Fiscal Year 2020
Panel Outcome Report
Food Safety (Animal & Plant Products)
NP 108

TODD WARD Digitally signed by TODD WARD
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Todd Ward, Ph.D., Scientific Quality Review Officer
(January 2020-December 2021)

MICHAEL GRUSAK Digitally signed by MICHAEL GRUSAK
Date: 2021.09.16 12:52:37 -05'00'

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Michael A. Grusak., Scientific Quality Review Officer
(April 2020-December 2020)

MARQUEA KING Digitally signed by MARQUEA KING
Date: 2021.09.17 08:33:00 -04'00'

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Marquea D. King, Ph.D., Director/Program Coordinator

Date

Panel Outcome Report FY 2020
Food Safety (Animal & Plant Products) NP 108

This Panel Outcome Report is a summary of the Food Safety (Animal & Plant Products) National Program 108, Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR) Project Plan Peer Review (PPPR) process held from August – December 2020.

The project plans reviewed by these panels were applicable to the mission of National Program (NP) 108 Food Safety (Animal and Plant Products): -to provide through research, the means to ensure that the food supply is safe for consumers; and that food and feed meet foreign and domestic regulatory requirements. Food safety research seeks ways to assess, control or eliminate potentially harmful food contaminants, including both introduced and naturally occurring pathogenic bacteria, viruses and parasites, toxins and non-biological-based chemical contaminants, mycotoxins and plant toxins. Food safety is a global issue; thus, the research program involves both national and international collaborations through formal and informal partnerships. Accomplishments and outcomes are utilized in national and international strategies delivering research results and advances to regulatory agencies, commodity organizations, industry and consumers.

This panel outcome report is intended to inform the Office of National Programs (ONP) and each Area of research (research scientist or SY) progress as it relates to the NP 108. Data tables display outcomes of scoring by Areas, Panels, and overall program.

Selected chairs (Table 1) were in part, recommended by National Program Leaders (NPLs) from NP 108 and/or previous OSQR service; others were sought based on their nationally recognized expertise by the OSQR Director. They were examined for suitability to lead a panel review, screened for conflicts of interest (COI) and finally concurred upon by the current Scientific Quality Review Officer (SQRO), Dr. Todd Ward and Dr. Michael A. Grusak former (SQRO) for 3 plans that Dr. Ward had a conflict of interest with.

Table 1.
Panels reviewed for the Food Safety (Animal & Plant Products) National Program 108

Panel	Panel Chair	Panel Meeting (Re-Review)	Number of Panelists	Number of Projects
NP 108 Panel 1.* Chemical Contaminants	N/A	N/A	3	2
NP 108 Panel 2. Innovative Detection Technologies	Dr. Qin Zhang	1/7/2021 (5/12/2021)	4	3
NP 108 Panel 3. Detection of Foodborne Pathogens and Toxins	Dr. Michael Adler	2/23/2021	6	3
NP 108 Panel 4. Predictive Modeling	Dr. Sadhana Ravishankar	2/19/2021	4	3
NP 108 Panel 5. Mycotoxins/Aspergillus	Dr. Joan Bennett	2/9/2021	4	3
NP 108 Panel 6. Mycotoxins/Fusarium	Dr. Lauren Jackson	1/26/2021 (5/13/2021)	4	3
NP 108 Panel 7. Produce	Dr. Elliot Ryser	3/8/2021 (6/10/2021)	5	4
NP 108 Panel 8.* Pathogen Genomics	N/A	N/A	5	2
NP 108 Panel 9. Postharvest Intervention	Dr. Monique Lacroix	2/8/2021	4	4
NP 10. Panel 10. Preharvest Interventions/Cattle & Swine	Dr. Lis Alban	2/2/2021 (5/18/2021)	4	3
NP 108 Panel 11. Preharvest Interventions/Poultry	Dr. Catherine Logue	1/21/2021 (6/15/2021)	5	4
NP 108 Panel 12. Antimicrobial Resistance/Genomics	Dr. Mark Eppinger	2/25/2021 (6/3/2021)	4	3
NP 108 Panel 13. Antimicrobial Resistance/Ecology	Dr. Paul Plummer	2/1/2021	4	3

*Review conducted by no less than two (or greater) expert panel reviewers providing independent written reviews and scores without group panel deliberation. Scores reflect the average of no less than two expert reviewers and written reviews compiled and screened by OSQR Director.

Review Process

Following panel review for each plan, OSQR Director, with SQRO concurrence, sends each Area Director a panel consensus recommendation document. This may include recommendations for revision of the plan to which researchers are required to respond in writing and, as appropriate, revise their written plans in accordance with guidelines as detailed in the OSQR Handbook (see www.ars.usda.gov/osqr).

In addition, as part of the panel deliberation, a scoring of the overall quality of the plan is judged based on the degree of revision the panel deems is required. This scoring is termed an "Action Class." Each reviewer is asked to anonymously provide an Action Class rating for each plan. OSQR assigns a *numerical equivalent* to each Action Class rating and then averages these to arrive at an overall Action Class score for the plan.

Action Class is defined as follows:

No Revision Required. An excellent plan: no revision is required, but minor changes to the project plan may be suggested.[1]

Minor Revision Required. The project plan is feasible as written, requires only minor clarification or revision to increase quality to a higher level.

Moderate Revision Required. The project plan is basically feasible but requires changes or revision to the work on one or more objectives, perhaps involving alterations of the experimental approaches in order to increase quality to a higher level and may need some rewriting for greater clarity.

Passed Review:

For plans receiving one of the above three Action Class scores (No Revision, Minor Revision, or Moderate Revision), scientists are required to respond, in writing, to address all panel comments in the consensus recommendation document; revise their project plan as appropriate; and submit the revised plan and responses to the OSQR through their Area Office. Both the updated plan and the recommendations' form are reviewed by the SQRO and, once they are satisfied that all review concerns have been satisfactorily addressed, the project plan is certified, the Area Office is notified, and the project plan may be implemented.

Certification:

Certification is contingent upon making a good faith effort to satisfactorily address panel comments and recommendations. A plan has not "passed" the OSQR PPPR process until the SQRO's certification is delivered to the Area.

