

**Fertilizer Research and Education Program
Technical Advisory Subcommittee (TASC)**

DoubleTree Hotel, Sacramento Room
1150 Ninth Street
Modesto, CA 95354

October 30, 2013
1:00 PM to 4:00 PM

Minutes

TASC MEMBERS

Michael Cahn
Dennis Chessman
Eric Ellison
Charles Hornung
Marja Koivunen (not present)
Holly Little
Robert Mikkelsen
Jerome Pier
Stephen Spangler (not present)
Jack Wackerman, Chair (not present)
Doug West

CDFA STAFF

Edward Hard
Rick Jensen
Erika Lewis
Asif Maan

INTERESTED PARTIES

Daniel Geisseler
David McEuen
Mike Menes

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The meeting was called to order at 1:10 PM. Dr. Asif Maan welcomed the subcommittee and introduced newly appointed members Mr. Charles Hornung and Mr. Stephen Spangler (not present). Mr. David McEuen agreed to sit in on the meeting as the FIAB representative because Mr. Spangler could not attend the meeting. Self-introductions were made and a quorum was established.

SELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

MOTION: Dr. Maan requested the committee vote to select a new Vice Chair. Dr. Rob Mikkelsen explained that the Vice Chair is traditionally nominated based on seniority and committee activity. Based on both of these factors, Dr. Mikkelsen moved to elect Dr. Jerome Pier as Vice Chair, if he would accept the responsibility. Dr. Pier accepted. Dr. Eric Ellison seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES

MOTION: Dr. Pier requested the committee review the minutes of the July 3, 2013 meeting. Dr. Doug West moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Dr. Holly Little seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

REVIEW BYLAWS AND DISCUSS MEMBER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Dr. Maan explained that at FREP's annual staff meeting in August, the program reviewed the TASC bylaws to ensure they are still relevant and to assess whether any areas need improvement. To provide background for the discussion of bylaws, Dr. Maan went on to explain the difference between TASC and Fertilizer Inspection Advisory Board (FIAB). Dr. Maan explained that the TASC was created to serve as a body of scientific experts because the FIAB did not have the technical capacity for a scientific review of project proposals. The FIAB serves to represent those paying into the mill tax, while the role of TASC is solely to provide scientific/technical expertise to the FIAB.

Dr. Maan then explained how members are appointed to FIAB. Dr. Maan stated that this is a transparent public process; a press release is drafted and distributed to all licensees, as well as the department's distribution lists, Facebook page, and the CDFA website. Applications are reviewed and the FIAB meets and makes a recommendation on which applicants to appoint. The FIAB's recommendation is presented to the CDFA Secretary who makes the final determination of who to appoint to the board. The FIAB term is three years; terms are staggered so there are three members appointed each year.

Dr. Maan encouraged the TASC to consider their historical purpose and role while reviewing the bylaws to ensure they are consistent. Dr. Maan reminded the TASC that all meetings must be conducted in accordance with California's open meeting laws. If the TASC members feel the need to call a meeting, CDFA must be notified and the public notice process must be followed.

Dr. Pier led the group in a discussion of the Tenaya document. Dr. Pier explained that a subcommittee of the TASC met in Tenaya Lodge to discuss several members' concerns; the Tenaya document is a list of recommendations for the future direction and administration of FREP drafted by this subcommittee (henceforth Tenaya subcommittee) at the conclusion of their meeting. Dr. Pier then led the group in discussion of each of the stated recommendations.

First, the Tenaya subcommittee expressed their support on Article III, Section 1 of the TASC bylaws as currently written, which provides that terms for TASC members are unlimited. The Tenaya subcommittee felt that instituting term limits would lead to frequent turnover, potentially compromising the ability of TASC to follow a project over multiple funding cycles. Furthermore, Dr. Pier explained that long term membership allows for a historical perspective of projects completed in the past to be taken into account when making new funding recommendations.

