

AIARD 2014 Conference: On-Line Forum Discussion Document

Background

During the 50th anniversary conference of AIARD, participants discussed five questions regarding the past, current, and future of AIARD with the goal of creating a vision for the organization and action items for the future. The five questions were:

1. *How can AIARD build popular support and wider recognition that a sustainable food supply can be achieved; assure that food security can be a continued high priority in the next administration?*
2. *What are the key lessons learned from the past by AIARD's past that we should recognize/take action on moving forward?*
3. *What are the pressing issues ahead related to food security writ large? What are the key issues for AIARD to address?*
4. *What are some innovations that are needed? Institutional? Research? Education/Outreach?*
5. *What kind of future does AIARD want to help create? (i.e.: how strike a balance between advocacy for small farms and meeting food security needs via global free trade?)*

The results of the discussions of the five questions generated a list of three key issues and action items for further debate: 1) Thinking Strategically About Key Focus Areas for AIARD; 2) Organizational Innovation for AIARD for the Future; and 3) Building Broader Support. These issues and action items, summarized below, are now the subject of a year-long, on-line discussion forum at www.aiard.org/forum. Each key item will be posted for discussion for three months after which it will be integrated into a final vision document to be presented in time for the 51st conference of AIARD in 2015.

Key Issues

Thinking Strategically About Key Focus Areas for AIARD

Participants at the 50th anniversary conference were interested in many of the processes and ideas that our conference keynote/provocateur, Dr. Liam Downey, put forward for discussion. In particular, the conference participants applauded his encouragement of the need for more strategic thinking overall; the need to do some "slow thinking" on important issues; the need to set policy in key areas, rather than just depend on the results of politics; and the need for institutional innovation.

This key issue can be split into two parts. There is the need to consider how AIARD can be strategic, particularly in how AIARD can develop criteria to determine prioritized focus areas. Secondly, there is the need to discuss and debate several key areas as possibilities for AIARD to focus its efforts, all outlined by conference participants' discussion and feedback. How can

AIARD lead the way or be engaged in discussions around one or more of these topics? Topics include:

- There is a need to more consciously view farming as a business. **Market-driven development** is important to keep in mind, but AIARD should not forget that this approach is complicated by the fact that smallholder farmers are not always represented in the market as it currently exists. Work is needed to bring un-empowered farmers into the market so their needs can be considered.
- **Balancing the local and the global.** How can AIARD strike a balance between advocacy for small farms and meeting food security needs via global free trade? Can AIARD be a venue for rethinking, creating and improving public-private partnerships (and this is where AIARD's role is the most prominent – it helps to bring different stakeholders together) for improved agriculture and rural development programs for the future?
- **Smallholder farmers.** How can AIARD put a larger emphasis on rural development than just farming per se? There should be an incentive for people to stay in rural areas, as opposed to migrating to the cities. Diversification of rural livelihoods is critical to consider as the way for the small holders to advance, along with educating small farmers and sharing existing knowledge that could be applied to their problems.
- A critical issue and one that determines success on many other fronts, is the need for **Innovative Human and Institutional Capacity Building** in global food security. Within that broad area, some of the issues are: research capacity building in developing countries; moving from innovation to sustainable application (e.g. the new field of "implementation science": innovation in the extension function); innovation portfolios as market driven research attractive to the private sector (a concept being implemented by Ohio State colleagues); modeling innovation to meet the long-term challenges - slow thinking vs just short-term innovations that are not taken up to be sustainable.
- **Food waste** is a major issue where many institutions have an immediate role to play: research is needed to fully understand the problem, policy discussions need to be started, and programs need to be enacted to begin to address the issue. Action items on this topic that AIARD could pursue for the coming year include: having a discussion forum on food waste throughout the year; investigating post-harvest technology and advocating for its increased use; hosting a panel at the next conference specifically on food waste.
- Can AIARD lead the way in discussing **reforms of agri-food education and extension?** Extension services in low-income countries are poorly-resourced, over-stretched and have minimal impact. Can we mine the data we already have and extend the definition of agricultural education and extension, discussing the relevance and place for agri-food education systems in the 21st century?
- Can AIARD operate as a vehicle for **moving from data mining to knowledge application?** How do we build new models of knowledge application without reinventing the wheel? Could the next conference focus on this on a particular topic (ag extension in other countries)? Perhaps there is opportunity for a pre-conference/side-event?
- Can AIARD be a bridge/forum to **connect basic and social science?** How can we have an integrative, interdisciplinary approach to international agriculture and rural development to enact behavioral change? How can we ensure that culture and gender are used as platforms for innovation and are integrated into implementation plans?