Major Revision Required. There are significant flaws in the experimental design and/or approach or lack of clarity which hampers understanding. Significant revision is needed.

Not Feasible. The project plan, as presented, has major scientific or technical flaws. Deficiencies exist in experimental design, methods, presentation, or expertise which make it unlikely to succeed.

Failed Review:

For plans receiving an Action Class score of Major Revision or Not Feasible, scientists are required to address, in writing, all panel comments in the consensus recommendation document; revise their project plan as appropriate; and submit the revised plan and responses to the OSQR through their Area Office. The plan *MUST* then undergo a Re-Review by the initial deliberating panel, at which time a second set of consensus recommendations and second Action Class score are obtained.

Per the Re-Review, if the plan receives an Action Class score of a No Revision, Minor Revision, or Moderate Revision, the project plan may be implemented after following the **Passed Review** section above. Plans receiving a second Major Revision, or Not Feasible score are considered failed reviews. The Action Class and Consensus Recommendations from

[1] While a No Revision Action Class would imply that change to the plan is not required, where the panel requests specific additions to the plan, if accepted, should be incorporated into the updated plan.

the Re-Review are provided to the Area with NO further option for revision or review on that particular project plan as it has been submitted.

Such plans may be terminated, reassigned, or restructured at the discretion of the Area Office and ONP. For plans receiving Major Revision, it may be elected not to further revise them and to end review with the plan not receiving certification (plan fails review). For those receiving a score of Not Feasible, Area and National Program Leader (NPL) approval are needed for the plan to be revised for re-review. Otherwise the plan will be considered to have failed review. Subsequent action with regard to the research and researchers is left to Area and ONP-NPL leadership.

At the conclusion of each PPPR deliberation, the chair and panel reviewers are asked to provide general statements or recommendations on the overall process as well as the general quality of the plans which underwent review. The Chair is specifically asked to provide a Panel Chair Statement which they feel focuses on the overall conduct of the review or any broad areas with regard to the research they feel would benefit future researchers or the Agency as a whole. Copies of such statements for (NP 304) can be found following this report.

Review Outcomes

Reviews can vary, but ultimately, depends on a combination of the panelists selected and the scientific writing capabilities of the team who wrote the project plan. The OSQR is responsible for assuring that each panel contains subject matter experts who provide knowledgeable, clear, rigorous, and fair assessments. Therefore, PPPR panels vary in their overall outcomes.

Uniquely, the ability of an ARS research team to respond to panel recommendations/comments in order to *revise and improve project plans is, perhaps, the greatest strength of the ARS PPPR process.*

ARS uses the National Program Panel Outcome Report as a measure of scientific progress and as a demonstration of overall program quality, how well researchers understand and address the needs of the expert panel reviewers. Initial review scores that are moderate or higher are recorded as such and will not be certified as having completed the PPPR until the SQRO has deemed that all reviewer concerns have been satisfactorily addressed. For lower scores/failed reviews, the panel provides a re-review score, which is considered along with the initial review score.

Table 2.
Initial and Re-review Scores for the Food Safety (Animal & Plant Products) National Program 108

Panel	No revision	Minor	Moderate	Major	Not Feasible	Re-Review
NP 108 Panel 1.* Chemical Contaminants	2					
NP 108 Panel 2. Innovative Detection Technologies		1		2		1 Moderate 1 Minor
NP 108 Panel 3. Detection of Foodborne Pathogens and Toxins		2	1			
NP 108 Panel 4. Predictive Modeling	2		1			
NP 108 Panel 5. Mycotoxins/Aspergillus		2	1			
NP 108 Panel 6. Mycotoxins/Fusarium		2		1		No Revision
NP 108 Panel 7. Produce			1	3		2 Minor 1 No Revision
NP 108 Panel 8.* Pathogen Genomics	1	1				
NP 108 Panel 9. Postharvest Intervention	2	1	1			
NP 10. Panel 10. Preharvest Interventions/Cattle & Swine		1	1	1		No Revision
NP 108 Panel 11. Preharvest Interventions/Poultry			2	2		1 Minor 1 Major
NP 108 Panel 12. Antimicrobial Resistance/Genomics		1	1	1		No Revision

NP 108 Panel 13. Antimicrobial Resistance/Ecology			3			

*Review conducted by no less than two (or greater) expert panel reviewers providing independent written reviews and scores without group panel deliberation. Scores reflect the average of no less than two expert reviewers and written reviews are compiled and screened by OSQR Director.

Table 3.

Area Scores for the Food Safety (Animal & Plant Products) National Program 108

Area	No revision	Minor	Moderate	Major	Not Feasible
MWA		2	1	2 (No Revision; No Revision)	
NEA	4	3	5	4 (Minor; Minor; Minor; Moderate)	
PA	1	1	3	1 (No Revision)	
PWA	1	1	1	1 (No Revision)	
SEA	1	4	2	2 (Major; Minor)	

Table 4.

Overall Scores for the Food Safety (Animal & Plant Products) National Program 108

	No revision	Minor	Moderate	Major	Not Feasible
# Plans with each score	7	11	12	10	0

Overall Panel Characteristics:

Panel Characteristics

The OSQR PPPR relies heavily on expert panel member selection by the OSQR Director and SQRO selected Panel Chairs. ARS scientists, research leaders, and ONP are encouraged to recommend panelists they understand to be free of any COIs. While the selected/seated Panel Chair is under no obligation to use Agency recommended panelists, the SQRO must review and approve the Chair's panelist selections and may ask for substitutions or provide additional experts for consideration.

Factors and qualifications considered in PPPR panel selection (chair and panelist) such as being a qualified expert overall in the field being reviewed, research tenure, publication record, award history, geographic location, overall diversity, and availability to participate fully in the process, all play an integral role in who is invited to serve an ARS/OSQR PPPR panel. Many of the reviews are composed with a balance of nationally and internationally recognized experts. Tables 5-6 display various characteristics of the panel composition; all affiliations were accurate at the time of the panel review.

Affiliations

Peer reviewers are affiliated with several types of institutions, primarily those in academia, but also special interest groups and industry. In some cases, peer reviewers have recently retired but are still active as consultants, scientific editorial board members, and members of professional societies.

