

SCC-81 Coordinated Committee Meeting Minutes

(2025 Southern Section Meeting of the American Society of Animal Science)

Date: April 6 (1:00 PM to 5:00 PM CST)

Location: Hall of Fame Room, Sheraton Arlington Hotel, Arlington, Texas

Attendees: Richard Browning (TSU), Scott Bowdridge (WVU), Uma Karki (Tuskegee), Dahlia O'Brien (VSU), Stephan Wildeus (VSU), Diwakar Vyas (UF), Leyla Rios de Alvarez (MSU), Niki Whitley (FVSU), Dan Quadros (University of Arkansas), Enrique Escobar (UMES), Jake Thorne (Texas A & M).

1. Introductions

- As part of the meeting's opening activities, all members present reintroduced themselves, including their institutional affiliations and areas of expertise.
- A reminder was issued that all current and prospective participants must reapply for membership now that the SCC-81 project has been renewed. This is a standard requirement following the renewal of any coordinated committee project. Members are encouraged to complete the reapplication process through the NIMSS (National Information Management and Support System) platform to ensure they are officially listed and can participate in committee activities.
- The group reaffirmed that its primary function is to foster collaboration among participating institutions, rather than conducting individual research projects. Members are encouraged to use the committee as a platform to identify synergies, align research interests, and initiate multi-institutional projects.
- A clarification was provided regarding the committee's structure and funding eligibility. SCC-81 is classified as a coordinated committee, which differs from multistate research projects that often receive direct USDA funding and are tied to the 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions' research efforts. Coordinated committees, like SCC-81, serve to connect researchers across institutions but do not receive base funding for research activities. Instead, members must seek external funding or leverage institutional support for collaborative research aligned with the committee's goals.
- It was noted that Uma Karki (Tuskegee University) did not receive the official communication regarding the submission of station reports. The email was mistakenly directed to someone else and was not forwarded to her, resulting in an unintentional omission of Tuskegee University's report. This highlights the need for a more streamlined and accurate communication process to ensure all members are appropriately informed and able to contribute.

2. USDA-NIFA Update

- In the absence of Dr. Robert Godfrey, who was unable to travel to the conference, Dr. Richard Browning provided an update on behalf of USDA-NIFA.
- It was noted that USDA is currently undergoing a transition period, which has resulted in the termination or temporary freeze of some research projects at several universities. These disruptions are primarily due to internal administrative changes and budgetary realignments within the agency.

3. Presentation of Station Reports

- All five objectives outlined in the SCC-81 project were briefly reviewed and reintroduced to provide members with a comprehensive overview of the group's mission and intended activities. These objectives will guide collaborative efforts through the current project cycle, which continues until 2027. As we approach the final years of this cycle, the committee will need to revisit and assess the progress made under each objective and begin planning for project renewal or transition, identifying new priorities and deliverables. Discussion on strategic planning for post-2027 will be necessary in future meetings.
- A. *Submitted reports:* Annual station reports were submitted by the following participating institutions and representatives:
- Fort Valley State University – Dr. Niki Whitley
 - Mississippi State University – Dr. Leyla Rios de Alvarez
 - Tennessee State University – Dr. Richard Browning
 - University of Florida – Dr. Diwakar Vyas
 - University of Maryland Eastern Shore – Dr. Enrique Escobar
 - Virginia State University – Dr. Dahlia O'Brien
- These reports provided updates on research, extension, and educational activities aligned with the SCC-81 objectives, showcasing the progress made over the past year. Submissions highlighted ongoing experiments, producer outreach, student involvement, stakeholder engagement, challenges faced, and emerging opportunities for collaborative work. This information is vital in identifying synergies across institutions and reinforcing the value of coordinated efforts within the committee.
- In addition to formal reports, Dr. Uma Karki (Tuskegee University) gave an overview of ongoing activities at her institution. Her presentation included research findings that indicate BioWorma is currently not recommended for parasite control based on recent results. Validation studies are now underway on producers' farms. She also mentioned Tuskegee's involvement in a Climate Smart Extension proposal and efforts to measure methane emissions as part of their broader sustainability and small ruminant health initiatives.
 - Dr. Scott Bowdridge provided an update on activities from West Virginia University, including a large dataset of 5,000 fecal egg count (FEC) records and the provision of gastrointestinal larvae as a diagnostic service. He noted that the Buck Test continues to be a source of funding support, and that ongoing research focuses on the antibody

response to Clostridium, with 1,200 serum samples collected, including 700 from Katahdin sheep. His group is working toward generating breeding values for antibody response, contributing to genetic improvement strategies in parasite resistance and vaccine efficacy.

