



THE FAR-B NEWS

Dedicated to promoting the research and education programs of the Henry A. Wallace Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, Beltsville, MD

Friends of Agricultural Research-Beltsville, Incorporated P.O. Box 1061, Beltsville, MD 20704-1061

JANUARY 2023

Interim Editor: Suzanne Hubbard; *Editor Emeritus:* Hank Becker

FAR-B Board Message

The FAR-B Board continued to meet via Zoom in 2022 as it has met since the early phase of the pandemic. As the COVID incidence declined in Prince George's County, we hoped that we could eventually resume meeting in person at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) as before, with only those Board members residing too far away continuing to meet by Zoom. However, after a transition period when certain employees and chain-of-command were on site and the occupancy bell rang, teleworking remained in place according to approved schedules, positions, and duties. The Board decided that Zoom was working just fine for us.

The FAR-B Board ended 2022 with the same number of members as at the beginning (5), and only 3 are eligible to hold an office position. However, all 5 may vote on Board proposals and other decisions. We opted to share officer positions to spread out the responsibilities as well as identify tasks to simplify. That challenging situation led to internal discussions on how to accomplish effectively FAR-B's goals to support the ARS mission:

- Disseminate information on the unique expertise of Beltsville scientists and their research accomplishments that benefit society.
- Organize, sponsor and finance major symposia, field days, and scientific seminars.
- Generate funds to support student internships, scientific travel, and upgrade research equipment.
- Present information and expert testimony to the U.S. Congress and others to enhance funding for BARC.
- Present educational programs that focus on outstanding research conducted at Beltsville to local students.

Despite the challenges, the Board was able to accomplish much of its mission even with onsite employee events reduced. The catering for a "welcome back" gathering in Bldg. 005 was funded to mark the easing of pandemic restrictions and a return to on-site work. The FAR-B annual meeting was held at the National Agricultural Library (NAL) and included a talk by NAL Director Paul Wester and a tour as well as a catered lunch. Funding also was provided for catering the reopening event for Bldg. 307, which has been totally renovated to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards, as well as for lunches at 2 stakeholder meetings.

For educational programs, the majority of the cost of the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation's Mobile Science Lab visit to Beltsville Academy was funded by FAR-B, and the lab was staffed by BARC

Membership Dues Reminder

Personal memberships in FAR-B are **\$30** per year. Current USDA employees may join as associate members for **\$15** per year. Patron memberships (**\$100** per year) and sustaining memberships (**\$500** and above per year) are also available.

Dues can be paid using PayPal through the website (far-b.org) or by mailing a check to FAR-B, P.O. Box 1061, Beltsville, MD 20704-1061.

Please reach out to others about FAR-B membership and the value of our activities.

If you have retired from USDA, please consider serving on the FAR-B Board of Directors.

volunteers. The FAR-B/NEA Aileen Lee Support Staff Award was presented to Patrick Sullivan (Human Studies Facility, BHNRC) to expand his skills by studying accounting. Although we were not able to support students and interns, onsite symposia, science fairs, or BARC Field Day as in the past because of pandemic restrictions, we hope that these opportunities will reappear in 2023.

The present year will be focused on reexamining how FAR-B can operate effectively with the smaller Board, attracting more Board members as well as FAR-B members, reexamining what we should be doing for BARC research, and asking the Beltsville Directors what they would like FAR-B to do for them. Discussions held in 2022 with Beltsville leaders and employees will be expanded to address what FAR-B can do to support inter-laboratory collaborations, especially activities for which Federal funding cannot be used. A major focus will be upgrading and redesigning the FAR-B website as a venue to provide more information on agricultural research (especially at Beltsville) to a wider audience. In support of that goal, FAR-B is supporting a history intern at NAL as part of the “BARC history project” to begin archiving historic documents.

Dave Prevar, Interim President

Treasurer’s Report

FAR-B finances were simplified to accommodate the smaller Board size, shared officer responsibilities, and loss of an experienced treasurer. Three mutual funds that were not doing as well as in previous years were cashed out, and the funds were transferred to the FAR-B business bank account with Truist after its absorption of SunTrust.