Table 5.

Panelist Faculty Rank and Affiliations for the Food Safety (Animal & Plant Products) National Program 108

Panel	Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor	Government	Industry & Industry Organizations	Other
NP 108 Panel 1.* Chemical Contaminants	1			1	1	
NP 108 Panel 2. Innovative Detection Technologies	3	1				
NP 108 Panel 3. Detection of Foodborne Pathogens and Toxins				5		1 Senior Scientist, University
NP 108 Panel 4. Predictive Modeling		2	1	1		
NP 108 Panel 5. Mycotoxins/Aspergillus	4					
NP 108 Panel 6. Mycotoxins/Fusarium	3			1		
NP 108 Panel 7. Produce	2	1		1	1	
NP 108 Panel 8.* Pathogen Genomics	1	1		3		
NP 108 Panel 9. Postharvest Intervention	4					
NP 108 Panel 10. Preharvest Interventions/Cattle & Swine					4	
NP 108 Panel 11. Preharvest Interventions/Poultry	3	2				
NP 108 Panel 12. Antimicrobial Resistance/Genomics		2	1	1		
NP 108 Panel 13. Antimicrobial Resistance/Ecology	3		1			

Research Impact and Ethnicity/Gender

The OSQR PPPR process is lauded as a rigorous and objective ARS function striving for the highest possible scientific credibility. In general, panelists shall hold a doctoral degree unless the discipline in question is one which does not subscribe to a doctorate level education to achieve the highest recognition and qualification (e.g., engineers and modeling specialists). Panelists are also judged by their most recent professional accomplishments (e.g. awards and publications completed in the last five years). Finally, the panelists who are currently performing or leading research to address a problem similar to those being researched in the National Program under review are preferred.

Table 6.

Panel Additional Information for the Food Safety (Animal & Plant Products) National Program 108

Panel	Average H-Index	Gender	Geographic Locations
NP 108 Panel 1.* Chemical Contaminants	26	2 males 1 female	1 NEA 1 PWA 1 MWA
NP 108 Panel 2. Innovative Detection Technologies	32	2 males 2 females	2 NEA 1 SEA 1 PWA
NP 108 Panel 3. Detection of Foodborne Pathogens and Toxins	25	5 males 1 female	3 NEA 1 UK 1 MWA 1 SEA
NP 108 Panel 4. Predictive Modeling	16	2 males 2 females	1 SEA 1 MWA 1 PA 1 PWA
NP 108 Panel 5. Mycotoxins/Aspergillus	33	1 male 3 females	1 SEA 2 NEA 1 MWA
NP 108 Panel 6. Mycotoxins/Fusarium	32	3 males 1 female	1 PWA 1 Canada 2 MWA
NP 108 Panel 7. Produce	23	3 males 2 females	1 MWA 1 PWA 1 NEA 2 Canada
NP 108 Panel 8.* Pathogen Genomics	29	4 males 1 female	2 Canada 1 NEA 2 SEA
NP 108 Panel 9. Postharvest Intervention	35	1 male 3 females	1 MWA 1 Brazil 2 Canada
NP 10. Panel 10. Preharvest Interventions/Cattle & Swine	22	2 males 2 females	1 Ireland 1 UK 1 Denmark 1 Switzerland
NP 108 Panel 11. Preharvest Interventions/Poultry	26	4 males 1 female	3 MWA 1 SEA 1 PA
NP 108 Panel 12. Antimicrobial Resistance/Genomics	18	3 males 1 female	1 NEA 2 PA 1 Canada
NP 108 Panel 13. Antimicrobial Resistance/Ecology	20	4 males	1 PA 2 MWA 1 SEA

(* denotes ad hoc review)

List of Panel Chairs

NP 108 Panel 2. Innovative Detection Technologies

Qin Zhang, Professor
Director, Center for Precision & Automated Agricultural Systems
Department of Biological Systems Engineering
Washington State University

Education:
Zhejiang Agricultural University, B.S., Mechanical Engineering
University of Idaho, M.S., Agricultural Engineering
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Ph.D, Agricultural Engineering

NP 108 Panel 3. Detection of Foodborne Pathogens and Toxins

Michael Adler, Research Pharmacologist
U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Chemical Defense
Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD

Education:
The City College of New York, B.S. Biology/Chemistry
SUNY at Buffalo, Ph.D., Pharmacology
University of Maryland School of Medicine, Post Doctorate, Neurophysiology

NP 108 Panel 4. Predictive Modeling

Sadhana Ravishankar, Associate Professor
University of Arizona Tucson
Food Safety
School of Animal and Comparative Biomedical Sciences

Education:
Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, India, B.S. Agriculture
Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, India, M.S. Agricultural Extension
University of Georgia, Athens, Ph.D, Food Science & Technology

NP 108 Panel 5. Mycotoxins/Aspergillus

Joan Bennett, Professor
Rutgers University
Department of Plant Biology and Pathology

Education:
Upsala College, B.S. Biology and History
University of Chicago, M.S. Botany
University of Chicago, Ph.D., Botany and Genetics

NP 108 Panel 6. Mycotoxins/Fusarium

Lauren S. Jackson, Chief, of Process Engineering Branch
Food and Drug Administration
Bedford Park, IL

Education:
Cornell University, B.S., Food Science
University of Wisconsin-Madison, M.S., Food Science

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Ph.D., Food Science

NP 108 Panel 7. Produce
Elliot Ryser, Professor
Michigan State University
Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition

Education:
Carroll Collage, B.S., Biology
University of Wisconsin-Madison, B.S., Bacteriology
University of Wisconsin-Madison, M.S., Food Microbiology
University of Wisconsin-Madison, Ph.D., Food Safety

NP 108 Panel 9. Postharvest Intervention
Monique Lacroix, Professor
National Institute of Scientific Research
Quebec, Canada

Education:
Laval University, B.Sc. A. Food Science and Technology
Laval University, M.Sc., Food Science and Technology
Laval University, Ph.D., Nutrition

NP 108 Panel 10. Preharvest Interventions/Cattle & Swine
Lis Alban, Chief Scientist
Danish Agriculture & Food Council
Kobenhavn, Denmark

Education:
The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, DVM and Ph.D, Veterinary Epidemiology

