

An Assessment of Current Function and Future Needs for The Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy

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Introduction

As part of the broader examination of the various functions of the Land Grant Universities (LGUs), ESCOP conducted an assessment of its current function and future needs on behalf of the Experiment Station Section (ESS). The objective was to pursue the development of a new consensus and commitment to action for ESCOP and for the SAESs at the national level.

Thus far, four "workshops" have been conducted:

1. The ESCOP Executive Committee spent the majority of its 1995 spring meeting discussing this topic and developed a set of findings and considerations for discussion by the full committee.
2. The Executive Committee prepared the draft document which the full committee discussed its July 1995 meeting. A set of specific questions posed by the Executive Committee were addressed.
3. The ESCOP Planning Subcommittee, which met in August 1995, developed "Recommendations for Action" that are directly related to its planning function and to the overall assessment.
4. The Experiment Station Section discussed and made recommendations on the document at its annual meeting in November 1995.

The intent of this document is to capture the results of these several discussions and the emerging consensus that accompanies them. This will provide a sense of direction for ESCOP and input to the several futuring activities that are occurring both within NASULGC and elsewhere relative to the State Agricultural Experiment Stations.

Expectations and Outcomes

It is hardly necessary to call attention to the major external and internal changes that are so dramatically affecting the State Agricultural Experiment Stations (SAESs). Similarly, there also seems to be ready agreement that the functions of ESCOP, in its service to the ESS and the function of the Section itself, can also be improved. However, the answers to the following questions have less clear answers.

In the evolution of this report, three conceptual questions were examined:

1. Is there a consensus on what change is needed?

2. Do the additional benefits to SAESs and their customers outweigh the added cost of these changes?
 3. Do the leaders in the LGU system have the will to change?
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Products of the ESCOP Discussions

The first product of the ESCOP discussion provided an assessment of:

1. How ESCOP operates today.
2. Changes in ESCOP's function that are needed to improve its performance.
3. External and internal interactions that are needed to place the SAESs in the best position to continue to serve the food and agricultural system.
4. The purpose and function of the Experiment Station Section as a national organization.

The second product of the discussions was a set of actions ESCOP can initiate now, and a commitment to a further study leading to those actions that require better definition.

As stated below, much of what needs to be done must be done jointly with other parts of the family.

A third product of the ESCOP-ESS discussions is a set of proposals for joint actions either with other COPs or at the Board on Agriculture level. Most of these proposals have been initiated.

Premises

ESCOP accepted the following as premises for further analysis:

1. The overall goal is to continue to orient ESCOP activities so that the state agricultural experiment stations can better serve broadening public constituencies that benefit from the products of research and development.
2. A unique strength of the land grant universities is the three-way linkage between research, education and outreach. Other academic institutions and federal agencies seek to emulate this basic relationship which is in place and functioning. There continues to be opportunity to build on this strength.
3. While a vision and set of national goals for U.S. agriculture is lacking, there is clear benefit to individual SAESs (LGUs) in continuing to work with the federal system and seek to influence policy and direction for the food, agriculture and natural resource system and for the research, extension, and higher education programs that underpin it.

If the second premise is accepted, then much of what is needed cannot be accomplished within and by ESCOP acting alone. Throughout the several discussions by ESCOP and the Section, there was the recurring recognition of the dilemma that:

1. The next generation of national activities must be done in much closer cooperation with both Land Grant and federal partners.
 2. Networking of various System parts and shared decision making has thus far failed to routinely elicit meaningful mutual commitments, actions, and results.
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Situation

Before examining the function of ESCOP and the ESS and the relationships with other parts of the internal and external environment, it may be useful to set a context by considering a partial list of state, regional, and national factors that lead to the call for re-examination and possible change:

1. Current federal and state budget pressures.
2. Unprecedented Congressional actions to reform and downsize federal government.

