

TO: WIB Executive Committee

DATE: 03/29/04

FROM: WIB Staff

For Action

For Information

For Discussion

SUBJECT: Additional Information regarding the Central Valley Agri-Food Research Institute

PROPOSED MOTION(S): Information Only.

DISCUSSION: At the March 11, 2004 WIB Meeting, staff was directed to clarify the funds request and support for the project, and provide a more detailed description of the project.

A letter of support from UC Merced Chancellor Carol Tomlinson-Keasey dated December 5, 2003 was written to Carol Whiteside from the Great Valley Center. Also, communication from the Great Valley Center on February 5, 2004, confirms that letters of commitment to raise \$32,000 (the request to the WIB was for \$10,000 of that amount), were required by May 1, 2004, which coincides with the initiation of the grant. In order to receive the entire \$32,000 from EDA a local cash contribution commitment of \$10,000 will be needed at that time. The Great Valley Center proposes a project to develop a business plan to create a Central Valley Agri-Food Research Institute at UC Merced. The purpose of the institute is to expand the economic diversity of the Central Valley around its primary agricultural base, create high paying jobs, provide training opportunities for the local workforce, and enhance economic growth in a region that is underserved, has high unemployment, low paying jobs, and the fastest projected growth rate in the state.

The following details the planning for creating the Central Valley Agri-Food Research Institute.

Project Concept

The Great Valley Center proposes a project to develop a business plan to create a Central Valley Agri-Food Research Institute at UC Merced. The purpose of the institute is to expand the economic diversity of the Central Valley around its primary agricultural base, create high paying jobs, provide training opportunities for the local workforce, and enhance economic growth in a region that is underserved, has high unemployment, low paying jobs, and the fastest projected growth rate in the state.

A Unique Institute

The Institute will bring together agriculture, engineering, technology, and business to focus on the application of information science to the agri-food industry from seed production to product delivery including such areas as regulatory compliance, environmental impact monitoring, and quality assurance. It will identify, research, develop, apply, and transfer information-, analysis-, and communications-technologies to help agri-food and related businesses and organizations become more efficient, competitive, sustainable, and responsive to the changing global marketplace and regulatory environment. The Institute will be unique because it will research and develop information- and communications-based technologies for the agri-food sector that can help businesses reduce costs, make more efficient use of resources, and create higher value products.

The Institute will encourage the formation and growth of companies developing and marketing products and services utilizing informatics, a new field of research that brings together the activities of data collection and analysis for decision making. Agri-food and related industries will participate in collaborative research, educational programs, training, technology transfer, conferences, and publications pertaining to a broad range of crops as well as dairy and livestock. The Institute will work in collaboration with public and private research, development, and educational organizations to identify and address challenges in areas related to its mission.

Two Phase Process The Agri-Food Research Institute will be created in two phases:

- 1. Development of the business plan, coordinated by the Great Valley Center.**
- 2. Implementation of the research and educational programs, conducted by UC Merced.**

The Great Valley Center will seek competitive proposals to complete the scope of work. It will hire and supervise the consultant(s) who will prepare the business plan. Preparation of the business plan will be done collaboratively with UC Merced, industry, government, and additional interested parties to ensure that the plan has the support of interested stakeholders.

At the completion of the development of the business plan, the expectation is that UC Merced will take responsibility for the operation of the Institute with some on-going support from the Great Valley Center. The business plan will help provide information to UC Merced as it develops related plans including incubators and a potential adjacent research park.

Anticipated Benefits

The goal of the Institute is to generate new ideas and technologies that can be put to practical use to benefit industry, the economy, and the environment.

The Institute will conduct research that is expected to have ancillary benefits for the following significant regional issues:

- **Developing regionally appropriate economic development strategies for agri-food businesses.**
- **Helping agri-food businesses use computing and communications technologies to become more competitive.**
- **Encouraging job creation and local workforce training in new and existing businesses serving the agri-food industry.**
- **Helping resolve agriculture-related natural resources issues including land use, water, and air quality.**
- **Fostering collaboration among the diverse sectors of the agri-food industry.**
- **Raising the reputation of California's Central Valley as a center for innovation.**

The Institute will serve as a gathering point for agri-technologists to talk, to network, and to develop technologies that might be spun off to start or support local business. It will attract compatible investment, encourage a new cluster of related business, and create new jobs.

The Agri-Food Research Institute will help transform the Valley's agri-food industry and the regional economy. It will be an important catalyst connecting the research community with the private sector and developing a network to enhance innovative agri-technology.

It is appropriately placed in California's Central Valley, premier producer of agricultural and food products.

Proposed Time Line

This 12 month project will begin in January 2004 and be completed by January 2005.

For further information

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ATTACHMENT(S): N/A