Mid-Atlantic Poultry Consortium: A Department Head’s Viewpoint on Regionalization

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ABSTRACT A document outlining possible areas of coordination and cooperation among university faculty to meet the research, extension, and teaching needs of the poultry industries in the Mid-Atlantic region (i.e., in the states of Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina) has been developed. Poultry-oriented faculty in the region’s Colleges of Agriculture and Colleges of Veterinary Medicine in the 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions participated to varying degrees in the development of the document. Poultry scientists with the ARS/USDA, Beltsville, MD, have also expressed interest in and provided input to the plan. Three university-based committees addressed potential avenues of cooperation for academic programs, teaching, research, extension, and technology transfer. Input from those committees was summarized and presented as a basic concept paper for the development of a Mid-Atlantic Poultry Consortium at the Poultry Extension Symposium at the Poultry Science Association’s annual meeting in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, in 1995. Meetings of faculty from the participating institutions have been held twice yearly at the Southeastern Poultry and Egg Association Congress in Atlanta, GA, and at the annual Poultry Science Association meetings to specifically discuss strategies for moving forward with the plan. Unfortunately, for a number of different reasons, buy-in by individual faculty at the various institutions has, at best, been very limited. Nevertheless, some progress has been made toward increasing the amount of regional cooperation underway. Most of the cooperation to date has been in interstate extension programming, with reciprocal use of specialists with different expertise between two states, and with the joint planning of regionally based educational conferences. Some joint extension publications and a few joint applied research or demonstration projects are also underway. Currently, however, no program is in place that involves all of the region’s university-based poultry groups in a single program effort. The slow development of such an effort is partially due to difficulties in communication. An attempt is currently being made to get all of the poultry-oriented faculty in the region linked via an e-mail listserv, so that individuals with needs for partnering can freely communicate their needs to others in the region who might be interested in cooperating with them.

(Key words: regional poultry programming, research, extension, teaching)

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of regional cooperation and regional programming by universities within the U.S. is not new. As most people are aware, regional research programs have for many years been funded and carried out through the Cooperative States Research Service under the direction of Experiment Station Directors at the land-grant universities in the Northeast, Southern, North Central, and Western regions. Due to the continuing reorganization of the USDA and the development of the new consolidated Cooperative States Research, Extension, and Education Service (CSREES), regional research programs may be modified, but will, undoubtedly, continue. Over time, as funding and commodity production levels by state have shifted and changed, many of these so-called regional research programs for poultry, even though they have continued to be directed by the four federal regions, have become very much national in scope. This widened scope has been the result not only of shifts in commodity production levels within states, but also of reduced federal budgets accompanied by the reduction, and in some states nearly total elimination, of poultry programs. Fewer programs and fewer personnel

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Abbreviation Key: CSREES = Cooperative States Research, Extension, and Education Service; LGCA = land grant colleges of agriculture; OSU = Oregon State University; UI = University of Idaho; WSU = Washington State University.
have forced change upon how these regional efforts are conducted. This reduction is true not only in the poultry area, but in many other commodity areas as well.

Regional cooperation has existed to some degree for many years in poultry extension programs. Most regional efforts have been quite informal in nature, and have primarily involved the joint development by faculty at more than one institution of extension publications, and or the planning and conduct of jointly sponsored educational conferences and workshops.

Several attempts have been made over the past few years to develop formal, regionally based, poultry-oriented programs. In the early 1980s, following the demise of the Poultry Science Department at Washington State University (WSU), WSU, Oregon State University (OSU), and the University of Idaho (UI) developed a formal program that allowed poultry-oriented students from WSU and the UI to enroll, at in-state tuition rates, at OSU. Reciprocal arrangements were made for other students from low-enrollment programs at OSU to enroll at WSU or UI. Due in part to the lack of adequate funding and support, and, therefore, a lack of recruitment, only a few poultry students (about one every other yr) have participated in this program (T. F. Savage, Animal Science Department, OSU, Corvallis, OR 97331; personal communication).

