

History of the Multistate Program

Introduction

The four regional associations of State Agricultural Experiment Station (SAES) directors based on geography (Northeast, North Central, South, and West), in cooperation with the [National Institute for Food and Agriculture](#) (NIFA)/USDA, have developed a set of [National Multistate Research Guidelines](#) for organizational and operational procedures that are common to all regions. These guidelines recognize that there are some regional differences in procedures and policies relative to the conduct of multistate activities that are sufficiently important as to require the regional associations to develop supplements to the National Guidelines.

The [Western Region Supplementary Guidelines](#) apply to the Multistate Research Projects (W-xxx), Coordinating Committees (WCC-xxx) and integrated education/extension/research activities (WERA-xxx) that are, or will be, sponsored by the [Western Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors](#) (WAAESD). In all cases, where guidance is provided in the National Guidelines, that guidance will take priority over these procedures. However, consistent with the nature of guidance, exceptions/exemptions are permitted, and these supplementary guidelines reflect the operational procedures for the Western region.

History of Multistate Research

President Harry S. Truman signed into law the Agricultural and Marketing Act of 1946 which included a provision to set-aside 25 percent of the Hatch Act formula funding for research that is provided annually to State Agricultural Experiment Stations (SAES or Stations) for what was then called Regional Research. The term Multistate Research replaced “Regional Research” as a result of the 1998 AREERA Farm Bill Legislation.

The establishment of the Regional (now Multistate) Research Fund created a novel mechanism for the SAESs to work across state lines in ways that were previously more difficult. The Regional Research Fund requires matching non-Federal funds, and is to be used to support research conducted by two or more states. To coordinate the activities the four regions (as designated by the USDA) formed associations of Experiment Station Directors to manage the portfolio, and to serve as the responsible body for the activities. These regional associations were formed within 2 years of the signing of the Agricultural and Marketing Act of 1946 with the WAAESD being formed in 1948.

In 1960 the Western Association employed a “recording secretary” who was charged with tracking and management of the region’s research program. By the mid 1960’s the association evolved to support a regional office which included a “Director and Large” and an administrative assistant who provided both staff support for the region’s research activities and programmatic leadership for aspects of the experiment station program at the national level.

The 1998 Farm Bill, “The Agricultural Research, Education and Extension Reform Act” (AREERA) altered the description of the regional research program to the Multistate Research Program with a concomitant change in the name of the fund to the Multistate

Research Fund or MRF. The action recognized that many multistate activities had expanded far beyond the regional boundaries.

Membership on a multistate technical committee is open to participation by scientists beyond regional and functional boundaries. Some projects have more than 100 participants representing institutions from all regional associations, the 1890 institutions, ARS, private industry and in some cases, foreign countries.

Multistate research is easily justified from the Federal perspective as research problems and results often "spill over" state boundaries. It is known that Multistate Research activities provide synergy and some amplification of efforts, often leveraged from multiple sources of funding. Multistate Research is therefore, from the perspective of the Federal government, a very good deal.

The counterpart to the regional associations in the Federal-State partnership is the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Planning and Accountability Office is responsible for federal oversight, accounting, and day-to-day record keeping for the Multistate Research Fund. In addition, each regional association supports the [National Information Management and Support System](#) (NIMSS). This system has been adopted by NIFA as the official mechanism for the management and reporting of multistate activities.

A collateral, but completely separate, organizational entity is the [Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy](#) (ESCOP) of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU). ESCOP, founded in 1905, is not an instrument of the regional associations, but SAES Directors belong to both organizations. There are, however, no legal links between the Multistate Research associations and ESCOP, and no formal exchanges of funding occur. This point is lost on many individuals not familiar with the structure of the U.S. regional and national agricultural research entities.