**Minutes**

**11-16-17**

**Attendance: (15)**

* Disk Bostdorff, Walt Krueger, J.L. Willett, Wade Smith, Bill Hendriks, Tom Demaline, Don Schmidlin, Jack Schultz, Jill Bench, Jeff Creque, Frank Calzonetti, Bob Jones, Joe Perlaky, Lou Kozma and Bill Hirzel.

Dick Bostdorff opened the meeting at 9:13.

**Introductions:**

**Talking Points:**

Walt Krueger:

* Provided a brief overview societal benefits of flowers throughout history.
* Urged increased collaboration between research experts and growers to raise the level of awareness and education beneficial to each partner and the community.
* The availability of natural resources allows for the production of flowers and food for years to come.

Wade Smith:

* Beginning farmers are still learning the trade and need assistance in a variety of environmental cost control measures. Development and implementation of new technologies continue to be important to farmers’ sustainability plans long-term.
* Developing small farmer pilot projects involving advanced energy systems would lead to affordable automation options that could be duplicated and scalable nationwide.

Tom Demaline:

* The nursery industry has undergone tremendous change recently. 30-40% of business is no longer in business. 8% growth anticipated over the next 10 years reflecting a continued flat growth industry while costs continue to grow especially in labor. Increased revue capabilities remain limited.
* There is labor shortage along the entire supply chain.
* General interest in agriculture is diminishing with few available to move up in the ranks to management and ownership positions. Generally, wages remain on the low side.
* The average age of owner/operators in the nursery industry is about 60 years of age with minimal succession planning.
* The ability to sell a business is limited because of generally large asset values.
* There have been a few major biological issues that have challenged the industry recently. Need more help with recommended treatments and controls including more targeted research.
* The landscaping industry brings many environmental and economic benefits to a community. Economically, every dollar invested brings in $1.09.
* More mechanization is needed to reduce costs.

Jill Bench:

* Over $6M dollars in grants have been invested in our community over the last 15 years mostly through the University of Toledo with the help of Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur.

J.L. Willett:

* 27 years working at the ARS, grew up in NC and majored in textile chemistry. At the University of Illinois, he majored in a biobased industry and received his Ph.D. in metallurgy.
* He is interested in gathering more information about the needs of the growers.
* Currently, the USDA is operating on a continuing resolution. The budget for FY 18 budget has some degree of uncertainty at this time. About a $38M or about 4% reduction from the House is being recommended, while the Senate suggests a $12M increase. The final recommendation between the House and Senate is hopefully expected by the end of the year.
* ARS site locations under consideration to be closed are dependent on the final 2018 budget.
* Increase in the intelligent sprayer program is anticipated.
* 3 vacancies in at the ARS in our region remain including Dr. Krause’s position. There is currently a hiring freeze as a result of the President's executive order. Hierarchy restructuring is also being examined.
* There remain strong partnerships with UT and OSU (OARDC)

**Q & A:**

* Dick Bostdorff says it is anticipated that 2700 more hectors of food will be planted in greenhouses.
* Approximately 70% of ARS grant dollars are dedicated to salary. About 10% is set aside for indirect cost (staff, some operations) leaving the balance discretionary.
* There are some additional sources of income generally in the several hundreds of thousands of dollars range nationally.
* There is also third party, private sector collaborative funded research including cooperative research agreements. The ARS does do not conduct research on the contract.
* All ARS research is published.
* The only office at UT that is federally funded for research is through the USDA-ARS. This is very important and most appreciated by the university and a significant asset to the region. Would like to see an increase in statewide partnerships.
* There are 9 states in our USDA-ARS region.
* USDA’s 5-year research planning ongoing now included a revised mission statement. Need input now through direct discussion with the scientists who would outline objectives recommended by stakeholders. This information could obtain information from workshops whereas the ARS would bring people in to assist in the discussions.
* Joe Munyaneza is the National Program Leader. 1 or 2 key people from our region are needed to assist in the ARS making recommendations guiding their national mission statement. This timeline will be over the next year with projects being suggested or recommended starting the spring of 2018 until the end of the year. These projects will be consistent with the ARS new modified mission. Project objectives need to include specific milestones.
* Joe Munyaneza (about a year now at ARS) is a key team member to make sure our input is under consideration regarding future research. His boss is located in Beltsville.
* Communicating results and outreach from ARS initiatives is always challenging as with any private sector venture.
* ARS researchers and administrators are evaluated through an annual approval performance process typically through peer review but can also include trade journals and/or extension type reports. Technology transfer projects are important especially in collaboration with academic institutions. Cooperative research agreements, field day outreach activities are all tools available for a results-oriented initiative.
* Like the nursery landscape business, floriculture has remained relatively flat over the last 10 years. Food focus involving local production and small farmers are receiving increased attention in the last few years. This promotes job creation, food diversity, and specialization and potential wealth creation for the growers.
* How do we best address research needs in a rapidly changing environment? The model must be flexible enough to respond to these needs.
* How can we help or provide better input to the ARS: Continue to communicate with the scientists, JL and the national program leader (Joe M.) and assist in laying the groundwork for the 5-year mission statement and strategic plan. Communication with Congress, and the agency in general regarding the impact of any particular research. Defining a message that is clear and meaningful to everyone along the information chain.
* The growers need to prioritize our needs and requests.
* A compelling story from a successful farmer is important more so than an organizational message. However, the needs of a region or organizations must be direct, consistent, concise and clear possible. Agriculture has a great story to tell but generally does not do a good job of telling it. Recommendations must come at it from both the legislative and research perspective.

**Action items:**

What mechanism, protocol or procedures are in place to propose potential collaborations between the growers, ARS and UT?

* The growers need to identify and prioritize research projects that combine Jennifer Boldt’s skill sets (ideally) and current UT/TBG facility capabilities.
* Make these recommendations using existing channels of ARS hierarchy including the eventual new regional leader (Krause position) and national program leader (Joe) that will address both NW Ohio and national challenges.
* The focus should encompass food, ornamental or nursery challenges that are meaningful to both researchers, growers and the public.

The meeting concluded at 2:00 pm.