

ESCOP Social Science Subcommittee (SSSC) Meeting Summary February 23-24, 2006

The ESCOP Social Science Subcommittee is the only venue where the agricultural social sciences come together to build our collective research agenda. The presence of agriculture economics, rural sociology, family sciences, agricultural communications and agricultural education was critical in our discussions. Our previous work identifying social science questions related to each of the NRI research areas results in the specific inclusion of those social science questions in at least two NRI RFAs that had not previously included them.

We addressed social science research areas with colleagues from a variety of federal agencies.

1. Rural Entrepreneurship

- a. Brian Dabson of RUPRI laid out a research agenda for rural entrepreneurship.
- b. Colien Heffernan, Administrator of CSREES, supported the need for research that could help build a culture of entrepreneurship in rural areas and challenged the SSSC to construct a national research program on place-based entrepreneurship.
- c. The NSF representative described a number of program areas where the basic research questions that relate to these topics could be effectively addressed.
- d. USDA/Rural Development has set rural entrepreneurship as a priority.
- e. SBIR grants provide staged access to research by entrepreneurs to further innovation.
- f. NIST is another source of data about entrepreneurs.
- g. A House Small Business Committee staffer discussed policy-related research on entrepreneurship. The impact of trade policies on rural entrepreneurship is of great interest to Congress.

h. The SSSC will write a one-page white paper on research on rural entrepreneurship to compare return on investment for entrepreneurial support versus firm attraction.

2. Vulnerability Research.

- a. After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, CSREES is discussing an initiative on vulnerability research in the areas of natural and man-made disasters.
- b. SSSC members have sponsored a meeting to begin to develop a research agenda for disaster prevention, mitigation, response, recovery, and rebuilding.
- c. While the Land Grant System was relatively effective in response, a better social science research base would make prevention, recovery and rebuilding more effective.
- d. An NSF representative described research mechanisms to get rapid access to ephemeral data sets (such as disaster situations), as well as NSF interest in the growing field of vulnerability research. Studies at the individual and household level of resilience and responsiveness would help with disaster preparedness.

e. The SSSC committed to reviewing and providing input into the CSREES vulnerability research white paper.

3. Childhood obesity.

- a. Representatives from Health and Human Services, NIH, NSF, ARS and CSREES lead a discussion around the social science research questions around childhood obesity.
- b. Obesity is the one health issue where there is recognition that social conditions are probably leading contributors. www.obesityresearch.nih.gov

- c. The Southern Rural Development Center and ERS fund small studies related to obesity.
 - d. More SARE research is related to food systems and could be applied to obesity.
 - e. A challenge for social scientists is to find a short-term indicator of improved obesity status, as BMI (body mass index) is slow to respond to experimental interventions.
 - f. Invitations went out to AES and CES directors the end of January for W-temp 1821, "An Integrated Approach to Prevention of Obesity in High Risk Families. Participation by social scientists is encouraged.
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">g. The SSSC recommends that CSREES prepare a map of funding options for social science research on childhood obesity, focusing on family and structural factors. |
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The SSSC provided feedback to two systems initiatives.

1. A new area of research for the NRI, Improving the Competitiveness of U.S. Commercial Farms.
2. CREATE21 -- while generally enthusiastic about the implications of the new structure, the Committee wants to be sure that the agricultural social sciences are acknowledged and included in the new Farm Bill language.

Other business:

1. SSSC has traditionally met twice a year in DC. To save costs and time, in the future we will meet once in DC but will meet quarterly using web based conference technology. Web conferences will be held three times a year on May 19, August 16, and October 12.
2. Our next face-to-face meeting will be February 22 and 23, 2007 in Washington, DC.
3. The disciplines will work to identify scholars to fill our empty slots and the chair of the SSSC will contact the Regional Experiment Station Directors to appoint them formally to the SSSC.
4. Tamara Wagester of C-FARE will join our committee.

ESCOP Social Science Subcommittee meeting
May 22, 2006

Attending:
Bo Beaulieu
Bob Birkenholtz
Jon Brandt
Larry Busch
William Camp
Patricia Dyk
Jack Elliot
Cornelia Flora
Betsy Garrison
Sally Maggard
Richard Shumway
Chris Sigurdson
Lou Swanson
Bruce Weber
Dreamal Worthen

The next telephone meeting is September 20, 2006: 8:30 am Pacific time; 9:30 am Mountain time; 10:30am Central time; and 11:30 am Eastern time.

