

Obtaining Program Input from Pennsylvania Residents for the Purpose of Designing the Next Five-year Plan of Work

Instructions for Faculty and Agents Conducting Focus Groups

The purpose of the focus group is to obtain stakeholder input into the planning of the next five-year plan of work for Penn State Cooperative Extension. Focus groups are just one of the four ways we have chosen to gain stakeholder input concerning major programs to be conducted in the 05-09 plan of work.

There are questions in six program categories that mirror the questions from the web based needs assessment survey. We would like you to use these questions. However, you may also design questions from which you would like responses. The six categories are:

- Youth, Family, and Community
- Nutrition and Health
- Plant Production
- Animal Production
- Food Processing
- Forestry and Wildlife

To get started, select the set of questions that best fits the clientele group for the program area that you are interested in gaining input. However, you may want to include a few questions from the other sections to gain individuals thinking about other program areas. Individuals involved in agriculture also are members of a community and family. Regardless of the set of questions you select, it is unrealistic to think you can have one group respond to all the questions--this is not the expectation.

Once you have completed the focus group session, compile the information by category and question number. As you record the responses, please be sure to indicate if more than one person responded to the topic. Please send this information electronically to Margaret Koble, mak10@psu.edu with the following additional information:

- Audience—identify the group as 4-H leaders, dairy farmers, etc.
- County/Region session was conducted
- Who facilitated
- Date conducted

All information is due to Margaret Koble by May 30, 2003.

Tips in Preparation for Conducting the Focus Group

- Follow suggestion on conducting focus group from "Guide for Faculty and Agents Conducting Focus Groups," attached along with this document.
- Thank participants for agreeing to participate in the focus group at the beginning and end of the session.
- Review the purpose for asking the group to participate in the focus group.
- Remind the group that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions that will be posed. It is important for them to be frank in their responses. It is also important while in discussion to be respectful of other opinions and their right to speak.
- Record responses from the group. Use either a tape recorder (most desirable method) or write responses on a tablet or easel pad.

Explain why the group's responses are being taped. It is to gain an accurate record of what has been said. After the tape has been transcribed, the tape will be destroyed. At no time will group members' names be attached to any specific comments. Not using their names maintains their confidentiality. All of the comments from focus groups being conducted in other parts of the state will be combined to create one total group response. It is this total response, not individual comments, that will be used to assist in planning future program priorities.

Youth, Family and Community Questions

Youth

To get us started, please tell us what youth activities you are involved in, in your community?

Q1. As you think about your community, what are the positive aspects for youth who live there?

Q2. As you think about the next five years, what concerns you most about your community's youth?

Q3. The ability of youth to interact, get along and do things together begins in the family. Over the next 5 years, what challenges do you see youth facing in their ability to get along with others? What type of educational programs might Cooperative Extension conduct to address family issues?

Q4. As you think about policies that affect youth, such as alcohol abuse or school attendance, what are your greatest concerns about today's policies that impact youth? What educational programs could extension conduct to address these issues?

Family:

To begin tell us about your family's makeup?

Q1. As you think about changes over the next five years, what concerns you the most about families in your community? What ideas do you have about the types of educational programs Cooperative Extension could conduct to help families?

Q2. The ability of families to interact, get along and do things together is what makes a family cohesive. Over the next five years, what do you think will be the most challenging for healthy family interaction? What type of educational programs might Cooperative Extension conduct to address these challenges?

Q3. As you think about policies that affect families, such as affordable and safe child care and employment opportunities, what are your greatest concerns about today's family policies? What educational programs could extension conduct to address family public policy issues?

Community

To begin this session, would you tell us what are the things you like about living in your community?

Q1. As you think about the next five years, what concerns you most about your community?

Q2. County and local governments are being challenged to effectively manage the community's resources, environment, and economic well-being. Over the next five years, what do you think are the greatest challenges for public officials? What programs could Cooperative Extension conduct to help local officials and the public understand and deal with these issues?

Q3. Public policies such as employment opportunities with a living wage, local taxes and services and land use, affect communities. In the next few years, what are your greatest concerns regarding potential public policies? What educational programs could Cooperative Extension conduct to address community public policy issues?

Home Gardening and Landscaping

Gardening and lawn care are important aspects of many families. Will you tell me what type of gardening, lawn care and landscaping you do?

