

NRSP Review Committee (NRSP RC) Meeting May 15, 2026 (via Zoom)

In attendance: Beth Gugino (Chair-agInnovation Northeast-Penn State), John Blanton (agInnovation NC-South Dakota State), Harshavardhan Thippareddi (agInnovation South-Georgia), Jeannette Thurston (agInnovation North Central), Tom Bewick (USDA-NIFA), Mike Schmitt (ECOP-Minnesota), Erdogan Memili (ARD-Prairie View A&M), Bob Mattive (CARET-Colorado), Gene Kelly (agInnovation West, Colorado State), David Leibovitz (agInnovation Northeast), Rick Rhodes (agInnovation Northeast)

Meeting administration

- The group went through a series of introductions
- The agenda for this meeting was approved unanimously

Request to Draft New NRSP Proposal Discussion

- *Building a Collaborative Network to Support Capacity in Digital Agriculture*
 - This group submitted a full proposal focused on Digital Agriculture which was rejected by the NRSP Review Committee in March 2026.
 - Experiment Stations understand the importance of digital agriculture and the role it will play in our research portfolio moving forward. This proposal also fits well into USDA's research agenda.
 - The committee has concerns about the project's leadership, its broad focus, and the lack of a clear vision of the proposal's impact.
 - In the rejection of the previous proposal, the NRSP RC called for the group to present proof of concept for their work in the digital agriculture space.
 - What distinguishes the work being proposed in this NRSP from the work that project leadership is currently undertaking at their home institutions? The budget is fully dedicated to salary and fringe. What research will be supported beyond the ongoing activities of the project team?
 - Digital agriculture is a focus area that will require research support for the long-term and this proposal request is more a response to a "hot topic" area with near-term solutions.
 - Data sharing, data access, and data management components need to be expanded in any digital agricultural initiative.
 - agInnovation owes this group clear guidance on what Directors are looking for in an NRSP related to digital agriculture and how best to move forward. The iterative process of submission and rejection with justification is not fair to the writing team.
 - Could we recommend the group draft a visionary white paper on research needs for data management in digital agriculture over the next 10-30 years?
 - agInnovation could issue a charge to Directors to assemble a group of "big thinkers" to take on a whitepaper effort. This could be handled by issuing an RFP with a timeline of 3-6 months.

- The NRSP RC discussed offering a monetary incentive to come along with the RFP of \$10,000-15,000. Depending on the agreed upon funding amount, the money could come from agInnovation’s budget or from FY2027 off-the-top funding to the Experiment Stations.
- This whitepaper activity could serve as a model for other proposals in “hot topic” areas.
- **A motion was introduced for the NRSP RC to reject this request to draft a new proposal in Digital Agriculture. The motion was approved unanimously. Rick will draft a note on this decision to the writing team.**
- **John, Harsha, Jeanette, Rick, and David will convene to draft an RFP for the “digital agriculture whitepaper” opportunity. agInnovation can advertise this opportunity broadly to all Experiment Stations.**

NRSP Proposal Recommendation

- *NRSP_TEMP12 Building Integrated Research Networks to Advance the Conduct and Application of Science with Urban Communities*
 - Three regional associations recommended rejection (W, NC, S) and one recommended approval with revision (NE). Concerns about this proposal echo the NRSP RC discussion from 2025 that resulted in rejection.
 - The revised proposal does not support research infrastructure; activities are steeped in extension and not research. The budget is almost entirely dedicated to personnel and strongly supports the National Urban Research & Extension Center (NUREC).
 - The northeast region, positioned at the rural-urban interface and with a high urban population, had a favorable view of urban agriculture as a topic area, and recommended offering the team an opportunity to revise, with the caveat that if approved, the NRSP would undergo a rigorous midterm review in year 3 that would serve as a “make or break” point for the 5-year project.
 - The involvement of Extension in this work could provide agInnovation with an opportunity to engage with audiences that research has not focused on historically. Nevertheless, concerns about the proposal echo discussions from 2025.
 - The committee is recommending rejection of this proposal.
 - **A motion was introduced to recommend not funding this proposal. In that motion, the NRSP RC will recommend not accepting a follow-up, revision, or resubmission of this proposal from the NRSP_TEMP12 writing team. This motion was approved unanimously.**
 - **Rick will draft a note on the NRSP RC’s deliberations to the NRSP_TEMP12 writing team. agInnovation Directors will have an opportunity to vote on this motion via an electronic ballot this summer.**

NRSP Mid-term review Discussion

- *NRSP8 Genomic Capacity: Building Applied Genomic Capacity for Animal Industries*
 - This NRSP has been operating as expected. Administrative advisers recommend continuation of the funding and are supportive of this project's work.
 - The NRSP RC recommends the establishment of a stakeholder advisory board associated with NRSP8. Supplemental funding may be approved to support this board if needed.
 - Should the NRSP RC encourage the team to consider utilizing alternative sources of funding as an “offramp” from NRSP funding in the future?
 - Is NRSP8 expected to submit another proposal for a 5-year cycle beginning 10/1/2028? While we are recommending continuation of the proposal, the group should consider its future activities and sources of funding prior to submitting for another cycle.
 - This NRSP is considered a “new/emerging initiative” project. Can we recommend they submit a justification for converting to a “capacity/core” project on the next submission?
 - **A motion was introduced to recommend continuation of funding for NRSP8. The recommendation will include language about establishing a stakeholder advisory board as well as consideration of what an “offramp” away from NRSP funding in favor of alternative funding sources would look like.**

- *NRSP11 Building Collaborative Research Networks to Advance the Science of Soil Fertility: Fertilizer Recommendation Support Tool (FRST)*
 - This project is on its first cycle of funding and has been operating as expected. Administrative advisers recommend continuation of the funding and are supportive of this project's work.
 - The administrative advisers are also seeking a funding increase of \$265,000 to cover the cost of salary and fringe of a computer programmer for a period of 18 months (January 2027 - September 2028).
 - **A motion was introduced to recommend continuation of funding for NRSP11. The motion was approved unanimously.**
 - **A motion was introduced to recommend approval of an NRSP11 funding to \$265,000 for the remainder of the project term, per the request from the project's Administrative Advisers. The motion was approved unanimously.**

Discussion item: Revision of NRSP Review Forms

- The NRSP review forms allow for only binary responses to elements of the project as they are being evaluated. We might consider revising these forms using a Likert scale or other mechanism for evaluation. A more robust form could yield better feedback to the writing teams and administrative advisers.

- **Rick agreed to develop a proposal for revised evaluation forms for consideration by the NRSP RC.**

The meeting adjourned at 12:36 pm Eastern time.