

**ANALYSIS OF AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR ENHANCED OPERATION OF
THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS OF
AGRICULTURAL
EXPERIMENT STATIONS**

**A White Paper
On the Contributions of
Associations of
SAES/ARP Directors**

**Submitted to
National and Regional Associations of
State Agricultural Experiment Station and
Agricultural Research Program Directors¹**

August 2000

¹ Significant portions of this paper were based on a report by Neville Clarke [former Executive Director from the Southern Regional Association of SAES Directors] entitled “An Assessment of Current Function and Future Needs for the Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy” (March 27, 1996) which can be accessed at <http://www.escop.msstate.edu/archive/synthesis.htm>

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INTRODUCTION

It is appropriate, from time to time, to review and examine the structures and functions of the national and regional associations that service the managers of the Land Grant Universities, especially the “colleges of agriculture” (used herein as a general term for colleges, institutes, divisions and programs). Many factors are contributing to this exchange including:

- New requirements for implementing multistate and integrated activity provisions found in the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA 1998);
- Long-continuing and legitimate concerns for the effective and efficient use of resources nationally, regionally and locally; and,
- Organizational uncertainties derived from an institutional structure that has evolved over many years, and with much different and ever-changing expectations among stakeholders, managers and policymakers.

To address these and related topics, the Executive Directors (EDs) (listed at the end of the report) of the five regional associations of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations (SAES - which are primarily affiliated with the 1862 Land-Grant Universities) and Agricultural Research Program Directors (ARP - which are affiliated with the 1890 Land-Grant Institutions) developed this White Paper. Hereinafter, these institutions will be referred to as SAES/ARP unless otherwise noted. The paper’s intention is to:

- Explore some contemporary regional and national issues;
- Highlight our view of the current value-added aspects of the national and regional associations; and,
- Examine additional value-added products and services which might be provided to member institutions.

A second step in this self-assessment occurred as a request to each of the five regional associations’ leadership to appoint one director to serve as a panel of five reviewers (listed at the end of the report). The review panel was asked to evaluate the points contained herein and the additional activities that we suggest might be added to the mix of an association’s activities. The review panel was asked to report their findings to a meeting of SAES/ARP directors in New Orleans in late September 2000.

The response is presented in two sections. The first addresses issues and questions related to activities at the national level. The second section looks at the regional associations. In both cases, the panel asked the following questions:

- (1) Are the regional associations of agricultural experiment stations the appropriate mechanism for doing the collective business of the AESs?
- (2) If the answer to question #1 is no, what is a more effective mechanism, structure and/or organization?

- (3) If the answer to question #1 is yes, what should be done to assure that the regional associations add value to their current activities, roles and services?

In both cases we are aimed at not only explaining the value of the national and regional associations, but also at honestly attempting to identify approaches and activities to add even more value to current services. Finally, this is a work in progress. We encourage close scrutiny and discussion of the materials herein for the purposes of improving accuracy, clarity and value in representing the regional associations and Experiment Station Sections.

BACKGROUND

A Washington, DC trade association staffer once lamented...“You guys call a meeting of Ag research directors, and get great attendance. I call a meeting of environmental research directors, and hardly anyone comes. Why?”

The answer is simple. Agriculture (“agriculture” is used generally to also include related food, environmental and life sciences) research directors have a vested interest in formula funds as well as competitive grants, policy implications for the SAES mission and a historic responsibility for the national food system. In addition, a portion of the formula funds require regional and national program planning and development. And finally, the “agriculture system” is long standing, and federal formula funding acts as the “glue” to hold the national research network together. In contrast, environmental research directors get their Washington-derived funding from competitive grants, which does not necessarily require comprehensive program planning, collaboration, or joint operations. And their organization(s) does (do) not benefit from a historic “glue” binding it to common purpose.

In this section, the relationships of the national components of the associations that represent the SAES/ARP directors at the national level are explored. Additionally, their relationship to their partners and others are evaluated. Finally, some recommendations are offered along the way for improvements in efficiency, more cost effectiveness, and greater returns on investments. We, the Executive Directors of the regional associations and the review panel, also leave some of our own questions unanswered, because we do not know the answers. We are seeking additional input leading to national solutions.

History of the National System

The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) was formed in 1887 to represent primarily the agricultural research, extension and teaching interests of the Land Grant Universities. NASULGC has since evolved into an association that also represents the interests of the entire university system. Memberships are no longer exclusively LGUs, and university presidents are essentially the loci of recognized leadership of NASULGC.

More recently (1993), NASULGC was reorganized into a structure of Councils and Commissions, with agriculture (broadly defined) subsumed under a board structure. The functions of teaching, research (experiment station), extension and international programs are represented by their own sections, each with its own Committee on Organization and Policy (COP). This multi-layered structure has certain advantages, as well as several acknowledged drawbacks.

Contemporary Dynamics

The operations of NASULGC are funded by institutional dues and fees collected for services rendered (e.g. centralized organizational costs, meeting registration fees). It is hardly necessary to call attention to the major external and internal changes that are so dramatically affecting the SAES/ARPs. Similarly, there also seems to be ready agreement that there is room for improvement in the functions of Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy (ESCOP), in its service to the Experiment Station Section (ESS) and the function of the Section itself. However, the answers to the following questions to undergird positive change have less clear answers.

It is also important to emphasize that the issues examined herein are not of recent origin. They have evolved to the present level, especially over the past decade, but the issues have been addressed, at least in part, almost continuously. As evidence, the body of this paper is built around one delivered almost five years ago focused on the same central issues. During this decade of introspection and discussion, three conceptual questions have been repeatedly (but usually informally) examined, and without resolution:

1. Is there a consensus on what change is needed?
2. Do the additional benefits to SAES/ARPs and their stakeholders outweigh the added cost of these changes?
3. Are the leaders in the LGU system prepared to exercise the will to make the necessary changes?

Underlying Premises

ESCOP accepted in 1995 the following as premises for further analysis:

1. The overall goal is to continue to orient ESCOP activities so that the SAES/ARP can better serve the broadening public constituencies that benefit from the products of research and development.
2. A unique strength of the Land Grant Universities (LGU) is the intra- and inter-institutional, three-way linkages that occur among and between research, teaching and extension, even given their differing missions areas. Other academic institutions and federal agencies seek to emulate this successful relationship. There continues to be opportunity to build on this strength.

3. Armed with a contemporary vision statement and set of national goals for U.S. agriculture, there is clear benefit to individual SAES/ARPs (and the LGUs) in continuing to work with the federal system in organized ways. Efforts need to continue to influence policy and program direction for the food, agriculture and natural resource system, and for the research, extension, international and academic programs that underpin it.

If the second premise is accepted, then much of what is needed cannot be accomplished by ESCOP acting alone. Throughout the several discussions held by ESCOP and the Experiment Station Section, there was the recurring recognition of the growing dilemma that:

1. The next generation of national activities must be done in much closer cooperation among and within the mission areas of the LGUs, and among the LGUs with our federal partners.

2. Networking of the various System parts to the extent that shared decision making is uniformly adopted has thus far not routinely elicited meaningful mutual commitments, actions and results.

Situation Analysis

Before examining the function of ESCOP and the ESS and the relationships with other parts of the internal and external environment, it may be useful to set the context by considering a partial list of state, regional, and national factors that have led to the call for structural re-examination and possible structural changes:

1. Current federal and state budget pressures have built progressively, especially over the past two decades.

2. Unprecedented congressional actions to reform and downsize the federal government are occurring and will continue to place pressure on the system for the foreseeable future.

