Science Societies

Benefits of an external review of outlying research centers, ranches, and farms

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A robot gathering information in Sanborn Field in Missouri. How best to deal with fiscal realities while not losing sight of the need to continue impactful mission efforts at land grant university research centers, stations, and properties is the focus of a symposium at this year's Annual Meeting.

Agricultural Experiment Stations (AES) at land grant universities (LGUs) were established by federal legislation known as the Hatch Act back in 1887. Such a forward-thinking research structure has served the essential role of advancing agricultural, natural resources, and human systems science across the nation and beyond. Research outcomes facilitated by AES administration and programming have traditionally been made available to Cooperative Extension agents, specialists, and other staff at LGUs who, in turn, transfer that knowledge to producers and other stakeholders. In addition, both on- and off-campus research efforts and activities at LGUs have delivered on the need to educate future scientists for both academia and industry. Historically, a substantial amount of new knowledge for the public has been generated at off-campus locations that are known as research centers, research and education centers, biological stations, or farms/ranches managed by AES or other units at LGU colleges/institutes of agriculture.

Over the past decade, funding for LGU mission efforts, including the AES research enterprise, have been adversely affected by stagnation or reduction in state and other funding. These financial challenges have led to outlying research centers and properties having to deal with the realities of continued deferred maintenance of equipment, facilities, and other vital research infrastructure and the loss of both onsite and campus-based research expertise that engage in regional or statewide research

efforts readily transferrable to stakeholders. The result of such fiscal challenges has been for AES and other college/institute leadership to look at new budget models, downsizing, and/or alternative policies for cost recovery for sponsored research, etc.

How best to deal with such fiscal realities and not lose sight of the need to continue impactful mission efforts at outlying research centers, stations, and properties at LGUs is the focus of this symposium. What is the value of external review exercises at such outlying locations and do such reviews aid college or institute leadership when contemplating changes including substantial restructuring? The AES directors at the University of Illinois, Nebraska, Missouri, and Florida (UF/IFAS) have recently taken the step of having an outside team review their AES-supported centers and properties with the overarching goal of better understanding how best to allocate limited resources and, if needed, execute structural changes to increase efficiency and effectiveness of outlying AES-supported locations to maintain relevancy for traditional and other stakeholders.

Attend the Symposium in Salt Lake City

At the Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City on Tuesday, 9 November from 1:45–3:45 pm, these AES directors (Hector Santiago, German Bollero, and Shibu Jose presenting with Jerry Fankhauser serving as the moderator) will report in a symposium on the process, challenges, and benefits of such a review effort and how they have implemented those outside reviewer comments and conclusions. The symposium is sponsored by the ASA Agriculture Experiment Station Management Community.

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