



### **Agricultural Research Stations Committee Meeting**

Tuesday, April 6, 2021

10:00am - 11:30am

Virtual meeting via Zoom

**Attendees:** Francisco Arriaga, Bill Barker, Julie Dawson (departed at 11:10am), Phil Dunigan, Nancy Esser (joined at 10:45am), Luiz Ferraretto, Claudio Gratton, Deena Patterson, Mike Peters, Jamie Reichert, Valentin Picasso Risso, Phil Townsend

**Not present:** Brian Luck, Doug Sabatke

**Minutes by:** Erica Flyte

**Attending as public meeting:** None

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### MINUTES

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The meeting was called to order by Francisco Arriaga at 10:01am.

#### **Welcome**

Francisco Arriaga welcomed Dean Kate VandenBosch.

#### **Dean Kate VandenBosch: College updates and Q&A**

Gratitude was expressed to the committee members for their service. The topics previously submitted by ARS committee members were addressed.

Status of West Madison Agricultural Research Station (WMARS) and future consideration of land sales/swaps

- Because of the location of WMARS, developers reach out to make offers for land sales and swaps. For the most part, these offers are declined because the WMARS land is valuable and should be retained. In the past, a 12-15-acre parcel near Junction Road was considered, but this did not turn out to be a worthy consideration. A recent land swap for a 3:1 ration was considered, but it did not meet the desired requirements. There are no active land swaps or trades being considered.
- The Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration will meet with the CALS Dean and CALS Associate Dean for Research to formulate a strategy for considering land sales and trades. A recent statute requires any holdings of research station land to be used for additional land or improvement of current land: it must meet the continuing and evolving needs of the research station.
- Land sales and swaps will continue to be a consultative process and the ARS committee will be involved in these conversations.

Status of plant breeding/horticulture facility at WMARS

- A multi-year search has concluded that WMARS will be the location for replacement facilities. These facilities have been deemed a priority by congressional staff members, who have signed letters of support and expressed encouragement for facilities with additional functions. Users of the facility will be involved in the planning process once the funding details are finalized. This is a joint project with USDA federal employees because of CALS' partnership with vegetable facilities. Greenhouses may be an

additional component of the project, but these may differ from the level of campus greenhouses due to the needs of the facilities. The CALS Associate Dean for External Relations and Advancement is working with congressional delegation on the project.

#### Walnut Street Greenhouses

- Some of these greenhouses are from the 1960s and some are newer (2005). The old greenhouses are being considered for upgrades. The Assistant Dean for Facilities, Planning, Health & Safety is the contact for this initiative. The desire is to replace the old greenhouses with some like the newer greenhouses. Like most facilities projects on campus, half of the cost would likely need to be fundraised. The total cost of the project could be \$30 million.

#### Field days

- Summer field days will occur, in alignment with public health, campus, and Extension requirements. At the time of this meeting, outdoor events may have 150 people for a maximum duration of four hours with no meals involved. Facial coverings should be worn, and physical distancing should be observed. New event policies will be shared later this month, and updates will continue to be communicated as soon as they are available.

#### Interest in recognizing Native Nations and land heritage

- Campus has installed a heritage marker on Bascom Hill which recognizes the land as the ancestral home of the Ho-Chunk, acknowledges the circumstances that led to their forced removal, and honors the Ho-Chunk Nation's history of resistance and resilience. Early stages of exploration are taking place for how to include land acknowledgements specific to the research stations.

#### Questions/comments from committee:

- Appreciation was expressed for land swaps being considered strategically.
- What is the strategy for future land swaps? Do we want to move further out, or should we consider ourselves an urban research center?
  - Discussions of strategy are welcomed, with this group and others. WMARS is valuable and needs to be retained. It is valuable land for many reasons, including proximity to campus, quality of land, and opportunities to interact with the public.
  - The recent land swap was considered because of the size and proximity of the land. The land to be swapped was underutilized but had commercial value. Ultimately this swap was no longer considered because it was not to our overall benefit.
  - Strategic planning regarding WMARS and the value of the land can be accessed on the ARS website and is available to the committee through Box.
  - Developers often reach out and much effort has gone into the strategy for WMARS. It is a valuable site for plant breeding and urban agricultural research and teaching. It was especially valuable during the pandemic due to its proximity to campus. In the past instances of selling or trading, only the marginal, problematic, or unvaluable areas of land were considered. WMARS will be a valuable site for the long term, as it supports our strategic plan of urban agricultural research and gardening research.
- We are fortunate to have these research facilities. The long-term vision for ARS could include outreach to high schools, community gardens, etc. There is much potential to work with students in the community. What could be possible for work with external partners?
  - This could be a future agenda item for this group to consider.

### **Approval of January 29, 2021 meeting minutes**

Jamie Reichert made a motion to approve the January 2021 meeting minutes. Claudio Gratton seconded the motion. The motion was passed with 7 votes in favor, 0 votes not in favor, and 4 votes abstaining.

### **ARS Director's report**

The Walnut Street Greenhouse manager position has been posted. There is robust interest. A search and screen committee of greenhouse users is being assembled. ARS committee members should contact Mike Peters if they would like to be involved.

The enviroweather stations equipment orders are in stock. Once out of state travel is approved, a liaison from MSU will do a full day in-person training at the Marshfield ARS. The training will probably happen in late spring, with full employment of equipment beginning in the summer.