3. Expectations and competitive demands for resources are broadening for the LGUs while, concomitantly, resources to respond become progressively more limited.

4. The complexity of LGUs engagement at the federal level is increasing simultaneous with expectations for the LGUs to become more robust.

5. The methods of doing business at the national level, including the mandates to implement the Government Performance and Results Act and the Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (1998 AREERA) are a heavy load on institutions.

6. Science and technology, especially information technology and biotechnology, are catalyzing change at a blistering pace.

7. Limited administrative resources within the System to respond to the challenges at the national level may result in:

- a. Fewer administrators at both state and national levels;
- b. Increased inter- and intra-state demands on administrators; and,
- c. Shrinking even more the current limited involvement of the System's best leadership at the national level because of the relatively small portion of their total budget arising from federal formula funding.

8. Variable backgrounds, experiences, and commitments of individual ESCOP members, and the difficulty of sustaining ESCOP activities over a longer time frame -- the problem of too few doing the bulk of the work at the national level.

9. Congressional concern and expressed disillusionment about the System's ability to effectively set national priorities and implement programs in a timely fashion that are responsive to perceived stakeholder needs.

10. A growing need to enhance the SAES/ARP research visibility and credibility in the context of the overall federal science establishment. The emergence of the President's National Science and Technology Council and the recent activities of the House of Representatives Science Committee reemphasize this need.

11. Reorganization of USDA to establish CSREES with a major emphasis on linking the partnership programs at the strategy, program, and evaluation levels -- but with a limited institutional cognizance, coherence, and an unestablished track record.

12. Growing unevenness of administrative structure. In more than 30 LGUs the administrative head of agriculture also carries the title of director of the experiment station (in a few cases, the experiment station *per se* has been redefined and blended into broader organizations). The State Cooperative Extension Services, on the other hand, remain much more distinct and the numbers of administrative heads acting as director of both SAES/ARP and CES are fewer today than previously. In some states, the CES is not under the administrative head of agriculture. In a number of states, the administrative head does not have responsibility for resident instruction or international agriculture. The net result is that the CESs and the resident instruction functions have relatively more distinct organizational identities while the SAES/ARPs are being more rapidly blended into the broader food, agriculture and natural resource programs. There is an apparent calculated intent of some institutions to submerge the experiment station as an organizational entity into broader programs, which further clouds the interpretation of organizational structure by our stakeholders and policy makers. This institutional disparity contributes to the difficulty of integrating functions at the national and regional levels. Moreover, the CES is supported by county as well as federal and state funds, unlike the SAES/ARP System. Academic programs are supported only by state funds in

most cases. These differences in mission areas, administration, funding and culture add complexity to the idea of mutual decision-making.

The Leadership Issue

The lack of continuity in ESCOP leadership, with annual rotation of elected officers, is a serious concern. Also of concern is the possibility of variable quality of leadership, some of which can be attributed to the uneven administration across states (for example, in many states the associate director or equivalent is the chief administrative officer or chief operating officer with the administrative head carrying title of director and assuming some of the administrative duties). The limited term of elected officers relative to the national need is also a critical item in the effectiveness of the organization and the national representation of the SAES/ARPs.

The EDs of the regional SAES/ARP associations provide the primary continuity and that is augmented by the early selection of the Chair-Elect. But there is a serious disparity between the time needed and the time available for elected leadership to learn, adjust to, and be involved in, the rapidly expanding agendas of ESCOP and the Board on Agriculture. Too often, the term of leadership expires just as the leader begins to understand the agenda, processes, protocols and his/her role.

Professional societies have recognized this dilemma long ago and most now have a “permanent” chief executive officer (entitled executive director, usually) who speaks on behalf of the organization, often drawing heavily on corporate memory and working for/with a board of governors or directors that sets broad policy.

Members of the ESS discussed this as a possibility in some detail at the November 1995 meeting. The advantages of a stable national presence was appealing to some, but the mechanism for implementation within the present complex NASULGC environment was neither obvious nor attractive. Consequently, the idea was never subjected to formal debate.

AESOP Enterprises, Ltd., supported by ECOP and ESCOP assessments, has evolved to play a vital role as an advocate for the entire System. It has institutional credibility with all parts of the System and growing external credibility on the Hill and with the Administration. The continuing health and vigor of this relationship is critical to the effectiveness of overall leadership within the System.

Critical National Questions

ESCOP has previously examined a series of very fundamental questions that seemed appropriate for this self-assessment. The questions and answers developed in the several workshops are presented in this section.

1. What is the LGU “System”? Is it truly a system or a network of individual state-oriented institutions or simply a loose confederation of institutional parts that have a mutual and common agenda at the national level?

We view the System as a network of individual state institutions that have a common agenda at the national level. The network is multi-layered. At the state level functions are grouped in varying ways that are mutually interactive and supportive. At the regional level, the network is manifest in regional associations of related traditional institutional entities, including Experiment Stations, Cooperative Extension, Academic Programs, International Programs and Administrative Heads. There are active and interactive efforts, some better developed than others, to bring the parts of the network (System) closer together at the regional level. We view the most highly-developed regional organization to be the Associations of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors. Regional-to-national linkages are in place for all key parts of the network (System).

*2. What do the following institutional labels **really** mean?*

a. SAES/ARP System

The SAES/ARP System is an interactive network of institutions that deals with agricultural research in Land Grant Universities. Today, most of these research and development-oriented functional units are classified organizationally under the traditional label of State Agricultural Experiment Stations, although there is a well-established trend towards incorporating these formerly distinctive but now overlapping units of agriculture programs into a blend of the overall mission of research, extension, and higher education. Joint research/extension, and research/teaching appointments foster the integration of the missions. (Some stakeholders and even system participants view integrating as “homogenizing” of the mission areas, which causes concern. There is broad agreement that the focused mission areas for teaching, for research and for extension are as relevant as ever.)

The Experiment Station Section is the organizational unit of NASULGC that represents the SAES/ARPs. The Executive Committee of this group is ESCOP, which acts on behalf of the SAES/ARPs in matters relating to national policy. The SAES/ARP strategic research plan, developed jointly with USDA, is illustrative of the common agenda that transcends states and regions and identifies a set of national needs and opportunities common to the network.

Individual SAES/ARPs active in the national network (and all are, to a greater or lesser extent) benefit from the continuing advocacy for federal funds, cooperative research activities which enhance efficiency, and institutional feedback from the national level on general research agendas and on common administrative and leadership experiences.

b. LGU System

The LGU System represents a loose confederation of institutions having similar origins, but with substantially different evolutionary backgrounds and current organizational contexts. This has resulted in diverse institutional arrangements with regard to current configurations, missions, and resource bases. While common functions for agricultural research, extension, academic programs and international programs are fairly well understood, the organizational arrangements under which they operate vary considerably-- to the extent of causing some confusion, even misconception, among some stakeholders and policy makers.

The layers of activities within the LGUs, relative to the ESCOP agenda include those of the overall university CEO and upper administration of the university, the Administrative Heads Section (a fairly diverse group as a result of varying local organizational framework) with the councils and commissions, as mentioned above.

c. NASULGC

As viewed from both state and national levels, the LGUs have a tradition of working for the people, solving practical problems, providing both undergraduate and graduate education to degree-seeking students, and continuing education to the general population. The partnership arrangement discussed below between state and federal governments to meet these objectives is the traditional basis for the national focus of the LGUs. NASULGC provides the current institutional framework for the LGU network at the national level through the functional framework representing the LGU hierarchy of activities in the matrix formed by the Councils and Commissions.