3. Broadening expectations on LGUs with fewer resources to respond.
 4. Increasing complexity of LGUs engagement at the federal level.
 5. Increasing complexity in the methods of doing business at the national level, including the mandate to implement the Government Performance and Results Act.
 6. Limited administrative resources within the System to respond to the challenges at the national level:
 - a. fewer administrators at both state and national levels
 - b. increased intra-state pressures on administrators
 - c. limited involvement of the System's best leadership at the national level because of the relatively small portion of total budget arising from federal funding
 7. Variable background, experience, and commitment of individual ESCOP members and the difficulty of sustaining ESCOP activities over a longer time frame -- the problem of too few doing too much at the national level.
 8. Congressional concern and disillusionment about the System's ability to effectively set national priorities and put programs in place that are responsive to perceived needs.
 9. Growing need to enhance the SAES research visibility and credibility in the context of the overall federal science establishment. This need is reemphasized by the emergence of the Administration's National Science and Technology Commissions.
 10. Reorganization of USDA to establish CSREES with a major emphasis on linking the partnership programs at the strategy, program, and evaluation levels -- but with a limited institutional coherence and unestablished track record.
 11. In more than 30 LGUs the administrative head of agriculture also carries the title of director of the experiment station (in a few cases, the experiment station per se has been redefined and blended into broader organizations). The State Cooperative Extension Services, on the other hand, remain much more distinct and the number of administrative heads acting as director of both SAES and CES is much smaller. In a number of states, the CES is not under the administrative head of agriculture. The net result is that the CESs have a relatively more distinct organizational identity while the SAESs are being more rapidly blended into the broader food, agriculture and natural resource programs. There is a calculated intent in some institutions to submerge the experiment station as an organizational entity into broader programs. This institutional disparity contributes to the difficulty in bringing programs together at the national level.
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The Leadership Issue

The lack of continuity in leadership, with annual rotation of elected officers is a serious concern as is the possibility of variable quality of leadership. The limited time of elected officers relative to the national need is also a pacing item in the effectiveness of the organization and the national representation of the SAESs.

The Executive Directors provide some continuity as does the early selection of the Chair- Elect. But there is a serious disparity between the time needed and that available for elected leadership to be involved in the rapidly expanding agendas of ESCOP and the Board on Agriculture.

Professional societies have recognized this dilemma long ago and most now have a "permanent" chief executive officer that can speak on behalf of the organization and a board of governors or directors that sets broad policy.

Members of the Experiment Station Section discussed this possibility in some detail at the November 1995 meeting. The advantages of a stable national presence was appealing, but the mechanism for implementation within the present complex NASULGC environment was not obvious.

AESOP Enterprises, Ltd. has evolved to have a vitally important role as an advocate for the entire System. It has institutional credibility with all parts of the System and growing external credibility on the Hill and with the Administration. The continuing health and vigor of this relationship is a critical part of the overall leadership within the System.

Critical Questions

During the evolution of this paper, ESCOP examined a series of very fundamental questions which seemed appropriate for this self-assessment. The questions and answers developed in the several workshops are presented in this section.

1. What is the "System"? Is it a system or a network of individual state-oriented institutions that have a mutual and common agenda at the national level?

The System is a network of individual state institutions that have a common agenda at the national level. The network is multilayered. At the state level functions are grouped in varying ways that are mutually interactive and supportive. At the regional level, the network is manifest in regional associations of related traditional institutional entities, including Experiment Stations, Cooperative Extension, and Administrative Heads. There are active efforts, some better developed than others, to bring the parts of the network (System) closer together at the regional level. The most highly developed regional association is that of the Associations of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors. Regional-to-national linkages are in place for all key parts of the network (System).

2. What do the following institutional labels really mean?

a. SAES System

The SAES System is a network of functions that deals with agricultural research in Land Grant Universities. Today, most of these research and development oriented functional units are classified organizationally under the traditional label of State Agricultural Experiment Stations, although there is a well established trend towards incorporating these formerly distinctive units of agriculture programs into a blend of total mission of research, extension, and higher education. The Experiment Station Section is the organizational unit of NASULGC that represents the SAESs. The Executive Committee of this group is ESCOP, which acts on behalf of the SAESs. The SAES strategic research plan, developed jointly with USDA, is illustrative of the common agenda that transcends states and regions and identifies a set of national needs and opportunities common to the network. Individual SAESs in the network benefit from the continuing advocacy of federal funds, cooperative research which enhances efficiency, and institutional feedback from the national level on general research agendas and on common administrative and leadership factors.

b. LGU System

The LGU System also represents a loose confederation of institutions having similar origins, but with substantially different evolutionary backgrounds. This has resulted in a diversity of current configurations, missions, and resource bases. While common functions for agricultural research, extension, and higher education are identified, the organizational arrangements under which they operate vary.

