# NCRALogo.JPGNorth Central Regional Association of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors

## 230th Meeting Sheraton Raleigh, Raleigh, NC Room: Governor’s I Monday, September 23, 2024, 8 am to 12 noon ET

## AGENDA ([Meeting notes here](#Notes))

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| **Time** | **Item #** | **Topic** | **Presenter** | **Action Requested** |
| 8:00 am | 1.0 | Welcome and introductions | Gary Pierzynski, NCRA Chair FFY24 |  |
|  | 2.0 | Approval of today’s agenda | Gary Pierzynski | Approval by acclamation |
|  | 3.0 | Approval of the 8/6/2024 NCRA Business Meeting notes: <https://www.ncra-saes.org/agendas-minutes> (pwd is NCRA!) | Gary Pierzynski | Approval by acclamation |
| 8:10 am | [4.0](#ARS) | ARS Updates, Discussion, Q&A with NCRA Directors (joint session with the Western regional association) | Larry Chandler and Rosalind James, USDA ARS | For information, and discussion |
| 9:40 am | 5.0 | NIFA Updates, Discussion, Q&A (joint session with agInnovation West) | Kevin Kephart, USDA NIFA | For information, and discussion |
| 10:00 am | [6.0](#ProfDev_respartnership) | Proposal: Professional development for research partnership | Deborah Thompson, NCSU | For information |
| 10:10 am | Break – 15 min | | | |
| 10:25 am | 7.0 | Group Discussion/Best Practices Session:   * NCRA Feedback on [agInnovation Research Roadmap](#ResRoadmap) – 15 min * DEI Programs and Your Institutions – What issues have you been facing and how are you solving them? – 45 min | George Smith, Jeanette Thurston  All | For information, and discussion |
| 11:25 am | [8.0](#NCRA_budget) | NCRA Budget Process and Future Options | Gary Pierzynski, Jeanette Thurston, Chris Hamilton | Discussion/approval of the budget process for inclusion in the NCRA Rules of Operation, discussion of NCRA’s current budget status, and discussion/approval of future options. |
| 11:45 am | 9.0 | Appreciation for Gary Pierzynski and his leadership as NCRA Chair | Jeanette Thurston, All | For celebration and recognition. |
| 11:55 am | 10.0 | Changing of the NCRA Guard – Shibu Jose takes over as NCRA chair for FFY25. | Gary Pierzynski, Shibu Jose | For information and recognition. |
| 12:00 pm | Adjourn for Networking Lunch | | | |

Upcoming Meetings:

* [APLU Annual Meeting](https://web.cvent.com/event/ea2cba54-410b-4e17-b400-7de694457c8c/summary?RefId=summary), November 10-12, 2024, Orlando, FL.
* 2025 CARET/BAA Washington Conference, February 23-26, 2025, Washington, DC. More details to come.
* NCRA Spring Meeting, April 7-9, 2025, [Marriott Aloft San Juan, PR](https://www.marriott.com/en-us/hotels/sjual-aloft-san-juan/overview/). More details to come.

## Meeting Notes

## ****Attendees:** Derek McLean (UNL), Jane Schuh (KSU), Shibu Jose (Univ MO), Larry Chandler (USDA-ARS), Rosalind James (USDA-ARS), Joleen Hadrich (UMN), Gary Pierzynski (Ohio State), Jeanette Thurston (NCRA), Ron Turco (Purdue Univ), Ruth MacDonald (IA State), Hector Santiago (UNL), John Blanton (Univ of IL), Troy Runge (UW-Madison, via Zoom), Christina Hamilton (NCRA, recorder).**

