

NSIP Technical Advisory Committee Report

Sept. 2015

Technical Advisory Committee Membership

With many of the current members of the Technical Advisory Committee at or near retirement, encouraging younger U.S. based scientists with skills in small ruminant genetics to join the committee is a priority. A challenge, however, is identifying individuals with, particularly, quantitative genetics skills and expertise in small ruminants.

One strong candidate is Tom Murphy, a Ph.D. student working with Dr. Dave Thomas at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In correspondence with Dr. Thomas, he is very supportive of Tom being invited to join the Technical Advisory Committee. Such industry experience also would be valuable in preparing Tom for his next step in his career. Therefore, the Committee plans to extend Tom an invitation to join.

There is also a need to recruit Committee members with longer-termed experience working with livestock industries and in quantitative genetics. Other possibilities for Committee membership being considered are (i) international experts, (ii) scientists from USDA, and (iii) experts with alternative species within the U.S. Dr. Daniel Brown is the primary geneticist at Sheep Genetics involved with NSIP. Since technical developments in NSIP (following item) will need to be integrated into LambPlan, Dr. Brown's engagement in their earliest discussion seems sensible. Therefore, he has been invited to join the Technical Advisory Committee, and has agreed to do so.

Let's Grow Funding Opportunities

Applications are due on Nov. 11, 2015, for the second round (2016) of the Let's Grow Program. This presents an exciting opportunity to seek funds to support technical development work for NSIP. Through correspondence among the Executive Committee, Board of Directors and NSIP members, several ideas for technical developments have been raised:

- Further design of selection indices particularly for maternal breeds;
- Development of EBV for novel traits such as aseasonality and longevity;
- Reevaluation of target end-points for trait adjustments to an age *versus* a weight; and,
- Enhancing the robustness of the prediction and comparison of EBV (e.g., connectedness; genetic grouping strategies)

As part of the discussion, other points raised were:

- The need to develop a focused application on one or perhaps two development areas, since a carefully targeted proposal may be more fundable;
- When setting priorities:
 - identifying development areas with broad interest across NSIP's membership;
 - considering the availability of existing performance data within NSIP to tackle a particular question; and,
 - assessing the pathway to implementation. To impact NSIP members, the innovations developed will need to be incorporated into LambPlan. Where possible, by focusing on technical developments with common appeal, opportunities may exist to engage the expertise of colleagues in Australia, and to encourage buy-in.

The development work proposed would involve primarily scientific personnel time. Therefore, a majority of a grant application would likely need to support a post-doctoral or graduate student, and/or the costs of a subcontractor.

Ron Lewis
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