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# Extension Educators Collecting Industry-specific Stakeholder Input

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## Need for Stakeholder Input

Extension mission includes:

- Education (McDowell) & diffusion of research and innovation (Rogers),
- Institutional maintenance (McDowell),  
Mandated by 1998 Farm Bill for setting research, extension, and education priorities.
- Dairy team uses:
- Advisory board,
- Broad-based input last collected 1997,  
In 2007, team decided that current, inclusive input was needed.

Large group discussion  
Photo courtesy of Ted Ferris

## Group Methods Reviewed



Nominal groups (Delbecq & Van de Ven):  
• Effective in generating information, describing problem dimensions;

- Participants work on broad question individually in a group setting;
- Participants' time commitment high;
- Result is pooled summary, available immediately after sessions.

Focus groups:

- Effective in need assessment and program development (Bitsch);
- Moderated group discussion with interaction, leads to deeper problem conceptualization;
- Participants' time commitment moderate;
- Results need to be analyzed and summarized by trained expert.

Combined elements of both methods, based on participants' time commitment, breadth and depth of issue generation, timely results.

## Issue Identification Process

In different Michigan regions:

- 4 sessions with dairy farm owners, managers, herdpersons, and next generation family employees;
- 3 sessions with allied industry professionals, such as milk cooperative representatives, veterinarians, feed consultants, lenders, and government agency personnel;
- On average, 10-14 participants per session.

Small group discussion  
Photo courtesy of Bill Robb

## Session plan

- Introduce meeting format, fill out forms
- Participants record individual lists (5 min)
- Assign subgroups with 3 or more participants
- Subgroups rotate until each group has discussed issues for each 4 categories (10-15 minutes each):
  - ⇒ Business management
  - ⇒ Production performance
  - ⇒ Environment
  - ⇒ Industry issues
- Category facilitator moderates each subgroup and records all contributions on laptop
- Forum to reduce duplications, clarify, and discuss issues (1 hour)
- Each participant rates each issue as high, medium, low, or no importance
- Average ratings calculated for each session and shared with participants

Differences in abstraction level, specificity of each issue, and number of issues identified preclude formula aggregation of issues across different sessions.

- Summarizing across sessions through research team consensus, using qualitative and quantitative information from each session.
- Building good relations with non-farm neighbors
- Handling dead animal carcasses
- Reducing the potential for manure runoff from farm

## Results

Total number of issues rated per session: 103.1

- Farmers and industry professionals similar in number of issues: 106.0 (Range: 87-133) and 99.3 (Range: 54-149), respectively
  - ⇒ Production performance: 31.4 per session
  - ⇒ Industry issues:
  - ⇒ Business management: 21.3 per session
  - ⇒ Environment: 20.3 per session

### Industry Needs and Concerns

- Promote availability of career opportunities in agriculture
- Increase regulations, knowledge of agriculture
- Ensure continuation of Michigan Right to Farm program
- Maintain adequate access to water resources
- Work with government to deal with foreign animal diseases
- Communicate to consumers about safety of milk products
- Inform the public about current farming practices
- Involvement in the legislative process
- Dairy farmers demonstrating environmental stewardship
- Science-based environment regulations
- New dairy products increase milk utilization
- Legal advice on agricultural and environmental regulations
- Methods to reduce odor and air pollutants
- Science-based environment regulations
- Traceability of farm products to their origin
- New data for dairy industry to improve quality
- Methods to improve disease resistance
- Farm business growth to improve quality of life
- Consumers' interpretation of dairy product labels
- Food imports from less regulated countries
- Agro-terrorism and bioterrorism
- Loss of farm land due to urban encroachment
- Availability of dairy veterinarians

### Examples of Viability Issues

- Science-based environment regulations
- Traceability of farm products to their origin
- New data for dairy industry to improve quality
- Methods to improve disease resistance
- Farm business growth to improve quality of life
- Consumers' interpretation of dairy product labels
- Food imports from less regulated countries
- Agro-terrorism and bioterrorism
- Loss of farm land due to urban encroachment
- Availability of dairy veterinarians

## Conclusions

Issue identification process suited to:

- Collect broad-based input and a large number of issues from stakeholders in a resource and time-efficient manner;
- Consolidate, reduce number of issues;
- Conserve richness of input suitable to program development.

Process not well suited for priority setting:

- Different stakeholder groups need to set priorities based on their functions and values;
- Ratings during the process cannot substitute for this additional step, but help to narrow the number of issues to consider.

If statistical information on the distribution of priorities within different stakeholder groups is needed, issues identified are suitable as a basis of questionnaire development



Heifers at feed bunk  
Photo courtesy of Bill Robb

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## Further Information & References

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