United States Department of Agriculture
Research, Education and Economics
Agricultural Research Service

July 17, 2008

SUBJECT: Notification of Information Staff Concerning Important Papers

TO: Center/Laboratory Directors
Research Leaders

FROM: W.H. Blackburn, Area Director /s/

Are you or your scientists considering publishing your results in a scientific journal, such as Nature, Science, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), or other significant journal that has far reaching implications? Are you working with collaborators whose own institution is preparing a press release on a significant finding that lists you and the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) as a collaborator? If the answer to either of these questions is yes, the ARS-Information Staff (IS) would like to know as soon as possible. IS had several instances lately where a possibility existed for ARS to have a really great story about a scientist's research, but found out too late in the game to get the ARS News Service story written and cleared in time to come out at the same time as the journal article or the collaborator's press release. If the collaborators decide to develop a press release or news feed that mentions the ARS scientists, ARS or the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), it is USDA policy that the collaborator must review the release before it goes out.

We understand the necessity for keeping information and articles from public consumption until after the article has been published online or in print. However, that does not preclude you from working with IS to prepare releases and news feeds ahead of the publication so they can prepare the necessary information and get it cleared through the Department (a process that can take several days). If a collaborating institution releases a news story, it precludes the possibility of ARS releasing something similar and receiving credit for our ARS research. Often the other institution may or may not mention ARS, thus an opportunity is lost.

In these days of flat resources, it is extremely important we convey to the public the good work ARS does while utilizing taxpayer's resources. If we wait until the paper is published, a period of several weeks may ensue before the news release can be prepared, approved and made public. In the meantime, either the Journal or the collaborator may release the story.

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IS has an excellent reputation for working with collaborating institutions, writing stories, allowing scientists to comment on the language, then disseminating widely the information.

We are requesting you and your staff work with IS should a major breakthrough occur in your research unit. Please keep the Area Office 'in the loop' as you communicate with IS.

If you have any questions, please contact Sandy Miller Hays. Sandy can be reached at 301-504-1636 or sandy.millerhays@ars.usda.gov.

cc:
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