Q1. There are many places to obtain gardening and landscape information. Where do you go to get answers to those questions?

Agriculture—questions suitable for animal & plant production

I'd like to begin by asking you to share what agriculture business you are involved in.

Q1. Agriculture is an important industry to Pennsylvania. As you think about your ag operation, what are your major business and marketing concerns? What type of Cooperative Extension programs could help you in the future with business and marketing skills?

Q2. Those involved in agriculture, like many other industries, must employ environmental management practices. What educational programs might Cooperative Extension conduct over the next five years to help farmers understand and implement these practices?

Q3. Having a highly productive and efficient agriculture enterprise is a goal for most agriculture businesses. What are major barriers to productivity and efficiency? What programs could Cooperative Extension conduct to address these issues?

Q4. A well-informed public is key to good public decision-making. What are your concerns about the policies, such as the use of pesticides, water and land use, which affect agricultural production? What programs could Cooperative Extension conduct over the next five years to increase the public's and decision makers understanding of public policy and agriculture?

Q5. Bioterrorism and a safe food supply is a national topic of discussion. What are your concerns in maintaining a safe food system? What programs could Cooperative Extension conduct to help people understand issues to maintain a safe food system?

Nutrition and Health

To get us started, what does the comment “Live long and prosperous...mean to you?”

Q1. As you think about the next five years, what are the most important issues you and your family face in order to achieve physical good health?

Q2. Growing older can surface health concerns. What do you think are the immediate and long-term health concerns of middle-aged and older adults? What type of educational programs would be beneficial for individuals to learn how to deal with these health concerns?

Q3. Issues on youth’s physical well-being are being talked about more and more. As you think about the youth you know in your family and community, what are the nutritional and health concerns you have for them? What type of educational programs would be beneficial for parents, guardians, grandparents to learn more about health issues of today’s youth?

Q4. Thinking beyond your family to the community as a whole, what are the food and health issues in your community? What type of educational programs would help educate the public about these issues?

Food Processing

To get us started, please tell us what type of food processing business you are involved in.

Q1. Food processing is an important industry in Pennsylvania. As you think about this industry, what are your major business and marketing concerns? What type of Cooperative Extension programs could help you in the future with business and marketing issues?

Q2. Those involved in the business of food processing, like many other industries, must employ environmental management practices. What educational programs might Cooperative Extension conduct over the next five years to help small emerging and larger food processors understand and implement environmental management practices?

Q3. The processing of food products in a highly productive and efficient manner is essential for cost effective processing. What are major barriers to productivity and

efficiency that affect your enterprise? What programs could Cooperative Extension conduct to address these issues?

Q4. A well-informed public is a key to good public decision-making. What are your concerns about the policies, such as water use, water quality, and free trade agreements, which affect food processing? What programs could Cooperative Extension conduct over the next five years to increase the publics and decision makers understanding of public policy and food processing industry?

Q5. Bioterrorism and a safe food supply is a national topic of discussion. What are your major food safety and security concerns in the food processing industry? What programs could Cooperative Extension conduct to help people understand issues on keeping a safe food system?

Forestry and Wildlife

To get us started, please tell us how you are involved with forestry and/or wildlife.

Q1. Pennsylvania has an abundance of wildlife and great streams for fishing. Over the next five years, what can be done to assure quality wildlife and fishing opportunities? What programs could Cooperative Extension conduct to help people understand issues pertaining to wildlife and fishing?

Q2. Pennsylvania has some of the best forest lands that are timbered for secondary processing. Over the next five years, what are the issues that need to be addressed in this industry? What programs could Cooperative Extension conduct to help people address these issues?

Q3. Maintaining forest lands for future generations involves effective planning by people in the industry. What concerns do you have regarding maintaining productive forests for the next generation? What programs could Cooperative Extension conduct to help individuals in the forest industry sustainable Pennsylvania forests?

Q4. Trees are important in urban environments. Over the next five years, what are the urban issues communities will face to maintain trees as a part of their environment? What programs could Cooperative Extension conduct to help people understand the value and importance of trees in communities?

Q5. Water quality and quantity are essential in every day life for all peoples. What are your concerns about the quality and quantity of water resources in your home and community? What programs could Cooperative Extension conduct to help people understand water resource issues?