

Advisory Committee on Biotechnology and 21st Century Agriculture (AC21)

Models and Incentives subgroup meeting Conference Call Summary February 8, 2016

A two-hour telephone meeting of the Models and Incentives ad hoc subgroup was held on February 8, 2016. The official members of the subgroup are Marty Matlock, David Johnson, Jerry Slocum, Douglas Goehring, Isaura Andaluz, Laura Batcha, and Keith Kisling. All members participated in the conference call except for Ms. Batcha. Michael Schechtman, AC21 Executive Secretary and Designated Federal Official, convened the call.

In preparation for the call, Dr. Schechtman had distributed information gathered by various subgroup members and others about potential cooperative models. The focus of the discussion is to compare the different models and discuss potential lessons to be learned from them and, if there is time, further discuss potential incentives that might be considered.

The subgroup began by discussing various models. One participant noted that the State of North Dakota has created a few participatory models, which each identify mechanisms for their specific topic of concern by which useful information can be shared, conveyed, or outlined as Best Management Practices (BMPs) for stakeholders. He added that the subgroup might consider a process of identifying stakeholders for coexistence discussions, encouraging the setting of local public meetings, and discussing ways to mitigate unintended GE presence.

A participant described uses of Grower Opportunity Zones (GOZs) in alfalfa seed cultivation. In order for such zones, which limit the types of production practices allowed in a region, to be established, a positive vote by 80% of farmers in the area is required. Such zones do not establish true coexistence: the other up-to-20% of farmers don't get to choose what they plant. A policy for how farmers might exit a zone once established has not yet been established. Another participant suggested that the subgroup and the AC21 as a whole should be striving for voluntary approaches.

One participant offered the view that if the goal is to achieve coexistence everywhere, it is important to recognize differences between regions and States in terms of crop practices and mitigation methods, and other factors, especially in the consideration of appropriate BMPs. The important thing is to bring stakeholders together to discuss who is doing what and how to be better neighbors, and implement strategies to further coexistence.

The participant noted that in bringing stakeholders together on Pollinator Protection Plans in North Dakota, there is a wide audience with varying knowledge. There is a recognized need in these instances to articulate the concerns/issues and describe data that exist to clarify them. In discussions around Pollinator Plans, the first issue everyone discussed was Colony Collapse Disorder and all of the factors that can contribute to it--nutrition, pesticide use, forage crops, weather, parasites, the transporting of hives, bacterial and fungal diseases,

lack of genetic diversity. This foundation enabled subsequent discussion of BMPs, enhancing communication, identifying where sensitive activities would take place, the need to be mindful of other stakeholders, other issues addressing bee health, minimizing risks of pest exposure, working with APHIS and State Departments of Ag on treatments for Varroa mite and other parasites, identification of sites where hives were placed, and overall increased awareness. Since the plan was put in, bee numbers in North Dakota are increasing dramatically, up 13% in colonies over 1 year. The plan brings enhanced communication and increased awareness but it is voluntary, and everyone becomes aware of everyone else's challenges. Having a third party lay out the challenges helps everybody.

Another participant observed that the Plan provides a telephone number where beekeepers can report pesticide incidents and inquired whether just having such a number helps the system work. The previous participant responded that the State can inspect where there's an incident and there is a GPS system with a map that anyone can call up identifying sensitive sites—organic farms, beehives, and vineyards, so stakeholders can be mindful of those sites. He added that beekeepers have realized that they are guests on the land and can't make life too difficult for farmers. Another participant noted that a similar program exists in Arkansas but it is not so sophisticated an effort.

A participant noted that few States have such few states have mapping systems because of the cost. But Purdue University maintains a mapping and notification system for others to report sensitive crops and a few States subscribe to it. A participant noted the use by alfalfa growers of a mapping system as well.

A participant suggested that it would be beneficial to farmers if there was a mechanism to cost-share the mapping of sensitive sites. Information about the North Dakota mapping program goes out not only to agricultural forums, but also to pesticide certification and training programs—State staff attend and tell participants about the program. These activities help to avoid claims, and provide opportunities to talk about mitigation and about steps that can be taken to avoid problems (e.g., not spraying on a windy day near a sensitive crop).

