



Minutes of the NREC Research Committee Meeting
October 15, 2015 - Conference Call – 10:30 am

DRAFT

Committee Members Participating in Conference Call: Dale Hadden (Research Committee Chair), Chuck Cawley, Ed Corrigan, Jessica Dexter, Howard Brown, Ted Mottaz, Terry Pope, Linda Kull, Matt Hughes, Laura Gentry, Dr. Robert Hoeft (NREC Research Advisor), Jean Payne (NREC Administrator), Julie Armstrong (NREC Executive Director)

Chairman Hadden called the meeting to order at 10:31 am. He introduced new Executive Director Julie Armstrong and asked her to introduce herself to the committee and provide a bit of background. Julie expressed her excitement at joining the organization and talked briefly about her background in marketing, production agriculture, and research.

Chairman Hadden reviewed the purpose of the meeting and reminded the committee that the outcome of the meeting would be a list of submitted proposals that will be sent to an external team of peers for review. This meeting is not to determine funding or make any decisions on projects that will be funded in 2016. He reviewed the process that no previously funded projects will be sent for review and that the group will not discuss these until the November meeting.

Chairman Hadden reviewed the minutes from the June committee meeting and asked for a motion to approve the minutes as submitted. Terry Pope moved to approve the minutes, Ted Mottaz seconded and the motion carried.

Chuck Cawley reviewed the projected income from IDOA's perspective. They are seeing a downward trend in Fall application (predicting a 25% reduction in dry fertilizer this Fall). \$1.1M was collected in the first half of 2015 and IDOA is predicting \$960,000 for the second half. Group discussion offered an opposite prediction with the retail representatives predicting a strong year for Fall fertilizer. After discussion, the projected income for the 2nd half of 2015 was adjusted to \$1.26M (same as last year) which will make a total collection for 2015 of \$2.36M.

Dr. Bob Hoeft reviewed the external review process and reminded the group that this process was identified in 2012 as being the best method for ensuring that the Council is funding science-based research that can impact nutrient efficiency. There are currently three reviewers being used – 2 from academia and 1 from industry and all three have done extensive research throughout their careers. Bob told the group that if we get proposals that fall outside of the area of expertise for these three he will search out appropriate experts. There was continued discussion about the need for the reviewers to remain anonymous. This allows the reviewers to be more direct without fear of insulting colleagues. This is a common practice in research. Any proposals identified as "education" will be sent to the Outreach and Education committee for review. Proposals that are currently being funded will not be sent for review. Neither will proposals that have been submitted in the past but NOT funded.

There were 20 new proposals submitted. They are: 1-16, 2-16, 3-16, 4-16, 11-16, 14-16, 16-16, 19-16, 23-16, 24-16, 25-16, 27-16, 28-16, 29-16, 30-16, 31-16, 32-16, 33-16, 34-16, and 36-16. In addition, proposals 18-16 and 26-16 are previously funded projects that are asking for additional money to add N-15 to their research. Dr. Hoeft is suggesting that these be sent to peer review to review the potential for a need to change procedures.

Julie reviewed the questions that are put to the peer review team as they consider proposals:

1. Does this project have scientific merit?
2. Have the authors clearly identified a researchable question? Is this a significant problem in crop production in the Cornbelt?
 - a. Have they directly or indirectly posed a hypothesis?
 - b. Are the objectives of the proposal clearly outlined?
3. Is the design of the project adequate to address the hypothesis?
4. Is the funding proposed adequate to conduct the project?
5. Is it feasible to expect that the amount of work being proposed can be accomplished within the timeframe proposed?
6. Is it feasible that the work being proposed can be done with the labor force and equipment being proposed?
7. Is there a body of research information available that will address the hypothesis?
8. What is the probability that this project will produce results that allow farmers to make informed decisions on nutrient management?
9. What is unique and innovative about this project?

Jessica Dexter asked for more information on identifying which proposals are addressing the same questions. Julie and Dr. Hoeft will review the proposals and work on tying that information together.

Dr. Hoeft led a discussion about the need for more coordination amongst the researchers – particular with the modelers. His suggestion is to suggest that modelers work with those who have already done the work.

