Ohio State University Extension Crowdsourcing Insight Summary: Agriculture and Natural Resources
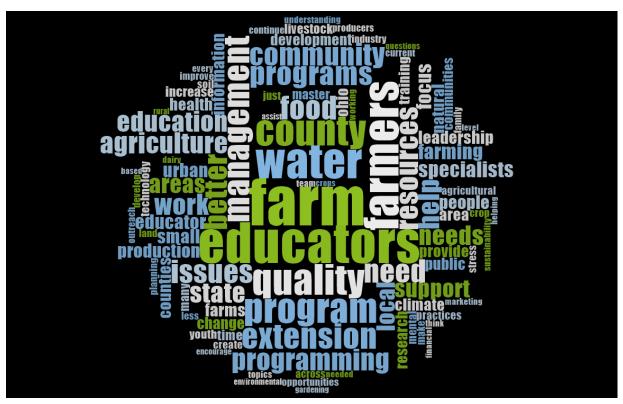

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

extension.osu.edu

Preface

Purpose

The purpose of a program review is to guide program development on a continual basis. A program review is a process that evaluates the status, effectiveness, and progress of programs and helps identify future direction and priorities. Program reviews are a standard practice in higher education (Barak, 1082; Barak & Berdahl, 1978; Berrett, D., 2011). The Ohio State University Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources program review is a voluntary practice for self-study and external review.

The Review Includes Five Elements

- The State of Agriculture and Natural Resources in Ohio
- Ohio State University Extension Agriculture and Natural Resource Internal Self-Study
- Ohio State University Extension Crowdsourcing Insight Summary: Agriculture and Natural Resources
- External committee visits and final report
- Key stakeholder communication throughout the process

Context

Ohio State University Extension embarked upon a multi-year effort to build the Extension organization of the future. That journey began with the *Vice President's Conversation on the Future of Extension*. The overall goal of that effort was to ensure that OSU Extension remains relevant and responsive to the needs of Ohioans well into the future.

Data gathered through the *Vice President's Conversation* was used as a foundation for a designEXT effort to put ideas into action. One of the designEXT steps includes partnering with individuals and communities to co-create multi-faceted solutions for current and emerging issues.

The *OSU Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources Review* is one of a series of OSU Extension program reviews.

> # ONE Thing
>
> **Our land-grant mission –**
> OSU Extension delivers knowledge from Ohio State to every county in Ohio, and we work **WITH** people right where they live to strengthen their own lives and communities.
>
> *(excerpt from OSU Extension Interim Director Update,
> Jackie Kirby Wilkins – August 2019)*

Contact

Ohio State University Extension program reviews are conducted on behalf of Dr. Jackie Wilkins, interim director of OSU Extension and associate dean, College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences. Program reviews are led by Dr. Greg Davis, with support from Terri Fisher.

https://extension.osu.edu/strategic-initiatives/ohio-agriculture-and-natural-resources-anr-program-review

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For the purpose of this report, the Ohio State University Extension
Agriculture and Natural Resources program may be referred to simply as ANR.

I. Introduction

A. Purpose

One of Ohio State University Extension's four program areas is Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR). OSU Extension's Agriculture and Natural Resources team provides Ohioans resources and educational programs focusing on profitable and sustainable agriculture, a clean environment, and proper stewardship of Ohio's natural resources.

This crowdsourcing insight summary is part of the Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) program review that evaluates the status, effectiveness, and progress of programs and helps identify future direction and priorities.

B. Methods

The OSU Extension Learning and Organizational Development (LOD) unit administered a crowdsourcing two-question survey. Crowdsourcing is an effective and powerful practice of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of geographically dispersed people (Doan, Ramakrishnan, & Halevy, 2011; Estellés-Arolas & González-Ladrón-De-Guevara, 2012; Merriam-Webster, 2014; Raison, Fox & D'Adamo-Damery, 2014).

In November 2019, a two-question survey invitation was sent via email to 986 OSU Extension personnel included on the "ALL-Extension" listserv and employees in The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences Human Resources database who have an Extension appointment. Two follow-up reminders were sent to non-respondents. All Extension personnel were included in this inquiry to gain insight from interdisciplinary perspectives. There were 306 respondents for a response rate of 31.3 percent.

Two researchers on the OSU Extension Learning and Organizational Development team and a Ph.D. student in the Department of Agricultural Communication, Education, and Leadership analyzed the survey data using NVivo software. After reading through the transcriptions, the codebook was created by a researcher on the team and verified by another researcher. Then the three researchers collaboratively reviewed the coding system for validity. Three researchers coded the transcriptions independently, and then the files were combined for the final analysis.