A more successful regional effort was started about 1987 by the poultry faculty in the states of Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Kentucky (Havenstein, 1990). The original discussions for this group covered all aspects of poultry programs, but eventually ended up as primarily an effort to cooperatively plan and host a number of regional extension education conferences and workshops. Now known as the Multi-State conferences, they are generally well supported and include a number of nationally recognized speakers. This is one example of a regional effort that has paid off well for all involved over the past 8 to 9 yr. Due to the limited number of extension poultry faculty in the five states involved in the Multi-State effort, none of the states alone could have arranged, sponsored, and conducted these conferences by themselves; and due to the increased size and shrinking number of poultry firms in each of the individual states, it would probably have been impossible to sustain individual state-supported conferences over this time period as well. A Multi-State Research and Extension Newsletter was also initiated by this group in 1989 in an effort to keep their clientele informed of applied poultry research and extension efforts that were underway or planned in the region (Havenstein, 1990).

In 1984, the Cooperative Extension Directors in the six New England states (i.e., Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island) began a regional programming effort for poultry extension (Wyman and El-Begearmi, 1990). A strategy was developed, and the program was started in 1986. A New England Poultry Letter was produced, and strong regional conferences were developed, but due to budget cuts, a diminishing industry, failure to replace retiring specialists, and changing priorities, by 1989, only half as many specialists were involved in the program as started in 1986. Thus, Wyman and El-Begearmi (1990) stated that if regional cooperation is attempted, then there should be “a clear contract stating: 1) what each state contributes, with negotiations if anything changes; 2) an annual review, regardless of changes, to ascertain that those who really control inputs are involved and committed; and 3) clear communication with the industry. If cutbacks are necessary, they must be announced and explained.” Havenstein (1990) also suggested that if regional programs are to be established and succeed, they must have: 1) continuous support at all administrative levels of each institution, 2) effective leadership for the program by one leader selected by all groups, and 3) continuous written and oral communications. All parties must also agree that personnel and financial support will not be equal from the participating states.

A number of universities in the North Central region have banded together with industry representatives from the region over the past few years in an attempt to improve poultry education. Summer teaching programs for the Midwest Poultry Center of Excellence have been planned and are currently being conducted at the University of Wisconsin for students from throughout the Midwest region. That program is discussed elsewhere in this symposium. The land-grant universities in Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and Missouri have also been attempting to develop regional cooperation. That effort is also being discussed at this symposium. Numerous examples of multi-state-supported extension conferences and workshops, especially in the Atlantic coast and New England areas, could be cited as successful regional efforts as well. Most of those efforts have been developed for the same reasons as the Multi-State conferences, i.e., shrinking numbers of firms and potential participants, and shrinking numbers of extension personnel to arrange and conduct the conferences. In general, most regionally based conferences are better than the state-based conferences they replaced due to better corporate sponsorship, better planned programs, and better attendance.

Reynnells et al. (1988), as part of an Intersociety Task Force on Extension, conducted a survey concerning the extent of regional cooperative programs by universities, their effects and opportunities. Respondents to the survey indicated that there were lots of potential benefits and opportunities for regionally based programs in extension, teaching, and research; and that regional programming had been proven to be beneficial in all areas of the country, in all disciplines, and in all phases of the extension service. A survey of agricultural college deans (Thompson and Gwynn, 1989) showed a need for higher level of subject matter competency and a need for more specialization within the extension
service. That survey also suggested a definite need for more extension programs to operate on a regional rather than a state basis.

The Poultry Science Association sponsored a symposium on the Regionalization of Extension Poultry Programs in the U.S. in 1989. Several presentations at that symposium (Boyle, 1990; Carter, 1990; Casey, 1990; Ernst, 1990; Goodwin, 1990; Havenstein, 1990; Reynnells, 1990; Wyman and El-Bergearmi, 1990) discussed the role of extension education in a rapidly changing society and the pros and cons of forming regional partnerships for poultry extension education. Boyle pointed out that extension’s 75-yr (now 81-yr!) history is long and impressive, but that extension could not “rest on its laurels.” Poultry educational history must serve as a base for meeting current customers needs. Obviously, this is true, not only for extension, but for poultry-related academic and research programs as well. Poultry-related programs have been underway in numerous states for nearly a century. That is, according to Termohlen, (1969), the first poultry research was started in Maine in 1886, followed by New York in 1889, Rhode Island in 1891; North Carolina, North Dakota, and Utah in 1896; and Indiana and West Virginia in 1897. Maine had the first poultry instructional program in 1894, and most others were started between 1902 and 1920. Indiana was the first to establish a poultry extension program in 1910, and most others were established between 1912 and 1919. This long history of poultry research, teaching, and extension provides those of us currently involved with a legacy upon which to build and improve poultry-based programs to support our student and industry clientele. Change has been a hallmark of poultry research, teaching, and extension and of the industry itself. Regional programming, planning, and teaching will undoubtedly be part of the future, as we continue to change to support our clientele.