Second, the Tenaya subcommittee expressed their support on Article III, Section 2 of the TASC bylaws as currently written, which provides for the composition of the TASC.

The Tenaya subcommittee felt there was pressure to shift the composition of the TASC from a group with diverse backgrounds in favor of appointing more academically focused members. Dr. Pier argued that while PhD's are qualified to evaluate proposals on scientific merit, they may not necessarily have adequate experience to assess a proposal's field applicability and likelihood of adoption of practices. Dr. Pier stressed the Tenaya subcommittee's belief in the importance of including TASC members that are actually in the farming community and involved in fertilizer sales. Their connection to the field will help ensure that FREP funds projects with practical outcomes.

Dr. West shared his observation from previous meetings that, in general, most of the discussion was carried by TASC members with post graduate training and field research experience. Dr. West expressed his concern that if the list proposed by the Tenaya subcommittee is implemented, over half of the TASC may not have an adequate research background to be able to critique proposals on their technical merit.

Dr. Little said that it comes down to picking the right candidates regardless of their qualifications on paper. Mr. Hornung agreed, adding that candidates without post graduate education may have a wealth of research and field experience to offer the TASC. Dr. Michael Cahn added that it's important to have the diversity of backgrounds and interaction between members to share expertise.

Dr. Maan inquired whether the Tenaya subcommittee recommended allocating seats for different industry members (dealer, farmer, CCA, etc.). Dr. Maan cautioned that this could limit the TASC and suggested looking at qualification criteria in a broader sense. Dr. Pier explained that while the representation sectors listed in the Tenaya document seem like a quota, the original intent was not to allocate membership. Dr. Pier suggested continuing to use the current language in the bylaws that "one member can satisfy more than one of the criteria stated above." The emphasis should be on finding qualified members that will participate and contribute to the discussion.

Dr. West explained that he is not arguing for requiring PhD's for TASC members, but simply that technical expertise should be the focus of TASC while industry representation should remain the focus of the FIAB. Dr. Maan explained that because of the ongoing nitrate issue there is interest in FREP, especially regarding the individuals that decide what kind of research gets funded. There have been questions regarding the membership and credibility of the TASC from industry, the state legislature, and environmental groups. Mandating which sectors are represented on the TASC could potentially turn the TASC from a technical body into a political body. Mr. Rick Jensen reinforced the importance of assessing the abilities and core competencies currently on committee and filling the gaps that are missing; the overall goal should not be about having certain groups represented but rather having skill sets represented.

Third, the Tenaya subcommittee expressed a desire to conduct a survey of Pest Control Advisors, Certified Crop Advisors, and practicing farmers to determine what drives

adoption of new practices. The committee agreed to look into this ongoing effort to avoid duplication of effort.

Fourth, the Tenaya subcommittee expressed concern with the current request for proposal (RFP) process. In recent years, there has been a frustration with low-impact proposals. The Tenaya subcommittee asked that the TASC receive a detailed list of priority topics based on a gap analysis of existing research to help tailor the priority research areas. In addition, the Tenaya subcommittee expressed a desire to fund more integrated/multi-disciplinary proposals with strong demonstration/outreach components in hope of promoting the rapid adoption of practices. Discussion ensued and the TASC members agreed that a more proactive RFP process should be implemented in an effort to fund only the highest quality projects.

Lastly, the Tenaya subcommittee recommended creating a new "FREP Project Specialist" position. This position would be funded 50/50 between FREP and UC and would function as liaison between FREP and the UC system. Dr. Mikkelsen explained that this suggestion is an attempt to respond to the number of upcoming retirements in the UC system and concern about a lack of fertilizer research being conducted. Dr. Maan explained that funding a position is a long term commitment and that FREP is better equipped to fund projects, not positions.