NP 108 Panel 11. Preharvest Interventions/Poultry
Catherine Logue, Professor
University of Georgia-Athens
College of Veterinary Medicine

Education:
St. Patrick's College, B.Sc., Biology
College of Technology, Graduate Diploma
University of Ulster, D.Phil., Food Microbiology

NP 108 Panel 12. Antimicrobial Resistance/Genomics
Mark Eppinger, Associate Professor
University of Texas, San Antonio
Department of Biology

Education:
Eberhard-Karls University of Tuebingen, Germany, B.S., Biology
Max-Planck Institute for Developmental Biology-University of Tuebingen, Ph.D. Microbial Genetics
Pennsylvania State University, Postdoctoral, Microbial Genetics
The Institute for Genomic Research, J. Craig Venter Institute, Postdoctoral, Infectious Disease

NP 108 Panel 13. Antimicrobial Resistance/Ecology

Paul Plummer, Professor
Iowa State University
Veterinary Diagnostic and Production Animal Medicine Department and Veterinary Microbiology and Preventative Medicine

Education:
University of Tennessee, B.S., Microbiology
University of Tennessee, DVM, Veterinary Medicine
Iowa State University, Ph.D. Veterinary Microbiology

NP 108 Food Safety (Animal & Plant Products) National Program Panel Chair Statements

Panel Chair responsibilities include providing the OSQR with a statement that describes their overall panel experience, how the panel was conducted, and general quality of the plans reviewed, it does not lend itself to discussing details of specific research project plan reviews nor attribution to individual panelists. Panel Chairs are given a format to follow for writing their statements, however, are free to discuss what they believe is important for broader audiences.

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Center for
Precision & Automated Agricultrual Systems
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, HUMAN, AND NATURAL RESOURCE SCIENCES

July 22, 2021

Todd Ward, Ph.D.
Scientific Quality Review Officer Office of
Scientific Quality Review Agricultural Research
Service, USDA5601 Sunnyside Avenue, MS 5142
Beltsville, MD 20705

Dear Dr. Ward,

Per procedural request, I am sending this letter as the Panel Chair Statement for NP 108 Panel 2 Innovative Detection Technologies (2020) to provide you highlights of this review process.

This panel has been assigned to review three proposals on developing technologies for food safety and security sensing. Formed by four members, all experienced university researchers. Allproposals were first reviewed by one primary and one secondary reviewers, then discussed at all-panel meeting, to assess their technical merit, adequacy of methods, and probability of success.

At the first round of the review process, the panel found that only one out of the three proposals clearly defined their objectives and proposed adequate approaches to accomplish their proposed goals. The panel unanimously felt that two other proposals requesting for more clarity on their project scope, research objectives, or proposed approaches. Both revised proposals satisfactorilyaddressed the panels concerns and passed the review at the second round.

One impression all the panel members unanimously agreed was that it looked like the overall quality of those internal proposals could be improved to make it comparable to those for externalcompetitive ones. Such an improvement could make the researchers think more carefully on the adequacy of their approaches or procedures, and thus to improve the chance for success.

Please feel free to let me know if I can provide further assistance.

Sincerely

Qin Zhang, Ph.D.
Director, Center for Precision & Automated Agricultural Systems
Professor, Department of Biological Systems Engineering Washington State University

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF CHEMICAL DEFENSE
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30 March 2021

Todd Ward, Ph.D.
Scientific Quality Review Officer
Office of Scientific Quality Review
Agricultural Research Service, USDA
5601 Sunnyside Ave, MS 5142
Beltsville, MD 20705

Panel Chair review of NP 108 Panel 3 Detection of Foodborne Pathogens and Toxins, 10 AM EST, Tuesday February 23, 2021

Dear Dr. Ward:

It was my honor to chair the NP 108 Panel 3 review committee on the detection of Foodborne Pathogens and Toxins. I felt that each of the proposals was exceptionally well written and addressed an unmet need for improving current methods for detecting allergens, toxins and pathogens that can potentially contaminate our food and water supplies. By working closely with the USDA team, I was able to assemble a group of subject matter experts who not only know their areas well, but were free of actual or perceived conflicts of interest. The number reviewers (5) to proposals (3) allowed for a thorough assessment of each project and an interesting and lively Zoom meeting (which went off flawlessly).

In accordance with the USDA guidelines for reviewer diversity, the reviewers were selected from the United States and United Kingdom and included both government and university scientists. The orientation by the USDA was quite helpful in identifying the intent of the Agency programs and to focus the attention of the reviewers on the key issues.

A common suggestion that a number of reviewers expressed was for inclusion of more extensive methodological details, a clearer description of the role of co-investigators and collaborators and more detailed backup plans. Perhaps these can be emphasized to the PIs in future submissions. The five-year duration of the projects was felt to be of significant advantage for allowing sufficient time for implementation of a larger vision without time constraints.

Best regards,

ADLER.MICHAEL.1228832150 Digitally signed by ADLER.MICHAEL.1228832150 Date: 2021.03.30 16:15:21 -04'00'

Michael Adler, Ph.D.
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THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
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February 27, 2021

Dr. Todd Ward
Scientific Quality Review Officer
Office of Scientific Quality Review
Agricultural Research Service, USDA
5601 Sunnyside Avenue, MS 5142
Beltsville, MD 20705

Subject: Regarding Panel Chair Statement for NP 108 Predictive Modeling Panel

Dear Dr. Ward,

I am writing to you regarding the NP 108 Panel that reviewed three USDA-ARS project plans on Predictive Modeling. I was contacted by the Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR) in early December with an invitation to serve as the Panel Chair for this panel. Once I accepted to serve in this capacity, I was provided an initial orientation in which the process was explained well via a Powerpoint presentation and a video was shown. Peer reviewer guidelines and the video were also provided via email. A sample letter was provided for inviting the reviewers. All the materials provided were very useful, making the process clear and easier to follow. Any questions I had were also answered during the orientation and also later via emails throughout the review process.

