Minutes of the Northeast SARE Administrative Council Meeting  
July 29-30, 2010  
Swedesboro, NJ

AC members present:  John Ayers, Tom Brady, Tiffany Davis, Dahlia Jackson-O’Brien, Lewis Jett, Kim Kroll, Stephen McHenry, Erik Miller, Tom Morris, Mark Nardi, Kate Newkirk, Jean Noon, Lela Reichart, Judith Schwank, Andrea Szylvian, John Teasdale, Ryan Voiland, Brian Wickline, Seth Wilner

Absent: Jackie Folsom, Chris Watkins

Staff attending: Carol Delaney, Vern Grubinger, David Holm, Candice Huber, Janet McAllister

Guest Presenter: Gladys Zinati, Rutgers

Regional updates and old business
Welcome and Introductions; review of role of the AC and the purpose of the meetings. Agenda revised to allow time to review materials handed out before their discussion. Review of minutes from winter AC meeting. Motion to approve minutes from Feb. 15-17, 2010, made by Erik Miller; seconded by Brian Wickline. Motion passed, all in favor.

Farm tours
This year’s tour was very well organized and presented. Two of the stops were at larger farms that had unsuccessfully applied for SARE funds and were unhappy about this. This brings up the question of how we can get our comments out to such applicants in a way that will encourage them to reapply if their ideas are compelling, or to be clear why their projects are not suitable for SARE. It would be good for larger farms to have success in SARE, since they affect so much of the food system. How can we be more welcoming to them? We need to educate them on how to make a stronger case to SARE, and to realize it is a competitive grant process. Recently we have changed our feedback and are strengthening the comments. We are clear that size of operations it is not a review criterion, but it might be good to clarify our position on this to reviewers. A small change in a large operation could have a bigger impact than a large change in a smaller operation. Calls have become clearer and these changes in place may not have yielded results yet.

National SARE report by Kim Kroll (handout)
In restructuring of NIFA the SARE program will be housed within the Agricultural Systems Division. NIFA has also identified five Priority Science Areas and six core areas for which funding will be available through AFRI. The President’s 2011 Budget request includes increases in both the Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 funds as well as $10 million to launch the Federal States Matching grants program. Hopefully we will see Congressional approval by Sept 30. Legislation spells out some specific things that the matching funds are to do. Indirect costs will be allowed on Chapter 1 agreements beginning in FY2011. Logistics are still being worked out. It is allowed, but not required. Statutory language specifically prohibits indirect cost recovery on Chapter 3 funds. Grantsmanship workshops on systems-based applications are being offered through collaboration with other USDA initiatives. This year it will be at Washington State University on September 8th and the webcast, live and archived, will be available for viewing. The online reporting system is in the process of being improved to enhance the reports. The upload feature will be done soon.
This reporting system is an important feature as we instruct potential applicants to look at the project database to see what has been done on their topic before they submit. Carol Delaney pointed out that when in the system you can locate reports by key words, however search engine spiders cannot see these reports since they are housed inside this system, thus they are not accessible to the broad community. Consensus is that this is a major concern. Kim will check with the system programmer to see how we can change this.

**National SARE Outreach report by Andrea Szylvian**

There was a meeting in March of regional representatives to advise SARE Outreach. There was a survey sent out to the SARE community soliciting resources that might be helpful to SARE. Everyone is invited to submit resources to SARE Outreach at anytime. Currently SARE Outreach is mostly busy with design and content migration for the new website. Books and bulletins are still being worked on – the latest publication is *Managing Alternative Pollinators*. All SARE publications are available to AC members free of charge. Please make requests to Burlington office staff.

**Executive Committee report by Andrea Szylvian**

The Executive Committee has monthly meetings largely to discuss proposals that are brought to the AC meetings. EC representatives attended the winter PDP meeting and the April Ops meeting. Minutes from all EC meetings are posted on the Northeast SARE blog. There is an open slot on the EC for a member of the class of 2013. Erik Miller has agreed to serve if approved. Motion to approve Erik Miller to serve on the Executive Committee made by Kim Kroll; seconded by Stephen McHenry. Motion passed, all in favor.