FAR-B also received the annual \$1,000 grant from a Donor Advised Fund of the U.S. Charitable Gift Trust in memory of Vernon Pursel, past president and long-time member of the FAR-B Board, to support BARC Poster Day. Those funds are kept available for resumption of that event, which was postponed because of pandemic restrictions.

Dave Prevar, Acting Treasurer

CFC Update

The 2022 Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) resulted in more donors and pledges than last year (11 total), which was a welcome and encouraging sign. However, the total amount in one-time donations and pay-roll deduction pledges (\$2,555) was less. The Board decided that applying for the fall 2023 CFC campaign was not feasible because of the extensive reporting requirements for investment activity. The closing of FAR-B’s investment accounts may make FAR-B participation in CFC less complicated and tedious in the future.

Although no longer participating in CFC at present, FAR-B remains a 503(c)(3) tax-exempt charity and a nonprofit business organization. Donations and pledges from the just-completed 2022 CFC as well as those received directly in 2023 will be used for support of Beltsville research. Former CFC donors can still donate to FAR-B annually or monthly using the link at the bottom of the donation webpage (<http://far-b.org/donations-bequests.html>)

Dave Prevar, CFC

FAR-B/NEA Aileen Lee Support Staff Award

The Aileen Lee Support Staff Award was presented in November 2022 to Patrick Sullivan, a supervisory dietician with the Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center’s Human Study Facility. The award, which promotes advancement of office professionals through training, will assist with tuition and book costs for accounting certification. Patrick’s goal is to provide the new Food for Health of People and the Environment Laboratory with budget management assistance.



*Naomi Fukagawa,
Director, BHNRC*

Patrick Sullivan (HSF, BHNRC),
2022 winner of the FAR-B/NEA
Aileen Lee Support Staff Award
Photo: HSF Staff

FAR-B Annual Meeting

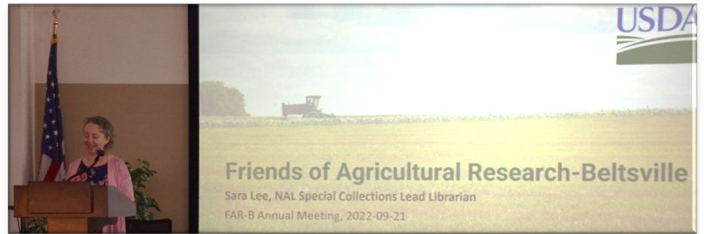
FAR-B held its annual meeting on September 21, 2022. This meeting was the first in-person gathering since 2019. Approximately 60 people attended, and FAR-B welcomed 2 new members.

The event was held at NAL, and Paul Wester, NAL's Director, welcomed attendees and provided an update on NAL activities. After introductions, the FAR-B Board of Directors reported on the past year's activities and asked for input from attendees regarding important support that FAR-B can provide to enhance the work of BARC. Several attendees shared stories of FAR-B support in the past and the impact it had on their work and careers.

Two NAL staff members made presentations. Clayton Ruminski shared NAL efforts in "Supporting Biodiversity Research in Ukraine." Sara Lee provided an overview of NAL's Special Collections and shared details of the specialized storage for rare books, historic papers, and artifacts. She detailed some recent donations received to continue to build unique collections. Sara outlined efforts to support diversity and inclusion and concluded her talk with information on outreach activities.

Following presentations, attendees and participating NAL staff shared lunch. There were plenty of opportunities to enjoy the historic exhibits on NAL's first floor.

Susan Fugate, Recording Secretary
Photos: Jay Green



NAL News

In December, NAL selected 2 graduate students from the University of Maryland's College of Information Studies (iSchool) to work collaboratively on 2 research projects, including the BARC history project. The iSchool Fellows – part of the Digital Curation Fellowship Program funded by NAL and administered with the iSchool – began their orientation work the week of January 23rd as the 2023 spring semester commenced at Maryland. NAL appreciates the financial support FAR-B provided to initiate this important work.