The OSQR staff were very helpful and prompt in getting the information that I needed to begin the process. Once I received the list of projects assigned to the panel, I identified and sent the names of potential reviewers for each project to the OSQR. They immediately informed me of the reviewers who had a conflict of interest with the project Principle Investigators (PIs) and suggested alternate reviewers. Using their suggestions, I was able to finalize the list of reviewers and invited them to serve as primary and/or secondary reviewers. Once they agreed to serve, I informed the OSQR staff, who then shared the project plans and all the required forms with the reviewers and also made all the arrangements for the panel meeting, including figuring out a date for the virtual meeting and the due date for the reviews, etc. The OSQR staff sent timely reminders, collected the reviews, complied them together and shared with all the reviewers and the Panel Chair. The Zoom meeting and other details of the panel were sent to the panel members several times reminding them of the meeting as well. All the arrangements were done smoothly without any issues. The OSQR staff were very prompt in responding to any questions the panel members had and were very helpful in organizing and arranging everything that was needed.

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The reviewers selected for this panel have expertise in Food Safety, Microbiology and Predictive Modeling. All panel members had used Predictive Modeling in their research and/or teaching activities and felt that this area of research is very important for enhancing the food safety of various food products including foods in the high-risk category. The panel members had about two weeks to review the project plans assigned to them and prepare their reviews. Each reviewer was assigned two project plans. The reviewers prepared a comprehensive review addressing the adequacy of approach and procedures, probability of successfully accomplishing the objectives, and merit and significance of the work proposed. The strengths and questions or recommendations for each objective in each project plan were listed in the review. All these were discussed during the panel meeting as well. The panel members felt that all project plans were solid, very well put together and addressed vital areas of food safety and food preservation that will be very beneficial for improving the safety of ready to eat foods. All these project plans will provide essential food safety data towards their completion, which could be very useful for the regulatory agencies in risk assessment. Any questions or items that were not clear in their approaches as well as any recommendations that the panel had for the PIs were discussed and listed in the recommendations. One of the common areas (identified by the panel) where additional information could help, in general with the project plans in the future, is the implementation of outreach activities to reach the project findings to the stakeholders. It is possible that this may not be a requirement for the ARS scientists.

The panel members felt that the panel was very well-organized, and that the entire process was very smooth and efficient without any issues. No concerns or suggestions for improvement were expressed by the panel members. The panel members thank the OSQR for the opportunity to review the project plans and provide their feedback. The panel members are also very thankful to the OSQR staff for their prompt and timely help with everything from the start (orientation) to the completion of the review panel meeting. Overall, the quality of the review process was very good, and the panel members had a productive and fruitful experience. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Sadhana Ravishankar, Ph.D.
Associate Professor & Chair of the Food Safety Consortium
University of Arizona

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March 9, 2021

Dr. Todd Ward,
Scientific Quality Review Officer
Office of Scientific Quality Review
Agricultural Research Service, USDA
5601 Sunnyside Avenue, MS 5142
Beltsville, MD 20705

Dear Dr. Ward:

This is a Panel Chair Statement for USDA/ARS Panel 5 “Mycotoxins/*Aspergillus* 2020.” The review panel was held online on February 9, 2021.The panel consisted of a chair and three reviewers. Each reviewer served as primary reviewer on one project and secondary reviewer on another, thereby spreading the workload. As chair, prior to assembling the panel I read all three proposals and did my best to locate appropriate reviewers. It is my understanding that I am not allowed to use names of either the reviewers, or of the titles of individual ARS research plans and program leaders, in writing this summary report. This constraint makes it difficult to say anything substantive about the process. There is an old aphorism that states: “The truth is in the details.” Your instructions prevent me from using any details.

Nevertheless, accepting these constraints, here are a few general comments about the overall activity.

The reviewers were well prepared for the panel. They had spent thoughtful time in getting ready for the discussion on February 9th, and were well acquainted with the scientific and technological aspects of the proposed research. They contributed effectively to the discussions and the written reviews. However, it became apparent that the three proposals we had been assigned reflected different budgetary or administrative constraints imposed on the ARS researchers. In one case, a single ARS researcher had been asked to put a number of barely related research objectives into a single ARS project. It was obvious that considerable financial restrictions had been imposed on the ARS unit prior to the writing of the research plan. The ARS project leader had been asked to create a rational structure out of what remained of the existing programs after the budget cuts. Given that the job of the panel was to judge the research feasibility and merit of the plan, not the coherence of its prior administrative challenges, there was a mismatch between what was problematic about the research plan and our charge to assess scientific merit.

I also have been asked to “address the overall quality of the review process.” Here are a few general remarks. I had never been a member of one of these ARS panels before, so before agreeing to chair the intramural project plans, I asked for some guidance. I was directed to several on-line prepared slide shows that I barely found to be useful. A single phone conversation with the Program Coordinator would have been much more valuable and much more time effective. Luckily, I was able to schedule a meaningful conversation with the Program Analyst who was able to answer my questions.

RUTGERS
School of Environmental and Biological Sciences

Put in other words: the online slides and video save time for the ARS staff, but required way more time from me. Perhaps because this the pandemic year, the request to sit in front of a screen, yet again, without any input from a human being, seemed particularly onerous.

My instructions for this report had the following sentence highlighted. "If a video of the National Program was provided please let us know the impact it had on the review." I do not remember watching this video so cannot comment on its impact. However, I did look at the slide deck titled "USDA Agricultural Research Service Office of Scientific Quality Review Panel Chair Orientation. " I found it useful, but only *after* my zoom meeting with the Program Analyst. It would have been more useful if a human being had been available to answer my questions the first time I watched the slide deck. The ARS does not pay my salary. It took time from my "real" job to participate in the ARS review activity.

Prior to assembling the review panel, I was given a list of approved reviewers who could be invited to be members of the review panel. Having internalized all the feel-good statements about the USDA commitment to diversity, I was surprised that of the 15 people on the approved list, only two were women -- one of whom was me. Moreover, to my knowledge, no one on the list was African American, Hispanic, or Native American. Therefore, I generated a new list of suggested reviewers, encompassing greater diversity, who were not on the pre-approved list. I recommend that your office work hard in the future to create a more diverse list of pre-approved reviewers so that the panel chair does not have to do it.

Perhaps my most important recommendation is that you do not ask a scientific review panel to use the criteria of research excellence and feasibility when the real issue with the coherence and merit of a plan has to do with the administrative challenges within the ARS-USDA system.

