**Meeting summary for WERA 1053 2024 Annual Meeting (10/08/2024)**

**Attendance**

* **Refer to Meeting Notes for more details on attendees’ work and interests**
* **Brad Gaolach (Washington State University),Gail Langellotto (Oregon State University), Paul Priyesh (University of Kentucky), Christine Coker (Mississippi State University), Xinhua Jia (North Dakota State University), Ned Spang (UC Davis), Laura Ingwell (Purdue), Most Tahera Naznin (University of Nevada), Bill Miller (University of Massachusetts), Manreet Bhullar (Kansas State University), Jessica (USDA NIFA), Robert McAfee (USDA NRCS)**

**Quick Recap**: The meeting covered a range of topics related to urban agriculture, including funding structures, research initiatives, and future planning. Participants discussed various projects and programs aimed at supporting advances in urban agriculture and sustainable urban food systems. The group also addressed organizational matters, including officer nominations, increased funding for in-person meetings, and plans for the upcoming 2025 annual meeting.

**Next steps**

* Brad to reach out to organizers of the National Urban Agriculture Conference about potential 2025 conference and opportunities for WERA participation
* Paul to be point of contact for Urban Food Systems Symposium in 2026 regarding WERA participation
* Brad to continue as chair, Paul as chair-elect, and Gail as secretary for the upcoming year
* Most Tahera to take lead on production systems theme and recruit others with relevant expertise to join WERA
* All members to consider recruiting experts in urban ag policy, food system policy, equity/inclusion, labor relations, niche product marketing, etc. to join WERA
* Mostafa to submit introduction and methods for annual report, given lab just started
* Gail to develop meeting minutes and final annual report based on survey submissions and AI meeting notes
* Gail to distribute draft annual report to members for review and additional input
* All members to review draft annual report when distributed and provide any edits/additions
* Brad to work on organizing WERA activities earlier in the year for 2025
* All members to consider gaps in expertise and recruit relevant colleagues to join WERA

**Meeting Minutes**

*Welcome and Overview of this WERA-1053 (including discussion of funding)*

Brad reviewed the two objectives of WERA 1053:

1. To facilitate collaborate with federal agencies around the topic of urban agriculture.
2. Share information on urban ag research, extension, education. Specifically, how might we start bringing more people into this WERA, and bringing people together around the theme of urban agriculture? There are five themes to this work.
   * urban ag production
   * urban agriculture food systems
   * policy, systems, and environment change
   * cross cutting theme: equity and inclusion
   * cross cutting theme: co-creation with communities

Laura asked about funding associated with this group. What, as a group, are we trying to achieve, and are there resources or no resources to achieve those goals.

* Within Hatch multi-state system, there are RAs (research activities) and ERAs (Extension & Research activities)
  + RAs: ag experiment station directors direct where hatch funds are used
  + ERAs (which we are): funds available for attending meetings. You can inquire and apply through your local Extension Director.
    - “ERAs are activities that serve to integrate education (academic and/or Extension) and research on a particular topic where multistate coordination or information exchange is appropriate. ERAs do undergo peer review. These activities receive some additional funding to support travel to annual meetings.”
  + However, there is no direct funding related to doing research, associated with this group. It is a federal rule that only travel funds can be expended on an ERA. Within your state, there may be other rules around who gets funding, and how much.
  + WERAs are primarily a place for exchange of information between research and extension folks. It provides opportunities to identify potential collaborators and funding sources.
* This group does not qualify as the ‘Hatch Project’ that many universities require faculty affiliate with.
  + If you are the official state representative for this WERA, you may be able to get funds for travel to the annual committee meeting. Once again, the key is to inquire with your Extension director.

William announced a multi-state Hatch research project, out of the NE, focused on urban agriculture and urban food systems. This project that started October 1st,

* NE2401: Urban Agriculture: equity, sustainability, and community development. <https://nimss.org/projects/view/mrp/outline/19111>
  + If you’re looking for funds related to research work in the area of urban agriculture, this Hatch Multi-State Project provides that opportunity. You will once again have to approach either your Experiment Station Director or Extension director, to inquire about funds.

*Introductions*

We all did brief introductions, including our name, organization, position & duty assignment, and interests in urban agriculture.