There will be no position reductions in any of the ARS. There will be alternative methods to make up for the loss of 101 funding. All positions are filled, and there are no cuts or reductions.

The committee was thanked for their discussion within the committee and with departments about the previously considered WMARS land swap. It was helpful to see this feedback and have strategic conversations about future opportunities.

Questions/comments from committee:

- Is there still funding for the carpentry position at the Arlington ARS?
  - Yes. We will strategically consider if the position is needed or if the funds should be reallocated elsewhere.

There is a potential land sale for a parcel adjacent to the Arlington ARS. There is no offer on the land currently. An appraisal is being pursued to learn the cost of the land. The data of the appraisal will be shared with the ARS committee. The land is close to the station, so it is of interest. There is no guarantee that funding is available to purchase the land, but investment in an appraisal is desired to see if further discussion is warranted. The parcel would be an additional 70 acres of tillable, flat land with some water.

Questions/comments from committee:

- Is there any land available to trade at Arlington ARS?
  - No.
- How would we pay for the potential new land at Arlington?
  - There is no current plan. First, we need to get an appraisal to learn the cost.
- Are there any potential donors?
  - Not yet, but that is always an option. We would need to cultivate interest.
- Anyone who goes to a station or greenhouse must complete Worker Protection Standard training. The training will be virtual this year. Dates are available in eCALs and were emailed directly to users.
  - Some people won't start until the end of May. How should this group complete the training?
    - Deena Patterson can set up individual trainings or group trainings as needed and can offer continued virtual sessions.
- Is it possible to watch a recording of the training and then complete the exam?
  - No, this is not legally permitted.

## **2020 annual report review**

The 2020 annual report is available to ARS committee members in Box and will be posted on the ARS website after it is approved. Highlights were shared:

- The stations were extremely diligent in addressing the challenges of the pandemic. Contact tracing showed no cases of COVID-19 originating at any stations.
- 95% of ARS staff was deemed essential and were on site, so these statistics are impressive.
- High levels of creativity were used to develop opportunities for untraditional lab settings.
- The overall usage of stations was down, but needs were still met. The crew, management, and workers deserve much credit.
- 2020 was a great growing season; yet, climate change is a real threat. ARS must remain a robust facility for research and be prepared for climate change. Infrastructure must be in place to prevent loss of research due to drought and other climate threats.
- Animal units are being strategically discussed. A strong partnership with the Department of Animal and Dairy Sciences is underway.
- For questions about the annual report, contact Mike Peters.

Questions/comments from committee:

- Can you elaborate on the potential expenses that may be cut at the Arlington feed mills? What are the issues?
  - The feed mill is a dated structure in which high levels of maintenance funding have been invested. Strategic conversations include considering whether large quantities of feed should go to outside vendors while the feed mill handles smaller projects, or if investments should go toward expanding the Arlington mill facility to benefit all of campus and not just CALS.
- Appreciation was expressed for having climate change on the radar. Is there an internal process to get feedback from stations about the challenges they are facing? What does that feedback look like? How are stations tackling climate change?
  - There are monthly meetings with station managers for updates and concerns. The annual report is where thoughts are expressed through writing. Great dialogue occurs continuously. There could be a more formal process if there is interest.
- We are interested in how stations are handling climate change specifically.
- It was impressive to see culture and community-building addressed in the Marshfield station report. Are there similar efforts at other stations for addressing inclusivity?
  - Each station manager is given flexibility as to what they include in the report, but guidelines could be added. All stations participated in the CALS climate survey. Mike Peters will work with station managers on the data. Data from smaller stations is aggregated to protect confidentiality. A first glance at the data shows positivity. There was a 75% response rate to the climate survey.
- Are there any COVID-19 policy updates related to hiring undergraduates or traveling to and from campus?
  - The hope is for fall of 2021 to look like fall of 2019.
  - You can currently hire undergraduates to work in stations and in research programs without any restrictions; however, these guidelines are contingent on vaccination rates, testing, and variants. It is critical to encourage everyone to get vaccinated. Everyone on campus is eligible.

## **CALS Associate Dean for Research updates**

- Strategic work is being done to increase funding for organic research. Funding for this area is competitive, so a priority will be to increase acreage of certified organic land.
- Another priority is to increase prairie land to provide for more insect and bird habitats.

- In relation to climate change, the goal is for agriculture to be more productive and less destructive. The new federal administration values agriculture as part of the solution to climate change. The USDA will invest in the initiative of restorative agriculture, an area in which our college is perfectly positioned to be a leader. Going forward, ARS must be ready for this new research priority.
- The Gordian report released by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities in March of 2021 estimates that \$11.5 billion needs to be invested into infrastructure and deferred maintenance needs across 97 institutions.
- President Joe Biden gave a speech introducing his \$2 trillion infrastructure plan on March 31, 2021. If this legislature passes, UW-Madison will receive funding for infrastructure upgrades.

#### **Louise Hemstead Leadership Award**

- A subcommittee of ARS met to form guidelines for reviewing award nominations. The 2021 award nominee is Julie Dawson.

#### **General questions & feedback**

- The next meeting will be TBD in fall 2021.
- A brief summer virtual meeting may be scheduled to discuss the Arlington land purchase if this is deemed a worthy potential investment.
- Send future agenda items to Brian Luck and Erica Flyte.
  - How to make WMARS a hub of public relations

#### **Adjourn**

Valentin Picasso Risso made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Luiz Ferraretto seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved. The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:21am.