

A Statewide Summary of Stakeholder Input 2014-2015

UW Extension develops programs to meet the needs of Wyoming residents. Focus groups actively engage stakeholders in assessing needs and identifying issues of importance to Wyoming. Input from stakeholders helps to improve existing Extension programming and direct new programming efforts.

The focus group process is different from processes used for decision-making, evaluating a program or planning. The intent of focus groups is to listen and gather information to understand how people think and feel about an issue. Careful, systematic analysis of focus group input will provide clues and insights on the needs of clientele and guide the initiative team's educational efforts. All initiative teams utilized the same process and questions to identify common trends and patterns across the state. Focus groups rotate annually among the counties in an Extension geographic area over a five year period.

November 2014 – January 2015, Converse, Hot Springs, Platte, Sublette, and Weston counties representing the five UW Extension Areas, conducted focus groups. Each county hosted five con-current initiative topic focus groups, which included: 4-H and youth development; nutrition and food safety; community development education; sustainable management of rangeland resources; and profitable and sustainable agriculture systems. Input was provided by 152 individuals across the state.

This summary reflects issues identified which were prioritized and had common themes across the five Extension areas.

4-H and Youth Development

- Increase parent or adult involvement to provide positive adult modeling of behavior and interaction with youth. Mentoring by both adults and peers can be beneficial.
- The foundation of 4-H is life skill development. Provide educational activities utilizing experiential learning. Service learning can be beneficial to youth and communities.
- Youth and adults face competing priorities for their time. Lack of facilities and more coordination of community youth activities is needed among youth serving agencies. Many youths across the state are not aware of opportunities in 4-H. Increased communication and marketing of the program is needed.
- Leadership training is needed for volunteers; many lack the skills and confidence to become fully engaged in the program.

Community Development Education

- Economic development including training for employees to enhance skills. Infrastructure needs such as affordable housing and transportation. Extension's role may be to facilitate networking and dialogue among government and local agencies to discuss needs and solutions. Personal finance as it relates to entrepreneurs.
- Facilitate opportunities for municipal and county agencies, organizations, and chamber of commerce to meet and form systematic relationships to allow for more collaborative planning in communities. Strategic planning including sustainability and succession planning is important for community growth.
- Market the personal and community benefits of rural towns to attract growth.
- Communities need help with developing volunteerism, and service learning for youth and adults.



Nutrition and Food Safety

- Accessibility of food and where food comes from. Many rural communities have limited access to fresh foods. How to prepare and preserve local foods was an issue identified.
- Target youths in education on nutrition and basic food preparation skills. By reaching youth, programs could impact entire family. Recognize that methods to reach different age groups should be appropriate; more social media or on-line presence for younger audiences.
- Basic education on improving healthy food choices; preparation, storage and food safety.
- Time management in relation to cooking at home versus convenience foods and restaurant meals, and food budgeting were also identified as important issues facing Wyoming families.

Agriculture and Horticulture

- Invasive species: new varieties of weeds and biological controls. Soils, how to mitigate damage from fires and other erosion. Endangered species is also a concern.
- Education on how to speak about the agriculture industry; including understanding of how food is grown or raised. More effort is needed to encourage young people to choose production agriculture as a career. Internships were suggested for adults who may desire a career in agriculture. Consumer education on agriculture and where food comes from.
- Profitability; focus on income and expenses. Basic business information. Development of specialty crops and markets.
- Environmental information for agriculture and horticulture which is research based.

Sustainable Management of Rangeland Resources

- There is a need for facilitation and communication and information dissemination between agencies, (local, federal, and state) and landowners. Energy companies were also identified.
- Invasive species, noxious weeds, and endangered species, for agriculture lands are key issues. The general public needs more knowledge on invasive weeds.
- Small acreages need basic education on all natural resource management.
- Grazing management, including economics of grazing system implementation, water development and drought mitigation.
- Keeping the agriculture industry alive for future generations. Encouraging K-12 curriculum to cover agriculture career possibilities.

A common issue identified across all initiatives in all five areas, statewide, was lack of marketing UW Extension. Multiple methods should be used to reach clientele include face to face meetings, on-line presence, use of technology, and social media which may meet needs of multi-generation clientele. Emphasis of educating youth was identified as a priority to have strong impact.

The issues identified will be utilized by county, area, and state Extension teams to direct new programming efforts.

Issued in furtherance of extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Glen Whipple, Director, University of Wyoming Extension, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming 82071.

Persons seeking admission, employment, or access to programs of the University of Wyoming shall be considered without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, genetic information, or political belief.