

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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January 24, 2011

Senator Roger Sherman
Representative Peter Edgecomb
Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
115 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0115

Dear Senator Sherman, Representative Edgecomb, and Members of the Committee,

As Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Agriculture, it is our pleasure to provide the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry an annual report on the Board's progress and activities for the past year. The Board of Agriculture was established by the Legislature to provide input from Maine's agricultural community into the research and extension programs of the University of Maine. The Board's primary interaction is with the College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture, including the associated Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station, and University of Maine Cooperative Extension. The College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture also informs the Board and requests input on its agricultural teaching programs.

The Board met three times in 2010 and used those opportunities to meet with University administrators, selected research and extension faculty, legislators, and Governor Baldacci on University agricultural programs. 2010 was a successful year for the College, Experiment Station and Extension. Faculty continue to be successful in obtaining extramural research and extension grants and student enrollment across the college is strong. UMaine received significant research and development (R&D) support from Federal stimulus funds; however, there were no stimulus funds included for agriculture. A looming concern is the projected reduction in faculty through this period of fiscal challenges at the state and federal level. Going into the future, reduction in faculty capacity will result in a reduction in extramural grants as faculty are the human capital necessary to write and carry out grants.

The Board reviewed the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) recently established five priority areas for research, education, and extension which include: Global Food Security and Hunger, Climate Change, Sustainable Energy, Childhood Obesity, and Food Safety. It is expected that into the foreseeable future successful USDA grants will need to meet these priorities. In the future USDA may require other Federal funding provided to the Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension be targeted to these priority areas which may limit capacity to meet state agricultural priorities.

The major current challenge of the College, Experiment Station and Extension is to meet the current needs of Maine's diverse agricultural sectors during a time of shrinking faculty resources. Salary savings for faculty attrition / retirements are expected to be used to meet budget challenges as has occurred over the last 5+ years. University management projects that only approximately ¼ of positions vacated due to retirements in the foreseeable future have the potential to be filled.

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A second important dynamic will arise from the increasing dependency on tuition in the college budget. Staffing priorities will increasingly be driven more by teaching priority than research and public service.

The Board spent considerable time discussing agriculture's research and extension priorities. The diversity of Maine agriculture makes prioritization a challenge, however, themes were confirmed. A half dozen groups identified new product development (value added processing) and local marketing as priorities. An aquaculture health facility is a priority for this industry segment. Animal veterinary services, farm production practices and business planning are also important. The long standing need to significantly upgrade the Animal Diagnostic Laboratory and Plant Diagnostic Laboratory at the University for Animal and Plant Agriculture and Aquaculture was again confirmed. Many groups have ongoing production challenges such as changing crop pests and adaptation of new technologies to Maine agriculture.

The Board held its last meeting of the year at the USDA, Agricultural Research Service lab located on the Orono campus. The staff at this facility has historically worked in the potato ecosystem looking for rotational crops that could both build the soil and provide cash income. In recent years the portfolio of ARS projects have expanded to include organic production, food safety in addition to the sizable cold water marine aquaculture work centered in Franklin Maine. There are many partnerships with the University and ARS scientists leveraging the resources of both institutions for the benefit of Maine Agriculture.

The Board was also briefed on recent success the University had through the Maine Technology Institute Asset Fund which awarded three agriculturally related projects totaling \$2.75 million. Projects funded include the Biomass Engineered Fuels lead by Andrew Plant, Assistant Extension Professor, Aroostook County; the Fishery Innovation, Sustainability & Health Lab, Ian Bricknell, Professor, Aquaculture; and Commercialization of New Technologies for Animal Disease Surveillance, Robert Causey, Associate Professor, Animal and Veterinary Sciences. This last project is instructive on how one \$600,000 capital investment can help support an industry and potentially develop a new one.

Dr. Causey's project focuses on the respiratory infection "strangles" in horses. This highly infectious disease disrupts training, riding, racing, breeding and results in high veterinary costs to horse owners and potentially death to the horse. While after years of research a vaccine has not been developed, the disease can be effectively controlled by detection and treatment of carrier animals. New technology has been developed by a Maine company for rapid detection. This

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project will provide resources for continued development of these diagnostic tools at the University of Maine and equipment to implement state-wide strangles surveillance with veterinarians. This project will bring together Umaine faculty, biotechnology companies, Maine animal industries (such as the equine industry) and Maine veterinarians. The ultimate goal of this effort is to develop test-kits for the disease that would be sold nationwide to help protect the national horse population. This is just one example of dozens of innovative research and extension projects conducted through the University of Maine.

We would be pleased to make ourselves available to meet with the Committee to discuss opportunities and challenges regarding Agricultural Research and Extension capacity and programs.

Sincerely,



David Bell, Chair
Board of Agriculture



Donald Marean, Vice Chair
Board of Agriculture

C: Robert A. Kennedy, President
University of Maine System Board of Trustees