The layers of activities within the land grant universities, relative to the ESCOP agenda include those of the overall university CEO and upper administration of the university, the Administrative Head of Agriculture (manifest in several organizational frameworks) and the agencies and entities.

c. NASULGC

As viewed from both state and national levels, the LGUs have a tradition of working for the people, solving practical problems, providing both undergraduate and graduate education to students, and continuing education to the general population. The partnership arrangement discussed below between state and federal governments to meet these objectives is the traditional basis for the national focus of the LGUs. NASULGC provides the institutional framework for the LGU network at the national level. NASULGC provides a functional framework to represent the LGU hierarchy of activities in the matrix formed by Boards and Commissions.

Dr. Rodney Foil's presentation to the joint session of ESCOP and ECOP in July 1995 provided a contemporary view of relationships at the Board on Agriculture level. He noted that the Board brings together related functions in a neutral forum and offers the ability for the System to define itself and operate across functional lines at the policy level. He noted the continuing importance of strong COPs to make things happen. He also suggested the role of the Administrative Heads Section was evolving to include helping to establish policies and interacting with national level customers. He suggested avoiding attempts to recreate institutional frameworks which emulate the individual university, but to bring together functional units that are meaningful at the national level.

d. The state-federal partnership with USDA

This definition is still evolving in current discussions. Taken broadly, the partnership has roots in founding legislation which recognized that agricultural research and extension are inherently site-specific and that (as stated by Deputy Secretary Romminger in July 1995) national problems and opportunities are addressed at the local level, so that "one size does not fit all." Cost sharing is an inherent part of the partnership. As the GPR process and the current budget environment emerges, it becomes more important to consider defining the partners relative to the resources they bring to the table. As the new partnership agency has been formed, and with the new commitments that have been stated by the Undersecretary for REE, the shared decision making that occurs in this partnership should be made by those who have responsibility for the resources that come to the partnership.

3. What is a working definition of the term "partnership"?

The term "partnership" is being loosely used in the vernacular of our shared community to mean "working together." Included within this more general definition are a set of relationships, based on common mission and goals and on shared resources that are defined more specifically. In examining the SAES function, we need to more clearly define those partnerships that have specific meaning in the more formal context.

a. Within the LGUs

This term is most often used to define the traditional three-way relationship between traditional research, extension and higher education functions. There is a growing relationship between programs in colleges of agriculture and other parts of the broad university to meet the needs of an increasingly complex set of customers.

b. Between parts of the LGUs and USDA

The definition of this relationship is taking on increased importance in the new USDA organization. As discussed above, one dimension of the definition could and probably should be the sharing of resources. This can be the formal sharing of funds or the in-kind sharing of other resources, including human, and physical plants. The emerging debate about the partnership will probably center around how the commitment to the use of state funds for national objectives will be enunciated. Also at issue is how much the state partners will actually be involved in upper level decision making, as opposed to providing advice to the Department. The reorganization of CSREES must continue to assure that this agency partners with the SAESs and does not assume a function of administering to the partners.

c. What does an institution or group of institutions have to bring to the table to be classified as a partner?

This is an ongoing debate. There is a substantial up side to defining cooperative efforts as partnerships in that it brings related activities into a more explicit relationship that can include joint planning, sharing of resources, and common assessment of impact. However, it may be to the advantage of the SAESs and their parent institutions to more clearly distinguish within this more general framework a very specific meaning of partnership in terms of mutual commitments to use separate resources to address common problems and opportunities.

4. Is the System still needed in its present form?

Relationships that bring together the network of state institutions with common national agendas is clearly needed, perhaps more today than ever before. The present form of the nodes or focal points in the network are evolving, some more rapidly than others. The new CSREES is a major institutional change, the import of which has probably not yet been fully appreciated. Something like the COPs and something like the BOA will continue to be needed. The form and direction of these institutions should be a key issue in the BOA futuring activities that will occur in the next year. Terry Nipp suggested (July 1995) that some very substantial recommitment to national affairs and focus is needed within this thing we call "the System," if we are going to survive and prosper in the new federal agriculture and science environment.

