

Agricultural Research Stations Committee  
Meeting Minutes – April 29, 2020

Present: Arriaga, Barker, Chapman, Dunigan, Esser, Genovese, Gevens, Luck, Peters, Picasso, Sabatke, Townsend

The minutes from the November 2019 meeting were approved.

**DIRECTOR'S REPORT:**

- We are exploring a partnership with the US Veterans Office that would provide a veteran with on-the-job agricultural experience and training on some of the Ag Research Stations. This might also provide ARS and CALS with potential future employees.
- We have completed installation of improved internet service to portions of the Arlington Station. Currently this improved service is available to the Arlington Headquarters, Agronomy, Swine and Dairy units on the station. The new service offers 1GB service in the headquarters area and 50MBS at Swine and Dairy. We want to thank the CALS-IT group for their expertise, assistance, and support in getting this service. Spectrum is the provider.
- We want to also acknowledge the great assistance and support provided to ARS from the CALS-IT group overall. They are working with us to improve and upgrade our IT resources on all the stations and helping us set up a computer resource inventory and planned replacement schedule for the stations.
- Campus maintenance funding has helped stations this past year with road, roof, and exterior maintenance projects. They are currently working on a major boiler replacement project for buildings at Arlington.
- Staffing on the stations is down due to Covid-19. We typically hire 50 Temporary Employees or Students for the growing season. This year we are down to only 12 so far. Despite this minimal staffing, we are meeting all essential research, operational and critical needs. We are concerned, however, so please contact Mike if you know of any problems. Bill Barker noted that ARS has most of the research-approved student hires currently.
- Rebecca Wiepz has been hired as the new superintendent for our Peninsular Ag Research Station. She will begin June 1, 2020. Rebecca has a horticulture background from both UW-Madison and Cornell University and has previously worked at the Peninsular Station. She also has relevant work experience from time spent in New Zealand.
- Felix Navarro is leaving his position as superintendent of the Hancock Ag Research Station and joining Seneca Foods. He will remain at Hancock from May 1 to August 1 with a 20% appointment to finish up some ongoing projects but will step down from his superintendent duties during this period. Troy Fishler will serve as interim superintendent while we conduct a search for a new superintendent.

**SAFETY PROGRAM REPORT:**

- Nick Genovese gave a power-point presentation that reported on the safety-related activities he has undertaken with ARS. Among these are an update to the ARS Safety Manual that included new, more organized, formatting, a number of new chapters and sections, a number of guidance documents, hyper-links to safety resources and campus health and safety services, a new safety training and awareness checklist that aligns ARS safety programs with campus programs (such as hazard communication) and a general safety and health training matrix. The ARS Safety Manual is available on the ARS websites, UW Knowledge Base, and hard copies on the stations. There are annual updates and safety

training surveys planned to keep the ARS Safety Manual current. Non-ARS employees are encouraged to utilize this valuable resource. Nick recently worked with campus to develop an AED resource inventory of the Ag Research Stations and an inventory of ARS fume hoods. Nick indicated the next phase of his work will include sharing the ARS Safety Manual throughout CALS and working with departments to develop an overall CALS Safety On-Boarding Program for new employees. He is also working with the stations on the development of a Safety Training Management System and on-line learning tools. Nick has been producing and distributing a monthly safety topic document that he shares through a monthly E-CALS article. Some upcoming topics will likely include Shop Safety, New Hire Orientation, UTV Training, Heat Stress, and Severe Weather.

- Worker Protection Standard training for CALS will be offered on-line through WebEx this year. Announcements will be made through ECALS on when the training is available.

#### GREENHOUSE FEE INCREASE:

Increases to the current greenhouse user fees are being proposed. A 10% increase is proposed for 7/1/2020 and 7/1/2021. The proposal calls for rates to increase from \$0.45/sf to \$0.50/sf (7/1/2020) and to \$0.55/sf on 7/1/2021 for older sections of the greenhouses and from \$0.73/sf to \$0.81/sf to \$0.89 for newer sections. The average impact of the full increase is \$385 per year for most researchers. The current rates date back to 2011. Since then the greenhouses have been carrying more labor and increases to CALS and Campus assessments from these revenues. Several large maintenance costs are coming up that include new lights, King Hall cooling, and West Madison coverings as well as new resources like better benches. The ARS Committee discussed the rate proposal and confirmed these funds are intended to cover maintenance, repair, and upgrades, and not employee salaries. The increases were deemed reasonable. Committee members asked whether overhead charges to PI's should be covering greenhouse operations and whether PI's receive any credit for other contributions they make to the greenhouses. It was noted any new faculty start-up packages should include funding to cover greenhouse costs. The greenhouses have worked hard to keep user fees as low as possible and they have been successful doing this. It was noted that some costs to operate the greenhouse are being provided by campus (salaries, custodial building services) but that Covid-19 expenses and related budget cuts will likely prevent any new campus support for the greenhouses. Closing of the Biotron will likely increase pressure and need to use the Walnut Street Greenhouses and a need for better environmental controls. The idea of an annual "rate-of-inflation" increase being implement was suggested. **The ARS Committee approved the proposed rate increase with a vote of 9-Yes, 1-No and 1-Abstention.**

#### ANNUAL REPORT REVIEW:

The ARS Annual Report has been posted in UW-Box. The main concern of ARS is weather constraints on research and operations and having the resources to react and move quickly when needed. It was suggested we compile reports and findings by researchers from their research on the stations. This request might be made part of the Project Information Request Form (PIRF) process that is done each year. It was also suggested PI's be encouraged to acknowledge station inputs in their written reports and to have PI's send copies of their publications to the stations.

#### ENVIRO-WEATHER STATION UPGRADES:

CALS is meeting with Michigan State University in May to secure funding to install automated weather station on all the Ag Research Stations and funding to maintain them. The plan is to network the weather stations to provide information for researchers.

**LOUISE HEMSTEAD LEADERSHIP AWARD:**

This is the first year for this award which recognizes a faculty or academic staff member who demonstrates a passion for advancing agriculture through innovation or cooperation, has a record of stewardship for natural resources and communities, a history of getting things done through service leadership and the tenacity to overcome odds. A call for nominations was made December 2, 2019. Erin Silva was selected by the CALS Research Division to receive the award this year. In future years, the Ag Research Stations Committee will review and select the recipient of this award.

**COVID-19 UPDATE:**

Each station has an operational plan to help safeguard personnel while conducting research. Any concerns should be communicated to the stations, Mike Peters, and Bill Barker. Summer events that were planned to be held before July 1 have been cancelled. Events planned for after July 1 are still uncertain. A decision on whether we hold station field days will be made in early May. We may hold virtual field days this summer in place of in-person field days. Continuous web-cameras, on-line research progress presentations, self-guided tours and drive-in field days have also been proposed as possible outreach activities. It was noted we need to provide captioning on any video messaging.

**OTHER:**

USDA-NIFA Rapid Response – What can we do (ARS) to minimize the impact of Covid-19. Donations to local food banks and possible local food production on non-research lands were suggested.