Dr. Rodney Foil's (former Vice President for Agriculture at Mississippi State University) presentation to the Joint Session of ESCOP and ECOP in July 1995 provided a contemporary view of relationships at the Board on Agriculture level. He noted that the Board brings together related functions in a neutral forum and offers the opportunity for the System to define itself and operate across functional lines at the policy level. He noted the continuing importance of strong COPs to assure implementation at the mission level. He also suggested that the role of the Administrative Heads Section was evolving to include helping to establish policies and interacting with national-level stakeholders. He suggested avoiding attempts to recreate institutional frameworks at the national level which emulate the individual university, especially given (or perhaps because of) the variation previously mentioned, but to bring together functional units that are meaningful at the national level.

d. The State-Federal Partnership with USDA

This relationship of the LGUs to CSREES (or what is called the Federal-State Partnership) is still evolving. Taken broadly, the partnership has roots in founding

legislation which recognized that agricultural research and extension are inherently site-specific and that (as stated by Deputy Secretary Romminger) national problems and opportunities are addressed at the local level, so that “one size does not fit all.” Cost sharing is an inherent part of the partnership. As the GPRA and AREERA Plan of Work processes develop, and the current budget environment emerges, it becomes more important to consider defining the partners relative to the resources they bring to the table. As the partnership agency was formed, and with the new commitments that have been stated by the Undersecretary for REE, the shared decision making within this partnership should be made by those who have responsibility for the resources (federal and state) that come to the partnership.

3. How should we define the Term “Partnership”?

The term “partnership” is loosely used in the vernacular of our shared community to mean “working together.” There is general agreement, however, that the notion of partnerships should, and will, evolve into shared goals, decision making, mission definition and resource investments. Included within this more general definition are a set of relationships, based on common mission and goals and on shared resources that are defined more specifically. In examining the SAES/ARP function, we need to more clearly define those partnerships, current and anticipated, that have specific meaning in the more formal context.

a. Within the LGUs

This term is most often used to define the more common three-way relationship among traditional research, extension and teaching functions. The area of international programs generally is newer and generally transcends the other three. There is a growing relationship between programs in “colleges of agriculture”² and other parts of the broad university to meet the needs of an increasingly complex set of customers.

b. Between parts of the LGUs and USDA

The definition of this relationship is taking on increased importance in the new USDA organization. As discussed above, one dimension of the definition could, and probably should, be the sharing of resources both in terms of human and pecuniary resources. This can be the formal sharing of funds or the in-kind sharing of human and physical resources. The emerging debate about the partnership will probably center on the commitment to using state matching funds for addressing national goals through multistate research activities. Also at issue is how much the state partners will actually be involved in upper-level decision

² *“Colleges of Agriculture” is used in the generic sense understanding the variability in structure mentioned earlier with contexts such as “Division,” “Program” and “Institute” used at some universities.*

making, as opposed to providing advice to the Department (USDA-CSREES). The reorganization of CSREES must continue to assure that this agency truly partners with the SAES/ARPs and does not assume a function of attempting to administer to the partners.

c. What must institutions bring to the table to be classified as a partner?

This is an ongoing debate about what needs to be brought to the table to be considered as a partner. There is a substantial upside to defining cooperative efforts as partnerships in that it brings related activities into a more explicit relationship. It should, in our view, include joint planning, sharing of resources, and common assessment of impact. However, it may be to the advantage of the SAES/ARPs and their parent institution to more clearly distinguish within this more general framework a very specific meaning of partnership in terms of mutual commitments to use separate resources that address common problems and opportunities. And, these should be expected to vary, given the variable organizational structures and goals of the partners - common themes will have to be sought.

4. Is the System still needed in its present form?

In our view, relationships that bring together the network of state institutions, even given the organizational variation, with common national agendas clearly are still needed, perhaps more today than ever before. The present form of the nodes or focal points in the network is evolving, some more rapidly than others are. The “new CSREES” is a major institutional change, the import of which has probably not yet been fully appreciated. Something like the COPs and something like the BOA will continue to be needed, but comprehensive discussions will also be needed to seek the optimal form. The form and direction of these institutions should be a key issue for the BOA. Terry Nipp has suggested that some very substantial recommitment to national affairs and focus is needed within this amorphous being we call “the System,” if we are going to survive and prosper in the new federal science environment. And the choice is not ours –we not only must adapt, but we must begin to provide solid leadership in the ever-changing environment in which we are expected to compete.

5. Should the System be redefined to better identify state interests that converge at the national level?

NASULGC represents the interests of state universities and land grant colleges over the entire landscape. A portion of the funding for the agriculture and natural resources functions comes from an overall institutional assessment. For other non-SAES/ARP functions, an incremental assessment of agriculture programs partly supports added NASULGC staff who act on behalf of COPs and other specific entities. AESOP

Enterprises, Ltd. is funded through an additional assessment of SAES/ARPs and CESs administered through NASULGC.

Consideration was once given to the establishment of a full-time position as associate director for research on the NASULGC staff. Previously, the Executive Vice-Chair of ESCOP served this role as an additional assignment (which further contributed to the discontinuity previously discussed). But several factors have contributed to lack of participation, the greatest among these being accepted fully as a member of the NASULGC staff.

The positive side of having such a research-representative position at NASULGC would be the day-to-day coupling with NASULGC. The down side is the incremental cost of an additional person, which would have to come at least partially from an additional assessment (or from some mutually agreed upon redirection of resources and reorganization of the SAES structure). Related discussions among some administrative heads have focused on assessments in general but especially on those to NASULGC relative to value returned. This discussion to this point has weighed negatively on the idea of an associate director on the NASULGC staff. The ESS (and ESCOP) made the conscious decision several years ago, for various reasons, to decouple from the annual NASULGC meeting. Instead, the ESS has held an annual meeting in early fall to conduct its business. These have been very successful.

6. Is the Board on Agriculture converging on a workable model of engagement of the various parts? Can controversial decisions be made in a timely way?

The following notes from a presentation made by Dr. Rodney Foil to the joint meeting of ESCOP and ECOP in July 1995 reflect the current thinking on this question.

Role of the BOA:

The Board on Agriculture (BOA) (formerly known as the Division of Agriculture) has a limited history in comparison to the sections and COPs. More recently, the BOA has defined a role that seems to work at the outset and may continue to serve the system well. The current image of this role includes:

a. Representational Responsibilities: A body which can act on behalf of all parts of the university side of the state-federal partnership. It includes representation from all parts of the family. Unfortunately the NASULGC Rules of Operation presently define the BOA membership and in a way that omits Natural Resources, although it does include forestry.

b. Consensus Building: The BOA is the only place where broad consensus can be developed and maintained. While a consensus between ESCOP and ECOP (as well as ACOP and ICOP) is very important, that consensus must be considered a part of the whole.

c. Continuity: The BOA provides at least some level of ‘corporate memory,’ as rapid turnovers of various participants continue to occur.

d. Transcending the Issues: The BOA is an entity that can act on behalf of the entire system when issues are transcending. Examples are: the 1993 reorganization of USDA; the development of recommendations for the annual Federal budget; and the quinquennial Farm Bill engagement. (In our view, the “day to day” engagements are becoming even more important than when these observations were made 5 years ago).

e. Stakeholder Relations: Under leadership of the Administrative Heads Section (AHS), all parts have a role in stakeholder relationships at the national level. The expectations of CARET to become more conversant (perhaps even more-hands on) with, and operative as direct advocates for the system components is growing both within the System components and with CARET.

