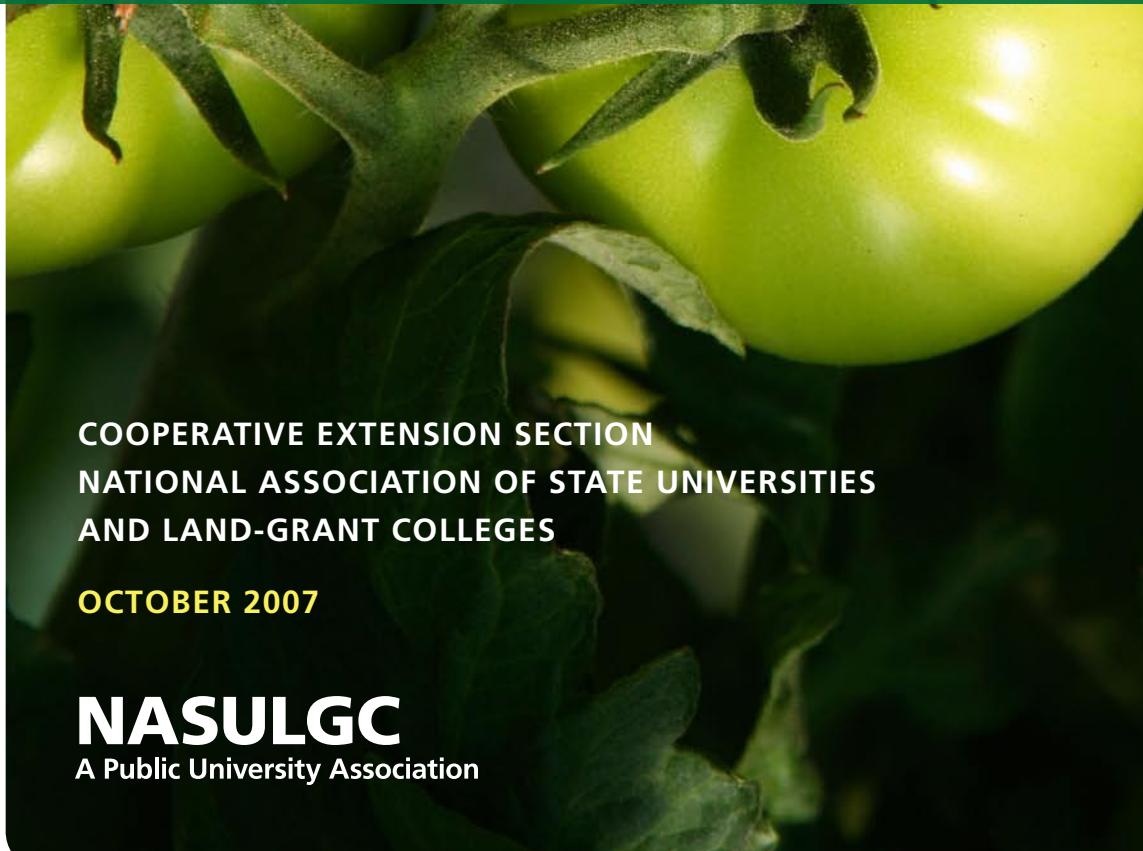




Strategic Opportunities for Cooperative Extension



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SECTION
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE UNIVERSITIES
AND LAND-GRANT COLLEGES

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THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

at each of the Nation's land-grant universities and colleges is a powerful presence in moving the country forward in the 21st Century. As the country's population has changed over the years, historic links to colleges of agricultural sciences and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have expanded to include partnerships across the educational enterprise of the university and to many other federal agencies. The deep connections to citizens at the grassroots level are fostered by close relationships to local and county governments. The local-state-federal partnerships now include new relationships that take the efforts into all communities and neighborhoods across the U.S. Extension's potential is bounded only by its imagination and creativity; thus the need for identifying priority opportunities.

In this new century, opportunities exist to help advance America's greatness in the midst of many challenges. Energy, water, food, environment, health, economic productivity, global competitiveness, and the quality of the living environments are all paramount to the future. Extension is, as a part of higher education, prepared to create new knowledge and to participate as co-learners with others. Extension is positioned and prepared to engage in education to meet the challenges—**opportunities**—of this new century.

This document portrays the opportunities the Cooperative Extension System envisions as priorities in serving the country and its citizens.

A survey of Cooperative Extension Directors/Administrators was undertaken to determine the level of agreement among the Cooperative Extension System with each opportunity and the specific priorities under each. Sixty-two (62) institutions with Cooperative Extension programs responded to the survey. The summary of the results is shown in the following document.

- First, each of the seven opportunities is designated by the percent of respondents that rated the opportunity very important.
- Second, the priorities are designated with the percentage of respondents that selected the priority among their top three for that opportunity.
- Finally, the priorities are reordered so that the highest priorities are listed first. Using a breakpoint at 40% provides a list of the top priorities under each opportunity. Three or four priorities are thus highlighted for each opportunity.

