

# **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

**For the Recommendations  
Found in the**

## **Regional and National Experiment Station Associations Evaluation Task Force Report**

**Prepared  
by the  
Executive Directors**

**In response to a request from the Chair  
of the  
Experiment Station Section  
NASULGC**

### **Preamble**

The Executive Directors (EDs) take this opportunity to thank the members of the Regional and National Experiment Station Associations Evaluation Task Force, and the community of Experiment Station Directors, for their continued support and encouragement. We feel as a group that the generally strong endorsement of our organizations and our efforts to improve our products and services are appreciated. We recognize that more can be derived from these resources and the support provided to our regional and national associations. We are particularly appreciative of having the opportunity to propose some implementation activities for the 14 recommendations found in the Task Force's report.

### **Background**

During the past year (2000) a Task Force of SAES Directors representing the 5 regional associations of SAES and ARD Directors prepared a report containing 14 recommendations for addressing multiple opportunities for adding value to the products and services of their regional and national associations. Following presentation and discussion at the September '00 meeting of the Experiment Station Section in New Orleans, Louisiana, the Chair of ESS/ESCOP directed the five Executive Directors to prepare a report on options for implementing the 14 recommendations.

This report responds to that request using the structure provided by the 14 recommendations.

*1. Retain the current regional structure with the understanding that it is, and will continue to, undergo continuous evolution.*

**Response:** No action seems necessary at this time.

**Recommended Action:** ESCOP should continuously monitor the situation, and take action only when deemed appropriate.

*2. We must be very diligent in our use of all modern means of communication available to inform scientists and research administrators about research opportunities, new projects, new programs and funding opportunities.*

**Response:** Current activities in information technology seem, for the most part, adequate to the needs of the ESS community.

**Recommended Action:** Continued support should be given to the regional associations' and the national ESCOP home pages. ESCOP's leadership should request additional financial support from CSREES for the development of a national "paperless management system" for multi-state research activities. Follow-up on these multi-state research management opportunities should be given as a charge from the ESCOP chair to the National Partnership Coordinating Committee.

*3. Redouble the efforts of the ESCOP Partnerships Committee to emphasize strengthening and harmonizing the fundamental partnership with CSREES.*

**Response:** The planned February Partnership meeting should contribute to furthering this need.

**Recommended Action:** The ESS community should give full support to the February Partnership meeting, and follow-up that meeting with a directed action plan. Additionally, the EDs should be encouraged to visit quarterly with the CSREES Deputy Administrator for Partnerships, to foster excellent communication and joint planning.

*4. Continue to monitor assessments to assure regional associations remain cost effective and accountable to the membership.*

**Response:** Many directors have expressed interest in getting an annual report of assessments and outlays plus reserves. Although this recommendation refers only to the regional outlays, a comprehensive accounting of all national assessments and outlays seems appropriate to the needs of directors to stay informed, and willing to contribute to this collective budget. Making this information available in a national annual report seems reasonable.

**Recommended Action:** The Chair of ESCOP and ECOP should request NASULGC to provide an annual financial statement to the COP's, listing all sources, all expenses, and the current available balances for the national activities.

*5. Continue to manage the short-term dynamics to assure the continued healthy evolution and accountability of the regional associations through periodic (ca. 5 year intervals?) self-assessments.*

**Response:** This evaluation was the second in a series of seemingly valued assessments.

**Recommended Action:** ESCOP should plan to schedule another panel for an evaluation of the regional and national associations in 2005.

*6. Strengthen regional association capabilities and encourage the Executive Directors to be more proactive in identifying and developing initiatives of broad mutual benefit and to serve as advocates under the guidance and concurrence of (and with accountability to) the association membership.*

**Response:** The regional associations may choose to address this recommendation in individual ways. This plurality should be respected, and even encouraged.

**Recommended Action:** The Chair of ESCOP should communicate this recommendation to each regional association's Chair encouraging their Executive Committees to meet periodically to exchange information and collectively decide the issues that transcend regional boundaries.

*7. The national organization of 1862 State Agricultural Experiment Stations and 1890 Agricultural Research Directors should be strengthened, especially given the growing need for highly orchestrated accountable research that brings the sum of national capacity to bear on priority national issues.*

**Response:** The recent (1998) reorganization of ESCOP's core committees directly addressed this recommendation. The benefits of those structural changes are just now being assessed. It would seem to be premature at this time to make any additional changes to the structure of ESCOP. The September meeting of ESS and the SAES/ARD workshop have gone a long way to strengthen the national organization. However, an evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiencies gained might be in order given the recent criticism by NASULGC representative Sam Smith.