## **Members of agInnovation West also joined the meeting for USDA ARS and NIFA updates.**

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| **Item #** | **Topic** | **Notes** | **Action Taken** |
| 1.0 | Welcome and introductions | NCRA Chair Gary Pierzynski welcomed everyone to the meeting and led a round of introductions, with participants sharing their names, titles, and affiliations. | None |
| 2.0 | Approval of today’s agenda |  | Approved as distributed |
| 3.0 | Approval of the 8/6/2024 NCRA Business Meeting notes: <https://www.ncra-saes.org/agendas-minutes> (pwd is NCRA!) |  | Approved as distributed |
| [4.0](#ARS) | ARS Updates, Discussion, Q&A with NCRA Directors (joint session with the Western regional association) | Larry Chandler and Rosalind James, USDA ARS, met with W and NC AES directors to discuss priorities, how to continue to work well together and support each other, and answer questions.  ARS budget and priorities update: Rosalind provided an overview of the agency's budget priorities and funding outlook. Key points included:   * Continued resolution funding through December, avoiding a government shutdown for now * Priorities around product quality, value-added agriculture, animal and crop production, human nutrition, and natural resource conservation * Challenges with sustaining funding for facilities and genetic resource banks due to inflation * Opportunities to align ARS initiatives with university research and stakeholder needs   Collaboration between ARS and LGUs: The group discussed ways to strengthen collaboration between ARS and the land-grant universities, including:   * Developing cooperative agreements to clarify shared spaces, resources, and responsibilities. FYI ARS needs a lease in place with universities to be able to invest funds. Troy Runge shared that WI is working on an agreement now and recommends starting with a template, then passing back and forth with campus and ARS to personalize, since each site is different. * Aligning ARS priorities with university research agendas and stakeholder needs * Engaging with ARS national program leaders to shape research directions * Communicating university successes and joint publications to demonstrate impact, and to help share with ARS leaders the value of these partnerships and shared facilities.   Jeanette also reminded the group that we must reach out to USDA (NIFA, ARS) now regarding our priorities for 2027. Two years in advance is best since the agency is already building that budget.  Rosalind emphasized the need to keep ARS and LGU communications open for the best results. Please keep them in the loop for any thoughts/initiatives/ideas and planning for new shared buildings. | None, for information and discussion |
| 5.0 | NIFA Updates, Discussion, Q&A (joint session with agInnovation West) | Rubella Goswami presented a brief USDA-NIFA update (Kevin Kephart was in another meeting)   * Staffing update: Almost at hiring maximum * Budget proposal: FY25 [NIFA detailed requests](https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2025-usda-budget-summary.pdf) are in the President’s budget. Priorities are similar to LGUs and ARS.   RFAs:   * Grant application status dashboard status and calendar are available for awardees. * $4.5M received for additional nutrition hubs. RFA is out with a 10/3/2024 deadline. * Specialty crop and Community food RFAs are out as well. * Opportunities to work with APHIS on avian influenza, applications are being considered. * $10M from CDC for EXCITE program with Extension foundation around vaccine education.   Policy Updates:   * Dual-use research on pathogens around pandemic concerns. * National Security Memorandum 33 – protects federally funded research * Rubella noted that they will have technical assistance webinars for all of these and these updates may cause some changes to processes and timelines.   Other Items:   * $4.5B in new climate-smart agriculture funding available * Implementing new policies on dual-use research oversight and research security * Moving to eRA Commons grant management platform. This is the same as NIH’s system. Again, training will be provided. * Encouraged engagement from LGUs on environmental justice initiatives. * Food loss and waste team is at work, as well.   Reminder: DO NOT contact Federal employees during a government shutdown! They are not allowed to work, including any kind of correspondence. | None, for information and discussion |
| 6.0 | Proposal: Professional development for research partnership | Deborah Thompson, NCSU: Deborah presented her [proposed training program](#ProfDev_respartnership) to improve how university agricultural researchers build relationships with and partner with industry. | None, for information |
| 7.0 | Group Discussion/Best Practices Session:   * NCRA Feedback on [agInnovation Research Roadmap](#ResRoadmap) – 15 min * DEI Programs and Your Institutions – What issues have you been facing and how are you solving them? – 45 min | AgInnovation Research Roadmap Updates: George Smith, Jeanette Thurston:   * Research Roadmap originally born out of funding frustrations and a desire to try something new. We can no longer do more with less and we’re falling behind in the world in ag research and innovation. * This Roadmap is a more holistic, long-term, strategic approach that is a platform for conversation that will stay on message, regardless of federal funding climate. * Three over-arching focal areas that everyone can understand: Climate Solutions, Water Resilience, and Sustainable Food Systems. * The first official presentation was during the Summer Joint Leadership meeting in RI; it’s been shared widely with other APLU sections. More recently, it’s been shared with many, many stakeholders and other federal agencies. Well received, especially because of the specifics and metrics of this 10-year approach. * Funding strategy = 1% of federal R&D budget ($1.9B/year over 10 years) * Need all directors’ feedback and help socializing the documents more widely now. * NC-FAR lunch and learn on the Hill last week featured George and the Roadmap. The session went well. * George thanked Jeanette for all her help and support in this effort. Steve Lommel will take over as he steps into the agInnovation chair role for FFY25, taking over for George. Shibu thanked George and Jeanette for all their work, as well. * Request: Can directors have the documents and instructions for sharing with their university government relations folks? George, Jeanette, and Steve Lommel will work on this - stay tuned.   DEI Discussion Summary: The group shared experiences and perspectives on how their institutions are navigating challenges related to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, including:   * Some states facing new legislative restrictions on DEI programs * Dissolving centralized DEI offices and decentralizing efforts for several institutions, while others are still very supportive of these efforts and staff * Reframing DEI efforts as "inclusive excellence" to broaden appeal and/or restructuring efforts while maintaining commitment * Challenges balancing state requirements with federal civil rights compliance needs   DEI Comments by State:   * UNL programs canceled, and positions have been reorganized. Framing DEI efforts now around inclusion and valuing everyone. * IA State: Civil rights review with USDA a year ago. Took a full year to receive the report. Having conversations with legal on how to meet these at a federal level while not being able to keep DEI offices in place. * KSU: Keeping conversations going as long as they can and not making any changes. * MO: The Vice-chancellor of DEI left, so the office was dissolved with no one fired; staff moved to other offices in a de-centralized approach. No central DEI offices currently exist. * UMN: Quite the opposite situation from the above, as UMN remains committed to supporting their DEI offices. College of Ag even has its own DEI office. The VP for Inclusive Excellence created the UMN Budget 6 (main campus budget), so she’s one of the top decision-makers now. * IL: Similar to UMN. College just hired an Associate Dean for DEI. Departments also have their own DEI committees. UIUC has a 50-page document on strategic plan options to work on. Challenges exist with traditional, more conservative stakeholders, though. * MI is also similar to UMN and IL. The college had one of the first DEI offices on campus, but also get stakeholder questions. DEI office name was changed to “Office of Culture, Access, and Belonging.” * OH: Successfully fought back on state legislation. Changed names of offices and efforts. Everything seems to be working fine. | None, for information, and discussion |
| [8.0](#NCRA_budget) | NCRA Budget Process and Future Options | Gary received the future budget options and processes presented in the included agenda brief.   * A motion to approve the $5000 discretionary fund and 5% increase in the NCRA FY2026 budget assessment made by Shibu Jose and seconded by Ruth MacDonald. The motion to approve was unanimously approved by the NCRA directors. * Changes to Rules of Operation to include NCRA budget processes for regular, systematic assessment increases will be taken up by the NCRA Executive Committee (EC) and Chris/Jeanette to send for director electronic approval. | A motion to approve the $5000 discretionary fund and 5% increase in the NCRA FY2026 budget assessment made by Shibu Jose and seconded by Ruth MacDonald. The motion to approve was unanimously approved by the NCRA directors.  Budget rules of operation: NCRA Executive Committee will finalize and Chris/Jeanette will send for director approval. |
| 9.0 | Appreciation for Gary Pierzynski and his leadership as NCRA Chair | Jeanette presented a picture of the award book/clock ordered for Gary to celebrate and thank him for his NCRA service as chair since May 2023. The group applauded and thanked Gary for his service as chair to NCRA. | None, for information. |
| 10.0 | Changing of the NCRA Guard – Shibu Jose takes over as NCRA chair for FFY25. | Shibu was recognized as the new NCRA chair for FFY2025. | None, for information. |
| *Meeting adjourned at 11:47 am ET.* | | | |