Create pathways to energy independence.
89%

Assure an abundant and safe food supply for all.
85%

Sustain profitable plant and animal production systems.
84%

Prepare youth, families and individuals for success in the global workforce and all aspects of life.
84%

Assist in effective decision-making regarding environmental stewardship.
82%

Help U.S. residents to become physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy.
82%

Assist communities in becoming sustainable and resilient to the uncertainties of economics, weather, health, and security.
58%

Extension's strategic opportunities are to:



Create pathways to energy independence.

Top Responses

- Increase knowledge through science-based energy efficiency technologies and energy conservation to develop greater energy independence among consumers (youth and adults in households, farmers/ranchers, and small business, industry, and government sectors). **75%**
- Reduce U.S. dependence on fossil fuels through the effective implementation of renewable energy production, transportation and, marketing and distribution systems. **61%**
- Build local, regional and state leaders' understanding of the economic impacts and trade-offs of alternative energy production models, and provide the tools they need to address the unintended consequences of the bio-economy. **54%**

Other Responses

- Increase the use by decision makers of integrated approaches to policy and planning with regard to renewable energy that address opportunities and impacts at local, regional and national levels. **36%**
- Increase the ability of local communities to retain wealth generated by expanding the production and use of renewable energy. **26%**
- Increase the safe use of bioenergy co-products in animal production systems. **25%**
- Increase the understanding among consumers (youth and adults) of the linkage of energy use to the issue of global climate change. **16%**

Other Suggestions and Comments

- Reduce energy consumption through energy conservation at all levels.
- Assist agricultural producers in changing their farm organization (crop mixes and rotations, etc.) in response the historically unprecedented changes in market prices cause by biofuel feed stock demands.
- Positioning the grain production sector in U. S. Corn Belt for addressing the vertical integration in the bio-fuels/polymer industry.
- Increase understanding among government agencies of the linkage of energy use to the issue of global climate change.
- Along with bioenergy development, such as cellulosic ethanol, natural resource conservation practices need to be emphasized with any initiative.



Assure an abundant and safe food supply for all.

85%

Top Responses

- Reduce food borne illnesses and diseases by improving food preparation, processing, and handling practices at the individual, family, production, and supply system levels. **79%**
- Increase limited-resource families' and communities' access to local, safe, nutritious, and affordable foods. **60%**
- Enhance consumer's knowledge and understanding of healthy food options. **58%**
- Strengthen local and regional food systems. **42%**

Other Responses

- Increase use of locally produced food to maximize quality and minimize long distance transport. **34%**
- Increase use of fresh and healthy foods in institutional settings. **24%**

Other Suggestions and Comments

- Explore and help develop marketing alternatives.
- Educate consumers about the nature and economics of the food supply system.
- Provide alternatives for commercial relations of US Territories and Insular Areas, particularly in the Caribbean, in order to reduce costs of merchant maritime companies.



Sustain profitable plant and animal production systems.

84%

Top Responses

- Increase the sustainability and profitability of agriculture, forestry, and green industries. **74%**
- Increase and diversify the number and success of profitable alternative agricultural and forestry enterprises, value-added and niche markets, and organic production systems. **74%**
- Strengthen environmentally sustainable non-food and non-fiber agricultural production such as turf, nursery, ornamental horticulture, and equine. **40%**

Other Responses

- Stabilize the number of agricultural producers in and near metropolitan areas by helping them remain economically, socially, and environmentally viable. **31%**
- Increase consumer understanding of the impact of agricultural policies. **18%**
- Decrease threats from invasive species and pests. **18%**
- Increase small farmers' risk management practices to ensure sustainability. **15%**
- Increase on-farm research around untested, high-risk practices, and communicate the results to farmers; help producers anticipate and cope with the unintended consequences of alternative enterprises and practices. **11%**
- Decrease risks to agricultural security. **11%**
- Improve biosecurity through animal identification and country of origin tracking. **5%**
- Reduce the number of agricultural accidents by increasing worker safety. **2%**

Other Suggestions and Comments

- Address water issues
- Irrigation capture
- Storage of water
- The integration of a bio-based fuels industry into our current food - feed - fiber production system.
- Enhance global competitiveness of agricultural and food enterprises.



84%

Prepare youth, families and individuals for success in the global workforce and all aspects of life.