In 2011 the Host Institution review will be due. The EC working with the national director is required to review the host institution every three years.

**Hand out: Toward Sustainable Agricultural Systems in the 21st Century**

This report from the National Academy of Science summarizes new recommendations for the direction of sustainable agriculture.

**Northeast SARE Regional Coordinator’s report by Vern Grubinger**

Welcome to the new AC members. Orientation will be after dinner. There is still one seat vacant on the AC representing agribusiness; we sought someone from NJ because NJ is currently not represented on the AC, but were unsuccessful in finding a candidate. Staff will send out application information to AC members. Staff has worked with EC to prepare the five proposals that will be discussed at this meeting. The Graduate Student Grant Program was a huge success in that we received 53 applications which was far greater than we anticipated. David worked hard to put together extra review teams. The online system worked well for submissions and review, but needs some adjustment on the administrative end. It clearly saves paper and resources, and is also more efficient in getting the review completed and comments back to the applicants. We are still able to provide hard copies for reviewers as needed. There is a proposed funding increase for the 2011 budget and we discuss implementing a matching grants program. The NESARE website continues to improve as staff is pursuing training and working on development. Analytics have shown a large increase in web traffic over the last year.
We have upgraded Candice’s position so she can assume primary responsibility for our website and also represent the northeast on the national web project committee. We will be hiring a new office manager this fall for the Burlington office’s clerical and reception tasks. Helen will continue as copy editor for website content and will work with Candice on analytics and development. Helen has prepared three one page educational handouts for Farmer, Partnership and Community grant to provide an overview of the programs. These are intended to help people decide if the program might be for them and if they want to look at the application instructions.

The newsletter has been going out electronically to approximately one-third of our mailing list. The rest are receiving the printed copy. It is an ongoing battle to keep our database updated, but it is constantly improving and the e-newsletter has saved significant costs. Staff is working on a how to-write guide for the Community grant program. The Farmer how to-write guide has been very effective, as have the guides for R&E and PDP. Each year these guides and the calls need to be tweaked to reflect changes and provide clarifications. The Minigrant Evaluation process has unfortunately broken down. We have a partial report and have not had any further communication from the evaluators, despite repeated requests. Our prior grantees have been pestered enough, so we do not feel we can start over at this time. We will wait to see if anything further comes of the current evaluation before deciding where to go next. The Community grant program was evaluated last fall and this helped us to make some improvements to the call. We keep honing it down to make it clear that the ultimate beneficiaries are farmers.

**Report on State Program proposals by Tom Morris**

Three years ago began enhanced funding of state programs with the goals of having paid staff, targeted education programs and outreach about SARE, and to encourage support from land grant institutions. This also allowed for joint programs to work as a region which is more suitable in some areas than distinguishing by state. State coordinators submitted 3yr proposals, but budgets are awarded annually so the proposals need to be resubmitted each year. Proposals this year were reviewed by Andrea, Erik, Vern, Tom M., and Janet. Two years ago these programs moved to the outcome funding model, so reviewers were looking for performance targets (what improvements farmers will make), milestones (what are the activities and who is going to participate), and verification (how they will determine if they met the performance target). Nancy Kiernan from Penn State spoke at the PDP meeting on these things. PDP staff are working to provide more support to the state coordinators in the way of education and tools. Erik Miller suggested that presentations such as the one by Nancy Kiernan be recorded and available for reference. Janet will provide Nancy’s handouts and resources via the website and blog. Proposals were sent back for revisions and there was some frustration on the part of the state coordinators. However, improvements were made and 11 proposals are complete with contracts being issued for 2010. Still awaiting revisions on two proposals and the last three are not moving forward at this time. Janet will be following up on these.

**Update on review of Graduate Student Grant proposals; report on electronic submission process**

The list of Grad Student proposals recommended for funding was handed out - presentation and vote will be tomorrow morning to allow time for AC members to read it. This was a new program this year. 53 proposals were received; two were withdrawn, so 51 were reviewed.
This was also the maiden voyage of the electronic submission and review system. It worked well for the user and reviewers, but there are details that need to be fixed. AC members on review teams had positive feedback on the electronic system. Outreach plans were poor to non-existent in most proposals, so will stress that more in the next call. Two-thirds of all the proposals were fundable. Reviewers felt the science was better in these proposals than in other programs, so feel that this program is valuable. The original funding target was $120k, but we propose increasing it to $166,059 to be able to include some livestock proposals.