Paul Wester, Director, NAL

Employee Welcome Back

USDA-ARS Beltsville employees had been unable to meet in person socially or to discuss research for 2½ years as a repercussion of the global COVID-19 pandemic. As part of FAR-B's mission to facilitate research and collaboration for Beltsville employees, a Welcome Back Employee Engagement Event and Coffee Break was sponsored in the Bldg. 005 conference room on June 7, 2022, just a week after Beltsville employees were allowed to resume on-site work. The celebration was hosted and attended by Northeast Area Director Dr. Thomas Shanower and Northeast Area Associate Directors Dr. Charles Onwulata and Dr. Rosalind James. After teleworking or isolating in laboratory conditions for so long, Beltsville employees were eager to resume regular on-site work and to meet, greet, and reconnect with colleagues.



Left to right: Aijun Zhang (IIBBL), Michael Sparks (IIBBL), Nickki LaCour-Campbell (NEA OAD), and Don Weber (IIBBL) enjoy refreshments and conversation at the Employee Welcome Back Engagement Event.

Photo: Dawn Gundersen-Rindal

caught up with old and new colleagues. Many scientific discussions transpired, and several research connections and solid collaborations for mission research were forged. Beltsville employees were greatly appreciative of FAR-B's support of all facets of scientific interactions!

*Dawn Gundersen-Rindal, Invasive Insect
Biocontrol & Behavior Laboratory*

Field Research Tour for Stakeholders

About 30 people attended a research tour of the Farming Systems Project (FSP) at BARC on Monday, May 16, 2020, with another dozen attending via Zoom. Participants included personnel from nonprofit organizations that support sustainable and organic farming research; USDA agencies such as the Economic Research Service, Agricultural Marketing Service, and Natural Resources Conservation Service; universities; and Congressional offices. FSP is a long-term research project conducted by scientists in the Sustainable Agricultural Systems Laboratory (SASL) to compare conventional and organic farming methods.

During the 2-hour morning field session, SASL scientists Drs. Michel Cavigelli, Kathryn White, Harry Schomberg, Jude Maul, and Matthew Fischel shared data from the 26 years of FSP research, which highlighted the value of long-term research as the only way to measure factors that change slowly (such as soil carbon sequestration) and the best way to evaluate factors that have high interannual variability (such as crop yields and greenhouse gas emissions). Researchers also discussed the value of long-term research to better understand soil microbiology, nutrient dynamics, and a host of other topics. The FSP is unique among long-term studies because it includes 2 conventional systems that differ in tillage intensity and 3 organic systems that differ in crop rotation length. Although organic systems had greater soil carbon, higher soil fertility, and better economic performance, conventional systems had higher crop yields. FSP results show the multiple tradeoffs in agricultural system performance as well as provide insights on ways to improve agricultural sustainability in the United States. Plenty of time was made available for questions and discussion, and the

audience engaged in great discussions about agricultural sustainability.

Those conversations continued as participants moved to the Log Lodge National Visitor's Center for a catered lunch, which was provided by FAR-B along with organic flower arrangements from a local source. Many thanks to Susan Fugate of FAR-B and the SASL volunteers that assisted with lunch.

After lunch, SASL scientists and ARS National Program Leader Dr. Sarah Beebout facilitated discussion of future research directions for FSP and the organic sector in general. The FSP is part of a USDA-ARS project that is going through the Office of Scientific Quality Review renewal process this year, and stakeholder feedback is an important part of the planning process. The tour provided a great opportunity to seek stakeholder feedback. Stakeholders were very supportive of the on-going FSP research and were very interested in future research directions that included delving more deeply into the aspects of soil science that can help explain the higher fertility found in organic systems.