During the analysis process, themes that participants mentioned more often and across most of the participants were identified as "Primary Themes" and themes that were mentioned in some responses were identified as "Secondary Themes." Some themes were identified but rarely mentioned, so were not included in the report. This report will highlight the findings of the two survey questions.

C. Summary of Findings

Two open-ended questions prompted responses with primary and secondary themes.

Question 1. Based on what you know about OSU Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), if you could transform the ANR program in any way you wish, what one to three things would you do?

> **Primary Themes:** Programing, Operations, Partnerships and Collaborations
> **Secondary Themes:** Leadership and Responding to the Needs

Question 2. Based on what you experience and observe in Ohio's communities where you live, work, and play (or agriculture and natural resources industries/way of life), what are the most pressing issues OSU Extension ANR should address to better meet needs of Ohioans in the future?

> **Primary Theme:** Programming
> **Secondary Theme:** Responding to the Needs

From the qualitative analysis of the crowdsourcing information, there was an overlap in the themes identified in the responses to the two questions.

II. Question 1. Based on what you know about OSU Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), if you could transform the ANR program in any way you wish, what one to three things would you do?

A. Primary Themes

1. Programing: This predominant category was identified by most of the crowdsourcing participants. In this category, respondents focused on the type of programs offered by ANR to the communities of Ohio. Participants suggested continuation or addition to a specific type of programs.

> a) **Farming-related:** in this subcategory, participants focused on programs that are provided to farmers including supporting farmers with challenges facing them.
>
> *Examples:*
>
> "More hands-on learning in the off season for farmers."
>
> "Be at the forefront of organic farming."
>
> "Help farmers understand the legal procedures."
>
> "Hold meetings/sessions on ways to help the farmer with ways to add an extra income."

b) **Food-related:** This subcategory is for educational programs related to food and security.

Examples:

"Have more talks/trainings available for gardening/encouraging local food sources."

"Educating communities on where their food comes from."

"Build a continuum of farm to table education with ANR."

"Help broader public become more aware of how diet affects sustainability."

"Offer tours of orchards and farms to kids so that they learn where their food comes from."

2. **Operations:** Operations is one of the central categories found in the responses. Participants mentioned operations referring to policies and procedures, as well as resources available to the ANR program across the state of Ohio. Subcategories found in this theme are:

a) **Human Resources:** In this category participants shared their concerns related to two job categories: educator and specialist.

   a. **Educators:** This was the predominant subcategory, as many participants indicated the need for more educators to cover every county.

   Examples:

   "Since Ohio is an agricultural state, there should be at least a 50 percent ANR person in every county."

   "Desperate for an ANR educator in our county."

   "Have solid ANR expertise in every county."

   "Try to replace retiring educators before they retire instead of waiting to fill the position until after they are gone."

   b. **Specialists:** This was a major subcategory, as many participants suggested hiring more field specialists.

   Examples:

   "Create more specialist positions that are focused on in depth areas to serve Ohio farmers."

   "Add regional specialists of target topics who teach across the EERAS or regions (depending on needs of region) to relieve demands on county educators to be all things to all people on all topics that grow and crawl indoors and out."

   "Hire field specialists to work in all ag areas, and areas of the state. Not just west of I-71."

   "Hire district/area specialists in areas of farm management, livestock production, and financial management."

b) **Financial Resources:** This category was mentioned by some participants referring to the availability of funding to support better salaries, research, and programming.

Examples:

"Allocate funding for specialty crop research (demonstration) and Extension (curriculum development and program delivery)."

"More funds for mileage and acquiring expertise in their specialization."

"More equitable opportunities and funding for new educators who may not have these at the county level."

"Better pay for county educators and support staff."

3. **Partnerships and Collaboration:** This is a major theme identified by many participants, referring to the engagement of ANR in programming activities with other internal or external stakeholders. Main subcategories in this theme area are:

a) **OSU Extension Programs:** Participants emphasized the importance of collaboration between ANR and other OSUE programs area.

Examples:

"Have ANR assist with programming at 4-H camp."

"Promote more crossover between other Extension programs such as 4-H youth development."

"Tie food systems work closer to FCS for true cross program initiatives."

"Create a collaboration with community nutrition group (EFNEP and SNAP-Ed) to combine gardening with nutrition education."

b) **K-12 Schools:** Many participants suggested more programing for children and youth via the school system.