1. The quarterly phone meetings with one face-to-face meeting replace the two face-to-face meetings a year. This allows us to be more timely in our inputs to the ESCOP Science and Technology Committee and in forging bonds beyond CSREES in building partnerships for rural and agricultural social sciences.
2. Lou Swanson gave an update of the Science & Technology Committee on our NRI concerns.
 - a. We will look over the questionnaire, which is available online. The subgroup (Nancy Cox, Lou Swanson, Bruce Gage, and Eric) have developed a draft on-line instrument to solicit preliminary input on NRI priorities from Experiment Station, Extension, and Academic Program directors. This input will be used by the breakout groups at the SAES/ARD Workshop in September to further refine ESCOPs recommendation to CSREES on NRI funding priorities for 2008.

The instrument can be seen at <http://ces.ca.uky.edu/escop/nri1.htm>

Please review this instrument and give Lou louis.swanson@colorado.edu any comments, edits, etc by **Friday, May 26.**

This instrument uses the updated Roadmap challenges and objectives as the framework to develop recommendations. This initial input will be gained by asking the following three questions relative to each Roadmap objective.

- i. Should this objective be a high priority for NRI support in 2008 funding awards?
- ii. If NRI supports this objective in 2008, is it very important that proposals to address this objective be integrated as opposed to primarily research?
- iii. If NRI supports this objective in 2008, what are the most critical knowledge/technology gaps related to addressing this objective?

Action Items

A. The ECSOP SSSC authorized Bo Beaulieu and Cornelia Flora to meet with CSREES leadership to reconsider the every other year sequencing of Rural Development and Markets and

Trade programs of the NRI. These are the concerns we have consistently expressed as LGU representatives.

1. The inability to rewrite proposals in light of the previous reviews, due to the change in focus every two years for each of the categories. This may lower the quality of proposals. It also particularly disadvantages 1890 institutions.
2. We do not consider funding programs every other year as doubling the funding for either Markets and Trade or Rural Development, despite the noble efforts of Pat Hipple to convince us. Pat is a valuable conduit for two-way communication between LGUs and CSREES.
3. This is a concern that comes from the committee, and not CSREES staff.
4. NRI needs to be aligned with what the land grant university system sees as some of the critical research needs, which is highly inclusive of social science.
5. The NRI is over-specified, making it more of a contract program. The most creative research will not get in there, because these ideas are emergent in the field and will not be thought of by the grant officers. Important science will occur at the margins, where national public goods are generated.
6. Social science integrates into many programs of the NRI, and we are pleased about its overt inclusion. But we need to have social scientists on all the review panels where social science is included.
7. Are social science proposals encouraged, or is the direction only adding social scientists to other disciplinary/multidisciplinary teams?

B. Representatives of the SSSC will meet with the social science committee within CSREES. Neal will work with Maurice Dorsey to identify potential dates. We will also meet with Deputy Administrator Anna Palmisano and her senior leadership staff (research Director Mark Poth, Integrated Programs Director Deborah Sheeley, and Peer Review Director Ruth Lange).

C. When we next meet as a whole with Dr. Hefferan (February 2007), we will use the time to express our concerns to her and discuss directions of the NRI.

Measurable NRI outcomes:

1. Calls for proposals are less specific.
2. The every other year protocol is changed
3. There are more social scientists on all review panels
4. There are more social science teams applying for other than markets and trade and rural development.
5. There are more social scientists on teams applying for other NRI areas.

SSSC members found the meetings with other potential partners and funders extremely useful. We will continue that through our telephone and face-to-face meetings.

ESCOP Social Science Subcommittee Virtual Meeting September 20, 2006

Committee Chair Cornelia Flora called the meeting to order at 11:30 am EDT

Sub-Committee members present:

John Allen, Bo Beaulieu, Jon Brandt, Bill Camp, Ann Dodd, Patricia Dyk, Jack Elliot, Cornelia Flora, Betsy Garrison, Pat Hipple, Stephen Jorgensen, Sally Maggard, Richard Perrin, Brenda Seevers, Richard Shumway, Fisseha Tegegne, Bruce Weber, and Dreamal Worthen.

Guest: Richard Spoth, Iowa State University

1. There is a growing need to have systematic research on the impact of interventions, particularly those carried out by our extension colleagues. Richard Spoth used a set of slides submitted for the committee's review to highlight key points about an Extension-assisted, evidenced-based approach to social programming that he had presented to congress on two occasions. Included in the slides were the standards of evidence for intervention research developed by the Society for Prevention Research
 - Design allows strongest possible statement about intervention “causing” outcome (e.g., randomized, controlled); also
 - Specific statement about what outcomes, with whom
 - Specific description of intervention and outcome measures
 - Quality, appropriate timing of measurement
 - Sample clearly specified
 - Sound statistical analyses, with attention to practical value and duration of effects

Spoth related these standards to on-going projects on adolescent problem behavior prevention as a potential model for undertaking research that can inform programs and policies. He noted a number of specific activities in which his Institute is engaging with Extension as part of an effort to enhance evidence-based intervention in IA and other states.

