



NATIONAL COALITION FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

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February 27, 2004

Dear National C-FAR colleagues,

I would like to take this opportunity to share a few thoughts with you about (1) the importance of **research “customers” taking the lead** if we are to realize National C-FAR’s potential as an advocate for increased public investment in food and agricultural research, and (2) **potential collaborative opportunities** with other noteworthy initiatives.

The past few months have been extraordinarily interesting and busy for me, in part because the National C-FAR Board of Directors elected me to serve as its President following the departure of David Graves from the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives. I represent the National Agricultural Biotechnology Council on the Board; but as most of you know, I have a day job at the University of Illinois. It is for this reason that I’ve informed the Board that I wish to remain as President only until the next regularly scheduled elections in May and then step back to help my successor fight the good fight.

It’s not that my time is overcommitted. But as an Illinoisan and a long time employee of Land-Grant Universities, I’ve come to realize that stakeholder leadership lends an aura of credibility that I could never muster as a representative of “the system.” We learned this lesson with the establishment of Illinois C-FAR 10 years ago. For the first time ever, the potential beneficiaries of our research were arguing for increased funding, and to the great surprise of the legislators, with one voice. And it was not just the solo voice of the traditional agricultural interests.

No, all those interested in the environment and in food and in nutrition were in the chorus, and they were ultimately successful in influencing legislative process and public policy. From this flowed new resources and a model that has the customers identifying problems and setting priorities, while the research community and our extension partners gained increased public funding and a clear expectation of what needed to be done.

National C-FAR brings the research community and its customers together in a common cause. Being customer-led is arguably what makes National C-FAR different from other groups with similar objectives, providing real value to members, customer and researcher alike. Our challenge in National C-FAR is not so much to replicate Illinois C-FAR as it is to exploit the model and secure adequate federal funding for the unmet needs that we are all so passionate about. So although I look forward to engaging through National C-FAR for a long, long time, I want to stand behind leaders from the “customer” stakeholder communities who feel they can benefit from the outcomes of increased public investment in food and agricultural research.

Let me change the subject and tell you about an opportunity for National C-FAR to partner up with a new federal task force charged to “evaluate the merits of establishing one or more National Institutes focused on disciplines important to the progress of food and agricultural science.” This group was called into life under Section 7404 of the 2002 Farm Bill and is chaired by Dr. William Danforth, former Chancellor of Washington University in St. Louis.

National C-FAR has been monitoring the process closely. This task force has met on several occasions, most recently on January 28, and I have been in contact with several committee members to think about the potential of the “strength in numbers” approach. At this point, the task force has not come to any firm decisions, and we have made no firm commitments either. But there is great potential.

Similarly, I have been contacted by a leading representative of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, an organization that has fought for decades to enhance funding for food and agricultural research. The message is much the same as that from the federal task force—*how can we work together?*—and my response has been to signal a willingness to listen and consider joint activities. I’m sure we’ll all be hearing much more about this opportunity over the coming months.

In the meantime, let me thank you for the privilege of serving as President of your Board of Directors and to ask that you contact me directly [Pueppke@uiuc.edu, or (217) 333-0240] if you have any comments or suggestions. I am confident we are now moving in the right direction. It is up to each of us to pitch in through National C-FAR and help make a difference by teaming together as advocates for food and agricultural research.

Here’s hoping for an early spring,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Pueppke". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steve" and last name "Pueppke" clearly distinguishable.

Steve