Examples:

"ANR program to work with county school district in order to teach our children/youth about agriculture and natural resources."

"Partner more with school/communities to teach sustainability."

"Establish ongoing partnerships with schools to expose students to ag careers."

"We could partner with science classes to teach a workshop on agriculture."

c) **Communities:** A major subcategory mentioned by many participants is to partner with local communities and agencies both government and non-profit working in those communities. However, this sub-category overlapped with communication and reaching out to communities.

Examples:

"Partner more with school/communities to teach sustainability."

"Connect more with local professionals in the agriculture and natural resources in the area."

"Exchange resources and connections with organizations like Cooperative Jackson and the Black Church Food Security Network."

"Let the community know more about what Extension has to offer."

"Have a more defined role with interactions or other state and federal agencies."

d) **College-Level and Other Departments:** A few participants highlighted the importance of collaboration at the college level and with other colleges and departments at Ohio State. Most participants in this sub-category addressed the connection between faculty appointments and Extension programming.

Examples:

"Reconnect Extension faculty to faculty in academic departments."

"Foster collaborations with faculty members without formal Extension appointments."

"Encourage and support courtesy appointments of educators within departments."

"Better interaction with the departments."

B. Secondary Themes

1. **Leadership:** Some of the crowdsourcing participants focused on enhanced communication and decision-making process for the leadership of ANR.

   Examples:

   "Connection within educators from leadership at the top, through departments, and through the county educators. We are disconnected (by design? I am not sure)."

   "Meaningful communication from Leadership to ANR educators, too much forwarding of information without context leads to confusion."

   "Less upper management/more county-based autonomy."

   "Active, engaged, supportive leadership with the interest of building/rebuilding relationships with industry and collaborative work with partnerships."

2. **Responding to the Needs:** This theme reoccurred within some of the responses, as participants emphasized the importance of responding to the needs of communities considered "non-traditional" to ANR such as:

   a) **Urban Communities:** Participants called for programs that are responsive to the needs of urban and suburban communities, as ANR is perceived to focus on rural communities.

Examples:

"Provide technical assistance for farming on metro areas specifically on how to use land bank resources for urban farms."

"Provide urban communities with knowledge of how to grow/preserve some of their own fresh produce."

"More reach into urban areas through school programs."

"Meet more urban/suburban clients."

b) **Diversity and Inclusion:** Some participants highlighted the importance of offering programs to diverse populations. Within this subcategory, diversity is not clearly defined by the respondents but in some comments, there is a reference to income, culture, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and urban/rural.

Examples:

"Offer outreach and educational programs for farmers of color."

"Continue programming for more non-traditional communities."

"Offer educational programs to ANR professionals regarding cultural competencies for better recognition and understanding of diverse audiences—ethnicities, nationalities, gender identities, urban/rural."

"More community gardens in areas where low income seniors live that is not necessarily inner city."

III. Question 2. Based on what you experience and observe in Ohio's communities where you live, work, and play (or agriculture and natural resources industries/way of life), what are the most pressing issues OSU Extension ANR should address to better meet needs of Ohioans in the future?

A. Primary Theme

1. Programing: The only dominant theme and shared by almost all participants as they called for focusing on specific areas of programs. As expected, participants recommended focusing on farming-related programs.

    a) **Farm-related:** Unlike the first question, the number of comments was not enough to see a recurring theme within the suggestions for farming programs. However, in this question the heavy number of comments allowed for further investigation and understanding of specifications within farming-related programs. The major sub-categories identified are:

        a. **Farm Stress:** Many participants recommended focusing on farm stress programs. This category sometimes intertwined with addressing mental health concerns and financial struggles for farmers.

Examples:

"Farmers need to be recognized for all that they do for our society, in that through their efforts we have food to eat! Yet, they are very concerned about their financial future, and this results in at times great despair, depression, isolation, and even suicide."

"Stress/mental health of farmers."

"Farm/economic stress."

"Adding components of farm stress resources to all programming."

"Community and FCS partnerships to bring down the stigma and raise awareness of mental health issues in farmers. Specifically, dairy farmers in our area."

b. **Farm Management:** Many participants highlighted the importance of farm management programs to assist farmers particularly in the area of financial management and assessing profitability.

Examples:

"More farm management and business training in local counties."

"Develop more programs to address 'average farm' profitable."

"Farm management, farm management, farm management."