MID-ATLANTIC POULTRY CONSORTIUM

An effort has been underway for several years to develop a document that outlines possible areas of coordination and cooperation among university faculty to meet the research, extension, and teaching needs of the poultry industries in the Mid-Atlantic region (i.e., in the states of Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina). Poultry-oriented faculty in the region’s Colleges of Agriculture and Colleges of Veterinary Medicine in the 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions participated to varying degrees in the development of this document. Poultry scientists with USDA-ARS, Beltsville, MD, have also expressed interest in and provided input to the plan. Three university-based committees have addressed potential avenues of cooperation for academic programs, teaching, research, extension and technology transfer. Input from those committees was summarized and presented as a basic concept paper for a Mid-Atlantic Poultry Consortium at the Poultry Extension Symposium at the Poultry Science Association’s annual meeting in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, in 1995 (Havenstein et al., 1995).

The Mid-Atlantic Poultry Consortium has the following aims: 1) to encourage the coordination of poultry-related teaching, research, and extension efforts in order to strengthen poultry-related programs over the entire region; 2) to organize and sponsor basic and applied research that addresses the needs of the region’s poultry industries; 3) to promote and support high-quality training for 2-yr and 4-yr undergraduates, veterinary students, graduate students, interns, residents, and post-doctoral fellows to meet the needs of the industry; 4) to promote proactive regional extension and outreach programs in order to enhance the adoption of relevant technologies by industry and to provide meaningful information for consumers; and 5) to improve communications and foster cooperation and understanding among universities and the public and private sectors.

POTENTIAL AREAS OF COOPERATION

A number of potential areas for regional cooperation have been identified. Some are aimed at fostering improved communication among faculty at the region’s universities, as well as between university faculty, students, and industry personnel. Others are directed at the improvement of the teaching, research, and extension efforts of the various faculties.

Academic Program Opportunities

Coordination of recruitment efforts for poultry-oriented students within the region, including: 1) Shared development cost and use of recruitment materials such as brochures, videotapes, high-school student databases, online services, and multimedia recruitment and/or educational materials, and 2) Jointly conducted “Summer Institutes for High School Students Related to Career Opportunities in the Poultry Industry”.

Multi-institutional development of poultry instructional programs using multimedia materials and distance learning technologies.

Joint provision of sufficient student numbers to offer specialized advanced undergraduate poultry courses (possibly, at least in part, through distance learning). Joint development of new instructional models (internships, real-world external experiences, independent study, international study programs, etc.).

Coordination of field trips/training programs for students from several universities.

Joint offerings of advanced graduate training programs in such areas as poultry related biotechnology, immunology, systems analysis and modeling, poultry waste recycling and management, etc.

Regional development of post-graduate life-long education through short courses, training modules for industry personnel, etc.

Multi-institution and industry partnerships for poultry instructional programs (similar to the Midwest program).
Regional Research Program Opportunities

Researchable problems (basic/applied and long-term/short-term) related to the needs of the poultry industry abound. Generally, these problems impact the industry in the entire region, but are often dealt with on a state-by-state basis with limited resources rather than on a regional basis. Development of coordinated research efforts that would include and optimize the resources within the region could enhance the research on general egg and meat production, avian health, poultry food science and food safety, economics, entomology, nutrition, physiology, immunology, genetics, biotechnology, waste management and utilization, etc., as they relate to the poultry industries. Regionalization of research programs would result in:

1) Multi-state or regional approaches to problems affecting the Mid-Atlantic poultry industries.
2) Improved use of the knowledge, skills and resources available (i.e., people, specialized facilities and equipment, breeding populations, etc.) at the region’s educational institutions.
3) Formation of multidisciplinary research teams with members from several universities and/or USDA/ARS in order to improve the knowledge gained from individual research efforts.
4) Development of joint grant requests to major government funding agencies by faculty at several universities and/or staff at USDA-ARS.
5) Possibly some reduction in duplication of research efforts. Some will argue that duplication is good, but under the current funding climate, can we justify duplication when some key areas are not being addressed?