Role of Administrative Heads:

The AHS provides:

- a. Overall administrative leadership at the national level.
- b. Broad problem identification and opportunity recognition that the LGU community should value, in our view, should be a primary role of the administrative heads. This is helpful to the collective community to pick those things about which consensus is possible -- things that make a difference. (We admit, however, that the iterative process from the AHS to the COPs should be strengthened).
- c. A voice to call players to the table when needed; for example, to complete the role in #1 above). Success or failure usually depends on who calls the meeting. If the AHS call the meeting, it is perceived as a level playing field with appropriate care that it is not simply an act of “command and control.”
- d. A bridge for resolving divisiveness caused by the varying desired strategies and tactics of the research, extension, academic programs, international programs and other functional players.
- e. Initiative for maintaining the various overall national advocacy functions, such as CARET, but with modulated input from all BOA components.

Relationships with CFERR:

The recent creation by NASULGC of Councils and Commissions and their interrelationships introduces another dimension of complexity to our community. Membership on these councils and commissions ranges from department heads to deans. The BOA (and likewise ESCOP) is probably not investing enough energy in CFERR and vice-versa. [Please note the intent of CFERR to form a budget committee.]

7. What is the optimum set of operating rules to get the best return on investments from the LGU association expenditures made at the national level? (Setting the “rules of the road.”)

ESCOP must have active representation in the debate within NASULGC that relates to staffing for agriculture if that debate truly becomes substantive. There is also an overarching need to simplify decision making and to reduce the bureaucracy within NASULGC. As noted elsewhere, part of the overall evaluation of options should include consideration of whether a separate institutional arrangement for the BOA would be advisable. In our view, this latter issue is among the most pressing for the system.

8. Does the present System impose a “lowest common denominator” on the participants - where institutional initiatives the System undertakes are limited to those in which all parties can participate and benefit equally? (Within System)

Consensus seeking is an appropriate and inevitable part of the process of building strategies, budget proposals, and programs for the BOA. There are components of each, given mission area differences for the parts of the family, which fall into the categories of “yours, mine, and ours” – there always have been and should be. The System seems to increasingly face a “net-sums” game in which the total budget or budget request is finite and new or different components cause redirection of resources from existing programs. This, of course, exacerbates any existing competitive spirit. In previous budget-building experiences with the BOA, there was an understandable tendency to assure that there was “something for everybody.” The resulting proposals, it has been said, become too multifaceted, too ponderous, and only of limited use in decision making by the Congress or the Administration. Framed another way, they are too disaggregated to engender confidence that the “system can deliver.” There have been examples from recent history in which major initiatives have been undertaken which benefit mainly one part of the family; Youth at Risk and the National Research Initiative are examples. But these are established programs. There have been recent occasions in which progress has been limited by a lack of early agreement on definition and scope of new programs which could benefit the entire family in serving our constituents. In the present environment, it is expected that the situation potentially will become more contentious. New efforts to develop working ground-rules and better understanding among the system parts will be needed.

9. How can the SAES/ARPs (and the LGUs) create a “partnership” relationship with other agencies of federal government that sponsor or conduct research contributing to the food, agriculture and natural resource agenda? (From the System to the Partners)

The approach the Environmental Affairs Subcommittee is using to engage EPA in a partnership (aka SUNEI) could be expanded to other topic areas. This SUNEI model could be useful for developing broader relationships with federal funding agencies involving more than just environmental research (e.g., food safety, genomics). Again, this approach would likely demand more resources or redirection of current resources and/or a different administrative approach than has been employed in the past.

CSREES states an intent to take more seriously their potential role as brokers and facilitators for SAES/ARP research that is related to other federal agencies, including the action agencies within USDA.

10. Is NASULGC the organizational entity to best represent the food, agriculture and natural resources system of the LGUs in the next generation?

Any service entity should prosper in proportion to the values it adds to the organization(s) it serves. The ESCOP community is nearly unanimous in agreeing that NASULGC is not meeting current needs and that the prognosis for change is not positive. And, there is a general feeling that an effective national entity is sorely needed. Some believe that a revised and revitalized NASULGC could be the most readily available vehicle but, lacking that, believe that a reorganized approach by the SAAESs is dictated (at least for the mid-term).

11. Should the SAES/ARPs and/or the Board on Agriculture meet separately from the annual meeting of NASULGC, where there is increasing competition for meeting time?

This could be viewed by NASULGC as simply mechanics but should not be trivialized. There are a growing number of SAES/ARP directors who do not feel the other parts of the NASULGC annual meeting are sufficiently interesting or relevant to them to justify the time and expense of attending the annual NASULGC meeting. The need to have a more focused and in-depth relationship between the component parts of the community seems to be growing. The annual meeting of the SAES/ARP directors (or operational equivalents) seems to be progressively satisfying that need.

Actions Needed to Improve ESCOP

ESCOP has considered its Executive Committee's recommendations for possible actions that would strengthen ESCOP as the action vehicle for the Experiment Station Section. The recommended actions in light of evolving changes are:

1. Ongoing Assessment of Needs and Function

ESCOP was totally reorganized in 1998. Committee structures, charges, and functions hopefully now better serve the needs of the members, and align better with the other parts of the Board on Agriculture. A re-examination of the key ESCOP subcommittee

functions now needs to be undertaken to verify that the reorganization has resulted in the desired outcomes.

2. Relationship with Cooperative Extension

The main goal of the Joint ESCOP-ECOP Summer Sessions has been to seek real and meaningful commitments to joint actions between ESCOP and ECOP at the grassroots levels. There is good evidence from some of these efforts that a more meaningful mutual commitment to mutual action has emerged. ESCOP should be strong in its support of the follow-on action plans.

There is a long recognized need to develop a short-term action plan to harmonize the strategic plans of ESCOP and ECOP. ESCOP recognizes the merit of continuing initially separate research planning to ensure precision and focus, but it is necessary that these separate plans be linked to Extension, Academic Programs and International Program plans both within the NASULGC structure and with the relevant USDA agencies.

Thus, it is recommended that ESCOP and ECOP expand the recent list of joint task force activities (e.g., GMOs, Food Safety) to include an effort to harmonize the strategic plans of the two committees and link this to the GPRA process. It is further recommended that ESCOP, ACOP, ECOP and ICOP create a formal joint planning committee, under the auspices of the Board on Agriculture. The ESCOP Planning Committee could represent ESCOP and the Strategic Planning Council could represent ECOP interests in providing leadership for this effort.

3. Farm Bill

ESCOP should continue its active role, with other NASULGC players, in revising the Farm Bill to:

- Enhance organizational relationships and formal communication lines with USDA.
- Streamline and restructure government organizations.
- Define methods to establish priorities, and credibly deal with accountability (*see joint planning recommendation above*).
- Establish more effective methods of separately dealing with partners and stakeholders, including more formal relationships with CARET under the auspices of the Board on Agriculture.

4. Accountability and Credibility

a. Develop quantitative assessment methods. The ability to make credible assessments of the impact of research is severely limited by lack of established quantitative procedures for estimating the economic, social, and environmental benefits of research, especially on the long-term. Other federal agencies such as NIH have developed the capability to generate this kind of information and there

is a demonstrated pay-off in using such data as part of effective advocacy for funding. The necessity of developing such capability is recognized in the AREERA of 1998 but has yet to evolve with constructive debate.