Proposals identified as Education/Demonstration/Survey were: 1-16, 4-16, 11-16, 25-16, 34-16 and 36-16.

Proposals as identified as having been previously reviewed and not funded were identified as: 2-16, 3-16, 23-16 and 29-16. Jessica Dexter asked if the reason these projects were not funded in the past was because of negative peer reviews. Matt Hughes clarified that they received favorable feedback from peer reviewers but the committee did not recommend them for funding.

Laura Gentry posed a question about the numbering system and Julie and Dr. Hoeft walked through the numbering system and agreed to continue to work on a system that will work going forward.

Discussion was held on each of the remaining new proposals.

31-16 – Laura Gentry asked if this proposal was a meta-analysis or data mining and it was suggested by Chuck Cawley that this is to build a baseline and knowledge base. Linda Kull asked for clarification that the reviewers are knowledgeable in database and statistical review. Dr. Hoeft confirmed that they are. Group discussion continued.

16-16 – Dr. Hoeft expressed concern about how the data will be gathered. Group discussion identified this as a project to be reviewed.

19-16 – This is for a diverter system and group discussion identified this as a project to be reviewed.

24-16 – Group discussion focused on the fact that similar research is already being funded and that perhaps we should evaluate the methodology. After group discussion, it was determined that it was not necessary to send this out for review.

28-16 – Chuck Cawley indicated that this project is to establish baseline status and asked if the peer review would indicate if this was adequate to do so. Dr. Hoeft will review the money requested but is comfortable with the methodology. Group discussion identified this as a project to be reviewed.

32-16 – This project focuses on gypsum research and Dr. Hoeft indicated that his opinion is that there is a small chance of success on this research. Matt Hughes asked for clarification on the process for today's meeting and the group was reminded that the purpose of the call is not to evaluate the proposals but to determine which ones should be reviewed. Dr. Hoeft commented that we want to be careful about overloading the reviewers and sending through projects that have a low likelihood of being successful. Howard Brown asked if we should also do research to refute a practice? And Chuck Cawley suggested that gypsum is gaining attention and it would be helpful to have third-party peer review to help validate the research. Group discussion identified this as a project that should be reviewed.

Linda Kull asked if the peer review process identifies other similar research that has been done or is currently being done. Dr. Hoeft indicated that we typically don't get this type of information but can ask for it.

Terry Pope moved to send the following proposals to peer review: 14-16, 16-16, 19-16, 27-16, 28-16, 30-16, 31-16, 32-16, 33-16. Jessica Dexter seconded and the motion carried.

Jessica Dexter asked what happens to proposals that get sent to Outreach and Education committee. Dale Hadden clarified that they are evaluated for feasibility by that committee and recommendations for funding are brought to the December Council meeting in a manner similar to research proposals.

It was moved by Matt Hughes and seconded by Howard Brown to send the following proposals to the Outreach and Education Committee: 1-16, 4-16, 11-16, 25-16, 34-16, and 36-16. The motion carried.

Laura Gentry and Julie Armstrong led a discussion on the voting process. The process was reviewed and the group was reminded that last year the committee voted with a show of hands rating each proposal with a high, medium and low. This was based on the ability to impact. If someone had to recuse themselves from the voting or had stepped out of the room for another reason, that proposal had a lower potential to receive votes. Several options were discussed – 1) Allow someone to vote twice (Julie pointed out that proxy votes are not allowed by our by-laws) or 2) let the most frequent value fill in for the missing votes to generate consensus.

Linda Kull asked if there is a numeric value assigned to high, medium and low. Matt Hughes asked if we can use a simple average since the Council will vote with a yes or no vote. Jessica Dexter pointed out that the breakdown of votes cast in each of the three categories allowed for an easy breakout of the top proposals. Chairman Hadden asked Laura and Julie to put together a system for voting and they will share with the committee prior to the next meeting.

Chairman Hadden reminded the group that the next meeting will be on November 17th at Brandt's Springfield location and asked the committee to share any questions/comments with either he or Julie.

Having no further business, motion to adjourn at 11:55 a.m. made by Ed Corrigan, seconded by Howard Brown, motion carried unanimously.

Minutes recorded by Julie Armstrong, reviewed by Committee Chairman Dale Hadden.