5. Should the System be redefined to better identify state interests that converge at the national level?

NASULGC represents the broad interests of state universities and land grant colleges. A portion of the funding for the agriculture and natural resources functions comes from an overall institutional assessment. For other non-SAES functions, an incremental assessment of agriculture programs partly supports added NASULGC staff who act on behalf of COPs and other specific entities. AESOP Enterprises, Ltd. is funded through an assessment of SAESs and CSEEs. Consideration is being given to the establishment of a new full time position as associate director for research. At present, the Executive Vice Chair of ESCOP serves this role as an additional assignment. The positive side of having such a position would be the day-to-day coupling with NASULGC; the down side is the incremental cost of an additional person which would have to come from an additional assessment.

6. Is the Board on Agriculture converging on a workable model of engagement of the various parts? Can controversial decisions be made in a timely way?

The following notes from a presentation made by Dr. Rodney Foil to the joint meeting of ESCOP and ECOP in July 1995 reflect the current thinking on this question.

Role of the BOA:

The Division, now Board on Agriculture, has a limited history in comparison to the sections and COPs. More recently, the BOA has defined a role that seems to work at the outset and may continue to serve the system well. The current image of this role includes:

- a. **Representational:** A body which can act on behalf of all parts of the university side of the state-federal partnership. It includes representation from all parts of the family.
- b. **Consensus:** The BOA is the only place where broad consensus can be developed and maintained. While consensus between ESCOP and ECOP is very important, it is part of the whole.
- c. **Continuity:** The BOA provides at least some level of corporate memory as rapid turn overs of various participants occurs.
- d. **Transcending Issues:** The BOA is an entity that can act on behalf of the entire system where issues are transcending; an example is the recent reorganization of USDA.
- e. **Customer Relations:** Under leadership of the Administrative Heads Section, all parts have a role in customer relationships at the national level.

Role of Administrative Heads:

- a. Provide overall administrative support.
- b. Identify problems and opportunities that the community should consider. Help pick those things about which consensus is possible -- things that make a difference.
- c. Call players to the table when needed. Success or failure usually depends on who calls the meeting. If Administrative heads call the meeting, it is perceived as a level playing field.
- d. Avoid involvement in the strategy and tactics of the research, extension and other agendas.
- e. AHS is a section just like other sections--and they must do those things which affect them.
- f. The BOA Chair is an Administrative Head.
- g. Initiate and maintain various overall support functions such as CARET.

Relationships with CFERR:

Creation of new Boards and Commissions and their interrelationships introduces another dimension of complexity -- membership ranges from department heads to deans. The BOA (ESCOP) is probably not investing enough energy in CFERR. Note the intent of CFERR to have a budget committee.

7. What is the optimum set of operating rules to get the best ROI from the LGU investment at the national level? ESCOP will have active representation in the debate within NASULGC that is related to staffing for agriculture.

There is an overarching need to simplify decision making and to reduce the bureaucracy within NASULGC. As noted elsewhere, part of the overall evaluation of options should include consideration of whether a separate institutional arrangement for the BOA would be advisable.

8. Does the present System impose a "lowest common denominator" on the participants -- where institutional initiatives the System undertakes are limited to those in which all parties can participate and benefit equally?

Consensus seeking is an appropriate and inevitable part of the process of building strategies and budget proposals for the BOA. There are components of each which fall into the categories of "yours, mine, and ours." The System seems to increasingly face a "net-sums" game in which the total budget or budget request is finite and new or different components

tend to require redirecting resources from existing programs. In previous budget building experiences with the BOA, there was an understandable tendency to assure that there was "something for everybody." The resulting proposal is multifaceted, ponderous, and of limited use in decision making by the Congress or the Administration. There have been examples from recent history in which major initiatives have been undertaken which benefit mainly one part of the family, Youth at Risk and the NRI are examples. But there have been recent occasions in which progress has been limited by lack of early agreement on definition and scope of new programs. In the present environment, it is expected that the situation will be potentially more contentious; new efforts to develop working ground-rules and better understanding will be needed.