As was pointed out in the introduction, a number of so-called regional research projects are currently underway under the auspices of CSREES. It is certainly not the intention of the Mid-Atlantic regional effort to alter or duplicate those efforts. The mid-Atlantic effort should simply provide the basis for multi-state, multi-institutional cooperation on poultry research needs for the region that are not being met by the CSREES sponsored research and information exchange groups. In some cases, the mid-Atlantic regional research may very well fit under the umbrella of one or more of the CSREES-sponsored poultry research programs.

Regional Extension Program Opportunities

Based on the commonality among states in a number of program areas and in the industry groups functioning throughout most of the region, it is recommended that efforts be made to develop proactive interstate extension program initiatives. These initiatives would address, but not be limited to, the following:

1) Continued development and improvement of existing regionally based poultry conferences.
2) Development of one-time and/or possibly continuing conferences for new and emerging areas (including nontraditional), e.g., zoning issues, regulatory issues, human resource development for the poultry industry, by-product management and recycling, worker safety, environmental control in the poultry house, etc.
3) Development of regionally based in-depth, hands-on workshops and short courses on current topic areas.
4) Joint development of extension educational materials, e.g., bulletins, fact sheets, youth educational materials, etc.
5) Regional development of distance learning materials for extension education, e.g., e-mail, computer software applications, multimedia educational modules, etc.
6) Development of proactive interstate program initiatives in food safety, water quality, waste management, etc.
7) Arrangements by two or more states in identifying reciprocal programming needs that can be met in one state by specialists located in the adjacent state. Arrange reciprocal trade of days and travel funding to cover needs not being met in one state by the specialist in the adjacent state and vice versa.

Other Regional Opportunities for Poultry Scientists

1) Joint development of a regional e-mail listserv for the Mid-Atlantic region in order to enhance communication amongst faculty in the region.
2) Joint development of regional databases and graphics sets for use in classroom teaching, extension, and research.
3) Sharing and enhancing individual campus resources in order to eliminate duplication of equipment, facilities, and effort, and to enhance research, teaching, and extension efforts.
4) Joint development of a World-Wide-Web site for the Mid-Atlantic Poultry Consortium to tie together all poultry related information for the region.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

There is little doubt that numerous facets of our poultry educational programs could be improved by increased multi-university regional cooperation. Before regional cooperation for any programmatic area can be initiated and be successful however, a number of barriers must be overcome. Some of these barriers are political, some are administrative, some are “turf-related”, some are related to the fear that regionalization is just another excuse for downsizing, and some involve
how the faculty involved will receive credit for out-of-state teaching, research, or extension. Most of these issues must be addressed and resolved, however, if regional programs are to truly come about and be effective. Some of these issues were addressed by participants in the 1989 PSA symposium on regional extension programs, and some of those discussed therein also relate to the development of regional teaching and research programs.

As was pointed out by both Havenstein (1990) and Wyman and El-Bergearmi (1990), before a regional program can truly be implemented and successful, the administrators at the cooperating universities must insure administrative support at all administrative levels and at all of the cooperating institutions. They must also put together a binding contract that specifies each unit's contribution to the regional effort. This must be done up front so that all parties involved know exactly what is being considered, what the ground rules are for participation, and what each party is bringing to the table as far as human resource, facility, financial and other support are concerned.

Some of the specific issues that academic administrators and state officials in the region must face before the development of any regional program can move forward and be successful include:

1) Administrative
   a) A written commitment from the college administrators involved with an operational plan and the commitments of the necessary resources to make the regional effort successful.
   b) A description of how the regional program will be administered without increasing the number of administrators.
   c) A description of how the administrator/coordinator for the program will be chosen?
   d) A description of the duties and expectations of the administrator/coordinator?
   e) Who does the administrator/coordinator report to, and what is his/her authority?

2) Faculty buy-in and support
   a) How can the faculty be assured that regionalization is not just a ready-made excuse for further downsizing by some of the institutions involved?
   b) How will the regional program efforts be financed?
   c) If funding is provided for regional programs, where will those funds come from? What will happen to funding for individual state poultry programs if funding is provided for regional programs?
   d) Who pays for the increased travel costs associated with regional extension programs?
   e) How will regional priorities be set for teaching, research, and extension?

