UC DAVIS AGRICULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE (ASI)

EXTERNAL ADVISORY BOARD MIDYEAR MEETING

May 11, 2010

DRAFT MEETING REPORT

June 1, 2010

Prepared by: Courtney Riggle and Thomas P. Tomich
Welcome by Howard Shapiro

Imagine what it would have been like to cut down the last tree on Easter Island? The last tree is a metaphor for the destruction of Easter Island but more generally a comment on human frailty. First, the failure to perceive threat, make plans and execute. Second, how the insulated decision maker with a conflict between short and long term, embraces neither choice. Third, it is hard to make decisions in changing circumstances. Today, there is a growing recognition that knowledge really does matter. Data driven/technology neutral solutions should be the norm, from indigenous knowledge to modern science.

The issue is how to think, not what to think. What are the key impacts to be addressed? Whose responsibility are they? Where does a responsibility begin and end? It is easy to disagree, it is critical to have a tractable conversation so there is a way to move forward if not reaching consensus. We need literacy, not just compelling messages. We move from site and preserves to systems, scalability. All farmers must have access to the best of everything!

ASI is on the forefront of understanding the biological resources, the natural capital and livelihood's associated with sustainability. These are bundled values. Transformational not transaction based. We are working, aligning the conversation with partners. We cannot have adversaries. There is strength in numbers, pooling resources. All institutions working together in a tractable conversation. This is our conversation.

Participants
Board - Howard Shapiro (chair), Ashley Boren, Corny Gallagher, Janaki Jagannath, AG Kawamura, Craig MacNamara, Meredith Niles, Richard Rominger, Rachel Surls; Remote - Martha Guzman Aceves, Carl Johnson; Staff - Tom Tomich (director), Kate Scow (deputy director), Sonja Brodt, Ian Cahir, Adrian Crabtree, Gail Feenstra, Bev Ransom, Courtney Riggle, Mark Van Horn; Guest - Joe DiTomaso

Meeting Objectives
1. Deepen board members’ engagement with ASI work through targeted discussions of ASI’s initiatives.
2. Sharpen and clarify messages on intended outcomes for ASI activities so communications by staff and board members are more compelling to our stakeholders and potential funders.
3. Receive Board members’ guidance on ASI’s evolving portfolio of activities, including priorities for SAREP’s grant programs.
4. Strengthen board members’ relationships with each other and with ASI staff.
A Carousel of ASI’s Thematic Areas

ASI’s thematic area leaders: Sonja Brodt, Gail Feenstra, and Mark Van Horn, put together Venn Diagrams highlighting the key activities and overlapping initiative areas of ASI’s key activities, which were used to focus and facilitate discussions for each thematic area.

Session Objective
Engage board members in a deeper understanding of ASI initiatives and enhance their ability to champion the institute by focusing on specific outcomes and activities.

Thematic Area 1: Agriculture Resources and Environment

Facilitator: Sonja Brodt

Overview

Brief presentations on the current work foci in this area were made, and how this work fits into the overall thematic initiative structure. Highlights included work on: Life-cycle assessment (LCA) of food products, Field-level green house gas (GHG) emissions, Long-term research of Agricultural Systems at the Russell Ranch, the California Nitrogen Assessment project, and climate preparedness workshops with the rice industry.

Discussion

Key ideas that came out of the discussion for the Ag, Resources, and the Environment theme include:

- How do we communicate overlapping ideas, issues?
- What can ASI offer? Need to affirm ASI’s role as “glue”, not a competitor
- In the diagram, the central, overlapping area is empty, but in fact it holds a lot of content - what should go in there?
The CA Nitrogen Assessment project should move into this area, and is also closely linked with projects on field level greenhouse gas emission (GHG), listed under climate footprinting.

The idea of ASI as “glue” facilitating efforts among all of these areas is also central.

- Water is always critical
- Need to engage and communicate GHG/LCA research with CE and growers
- Find ways to use Russell Ranch to support & enhance initiatives; communicate, use for PR

Growers need to be included in the discussion for GHG, other issues

Thematic Area 2: Food and Society
Facilitator: Gail Feenstra

Overview

Brief presentations on the current work foci in this area were made, and how this work fits into the overall thematic initiative structure. Highlights included: Farm to institution, Values-based supply chains, Farm to school, and San Diego Food system assessment project; collaboration with Soil Born Farms’ “Food for All” project; and meetings with potential collaborative partners to ramp up activities associated with Farmworker well-being.