9. How can the SAESs (LGUs) create a "partnership" relationship with other agencies of federal government that sponsor or conduct research contributing to the food, agriculture and natural resource agenda?

The approach the Environmental Affairs Subcommittee is using to engage EPA in a workshop on joint strategic planning should be evaluated and expanded, if it continues to work. The other activities of this Subcommittee in developing broader relationships with federal funding agencies involved in environmental research may also provide useful models. CSREES states an intent to take more seriously their potential role as brokers and facilitators for SAES research that is related to other federal agencies, including the action agencies within USDA.

10. Is NASULGC the organizational entity to best represent the food, agriculture and natural resources system of the LGUs in the next generation?

The most likely answer is a qualified yes. The ESCOP community is substantially divided on the perception of how useful NASULGC is at this point. But there is a general feeling that an effective national entity is needed and that a revised and revitalized NASULGC could be the vehicle that is most readily available.

11. Should the SAESs and/or the Board on Agriculture meet separately from the annual meeting of NASULGC, where there is increasing competition for meeting time?

The need for broad participation in activities related to the Board on Agriculture makes it appealing to continue to have the SAESs meet as a Section at the time of the NASULGC annual meeting. However, there are a growing number of SAES directors who do not feel the other parts of the meeting are sufficiently interesting or relevant to them to justify time and expense. The need to have a more focused and in-depth relationship between the component parts of the BOA seems to be growing. The time allocated for such meetings is decreasing. The issue will not be decided by the ESS alone. ESCOP recommends that a BOA ad-hoc committee be formed to address the issue.

Actions to be Considered to Improve ESCOP

ESCOP considered the Executive Committee recommendations for possible actions that would strengthen ESCOP as a vehicle of the Experiment Station Section. The Strategic Planning Subcommittee of ESCOP also contributed to recommendations for action, following the ESCOP meeting in July 1995. The actions are:

1. Ongoing Assessment of Needs and Function:

A re-examination of the key ESCOP subcommittee functions was undertaken in recognition that the Congress now has a growing interaction between its budget, authorizing, and appropriations activities. Consideration was given to combining or better linking related ESCOP subcommittees. This included consideration of a corresponding re-definition of committee structure and function in other parts of the Board on Agriculture.

2. Relationship with Cooperative Extension:

The main goal of the Joint ESCOP-ECOP session in July 1995 was to seek real commitments to joint actions. There is good evidence that a more meaningful mutual commitment to mutual action has emerged. ESCOP should be strong in its support of the follow-on action plans.

3. Harmonization of Planning Activities:

At its August 1995 meeting, the Planning Subcommittee provided the following recommendations to ESCOP as part of the overall process of self assessment:

- a. Develop a single taxonomy to describe the common elements of the strategies of the SAESs, SCESs, and ARS.

A first step toward increasing the ability to present a coherent picture of the REE's mission would be to agree on a common set of descriptors that would lay out the general structure of related programs so that similar activities could easily be identified. There is a large existing convergence of strategy and terms to describe goals and objectives within the separate plans of the agencies and their partnership counterparts. It should be an achievable goal to agree on a common set of these descriptors and to use this as a means of aggregating related activities. A longer range goal could be to use such descriptors in farm bill language and in budget language.

It is recommended that the new ESCOP-ECOP Task Force on Partnerships that was formed to engage the Office of Undersecretary for Research, Extension, and Education take this as one of the early recommendations for immediate action. The action would be to mandate a joint effort in defining the taxonomy as part of the revision of strategies now underway.

- b. Establish a common framework and interaction for leading to a coordinated strategy for intra- and extramural research in USDA.

One of the most common criticisms of the Department and its partners today is that there is not an obvious or understandable effort to assure appropriate joint strategic planning of the overall research agenda for the USDA. Many believe that responsibilities of the various parts of the partnership have not been clearly defined at the national level. There is the feeling that an unwarranted amount of duplication of effort exists. There is not a clear understanding of the role of federal intramural and SAES roles in research and how they relate at the national level. While many agree that the relationships are highly complementary at the state level, this is not as obvious at the national level, despite efforts of the Joint Council and interdependent efforts at planning.