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**Item 4.0: Fall agInnovation** **USDA-ARS and West and North Central Regional Joint Discussion  
Presenters: Larry Chandler, Rosalind James  
Action Requested: For information and discussion**

* Budget and Science Priority Updates (ARS, agInnovation, institutions)
  + What are the budget priorities in the near and long term?
  + ARS facilities priorities for the west and north central region states?
  + Specific to ARS--What is the status of the pass-through funds that were cut or reduced in the President’s Budget?
* Planning, Developing, and Working Together in Shared Facilities--We would like to have a facilities discussion that explores questions to help us develop an LGU-ARS guidance document on the topic. Some of the questions that will help to develop a guidance document include:
  + New Building Planning/Design
    - Where do we start in a building/facilities partnership?
    - What are the best practices for working with ARS/LGUs on identifying building needs, design, construction?
    - What are some successful strategies for raising and leveraging funds, sharing costs of early architectural studies, renovations, construction of a new building, and/or building maintenance over the long term?
    - What are common challenges to planning shared facilities?
      * How have these challenges been addressed?
    - What are the different types of facilities where LGU and ARS scientists and students occupy/utilize?
    - Are there any restrictions or complications for sharing certain types of facilities?
    - Who are the contacts at USDA/ARS that LGUs can inquire about building status during the design and building phases?
  + Post Construction
    - Who is/are the contact(s) for an ARS or LGU building that questions/issues can be posed to after construction?
    - What are the ARS facilities policies that LGU scientists/students should be aware of and that guide facilities access/practices?
    - Are ARS policies on access different depending on the type of facility?
      * Are these policies nationwide or by region?
      * Are there different policies for scientists than for graduate students and postdocs?
      * Are there opportunities to modify policies that limit access?
    - How are overhead and other facilities expenses managed and are there different approaches across sites and regions?
    - What are common challenges concerning shared spaces?
      * How have challenges been overcome?
    - Is there a communication cadence that would benefit both ARS and LGU partners who occupy the same space?
      * What are the topics that should be discussed during these meetings?
      * Who should be involved in these meetings?