Dr. Eric Ellison expressed concern that it may prove difficult for a researcher to balance expectations from the university versus expectations from FREP. More information is needed to see how this has impacted similar positions. Dr. Mikkelsen explained that this discussion was driven by FREP losing the capacity to do research at UC and perhaps the discussion should be expanded to include contract research. Discussion ensued and the TASC agreed that further refinement of the RFP is needed in the future.

Dr. Pier requested that the TASC move on to discussing the proposed bylaws. The bylaws were projected onto a screen and Ms. Erika Lewis made revisions in real-time per TASC direction. TASC accepted the proposed revisions to Article III, Section 2, stating it is recommended (not required) that members possess at least a master's degree in a related field. Discussion ensued on Article II, Section 3 regarding the TASC steward process. Dr. West explained that he sent several reports to stewards in January 2013 and received very limited response. Several TASC members indicated that they would like to receive a copy of all reports in order to be able to make informed decisions about future projects. It was agreed that CDFA staff will review all project reports and may request technical advice from TASC members as necessary. All reports will be provided to TASC members for their information and comment.

DEVELOP RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR 2014 RFP

Dr. Pier moved discussion to research priorities for 2014. Dr. West led the TASC in a discussion of a draft list of priorities. The draft contained the same priorities as 2013 with the addition of crop-specific research gaps identified by Dr. Daniel Geisseler. It was

agreed that Ms. Lewis would email the draft RFP to the TASC and ask for comments before the December release date.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

Dr. West then led the TASC in a discussion of the Fresno State Center for Irrigation Technology's request for additional project funding. Discussion ensued regarding the merit of the funding request. Dr. West then posed the question of what to do in similar situations – do all requests for additional funding need to be presented to the TASC? Dr. Maan clarified by explaining that FREP wants to cultivate trust between the program and the TASC by clearly defining how to handle these situations. Dr. Cahn directed the group's attention to a motion from the July 3, 2013 meeting in which it was decided that the TASC be notified in any expenditure of FREP funds. Discussion ensued and the TASC agreed that FREP should be allowed to advance project funding with electronic approval by a majority of TASC members.

Dr. Maan then led a discussion about department based initiatives. There are certain situations in which administrative initiatives are implemented – for example, the crop fertilization guidelines, project database, and Nitrogen Tracking and Reporting System Task Force. Dr. Maan explained that although these initiatives do not fall within the TASC's technical advisory capacity, FREP should keep TASC informed of these initiatives in order to foster open communication.

Mr. Jensen informed the TASC that the legislature allocated seven additional staff positions to the CDFA fertilizer program. The program is currently conducting a gap analysis to identify how these positions should be filled. Some of the positions will be paid for with FREP funds and the remainder will be paid for with fertilizer program funds.

At this point, Dr. Maan reinforced that the TASC should not be concerned about funding. TASC should only be concerned about the scientific merit of the project proposals. Dr. Pier suggested that it may be more useful to rank proposals in number order and leave the decision of which projects to fund to the FIAB to make a recommendation to the secretary. Discussion ensued and the TASC agreed to employ the following process for evaluating full proposals:

- Each TASC member will review, score, and comment on each full proposal independently before the TASC meets (the 90 point minimum score to approve a project is no longer in effect)
- During the meeting, the TASC will discuss each proposal, ultimately ending in a yes/no vote
- Those projects recommended for funding will then be ranked according to priority by the TASC
- This ranking will then be given to the FIAB to make the ultimate decision on which projects to recommend to the secretary for approval based on funding availability

Moving on, Dr. Pier then asked to let the record show that the TASC thanks former members Mr. Tom Gerecke and Mr. David McEuen for their years of dedication and service. Both members possess valuable experience in the field and their leadership and contributions to the TASC have been greatly appreciated.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting to discuss and recommend 2014 research concept proposals is scheduled for February 27, 2014 in Sacramento.

Dr. Pier called the meeting to an end at 3:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Erika Lewis, Research Analyst
Fertilizer Research and Education Program

Date