There will be a need to recognize and address the fundamental problem of defining a mutually supportive agenda between the SAESs and ARS that does not convey an image of unwarranted duplication of effort -- and that can be effectively enunciated to Congress and others who are concerned about this issue. There is a need to do some real sorting out of responsibilities between these two groups.

It is recommended that, as part of the new ESCOP-ECOP Task Force on Partnerships that was formed to engage the Office of Undersecretary for Research, Extension, and Education, an immediate action be recommended between ARS, CSREES, and ESCOP to establish a common framework and interaction to develop a coordinated strategy for intra- and extramural research in USDA. The focal point for this interaction from ESCOP would be the Strategic Planning Subcommittee.

- c. Develop a short-term action to harmonize the strategic plans of ESCOP and ECOP

It is recognized that the BOA Futuring Activities will ultimately result in a greater level of integrated planning among the parts of the NASULGC family. Meanwhile the GPRA process is being initiated and requires that an integrated set of common goals and indicators be established in the immediate future. It would be to the advantage of the LGU partners if there could be agreement on related elements of the strategic plans and even some integration across closely related areas in conjunction with the early GPRA process.

ESCOP recognizes the merit of continuing initial separate research planning to ensure precision and focus, but it is intended that these separate plans be increasingly linked over time to Extension and Higher Education plans both within the NASULGC structure and other USDA agencies.

Thus it is recommended that ESCOP and ECOP expand the recent list of joint task force activities to include a short-term effort to harmonize the strategic plans of the two committees and link this to the GPRA process. The Strategic Planning Subcommittee could represent ESCOP and the Strategic Planning Council could represent ECOP interests in organizing this effort.

- d. Continue development of relationships with other federal funding agencies via joint strategic planning

The efforts of the ESCOP Environmental Affairs Subcommittee to develop an "opportunity document" outlining a common strategy between the SAESs and EPA in the area of agriculture and the environment may be useful as a template for developing relationships with other federal funding agencies.

The Strategic Planning Subcommittee looks to the input of the Environmental Affairs Subcommittee as a principle contribution to the overall SAES-USDA strategy and to the broader strategy of the SAESs as it applies to relationships with other federal agencies in the area of agriculture and the environment.

4. Farm Bill

ESCOP should continue its active role, with other NASULGC players, in revising the Farm Bill to:

- a. Enhance organizational relationships with USDA
- b. Streamline and restructure government organizations
- c. Define methods to establish priorities and credibly deal with accountability
- d. Establish more effective methods of separately dealing with partners and customers.

5. Accountability and Credibility

- a. Develop quantitative assessment methods

The ability to make credible assessments of the impact of research is severely limited by lack of established quantitative procedures for estimating the non-economic and economic results of research. Other federal agencies such as NIH have developed the capability to generate this kind of information and there is a demonstrated pay-off to using such data as part of effective advocacy of funding. The necessity of developing such capability is recognized in the Senate version of the 1995 Farm Bill.

It is recommended that a System-wide partnership decision be made to commit sufficient resources to the development of quantitative assessment methods to ensure a timely delivery of this capability. This is a component of the larger need which is described in succeeding recommendations.

- b. Develop a management strategy and information system to report research output for policy and decision makers

Congress and the Administration are calling for a capability to define output-oriented objectives for research to determine criteria for successful performance and to collect the products of research in terms of stated output objectives. The CRIS provides some but not all information needed to meet these needs. The management information needed has to be defined, and the expectations for reporting clearly stated. A management information system, using modern hardware and software, is needed to collect and analyze information coming from multiple sources and varying levels of specificity. The ideal MIS would provide information that would satisfy both state and federal needs.

There is an urgent need to provide this kind of management strategy and implement the MIS on an expedited basis. The talent of the LGU system could be brought to bear on definition of the system. Cost sharing between the USDA and its partners may be a necessary factor making this happen in a constrained resource environment.

- c. Establish a firm and visible relationship between the SAES-USDA strategic research plan and the GPRA process

CSREES is developing the implementation plan for GPRA and is scheduled to deliver their draft proposal to the OMB in March 1996. There are ongoing discussions with the LGU system about the development plan and the involvement of LGU partners in specific team efforts. The draft plan will be finalized in August 1996.

