

Kansas Association of Counties/K-State Research and Extension Dialogue
Working Together for Lasting Solutions

10:00-3:00

September 20, 2012

Summary Report

Participants: Randall Allen, Gary Baker, Ben Bennett, Daryl Buchholz, Dale Fjell, Jim Lindquist, Richard Malm, J. D. McNutt, John Miller, Tim Norton, Chris Onstad, Duane Patrick, Kimberly Skillman-Robrahn, Phil Sloderbeck

Moderator: David Procter

Recorder: Trudy Rice

Note: See last page of this report for additional details on the participants

Overview

County Commissioners serving on the Kansas Association of Counties Board of Directors and Area Directors from K-State Research and Extension, hosted by the Executive Director of Kansas Association of Counties and the Associate Director of K-State Research and Extension, met together on September 20, 2012 to discuss how to build upon the historic partnership between K-State Research and Extension and County Government. The facilitated dialogue was designed to explore ways in which both organizations can continue to work together for mutual benefit as they strive to address the current and emerging needs of the people who live and work in Kansas in the most efficient and effective way possible.

Identified Outcomes for the dialogue were:

- Increased understanding of the mission of each organization
- Identification of strengths/resources each organization brings to the table
- Identification of current and future needs/opportunities of each organization
- Explore ways to strengthen the partnership for the benefit of the people of Kansas
- Determine next steps

This report summarizes the high points of the discussion which contributed to meeting each of the above identified outcomes. It is intended to be used to inform additional representatives from each organization about the dialogue, guide future actions of each organization as they move forward to strengthen the relationship and, referred to when planning additional conversations including these two partners and potentially additional partners.

Daryl Buchholz shared how this initiative was started at the national level between the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) and National Association of Counties (NACo) and he saw an opportunity to bring it to the state and local level. Randall Allen shared that he was excited about the day and in his recollection it had never been done before. Everyone agreed it was past time and complimentary that it was happening.

The day's dialog was launched with an opportunity for all participants to share when they each became associated with the other organization. This was very interesting with the majority of the County Commissioners becoming familiar with KSRE either as a youth involved in 4-H and/or by serving on the local Extension Board. The County Commissioners emphasized at this time that most people associate Extension with 4-H or agriculture with some recognizing Extension's role in community leadership development and health education.

The KSRE staff in attendance shared that most of them became familiar with the role of the County Commissioners through working with them on land use policy, working with the elected official in their farming business as a KSRE specialist or, most often, when working with the County Commission to secure the annual budget for the local unit Extension program. Some shared their role with Extension in other states and how it had included elected training for and about county government. Most shared that they were very appreciative of the complexity of the issues that elected officials have to deal with and recognized that KSRE is a small piece of their budgets.

During this discussion the following comments/questions were shared for future discussion:

- How do newly elected County Commissioners learn about Extension?
- The Extension District concept is working great and has provided additional opportunities.
- There are 105 different perceptions of Extension.
- Is Extension in need of a new mission-has their time come and gone?
- Extension is absolutely necessary however, the changing demographics and technology impacts the delivery.
- Is Extension relevant in urban communities?
- What are the state mandates related to Extension and core services?
- Extension is a key element in providing services to the people in the county.
- Extension is unknown, forgotten, and misplaced. There is a need for a new marketing plan.
- Local decision makers need to understand the broad mission of Extension.
- Extension needs to re-brand and re-tool.

Increased Understanding of the Mission of each Organization

It was shared that by direction of United States Department of Agriculture and State of Kansas statute KSRE has 4 core mission areas that include:

- Agriculture
- Community Development
- Family and Consumer Sciences
- 4-H and Youth Development

In addition to this it was shared that KSRE has a strategic plan that addresses current issues that we provide educational support to. These include the following: *Sustain profitable agricultural production systems; prepare people in Kansas to thrive in a global society and all aspects of life; Identify pathways for efficient and sustainable energy use; Ensure an abundant and safe food supply for all; Enhance effective decision making regarding environmental stewardship; Assist communities in becoming sustainable and resilient to uncertainties of economics, weather, health, and security; Create opportunities and support people in Kansas to improve their physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being.*

As County Commissioners discussed their purpose being to provide for the health and safety of the people in their counties through generating revenue and funding essential services the following questions were raised:

- Does the mission of extension support current needs or does it need to be revised and is it relevant in both rural and urban counties?
- How can we communicate the relevancy of programs for both rural and urban youth and adults?
- Is there a perceived disconnect between County Commissioners and KSRE?
- Is collaboration with other organizations part of the KSRE mission?

