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

November 15, 2011

SUBJECT: Long-Term Agro-ecosystem Research (LTAR) Network – Upper Mississippi River Basin LTAR

TO: Steven R. Shafer, Deputy Administrator
Natural Resources and Sustainable Agricultural Systems

Mark Walbridge, National Program Leader
Natural Resources and Sustainable Agricultural Systems

FROM: Laurence D. Chandler, Director /s/ 11/15/11

The USDA-ARS National Laboratory for Agriculture and Environment (NLAE), the ARS North Central Soil Conservation Research Laboratory (NCSCRL), the ARS Soil and Water Management Research Unit (SWMRU), and the University of Wisconsin-Platteville Pioneer Farm have together formed a consortium with an expressed interest in formally affiliating with the ARS Long-Term Agro-Ecosystem Research (LTAR) Network. The Midwest Area Office supports their application to be a part of this new opportunity and feels that the combined assets of three ARS laboratories and a key university partner could play an important role in the overall success of the LTAR efforts.

The three above mentioned ARS laboratories have been involved in soil and water conservation research for thirty plus years. Each laboratory brings unique scientific expertise and capabilities to the proposed project. Access to a geographically dispersed network of 5 watersheds and a multitude of ancillary field sites provides a sound basis for the group to adequately support the LTAR concept. An ARS team of 20 research scientists, numerous support staff and a large number of collaborating scientists provides a sound basis for the conduct of LTAR related activities. All scientists involved in this effort have an excellent record of scientific productivity and we expect their productivity and problem solving capabilities to continue well into the future. The scientists have developed excellent collaborations outside of each of their management units and also have substantial stakeholder interest and support of their research programs. We expect these partnerships to be sustained over the coming years.

Office of the Director, Midwest Area
1815 North University St.
Peoria, Illinois 61604
Phone: 309-681-6602 Fax: 309-681-6684
An Equal Opportunity Employer

The key to the success of this collaborative effort is access to excellent facilities and research infrastructure. The 5 watersheds are equipped with water sampling and monitoring devices, as well as the ability to measure various environmental/climate related parameters. In addition, the 10 associated field sites provide ample opportunity to augment watershed activities and provide needed information related to long term cropping systems, renewable energy, subsurface drainage, etc. All scientists have access to excellent laboratory and office space, an efficient IT infrastructure, and access to numerous analytical tools at their location and via access with assets of their numerous collaborators.

No one can guarantee that any of the participating ARS laboratories will be in existence at the some point in the future. The budgetary constraints all labs are facing may result in various laboratory management changes in coming years. However it is obvious that within structure of this proposed LTAR, the current scientific staff each is well positioned to maintain current programs, continue high quality research and collect important data needed to support the LTAR endeavor. Long term funding guarantees will remain an issue, but if current funding remains somewhat predictable over the coming years this group should continue to be a viable research entity in comprehensive natural resource research efforts. I strongly support inclusion of the Upper Mississippi River Basin group in the LTAR Network and approve the participation of the three ARS units included in this application.