The ESCOP response to proposals for GPRA implementation has stated a firm commitment to the need for an obvious and visible relationship between the current SAES-USDA Strategic Research Plan and the goals of the GPRA five-year budget strategy. To assure that this linkage occurs most effectively, the Subcommittee urges that ESCOP adopt the following principles in further discussions with CSREES and the Office of the Undersecretary:

- i. Produce a SAES-USDA plan that is the single strategy for partnership research and GPRA is derived as a subset of this plan, selecting individual initiatives and defining these in terms of projected budgets.
- ii. Assure explicit membership linkages between the Planning Subcommittee and the GPRA Councils.
- iii. Modify the SAES-USDA Strategic Research Plan to make it more responsive to the GPRA process, while maintaining its strategic framework and orientation to opportunity rather than budget.
- iv. Recognize the need to integrate the SAES-USDA strategy with Extension and Higher Education in the GPRA five-year budget plan.
- v. Work towards integrated planning at the BOA level as ultimate input to the GPRA process.

- vi. Ensure the GPRA goals, indicators, and methods for performance assessment are the same between the SAESs and ARS.
 - vii. Recognize that GPRA is one, perhaps not the major, effort needed to address the need for more definitive assessing and reporting the impact of SAES research.
- d. Develop improved communication and commitment from customers

ESCOP recognizes the need to undertake a broad initiative to improve communication with its customers and to develop a stronger commitment from these customers in advocacy of federal funding. A more effective coupling of the strategic planning process is one component of the broader initiative. ESCOP recognizes a growing need to approach customers on behalf of the overall System and looks to the leadership of the Administrative Heads Section to assure a continuing balanced approach to our common customers.

6. Workshops for SAES Directors:

ESCOP is conducting a workshop for ESS members in May 1996. The workshop will define goals, functions and expectations of station directors and ESCOP members.

7. Relationships with Professional Societies:

Professional societies set standards and have a major influence on the general science agenda. Increasingly, these organizations have effective presences at the national level and influence both policy and funding decisions. Better linkages with these organizations would improve the image of ESCOP and bring the agendas closer together. If two-way communication produces a better consensus on the research agenda, this could be manifest in a modification of the academic reward system and encourage and recognize such activities as interdisciplinary research within the overall university community. This engagement can and should occur at both the institutional and national level. Special short-term emphasis should be placed on the CAST engagement of professional societies as they examine strategy for acting as agents of change in the LGUs. Also, COFARM offers a network node at the national level for engagement of these societies and it should be encouraged and supported.

More Effective Interactions Within NASULGC

As previously noted, much of what is needed to improve the image for and support of the SAESs at the national level requires joint efforts with members of the NASULGC family (either within or separate from NASULGC) and the agencies of federal government, especially CSREES.

1. CFERR

NASULGC is committed to placing increasing emphasis on the broader relationships exemplified by CFERR. ESCOP has not invested heavily in this relationship; yet, CFERR states the intent to develop its own budget recommendations and other inputs to the federal system. A re-examination of the need for and appropriate mechanism to engage this broader group is needed.

2. Participating Commissions

Forestry, Veterinary Medicine, Home Economics, and the 1890 Institutions are increasing their identity and national presence, but still remain closely linked at the COPs and BOA. Methods to ensure a continuing consensus on issues of joint concern and to provide equitable representation of these groups within the various levels of federal engagement should be considered.

3. Extension Committee on Organization and Policy

As noted above, the need is obvious for a hand-in-glove relationship as stated by both our customers and those funding these efforts. A statement was made during our Executive Committee meeting which sums up the problem: "We get along well with Extension at the national level, but we don't really work together." The joint meeting in July 1995 put this issue squarely on the table and, hopefully, the commitment to mutual efforts will be a new step forward.

4. Academic Programs

In many ways, particularly at the state level, the relationship between experiment stations and academic programs has a rich tradition of being close, especially as regards joint faculty appointments and the influence of the research agenda on graduate education. The relationship is less close at the national level. The COPS should continue to build better bridges, such as has occurred with the joint leadership development course.