This discussion was concluded with suggestions to simplify the mission, rank the priority programs, re-brand extension, and seek additional partners to participate in these discussions.

Identification of Strengths/Resources each Organization Brings to the Table

When asked of the County Commissioners if KSRE adds value to their responsibilities the conclusion was most likely/maybe and how can we enhance the value of it.

The following examples were given: work with diverse populations; planning and zoning; health issues; agriculture education to the urban audience; environmental issues with the Soil Conservation Districts; family issues through JJA; VITA volunteers; community health assessments, etc..

Several County Commissioners indicated that sometimes they do not bring KSRE in soon enough and need to ask of themselves “how can we do it better” in reference to tapping the resources of KSRE.

Identification of Current and Future Needs/Opportunities of Each Organization

KSRE participants shared that their challenges to providing cutting edge educational programs at the local level include: *funding of the local unit-however districting has improved this; agents being specialists vs. generalist; diverse ways to communicate; staff turnover; differences among counties in expectations of KSRE and funding philosophies; stressed economy; communicating the scope and impact of our programs; local needs vs. skills of the agent; generational challenge of work ethic and expectations; franchise model in that KSRE is only as good as the local program; marketing and branding; robust staff; multiple employers of local staff; concept of taking the research to the people; current and relevant information.*

KAC Participants shared their challenges as: *state legislative decisions and follow through; declining valuations; unfunded mandate; broken inter local agreements; growth; election turnover; more with less or less with less; public perception of the power of the County Commission; SB 59; declining tax base; home rule authority; overlap of services; public understanding of KSRE; knowledge transfer vs. research and teaching.*

It was discussed that the important issues for people of Kansas include:

- Water
- Health
- Public Safety
- Jobs-including the agribusiness arena
- The next generation of leaders

Explore Ways to Strengthen the Partnership for the Benefit of the People of Kansas

When asked how KSRE can be leveraged to assist counties with these and other emerging issues it was suggested that a systems approach including city, county, state, and university to coordinate services would be the ultimate. It is important for all to continue to look for local partnerships. We need to look at working more closely with regulatory agencies to educate the public on how to meet the regulations; shift 4-H from a traditional model to meet the needs of all youth; and emphasize education as an investment not a cost.

The following was discussed as potential action items in the future:

- Use each organizations' communication tools to increase understanding of issues and effective programming approaches between organizations
- Have a presence at the Annual Meeting of each other's organization
- Enhance the training program for new County Commissioners and new Extension Agents to better understand the role of each organization
- Bring additional organizations into the conversation such as Kansas Association of Health Departments to explore ways to build upon the strengths of each organization
- A discussion on the future delivery structure of KSRE
- A discussion related to the marketing of KSRE including mission and branding
- A discussion on what the future relationship between KAC and KSRE should be

Determine next steps

It was determined at the end of the day that the following should happen:

- Meeting notes will be distributed to all participants.
- A list of possible next steps will be distributed to each organization to respond to as “very important” “important” or “not important at this time”.
- A follow up meeting will be organized to design an approach to take action on the “very important” and possibly “important” next steps.
- Most importantly, this was seen as only a first step and this type of conversation needs to continue!

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Kansas Association of Counties

Gary Baker, Stevens County Commissioner
Board Member, Kansas Association of Counties

Ben Bennett, Geary County Commissioner
Board Member, Kansas Association of Counties

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John Miller, Norton County Commissioner
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Tim Norton, Sedgwick County Commissioner
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Duane Patrick, McPherson County Commissioner
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Faciliator: David Procter, Director, Center for Engagement and Community Development, Kansas
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Recorder: Trudy Rice, Associate Specialist Community Development, K-State Research and Extension