**2018 NCERA 180 Business Meeting Minutes**

The business meeting of the USDA NCERA 180 group was held May 23, 2018, on the campus of Kansas State University. The meeting was under the direction of Dr. Ajay Sharda, chair of the group.

Attendees at the meeting were Ignacio Ciampitti (KSU), Peter Kovacs (NDSU), Lei Tian (Univ. of IL), Yuxin Miao (Univ. MN), John Nowatzski (NDSU), Terry Griffin (KSU), Aaron Franzen (SDSU), Elizabeth Hawkins (OSU), Joby Czarnecki (MSU), Ajay Sharda (KSU), Pedro Andrade (Univ. AZ), Timothy McDonald (Auburn), and Bruce Mesa (AgVoice).

The meeting was called to order (Ajay). Following brief discussion of the previous years’ minutes it was moved (Elizabeth) and seconded (Ignacio) that the minutes be accepted. No objections were made, thus the minutes were accepted.

Meeting Reports:

ICPA (Terry) – Jun 24-27, 2018. There is still an opportunity to present a poster in Montreal. Please be prepared to submit your 2-page paper as well. Any orals that have been accepted will NOT be scheduled if you have not submitted your paper. There are still available slots in tours and workshops. They are additionally accepting nominations for awards and seeking to replace some vacant leadership roles.

InfoAg (Ajay) – Jul 17-19, 2018. Lots of exhibitors on the docket for this year. This is a great meeting and all are encouraged to go.

ASABE (Ajay) – Jul 29 – Aug 1, 2018. This year the meeting is in Detroit.

Austral Asian PAC (Ajay) Coming to India in 2019, October. Exact dates TBA. This is managed by Punjabi Agricultural University, but Ajay is assisting with organizing.

Constructive discussion period:

Following up on discussion from last year, the group again discussed how we as a community could work together on data issues in agriculture. Although last year, it was mentioned we might have a special volume in a journal such as Precision Agriculture, the effort will likely not come to fruition. However, some needs were identified and many critical points were mentioned. *These points may form the basis of presentations which should be offered at the 2019 meeting.*

To summarize the major points of that discussion –

We lack published protocols for dealing with large data volumes in our research. There is no accepted standard which can be following and referenced to simplify the research and publication process. Other fields that deal with large data volumes have data reduction methods which could be reviewed for their application to agricultural data.

We must make a distinction between “big data” and merely have a large volume of data. Journals are making this distinction, and authors simply calling something “big data” does not make it so. No official definition of big data exists, and this is open to interpretation. Agriculture is different than other markets in terms of what “big data” might encompass. Accordingly, perhaps we should avoid use of this term and let readers/reviewers decide if they view our data as big data without our overt claim as such.

Many scientists are potentially more open now to sharing data and code. This may help or hurt agriculture as a flush of poorly QA/QC’d data entering big data systems and research databases may have implications beyond research (e.g., food supply, ag markets). We should establish metrics for what makes data “good” before allowing it to be shared. We should endeavor to use tools such as github to make code and sample data available to other researchers. You can’t talk about data sharing without discussing privacy. It is still not clear what is and is not covered under FOIA. Considerations of privacy may be beyond the burden of the researcher. One approach could be using a snippet of code to assign an arbitrary coordinate system to geospatial data such that data are still geometrically accurate, but not geographically locatable.

Updates from NIFA:

We were joined remotely by Dr. Steven Thomson from USDA NIFA. He shared updates on the status of many relevant NIFA RFAs.

The Sustainable Agriculture Program call is out now. These are large awards. Dr. Thomson, along with two other scientists are NPL on this program.

The Foundational RFA is still not out. Many due dates are still going to be around the end of July. Remember to take advantage of those strengthening opportunities if you qualify. Be advised equipment awards are only available under strengthening.

We were also encouraged to consider the National Needs Fellowship program, which he highly recommends as a former recipient of these funds.

Although SBIR is not under his purview, he stays active in the program by frequent interaction with the NPL.

He is additionally pursuing extracting the smart and connected communities objective from Cyber-Physical Systems and making it a stand-alone effort.

He also shared a website with the group via email. The index database, [www.indexdatabase.de](http://www.indexdatabase.de), this website has a database of remote sensing indexes complete with equations and citations.

Administrative business:

The incoming chair for 2019 is Dr. Brian Luck from Univ. WI. Accordingly, we expect next year’s meeting to be in Madison.

We were unable to appoint a vice chair. Because of the late planting, many core members were not in attendance. Additionally, many new faculty have come on-board at other universities. Although many names were tossed around, it seemed inappropriate to appoint a vice chair without some discussion with other parties. Therefore, attendees were tasked with making contact with potentials and reporting back before Jun 30 to Ajay and Brian.

The group additionally discussed moving our meeting period to better accommodate more members. It was agreed that this is also a function of the host university’s availability. Comments on this are also to be sent to Ajay and Brian before Jun 30.

Following administrative business, motion was made to adjourn (Pedro) and seconded (Ajay).

**Action items:**

**Identify new members!**

**Communicate with potential vice chairs/host universities and send names to Ajay (**[asharda@ksu.edu](mailto:asharda@ksu.edu)**) and Brian (**[bluck@wisc.edu](mailto:bluck@wisc.edu)**) before Jun 30**

**Send comments on meeting time to Ajay (**[asharda@ksu.edu](mailto:asharda@ksu.edu)**) and Brian (**[bluck@wisc.edu](mailto:bluck@wisc.edu)**) before Jun 30**