

**agInnovation Northeast Meeting Minutes**  
**September 17, 2025, 2:15 pm Central Time**  
**Westport Conference Center, St. Louis, MO**

In attendance: Wendie Cohick (Chair-New Jersey), Jason Hubbard (Incoming Chair-West Virginia), Beth Gugino (Pennsylvania), Eric von Wettberg (Vermont), Toni DiTommaso (New York-Ithaca), Josh Kohut (New Jersey), Puneet Srivastava (Maryland), Anton Bekkerman (New Hampshire), Jake Bowman (Delaware), Ock Chun (Connecticut-Storrs), Chris Smart (New York-Geneva), Bill Miller (Massachusetts), Andrea Putman (APLU), Rick Rhodes (agInnovation Northeast), David Leibovitz (agInnovation Northeast)

**NIFA update and Delay in release of RFA**

- Earlier at this meeting, NIFA Director Jaye Hamby confirmed the delay in the release of the FY2026 Capacity RFA.<sup>1</sup>
- Please submit feedback to agInnovation Northeast on how this delay might impact your station. Responses will be compiled and provided to Lewis-Burke Associates (APLU BAA Government affairs consultants), who intend to initiate a conversation with congress.
- Carry-forward should not be impacted by this delayed release.
- There has not yet been any progress made on the delivery of Research Facilities Act funding.

**Meeting administration (Wendie Cohick)**

- **The agenda for this meeting, along with the minutes of June 4, 2025, were both approved unanimously.**
- Wendie Cohick will be rotating out of the agInnovation Northeast Chair position and encouraged the group to pursue positive public impact and elevate our status in the years to come.

**Evaluation of the Office of the Executive Director**

- [A tabulation of the accomplishments of the Office of the Executive Director](#) is posted on the agInnovation Northeast website.
- After a discussion of the roles, responsibilities, and accomplishments of the OED, the Directors expressed appreciation to Rick and David for their work on behalf of the association over the past year.

**Northeast Ag Tech Corridor (Beth Gugino)**

- This topic was introduced as a follow-up to discussions initiated at the March 2025 agInnovation Northeast Spring Meeting in Clarksville, Maryland.
- There is multi-institutional consideration of pursuing a National Science Foundation ENGINE grant for the Ag Tech Corridor, centered around food production (including

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<sup>1</sup> The FY2026 Capacity RFA was mistakenly referred to as being delayed. The delayed “RFA” refers to funding associated with the Research Facilities Act. FY2026 capacity RFAs are slated for release by early October 2026.

processing, distribution, waste management). This could also be called the “Food Tech Corridor”.

- The NSF ENGINE grant would be due in June of 2026. A regimented schedule of meetings will be critical to have in place to advance this effort.
- Building coalitions of commercial partners will also be critical in pursuing an ENGINE grant.
- **Question to all NE Directors: How might your institution participate? What current initiatives are in place that align with this effort?**
- Who are the faculty in the region that have been successful in the commercialization/IP space? We need to identify institutional champions for this proposal.
  - **All Directors are encouraged to identify a faculty champion to participate in this effort. Please submit those names to Beth Gugino by the end of this week (September 19)**

Work Session: The Computational Research Imperative (Jason Hubbard)

- **Slides from Jason’s presentation are uploaded to the agInnovation Northeast website.**
- **The Big Question: Is there an opportunity to collaborate on a regional position paper on data science and agricultural research?**
- Trends in computing have created an environment where new priorities have emerged for our leaders. Computational research will be a major point of investment, both regionally and globally.
- How do you create buy-in? Can we use computational research to demonstrate our impact at a regional level?
- Rutgers SEBS has champions in the big data space.
- Can we draft a paper or proposal that all NE institutions can endorse, to propel this initiative forward?
- How can we use computational biology to answer questions that have traditionally required the involvement of animals? Animal research is expensive.
- Can we share resources and develop a “collaborative big data infrastructure” among Experiment Stations?
- Rutgers has a “Data to decisions” Master’s Degree program; a program where the thesis is a computational decision-making tool rooted in interpretation of big data.
- Cornell has seen a 50% reduction in need for wet lab space in recent new hires. Job descriptions haven’t been edited to drive this; it has just been an emerging trend.

- Entrepreneurial thinking needs to be embedded into our curriculum; we need to encourage more than critical thinking, we need to drive students toward a value-added, impactful, results-oriented mindset.
- **Rick and Jason will draft an “innovation/entrepreneurial/computational whitepaper” for consideration by the directors by the December agInnovation Northeast meeting.**

Large Language Model (LLM) Meta-Analysis of Hatch and McIntire Stennis Projects (Anton Bekkerman)

- This topic was introduced as a follow-up to discussions initiated at the March 2025 agInnovation Northeast Spring Meeting in Clarksville, Maryland.
- If we are presented with a funding opportunity, can we use the northeast agenda to see where each university has strengths that align with the call of that funding opportunity?
- The LLM analysis identifies projects in each state by topic area. Two scores are derived: (1) what percentage of projects by topic fall into each location? (2) Within each location, what is the concentration of projects that focus within each category?
- The analysis can be performed both within stations, and between stations.

All of agInnovation Northeast congratulated Wendie for a chair’s term well-served!

*The meeting adjourned at 5:25 pm Central time.*