Discussion

Key ideas that came out of the discussion for the Food and Society theme include:

- There needs to be a gathering of institutional food programming in California to compare and share insights about where institutions are getting food
- Values: when you’re trying to show and transmit values (eg., as part of “values-based supply chains”) associated with production or other parts of the food system, “bundled values” are better – people don’t have to agree with every specific value, but they can generally agree to support a sustainably produced “package” of values
• Sysco must be considered and included in discussions on California’s food system. [Note: Sysco has been included in our values-based supply chain and farm-to-institution research. Also note: FreshPoint SF, a subsidiary of Sysco, recently participated in a project outreach event].
• Food security – has to involve CE, limited resource farmers, small urban farmers; Neil Hamilton (Agricultural Law Center, Drake University) is a potential reference; Other potential partners include: Center for Land-Based Learning(CLBL), Future Farmers of America (FFA), 4-H, Meridian Institute, DARPA (US Dept of Defense research agency)
• Water is critical issue running through all food system issues
• Agricultural systems & the environment – involve rural communities as part of broader approach
• We need to learn how to integrate farmworker issues with other food system issues
• Building regional markets and food system assessment should overlap.
  o Venn diagram will be updated to reflect this relationship.

**Thematic Area 3: Education and Leadership**

*Facilitator: Mark Van Horn*

**Overview**

Brief presentations on the current work foci in this area were made, and how this work fits into the overall thematic initiative structure. Highlights included: Student Farm permanent educational projects, professional development for schools in garden-based learning and farm to school efforts, children and youth programs, development and delivery of courses for the new Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems major and general shepherding of the major, the Inter-institutional Network for Food and Agricultural Sustainability (INFAS).

**Discussion**

Key ideas that came out of the discussion for the Food and Society theme include:

• Leadership – collaborate with other leadership groups, such as: Cal Ag Leadership Network, American Leadership Forum, Coro, Great Valley Center, Beahrs Environmental Leadership program (UC Berkeley)
Grad students – offer practical leadership opportunities, ASI board is a great resource for seminars, other activities

Foster leadership and education within farm worker community through collaborative efforts in which farm workers are both learners and teachers

Undergraduate major – can be a model for national sustainability science; INFAS can be a tool to share information on both process and progress

Children and Youth – explore possible collaborations with 4-H

Group Reflection on ASI Initiatives

Facilitator: Howard Shapiro

“Ag is the culprit, the victim, and also the solution” (Quote from the Copenhagen Climate conference)

Role of ASI

• What is the role of ASI vs. the broader university?
  o ASI’s role is to lead in exploring emerging sustainability areas

• What does ASI deliver? Who is the audience?
  o ASI is hub of information. It provides information to various stakeholders to enable them to make better decisions; farmers, policy makers, etc.

ASI as a Hub

• Role of ASI – hub is a great role; has been a lot of progress in ag, ie: water use efficiency, input production, however – there have been setbacks, such as a new chemical methyl iodide approved this week. ASI needs to take a more direct approach on some of these issues; promote healthy dialogues but also help prevent backward steps, if not always progress.

• How do we establish and/or position ASI? Idea of the institute as a hub or convener is important – takes time to get there. Largest potential impact is on emerging issues, where others are not already established as the experts.
  o Potential leadership topic: Nitrogen assessment

• Identify and harness other opportunities to put ASI on the map

• ASI has made tremendous strides in just 3 years. Has convened various groups creating conversations never heard before. There is a long way to go, but we have also come a long way. Education and leadership are important ingredients to ASI’s mission.

• ASI can be convener for connecting health, nutrition, diet; rural-urban interface. Southern Cal example: gap between lower income communities in need of better nutrition and their ability to embrace sustainable agriculture; health crisis is more prevalent for these communities.
Communication is key

- You don’t have to have final answers to communicate story and process as well as hard results. Package information for appropriate stakeholder groups – both ASI and board members.
- The Institute needs to be able to communicate in a compelling way to the general public and potential donors. The challenge is to match resources with potential, both staff and funding; e.g.: nitrogen team, experiential learning team.
- Coordination, collaboration, & communication are still at heart of forming a sustainable system.
- Providing information to decision-makers is key.

Collaboration

- ASI needs to make more group connections / collaborations, & keep building relationships.
  - Partner Suggestions: Roots of Change, Ag Innovations.
- Food assessment: Meridian Institute group – coordinating 9 major nat’l foundations, is doing food system assessments. Need to connect this group w/ INFAS.
  - Suggestion: Invite Meridian leaders to participate in Nat’l symposium in November.