Finally, it would help future panel chairs if a previous, sample Panel Chair Statement could be made available. The instructions are mostly about what we *cannot* discuss (the specifics of the research, the people involved, and the reviewers who make input) and not specific examples of what we *can* discuss. It would have made my job easier in writing this report if I could have seen an example of a representative Panel Chair Statement from an earlier review panel.

In summary, each of the three proposals that Panel 5 reviewed addressed a comprehensive breadth of important issues relating to mycotoxins, food security, and the targeted use of the expertise, equipment, and other human and physical resources available at the relevant laboratories. Despite the political and economic pressures the agency has faced in recent years, the ARS continues to produce scientific research of merit within established research priorities and with significance to US agricultural interests.

Sincerely yours,

Joan W. Bennett

Joan W. Bennett
Distinguished Professor
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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service
Food and Drug Administration

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July 25, 2021

Michael A. Grusak, Ph.D.
Quality Review Officer
Office of Scientific Quality Review
Agricultural Research Service, USDA
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Beltsville, MD 20705

Dear Dr. Grusak:

As Chair of the USDA NP 108 Panel 6 (Mycotoxins/Fusarium), I am pleased to report a synopsis and assessment of the panel review and the assessment process. The purpose of the panel review was to evaluate the scientific and technical merits of 5-year research plans for three USDA/ARS projects that focused on innovate approaches for detecting, monitoring and controlling mycotoxins in agricultural products. The three panelists chosen for this peer review are recognized experts in agriculturally important mycotoxins and have extensive publication records in this area. The panel met virtually for approximately 2 hours on January 26, 2021 to provide an in-depth review of the merits of each research plan and ways to improve the projects. A second virtual meeting was conducted on May 13, 2021 to review a revised project plan for one project that the panelists felt needed more focus and clarity.

Each of the panelists came to each of the review meetings well-prepared, providing their written comments at least a week prior to the meetings. I was impressed by the in-depth reviews each panelist presented and their ability to provide constructive ways to improve all three projects. The discussionsat the meetings were lively and were an important part of the review process since they resulted in additional comments on the projects not covered in the written reviews. The panelists worked well together to consolidate and clarify the comments reported to the investigators. Overall, I believe that the panel's efforts improved the quality and likelihood of success of each of the projects.

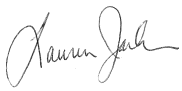
I was very impressed by the peer review process and the professionalism of the Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR) staff. They gave detailed instructions on the review process and provided an ample amount of time for preparation for the review meetings. The presentation given at the initial part of the review meeting on the OSQR, and the review process was an important one, particularly forthose such as myself, who have not previously served on USDA/ARS review panel. The OSQR staff was well organized and did an exceptional job setting up the meetings which went well despite very minor technical issues. All of the panelists were impressed with the on-line scoring system used in thereview since it simplified the review process and provided a fair evaluation of the research plans.
Overall, I can't think of ways to improve the process by which USDA/ARS projects are peer

reviewed—I think OSQR has optimized all aspects of the process.

Overall, I and the other panelists believe that the NP 108 Panel 6 (Mycotoxins/Fusarium) review was a very successful one. The research conducted by USDA/ARS on Fusarium mycotoxins is timely and

important for ensuring the safety of the U.S. food supply. I would like to thank USDA/ARS for the opportunity to serve as Chair of Panel 6. I found the experience to be a very rewarding one and wouldbe pleased to serve on other USDA panels in the future.

Sincerely,



Lauren S. Jackson, Ph.D.
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July 27. 2021

Todd Ward, Ph.D.
Scientific Quality Review Officer Office of
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Research Service, USDA5601 Sunnyside
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Beltsville, MD 20705

Dear Dr. Ward,

Having served as the Panel Chair for USDA NP 108 Panel 7 Produce 2020, below please find my assessment of the overall process along with some insights and a few suggestions for improvement. Prior to serving as panel chair, I was an *ad hoc* reviewer for several USDA projects some years ago and was also one of four reviewers for USDA NP 109 Panel 9 Postharvest Intervention 2020. These two experiences were very different with the review process far more rigorous for the panel which I chaired.

The members of my panel were all leading experts in the field and were carefully selected based on the content of the four projects that were evaluated. These four reviewers took their task very seriously, identifying numerous weaknesses and points requiring further clarification. Three of the four projects were returned to the investigators for major revision followed by a second evaluation by the panel which was again in depth and very thorough with some minor revisions subsequently required by the investigators prior to final acceptance. The quality and outcome of any such assessment relies on the expertise of the reviewers and their willingness to critically evaluate the work being proposed for scientific accuracy, timeliness, and in this case a positive impact on food safety and public health. I applaud my four reviewers for their critical written evaluations and in- depth discussions of all four projects which in the end should significantly enhancethe programmatic work being conducted by the USDA.

The quality and scope of the review process was aided by the video provided which underlined the fact that the topics for these projects were pre-selected and not to be evaluated based on novelty. The review process was very much a team effort with all panel members providing critical feedback for improving both their assigned and not assigned projects which was extremely helpful in reaching a consensus. In the end, the outcome from the review process is ultimately dictated

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by the qualifications of the reviewers and their diligence in critically evaluating thequality of the science for further improvement.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Elliot T. Ryser

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Institut national de la recherche scientifique

February 8, 2021

Mr. Todd Ward, Ph.D.
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RE : Panel chair statement for the NP108 Panel 9. Postharvest Intervention (2020)

Mr. Todd,

I had the pleasure to preside the present committee for the review of four projects submitted to the NP 108 Panel 9. The panel was composed of one Food Engineering and three Food Microbiologists and were asked to review research programs on the multiple intervention technologies to enhance food safety, on the development and validation of innovative methods of detection of pathogens and processing technologies to assure food safety.

Each panel member did a completed and detailed review of each objective and made general comments and drafted recommendations and questions when needed.

However, there was some confusion regarding the forms to be completed. The submission of forms (primary, secondary and general reviewer comment form) would benefit from being submitted at the same time as the research programs forms along with the expectations provided by the USDA.

