting will be conducted electronically.**
- ESCOP Committees
  - NRSP Review Committee (replace Fred Servello)
  - Diversity Catalyst Committee (replace Gary Thompson)
  - Northeast Regional Aquaculture Center Board of Directors (replace Fred Servello)
  - Budget and Legislative Committee (replace Sabine O'Hara and Jon Wraith)
  - Research Working Group (ad hoc group of NE regional reps [one director, one business/reporting manager] to work with other regional reps and NIFA/PARS on streamlining reporting)
  - **ESCOP committees discussion was tabled and voting will be conducted electronically.**

7. NERA Budget – Rick Rhodes and David Leibovitz

- NERA OED is proposing an FY21 budget similar to FY20:
  - No increases in institutional assessments.
  - No salary/fringe increases.
  - Reduction in overall operating expenses primarily reflected in:

- Travel reduction of \$10k.
- Decrease in meeting expenses due to the Ecosystem Services Symposium being delayed to November of 2021.
- Modest increase in telephone/teleconference budget to \$5k.
- Retention of full \$31k planning grants line.
- **Matt Wilson introduced a motion to approve the NERA FY21 budget proposal. The motion was seconded by Jason White and received unanimous approval.**

8. Development of a Northeast Agenda – Rick Rhodes

- Rick is working with Ali Mitchell to develop an op-ed piece about Northeast research and extension
- The Northeast Administrative Heads group (Deans) will be meeting on 6/11 (rescheduled to 6/25) to discuss the development of a Northeast Agenda to address research, extension, and academic programs.

9. Summary comments and adjournment – Carol Thornber

- Carol Thornber thanked the group for their participation and engagement with NERA during her time as chair.
- The group thanked all outgoing NERA Directors and Deans for their service: Jon Wraith (UNH), Brad Hillman (Rutgers), Bob Goodman (Rutgers), Carol Thornber (URI), and Fred Servello (Maine).

**The meeting adjourned at 2:52 pm.**