**Update on Agroecosystems projects: renewals and site visits by John Teasdale and David Holm**
Agroecosystem proposals are for a 3 yr period in the context of a longer project that could go for up to 9 years, which is two more cycles of funding. In 2008 we funded a UNH project and in 2009 we funded a Penn State project. In 2010 there were no projects approved for funding. Kate Newkirk and David Holm did a site visit at UNH, and David and Lewis Jett did a site visit at Penn State. Reports were reviewed. Both projects are moving forward and having an impact. Lewis noted the need for a full time data manager for a project of this scale. The UNH project is up for renewal in 2011. Penn State start was delayed one year, so will be up for renewal in 2013. This leaves a slot available for 2012 – do we want to allocate this money for another project or do we want to allocate it to other programs? AC will need to decide this at the winter meeting. Staff will prepare budget scenarios and bring to winter meeting for consideration.

**Presentation by Dr. Gladis Zinati (R&E project leader) Rutgers University**
Dr. Zinati has received SARE funding for her use of mycorrhizae for nursery crops with a 2007 R&E grant and a 2008 Partnership grant. She addressed the question on benefits of using mycorrhizae by conducting research and providing science based knowledge to the research community and nursery growers, and by engaging nurseries, students, and collaborators at the research and practical application levels. She spoke of her experience in applying for the R&E grant. First time around she was not invited to submit a full proposal, but the comments helped her to understand what was needed to be more competitive and she resubmitted her proposal. It was somewhat of an issue for her not to have the money until September.

**Proposal for revised review procedures for Research and Education and Professional Development**
At the last winter meeting it was decided that we would revise this proposal and discuss at summer meeting. Revisions include enhanced timeline; altered flow of clarity questions; ranked recommendations by primary review team; and replace interviews with “pre-award” meetings. Discussion about space limit for clarity responses as we don’t want to allow for more proposal content. Under “Specific Actions” will add “if needed” to #4, “within a space limit” to #5, and replace “co-PIs” with “any relevant collaborators” in #10. Clarity questions and comments from reviewers need to be phrased in a way that makes them appropriate to send directly to applicants. Purpose of preaward meeting is not part of selection process, but to explain reporting and offer guidance in verification to PI and collaborators. **Motion to accept the review process as revised** made by Tiffany Davis; seconded by John Ayer. **Motion passed, all in favor.**

Kim suggested as they do in the north central region to have a large meeting of PIs and state coordinators as the preaward meeting as a way to give consistent guidance and also as a mechanism to link Chap 1 & Chap 3. This will be discussed at a future meeting.
Review process timeline was reviewed and winter AC meeting date set for Feb. 15-17, 2011 (noon to noon). David is looking for volunteers for review teams. David will set 2nd tier review dates via email. (Dates were subsequently set for second tier review: January 18-19, 2011.)

**Release of revised call for Community grants**
The evaluation done last fall revealed some areas of improvement needed, so call was revised to address them and to reflect the online submission process. Language was added to require involvement of farmers in the project and in developing the project; to specify more exclusions; and to update review criteria to include verification. We are asking them to submit a verification tool. Also added FAQs at the end. In addition we will have a how-to-write guide. It was noted that comments from reviewers are useful in identifying areas of concern and writing examples. **Motion to approve the Sustainable Community Grant call for 2011** made by Judith Schwank; seconded by Jean Noon. **Motion passed, all in favor.**

**Minigrant programs update by Carol Delaney**
Carol has been doing outreach for the minigrants with the state coordinators. Due dates for minigrants are as follows: Community grants due 10/19/10; Partnership grants due 11/16/10; Farmer grants due 12/7/10. Carol has also been updating past project reports in the reporting system with the help of a temp worker. Carol has been busy visiting farmer grant awardees. She invites state staff to join her and would also like to extend the invite to AC members. Carol will email AC members when she will be in their area in case they would like to join her on these visits.