Another participant observed that some farmers do not know how to access or use a website but will go to their local extension offices and "pin" their area. Many farmers think this approach also works well.

A participant described grower production districts in Oregon and Washington designed to keep canola from impinging on vegetable brassica production and rapeseed from impinging on canola zones. He indicated there is useful information from Washington on protecting brassica production. A producer can enter into agreement with a neighbor on how he/she will do their production and the agreement is reviewed by 3 other parties appointed by the State Agricultural Director to see if it is strong enough. He offered the view that such agreements could provide flexibility for coexistence considerations and be of benefit to all parties. He suggested that examining the structure and governance of such agreements would be worthwhile. Another member indicated that such efforts had been tried in the Southwest but didn't work, but that there was the possibility of trying again.

A participant described wolf-livestock coexistence efforts in the Southwest, under which there is an actual compensation mechanism in place, with incentives, to allow livestock producers to have wolves on their land and provide redress for damage. The effort is supported with both with private and public funding, some from the Livestock Demonstration Program from the USFWS, and interested individuals can also donate.

A participant noted the subgroup's earlier discussions of who might provide incentives for the establishment of joint coexistence plans and noted that some key technology provider representatives with whom he had spoken found the idea of reaching out to private industry problematic.

There was additional discussion of the work of the Models and Incentives subgroup vis-à-vis the work of the other subgroups. Dr. Schechtman clarified that initial work for this subgroup is to clarify and contrast various models used in other complex situations requiring cooperation among diverse agricultural stakeholders. He added that it having all workgroups draft committee documents was not appropriate. There was agreement that ultimately a model put forward will need to explain the rationale for the effort, identify concerns, outline considerations and challenges, state a purpose of enhancing communications and providing workable strategies and BMPs, and put on the table those strategies and BMPs. A member noted the importance for the model of starting from the lowest common denominator so that the oval approach can apply everywhere.

A participant described documents shared on a watershed protection model. The work involves an EPA component, and the EPA has outlined a 9-point plan, identifying the cause, source, problem, load, and technical information, along with an educational component. David Johnson offered to share a document that highlights those 9 points.

A participant observed that there was unlikely to be a single model the AC21 would embrace from among all these examples, but rather pieces would be taken from different models, because the issue of gene flow is different from the others. He suggested that the heart of the coexistence model would be voluntary communication between participants, and that the model would provide an outline of issues that might need to be discussed and agreed to without infringing on rights of others. He added that establishing GOZs would likely not be palatable to many stakeholders in the Heartland. He also noted the reluctance of industry to participate in an incentives approach, and that this might make providing financial incentives difficult. Dr. Schechtman wondered whether all sides would need to contribute financially to much any such financial incentive approach possible. Another participant agreed that the approach for coexistence efforts would need to be specifically tailored to the topic. He wondered whether incentives would even be needed in this instance, arguing the need for greater recognition of all the different types of farming activities going on, and suggesting that building a model/program that enhances communication would be in everyone's interests, though not everyone would likely participate. For such a program incentives might be a last step. Another participant agreed, noting that the committee would provide information, but localities will need to find their own solutions.

Dr. Schechtman asked participants to consider, after this call, whether there were any potential reputational or other non-monetary incentives that might be relevant.

Commissioner Goehring agreed to provide the report on the subgroup's activities at the upcoming AC21 plenary session on March 14-15, 2016.

There was discussion about obtaining a copy of a brassica production agreement with participants suggesting that it might provide elements of a useful outline for similar coexistence plans among neighbors. Commissioner Goehring offered to reach out to a counterpart in the Northwest to see if such a document could be shared and relevant insight provided.

TO DO:

- *Commissioner Goehring to review both meeting summaries from this workgroup, excerpt the points he wishes to make at the upcoming plenary, and share with subgroup members.*
- *David Johnson to transmit a summary of the EPA 9-point approach for watershed management.*
- *Commissioner Goehring to attempt to obtain a brassica production agreement from a State counterpart in the Pacific Northwest to share with AC21 members.*
- *All participants to further consider the potential for non-monetary incentives that might help farmer participation in these processes.*