

## History

The Research and Marketing Act of 1946 set aside 25% of Title 1, Section 9 appropriations for regional research. While the Act specified that a committee of nine representatives of the Station Directors was to recommend projects worthy of support, the Experiment Station Committee on Policy (ESCOP) and the Office of Experiment Stations (later to evolve into the USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service) had to decide how to select these representatives, and how to allocate the money. At the time, most of the inter-state cooperative projects relied on the four existing regional associations of Directors to plan and supervise investigations. This experience no doubt led to the choice to establish the Committee of Nine on a regional basis, with each of the regional associations of Directors nominating two members from among its ranks and a home economist selected from the National Land-Grant College Association, now named the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.

The distribution of regional research funds was at first informally divided by four among the four regions. By the mid-1950s, the form of the distribution was formalized, leaving it to the Director's associations to recommend the distribution of funds between projects.

In the Spring of 1965, spurred by a USDA proposal to eliminate a host of agricultural researchservice installations and cooperative projects, Congress requested the "development of a plan for the 'systematic and continuous review of research programs' in order to weed out duplication and inefficiency in the public agricultural research system," according to A. K. Norwood.



Neither the existing Committee on Agricultural Science nor the Agricultural Research Planning Committee have the stature or staff support to undertake such a delicate and time-consuming task. As a result, an *ad-hoc* group representing the USDA research agencies and the State Agricultural Experiment Stations was commissioned. Following consultation with more than five hundred agricultural leaders from both the public and the private sectors, a report was issued calling for a long range study that promoted coordination within the system by indicating future goals and the "manpower" (sic) needed to meet them. It also devised a research inventory system whereby efforts toward the goals could be monitored.

The classification system that was selected included ninety-one research problem areas related to ten goals denoting the objectives of agricultural research as:

- Resource conservation and use.
- Protection of forest, crops and livestock.
- Efficient production of farm and forest products.
- Production development and quality.
- Efficiency in the marketing system.
- Expand export markets and assist developing countries.
- Consumer health, nutrition, and well-being.
- Raise level of living of rural people.
- Improve community services and environment.
- Basic research.

The long-range study also included an inventory of current (1965) research reflecting expenditures of scientist years and financial resources to serve as a benchmark for the future. The long-range study's classification scheme provided a standard of measure for the public agricultural research partners.

The research problem area-based classification model had the potential to provide scientists and administrators with a standard frame of reference for describing their work. But keeping track of the research projects proved a daunting task. A card index information retrieval system, begun by the Office of Experiment Stations in 1891 proved incapable of retrieving the enormous amount of information available from the long-range study classification.

In the 1960s, electronic information retrieval provided the opportunity to organize an automated system to support research decision making. Thus was born the Current Research Information System (CRIS), which became operational by 1970. The problems inherent in collecting, classifying and retrieving timely information intended to make CRIS's claim to be current somewhat suspect. Nevertheless, the CRIS was an enormous improvement over its forerunners.



Concurrently with the development of a national information retrieval system for agricultural research, discussions had begun within the regional associations on the desirability of identifying a single individual to represent its membership on a full-time basis. In 1960, the North Central Regional Association discussed the topic, but nothing immediately came of the suggestion. In 1966, other regional Director's groups were also giving consideration to similar measures. Encouraged by ESCOP in its April gathering, the North Central Association designated George M. Browning (Associate Director of the Iowa Station) as Regional Research Director. The Southern Directors Association soon followed the lead by naming Director Louis E. Hawkins of Oklahoma as its Director-At-Large prior to the November, 1966 ESCOP meeting. By February of the next year, Director Mark T.

Buchanan of Washington was serving in the same position for the Western Regional Directors. "More cautious in conferring 'at large' status on one man, the Northeastern Regional Association of Directors appointed Henry R. Fortmann, Associate Director of the Pennsylvania Station, as the Regional Coordinator in the Fall of 1967," according to A. K. Norwood.

There are some interesting confluences of history that apparently contributed to different expectations for these "Directors-at-large." The different titles bestowed on these regional representatives reflected the variety of expectations among the Station Directors who were chosen to create the positions. Apparently, some of the Directors desired the incumbents to act only as facilitators of communication and cooperation between the regional associations. With the emergence of the CRIS, the responsibilities for "keeping accurate records" fit in well with this expectation.

Other Directors envisioned the "Directors-at-large" as a "standing council of 'super Directors' to monitor developments within the USDA and Congress, and to serve as spokesmen on emerging issues affecting the entire system" (Norwood).

*"While the exact nature of their role remained undefined as they assumed their posts, the regional representatives concentrated their initial activities on the immediate tasks of collecting the data necessary to put the Current Research Information System in operation. Working closely with the Cooperative State Research Service's effort, the regional Directors functioned as a national resource group for the Washington bureaucracy and the Stations, because of their wide knowledge and availability to policy makers in the Capital, and to Directors in the states. Thus, their sphere of interest naturally expanded to include the whole range of issues in the Federal-State partnership, so that they involved into de facto liaisons for the State Agricultural Experiment Stations."*

(Note: the preceding was adapted from extracts from Norwood Allen Kerr, 1987, "The Legacy - A Centennial History of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations 1887-1987." Missouri Agricultural Experiment Station. University of Missouri-Columbia pp. 90-121.)