Michel Cavigelli, Sustainable Agricultural Systems Laboratory

Mobile Science Lab at Beltsville Academy

FAR-B sponsored a mobile science lab at Beltsville Academy, the public elementary school that serves the Beltsville community, on November 14–18, 2022. Operated by the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation (MAEF), the mobile laboratory was the first exposure that many of the students had to hands-on science. Each class performed an age-appropriate experiment with assistance from a MAEF teacher along with BARC and BHNRC volunteers. The pre-K through 2nd graders learned that pizza comes from agricultural products and made a bag of charms to take home representing the various components and ingredients that are used to make pizza. The 3rd through 5th graders started an experiment they could follow for several days to germinate soybean seeds in a small cup with a plaster of Paris substrate. They also made lip balm from beeswax, soybean oil and mint extract to take home. Several hundred students visited the mobile lab over the

week and the responses were enthusiastically positive from students and teachers alike. Ten Beltsville employees were volunteer teaching assistants for the week-long project. This has been a mainstay project of FAR-B for many years, and all were glad to see it return after an almost 3-year hiatus during the pandemic.

Gary Kinard, National Germplasm Resources Laboratory
Photos: Gary Kinard



Bldg. 307 Ribbon Cutting

USDA leadership and local elected officials cut the ceremonial red ribbon for newly renovated Bldg. 307, BARC-East, on December 5, 2022. This was the building's first renovation since being constructed over 80 years ago (circa 1939). The design-build team's broad sustainable strategy included:

- Historic preservation,
- Electric vehicle charging stations,
- Site habitat restoration,
- Efficient water use,
- Energy performance,
- Enhanced commissioning,
- Utility metering,
- Sustainable materials, and
- Responsible waste management.

The U.S. Green Building Council awarded the modernization project a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design silver certificate. The renovation of Bldg. 307 will allow USDA scientists in the Animal Biosciences & Biotechnology Laboratory and the Environmental Microbial & Food Safety Laboratory to work in water and energy efficient offices and laboratories that lend to a reduced carbon footprint and high indoor quality environment. FAR-B funded the catering for the ribbon cutting event.

Suzanne Hubbard, Interim Editor



Left to right: Simon Liu (ARS Administrator), Chavonda Jacobs-Young (USDA Under Secretary, REE/Chief Scientist), Jewel Bronaugh (USDA Deputy Secretary), Steven Kappes (ARS Associate Administrator, NP), Joon Park (ARS Acting Associate Administrator, RMO), Jeffrey Silverstein (NPS Deputy Administrator, APP), Rosalind James (NEA Associate Area Director, Dariusz Swietlik (retired NEA Director), Howard Zhang (BARC Director), and Julie Long (ABBL Research Leader)

Photo: Peggy Greb

In Memoriam



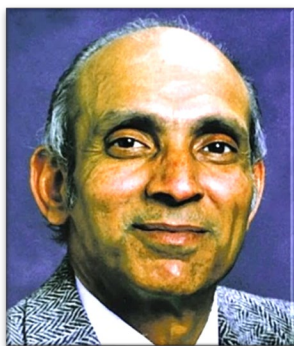
Lewis W. Smith
Jan. 13, 1937 – Jan. 22, 2022

Dr. Lewis Smith passed away at the age of 85 on Saturday, January 22, 2022, in North Bethesda, MD. Lew was born in York, PA, on January 13, 1937, and grew up on the family's dairy farm in Baltimore County, MD. Life on the farm gave Lew a strong work ethic and a deep thirst for science. This combination served him well as he earned a full-ride scholarship to attend the University of Maryland to become a scientist. While at Maryland, Lew earned a B.S. in dairy science as well as an M.S. and Ph.D. in animal science.

Lew's career of over 45 years with USDA began in 1961, and he held positions as a scientist, research leader, and institute director before joining the National Program Staff as a National Program Leader. As Director of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center's Animal Science Institute, Lew determined the direction of future animal and dairy science research at Beltsville. His most recent responsibilities before retiring as a senior National Program Leader centered on USDA research programs for aquaculture and animal well-being. During his career, Lew (co)authored over 125 scientific reports.

Lew's life revolved around his family. Nothing made him happier than being with his family around the dining room table, using his culinary talents, and picking just the right bottle of wine to share. He was particularly proud of his grandson, Will, who earned his private pilot's license before he could even drive a car.