5. International Programs

It would seem that international programs will continue to have a matrical relationship with other programs in agriculture. The agenda is broadening to include engagement with developed and developing countries and is moving to include mainstream academic, research, and extension programs that enhance global competitiveness for U.S. agriculture and provide the educated citizens to conduct agricultural operations in the global village. While U.S. funding for international agricultural activities is threatened, new opportunities are emerging with the CGIAR and its international centers, which have a growing mandate from their donors to engage in mutually beneficial activities with the institutions of developed countries. ESCOP, perhaps as part of the broader BOA engagement, could benefit from a re-examination of their relationship at the national level with ICOP.

6. Optimizing the Structure and Function of National Activities on Behalf of the LGUs

It is suggested that the question be asked as to whether or not a fundamentally different alternative is needed to meet future needs of the BOA and its constituent parts in planning, budgeting, and advocacy.

In light of these growing concerns, the Subcommittee recommended that ESCOP continue its assessment of options and alternatives, recognizing the following key concerns and recommendations:

- a. Concern over the complexity of the overall NASULGC structure in terms of effectiveness of decision making and product delivered.
- b. Recommendation that BOA consider fundamentally different operational structures.
- c. The possible need to develop more effective interim methods for ESCOP to represent the SAESs as structural adjustment is considered in the broader family.
- d. Encourage the redefinition of AESOP's role and scope, recognizing its major current role in advocacy for the System.
- e. Endorse the concern being expressed by ESCOP on the capacity and will of the members of the System to respond to the new challenges of Washington today.
- f. Recommend that ESCOP and ECOP (BOA) expand the planned effort on Congressional liaison to include a "crash course" on national affairs for all directors that would include dealing with legislative and administrative affairs and with university relations at the national level. (This workshop will be held in May 1996).

Vision and Mission Statement for the State Agricultural Experiment Stations

The vision and mission statements for State Agricultural Experiment Stations were reviewed and discussed at the Section meeting in November 1995. These statements were modified as follows to reflect the conclusions and have been incorporated in the Mid-Term Update of the SAES-USDA Strategic Research Plan.

Vision

The State Agricultural Experiment Stations (SAESs), in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, will conduct research to provide knowledge and technology to meet citizens' needs and expectations for wholesome, high quality, safe, convenient, and affordable food, fiber and forestry products. This will be achieved while helping citizens make the most effective use of the states' resources in economically competitive, environmentally sound food and agricultural systems, and preserving and enhancing the quality of life for the work force engaged in agricultural and forestry enterprises, their families and rural communities.

Mission

The mission of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations (SAESs) is to generate knowledge and technology to support a highly diversified agricultural and natural resource system that produces, processes and delivers food, fiber and forestry products for citizens.

Research in SAESs will help assure prudent and sustainable use of natural resources, preserve and enhance environmental quality and ensure that the food supply is wholesome, safe, affordable, and convenient; and enhance economic vitality by developing non-food uses of agricultural and forest products.

SAESs, in partnership with the USDA, address regional and national concerns and opportunities through coordinated and cooperative programs to make the best use of the resources of their decentralized network. SAESs operate in the international arena to mutually exchange knowledge and technology, to understand the needs of the international consumer, and to provide knowledge that contributes to stable food supplies in developing countries.

SAESs will use the revolution in biological, physical, and social sciences to form the scientific and technical basis to produce, process, and market products and maintain and protect the quality of life for all Americans. They will provide knowledge to enhance international competitiveness for U.S. agriculture and develop new products and uses from agriculture and forestry.

Next Steps

The report is part of an iterative process that will "spin-out" products on an ongoing basis. There have already been definitive actions taken since the first report of the ESCOP Executive Committee was prepared in April 1995. ESCOP has taken actions, especially in cooperation with ECOP this last summer that have great promise in terms of launching truly meaningful cooperative efforts. The BOA futuring activities are now underway with the Kellogg Foundation funding effort and employing a facilitator. The critically important thing is to continue to move past discussion to action where possible, and to continue to pursue convergence and cooperation with partners as necessary.

Reference

Toward the 21st Century: A Multidimensional Transition of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations (Based on the Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy National Futuring Conference, June 15-16, 1993, Washington, DC).