It is recommended that a System-wide partnership decision be made to commit sufficient resources to the development of quantitative assessment methods to ensure a timely delivery of this capability. This is a component of the larger need, which is described in succeeding recommendations. This might be with a series of regional projects in concert with extension, academic programs and international programs or a National Research Support Project (NRSP).

b. Develop a management strategy and information management system to report research outcomes for policy and decision-makers. Congress and the federal executive branch are calling for clear definition, outcome-oriented research. Clearly, they want to be able to determine allocations based on successful performance in meeting high-priority needs. The CRIS provides some but not all information needed to meet these needs. These management information needs must be defined, and the expectations for reporting clearly stated. A management information system (MIS) using modern hardware and software is needed to collect and analyze information coming from multiple sources and varying levels of specificity. The ideal MIS would provide information that would satisfy both state and federal needs³.

There is an urgent need to expedite development of this kind of MIS. Cost sharing between the USDA and its partners may be a necessity for making this happen in a constrained-resource environment.

c. Establish a firm and visible relationship between the SAES/ARP-USDA strategic research plan and the GPRA process. CSREES is developing an implementation plan for GPRA and is scheduled to deliver their first accomplishments report sometime soon. There are ongoing discussions with the LGU system about the development report and the extent of the involvement of LGU partners in specific reporting efforts. The ESCOP response to proposals for GPRA implementation has stated a firm commitment to the need for an obvious and visible relationship between the current SAES/ARP-USDA Strategic Research Plan and the goals of the GPRA five-year budget strategy. To assure that this linkage occurs most effectively, some individuals in the SAES/ARP community have been urging ESCOP to adopt the following principles in further discussions with CSREES and the Office of the REE Undersecretary:

1. Apply the available information management technologies for state-of-the-art services, and link to the individual states.

³ **Note: The planned USDA Research, Education and Economics Information System (REEIS) will not, by its current design, meet this need. REEIS will be a software platform to link existing databases only.**

2. Recognize that GPRA is one, and perhaps not the major, effort that is needed to address the need for more definitive impact assessment and accountability mechanisms.
3. Recognize the need to integrate the SAES/ARP-USDA strategy with Extension , International Programs and Academic Programs in the GPRA five-year budget planing.
4. Ensure that the GPRA goals, indicators, and methods for performance assessment are the same for the SAES/ARPs and ARS.
5. Develop improved communication and commitment from our stakeholders.

ESCOP recognizes the need to undertake a broad initiative to improve communication with its stakeholders and to develop a stronger commitment from these representatives in advocating for federal funding. A more effective coupling of users to the strategic planning process is one immediate need. Intuitively, we believe that the user groups desire closer working roles in research planning. ESCOP recognizes a growing need to approach stakeholders on behalf of the overall System, and looks to the leadership of the Administrative Heads Section to assure a continued balanced approach to our common stakeholders. Program advocacy can be greatly strengthened by familiarizing our advocates with the programs and individuals who perform the research. (see also other planning/management recommendations herein).

5. Workshops for SAES/ARP Directors

ESCOP is conducting a workshop for ESS members annually. The workshops help to define the goals, functions and expectations of experiment station directors and ESCOP members to meet the research mission.

6. Relationships with Professional Societies

Professional societies are the entry point to science policy at the faculty level. They set science quality standards and have a major influence on the general science agenda and are not under direct institutional controls. Increasingly, these organizations have effective presence at the national level and influence both policy and funding decisions. Better linkages with these organizations would improve the image of ESCOP and bring the agendas closer together. If two-way communication produces a better consensus on the research agenda, this could be manifest in a modification of the academic reward system and encourage and recognize such activities as interdisciplinary research within the overall university community. This engagement can and should occur at both the institutional and national level. Special short-term emphasis should be placed on CoFARM and CAST engagements of their member professional societies, as they examine strategies for acting as agents of change in the LGUs.

7. More Effective Interactions within NASULGC

As previously noted, much of what is needed to improve the image for and support of the SAES/ARPs at the national level requires joint efforts with members of the NASULGC family (either within or separate from NASULGC) and the agencies of federal government, especially CSREES.

1. CFERR

NASULGC is committed to placing increasing emphasis on the broader relationships exemplified by CFERR. ESCOP has not invested heavily in this relationship. Yet CFERR states its intention to develop its own budget recommendations and other inputs to the federal system. A re-examination of the need for, and the appropriate mechanism to, engage this broader group is needed immediately.

2. Participating Commissions

Forestry, Veterinary Medicine, Home Economics, and the 1890 Institutions are increasing their identity and national presence, but still remain closely linked at the COPs and BOA. Structure and methods to ensure a continuing consensus on issues of joint concern and to provide equitable representation of these groups within the various levels of federal engagement should be considered.

3. Extension Committee on Organization and Policy

As noted above, the need is obvious for a hand-in-glove relationship with ECOP, as stated by both ESCOP and those advocating and funding our efforts. A statement was once made during an ESCOP Executive Committee meeting which sums up the problem: "We get along well with Extension at the national level, but we don't really work together." A past joint meeting put this issue squarely on the table. It is hoped that the commitment to mutual efforts eventually will occur. Resolving differences and solidifying working bridges between extension and research at local and regional levels will enhance national partnering.

4. Academic Programs

In many ways, particularly at the state level, the relationship between experiment stations and academic programs has a rich tradition of being close, especially in regard to joint faculty appointments and the influence of the research agenda on graduate education. The relationship is less close at the national level. The COPS should continue to build better bridges, such as has occurred with the joint ESCOP/ACOP leadership development course.

5. International Programs

It would seem that international programs will continue to have a matrical relationship with other programs in agriculture. Their agenda is broadening to

include engagement with developed and developing countries and is moving to include mainstream academic (both undergraduate and graduate), research, and extension programs that enhance global competitiveness for U.S. agriculture. This should provide the educated citizens needed to conduct agricultural operations in the global village. While U.S. funding for international agricultural activities is threatened, new opportunities are emerging with the CGIAR and its international centers, which have a growing mandate from their donors to engage in mutually beneficial activities with the institutions of developed countries. ESCOP, perhaps as part of the broader BOA engagement, could benefit from a re-examination of their relationship at the national level with ICOP. This is especially true as International Programs is in a position to broker research efforts at both the local and national levels.

6. Optimizing the Structure and Function of National Activities on Behalf of the LGUs

It has been questioned as to whether a fundamentally different alternative is needed to meet future needs of the BOA and its constituent parts in planning, budgeting, and advocacy. These growing concerns, it is recommended that ESCOP continue its assessment of options and alternatives considered relative to the following key points:

- a. Consider** the complexity of the overall NASULGC structure in terms of effectiveness of decision making and product delivered; and, the apparent diminishing role of the ESS in that complex matrix.
- b. Recommend** that the BOA consider fundamentally different operational structures.
- c. Consider** the possible need to develop more effective interim methods for ESCOP to represent the SAES/ARPs, as structural adjustments are considered in the broader LGU community.
- d. Encourage** the redefinition of AESOP's role and scope, recognizing its major current role in advocacy for the System⁴.
- e. Address** the concern being expressed by many on the lagging capacity and will of the members of the System to respond to the new challenges of Washington today.
- f. Recommend** that ESCOP and ECOP (perhaps through the BOA) expand on the earlier effort for congressional liaison building to include a “crash course” on national affairs for all directors that would include dealing

⁴ It is important to remember that both SAES/ARP and CES pay assessments jointly to AESOP.

with legislative and administrative affairs and with university relations at the national level.

REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The second component of the SAES/ARP system is organized by region, for presumable historical reasons (see next section). This may or may not be an effective and efficient organization, given the alternatives. The following section looks at that structure, evaluates some alternatives, and makes some recommendations for improved added values from participating institutions.