* Brad Gaolach: Chair of WERA 1053; Director, Metro Center for Applied Research & Extension, Washington State University; Director of National Urban Research and Extension Center. Trained as an agroecologist. Works primarily in administration, with a strong focus on developing networks, infrastructure.
* Gail Langellotto: Professor, Horticulture, Oregon State University. Trained as an entomologist. Research and education appointment, but previously worked in Extension as statewide Master Gardener program. Also participates in WERA 1013 (native plants for the intermountain NW).
* Paul Priyesh: Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Department of Animal and Food Sciences, University of Kentucky. Extension and education appointment. Works in the area of food systems, value-added processing and food safety.
* Christine Coker: Extension/Research Professor, Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture, Plant and Soil Sciences, Mississippi State University, Coastal Research and Extension Center in Biloxi. Runs a 20-acre experiment station, where they focus on vegetables, small fruits, organic cover crops, and high tunnels.
* Xinhua Jia: Professor and agriculture engineer at North Dakota State University. Works in controlled environment agriculture, indoor farming, urban farming, smart irrigation for high tunnel crops or greenhouse crops.
* Ned Spang: UC Davis. Associate Professor of Food Science and Technology. Food waste and recycling foods. Looking at smaller scale anaerobic digestors, and then using digestate to grow food.
* Laura Ingwell: Assistant Professor, Entomology, Purdue. Extension, Research, and Teaching. Horticultural crop IPM Extension specialist. Works on insect pests on fruits and vegetables in high tunnels (with some indoor growing). Research interests span rural to urban gradient. Extension work focused on creating resources for urban farms and understanding insect communities on urban farms.
* Most Tahera Naznin: Assistant Professor of Urban and Indoor Agriculture, University of Nevada, Reno, but located in Las Vegas. Research and Extension appointment. Small fruits, vegetables, tunnels, outdoor production, hydroponics (environmental conditions and nutrient solutions). Research in plant quality and food chemistry (phytochemical and antioxidant accumulation in crops).
* Bill Miller: Associate Director for Program Management and Federal Relations. University of Massachusetts, Mass Agricultural Experiment Station. Clean energy and water resources make up the bulk of UMass federal portfolio. Has a specific interest in promoting urban agriculture efforts, regionally and nationally.
* Ned Spang: Associate Professor of Food Science and Technology, UC Davis. Focuses on food waste and recycling. Interested in smaller-scale anaerobic digestion systems that can be used in urban areas, and then using the digestate as a soil amendment in urban agriculture. Has a USDA grant focused on using digestate to grow peppers and tomatoes.
* Manreet Bhullar: Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist for Food Safety at Kansas State University. One of core faculty members at Urban Food Systems initiative at at K State. Research and Extension appointment. They have been conducting the Urban Food Systems Symposium (UFSS) since 2016. The next one will be September 14-17, 2026 in Kansas City ([UFSS website, with save the date](https://urbanfoodsystemssymposium.org/)). K State awarded $1,00,000 for urban food system research (how urban food system sites support urban resilience and food security). Work includes research on an aerobic membrane bioreactor, water reuse for hydroponic or vertical farms, growing crops in multiple cycles, etc.
* Jessica Shade: National Program Leader at USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA NIFA). The programs she is on include UIE (Urban, Indoor, and Emerging Ag), SCRI (Specialty Crop Research Initiative), plant breeding AFRI, SAS (Sustainable Agricultural Systems).
* Robert McAfee

*NIFA Update, Jessica Shade, National Program Leader,* USDA NIFA, Institute of Food Production and Sustainability, Division of Plant Systems – Production

