

Agenda Item 5: Agricultural Research Service Report (ARS) to ESS
Presenter: Dr. Larry Chandler

September 22, 2008, Traverse City, MI

Research Priorities and Initiatives

Within base research programs, ARS continues to address priorities in genetic resources/genomics, crop and animal health, food safety, human nutrition (obesity prevention), bioenergy, various aspects of natural resources, and digital electronic information dissemination (NAL). Particular noteworthy areas of current enhanced emphasis are African wheat stem rust, colony collapse disorder, and produce food safety.

Budget Status and Outlook

- FY 2006-2008. ARS has operated on essentially level funding for 3 consecutive years due to continuing resolution and omnibus budget appropriation actions. The declining purchasing power of available funds due to absorption of increased salary and other fixed costs has necessitated the curtailment of some discretionary ARS program activity and staffing plans.
- FY 2009. The President's budget request for ARS includes a proposed \$84 million net reduction (7.5 percent) and an additional reallocation of about \$60 million of ongoing research to enhance higher priority research initiatives. About half of the proposed reductions are attributable to former earmark projects. Potentially, 20 ARS locations and laboratory units will be closed or consolidated by the proposed changes. House and Senate appropriation subcommittee actions to date suggest that these changes may not take place, but final Congressional or appropriation actions are not expected until after the Presidential elections. In the meantime, ARS is expecting to begin FY 2009 operations on a continuing resolution budget with all ongoing programs intact.

Executive Leadership Changes

- Ms. Wilda Martinez, Director of the North Atlantic Area, retired in November 2007. Dr. Dariusz Swietlik is serving as Acting Area Director. Competitive recruitment is underway to fill the position on a permanent basis.
- Dr. Dwayne Buxton, Director of the Pacific West Area, retired in January 2008. Dr. Andy Hammond has been appointed as the new Area Director.
- Dr. Phyllis Johnson, Director of the Beltsville Area, retired in March 2008. Dr. Joe Spence has been appointed as the new Area Director.
- Dr. Steven Shafer, Director of the Midwest Area (MWA), has relocated to the ARS National Program Staff in Beltsville, Maryland, to become Deputy

Administrator for Natural Resources and Sustainable Agricultural Systems—a position vacated by Dr. Ghassem Asrar who is now on a long-term leave of absence from ARS to serve in a foreign post with the United Nations. Dr. Larry Chandler has been appointed as the new Area Director.

ARS Activities in Michigan

ARS operates two research units, The Avian Disease and Oncology Laboratory and the Sugarbeet and Bean Research Unit in East Lansing. The research focus at the Avian Disease and Oncology Laboratory is on solving practical problems in the control of poultry diseases, particularly Marek's diseases and avian retrovirus infections. Additionally, they are leading an effort to map the chicken genome. Their staff consists of 30 employees, including 6 SY's. Dr. Aly Fadly is the Research Leader.

The Sugarbeet and Bean Research Unit conducts research designed to develop physiological, biochemical, molecular, and genetic strategies and technologies to improve production, efficiency, food quality, and disease resistance and result in new germplasm and improved varieties of dry beans and sugarbeets. They also develop engineering methods and technologies for assessing, grading, and sorting tree fruits and vegetables to assure postharvest quality. The ARS staff consists of 8 employees, including 3 SYs. Dr. Renfu Lu is the Research Leader. The Unit's research is conducted in the Plant & Soil Sciences Building and the Agricultural Engineering Building located on the campus of Michigan State University.

All research is conducted in cooperation with Michigan State University

Action requested: For information only.