

NRSP6 FY11-15 Renewal Team response to External Review

January 19, 2010

The external review team returned 60 ratings (5 individuals scoring 12 areas) consisting of 58 “excellent” scores and 2 “good” scores. In light of this overwhelmingly positive rating, we have extracted the review comments for which the need for a response is implied, and have done so below in lieu of revising the original proposal:

*Comment #1. The extensive publication record demonstrates successful involvement and effective collaboration with a broad collection of stakeholders. Team members are aware of other types of stakeholder interaction, such as interaction with potato growers and the seed potato industry, in which NRSP-6 actively participates and which help to inform NRSP-6 project plans and activities. These additional stakeholder interactions could readily be further described in the review proposal. **Indeed. We read magazines relevant to the potato grower as well as those covering food trends and nutrition, attend and present at national meetings of the potato industry, and invite industry input on the TAC. In his role as chair of Crop Germplasm Committee and Editor in Chief of American Journal of Potato Research, the Project Leader also has ongoing responsibility to engage all areas of potato science, not just breeding and genetics/germplasm science.***

*Comment #2. During the coming 5-yr project, NRSP 6 may wish to investigate the possibility of working in additional areas, such as abiotic stress including drought tolerance. **Note Appendix E and other remarks indicating close collaboration with UW physiologist Jiwan Palta. Our ongoing joint research does include frost tolerance, and studies of how tuber calcium can mitigate defects caused by environmental stress. We recognize drought tolerance as high priority, and are currently looking for resources to support such evaluation in partnership with CIP.***

*Comment #3. The proposal does not use the very specific types of milestones required by some funding sources. If this level of detail is desired, then Section C.1.a.i. provides a comprehensive starting point. A drawback of more specific benchmarks is the many factors that influence what actually happens, and the need for flexibility to respond to events ahead in a changing environment. There may be some intermediate approach, for example, ranges based on experience in past years; adjusted for staffing levels. **The past 5 years amply demonstrate that we live in an age of extreme, unpredictable, and rapid changes in base resources and policy, not to mention challenges and opportunities in the science. We feel there is no recipe except having a clear goal pursued by a dedicated, experienced and clever staff.***

*Comment #4. The Peer Review Team notes, however, that an assumption of the business plan is to reduce staff to stay within budget. The NRSP 6 staff have done a tremendous job with a small staff. International visitors are regularly amazed at how much is accomplished by so small a group. The plan is well-developed within the budget constraints, but it may not be possible to continue all the services offered with continued decreases, or effective decreases, in the budget. **Our goal is to do the most we can pursuant to the greatest possible impact on potato science and industry. This is tempered by recognizing the pitfall of being spread so thin so as to be doing things poorly. Strategies for relief are as follows: 1) partition finesse***

work to base staff who can admin the more routine work being done by lower-paid temps, 2) choose activities that have the highest impact-to-cost ratio, 3) more aggressively pursue cooperators whose mutual interest in genebank outputs motivates them to do work for us (as it were) at low cost or free, 4) prioritize activities (keeping the germplasm we already have secure, available, and healthy being top priority).

*Comment #5. The Peer Review Coordinator notes that it might add useful context to include an additional appendix that briefly summarizes the structure and funding mechanisms of the overall U.S. National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) (see list at: www.ars-grin.gov/npgs/rephomepgs.html). For example, four NPGS active collections, involving 200 or more crops, are funded [and administered] as regional multistate projects. As many as 20 other active collections are funded entirely by the federal partner, ARS. Both regional and national crops are found in multistate and ARS collections. As a result, questions such as “Why is there an NRSP for potatoes and not for all crops?” or “Why not ask just the major potato-growing states to fund the potato collection?” are more readily answered when seen in the context of the overall system. In the National Plant Germplasm System as a whole, costs and management are broadly shared and balanced; a range of different state and federal funding mechanisms are used, including this NRSP; and state investment creates significant leverage and added value. **The preceding statement encapsulates the salient points. SAES genebank funding leverages a great deal of ARS activity that directly benefits states. Also, each region funds and administers a genebank that is patently national in scope. Ironically, the NRSP6 potato genebank only looks like the oddball because it is uniquely funded and administered like the national project that it is.***

*Comment #6. If budgets permitted, additional undergraduate internships at the NRSP 6 site would be a good opportunity for introducing students to ag science careers. **A graduate student was part of the NRSP6 budget for many years, but could not be maintained in the context of flat appropriations. Unfortunately, these types of activities that promote our long-term relevance are the first to be sacrificed for short-term survival.***

*Comment #7. NRSP 6 interacts with the popular press when possible. It would be of interest to hear more about this. **Full details of these activities (and many others relevant to the renewal proposal) are fully documented on our website for those interested.***

*Comment #8. With regard to outreach to scientists, distant researchers cannot regularly attend potato association meetings in the U.S. would benefit from seeing the meeting abstracts appear as publications more rapidly. **That is wholly the responsibility of the Secretary of the Potato Association of America. However, Bamberg will enquire whether abstracts could be published on the PAA website (that may not meet the publisher’s approval).***