We determined that there is a need to work with Extension in the design and implementation of studies in order to make them most useful in helping Extension do their job better and in guiding decision-makers in terms of the highest return on investments in terms of the individual, the household, the community and society. Impact studies work best when incorporated directly into program design, rather than retrofitting the programs to gather data after the fact. We acknowledged the need for integration with Extension in this work. Following on topics raised by the Board on Human Sciences, we agreed that **we will follow up on evaluation research design**, particularly in terms of nested systems impacts, for obesity and health intervention aimed at children and youth, the EFNEP program, where a great deal of such research has been done on a household level, financial stability of families, and youth development programs. We are particularly interested in economic impact research that address individual, family, community and societal levels.

Bo and Neal will meet with Cynthia Tuttle, the new Families, 4-H, and Nutrition Unit director of Nutrition and Family Consumer Sciences Programs, to learn more about how individual, household, community and society impacts of EFNEP are determined, and to compare those models of intervention research with that done by the PROSPER project on substance abuse prevention. We will also meet with David Smallwood of ERS to see how much of the relevant research that has been done can be a basis for intervention research.

2. The SSSC complemented Hipple and Auburn for the draft paper on alternative energy. **We will share further comments with them and the SSSC.** CSREES will convene a group of social scientists doing research on the social aspects of alternative energy. Committee members will let Pat know of researchers in their region and in their discipline working on this topic.

The change in the terms of trade for energy is having a substantial impact on households and communities as oil and gas exploration and development expand. There is a rich literature on boom and bust communities, but less research on households in these communities. We need to determine what we know from that research that can be useful in outreach and policy, and what new research is needed to make that impact more positive. We need to examine the interface of the two energy systems.

At the February meeting, we will meet with representatives who share our interests from the Department of Transportation, the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, and USDA/Rural Development. The committee to see this up includes John Allen, Bo Beaulieu, Dick Perrin and Pat Hipple.

3. There are a number of bodies of research on the rural urban interface and exurbanization, particularly by economists. It would be useful to see how those various bodies of research, which are determined in part by discipline and region, can be brought together and what are ways that family sciences, agricultural education and agricultural communications can be integrated in this research effort. **The committee to work on the rural urban interface includes Bruce Weber and Sally Maggard.**
4. The SSSC wants to have more influence on NRI priorities. We have come up with indicators of potential increase of social science participation. (We will seek the data to monitor our desired outcomes:
 - a. Calls for proposals are less specific.
 - b. The every other year protocol is changed
 - c. There are more social scientists on all review panels. The SSSC can serve as a resource for the non-social science topic areas to identify qualified social science reviewers.
 - d. There are more social science teams applying for other than markets and trade and rural development.
 - e. There are more social scientists on teams applying for other NRI areas.

We will also request a meeting with the new Under Secretary of Agriculture for REE, Gale Buchanan, to express our concerns and offer our alternatives, in light of the mission of REE.

5. The inclusion of some of the agricultural sciences in the National Research Council's survey of graduate programs will cover some of the agricultural sciences (including some of our programs). There are some concerns about the taxonomy and about the criteria to be used for weighting different components of those graduate programs. The SSSC will develop a response to the process based on our disciplinary perspectives. A committee made up of Ann Dodd, Jon Brandt, and Jim Zuiches will get as much information as they can in terms of the decisions yet to be made so that we can formulate SSSC input to the process.
6. We decided to further specify research questions related to entrepreneurship, building on the research questions of Jim Zuiches after he did a search of the CRIS files.
 - What are the roles of education, training and technical assistance and specifically what works for youth, for aspiring versus ongoing entrepreneurs, and for other types of entrepreneurs, in the context of rural communities?
 - What are the best practices to raise the level of creativity and innovative thinking in rural communities?
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 - What are the best practices to raise the level of creativity and innovative thinking in rural communities?
 - What is the appropriate balance of entrepreneurship development with traditional strategies of industry recruitment and business retention?
 - How important are social networks and community culture to entrepreneurship?
 - What is the competitive advantage for local, regional, and community groupings?
 - What is the payoff of an investment in entrepreneurial education and support in contrast to "welfare support or farm subsidies?"
7. Issues Surrounding the Growth in the Population of Immigrant Families

This is a growing body of scholars addressing issues of immigrant families, looking at the individual, the household, the community and societal level implications. While USDA has a deep interest in agricultural workers, other agencies, such as the Bureau of Labor and Homeland Security may share some research interests. Please contact Neal with potential contacts to invite to a discussion with us.