Top Responses

- Increase the number of youth selecting science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses, majors and careers by providing multiple ways to engage youth in STEM experiential activities. **79%**
- Increase financial literacy and financial independence of youth and adults. **55%**
- Build cohesive multicultural communities and workplaces through training, engagement, leadership, and service opportunities for adults and youth. **45%**
- Expand workforce readiness in youth and adults through training and retraining that focuses on high-demand skills. **40%**

Other Responses

- Increase the success of traditional and non-traditional families, including grandparents who raise grandchildren, by strengthening parenting skills and raising confidence through training programs, group experiences and one-on-one mentoring relationships. **31%**
- Build research capabilities among youth through after-school programs that involve youth as participants in scientific research endeavors. **16%**
- Expand the number of seniors successfully living in their own homes as long as possible by teaching "aging in place" skills to seniors and family members. **13%**
- Increase the access, stability, security, and safety of housing for low-income and middle-income families. **11%**
- Decrease the effects of divorce, loss, and other stressful events on families through education, self-help programs, and group encounters. **2%**
- Increase Internet safety for children, youth, and their families. **2%**

Other Suggestions and Comments

- Build personal skills in youth including self-esteem, decision-making, consumerism, and leadership.
- Internet safety is important, but we also need to shift the focus to the high level of opportunities from online activities.
- Increase the level of formal educational attainment.



82%

Assist in effective decision-making regarding environmental stewardship.

Top Responses

- Improve water quality and accessibility through seasonal management, watershed protection and enhancement, water- and chemical-sensitive agriculture and horticulture production systems, xeriscaping, and responsible irrigation. **56%**
- Build understanding around environmental issues and competing land, including the rural/urban interdependence. **53%**
- Increase low impact development, storm-water management, urban forestry, environmentally responsible horticulture, and access to renewable energy. **44%**

Other Responses

- Reduce Non-Point Source (NPS) pollution by agriculture and natural resource producers, homeowners, commercial developers and green industry businesses. **39%**
- Maintain rural landscapes and improve urban green spaces by developing capacity for decision making, community building and policy formulation. **29%**
- Increase sustainable land use planning through natural resource enhancement and multiple land uses, e.g., consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife activities and recreation. **27%**
- Increase decision makers' understanding and use of watershed approaches in implementing environmental enhancement, restoration, and conservation measures. **24%**
- Build a knowledge repository that leads to improved decision making as it relates to global changes, i.e., temperature, moisture, cropping systems, and sea and lake levels. **15%**
- Improve housing conditions related to indoor air quality, weatherization, and radon, heating and cooling efficiency. **13%**

Other Suggestions and Comments

- Teaching individuals to prepare their homes against the threat of wildfire in the urban interface areas.
- Proactively resolve conflicts related to the use and management of natural resources.



Help U.S. residents to become physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy.

Top Response

- Improve overall health and decrease obesity in children, youth, and adults. **97%**
- Increase ability to avoid and manage chronic health conditions. **45%**
- Improve the health and well being of the growing senior population. **42%**

Other Responses

- Increase affordability and accessibility of health care and health insurance for limited-resource populations to reduce income-related health disparities. **37%**
- Assist community leaders in addressing land-use policies to encourage the creation of safe, walkable neighborhoods and communities that are conducive to recreation and physical activity. **31%**
- Reduce the use of addictive substances by creating community support systems and educating youth and adults about prevention, cessation, early diagnosis, and treatment of addiction related behaviors. **19%**
- Reduce the incidence of eating disorders among young people. **11%**
- Reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies among youth and young adults. **5%**
- Increase access to mental health resources for youth and adults. **3%**
- Reduce the incidence of injuries and fatalities caused by youth and aging drivers. **0%**

Other Suggestions and Comments

- Increase availability of health care facilities and personnel in rural areas.
- Promote healthy weight through holistic approaches that address complex issues such as food choice, physical activity, family and workplace support, community environments and other factors that impact health.
- Improve nutritional status of residents, especially low income and disadvantaged populations.



58%

Assist communities in becoming sustainable and resilient to the uncertainties of economics, weather, health, and security.

Top Responses

- Increase civic and social responsibility among youth and adults in urban and rural communities by developing and enhancing leadership, citizenship, and public participation skills through partnerships which lead to sustainable communities. **82%**
- Improve community economic capacity through retaining and growing wealth opportunities by developing and providing tools in marketing, entrepreneurship, risk analysis, and decision-making for both adults and youth. **77%**
- Enhance preparedness for state and local emergencies by improving communication between community leaders and state and federal agencies, developing strategies for emergency planning, infrastructure design and operation, and by developing community networks that provide educational disaster information. **52%**

Other Responses

- Enhance community vitality by identifying and strengthening community drivers of change and intellectual capacity. **37%**
- Increase capacity within communities to identify and address stresses resulting from significant population diversity and other shifts. **19%**
- Increase the capacity of residents to make effective decisions regarding the transfer of wealth and assets from one generation to the next. **16%**
- Increase internet capacity and accessibility in all communities. **8%**

Other Suggestions and Comments

- Prepare communities for growth and the environmental impacts of growth.
- Entrepreneurship should focus on how to grow entrepreneurs.
- Create living wage jobs through retention and expansion of existing businesses, supporting local entrepreneurs, facilitating the use of technologies, and educating the workforce for tomorrow.
- Develop environmentally sensitive management capabilities.