History of Regional Associations

In 1946 Congress required each State Agricultural Experiment Station to commit 25% of its Federal Formula funds (without requiring a state match) to a Regional Research program (Section 9 of Title I of the Research and Marketing Act of 1946)⁵. Through this Act a Regional Research Fund was created as a set-aside separate fund, to be managed by the eligible stations. The regions were defined by the existing interstate cooperative projects that centered around the Bankhead-Jones regional laboratories. These, in turn, “relied on the four existing regional associations of directors to plan and supervise the investigations.” This regional structure has remained largely unchanged since the beginning of the Regional Research program (the addition of the 1890 institutions as full partners and as the “fifth region” being a recent and significant change), while some minor changes in state alignments have occurred.

For the first 20 years the SAES/ARP side of the Regional Research program was managed mostly through committee work, with little organizational support. In the late 1960s a decision was made to employ Directors at Large (DALs) to provide direct management support. According to N. A. Kerr (1987⁶) what was never adequately resolved was the actual authority of the DAL; were they to be “super directors” with actual management authority or were they to be support staff hired to carry out the decisions of the association’s membership (or some blend of the two roles)?

After another 20-year period the title of the DAL was changed to the title of Executive Director (ED). The responsibilities of the ED remained virtually unchanged from that of the DAL, i.e., not exactly defined. Thus, the role of the ED has evolved to that of one providing programmatic and policy support through facilitation and limited representational authority. Considerable variation appears to continue to exist in the expectations of directors for both their association and for the ED. (Please see Appendix 1 for a more detailed treatment of these topics.)

⁵ Kerr, Norwood Allen. 1987. “The Legacy: A Centennial history of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations”. Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Missouri-Columbia. 319 pps.

⁶ Kerr, N. A. (loc. cit.)

Parallel organizational evolution of extension's multistate program support did not occur. This seems to have occurred for the following reasons:

- No federal requirements for multistate activities were ever placed on extension (at least until the 1998 AREERA); and,
- The organization of extension activities by programs was less suitable for regionalization (whereas research has long been organized by projects with a regional flavor).

However, with the passage of AREERA 1998, extension now has multistate and integrated activity requirements, similar to research, for their formula funds. And, increasingly, extension specialists participate in regional activities (esp. IEGs, Task Forces and Conferences).

Regional Organization Effectiveness

The U.S. Multistate Research Program is considered to be an exemplary model for organizing multi-institutional research collaborations. The fundamental characteristic of the regional associations seems to lie in their added-value products and services provided directly to member states and to participating scientists. Through the support of the EDs, the regional association can efficiently identify common interests for collaboration, organize research and other activities, report actual expenditures, and summarize accomplishments. Additionally, the EDs serve as representatives of the region to national activities, including ESCOP and its committees. Absent the EDs and the regional associations, these duties would revert to individual SAES/ARP directors (which presumably would cause reversion to the old committee system). A recent indicator of the value of the regional ED is that the same structure is under consideration by one of the regional extension organizations. In another region, extension and academic programs have agreed to jointly share the ED with the research organization. But what other value-added activities are provided through the regional associations? And how might those activities be organized as institution(s)? These two questions represent the theme of the rest of this White Paper.

Form Follows Function

The organization of this section assumes that form (i.e., organizational structure) should follow the intended functions of that association. To that end, the EDs have inventoried our present regional and related national functions and reflected on what additional functions might be assumed by the regional association that would add value to the activities of the member directors and their institutions. The following categories were created to classify functions:

- Program management
- Science advocacy
- Functional partnerships

- Multidisciplinary efforts
- Encouraging integrated activities
- Fostering outreach
- Advisory activities
- Organizational support
- Education and training
- Meeting facilitation
- Gap filling

Program Management

Current activities. The regional associations of SAES/ARP directors have historically provided the management insight on the policies and procedures useful for the administration of the multistate research portfolio. Presently, the regional associations are developing national guidelines for multistate research to reflect the requirements of the 1998 AREERA. Additionally, to accommodate important regional differences, each regional association is developing their own region-specific supplements to the guidelines. This could have occurred only with the activities of regional associations.

Originally supported by the DALs, the USDA's Current Research Information System (CRIS) is now an internal function that allows for the characterization of the various research inputs. This procedural tradition continues with current plans to convert the regional association's record-keeping responsibilities to one of paperless management, to be mediated on the World Wide Web. This will strongly support the historical responsibilities of the regional associations' offices as the location of record for primary documentation of multistate research activities. This has evolved into sophisticated home pages, databases, and information-relay services. This helps SAES/ARP directors certify their station's compliance with federal requirements and helps them comply with state management requirements as well.

Regional associations provide in-depth analyses of research outlays with special reference to multistate expenditures.

The EDs assist the associations in the management of the research project portfolio by direct contributions and indirect assistance to regional activities through the administrative advisors.

Possible additional activities. Great potential exists for significantly increasing the role of regional associations in facilitating more integrated activities. In some regions the associations are forming partnerships with their extension counterparts, providing encouragement that integrated regional organizations might be possible for managing our integrated multistate research and extension activities.

The adoption of the proposed SAES-422 reporting form will permit the regional associations and their CSREES partner to be more informed on the progress of individual multistate activities. Moreover, the SAES-422 will permit greatly improved

documentation of accomplishments, especially with measurable impacts that will enhance our public image through accountability.

Science Advocacy

Current activities. Presently, the regional associations advocate for science indirectly through CARET (a creature of the administrative heads) and directly through AESOP Enterprises, Ltd. The EDs support this network through interactions, but no organized formal program for advocacy exists. The singular exception to this observation is the SUNEI effort, which is funded by SAES contributions, sanctioned by ESCOP, and hosted by the NE regional association, through the University of Maryland. Additionally, the NE regional association has hosted a NE Food Safety activity for the NE AHS which is in some ways both advocacy and support services for research faculty in the region.

The newly formed ESCOP core committee on Advocacy and Marketing is addressing this question. It is not known at this time what role the regional associations may plan in future advocacy efforts.

Possible additional activities. Some possible regional association sponsored advocacy activities are:

- Field day events for congressional members and their staff, with an emphasis on multistate research accomplishments (*sensu* Jim Carlson)⁷.
- Host congressional breakfasts for the agricultural caucus.
- Greater interaction with and support for CARET representatives.
- Working with ECOP's lay leaders.
- Secondment of staff to AESOP Enterprises, Ltd. (e.g., SUNEI coordinator).
- Secondment of staff to federal agencies.
- More direct links to CoFARM and other organizational derivatives of the professional societies.

Functional Partnerships

Current activities. The regional associations are the primary points of contact for the federal-state partnership (i.e., with CSREES) in agricultural research. This partnership relationship supports the organization of multistate research activities, and more recently activities that are integrated with extension. These collaborative activities are coordinated through a partnership committee, with membership from the regional associations and CSREES' Partnership Office.

⁷ This is already done in many states or at regional meetings, but needs to be expanded upon.

Much of the above activity is derived from requirements found in the 1998 AREERA, as administered through CSREES. The regional associations facilitate this compliance while adding value through activities specifically planned to provide synergism.

Possible additional activities. There has been discussion on the desirability of redefining the federal-state partnership to include appropriate federal agencies beyond CSREES as partners in agricultural research. This might best be organized through the regional associations (where ARS already participates), if not through the collective national association (i.e., ESCOP). How might the regional labs of EPA and DOE be better partners? Should the regional associations be preparing MOUs with selected federal labs? Would this be a more successful strategy for engaging these potential partners? Should federal (beyond ARS) and state labs be added to the membership of selected multistate research projects?