3) Regional teaching programs
   If students are moved from one university to another in order to take a part of their educational program, the following instructional and curriculum requirement issues must be addressed:
   a) Acceptance of courses taken or developed at another university by the student’s home institution to meet the student’s major and/or minor requirements.
   b) Course acceptance by the Academic Program Committees at two or more universities involved.
   c) Prerequisite requirements for course work taken at a second university.
   d) Transfer of credits from semester vs. quarter based teaching programs and vice versa.
   e) Reciprocity agreements for in-state tuition must be developed if students from one state’s university are to take part of their education from a university in another state.

4) Faculty credit and faculty incentives for regional teaching, research, and extension.

How will faculty and the faculty member’s home department who provide teaching or extension materials across state boundaries receive credit from their home institution for doing so? Who owns the intellectual property rights for teaching materials developed in one state that are used on a multi-state basis? Similarly, who owns the rights to research and extension programs conducted on a multi-state basis? How can the materials produced and the rights of the individuals and institutions involved be protected?

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT

In order for any regional effort to be truly functional and successful, the clientele for the regional effort will have to buy-in and be actively involved. Thus, once the university part of the plan is completed, administrative approval from the various institutions involved has been gained, and some of the barriers mentioned above have been overcome, industry (integrated poultry and allied) and student support must be sought. If industry does not provide both direct and political support for the regional effort, the chances for its success are probably minimal. General expressions of industry support for the Mid-Atlantic Poultry Consortium have already been received from a number of individuals and groups, but the industry in general has not at this time been asked to provide their formal support for the effort. At some point in the near future, it would be most helpful if industry and academia could collectively decide on their long-term (5 yr, 10 yr) needs, and then begin the process of how to prioritize and meet those needs.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Regional cooperation for poultry and other program areas is still in its infancy, but it appears quite certain that regional, national, and international linkages and collaborations in the areas of university-based teaching,
research, and extension will be an integral part of the future. One only has to be aware of the signals coming from our state and federal legislators to know that we will operate differently in the future, and that regional programs and multi-state linkages will be an integral part of how we operate. Clear evidence for this was recently provided by the NRC’s Board on Agriculture Committee on the Future of the Colleges of Agriculture in the Land-Grant System. Their recently released report (NRC, 1996) includes the following recommendations:

1) Federal programs and policies should enhance the Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture’s (LGCA) efforts to realize organizational efficiencies and synergies that broaden and deepen the system’s expertise and expand access and relevancy. Significant shares (25% or more) of total current USDA administered extramural funds—including formula funds and competitive grants—for food and agricultural research, teaching and extension should provide incentives for:
   a) regional centers, consortia, programs and projects that effectively integrate and mobilize multi-state and multi-institutional (including 1862, 1890, and 1994 colleges’) resources, and
   b) distance learning and other technologies that expand access, broaden clientele, and enhance multi-institution collaboration in teaching, research, and extension.

2) The bridging programs among 1862s, 1890s, and 1994s deserve special emphasis from federal funding programs, such as federal challenge grants, including the evaluation of their effectiveness as models for expanding access and diversity in the food and agricultural sciences. The Federal government should become an active promoter of the use of articulation agreements among institutions within and across states to facilitate student exchanges and transfers, and encourage collaborative internship programs among institutions in the Land Grant system.

3) All national extension initiatives should be available on a competitive basis to Land Grant and non-Land Grant institutions. Consistent with the committee’s prior recommendations, these competitive grants should provide incentives for:
   a) multi-state, multi-institution, or regional extension programs.
   b) new and innovative approaches to the delivery of extension services, particularly where access can be expanded significantly and benefits shared across political boundaries.

These three major recommendations (out of a total of 20) from one of the nation’s most influential agricultural policy organizations constitute a major shift in terms of the way federal funding for agricultural research and extension would be allocated. More than likely, these recommendations will, at least to some degree, be accepted and enacted at the federal level; and, if so, funding should become available to support regional efforts. Our poultry scientists need to be ready with well thought-out proposals for multi-state, multi-institution and/or regional cooperation when that change occurs.

The effort to develop a poultry consortium among the Land Grant institutions in the mid-Atlantic states is still in the developmental stage. Numerous areas of collaboration are possible, if some of the barriers mentioned above are overcome; and, if university administrators, faculty, federal and state government personnel, and industry supporters join together to provide the working plans as to how consortiums of this type should be administered and operate.

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REFERENCES


