

NCPN Tier II Meeting
Renaissance Hotel, Nashville, TN
January 26, 2020

Meeting attendees: Christie Almeyda, Matt Alvernaz, Rachael Carter, Chris Clark, Dianne Coats, Jennifer Daniels, Todd Daniels, Cathy DeRobertis, Beth Ellison, David Ellison, Roxanne Ellison, Scott Ellison, Kristen Farrar, Bill Foote, Ronald French, Ann Gallagher, Jim Jones, Waana Kalowasha, Brent Leggett, Sue Leggett, Sixte Ntamatungiro, Todd O'Neal, Kenneth Pecota, Donna Peterson, Sathish Ponniah, Erich Rudyj, Mark Shankle, Jonathan Schultheis, Sue Sim, Tara Smith, Scott Stoddard, Phil Wadl, Craig Yencho, Matthew Young

Bill Foote called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. Introductions were made. An agenda was distributed, but Bill said we may need to change the order to accommodate schedules.

A grower panel of stakeholders had been asked to give short presentations. Jennifer Daniels of H & D Farms in NC went first. She showed pictures and described the operations at their farm. She said they believe clean plants do make a difference. The NCSU Micro-propagation unit provided rooted cuttings in trays to their farm this year. They believe this is a superior system to the previous practice of providing a larger plant with many nodes.

Todd O'Neal with Black Gold in LA was second to present. Theirs is a large farm with a sweetpotato chip farm in NC. They grow for Frito Lay. They have enough seed in house now to plant 2,600 acres of G1 and G2. Their seed was from LSU originally.

Matt Alvernaz from California reported next. He is a fourth generation farmer and has grown clean plants for about twenty years. They grow about 400 acres and he manages his parents' 275 acres with plants from UC Davis FPS, all G1 and G2. They are working to educate farmers and consumers. Labor is about \$4,000 per acre now and expected to go up \$1,000-\$2,000 this year.

David Ellison of MS was the last grower to speak. His is a second-generation farm, the first for sweetpotatoes. They grow 480-500 acres and work with MS State and LSU. They formerly bought from NC; last year was their first year for nuclear stock from LSU.

Bill thanked the growers for their reports and asked for Center updates. He wanted them to tell how NCPN funding affected their center and how the funding affected their stakeholders. There are six centers, with five represented here today. Christie Almeyda from NC reported first. She said they purchased lights, a backup generator, put in a potting area, and an automated watering system, and hired a .9 FTE sweetpotato

person to help. She also purchased supplies for virus testing, tissue culture, greenhouse production (fertilizer and biological control). Funding helped them with the new greenhouses, space, pest control to pass inspections, new seed growers, and diversification opportunities. Virus testing and tissue culture capabilities allowed for clean material for breeders in NC and SC. Virus testing equipment and diagnostics.

Mark Shankle from MS reported they are maintaining tissue culture lines and adding new cultivars. They maintain propagation greenhouses; refinished plastic and wood on their greenhouses, switched from propane to natural gas and added a Research Associate. They supply MS with clean, certified seed. They provide growers the opportunity to grow certified seed. Working to increase production. Their main varieties are B-14 and Orleans. Have others in tissue culture.

Sathish Ponniah from AR reported they have a hoop house and one under construction. They provided 140,000 slips to growers in 2019. They have a cultivation area, do field demos and use hydroponics as a teaching tool. They continue to supply plants to growers and plan to develop more lines.

Chris Clark from LA reported in 2015 that they had 595 tissue culture plants in the greenhouses. They had 30,000 in 2019. NCPN money has enabled them to increase their greenhouse program. They added Aeroponics to increase the initial stage of sweetpotatoes in the greenhouse and used that to clean things on the station. No sweetpotato growers in LA. Helped to put more plants out and get rid of re-infection. Improved quality control – adding verification as part of quality control. NCPN money has helped them to buy equipment they could not before. Also helped them realize how much help is needed. Water, irrigation, and tissue culture (as teaching tool). The reduction of the number of growers has been dramatic. The remaining growers are more aware of costs involved, and value of getting higher quality clean plant material.

Sue Sim reported for CA. There are no roots in CA. They do tissue culture tests on the mother plant each year for three tests and six viruses. They grew 70,000 green plants and 2,300 slips. Did meristem tip culture and virus testing on about 70,000 plants this year. FPS protocols were written.

Mark Shankle reported on the SCRI proposal – he said more news would be coming as details of the SCRI proposal evolved. The SCRI proposal is a separate program closely linked to the NCPN-SP goals. Both programs are interested in educating growers about the benefits of clean seed. Mark added that the grower panel would be repeated at Sweet Potato US Council Convention General Session II on Tuesday morning and he has two helpers to interview growers.

The Advisory Roundtable was skipped due to redundancy of earlier discussions and.

Kristen Farrar gave the Education and Outreach Committee update and reviewed what E&O does. Material design, print and distribution. Products – brochures – national and for each crop, fact sheets, website, booth display, e-newsletter, PowerPoint presentations and the master NCPN poster. They posted a coordinators handbook on the Google Team Drive.

Tier II membership and election cycle – Bill Foote said one-half of the voting membership was up for election at the conclusion of this meeting. The group decided that Tier II members who regularly participated and expressed a desire to serve again were nominated for Tier II membership. Two additional nominations representing the sweetpotato industry were submitted, David Ellison and Todd O’Neal. The following people were unanimously approved to serve a three-year term beginning at the conclusion of this meeting: Greg Flint, Sue Leggett, Richard Miller, Chris Clark, Scott Stoddard, Sathish Ponniah, David Ellison, Todd O’Neal.

Sue Leggett motioned to keep Bill as chair, seconded by Jim Jones. Motion passed. Scott Stoddard will continue as the ad hoc review committee chair. Scott brought up the letters after the last ad hoc meeting and how confusing things were. It was decided that two letters would be written, one letter to notify the Tier I Governing Board that a review of the proposal was conducted and another letter to notify the PIs of comments from the ad-hoc review panel. The letter to the PIs could also be made available to the Governing Board at the chair’s discretion.

Erich Rudyj reported NCPN has questions about adding new crops all the time. They are not yet accepting hemp. The government cannot differentiate between hemp and marijuana. Olives have an interest, but only CA is interested now. Trying to get TX interested in them.

The Clean Plant Network is now permanent; originally, it was not. The new budget has \$7.5 million available, not \$6.5 million (a million dollar increase).

A question for existing and new centers – do we have enough centers? Protocols, standards, collaboration and coordination - improvement and coordination of cleanup activities are important. Foundation management – are we well positioned if there is a national disaster? Earthquake, fire, tornado, hurricane? Governance – do we have enough? Or need more?

Bill asked if the unified proposal was okay with everyone and thanked Chris for carrying the load. Chris said there is a need to find someone to learn the ropes and take over.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15.

Dianne Coats