Our meeting took place on February 8, 2021 and during this meeting, each member had the chance to express their point of view and discuss each point described in the forms. A fruitful discussion was made during this meeting. The committee thanks Mrs. Shaw and her colleagues for their support throughout all the period of the reviewing process. According to all the panel members, the process ran very smoothly and we are very happy to had the opportunity to participate at this reviewing process.

Receive my best regards,

Monique Lacroix, Ph.D.
Professor
INRS Armand-Frappier, health and Biotechnology Centre
Canadian Irradiation Centre

Todd Ward, Ph.D.
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Panel Chair Statement for NP 108 Panel 10. Preharvest Interventions / Cattle and swine (2020)

The review panel was gathered on-line on February 2, 2021. The panel consisted of two women (one of them was the chair) and two men, representing four different European countries, and expertise within microbiology and epidemiology in the livestock and food area. Moreover, coordinators from the USDA Agricultural Research Service Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR) were present.

The review meeting involved evaluation of the three project plans, which the panel had received well in advance. The meeting lasted 3 hours, where the time was equally divided to the plans, implying around 1 hour per plan. During the meeting, the plans were presented first by the primary reviewer, next by the secondary reviewer, objective per objective, issue after issue, following the written instructions provided by OSQR. Moreover, one of the OSQR coordinators had in advance sent an outline of a common review, based upon the comments received from the reviewers in the panel. The comments sent by the individual three reviewers were detailed in most cases, and two outof three reviews were submitted before the deadline set by OSQR, whereas the last camein too late, implying the day before the review meeting due to unforeseen obstacles.

Sound discussions took place between the engaged and well-prepared reviewers and the chair, focusing primarily on what was written in the report but also considering relevant information e.g. from the European Food Safety Authority. During the discussions, the OSQR coordinators captured when additional and relevant comments arose and entered them to the common review. This ensured that the common reviews became comprehensive with clear questions and feasible recommendations for further improvements. In most cases, there was agreement about the quality of the presented plans, and when there was disagreement about the details, it was of minor level. This was also reflected in the scoring of the three plans, where the deviations were not more than one score.

One issue that caused some confusion was the communication with stakeholders. All four panel members are of European origin and working in Europe, where it is considered a necessity to actively engage with stakeholders, from the beginning of a research project to the end. This is to ensure that the most relevant hypotheses are raised, that existing data are made available, and the results created will be taken up actively by the stakeholders such as livestock and meat-industry without too much delay. We were discussing in the Panel whether this is also a requirement for USDA, because all three research plans were only poorly describing stakeholder communication. Maybe the requirement for this issue could be described in more details in the instructions to the USDA-researchers along with an explanation of why this may improve not just the research plan but also the execution of the plan and subsequent uptake of the results obtained?

In conclusion, the overall quality of the review process was very high and ensured a fair evaluation of the three research plans, submitted to the review panel.

Best wishes,

Lis Alban

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Dr. Todd Ward,
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Agricultural Research Service, USDA,
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Beltsville, MD 20705.

Re: Panel Review for the USDA NP 108 Panel 11 Pre harvest Interventions/ Poultry (2020)

The following chair panel statement is submitted on behalf of the panel chair and panel members. A total of four projects were reviewed.

The panel consisted of four researchers and the chair from academia with expertise in food safety and poultry. Members of the panel were provided the proposals ahead of time resulting in each individual leading a review as a primary reviewer and participated as a secondary reviewer on a second project. In addition, the panel chair also provided review of these projects but did not submit written comments. The burden on the part of the reviewers was similar to that of a standard research grant and the reviewers were given ample time to review and comment in the form of written feedback for the projects as well as participate in panel discussion.

Overall, the panel members were prepared on the conference call and had submitted written reviews in advance with their opinions and concerns for each project plan. Unfortunately, one panel member was not able to participate in the live panel review due to illness; however, written feedback was received ahead of time and with the help of the secondary reviewer and the panel chair who had also reviewed the proposals, the overall reviews for these projects were not significantly impacted.

The reviewers provided good feedback in regards to the projects and did express their concerns where warranted. Written reviews provided a level of feedback for issues noted and when comments from all reviewers were merged and discussed during the panel review, clarifications were included and corrections made to these comments to ensure clarity in the feedback to be provided to the investigators.

The reviewers were well prepared to discuss the projects and provided a good overall summary of the project and its objectives and the approaches to achieve these objectives. The reviewers were able to make suggestions based on their own experiences for aspects of the proposed research from recommending alternative approaches or expansion or adjustment of the work to ensure a better outcome – as an example adding an extra step or control in a protocol to ensure that effects were measured accurately.

The panel members also provided feedback on the feasibility of the objectives for projects and where there were issues of concern, they suggested a review of the objective or revision of the approach. One overarching comment among all projects was related to the experimental design and the proposed methods. The reviewers found that some of the methods appeared to lack appropriate detail as to how the work would be carried out

leaving the reviewers with more questions than answers. As an example, understanding the doses of a challengeagent in the experiment set up, as the dose was considered to significantly impact monitoring and/or other measurements obtained. In another study, contingencies were not specific enough for the objective and without detail it was difficult to determine if the work proposed would be viable.

One significant concern raised across all projects reviewed was the lack of power analysis or justification for thesample sizes proposed for use. In some instances, the sizes of groups or sampling intervals or sampling approach were too small to be of any biological significance and emphasized the need for power analysis whichwould have identified the gap in the approach and objective design.

In addition, detail as to how the data generated from the work would be handled in consideration of the approaches used. The reviewers considered that there was a need for better definition and discussion of how theanalysis and data generated would be integrated.

Another concern raised by reviewers was that some of the work proposed appeared to be similar to previous workdone and the reviewers' struggled to determine what was new in the new project that was not already gained or completed from the previous project/ research and if the new work was just incremental changes. What would have helped reviewers in such a case was for the investigators to better articulate what was the impetus for the new work and how this differed from already completed work.

On a positive note – most of the issues highlighted by the reviewers can be addressed and the proposals refinedto ensure a stronger project generating better science from the proposed studies/ experiments. All of the investigators and teams on the various projects were capable, had the appropriate experience and were appropriate for the work and projects proposed. All of the teams had prior history and were actively publishing in the areas of their projects – demonstrating their expertise and facility for the proposed projects. Each project wasdesigned to keep moving the science forward and incorporated novel technologies and approaches. There was also evidence for significant collaboration between the USDA investigators and external entities including academia, industry and other USDA locations nationally.

