

## UNIVERSITY COOPERATOR GROUP MEETING REPORT

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The University Cooperator Group held its meeting at 4:30 p.m., Tuesday, July 15. Six universities were represented at the Conference: University of Florida, Auburn University, University of Tennessee, Texas Tech University, Texas A&M University, and University of Puerto Rico. It was noted that all cooperators were involved in research and/or teaching, but none from extension attended this year's SRCSSC. Attendees expressed concern that more university cooperators had not participated.

Discussions included the cooperative nature of the relationship between universities and the lead entity for the National Cooperative Soil Survey Program. It was noted that the cooperative nature was evident in a number of areas, to include, but not limited to:

- Universities:
- Educate/prepare students for careers in soil survey
  - Train students in soil morphology through soil contest participation
  - Host soils contests (collegiate and high school)
  - Conduct needed and valuable research on the soil resource
  - Provide basic physical, chemical, mineralogical information for soil survey operations
  - Participate in field reviews and technical change in soil science
  - Identify and recruit students for employment in soil survey
- NRCS:
- Host/provide technical service for soil contests
  - Serve as resource in site identification/research support during soil investigation/research activities
  - Provide limited summer experiences and employment in soil survey
  - Hire graduates of our universities' soil programs
  - Provide funding for selected research projects that train soil scientists and advance soils knowledge
  - Identify and recruit high school students into soils programs

Collegiate Soil Contests were singled out for their great contribution to both the development of students in understanding soils and their function in natural resources and in preparing students for a career in soil resources. This activity is the most successful of student activities that are under the purview of the American Society of Agronomy. It provides opportunity for students to learn hands-on in the field, is essentially a "basic training" experience in soil survey, and is a rich recruiting ground for NRCS. It was noted that NRCS, through Maxine Levin, had actively and successfully recruited three students at the past National Soils Contest, and such effort will continue this fall at Regional Contests. We noted that involvement of local and state NRCS staff was "priceless" in the successful staging of contests. Such involvement is greatly appreciated and encouraged.

C. T. Hallmark, for purpose of this report, reviewed TAMU soil team member statistics over the past five years: 83% of team members entered graduate school; 9 different academic majors, 5 were environmental soil science minors of which 4 continued in graduate school pursuing M.S. degrees in soil science; 3 entered

employment with NRCS, and 4 are current graduate students. Wayne Hudnall also noted that in the short time he has coached at TTU, 5 of the 8 students he has coached have entered graduate programs. Numerous universities across the nation could also show similar statistics of success for their soil judging programs.

Several recommendations were forthcoming from our discussions:

- a) Continue to recruit students for summer and full time positions at the regional and national soil contests. Personnel representing the NRCS should be on-hand during the contest week to visit with students about opportunities.
- b) Include recruitment at the spring soil judging contest sponsored by NACTA (National Association of College Teachers in Agriculture) which includes many of the smaller colleges/universities and some of the schools that participate in the regional contests in the fall but did not qualify to participate in the national contest.
- c) For summer employment of students, begin the interview process in December or January, even if money and authorization for hiring are not in line. Students who are interested will hold off decisions until they hear that the position is not going to be available. If one waits until April to begin identifying students, most will have already taken summer internships or employment.
- d) Avoid "famine or feast" in hiring. During periods of famine, students forget that there are opportunities in governments hiring of soil scientists. A steady recruitment program is more stable and gives students more incentive to work toward a goal.
- e) NRCS and other cooperators should investigate the hiring of well-trained international graduates versed in innovative technologies. Many of our best and brightest in new soil survey technologies are foreign-born students who could contribute valuable experience and expertise to our modern soil survey, but hiring practices close doors.
- f) We understand that there are new lists of courses/requirements for qualifying graduates for positions as soil scientist and soil conservationist. We request that these requirements be shared with university cooperators so we can better advise students and update curricula to meet the expectations of our graduates.
- g) We encourage input of research ideas, and look forward to the new MLRA-Office based research components as this should provide an excellent opportunity for field soil scientists and university personnel to work together to solve problems and advance our science.

Our status at these meetings relative to the Southern Association of Agricultural Experiment Stations Directors was discussed. Our project has expired, and we will take action to formalize a new action/planning group for soil survey.