**Portfolio review by David Holm**
A portfolio review, provided in the meeting packet, provides a summary of agriculture in our region based on the 2007 census, and where our grants are awarded by topic and state. Tables with the number of proposals received and funding requested, and the number and amount of grants awarded are useful for identifying underrepresented groups, topics, and states. This information is used to direct our outreach. Included in the portfolio this year is a table listing of the grants and funding levels for all SARE regions. It was noted that topics on p8-10 don’t include ‘quality of life’.

**Sustainable Farmer Educators proposal: discuss and vote**
The Sustainable Farmer Educator (SFE) program began in 2002 to allow farmers to justify their time to share SARE experiences and information. Initially it was a successfully active program, but activity has fallen off over the years after the Speakers Fund program began, which seems to be meeting a lot of the same needs. Since, the SFE program is work to administer, there are challenges obtaining reports, and the funds simply aren’t getting used fully, a proposal is considered to phase out the SFE program. **Motion to accept the proposal to phase out the Sustainable Farmer Educators program** made by John Ayers; seconded by Andrea Szylvian. **Motion passed, all in favor.**

**Review of new AC member orientation**
Orientation for new AC members was done after the first day of the AC meeting. New members felt that reading the handbook and the meeting binder prior to them meeting allowed them to have a good idea of the program and be able to participate in the discussions. Also felt it was good to have it after a day of meeting
which allowed them to understand what questions they had. Using the large meeting room was not great. For next orientation would like to have a specific, more intimate space reserved and also will formalize the orientation with an outline/agenda.

Graduate Student proposals
Summaries of proposals recommended for funding were presented by Candice. At last winter’s meeting the grad student program was approved to fund a total of $120,000. Looking at the large number of proposals submitted, the overall budget, and in an effort to include underserved topics, the top 13 proposals are being recommended for funding at an increased level of $166,000. Tom Brady pointed out that we should be looking at other regions to determine data for future evaluations and begin collecting that data now. Possible measures of success include: if the grad student goes onto sustainable agriculture fields; if they apply to other SARE programs in the next 5-10 years; do they publish their work and is it cited; was their subject matter and research doable because of this grant. It is necessary for us to establish short term and long term metrics. We need to determine if students are eligible to apply for a second year of funding for research on their project. Motion to approve funding of the 13 recommended 2010 Graduate Student Grant proposals for a total of $166,000 made by Tiffany Davis; seconded by Jean Noon. Motion passed, all in favor.

Target funding levels for 2011 grants
David Holm reviewed the number of proposals and funding levels for previous years and explained the rationale for this year’s proposed funding levels. For 2011 the proposed target funding levels for Farmer, Partnership, and Community grants is $250,000 each and for Graduate Student grants is $175,000. It was noted that sometimes we adjust our funding around the target level, so is it prudent to set the grad student target so high before we see more results of the program, as these dollars take away dollars available to R&E. Based on the number of Grad Student program quality proposals received, staff feel this is a worthwhile program to invest in and we may need to revisit the Community grant program as this may be the one to adjust funding levels if needed to free up funds for Graduate Student grants. Motion to accept the proposed funding levels for the 2011 minigrants as presented made by John Teasdale; seconded by Judith Schwank. Motion passed, all in favor. Request made to include in the table the amounts approved by review teams, including those not funded, for each program.

Matching Grants program
Funding for a SARE matching grants program has been proposed in the 2011 federal budget. The details of implementation need to be hammered out, such as exactly what the legislation means by “State programs”. The new program needs to be different from grants program we already have. Core intent is capacity building – something that will endure after funding from us. Vern handed out a list of sustainable agriculture centers and their descriptions for ideas. What to consider and what not to consider for this discussion were first addressed.