A potential strength of these projects is that they will have an impact on food safety, poultry health and productionfor the foreseeable future.

Overall, the review process was relatively smooth, with great help from Michelle Shaw, Todd Ward and MarqueaKing. The panel appreciated the assistance they provided especially where clarification or guidance on what the reviewers were articulating and how these comments translated into the review and feedback/recommendations/advice for the investigators.

If I can provide further clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely

Catherine M. Logue PhD,
MIFSTProfessor of
Microbiology,
Department of Population Health, CVM

The University of Texas at San Antonio
Biology Department

March 26th, 2021

Todd Ward, Ph.D.
Scientific Quality Review
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Beltsville, MD 20705

RE: Chair Statement- NP108 Panel 12. Antimicrobial Resistance/Genomics (2020)

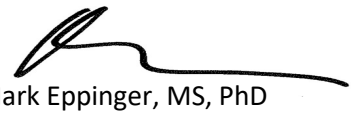
The international scientific review panel was comprised of researchers from academia and government agencies. All members have a demonstrated track record and expertise in key areas relevant to the reviewed research. Members included junior tenure-track and tenured faculty aswell as senior staff scientists.

In preparation for the panel meeting all panel members read the proposals. Each proposal was assigned to a primary and secondary reviewer who provided in depth reviews and written evaluations. All members contributed to the scientific evaluation of each individual plan by adding to the written comments of the primary and secondary reviewers and were engaged in discussions during the panel meeting. After anonymous scoring of the proposal, given scores were discussed and all members agreed with the final assessment.

Recommendations for enhancements: The panel members identified a lack of detail given in the experimental design that was noted across several plans. For example, the specific isolates/sublineages or total numbers of isolates/samples processed and/or analyzed were not clearly identified. The panel considered the availability of this information critical to facilitate a high quality review and to better assess the scope and feasibility of the proposed research.

If you require more information, or if I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Mark Eppinger, MS, PhD
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Dr. Todd Wood
Scientific Quality Review Officer Office
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Dear Dr. Wood,

In accordance with ARS Office of Scientific Quality Review policy I am providing this panel chair statement. At the request of your office I recruited three panel members with demonstrated expertise relevant to the scope and focus of the three programs that required our review. In addition, specific effortwas exerted to assure diversity of the panel with regard to race and stage of professional development were. Panel members were reviewed and confirmed by your office as having appropriate expertise. Eachprogram for review was assigned a primary and secondary reviewer and the third panel member was asked to read the proposal.

Full written comments, on the ARS template for program review, were submitted on time by all three reviewers. The written reviews were complete, concise and technically sound. In addition, I noticed significantly similar comments and perspectives from reviewers, suggesting that the points were noticed and concurred on even prior to formal discussion. The written reviews were disseminated to the review panel one week in advance of the panel discussion. The panel discussion was held virtually on Monday February 1, 2021. ARS staff started the discussion with a reminder to the panel of our role and a discussion of how we would be assigning final scores to each proposal. The panel then spent roughly 1.5 hours (roughly 30 minutes on each program) discussing the overall goal, each specific objective individually, the probability of success and finally the scientific merit. These discussions were prepared and led well by the panel members and there was significant consensus in the concerns raised. During the discussion the written comments were adjusted slightly for clarity, however the written reviews were overwhelmingly agreed to and only received minor edits. This demonstrates the time and effort that the reviewers placed in writing those written comments and the unity of the panel in their accuracy. Following the discussion each program received an anonymous vote on the final recommendation using the polling function of zoom.

It is my assertion that the review process followed all guidelines provided by ARS and was a fair and in-depth review of the programs assigned to our panel. The reviewers prepared and provided constructive critiques of the programs and valid concerns or areas for additional information were identified. The panel performed their duties with professionalism and integrity. In short, the panel functioned as it should and I stand by the outcomes of the effort.

In panel discussion, a couple themes emerged that might be beneficial for ARS to consider addressing with future panels and or the program authors. First, despite the introductory discussion on the review process, the panel members had not understood that the objectives of these plans were assigned by ARSand not written by the authors of the program plans. This led to some confusion on why the authors chose particular objectives and if other objectives would have been better. Discussion and input from theARS staff on the call corrected this confusion, however it was apparent that none of the three reviewers were completely aware of how these objectives were determined. It could be beneficial for ARS to makea bigger emphasis on this specific issue during panel orientation. Additionally, after better understanding this there was consensus that most of the program plans failed to adequately demonstrate how these objectives worked together to develop a comprehensive and rationale research approach. In essence, many of the program plans were written as stand-alone efforts. Perhaps ARS could raise this concern to future program plan authors and make sure that this is addressed in their plans.

I appreciate the opportunity to serve as panel chair and sincerely thank you for the exceptional work thatyou are doing at ARS. The panel was impressed with your efforts and sees value in what you are doing. If you have any additional questions please feel free to let me know.

Sincerely,

Paul J. Plummer, DVM PhD
Diplomate, American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (Large Animal)
Diplomate, European College of Small Ruminant Health Management
Executive Director, National Institute of Antimicrobial Resistance Research and Education
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Veterinary Microbiology and Preventative MedicineCollege of Veterinary Medicine
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Office of Scientific Quality Review

The Office of Scientific Quality Review manages and implements the ARS project plan peer review (PPPR) functions for all intramural research projects including administering the peer review policies, processes and procedures. OSQR centrally coordinates and conducts the PPPR for project plans within the Office of National Programs during a 5-year cycle.

The OSQR staff is responsible for:

- setting the schedule of Project Plan Peer Review sessions
- Panel organization and composition (number of panels and the scientific disciplines needed)
- Distribution of project plans
- Reviewer instruction and panel orientation
- The distribution of review results to Areas, ONP, and other interested parties
- Notification to panelists of the Agency response to review recommendations
- *Ad hoc* or re-review of project plans
- Final certification of each Area project plan

Contact

Send all questions or comments about this Report to:

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