Multidisciplinary Efforts

Current activities. Considerable multidisciplinary activity currently exists within the regional portfolios. Documenting this effort has become the responsibility of the regional associations.

Possible additional activities. There is still a need for more interdisciplinary activities (and that are more highly refined) that have greater involvement of the social, physical, biological and other science disciplines in the active membership. This could easily be encouraged through the regional associations.

Regional centers contribute considerably to the mix of regional activities. But these are not directly a function of the regional associations. Moreover, many regional centers benefit from contributing Hatch projects. This contribution goes unaccounted for, because they are not linked for reporting purposes. With the new 1998 AREERA requirements for the multi-level, multi-partner etc. (“multis”), credit deserved for these activities needs to be tracked by the regional associations.

Encouraging Integrated Activities

Current activities. The regional associations organize and participate in regional Summer Joint Sessions that are primarily intended to foster communications among functions and sections. Considerable progress has been made through these meetings in some regions.

Possible additional activities. Much more needs to be done to plan coordinated research activities with regional extension capacities and program themes. Alignment of agendas and careful allocation of appropriate resources to agreed priorities remains a goal of these regional meetings.

Greater integration of functional activities at the regional association is in the spirit and mandate of the 1998 AREERA. This should most likely happen through administrative

approaches, with some notable patterns of functional integration now emerging within some regions.

Opportunities to create several more regional centers should be explored. Centers (e.g., SARE, Rural Development Centers, Regional Aquaculture Centers) represent good models for bringing together common interests and shared responsibilities at the regional level. Examples might be Centers for Food Safety, Centers for Plant Biotechnology, etc

New approaches which enhance the creation and function of regional Centers also need to be explored. The application of the principles of System Science to have more holistic approach to regional problem solving is one alternative approach.

Fostering Outreach

Current activities. Multistate research activities represent enormously valuable opportunities and mechanisms for organizing activities. We know they are attractive to other public institutions, industry scientists, commodity groups, trade groups, and others. This represents a valuable benefit derived from the activities of the regional associations that would not occur should the regional associations cease to exist.

Possible additional activities. Could more be done by the regional associations to be more inclusive? Should stakeholders be added to the initial membership of regional activities? Could they serve as focus groups for tracking the frontiers of science? Might they serve as basis for one form of listening sessions? Are we using the multistate research project and committee functions to their potential?

Advisory Activities

Current activities. Almost everyone working in agricultural research management remembers the 57 Questions from The Honorable Mr. Roberts, in 1995. Without the regional associations as a mechanism for completing the responses, what might have been the outcome? This is but one highly-visible example of how the regional associations work together to respond as a community. Many others could be cited.

Previously, regional advisory councils advised regional associations, but that structure was removed six years ago, and no substitute system of advisors has replaced that system. Currently the regional associations rely on summary statements of need derived from state councils and meetings. How this will support the selection of regional priorities under the regulations for stakeholder listening promulgated by USDA, as required by the 1998 AREERA remains to be seen. Some have proposed that more efficient systems for priority setting could be created through the regional associations.

Interactions of the regional associations with regional and national CARET are excellent. But how that interaction could be transformed into directed advocacy remains a challenge.

Possible additional activities. Regionally organized science advocacy activities might be better organized through formal regional projects or perhaps through an NRSP on marketing and advocacy. The advantage of this approach would be in bringing together stakeholders and scholars knowledgeable in selected topic areas, with a focus on communicating the system's successes and its needs of the regional and national SAES/ARP system. They could also periodically assess the regional and Hatch portfolios to identify gaps, redundancies and opportunities to respond to stakeholder needs.

As one example, several times in the past few years regional associations have mentioned the need to initiate activities in land use management. A comprehensive analysis of existing Hatch projects related to land use management by a regional or national advocacy project/committee could serve as a basis for calling together the active scientists to explore their common interests, and to develop a plan of action. This activity could also serve as a forum for engaging other state and federal agencies. Support from the regional associations would be essential for this activity.

Organizational Support

Current activities. The regional associations support organizational needs in several ways. Primary among these are the research projects, committees and exchange groups sponsored by the regional associations. Organizing the purposes of the activity, providing administrative advisors, keeping and sharing records of activities are but a few of the regional association's responsibilities.

From past experience and newly emerging expectations from USDA, the regional associations have played a pivotal role in the transformation of the activities of the regional associations. Primary among these evolving research management themes are greater multidisciplinary activity, more interregional participation, and better integration with extension.

Possible additional activities. Much more needs to be done to capture the advantages of the Land Grant University (i.e., integration of teaching, research, and extension). How this will be accomplished remains to be determined. Nevertheless, the regional associations should play a central role in identifying and implementing appropriate changes.

Education and Training

Current activities. The regional associations and their national manifestation (a.k.a. ESCOP) sponsor a number of conferences and workshops each year. This takes the form of the September workshop for SAES/ARP directors; support for new department heads and station directors; campus visits by the regional association's ED; on-campus schools for administrative advisors; and elaborate home pages, all regionally and nationally organized. All of these services are directly the result of having regional associations.

Possible additional activities. Communications technologies represent a great opportunity for the regional associations to offer more and better educational and training materials. Plans are being prepared to move the associations in this direction.

Meeting Facilitation

Current activities. As noted above, the regional associations hold periodic national and regional meetings that are facilitated through the association's office of the Executive Director, in most cases. This service would be more difficult to perform in the absence of the regional association. Moreover, absent the EDs, the responsibilities would fall to the station directors. This would be a particular burden today, with severely diminished support staff in most stations.

Possible additional activities. As noted in the preceding section, the communications technologies are rapidly changing the possibilities for regional associations. We believe that in the not too distant future some regional and national meetings will be held on the World Wide Web (via Internet II). Regional associations should be involved in facilitating these "virtual" meetings.

Gap Filling

Current activities. The regional associations and their EDs serve as valuable gap fillers for duties such as panel members, replacement administrative advisors and "linebackers" for the SAES/ARP system. This is the luxury provided by having dedicated regional association members and EDs. Without the regional association there is no doubt that many needed regional and national activities would go untended.

Possible additional activities. Consideration is being given to partnering with extension associations in some regions. This may be a recognition of the desirability of focusing on the region's institutional needs for collaboration over national coordination. How this will play out remains to be determined.

QUESTIONS

We are asking for responses to the following questions:

1. Are regional associations the best model for the 21st Century?
2. What are the limitations to the current model of regional associations' accountability?
3. Are the costs of participating in a regional association justified, given the benefits?
4. Are there better ways to manage the regional associations and their portfolios?

5. Are there additional functions that regional associations should be providing?
6. Should “form follow function” for the regional associations?
7. What might the regional associations do better?
8. Are the regional associations an impediment to achieving desired activities?

August 2000

Regional Executive Directors

Bob Heil, Western Region

Tom Helms, Southern Region

Richard Lower (Daryl Lund), Northcentral Region

David MacKenzie, Northeast Region

Sam Donald, 1890 Agricultural Research Directors

Review Panel

C. J. Scifres, University of Arkansas, Chair

Eldon Ortman, Purdue University

John Nye, University of Delaware

S. Pancholy, Florida A&M University

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APPENDIX 1

The following is selected text from Norwood Allen Kerr's "The Legacy: A Centennial History of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations," published by the Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Missouri-Columbia. [(1987) 319 pps.]

