

October 15, 2025

Attendees: Jarred Chambers; Jeffrey Endelman; Luiz Ferraretto; Christelle Guedot; Christina Hamilton; Brian Luck; Mallika Nocco; Deena Patterson; Mike Peters; Damon Smith; Jennifer Van Os; Troy Runge

### **Notes**

Meeting was called to order by B. Luck. At 3:03

Introductions were made by attendees

April 17, 2025 meeting minutes were unanimously approved (Jennifer/Jeff)

### **Director's Report**

The agricultural research stations had a strong summer season marked by high engagement and impressive crop yields.

### **Field Days**

- The stations hosted over 24 field days and 400 tours and instructional events, attracting more than 15,250 attendees
- This outreach supports the college's mission and strengthens community and legislative relations.
- 132 state legislators were invited, with 10 attending events across four different stations, helping increase political support.
- Two legislators received the inaugural Friend of Agriculture awards, recognizing their contributions and fostering goodwill.
- Mike Peters emphasized the ongoing heavy use of land and animal units, with Arlington corn yields averaging over 225 bushels per acre and strong soybean performance, signaling excellent seasonal conditions.

### **Organizational Optimization**

A major restructuring centralized management of animal units and research stations to improve efficiency and labor use. Org chart attached at the end of notes was handed out.

- As of July 1st, animal units previously managed by departments moved under the Agricultural Research Stations, creating centralized hubs for dairy and beef cattle, and combined management of Arlington and West Madison stations.

- This change aims to flexibly allocate staff across units, such as shifting poultry lab staff to greenhouse work during low activity periods, enhancing labor utilization.
- Kemp and Dairy Forage stations remain separate due to unique economic and USDA-related factors, though integration is a long-term goal.
- Jessica Cederquist is being integrated into management meetings to help fold Dairy Forage into the broader cattle hub, potentially increasing available animal units for studies.
- Tony Ziehmke was hired as a dedicated facilities manager to oversee equipment and infrastructure across stations, improving resource sharing like tractors and vehicles during peak seasons.
- Individuals were assigned to lead each management unit to ensure accountability and clear oversight.

### **Capital Improvements and Technology Upgrades**

Significant investments were made to modernize equipment, irrigation, and IT infrastructure to support research quality and operational resilience.

- Nearly \$270,000 was invested at Hancock station to upgrade irrigation systems, including a new central pivot and linear system, while West Madison expanded irrigation by 33% through additional guns and piping.
- These improvements aim to protect crops amid changing environmental conditions and ensure reliable research outcomes.
- Equipment purchases included tractors at Hancock and Marshfield, a new forage harvester at Marshfield, and a replacement dairy tractor, enhancing operational capacity.
- **CALS IT supported a \$35,000 upgrade led by Bob Leahy to integrate all stations into the campus Wi-Fi and VPN networks, improving secure connectivity and guest access**
- A new Zurn combine was ordered to be shared among stations for corn plot harvesting, reducing individual researcher equipment costs, though delivery delays due to tariffs are expected
- Budget allocations are from previous fiscal cycles

### **Funding Strategy and Legislative Advocacy**

Efforts to secure new funding focus on gaining flexibility in project approvals and increasing infrastructure dollars through state and federal advocacy.

- An additional \$600,000 from campus was secured last year, raising total ASK funds to about \$3.6 million for Agricultural Research Stations in last 2 years, but funding remains insufficient and under strain
- A campaign led by CALS and supported by local senators seeks a state exemption for projects under \$2 million at ARS to speed approvals, but this was removed from the budget bill
- A separate proposal requests a new \$1 million annual state appropriation dedicated to ARS infrastructure, currently pending as a standalone bill, with strong legislative and industry group backing
- We discussed that ARS farms prioritize research over revenue, as research success supports broader agricultural productivity.
- The group is preparing for a federal Research Facilities Act (RFA) funding opportunity, authorized at \$125 million per year for 10 years, with an expected January RFP and matching fund requirements
- Two main project ideas under consideration are a \$4 million robotic milking system at Arlington to address labor shortages and data collection needs, and financial stabilization of the WCIC greenhouse complex.
- Input is invited from committee members to refine priorities and build matching fund strategies, with a rough target of about \$10 million total ask and \$5 million local match capability.
- The RFA is expected to favor large, strategic projects rather than smaller operational upgrades.
- Additional federal earmarks in the \$1 million range are being pursued, including for the West Madison building and Rural Partnership Institute, leveraging connections with influential senators.

### **Operational Challenges and Process Improvements**

Several process and operational issues are being addressed to improve efficiency, compliance, and research continuity.

- Campus facilities are conducting comprehensive infrastructure reviews across all stations to update records and prioritize maintenance and replacement, supporting long-term planning
- The Marshfield wind turbine lease was abandoned due to concerns over land value depreciation from turbine foundations, though negotiations to alter contract terms are ongoing
- The West Madison shed rebuilding is behind schedule after 18 months, with hope for completion before December, delayed by lengthy campus processes and high costs
- The team is monitoring highly pathogenic avian influenza risks closely, with regular meetings and a planned emergency response simulation to protect employees and maintain gold-standard biosecurity
- Workday and PERF systems struggle to accurately capture and correlate grant data with station research projects; progress is ongoing but incomplete.
- Budget pressures have forced cuts across departments, but ARS operations have been largely protected by shifting funds internally, though staffing remains below ideal levels.

### **Research Equipment Compliance and Drone Funding**

New federal restrictions on Chinese-made drones are prompting efforts to fund replacements and streamline operational approvals.

- The federal government bans use of funds to buy or operate certain Chinese-made drones (e.g., DJI) for federally funded research, effective December 2025,
- This affects many investigators who rely on these drones, creating an urgent need for compliant replacements.
- We are advocating for a bridge funding mechanism, similar to graduate student bridge funding, to help researchers replace banned drones with approved models.
- Coordinated bulk purchases are being considered to secure discounts and ease the transition.
- There are ongoing challenges with drone flight approval processes at research stations, with requests to streamline and allow blanket approvals for recurring flights to reduce delays and administrative burden

Meeting was adjourned at 4:15 (motion by Deanna/Jeff)

## Handout

