



NATIONAL COALITION FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

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Liaison

August 1, 2003

Memorandum

TO: National C-FAR Members and Supporters

FR: Tom Van Arsdall
National C-FAR Liaison

RE: Getting Acquainted

I am delighted to have the opportunity to serve the National C-FAR and its members and supporters. I strongly believe public investment in ag research is critical, and I am proud to play a small part.

By way of brief introduction, I have been an advocate for American agriculture in the national policy arena for nearly three decades, with a focus on environmental and energy issues. On a number of occasions I have found myself in the role as coalition facilitator, helping to build consensus within agriculture, and as appropriate reaching outside agriculture to other stakeholders. If you'd like to know more about my background and approach, give me a call (540-785-0949) or go to www.vanarsdall.com.

As National C-FAR president David Graves indicated in his recent communication, my assigned priorities include:

- Promote membership development, ownership involvement & outreach;
- Facilitate implementation plan as defined by Board and membership; and
- Assist in raising additional funds to support the program of action.

I have also been asked to help review the by-laws and to perform other liaison, communications and staff support roles. For example, I'm collaborating with Lorraine Halderman and the FASS team providing administrative support to see if we can find ways to improve coalition communications.

When I was asked what I'd like my National C-FAR title to be, I pondered the question some and selected '*Liaison*' because I believe the term captures the most important aspect of my role. I hope to serve as a liaison to each of you, helping to keep the diverse array of stakeholders informed about coalition activities, to facilitate dialog and consensus-based action and to encourage ownership involvement as we work together toward the important goal of increasing public sector investment in ag research.

We are embarking together on what is arguably a watershed year for the coalition and its mission. With that in mind, National C-FAR president David Graves has scheduled a Board working session for September 18. The NCFAR web site provides more information at <http://www.ncfar.org/upcoming.asp>. The 12:30-3:00 Board working session will be open to all National C-FAR members to observe. More information will be provided in the near future.

I hope I don't come across after only one month on the job as "preachifying" by offering a few perspectives via the enclosed for your reflection and to help stimulate our getting better acquainted.

I work for you, the National C-FAR member. I'll endeavor to offer suggestions on occasion, and try to listen carefully. I'll try to be an inclusive broker to ensure all members are a part of the process. Decisions are ultimately yours to make and mine to help you execute. If you ever have a problem with something I'm doing or not doing, I'd appreciate being the first to hear from you. If I don't know about it, I can't help fix it!

Feel free to e-mail (tom@vanarsdall.com) or call (540-785-0949) me at any time to share ideas and recommendations, report on successes or just get better acquainted.

In closing, I appreciate Joe Coffey's generous assistance in helping me get up to speed. Joe has moved to Florida, and his new contact information is as follows:

1919 N Eagle Chase Drive
Hernando, FL 34442
(352) 746-5855
E-Mail JoeDCoffey@earthlink.net

R. Thomas Van Arsdall

Attachment

National C-FAR Perspectives

Van Arsdall 'Liaison' Comments

August 1, 2003

- Public investment in both basic and applied ag research is driven not for the sake of research itself, but rather by desired outcomes that will address problems and provide benefits for the 'public' good.
 - In other words, research "*customers*" may be National C-FAR's most important potential asset.
 - Policymakers for the most part don't make funding decisions about ag research. They make decisions about research that improves water quality/efficiency, enhances productivity and competitiveness, improves nutrition, addresses invasive species, improves wildlife habitat, preserves working farms and open spaces, _____ (fill in the blank).
 - National C-FAR's challenge may be to build on the work I understand the Research Committee already has underway and then find ways to motivate the "*customers*," whether represented in National C-FAR or not, to tell policymakers that **THEY** want public sector investment in ag research.

- National C-FAR's work advocating public sector investment in ag research is arguably *more urgent than ever* in the current, difficult budget climate.
 - True, except for targeted opportunities, requests for increases in public sector ag research funding are unlikely to have much traction right in the near term.
 - Indeed, most ag research funding is experiencing budget CUTS, not increases, due to factors beyond National C-FAR's control.
 - However, this grim reality by no means suggests that National C-FAR's work is no longer relevant.
 - Indeed, taking no action has real consequences. Inaction leaves ag research vulnerable to even more draconian cuts in the near term and places longer-term objectives at risk.
 - National C-FAR's near-term task may be to make a compelling case as to why public sector ag research funding should be maintained, or at least cuts minimized, when policymakers are making difficult choices.

- National C-FAR can also regard the current situation as a *window of opportunity* to evaluate lessons learned over the first two years and build a smarter, more effective action strategy for the longer term.
 - It would be unwise to suspend operations and wait until the budget climate improves.
 - When the budget climate does improve, National C-FAR wants to have already laid the groundwork needed to achieve meaningful increases in public sector ag research funding.

- National C-FAR wasn't created to do the job FOR you, but WITH you. National C-FAR's success hinges upon leveraging limited resources invested in the coalition apparatus through member ownership and involvement—sweat equity, so to speak.
 - You joined or support this coalition because its goals are important to you, and because you haven't found a way to achieve those goals through other means.
 - National C-FAR is not meant to replace your own ongoing efforts, but to complement and build upon them.
 - Yes, you're already busy. The time you can invest in the coalition is limited.
 - And as a further reality check, each National C-FAR member likely has one or more issues/needs that rank higher than National C-FAR's goals.
 - I'm not the expert in ag research and how to make the case for public sector investment. "YOU" are, whether you're in research or a "customer." National C-FAR members provide a wealth of expertise on the need for ag research and ways to make a compelling case.
 - My task as your Liaison is to help you find ways to use your available time and energy creatively and effectively and to channel collective efforts into the critical mass needed to move forward.

- Achieving the goal of increased public investment in agricultural research is critically important, but it's not going to be easy. Relying on 'someone else' to do it isn't going to work.
 - So if you're already a member, *make sure your dues are current*. Commit to being involved; and help by recruiting another new member.
 - If you're reading this, and you're not a current National C-FAR member, change your status from cheerleader by *joining the team!*
 - If there's a reason you're not a member, let us know so we can try to be more responsive and inclusive.

In closing, few if any of the thoughts above are original. Some I've gleaned from conversations with a number of you. They're not intended to be comprehensive. Regardless, I assume sole responsibility for the perspectives offered. You can certainly disagree. All I ask is that you recommit to being involved in a strong program of action FOR public investment in ag research.