The "Long-Range Study" and Research Classification

Spurred by a USDA proposal to eliminate a host of Agricultural Research Service installations and cooperative projects, the Senate Committee on Appropriations issued a call in the spring of 1965 for the USDA and the state agricultural experiment stations, with industry advice, to develop a plan for "systematic and continuous review of research programs: to weed out duplication and inefficiency in the public agricultural research system.

Neither the Committee on Agricultural Science nor the Agricultural Research Planning Committee had the stature or staff support to undertake such a delicate and time-consuming task, so an ad hoc group representing the USDA research agencies and the state experiment stations was called into being. They, in turn, consulted with over 500 agricultural leaders from public research institutions and private industry in compiling a report issued in the fall of 1966. The fruits of their labor, popularly known as the "Long-Range Study," broke new ground by not only suggesting ways to promote coordination within the system but also by indicating future goals and the manpower needed to meet them. Most importantly, it devised a research inventory scheme whereby efforts toward the goals could be monitored.

Recommendations for enhancing coordination in the research system included the elevation of the Science and Education Director to Assistant Secretary status within the USDA; the formation of ad hoc subcommittees in the various subject matter areas to report on needs to the Agricultural Research Planning Committee; the extension of grant eligibility to institutions outside the land-grant community; the joint planning of future national and regional laboratories between the Agricultural Research Service and the state stations; and the implementation of a projects inventory on an annual basis.

The continuing inventory was to be based upon a classification system that included ninety-one research problem areas related to ten goals denoting the objectives of agricultural research: 1) resource conservation and use, 2) protection of forests, crops, and livestock, 3) efficient production of farm and forest products, 4) product development and quality, 5) efficiency in the marketing system, 6) expand export markets and assist developing countries, 7) consumer health, nutrition, and well-being, 8) raise level of living of rural people, 9) improve community services and environment, and 10) basic research.

Each project was then to be identified by activity, indicating its purpose; by commodity or resource, indicating its principal subject of interest, and by field of science, and indicating the disciplines involved in its execution. Once a project was characterized in the first two dimensions it could then be related directly to one or more of the research problem areas and, thus, tied explicitly to the goals. The Long-Range Study also included an inventory of current (1965) research reflecting expenditures of scientists-man-years and financial resources to serve as a benchmark for future. By this method, agricultural research administrators for the first time were given a standard tool for collecting data for use in planning and evaluation, as well as for presenting the scope of their activities to those demanding an accounting of their efforts.

The Long-Range Study classification scheme, with some refinements, fulfilled the intention of its authors to provide a standard of measurement for the public agricultural research partners. Within a year, a series of thirty-two federal-state research task forces were being assembled to conduct in-depth analyses of the problem areas identified in the report. The eighteen commodity (fruit, swine, etc.) and fifteen functional (farm prices, rural development, etc.) groups that resulted were comprised primarily of state station and USDA scientists but included a handful of consultants from industry and academe.

In each of their areas of responsibility the joint task force sought to evaluate the current situation, visualize the technology necessary to overcome existing problems, develop research approaches, identify and quantify potential benefits, predict probabilities of achieving objectives, and recommend manpower commitments to meet the goals. One of the first products of their work was a consensus to add five new research Problem Areas to the ninety-one originally identified.

Current Research Information System Established

The research problem areas-based classification model had the potential to provide scientists and administrators with a standard frame of reference in describing their work but the need remained for a system whereby that data could be effectively compiled and retrieved. Keeping track of the research projects at the state agricultural experiment stations and within the USDA had proved a daunting task from their beginnings.

A.C. True of the Office of Experiment Stations had begun a card index of station-issued publications in 1891, which reflected much of the research effort out in the states. A better indication of activities was possible after the widespread adoption of the project system early in the twentieth century. Project descriptions were enrolled into a manual card file that, by the 1950s, included Agricultural Research Service projects along with those of the stations, alternately known as the "Green Goddess" or "Green Monster," depending on the degree of frustration encountered in retrieving data from the enormous drum holding the files, system was ill-suited either to keeping scientists abreast of the latest efforts in their fields or to meeting the growing accountability demands upon administrators.

In the 1960s, information management reached the computer age, holding promise that an automated system could take over the role of the cumbersome manual filing system. First

proposed in 1964, and in the development stage by the time the Long-Range Study was issued to provide it with a ready-made classification scheme, the Current Research Information System (CRIS) was operational by the end of the decade. CRIS included a description of each project according to its objectives, approach, and relation to research problem areas. Manpower and financial support levels were included as well as a listing of publications resulting from the work, with new data added annually. Thus, the agricultural research partners were provided with a system for reporting, accounting, and management in addition to a library of current and past research projects.

Although problems inherent in collecting, classifying, and retrieving timely information tended to make the system's claim to be "current" somewhat suspect, the Current Research Information System was an enormous improvement on its forerunners. It introduced a common vocabulary and structural arrangement for describing investigations and provided benchmark data whereby projections for future research directions could be measured by actual performance.

Facilitating the Communications: The Directors at Large

Even as CRIS was in the planning phase the station directors realized that a staff would be needed to set standards for the gathering of data and to translate that information into a form that could be readily understood by policymakers. Concurrently, the activities of the Long-Range Study commission highlighted the need for better communication within the experiment stations and with the federal agricultural research agencies. The Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy, made up of three directors chosen from each region, a delegate from its home economics subcommittee, and the CSRS Administrator, represented the state stations on national issues but did not have the continuity of membership to lend to CRIS the sustained attention it required. The four regional associations of directors were better organized in this regard but their infrequent meetings and regional orientations limited their effectiveness in responding quickly to interregional and national issues.

In the 1960s, before either CRIS or the Long-Range Study plans were underway, the North Central Regional Association of Experiment Station Directors reflected its concern for the same need by proposing a single individual to represent its membership on a full-time basis. While nothing immediately came of the suggestion, by 1966 the other regional directors' groups were considering similar measures. Encouraged by ESCOP at its April gathering, the North Central Association designated George M. Browning, Associate Director of the Iowa station, as regional research director. The Southern Directors Association soon followed the lead by naming Director Louis E. Hawkins of Oklahoma as its director-at-large prior to the November, 1966 ESCOP meeting. By February of the next year, Director Mark T. Buchanan of Washington was serving in the same position for the Western Regional directors. More cautious in conferring "at Large" status on one man, the Northeastern Regional Association of Directors appointed

Henry R. Fortmann, Associate Director of the Pennsylvania station, as a regional coordinator in the fall of 196⁸.

The different titles bestowed on these regional representatives reflected the variety of expectations among the station directors who had chosen to create the positions. Some desired the incumbents to act only as facilitators of communication and cooperation between the regional associations. Others envisioned them as a standing council of "super directors" to monitor developments within the USDA and Congress and to serve as spokesmen on emerging issues affecting the entire system.

While the exact nature of their role remained undefined as they assumed their posts, the regional representatives concentrated their initial activities on the immediate task of collecting the data necessary to put the Current Research Information System in operation. Working closely with the Cooperative State Research Service in this effort, the regional directors functioned as a national resource group for the Washington bureaucracy and the stations because of their wide knowledge and availability to policymakers in the capital and to directors in the states. Thus, their sphere of interest naturally expanded to include the whole range of issues in the federal-state partnership so that they evolved into de facto liaisons for the state agricultural experiment stations.

⁸ In June of 1993 the Association of Research Directors of the 1890 Land Grant Institutions employed Research Director Samuel Donald of Alcorn State University as its Regional Research Director, which is the ED position for this fifth region.