Ideas about program to consider: Outcome funding model, Teaching, Faculty lines, Centers, Size & number of grants, Social aspects, Agroecosystems, Geography, Underserved audiences and topics, Infrastructure Multi-discipline. Issues not to consider for this discussion: What constitutes a match, Timeframe, Total dollars, Budget eligibility, Eligible entities, Staffing, Overhead (indirect).
The goal for this discussion is to come up with a paragraph which would drive a draft call. Five things to identify in the paragraph are: what the proposals must include; what the work should focus on; what capacity will be enhanced; what are the impacts, who are the beneficiaries and partners; and how success is measured.

Began with a list of helpful adjectives: Robust, Vibrant, Resilient, Integrated, Cooperative, Strategic, Visionary, Multi State, Diverse. Next, components of each topic were discussed and voted on to determine most important. Number of votes are beside each component in ( ).

Proposals MUST include:
Technical assistance to farmers (13)  
Applied Research (12)  
On-Farm research (11)  
Graduate education (5)  
Undergraduate education (2)  

Work should focus on:
Issues affecting sustainability of farms and food systems (14)  
Social issues affecting (1)  
Infrastructure & market issues (1)  
Agroecosystem design & component interaction (1)  
Sustainability metrics (1)  
Integrate rural and urban (1)  
Regional value chains (0)  

Capacity will be enhanced for:
Multi-disciplinary ‘systems’ work (12)  
Underserved institutions and constituencies (11)  
Organizations with a history of working with farmers (1)  

Impacts/Beneficiaries and partner organizations:
Proposals may (not must)
- include institutions of higher learning (11)  
- be sub regional (11)  
- be multi state (7)  
- include NGOs (6)  
- include Land Grants (4)  
- include farmer organizations (4)  
- include ag business/industry (3)  

Success will be measured by:
Farmer behavior change (16)  
Economic improvements (15)  
Societal/ Policy change (14)  
Academic Outputs (6)  
Institutional resources and external funds leveraged (4)  

Lastly, put in the parking lot to discuss later: Matching amounts, Time frame, Eligibility (entities & budgets), Overhead costs, Staffing needs, Implementation process

Resulting Paragraph:
Northeast SARE seeks matching grant proposals to build capacity for integrated, strategic, visionary programs that conduct applied and on farm research and provide technical assistance to farmers related to issues affecting the sustainability of agriculture and the food system. Programs should include diverse constituents including underserved institutions and audiences with a focus on multidisciplinary work leading to farmer behavior change, societal change, and economic improvement for farms, agricultural businesses and communities. Farms must be engaged in the planning and delivery of the program, along with others such as state agencies, institutions of higher learning and non-profit organizations. A 100% match is required.
By winter meeting the goal is to have a draft call with a separate document explaining why the call was crafted this way in respect to the legislation and in respect to matchability. This will be worked on by a subcommittee with staff and Executive Committee. Matching funds subcommittee: Kim Kroll, Kate Newkirk, Tom Brady, Jean Noon, Erik Miller (EC liaison)

**Revised proposal for liaison position**

At last winter’s meeting a position was proposed for a program liaison. The proposal was postponed for revision. Suggestions today include targeting specific, making it a fixed term, and opening the call to former AC members recently completing their terms. Proposal is amended to include the following: page two, paragraph three, “…with a focus on underserved, underrepresented stakeholders in SARE programs”; budget dates are corrected to Oct 1, 2010 – Sept. 30, 2011; page 1 “Measures of Success” will also say, “Measures will be evaluated and a decision made by the AC whether to continue the position after two years.” **Motion to accept the revised liaison proposal as amended** made by Stephen McHenry; seconded by John Ayers. Motion passed, all in favor.

**Proposal for revised conflict of interest policy**

National SARE Conflict of Interest Policy has changed thus we need to change our conflict of interest policy to comply. The new policy reflects two changes: 1) that reviewers are restricted from reviewing proposals submitted by their former thesis or post doc advisees for lifetime; and 2) that reviewers are prohibited from reviewing proposals from collaborators on publications until three years after the publication. We also clarified that the publications in question are peer reviewed. Proposed conflict of interest policy is revised to add “or postdoctoral advisor” after the parenthetic phrase in item #2 and “proposed” to the first occurrence of the word “project” in item #8. **Motion to accept the revised liaison proposal as amended** made by Tiffany Davis; seconded by Erik Miller. Motion passed, all in favor.

