

Changes at IR-4

On behalf of the IR-4 PMC I am reaching out to IR-4 stakeholders to notify you that changes will be occurring within the IR-4 system and organization.

Background

Since 1963, the IR-4 Project (IR-4) has been the primary entity in the United States to facilitate registrations of conventional pesticides and biopesticides on specialty food crops (fruits, vegetables, nuts, herbs, spices) and non-food ornamental horticulture crops (greenhouse flowers, nursery, landscape plants, and Christmas trees). These registrations are necessary to prevent damage to the crops we eat, or the plants that enhance our environment. In this capacity, IR-4 develops research data to support US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) registrations and cooperates in the registration of pest management tools for minor uses on major crops.

Challenges and concerns

The majority of IR-4 research is conducted at Land Grant Universities throughout the US. However this research is in jeopardy. Land Grant Universities have historically received significant appropriations from State and Federal funds to support infrastructure and fulfill their mission to agriculture, both in terms of research and extension activities. In more recent decades as public funds declined, this funding has diminished or ceased altogether. The direct cost of research includes the salaries of personnel, travel, and materials and supplies associated with the proposed research project. In 2015, Cornell University made a policy decision to no longer subsidize those programs that do not generate sufficient IDC to cover the costs of centrally-provided services. IR-4 does not provide IDC to universities and this policy resulted in the need for IR-4 to relocate its Northeast Regional Center. IR-4 sees this as the first university to initiate a policy for cost recovery and feels more universities will follow this trend.

The IR-4 Project Management Committee (PMC) firmly believes that the long term sustainability of the IR-4 program depends on taking proactive steps to assure its regional units will continue to be hosted on university campuses. With council from the USDA NIFA project director, Rob Hedberg, IR-4 is proposing to align the 2017 funding under a cooperative agreement, which allows for 10% IDC. While this still falls well below the full rates, it will show an important “good faith” effort and this move will greatly enhance ability for IR-4 Administrative Advisors to defend IR-4 to university administrators, well into the future.

Second to IDC, IR-4 is using precious resources on more difficult to analyze laboratory trials and the EPA is requiring that more trials be conducted within a project submission. Also, more manufacturers are asking IR-4 to conduct costly performance trials.

All told, IR-4 simply does not have the funding to operate the same way we do now.

Moving Forward

While it is unclear at this point how the 10% IDC, and the increase in trial data will impact IR-4 research, it is believed the number of research studies IR-4 conducts and the personnel conducting this research will change. In order to clarify the impact of this change, the IR-4 PMC will be conducting an organizational review to identify efficiencies in operations (completed by summer 2016) and will also be **seeking new funding sources**.

The PMC will issue frequent, **bi-monthly**, letters, emails, eblasts, etc. to notify you of these changes and we will solicit input on implementation and further direction in moving forward. Please know that these changes will take time and IR-4 has “bought time” by pushing the decision of 10% IDC implementation to the 2017 budget cycle. I look forward to sharing more detailed information as potential solutions and changes in operations are identified.

Jerry