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**Item 6.0: Professio****nal development for research partnership proposal  
Presenter: Deborah Thompson, NCSU  
Action Requested: None, for information only**

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**Item 5.0: NCRA Annual Budget Dev****elopment, Oversight, and Reporting Process  
Presenters: Gary Pierzynski, Jeanette Thurston, Chris Hamilton  
Actions Requested:**

* **Discussion/approval of the budget process for inclusion in the NCRA Rules of Operation;**
* **Discussion of NCRA’s current budget status;**
* **Discussion/approval of future options.**

Annual Budget Development Process:

Under the guidance of the NCRA Chair and Executive Committee, the Executive Director (ED) and Assistant Director (AD) are responsible for developing a draft of the NCRA annual budget for the upcoming fiscal year (FY). The NCRA fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. Key components of the budget include:

* **Support for the ED and AD offices**, including salary, travel, training, and office expenses (institution-related fees, equipment, and supplies).
  + Projections for Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA) for the ED and AD are based on information provided by the host institutions. If no such information is available before the Spring Meeting, a standard 2% COLA increase is assumed.
* **Reserve funds**, covering three months of salary and fringe benefits for the ED and AD. These funds are held by the host institutions.
* Specific regional efforts and priorities, as identified by the NCRA.
* **Annual State Assessment** (see explanation below).
* **Discretionary funds (to be discussed), with a preliminary placeholder of $5,000.** Discretionary funds will be used for small overages or projects at the discretion of NCRA leadership, providing flexibility for unforeseen expenses and opportunities. This ensures timely responses to minor budget fluctuations or small initiatives that may arise throughout the fiscal year.
* General operating carryover (to be discussed), with a preliminary placeholder of 5%.

The draft budget is evaluated based on the total NCRA assessments collected from each member institution. If the proposed budget exceeds the current funding available through these assessments, the ED and AD will develop alternative budget options for the NCRA directors to review during the annual NCRA Spring Meeting. These options may include reducing projected expenditures or proposing an increase in the NCRA assessment. The proposed annual budget is discussed, modified, and approved by NCRA directors during the annual NCRA Spring Meeting.

**Calculation and Collection of the NCRA Assessment**: Each state’s annual NCRA assessment is based upon the total assessment amount approved by NCRA directors during the spring meeting. To determine each member institution’s share of the NCRA assessment, 60% of the amount is divided equally (1/12th) PLUS 40% proportional to the state’s share of rolling 3-year Multistate Research Fund award. Award amounts are determined using [data available on the NIFA website](https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/capacity-grants/hatch-act-1887-multistate-research-fund). NRSP and regional trust funds received by states are excluded from these calculations.

Following budget approval during the Spring Meeting, assessment invoices for each NCRA member institution are prepared and sent to the appropriate directors and budget officers. NCRA office assessments are due August 31.

Oversight and Reporting of the Annual Budget:

The NCRA ED and AD are responsible for overseeing the NCRA annual budget, with guidance and approval from the NCRA Executive Committee (EC). Monthly year-to-date expense reports are collected from the accounting systems of the ED and AD host institutions and entered into the working budget for the current fiscal year.

The office budget is reviewed by the EC at least quarterly, or as requested by the EC or the broader NCRA membership. Final budget values are entered at the fiscal year close-out after June 30. At least quarterly and for transparency and accessibility, updated budget spreadsheets are uploaded to the designated “NCRA Budget Sheets” folder on NCRA’s MS Teams.

If any ED or AD budgeted expense lines are anticipated to exceed their allocations, the EC must be notified at least 30 days in advance of the expected overage. The EC may then request corrective action or approve the overage, as deemed appropriate.

NCRA FY2025 Office Budget (as of 9/16/2024)





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**Item 7.0: NCRA Feed****back on agInnovation Research Roadmap  
Presenters: George Smith, Jeanette Thurston  
For information, discussion**

Double-click .pdf objects below to open files.

Executive Summary:



Climate Solutions:



Water Resilience:



Sustainable Food Systems:



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