**Set AC reps to grant review teams**

David has arranged volunteers for the review teams as follows:

- **Community**: Andrea Szylvian, Judith Schwank, Stephen McHenry (Erik if needed)
- **Partnership**: Brian Wickline, John Teasdale, Tiffany Davis
- **Farmer**: Kate Newkirk, Jean Noon, Lela Reichart, Dahlia Jackson-O’Brien
- **R&E**: Kate Newkirk, Jean Noon (John Ayer if needed)
- **PDP**: Jackie Folsom, Seth Wilner
- **Agroecosystems project renewal**: John Teasdale, Kate Newkirk, Lewis Jett
- **State Program**: Erik Miller, Andrea Szylvian

Where needed: Lewis Jett, Kim Kroll, Ryan Voiland (not community), Mark Nardi

**2011 summer meetings**

Next summer’s meetings and farm tours will be held in Rhode Island. Dates were discussed and the meetings will be held the 3rd week in July.
Critique of Meeting
Good meeting, well organized, good tour; Tour opened eyes to difference in agriculture within our region
Suggest name tags for tour with identifier of AC, TC, etc.
Binder well-prepared
AC provides good guidance and direction and is appreciated by staff
Suggest having national and regional reports just read as handouts to save time at the meeting
Suggest team building activity in meeting to get to know other AC members better
Like schedule with overlap of tour; would like to see stronger connection to SARE projects on the tour
Appreciates work done in between meetings
Would like to see more educational components on the web
Suggest longer introductions for new members
NJ is known for highways and buildings so good to see why it’s called the garden state.
Each time the meeting gets better
Good to have presentation by grant recipient at the meeting.
More time for social interaction and improve orientation
Meeting should set best possible example with local foods and sustainable resources, etc.
Accomplished a lot in matching grants discussion – good use of time

Would like to officially thank Jack Rabin for his part in organizing the event and facility.

Summary of Actions Needed

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Needed</th>
<th>Person Responsible</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Send information on application to AC for Ag Business slot to AC members.</td>
<td>Vern</td>
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<td>● Investigate how to get search engines to find reports in project database</td>
<td>Kim</td>
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<td>● Post Nancy Kiernan’s materials on blog &amp; PDP web page</td>
<td>Janet/Vern</td>
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<td>● Post minigrant one-pagers on website</td>
<td>Helen</td>
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<td>● Budget scenarios reflecting Agroeco program to be brought to winter meeting</td>
<td>David</td>
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<td>● 2nd tier review dates will be selected via email</td>
<td>David</td>
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<td>● Clarify preaward meeting in review process in one page document</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<td>● SFE program: letters, website adjustment</td>
<td>David, Candice</td>
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<td>● Liaison search</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<td>● Set up metrics for evaluating Grad Student Program</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<td>● Draft call for matching grants program with rationale provided to be worked on by following subcommittee with staff and EC.</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<td>Kim Kroll, Kate Newkirk, Tom Brady, Jean Noon, Erik Miller (EC liaison)</td>
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<td>● Include in next year’s portfolio the percent of proposals approved, but not funded for each program</td>
<td>David</td>
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<td>● Next summer meeting in Rhode Island; Name tags for tour</td>
<td>Janet, Kristen, Office Manager</td>
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<td>● Future orientations – will structure an outline; will reserve better space</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<td>● Regular updates for TC &amp; PDP on NESARE business (AC meeting outcomes)</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<td>● Winter AC meeting date set for Feb. 15-17, 2011</td>
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## Summary of Motions

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>• to accept the minutes from the Summer AC meeting, Feb 17-19, 2010</td>
<td>Passed – all in favor</td>
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<td>• to accept Erik Miller to fill the empty seat on the Executive Committee</td>
<td>Passed – all in favor</td>
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<td>• to accept proposed R&amp;E/PDP review process for the 2011 funding cycle as revised</td>
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<td>• to approve the Sustainable Agriculture Community Grant call for 2011</td>
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<td>• to accept the proposal to phase out the Sustainable Farmer Educator program</td>
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<td>• to accept proposal for liaison position with amendments</td>
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