

agInnovation Northeast Zoom Meeting - August 21, 2026

In attendance: Chris Smart, Joe Moritz, Anton Bekkerman, Jean Vandergheynst, Jake Bowman, Lee Hecker, Lisa Townson, Beth Gugino, Jason White, Josh Kohut, Vagner Benedito, Jessica Leahy, Asim Zia, Puneet Srivastava, Lynne McLandsborough, Ock Chun, Tyler Messerschmidt, Jorge Atilas, Tsakani Ngomane, Gulnihal Ozbay, Rick Rhodes, David Leibovitz

Association Decision Items

- Nomination for and approval of Officer-at-Large – **Josh Kohut was nominated to serve as Officer-at-Large, and his nomination was approved unanimously.**

Search for the next Executive Director, agInnovation Northeast

- As a reminder, Rick Rhodes announced his retirement as Executive Director effective June 30, 2027.
- agInnovation Northeast has latitude to run its next Executive Director search as an independent organization, per a conversation with leadership at current host institution University of Rhode Island.
- The preferred operating model for the organization moving forward is for business operations to remain housed at the University of Rhode Island, with an option for the next ED to be located at URI, another Land-grant institution, or elsewhere (e.g., associated with a non-profit organization.)
- If the identified candidate would prefer to be housed at another institution besides URI, agInnovation Northeast can work with that other institution to set up an agreement for hosting their position (salary, fringe, office). Attendees agreed that the incoming chair be located in the Northeast.
- Discussion of a search committee ensued and the following were suggested as members:
 - agInnovation NE Directors: Chris Smart (Search Chair), Beth Gugino, Lisa Townson, Jake Bowman, Josh Kohut, Puneet Srivastava
 - Another agInnovation Executive Director (e.g., Jeanette Thurston, agInnovation NC)
 - Extension Executive Director (e.g., Ali Mitchell, Northeast Extension Directors)
 - Dean(s)?
- The association will be engaged in reviewing search materials, participating in deliberations, and confirming recommendations from the search committee.
- agInnovation NE intends to conduct face-to-face interviews during its spring meeting in State College, PA (Feb/March 2027)
- **Next steps: Chris Smart will confirm participation from all committee members, and the committee will draft a position description.**
- The position will be advertised via the regional associations and APLU. The search committee will also consider other advertising opportunities.

agInnovation Northeast Spring Meeting – Feb/March 2027, dates TBD

- To be hosted by Penn State in State College, PA
- Interviews of Executive Director applicants will be held during the Spring event
- The Second Northeast Graduate Student and Postdoc Forum
 - There is consideration of shifting the Graduate Forum to May, during the Northeast Joint Summer Session. This would position the Grad Forum to be held with the involvement of the NE Extension Directors.
 - If we want to arrange this event in Cape May, we need to decide quickly because event space and lodging books far in advance in that area.
 - Prospective dates for full summer event: May 4-7, 2027
- **For scheduling both the Spring and Summer meeting, Rick and David will distribute polls to the Directors to gather their feedback.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:01 am ET.