Other Comments

- It should be acknowledged that continued support or increase in base or capacity funds (formula funds) allows Extension to provide many of the educational programs already being developed or utilized.
- Continue to include the under served and limited resource populations in all decision making activities.
- Although not spelled out within each program priority, limited-resource individuals, families and communities are inherently an important target audience within each of these areas. Program planning and implementation must focus on this audience as well as our traditional and newly emerging audiences. 1890's should/will play an important role in helping to define the program agenda relative to this targeted population.

Current Capacities

Use of these priority statements in the implementation of Extension programs will be done in a context of current capacities and internal opportunities and will vary from state to state, as needs and opportunities vary from one area to another.

- 4-H and other youth audiences are incorporated into all of the above opportunity categories. Youth should be viewed as resources, as well as learners, in helping address all of these opportunities.
- Cooperative Extension's strength in agricultural sciences and natural resources is fundamental to Extension both in the present and in the future. These disciplines will be essential in addressing opportunities related to economic productivity, sustainable environments, resilience, and security.

■ America's rural communities face many challenges as do many of our urban communities. Extension's involvement in all communities will build on past experiences and expertise, and on emerging research and knowledge as Cooperative Extension provides leadership in building a strong future for all Americans.



Internal Opportunities

In developing this set of strategic opportunities, it is important to keep in mind the following internal organizational challenges that must be addressed.

Become more flexible and agile in identifying and serving residents with diverse backgrounds and needs.

- Eighty percent of the U.S. population now lives in urban areas. To remain relevant and accessible to all, Extension must enhance employee's skills and develop programming that addresses issues of urban and non-traditional audiences in addition to maintaining its strength in rural areas.
- Evaluate and modify staffing patterns and expectations to be more flexible and agile; this may include contracts, sub-contracts, and project-based, multi-county and multi-institution employees.
- Increase capacity within Extension for building and working in multi-cultural communities by hiring diverse and multi-cultural employees, and by providing language and cultural training and intensive immersion experiences.
- Enhance programs targeted to the baby boomer/aging generation.

Strengthen and diversify the funding streams for Extension priorities.

- Increase effectiveness in packaging and selling federal funding initiatives:
 - Increase formula/capacity funds to the highest of 5 percent per year or rate of inflation/population growth.
 - Increase the Smith-Lever 3 (d) line for eXtension to \$2.95 million (short-term) and to \$10–\$12 million (long-term).
 - Ensure that at least 25 percent of increased funding for bio-products, regardless of source, is dedicated to Extension.
 - Solidify Extension Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) funding in FY08 budget.
 - Expand National Research Initiative (NRI) funding available to Extension-led integrated projects and expand Extension participation in NRI Integrated projects.
 - Develop a strategy to show the value of formula/capacity funds to those influencing federal funding decisions, emphasizing the leveraging, value and accountability of these funds.
- Expand the funding partnerships to allow the CES system to serve as the outreach arm of other federal and state agencies:
 - Increase collaboration with potential partners at national, regional, state, and local levels to leverage resources for Extension work.
 - Develop grant writing, budgeting, and management skills needed to be successful in an competitive fund acquisition and development.
- Create sustainable funding models that include fees, product sales, gifts, endowments, etc.:
 - Develop sound business plans for new Extension initiatives.
 - Conduct market analysis to identify alternative sustainable funding opportunities.
 - Provide staff development to become confident and savvy entrepreneurs.

Internal Opportunities

CONTINUED

Speed up the rate of transformation of CES.

- Develop a strategy to diversify and improve program delivery methods:
 - Fully implement eXtension.
 - Provide staff training on educational design using new technologies.
 - Use multiple language resources.
 - Maximize the use of retired population (baby boomers) through volunteerism to help deliver Extension programming.
- Improve quality and skills of Extension personnel:
 - Recruit a high quality, diverse Extension workforce.
 - Increase use of Leadership Development for the 21st Century (LEAD 21): Linking Research, Academics, and Extension to train CES's future leaders.
 - Increase internal training of younger faculty to be better prepared for upcoming employee losses through retirements.
- Communicate with traditional constituencies to seek support for new directions.
- Promote eXtension as a synergistic opportunity that supports and empowers locally-based Extension educators.
- Develop issue focused, integrated community and economic development programs involving community resources development, agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences and youth development; consider building communities of practice where appropriate.
- Develop an internal accountability and marketing plan.
- Expand CES's base of expertise through partnerships with nontraditional departments/colleges.

Prepared by the ECOP Strategic Priorities Task Force, October 2007

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