

## agInnovation Northeast Call, January 15, 2026 (via Zoom)

In attendance: Jason Hubbart (Chair), Troy Ott, Bill Miller, Josh Kohut, Anton Bekkerman, Beth Gugino, Chris Smart, Gretta Tritch Roman, Gulnihal Ozbay, Jason White, Josh Kohut, Lee Hecker, Linda Prokopy, Mariks Alvarez, Ock Chun, Puneet Srivastava, Tsakani Ngomane, Lisa Townson, Toni DiTommaso, Jorge Atiles, Rick Rhodes, David Leibovitz

### Welcome and Chair's Reflections

- How are you preparing for the release of Research Facilities Act funding? Directors are interested in how the delivery of RFA funding will be executed.
  - Pennsylvania has a shovel-ready project identified (Plantworks) and they are awaiting the release of the RFP for the RFA.
  - We all might consider using the new USDA research priorities to drive prospective submissions for RFA funding.
  - The NE food tech corridor could serve as a model or a vehicle for regional coordination and cooperation around RFA.
- “Getting used to constant change / the certainty of uncertainty” – hiring pauses, grant freezes, impacts on capacity funding affect long-term research continuity. How do we prevent temporary loss from becoming permanent losses of capacity?
  - Massachusetts is undergoing one of the first Civil Rights audits under the new Presidential administration. The audits are scanning most closely for university policies related to training in diversity, equity, and inclusion, any references to support for transgender people, and experiences with antisemitism on campus. The General Counsel and research office are now in close contact with this process and how it might affect the greater university.
  - Pennsylvania has also been notified of a forthcoming civil rights review.
  - New York-Geneva underwent a civil rights review toward the end of the previous Presidential administration and has received new guidelines to adhere to from the current administration.
  - There is a forthcoming deadline for ADA web compliance in April. Does anybody have any information related to this deadline? How are stations preparing? NIFA has not provided guidance or recommendations on how to prepare for the ADA web compliance deadline.
  - Delaware State was informed that their university-wide non-discrimination statement is out of compliance due to references to gender.
  - How can agInnovation Northeast assist with compiling information related to Civil Rights audits?
    - **All are encouraged to share resources related to civil rights reviews; experiences, best practices, recommendations, and informational items. These will be archived on the association website.**

- **Whenever possible, the OED will seek to assist with understanding the distinction between compliance with the law and compliance with Executive Orders.**

#### Association Decision Items

- Approval of new MAC member – **Lee Hecker has been nominated. Lee's nomination was approved unanimously.**
- Approval of the Officer-at-large nomination – **Beth Gugino has been nominated. Beth's nomination was approved unanimously.**
- MAC recommendations – the NE food tech corridor group submitted a proposal to secure funding from agInnovation Northeast (\$12k) to support an in-person event for the development of the ENGINE submission. **The NE ag tech corridor in-person event funding proposal was approved unanimously.**

#### Discussion Items

- Northeast Computational Research Initiative
  - Jason Hubbart will join the Northeast Administrative Heads this Friday (1/16) to present the computational research initiative concept.
- New guidance: [Secretary's Memorandum 1078-020 "Directive of Departmental Research and Development Priorities"](#)
  - Our existing research can fall under the umbrella of those new departmental priorities. What new actions are the NE experiment stations taking in response to the rollout of these priorities?
  - The Experiment Station narrative to the USDA should convey that we are addressing and supporting these “new” priorities, even if we cite current/ongoing research activities as examples.
  - Climate research politicization: How do we change our narrative to strike the balance of being politically compliant while also equipping our stakeholders with relevant information related to issues associated with climate?
  - State examples of climate related reports from 2025:
    - Delaware Climate Action Plan (December 2025)  
<https://dnrec.delaware.gov/climate-plan/>
    - Maryland Climate-Smart Agriculture: Roadmap to Resilience (2025) –  
<https://go.umd.edu/climatesmart>
  - Examples of alternative “climate change” framing: extreme weather events, billion-dollar events, natural disasters, climate variability.
- Research impacts newsletter follow-up – **a call for submission of research project examples to the Executive Director's office will be circulated to all directors.**
- Graduate student research meeting follow-up – Anton Bekkerman and Chris Smart have been discussing the development of an event to bring graduate students together to share research, network, and identify opportunities for potential collaboration. The event is being proposed to be held at or near Rutgers: central in the NE region, convenient for transit, and located on one of our campuses.

*The meeting adjourned at 9:00 am ET.*