Organizational Innovation in AIARD for the Future

It was widely recognized that AIARD is a dynamic association, but that innovation is necessary for it to remain an engaging fora for sharing of information, networking, education, and advocacy. AIARD needs to innovate in order to create space to deepen relationships and dialogue. Many participants are looking for AIARD to be a place of engagement between annual conferences. Three goals for this key issue are:

- **Revolutionize AIARD's online presence and engagement.** AIARD can make better use of technology to engage its membership on a continual basis, rather than annually at the conference. Examples might include an active e-consultation to keep the conversation going and to determine next year's conference agenda so it is more member owned. Including more member information on the website and providing a space for interaction would increase awareness and build partnerships among members. Although challenging, AIARD could explore ways to connect communities of practice that members are involved in, such as InnoVATE or MEAS.
- **Reconsider the format of the annual meetings.** Although this year's conference was more interactive than previous meetings, AIARD should consider dedicating even more time on the agenda for interactive discussion and questions (perhaps start the conference with an interactive session). AIARD might even want to consider a format that allows time for concurrent sessions which would provide a venue for smaller groups to engage in more conversation. Other suggestions include:
 - Consider a call for presentations at least for a portion of the conference
 - Have Future Leaders bring posters about their research
 - Provide an opportunity in the meeting for participants to learn more about the legislative priorities and opportunities for advocacy – discussions on what we need to, potential topic to invite Stabenow to discuss the Farm Bill – dissect and inform the relevance and significance to our international work;
 - Can AIARD serve in the role of setting an “agenda” for advocacy and provide points to be raised as we move in the legislative circles;
 - Let the meeting produce action items that can then be crafted into a white paper for the members to use;
 - More focus on gender components and how to include this into our work, by asking presenters to really integrate this information into their presentation;
 - Meeting location: Consider rotating the meeting. What about meeting in other locations where members are based, even to potentially hold the meeting internationally?
- **Consider an AIARD publication.** AIARD should explore different models or examples for an annual publication that would highlight members' research and projects. This should not be in “academic” format, but rather in “practical” information style, with

infographics , etc. This could build on the AIARD newsletter stories and would be a good vehicle to reach policymakers and promote the work of the membership.

Building Broader Support:

During the course of AIARD's 50 year history, the organization has experienced many successes that can inform its future. Particularly, given its founding originally as ASUDIAP, the organization can draw upon a large base of knowledge, experience and skills from the Land Grant system and tradition. Participants at the 50th anniversary conference also consider AIARD's unique membership mix and its previous advocacy role via the Capitol Hill Forum as key strengths of the organization. Participants view the Capitol Hill Fora as a way to reach powerful individuals and ensure that development remains on the minds of policy makers despite the vagaries of the federal budget and foreign policy priorities.

In recent years, however, new advocacy groups have emerged and AIARD's voice has become less clear. Participants at the 50th anniversary conference suggest that the organization revive and extend its membership and engage in a new public outreach/media campaign to once again elevate its advocacy role. The following four general action items were suggested as a way to accomplish these goals:

- **Build additional involvement/partnerships/membership.** AIARD should incorporate more representatives from the developing world and/or the agricultural attaches in the embassies. Related to the discussion on organizational innovation, is there a way to use remote technologies to reach a broader audience?
- **Engage the US public.** AIARD is in an excellent position to provide broad-based public education on issues related to agriculture development. Ideas to investigate include:
 - More public communication of current issues or areas to focus on by engaging known authors and/or public figures, such as Roger Thurow;
 - More of the facts presented; Make efforts to diminish or minimize confusion regarding facts
 - Provide more visual images of issues
 - Provide data to media or public portals to help inform farmers for better decision making
- **Engage US policymakers.** AIARD has the membership to build a broad-based coalition to support legislation and should work to promote bills to ensure focus on food security remains despite political changes. (A key example of that will be the Feed the Future initiative as the administration changes.) AIARD should be prepared to highlight success stories from its membership to show process and results. AIARD may want to identify 'champions' to work with and update them regularly.
- **Develop an outreach/social media strategy.** AIARD should engage in media outlets to provide both support and data for stories. Such stories should be presented in a bipartisan way and tied into issues of healthy, family, and medical costs to 'personalize' them for public interest.