B. Reports from new participants:

- a. Dan Quadros (University of Arkansas): The program has initiated a comprehensive baseline survey to assess the current status, challenges, and opportunities within small ruminant production systems. This survey provides foundational data to inform value chain development strategies and guide future interventions. The institution operates three research stations actively engaged in livestock research, with a particular emphasis on small ruminants. Notably, small ruminants have been identified as the fastest-growing livestock commodity in the region, both in terms of population and market demand. To strengthen research and development efforts, the team is already collaborating with the USDA through ongoing projects with Dr. Joan Burke, focusing on improved genetics, health management, and productivity within smallholder systems.
- b. Jake Thorne (Texas A&M – St. Angelo Station): At the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center in San Angelo, Jake provided an overview of the station's current and historical activities related to ram performance testing and extension outreach. The station previously conducted a Rambouillet breed performance test, which concluded in 2017. Currently, the focus has shifted to a Dorper Sire Performance Test, which serves as a valuable tool for evaluating the genetic potential of rams under pasture-based, group mating systems. The testing protocol involves maintaining a flock of ewes at the station, with rams brought in during the breeding season. Offspring are then evaluated for growth and performance traits to assess sire value, particularly under practical pasture conditions. This model reflects typical commercial production systems and allows for evaluation of sire contributions to economically important traits such as growth rates and weaning weights. One challenge highlighted was that relatively few producers are enrolled in the National Sheep Improvement Program (NSIP), which limits the broader use of estimated breeding values (EBVs) for selection decisions. In terms of extension, the station leads the Texas Sheep and Goat Expo, now in its 10th year, which has become a flagship outreach event. It also hosts the largest goat sale in the country, drawing strong interest from producers. A key production trend in the region is the seasonal market timing most goats are born in the spring and marketed in the summer months, typically at 40–60 lbs live weight. The team is particularly focused on evaluating the value of lambs at weaning (typically by the end of May) to inform breeding and marketing strategies for producers operating under forage-based systems.

C. Acknowledgement of reports from members not in attendance: Recognized the contributions of members unable to attend but who submitted station reports.

- a. USDA Agricultural Research Service, Booneville, AR
- b. Lincoln University

4. Discussion

Old Business:

- Members must ensure they are registered in the renewed project.
- The group engaged in a discussion regarding the differences between coordinated committees and multistate research projects under the USDA framework. While various perspectives were shared, no consensus was reached on transitioning to a multistate project. The committee agreed to continue operating as a coordinated committee, given its primary focus on establishing collaborations and facilitating communication among institutions. Further discussions may be warranted in the future as the committee evaluates its long-term goals and structure.

New Business:

- It would be valuable for all program coordinators involved in ram and buck performance testing to come together for a dedicated session to discuss their respective approaches. This shared discussion can help identify areas where consistency across programs might be beneficial, particularly in data collection, performance metrics, and communication strategies. Additionally, such a session would provide an opportunity to highlight each program's strengths, address areas needing improvement, and share insights on effective stakeholder engagement. By fostering open dialogue, we can strengthen collaboration, enhance program effectiveness, and better serve the needs of producers and industry partners. Diwakar Vyas, the incoming president, will initiate email communications to begin the planning process. There is also potential to coordinate with the Southern Section for a dedicated session during next year's meeting. To support this effort, a subcommittee should be formed to explore the details, engage with the Southern Section planning committee, and ensure a well-structured and productive session that benefits all participating institutions.

Special discussion

- **Buck Test vs. National Sheep Improvement Program (NSIP)**
 - The committee engaged in a discussion comparing the traditional Buck Test programs with the NSIP. While Buck Tests have historically been used to evaluate growth performance and parasite resistance under controlled conditions, NSIP offers a more comprehensive approach by using estimated breeding values (EBVs) based on multi-trait genetic evaluations.
 - The general consensus among members was that NSIP provides more robust and long-term value for producers, particularly those focused on improving genetic merit within their herds and making data-driven breeding decisions. NSIP's standardized data collection and national database allow for benchmarking across flocks, which is not always feasible with isolated Buck Test results.
 - Given the significance of this topic and its potential implications for producer education and genetic improvement programs, the group recommended organizing a dedicated session possibly in coordination with the Southern Section meetings or

another regional platform to further explore the integration of Buck Tests and NSIP, identify pathways to increase producer adoption of NSIP, and discuss strategies to align both approaches for greater impact.

5. Recognition of Incoming Chair

- Recognition of the Diwakar Vyas who is current Secretary transitioning to the role of Chair in 2026.

6. Recognition of Incoming Secretary

- Leyla Rios de Alvarez was unanimously voted as secretary for 2026.

7. Closing Remarks

- The meeting concluded with an optimistic outlook on both ongoing and future collaborative opportunities within the SCC-81 committee. In his closing remarks, Dr. Richard Browning emphasized the importance of continued cooperation and innovation across member institutions. Committee members expressed strong interest in sustaining current research initiatives while also exploring new areas for collaboration. Participants were encouraged to strengthen inter-station linkages through resource sharing, alignment of research priorities, and coordination of project timelines. The group also discussed the value of developing multi-institutional proposals, harmonizing research protocols, and conducting cross-site data analyses to amplify the overall impact and visibility of the committee's efforts.

8. Adjournment

SCC-81 Coordinating Committee Meeting Agenda

Date: Sunday, April 6, 2025

Time: 1 - 5 pm

Place: Hall of Fame Room

Sheraton Arlington Hotel, Arlington, Texas

2025 Southern Section Meeting of the American Society of Animal Science

Session Chair: Richard Browning, Jr. - Tennessee State University

Session Secretary: Diwakar Vyas - University of Florida

Agenda Items

1. Introductions
2. USDA-NIFA Update
3. Presentation of Station Reports
 - a. Submitted reports
 - b. Reports from new participants
 - c. Acknowledgement of reports from members not in attendance
4. Discussion
 - a. Old business
 - b. New business
5. Recognition of the 2025 Secretary transitioning to the 2026 Chair
6. Election of a new Secretary for 2026
7. Closing remarks
8. Adjournment