* General NIFA update
* Federal funding options/opportunities related to urban agriculture
  + Urban, Indoor, and Emerging Agriculture (UIE): $50k to $1M. Application deadline TBD. Funding was authorized by the last Farm Bill (now expired), and don’t know if it will be included in the next Farm Bill. They will know more, once the next Farm Bill comes out. Program contacts: Jessica Shade, [Jessica.shade@usda.gov](mailto:Jessica.shade@usda.gov) or Mat Ngouajio, [Mathieu.ngouaiio@usda.gov](mailto:Mathieu.ngouaiio@usda.gov)
  + Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI): $2M to $5M. Application deadline November 8, 2024.Has to be on specialty crops, and usually are large-scale projects. Multi-disciplinary (production, social, economics). Program contact: Tom Bewick, [tbewick@usda.gov](mailto:tbewick@usda.gov)
  + Beginning Farmers and Rancher Development: $50k to $750k. Application deadline is usually in the spring. A beginning farmer or rancher is within first 10 years of managing an operation. Only collaborative groups can apply (not individuals or individual labs). Program contact: Denis Ebodagh, [denis.ebodaghe@usda.gov](mailto:denis.ebodaghe@usda.gov)
  + Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education (SARE). Program is hosted regionally. Program contact: Vance Owens, [vance.owens@usda.gov](mailto:vance.owens@usda.gov)
  + Community Food Projects Competitive Grants: $25k to $400k, Application deadline November 7, 2024. Program contact: Lydia Kaume, [sm.nifa.cfp@usda.gov](mailto:sm.nifa.cfp@usda.gov)
  + Organic Ag Research and Extension Initiative (OREI): $5k to $3.5M. Appropriate for urban ag producers who are also organic. Multi-disciplinary (production, social, economics). Program contact: Mathieu Ngouajio, [Mathieu.ngouajio@usda.gov](mailto:Mathieu.ngouajio@usda.gov)
  + Crop Protection and Pest Management:
    - includes applied research and development program area (ARDP), $200k to $325k for new IPM strategies and tools that mitigate climate change impacts on new/existing pests with application deadline usually in February.
    - Also includes 4 Regional IPM Centers with small grants
    - Contacts: Vijay Nandula, [vijay.nandula@usda.gov](mailto:vijay.nandula@usda.gov) and Emmanuel Byamukama, [Emmanuel.byamukama@usda.gov](mailto:Emmanuel.byamukama@usda.gov)
  + Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). Large program with several sub programs that align with Farm Bill’s Priority areas.
    - Foundational Knowledge of Agricultural Production Systems: $650k to $800k, with specific partnerships (often to work with small, minority-serving institutions). Application deadline is usually September. This is the one likely to be most relevant to urban ag. Supports a broad range of ag production projects, including soil health, climate change stressors, meta-analyses of existing data, how changes to cropping systems affect crop performance or soil health. This is the one USDA often points to, since UIE is on hold. Program contact: Mathieu Ngouajio, [Mathieu.ngouajio@usda.gov](mailto:Mathieu.ngouajio@usda.gov)
  + Engineering for Ag Production and Processing (A1521): $650k to $800k, focused on engineering devices/technologies that improve ag systems, but excludes precision crop and water management systems (because there is a separate program for those aspects). Program contacts: Steven Thomson, [steven.j.thomson@usda.gov](mailto:steven.j.thomson@usda.gov) and Kelly Garbach, [Kelly.garbach@usda.gov](mailto:Kelly.garbach@usda.gov)
  + Sustainable Agricultural Systems (SAS) is another program area that has supported urban ag projects: <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/agriculture-food-research-initiative/afri-sustainable-agricultural-systems>
* Upcoming request for applications calendar: <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/upcoming-request-applications-calendar>
* Subscribe to NIFA emails to stay up to date: <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/nifa-update>
* Be a grant reviewer: helps improve grant-writing skills, understand what reviewers are looking for in a proposal, expands your network, and can lead to future collaborations. USDA peer review system: <https://prs.nifa.usda.gov>

*NRCS Updates*

Robert McAfee from USDA NRCS: used to do field operations in Maryland, and saw the benefits that Extension can provide to urban agricultural producers.

* Not focused on production or start up. They’re focused on resource concerns or conservation goals that an existing producer might have. NRCS provides technical assistance, progressing through a conservation plan, and then can offer financial assistance to offset cost of conservation activities.
* NRCS started as an organization focused on stopping soil erosion. In 1994, mission broadened to include natural resources, including forests, wildlife, wetlands, etc. Current NRCS chief’s priority was to elevate urban agriculture as a priority, which resulted in NRCS pivoting to better serve small-scale, urban growers (0.25 acre and smaller). They worked to rescale current conservation practices, and how they pay for those practices. Instead of writing a contract for $32, they can write contracts for a couple $100, for example.
* They are looking at the Ag Census, which covers 1 to 9 acres, but what about the customer segment that is smaller than this? This includes backyard gardens. There is no restriction on size and location of an ag operation. There is no Farm Bill language that says you need to have $1000 of farm income to participate in programs. Producers may have resource concerns associated with the production of ag products, regardless of size or location of operations.
* Increased minimum payment for conservation stewardship program to $4000 for doing existing stewardship and adopting additional enhancements for additional activities.

*Group Members’ Updates*

Attendees provided an expanded, 10-minute overview of their work in urban agriculture.