**Recommended Action:** The Chair should request the ESCOP Chair's Advisory Committee to discuss the pros and cons of the September meeting format and provide the Chair with a set of recommendations. This might be done as part of a future conference call, or as a separate conference call.

*8. NASULGC and ESS/ESCOP should work jointly to insure that agricultural research is represented at the "NASULGC table" to facilitate full integration of research with extension, academic and international programs when dealing with joint issues. One solution might be to create a more formal relationship between the Executive Directors and the NASULGC Staff.*

**Response:** The pending actions by the BoA may impact this recommendation, especially if it is decided to employ an "ED" for national coordination.

**Recommended Response:** ESCOP should stay fully informed on the impending decisions to be made by the BoA. Then, based on their actions, plan a strategy for linking the regional associations to NASULGC.

*9. Create a program committee of ESCOP to insure that the quality and content of the programs at the annual NASULGC meeting are relevant and important to ESS/ESCOP members.*

**Response:** This seems to be a modest proposal to address the alleged deficiencies of the annual NASULGC meeting agenda as far as content and time allotments are concerned.

**Recommended Action:** The Chair of ESCOP should charge the ESCOP Planning Committee to look into this matter, and provide ESCOP with recommendations for possible alternative approaches.

*10. Explore alternative approaches for facilitation and management of multi-state integrated activities.*

**Response:** Substantial progress has been made in defining multi-state research activities through the recently completed national Multi-state Research Guidelines. In contrast, some progress has been made in jointly planning and conducting functionally integrated activities. But this progress varies considerably among the regions. A study of what works and what does not might help facilitate the adoption of practices and procedures by all regions. Additionally, the Plan of Work Advisory Committee represents another opportunity to express interests in integrated multi-state activity.

**Recommended Action:** The Chair of ESCOP should request CSREES to host a facilitated, regionally-represented national meeting of ESCOP and ECOP leaders to exchange information on forming successful integrated activities. This might best be scheduled after the Plan of Work Advisory Committee's work is completed.

*11. Create a committee of ESCOP, ECOP and ACOP to make recommendations on additional collaborative functions to be addressed at the ESCOP-ECOP- CSREES Partnership Workshop in February 2001.*

**Response:** A request for suggested topics for this meeting has been distributed to the LGU community. ESCOP's Partnership Committee will presumably be directly involved in assessing those returns, and formulating the options.

**Recommended Action:** No action seems necessary at this time. When a list of meeting topics has been produced by the planners, the Chair of ESCOP should review it for content on functional collaborations.

*12. A comprehensive review of the possible functions by the regional and national associations is needed. These suggested functions should then be prioritized by the associations' membership, and the priority needs worked into plans for implementation.*

**Response:** A good start has been made on a list of regional association responsibilities. This list was prepared by the EDs for the review panel's use. Addition items for their associations' regional and national activities could supplement this list.

**Recommended Action:** The Chair of ESCOP should charge a small *ad hoc* committee of SAES and ARD directors working with the EDs to compile a comprehensive listing of regional and national responsibilities and activities with the purpose of better defining optimum work loads for ESCOP/regional support.

*13. Develop a new mechanism to link the regional associations at the national level and promote partnering with extension and federal agencies.*

**Response:** This is a complex issue in need of critical analysis and careful attention. The differences here are deep, and the histories are long term. The up-coming February partnership meeting with the COPs and CSREES may unearth some of the issues, and some follow-up may be productive.

**Recommended Action:** The Chair of ESCOP should ask CSREES to continue to monitor the situation and recommend to ESCOP activities that will build stronger functional integration and better multi-institutional collaborations. As a minimum, the EDs, through the National Multi-state Partnership Committee, should hold regular

meetings with the CSREES Administrator (perhaps coordinated with meetings with the Deputy Administrator per item #3 above).

*14. Critically assess alternative approaches for improving the relationship with ECOP.*

**Response:** We acknowledge the need for improved partnering with extension. Further study of this issue is warranted, however.

**Recommended Action:** The ESCOP Chair should charge program committee for the 2001 summer meeting of the COPs to consider this topic as the theme for the next meeting.

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10/27/00