

**Report from University Cooperators**  
**National Cooperative Soil Survey Conference**

**Las Cruces, New Mexico**

**May 11 – 15, 2009**

Submitted by Mary E. Collins, University of Florida; Jim Thompson, West Virginia University;  
and Janis Boettinger, Utah State University

The following were those in attendance for part or all of the conference. The last twelve attended the university cooperators break-out session on May 14, 2009.

Mark Stolt, U. Rhode Island  
Toby O'Geen, UC-Davis  
Christine Morgan, Texas A&M U.  
Joey Shaw, Auburn U.  
David Lindbo, North Carolina State U.  
Craig Rasmussen, U. Arizona  
Tom Ammons, U. Tennessee  
Brian Mahan, U. Missouri  
Randy Miles, U. Missouri  
Brian Slater, Ohio State U.  
Lee Burras, Iowa State U.  
Phil Owens, Purdue U.  
Darcy Boellstorff, Bridgewater State College  
Jim Thompson, West Virginia U.  
Patrick Drohan, Penn State U.  
Ken Olson, U. Illinois  
Steve DeGloria, Cornell U.  
Rex Ellis, U. Florida  
Mary Collins, U. Florida  
Paul McDaniel, U. Idaho  
Janis Boettinger, Utah State U.  
Mickey Ransom, Kansas State U.  
Wayne Hudnall, Texas Tech U.  
Curtis Monger, New Mexico State U.  
Bruce Vasilas, U. Delaware

The university cooperators discussed the need for future funding to support cooperative research with NRCS. This cooperative research could be in-kind services such as

laboratory analyses, use of laboratory and/or field equipment, and including staff at the National Cooperative Soil Survey Center or other investigators on cooperative research studies. Discussion also pointed out that cooperative research could be accomplished with NRCS as well as with other federal agencies such as the Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, NASA, and the US Geological Survey. The cooperative research could include student training (undergraduate and graduate) and technology transfer (capacity building).

The university cooperators greatly support and encourage growth in Student Temporary Experience Program (STEP) and the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP). States that do not have these career paths are encouraged to establish the programs. Many states have had good experiences with the programs.

University cooperators would like to be involved with GlobalSoilMap.net, the Global Soil Classification System, and to continue our international relationships with joint projects involving other countries. Lastly, we would like to be kept informed of US Soil Taxonomy proposals. A dialog should be maintained on who is responsible on the cooperators' end to submit comments and suggestions concerning Soil Taxonomy.

Much discussion was spent on the "The State of Soil Science in the Ivory Tower". Universities, especially the land grant universities, have seen (and will very likely continue to see) elimination, reduction, and consolidation of departments, instructional programs, and faculty. It has become both a "domino effect" and a "catch-22" situation. As the number of students majoring in soil science declines, the enrollment in courses offered declines. The courses are then eliminated because of low enrollment. Since the students cannot take enough courses (credit hours), the major is eliminated. If the major and courses are eliminated, then there is a lesser need for faculty. Faculty are not replaced (and many soil science faculty are retiring) or are reassigned. The department becomes smaller and therefore, more likely to face elimination or consolidation. If eliminated or combined, soil science has lost its visibility. Presently, some universities do not teach enough credits for the core courses necessary to be certified as a soil scientist for the 470 series. Students are given less and less field experience. Therefore, we need to partner with NRCS for the universities to produce soil scientists and for NRCS to hire our graduates. The best recruiting tool NRCS has is the ability to hire our students.

The university representatives enthusiastically support the activities of the National Cooperative Soil Survey and as we look forward to active participation in the program.