Administrative Council for
Extension and Experiment Station Research Meeting
Friday, November 7, 2025
1:30-3:00 p.m.
130 Burruss Hall Conference Room

Participants

Jonathan Baros, Mary Burrows, Cyril Clarke, Jeff Earley, Mike Gutter, Tim Hodge, Margie Lee, Rebekkah Gunn, Saskia van de Gavel, Mario Ferruzzi, Amy Sebring, Mallory Miller, Dan Sui

AGENDA

Welcome and Introductions (Cyril Clarke)

Discussion Items

Approval of Meeting Minutes (Cyril Clarke)

The meeting minutes from the October meeting were distributed electronically and approved by the council.

Agency 229 Central Savings (Mary Burrows and Mike Gutter)

Mary Burrows presented the Agency 229 Central Savings spending plan. The spending plan was a collaboration between the directors and the three Agency 229 colleges. The spending plan was approved by the council.

Agency 229 O&M Recommendations (Mary Burrows)

Mary Burrows presented the Agency 229 O&M recommendations. All three Agency 229 colleges were engaged in the recommendation process. The recommendations were approved by the council.

Unit Updates

Virginia Cooperative Extension (Mike Gutter)

Mike Gutter shared that a team is working to reposition extension's health and nutrition efforts, especially considering changes to SNAP-Ed funding. Their goal is to create an integrated strategy that brings local governments together to improve access to healthy foods. Mike noted that VCE is increasingly integrating prevention-focused work—nutrition, food access, and cardiovascular health—and has growing opportunities through successful NIH and HHS grant portfolios. This aligns with the university's broader footprint around social determinants of health. Mike confirmed VCE's efforts are aligned with the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine.

VCE has also completed a new strategic plan, which Mike will distribute. The plan lays out a 10-year vision focused on addressing core stakeholder needs and exploring new ways to support communities.

Agricultural Experiment Station (Mary Burrows)

Mary Burrows shared that she and Mike Gutter have developed a one-pager outlining key legislative asks and demonstrations of past impacts; Mary will send it to the group.

The AREC meeting in Richmond was well attended, bringing together AREC teams and farm management staff for training and fellowship. Amy Orders and Facilities presented.

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) has added pre-award and post-award positions. Mary shared that last month, OSP processed 400 proposals—125 from CALS and 72 from the School of Veterinary Medicine. Mary highlighted opportunities in public-private partnerships (PPP) and entrepreneurship and suggested hiring support for foundation-funded awards. Cyril Clarke recommended looking to the College of Natural Resources and Environment as a model for portfolio diversity.

Mary also reported on lab tours in preparation for HABB1I, meeting with many faculty. A federal initiative is underway to install a diagnostic plant lab in Tidewater using special federal appropriations—the university will provide the facility, and the federal government will provide the equipment. This would be a fee-based service.

ARECs will undergo a five-year review (last completed in 2020). Materials have been provided, and tours of 3–4 sites are planned.

Deans
Mario Ferruzzi provided an update on leadership hiring searches.

Saskia van de Gevel shared that the college is exploring a collaborative around sustainable forestry and supply chain management. The collaborative would provide an opportunity for experiential learning.

Saskia is continuing to host Coffee and Convo with the Dean for internal stakeholders, which was well attended last month.

The college is launching a strategic plan process and engaging with the Office of Strategic Affairs.

Saskia also mentioned that CNRE is thinking through a collaborative or hub around infectious diseases.

Margie shared updates on research priorities, emphasizing the need to strengthen internal funding mechanisms and expand work in key areas such as biomedical research, agriculture, and disease ecology. She noted opportunities to better connect existing expertise and build thematic research clusters that align with priorities at agencies like USDA and NIH.

She also discussed upcoming engagement opportunities, including participation in a regional extension conference, and highlighted ongoing conversations about how veterinary outreach and extension activities fit within broader institutional efforts, particularly in areas like One Health.

Margie provided an update on leadership searches. She also mentioned that the college is preparing materials for an external review related to workforce needs in Maryland, with site visits planned.

Other

Office of Research and Innovation (ORI)
Dan Sui provided an update on the Destination Area 2.0 proposal cycle.

Dan also provided an update regarding the government shutdown and federal grant processing.

Government Affairs
Elizabeth Hooper provided a brief overview of the state election results.

Rebekkah Gunn provided an update on the federal government shutdown. The appropriations bill has funding as flat for Agency 229. However, Rebekkah suggested that earmarked funding is a potential way for funding and engagement outside of Blacksburg.