Cross-cutting Issues

- Rural communities are critical on national level, collapsing in US; Midwest. America needs to reinvest.
- Rural communities are a crosscutting issue for all agricultural issues. There is currently little or no academic focus on rural communities, leading to disfunction between human development and source of food.
- There is a diverse array of agricultural production going on. It is a complex system thought of uniformly by society. Society needs to realize its complexity, and need to prepare for significant change, climactically, systemically – look to future. The complexity of issues discussed today is difficult to comprehend.
- Agriculture is potentially politically powerful – but isn’t harnessing that power (ie: food is grown by 2% of population).
- ASI initiatives need to fit under CA Ag Vision – if they don’t fit, they should. If not – how can we be compatible?
- Figuring out how to feed 9 Billion people is the critical goal for agricultural sustainability.
Grant Making: A Compelling Menu  
*Facilitators: Sonja Brodt and Gail Feenstra*

ASI has pulled together $250,000 from ASI endowment income to fund grantmaking in 2010, which will be managed by the SAREP program. The goal of the grants program is to catalyze action on big emerging issues. The monies here have been carefully pooled and when they are spent, will exhaust the current grantmaking funds of the program. New funding sources will have to be found if SAREP grantmaking will continue in future years.

**Session Objective**

Board’s role was to help prioritize recommended options from a menu of possibilities.

*The proposed grant-making formula, depicted below, represents a “$250,000 meal”:*

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### Osteria Asi

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Menu Category</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Antipasti [Planning grants]</strong></td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Climate change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Food assessments/ Policy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Farmworkers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Primi Piatti [Education/ Outreach grants]</strong></td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Climate change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nitrogen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building regional markets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Food security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondi Piatti [Leveraging grants]</strong></td>
<td>$35 - 50,000</td>
<td>(2-3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Special emphasis on Farmworker Wellbeing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dolci [Grad student research grants]</strong></td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Any Food and Society flavor profiles</td>
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The board was supportive of the suggested structure and funding levels, with discussion focused on just a few issues; namely a few clarification points on the amount of funding, timing, and eligibility, and then the topics outlined in the discussion below: farmworker wellbeing and other emerging issues to potentially include as a focus, in addition to the issues outlined in the “menu” above.

Discussion

Key points
- Funds will be available statewide
- Use matching funds as extra points, but not required
- Would it make sense to give smaller grants for several years, instead of giving all at once?
  - No - there are distinct advantages to a larger call
- Need to carefully formulate call to clarify what fits in the focus...
- Discussed goal was to get calls out by the end of June (end of fiscal year).
  - Note: the ASI Steering Committee had previously discussed putting out the RFP in the fall in conjunction with the WSARE/ASI Sustainable Food System conference. Given the time that will to be needed for discussing these calls, especially the one on farmworkers, which will need to be done carefully, the exact timing of the call is currently under consideration.

Thoughts on farmworker wellbeing
- Farmworker/immigrants very important, looming issue, housing – missing immigration rules
- Observation: farmworkers today are farmers in 2-3 generations; must engage them now to have sustainable farming in the future
- Need to map farmworker issues as important elements of other food system components.
- Would it be more appropriate to phrase it “food system workers”? Or: Farmworker and rural community wellbeing?
  - Farmworkers have historically been treated differently by policies - e.g. exclusion from certain labor regs that apply to almost all other industries, so they stand out as needing specific attention
- Would the farmworker program make more sense as a leveraging grant or a stand alone grant?
  - Could do stand alone, with extra points for matching.
  - Could do 2 tier: planning grants leading to larger grants – all farmworker monies in 1 pot

Other topics/issues to consider funding
- Invasive species are a looming threat, ie: citrus psyllid, hoof&mouth, commodity specific diseases
- Food assessments – include rural and/or urban
- Obesity & nutrition
• Dynamic between and among regional / global systems – ie: interactions between food-sheds, energy-sheds, and water-sheds
• Agro-ecosystems: look at synergies among systems; infrastructure of regional sustainability
• Groundwater quantity and quality – key to global sustainable food systems
• Learning and communication
• Overall: suggestion to expand the list of “planning grants” to explore new issues

Communications Workshop
Facilitator: Ian Cahir

Overview
Board members were introduced to the new look and feel of ASI’s materials including website and printed formats, and shown the variety of communication avenues ASI is currently using, including blogs, tweets, and video postings. A discussion of The Institute’s mission statement and how to use this mission as the starting point to an “elevator talk” about ASI with a variety of audiences ensued.

Board members were asked to write down ideas or phrases representing ASI as they occurred to them during various sessions throughout the entire day. At the end of the day, these words and phrases were shared among the group and will be compiled into a “toolkit” for board and staff to refer to.

