

APPENDIX C

Peer Review Guidelines: Performance Standards and Operational Guidelines for State Agricultural Experiment Stations

Intention: This appendix sets out performance standards and operational guidelines for peer reviews of research to be supported at State Agricultural Experiment Stations (SAES) by federal formula funds. The intention is to facilitate individual stations and their collective multistate activities in complying with the provisions of the federal Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (AREERA).

Definition: Scientific review of an individual research project proposal is defined as: the evaluation of the conceptual and technical soundness of an intended research activity by individuals qualified by their status in the same discipline, or a closely related field of science, to judge a project's worthiness and relevance to a set of stated program goals.

Scope: The topics covered by this document pertain to research project proposals that are to be sanctioned and funded as part of the federal-state partnership in agricultural research. These standards and guidelines do not apply to proposed research that is subject to peer review by competitive grant agencies and peer review of research publications. However, in the aggregate, all research projects sponsored by stations and the regional association's adopting these guidelines will have been formally peer reviewed, before the expenditure of any federal funds.

Process: Prior to the initiation of any research project (to be supported wholly or in part by federal formula funding or by a special research grant), the responsible SAES director (or, in the case of multistate projects, the administrative advisor) will call for a review of the proposed research activities. A minimum of three peer scientists (i.e., individuals qualified by their status in the same discipline, or a closely related field of science), one of which may be a NIFA representative, will be asked to read and provide written comments on the proposed activities.

Terms of Reference: The terms of reference for the reviewers will focus their attention on questions of the quality of the proposed science, the technical feasibility of the research, the validity of the scientific approach, relevance to stated programmatic goals and on the likelihood for completing the stated objectives. Additional comments may be sought on the project's relevance to a station's (or regional, or national) priorities, the degree of integration with extension (as appropriate), responsiveness to stakeholder needs, and the accuracy of any claims for multi-disciplinary and multistate collaboration.

Responsibility: All review activities for proposed station projects are the responsibility of the station's director. All review activities for a proposed multistate research project are the responsibility of the administrative adviser.

Appointment of Reviewers: Reviewers may be selected from the same campus or from another institution, at the discretion of the SAES director (or the regional associations) or by the person

delegated this authority. In the selection of reviewers consideration may be given to the expenses associated with reviewing individual project proposals. Consideration will be given to appointing reviewers who are without any apparent conflicts of interest.

Documentation: Reviewers will be asked to present their findings in writing (see Appendix G), and records of the reviewer's comments will be preserved for the life of the project, or for a period of three years in the event that a project is not initiated. Document storage will, for the most part, be electronic.

Research not Covered: Projects funded by competitively awarded grants, federal contract research projects, and federal cooperative agreements are not subject to these provisions, as they would be reviewed under other authorities.

Performance Standards: Peer review of proposed projects is expected to provide the following performance outcomes:

- Maintain and/or enhance the quality of science funded by the federal-state partnership;
- Identify more opportunities to partner with other states, federal research agencies, and our Cooperative Extension counterparts; and
- Assure relevance to programmatic goals, and, in turn, provide responsiveness to stakeholder needs.

Performance outcomes from reviews will be monitored by the responsible station director (or the regional associations) through the annual process of reporting results and impacts, which is in turn made part of the Plan of Work reporting requirements. Adjustments to this review process will be made, as needed.