

California Walnut Board

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CALIFORNIA WALNUT BOARD

RESEARCH COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES September 9, 2010

The CWB Research Committee met on Thursday, September 9, 2010, at the Marriott Hotel in Rancho Cordova, CA. Chairperson Jerry Moore called the meeting to order at 2:15 p.m. Ms. Steindorf called the roll and a quorum was established. The following committee members were present:

Jerry Moore, Chairperson
Robert Driver, Vice-
Chairperson
Bruce Beard
Jerry Siebert
Bill Tos
Pete Turner

Committee members David Keyawa and Bert Crane were absent. Others in attendance included: David Ramos, CWB Research Director; Debbie Wray of USDA; and CWB staff members Dennis Balint, Carl Eidsath and Dana Steindorf.

The first agenda item was the approval of the minutes from the March 9, 2010 meeting. Mr. Driver made a motion to approve the minutes, Mr. Turner seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Chairperson Moore introduced the next agenda item, review and decision of funding for Research Proposal: Walnut Improvement Program (Leslie) for second six-month contract period. Dr. Ramos commented that the program was funded for six months out of last year's budget and the second six-month period (October 1, 2010 through March 31, 2011) will need funding from the current year budget in order to continue. The program will be back on its regular funding cycle beginning in the spring (following the Committee meeting in February or March where proposal funding is decided).

Mr. Tos made a motion to approve the Walnut Improvement Program for October 1, 2010 through March 31, 2011 at \$77,244. Mr. Driver seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

Dr. Ramos stated that there are consulting contracts for Bill Olsen and Chuck Leslie that are attached to the Walnut Improvement Program that need approval for the next six-month period as well. Mr. Driver made a motion to approve the consulting contracts for Bill Olsen at \$3,150 and Chuck Leslie for \$4,200 for the period of October 1, 2010 through March 31, 2011. Mr. Tos seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

Chairperson Moore moved on to the next agenda item, review of concept paper/research proposal for implementing a program of CWB support for farm advisor research and extension efforts. Dr. Ramos explained that at the March meeting, the Committee discussed a farm advisor support project. Dr. Ramos consulted with Joe Grant and Joe Connell (liaison officer for the Almond Board) to get some information from them on how the Almond Board supports the farm advisors through a single, specific proposal. He presented an example of the proposal the Almond Board has with the extension service along with a concept paper prepared by Joe Connell. The walnut farm advisors are requesting the endorsement of this Committee and if the Committee agrees with this approach, the walnut farm advisors will prepare a proposal to present at Bodega Bay. The contract would be between the CWB and A&R office in Oakland that administers the farm advisors. The money would be distributed by the A&R office to the individual advisors.

Mr. Driver stated that he believes this is a modest amount for services rendered and is in support of this proposal. Dr. Ramos stated that if the CWB follows the Almond Board model, the allocation would be a fixed amount of \$3,000 per farm advisor. Mr. Tos asked how many walnut farm advisors would apply for funding on the proposal. Dr. Ramos stated that there could be eight to ten walnut farm advisors on the proposal. The Committee would like to stipulate that the number of walnut farm advisors requesting participation in the proposal should not exceed ten.

Mr. Driver made a motion to request a proposal from the walnut farm advisors to be presented at Bodega Bay in January 2011 for the CWB to provide support to the advisors (stipulating \$3,000 per advisor, not to exceed ten advisors on the proposal). Mr. Turner seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

The next item on the agenda was commercialization of an RNA_i-based Crown Gall Resistant Paradox Rootstock: Status report and next steps. Dr. Ramos stated that this is a continuation of a discussion that began at the March Committee meeting where he was encouraged to proceed in the direction of commercialization. At the June Board meeting, Dr. Ramos introduced several of the committee members to Mr. John Callahan, who is an independent consultant, former patent lawyer and former co-founder of one or two biotechnology companies. Mr. Callahan is extremely knowledgeable in the area of regulatory requirements to move transgenic plants into commercialization. Dr. Ramos presented a report prepared by Mr. Callahan for the CWB.

A discussion ensued about the pros and cons to commercialization of rootstocks and the work that Abhaya Dandekar has done to date on transgenic rootstocks. Dr. Ramos stated that for the past few years, he has been working under the assumption that the nursery industry and the growers desperately want a crown-gall resistant rootstock. The Board has invested, for the industry, a tremendous amount of money into the development of this rootstock and the pay-off will be if nurseries and growers can use it. Mr. Driver stated that U.C. Davis has shown very little interest in being involved in the transgenic rootstock business. Dr. Ramos concurred that until now, U.C. Davis has not shown interest in releasing or having ownership responsibility for the transgenics; however, after meeting with Mr. Callahan, the university technology transfer people expressed a desire to work with Mr. Callahan. Mr. Callahan will be coming forward in the

next month to provide the Board with some ideas about the best course of action to proceed. Dr. Ramos would like to have Mr. Callahan present at the next Committee meeting in February or March 2011 to continue the discussion on this issue.

The Committee then reviewed the Walnut Genome Analysis Report and the research proposal from Abhaya Dandekar entitled "Crown gall resistant walnut rootstocks: analysis of the graft union for transmission of genetic and biological materials." Mr. Tos made a motion to approve the proposal at the requested budget amount of \$60,404 for the contract period 10/1/2010 through 9/30/2011. Mr. Driver seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

Chairperson Moore moved on to the next agenda item, reports and discussion of PRAC Genetic Improvement/Plant Pathology and Orchard Management Working Group meetings. Mr. Driver, a Research Committee liaison to the Genetic Improvement/Plant Pathology working group, commented on the meeting held on June 30th. He stated that it makes sense for the two groups to meet together as there are many cross-over areas of concern. There were some good discussions at the meeting about projects in genomics, transgenic rootstocks, germplasm screening, walnut blight and nematodes.

Chairperson Moore commented on the PRAC Orchard Management Working Group meeting that he attended. He stated that the main topic of discussion was sustainability including the air quality challenges, regulations for soil fumigants, water quality, and endangered species act. Dr. Ramos commented that the conclusion of the working group was that we need to talk to the handlers and determine how much pressure they are under from customers/marketplace on the issue of sustainability. Subsequently, Dr. Ramos gave this report to the Grades & Standards Committee and the consensus seems to be that there is not a lot of pressure, but there is a need to keep the handlers up to date on ways to document that the industry is, in fact, dealing with issues of sustainability. Chairperson Moore stated that other topics at the Orchard Management Working Group included walnut farm advisor support, orchard trials, canopy management, orchard nutrition, and postharvest handling and technology.

The next agenda item was Consideration of CWB Research Achievement Award for 2011. Dr. Ramos explained the criteria for determining a candidate for the research achievement award. After much discussion about the accomplishments of various candidates, Mr. Driver made a motion to recommend Gale McGranahan for the Research Achievement Award for 2011 for her leadership in the walnut breeding program and creating varieties such as Tulare and Ivanhoe. Mr. Turner seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

The time and place of the next meeting will be at the discretion of staff and the Committee chair.

An executive session was not necessary. Hearing no further business, Chairperson Moore adjourned the meeting at 4:20 p.m.