Discussion

Broad communication strategies
• Semantics
  o Don’t use “try”
  o Use “we”, not “I” – “We can lead the way...”
• Discussion on use of “consensus”
  o ASI builds “consensus” with farmers and other key stakeholders
  o Is ASI’s role building consensus or providing information?
  o More appropriate to say “scientific consensus” ...
• Environment should be stated more clearly as part of mission
• As a hub, ASI should bring UCCE and the Ag Experiment Station faculty – either merged together or by joining forces; the Institute should be the go-to place for business, policymakers, etc. For farmers - don’t recreate outreach; use UCCE and other partners.
  o Communications from ASI to Farm Advisors to farmers – may be stimulated by grants.
• Still unsustainable decisions being made, such as some recent FDA approvals – how do we engage?
• Elevator talk needs to be concise: Family – point – pet
  o Family: UC, important branding, should be stated first
  o Credibility of UC, nimbleness of a new institute
  o Begin and end with the relationship-building pieces (like asking about a person’s family first and asking about their pet as you close the conversation)

• Communication within the UC system
  o Connection to students on campus needs to be communicated
  o What does ASI have to offer for students? All of UC?

• Discussion on stakeholders
  o Who is customer and what are they coming to us for?
  o Just California – or broader focus?
    ▪ Focused on California; but global food system is context
    ▪ Work based in California – needs to be relevant to other locations/situations
  o How should ASI broaden its engagement with farmerworkers?
    ▪ Farmworker issue – health issue bigger on people’s mind than ag; can we link health/ag/farmworker community? Leverage SAREP funds?
  o How can ASI deepen and broaden its engagement with scientists across UC and at other institutions?
    ▪ Scientists reluctant to get involved/be seen as advocates. ASI can provide platform for sharing of information.
    ▪ Many scientists don’t realize how they are connected to agriculture

• Need to reach those “not in the room”, ie: CA roundtable

Ideas and phrases
• Connection between theory and practice; ASI can be think tank as well as action tank
• Bridging the continuum and bridging what is going on on-campus to what is going on in the field
• It isn’t either farm advisors or ASI; it is farm advisors with ASI; ASI is hub that links knowledge with action, connecting campus with farm advisors, business, policy makers
• The tent has gotten bigger
• ASI is a clearinghouse and catalyst for developing knowledge on emerging knowledge and sustainable food systems
• Agricultural “Solution” Institute
• ASI as “glue”
• Words: solutions, society, science
• Production and availability of healthy food
• Invent something different
• Agriculture is a culprit, victim, and solution
• ASI leads consensus building for sustainable solutions.
• Providing credible science-based knowledge, information, and data to support sustainable food system and policy.
• “We provide credible knowledge to make good decisions/policy.”
• “coordinate, collaborate, communicate”
• Health connection – healthy agroecosystems = healthy people
• ASI making a difference in “x, y z” areas (dependent upon the audience)
• “New look at food system for the 21st century”
• Integrating the pieces of the whole
• Need to figure out how to feed 9 billion people
• Need to figure out how to manage critical resources
• Understand what 20th century ag was about, move on and look to what 21st century agriculture can be...

Other points raised throughout the day
• Potential project: ASI may help create sustainability living prototype – 45 acres, food, ag, energy
• IBM is #1 social network modeler; potential collaboration?

Conclusion: Bringing it all together
Facilitators: Howard Shapiro and Tom Tomich

The board reached new depth at this meeting. The main focus and achievement was on presenting & refining messages about what we’re doing.

Did we achieve our objectives?

• Objective 1: Deepen board members’ engagement with ASI work through targeted discussions of ASI’s initiatives.
  o yes
• Objective 2: Sharpen and clarify messages on intended outcomes for ASI activities so communications by staff and board members are more compelling to our stakeholders and potential funders.
  o yes
• Objective 3: Receive Board members’ guidance on ASI’s evolving portfolio of activities, including priorities for SAREP’s grant programs.
  o yes
• Objective 4: Strengthen board members’ relationships with each other and with ASI staff.
  o yes
Agreed action items for follow up:

- Courtney Riggle, Tom Tomich, and other staff will produce a short “aide de memoire” on the main outcomes, recommendations and action items (the present document).
- Sonja Brodt and Gail Feenstra (with support from Bev Ransom, Courtney Riggle, Mark Van Horn and Tom Tomich) will develop a request for proposals for SAREP grants. (forthcoming)
- Ian Cahir will work with Tom Tomich to develop a page of key talking points based on the communication session that will be circulated to all Board members and ASI staff. The aim is to produce talking points that can be combined and crafted by each of us into compelling ASI “elevator conversations” suited to specific opportunities as they arise. (forthcoming)

Heartfelt thanks to each of our Advisory Board Members who were able to participate (face to face or by telephone) and to our chair Howard Shapiro for his highly-effective guidance on the pace and energy of the meeting. Thanks also to the ASI staff whose preparation was key to our success.