"Profitability (regardless of size and scale)."

c. **Finances and Economies:** Many participants focused on the financial hardships faced by farmers and suggested supporting farmers in finding resources and funding. Some comments about financial hardships intersected with comments about supporting dairy farms specifically.

Examples:

"How to help local farmers with costs since crop prices have declined—especially dairy."

"Making readily accessible current resources to help farmers with current issues such as relief funds."

"More money for farmers for milk and crops."

"The decline of small dairy operations and supports available to farmers in transition after the loss of their herd."

d. **Next Generation Farmers:** Many comments emphasized the importance of supporting the next generation of farmers while being responsive to their specific needs such as technology.

Examples:

"Find ways to bridge the gaps between generations and farming methods."

"Balance the needs of older farmers vs. younger, more tech savvy farmers."

"Farm transitioning—keeping the 'family in farm' as producers retire (locally we have seen many exiting agriculture with now family replacement)."

"Next generation of farmers."

e. **Public Perception of Farmers:** A few comments focused on raising awareness of the general public and non-farmers around misconceptions related to farming.

Examples:

"Farmers are getting very negative comments from non-agricultural people. If we could better inform the public about the truth about GMOs, antibiotic-free chicken, etc., the local farmers would be getting less push back and can feel appreciated for the hard work that they do."

"Non farming community needs educated on farming practices."

"Farmers need to be recognized for all that they do for our society, in that through their efforts we have food to eat! Yet, they are very concerned about their financial future, and this results in at times great despair, depression, isolation, and even suicide."

f. **Environment-related:** This is another major subcategory as participants emphasized the importance of environmental education programs mostly around pollution, climate change, and water quality.

Examples:

"Conservation and care for water, greenspaces, wooded areas, animals and reducing waste (food, household, industrial)."

"Ignorance about sustainability, reducing/reusing/recycling, proper waste disposal, etc.—what you toss out of your broken-down old car affects the soil, air, and water quality—which in turn affects the quality and nutritional value of what you eat and drink, as well as how you feel about your neighborhood. You can survive without trashing your surroundings."

"Find the problem of water quality."

"Climate change impacts on local ecosystems and coupled human-environment systems."

g. **Food-related:** This category was identified by many participants focusing on the importance of food production and food security.

Examples:

"Coming to grips with the expanding world of production that includes specialty crops and curious people interested in farming in small ways as in vegetable farming for the restaurant market. Vegetables, chefs, farmers markets, food trucks need to be addressed."

"Help draw the connections between agriculture, nutritious and safe food and drinking water, and health/quality of life. Be advocates for and role models of healthy lifestyles."

"I see a real need to help communities with food insecurities and lack of access to fresh fruits and vegetables."

B. Secondary Theme

1. Responding to the Needs: Some participants highlighted the importance of addressing the needs of urban communities and diverse populations.

a) **Urban Communities:** Participants are expecting ANR to be more responsive to the needs of the urban population of Ohio.

Examples:

"More urban involvement with neighborhood garden plots."

"Engage with suburban homeowners to educate and encourage them to make choices for their lawns and landscaping that support native species and biodiversity."

"Ohioans living in urban communities could benefit by understanding agriculture better— and how to grow food in their urban environments. There is a definite lack of education I see on a daily basis. Targeting the three largest metro cities in Ohio would help. (Columbus, Cleveland, and Cincinnati)."

"Meeting the needs of suburban 'farmers' figuring out what to do with their less than 5 acres."

b) **Diversity and Inclusion:** A few participants called for reaching out to diverse populations such as youth, urban/suburban, underserved population, and women.

Examples:

"There are less farmers every day, so shifting focus on things that affect all homeowners, youth, and suburban/urban audiences, they can reach a greater audience."

"Diversity, inclusion, and equity are big topics at the majority of county meetings."

"Adopt an Innovative Small Farmers Outreach Program Initiative in Ohio if there isn't one with focus on underserved and disadvantage farmers and ranchers."

"Women in Ag program expansion to entire state and through all program areas."

VI. Conclusion

The following conclusion can be drawn from the qualitative data analysis of the ANR crowdsourcing.

Participants are expecting ANR to focus on programs that are relevant and responsive to the needs of farmers such as farm stress and farm management. Also, there is a call for educating the public about the farmers and clarifying some misconceptions about farming. Extension programs need to address the needs of the next generation farmers that are different than current and former farmers. Therefore, ANR programs are expected to expand their reach to youth and deliver appropriate programs.

Both questions yielded important ideas of reaching out to "non-traditional" audiences or, in other words, attain diversity and inclusion to minorities and urban communities.

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