Even though Lew left the farm, his love for farming never left him. Lew loved to be outside in his gardens. Family, friends, neighbors, and strangers all benefitted from the legendary fruits (and vegetables) of his labor. Lew was also a world traveler. He enjoyed learning about new cultures, cuisines, and wines and traveled the world with his wife Kay, his family, and good friends. He caught the travel bug at work from traveling to share his research and to learn from his peers in other countries.



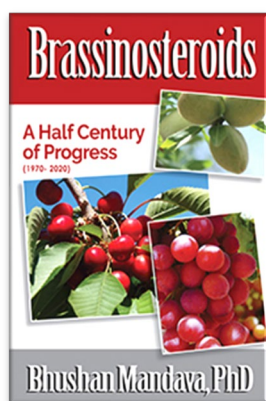
Naga Bhushan Mandava
Oct. 14, 1934 – July 7, 2022

Bhushan Mandava passed away at the age of 87 in Potomac, MD, on Thursday, July 7, 2022. He was born on October 14, 1934, in Andhra Pradesh, India. Bhushan received his Ph.D. from the Indian Institute of Sciences in Bangalore, India in 1962. The family immigrated to the United States in 1963

on a fellowship at Oklahoma State University.

A renowned scientist notable for his work in agriculture, Bhushan dedicated 24 years of public service to USDA and EPA, where he was involved in the discovery of the 6th class of plant hormones: brassinosteroids. He served as president of the Washington section of the American Chemical Society (ACS) and as a counselor, career consultant, and ACS ambassador for over 25 years. He received the prestigious Hillebrand Award in 1986 and served as Director of United Nations agencies (UNIDO, UNDP, and FAO) to advise 15 countries in Asia and the Pacific region on agricultural productivity and crop safety. Bhushan held 4 U.S. and Canadian patents as well as published over 170 papers and, 2 books; he edited 6 books on naturally occurring pesticides.

Bhushan was a kindred spirit who touched many people across different communities. He was an iconic pillar in the communities he helped create. His greatest impact was on his family and the Telugu community. His spirit is carried on through his loving life partner of 66 years, Leela, and their son Srinivas, daughter Santi and son-in-law Milan; grandchildren Natasha, Shaan, Nikhil, and Kosh as well as extended family and friends.



Debra Jo Dispenza Creel
Oct. 20, 1952 – July 30, 2022

Debra Creel passed away on Saturday, July 30, 2022. Debbie was born on October 20, 1952; grew up in Lewisdale, MD; and graduated from Regina High School in 1970. She received a B.S. in Biological Sciences from the University of Maryland at Baltimore in 1974. She joined the Systematic Entomology Laboratory

(SEL) at BARC in 1993 as a Museum Specialist and worked there for 29 years.

For those who experienced her sense of dedication and love for the collections, her passing has left a profound gap at SEL. Entering her office was like walking into a Disney studio filled with ruby dyes and precise tools for identifying insects or preparing them for accession into the vast Smithsonian Institution collection. She prepared thousands of specimens, recorded their collection data, and curated countless others. She answered requests for information from around the world. She was integral in shaping and integrating the programs and regulations for processing collection material. She was the unsung hero of the slide-mounted specimens (over 1 million!) of the National Insect and Mite Collections, with nearly 5 million specimens hosted at BARC. Debbie was a liaison for SEL to maintain efficient communication with other laboratories, the Safety and Occupational Health Unit, and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service – Plant Protection and Quarantine. She helped with more than 1,500 identifications of insects of quarantine importance. She was the “glue” to keep the lab working and accomplish its mission.

As a Maryland Terps football season ticket holder for 20 years, she was a spirited fan and decorated her office with “Fear the Turtle” decals to support her love of Maryland’s sports teams. She always stayed until the end of every game, no matter the weather or outcome.

Debbie is survived by her husband John B. Creel, Jr., daughters Carolyn M. Creel (Pete Tzamaras) and Gina Paulette Creel (Donald Keith Linthicum), and brother Thomas W. Dispenza (Elizabeth Dispenza).

2023 FAR-B BOARD

Friends of Agricultural Research – Beltsville, Inc.

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