

A STATEWIDE SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER INPUT 2015-2016

UW Extension gathers feedback from Wyoming citizens through Stakeholder Input. Each stakeholder input session includes individual focus groups around the five educational initiatives conducted by UW Extension: Sustainable Management of Rangeland Resources; Agriculture and Horticulture; Community Development; Nutrition and Food Safety; and 4-H Youth Development.

These listening sessions provide opportunities to identify issues important to Wyoming citizens. We value your feedback and strive to provide opportunities for you to identify positive things that happen in your counties and local communities and to share your concerns, and suggestions, which help direct UW Extension programming.

One-hundred and forty-five individuals participated in stakeholder input in Big Horn, Campbell, Laramie, and Lincoln Counties December 2015 through February 2016.

Input session results were analyzed to help identify issues that have emerged across the state in the educational program initiative areas.

This summary reflects those issues identified which were prioritized and had common themes across Wyoming. Stakeholder input session results will be used by county, area, and state Extension teams to direct new programming efforts.

Sustainable Management of Rangeland Resources

Rangeland use draws the attention of diverse audiences: ranchers, small acreage landowners, recreationist, conservation groups, government agencies (land and wildlife management), businesses, and politicians. Collaboration between audiences is critical because of the interdependent nature of rangeland management. Below are common priorities identified by the focus groups:

- Access to public lands and a distrust between groups who use those lands lead to scrutiny of public land grazing. Tactics to describe rangeland management and grazing to a recreationist need to be different than discussing the mechanics of rangeland monitoring with a permittee. This concept is at the heart of addressing the “balancing mixed use” issue.
- Education about rangeland ecology will help make ranches sustainable for generations. Management of weeds, wildlife, water and grazing management, and stocking rate were identified issues for educational programs and rangeland monitoring.
- The educational needs of small acre landowners are similar to those of rangeland owners: water utilization, ditch responsibilities, weed management, land use and planning. Extension could provide consultation regarding land management decisions, however Extension is an unknown resource to many small acreage landowners.

Agriculture and Horticulture

Advances in science and technologies have stimulated producers to become better businessmen. A change in attitude, and a willingness to try new technologies, allows for more specialization in production. Social media provides producers direct contact with consumers and influences marketing strategies. Other priorities which emerged are described below.

- Regulations and land policies need to be understood by producers. Help interpreting the guidelines and adapting to the changing regulations is a priority.
- A growing emphasis is being placed on local food production. It includes strategies to quantify local markets, identify niche markets, access to markets, and providing resources about the products consumers demand.
- Cost of production, cash flow and financing options, and optimizing natural resources.

Community Development Education

Focus group members recognized “people who care” when they talked about positive aspects of their counties. Comments included “camaraderie among communities,” “people willing to give their time to volunteer for boards and community efforts,” and “generous communities giving donations and time” were common themes. Focus group participants in Laramie and Lincoln counties addressed challenges associated with commuter populations. Discretionary income, and a sense of community, is reduced when residents spend most of their time outside the county. Priorities which arose in the focus groups are described below.

- Education focused on leadership development for elected officials. Public engagement to encourage elected officials and citizens to collaboratively identify shared concerns, goals, and strategies to address issues.
- Lack of infrastructure makes economic development difficult. Access to technology was cited as a challenge for small business development; city, county, and federal regulations can erect barriers for planning and development; public transportation and affordable housing are challenges for lower income residents.
- Depreciation of the economy will have a major impact across the state. Loss of jobs and stagnant wages will affect families and an anticipated revenue shortfall will affect services provided by government.

Nutrition and Food Safety

The importance of using technology to reach youths and young families was discussed in each Nutrition and Food Safety focus group. Facebook, twitter, web sites and other social media could be utilized to share convenient recipes, resources for eating healthy, and marketing educational programs. Social norms around food were also identified as a challenge in each area: emotional eating; unhealthy food choices at social gatherings, in the workplace, and at school; candy used as a reward for youths; etc. Below are common priorities identified by the focus groups:

- Hectic lifestyles require healthy meals that can be easily and quickly prepared. Convenience was often stated as a primary factor in deciding what to consume.
- The selection of fresh vegetables and fruits is limited in small, rural communities. Cost of perishable food items is also a detriment to purchasing healthier foods in all communities.
- Basic nutrition education for all audiences: youths, adults, income levels, and cultures. Learning to make healthier choices when the options are limited (i.e. traveling, time constraints, etc.) will improve eating habits and lifestyles. Understanding how marketing influences consumer purchases will increase consumer savvy in purchasing decisions.

4-H Youth Development

The positive influence non-formal educational programs have on life skill development of youths was shared in each of the 4-H Youth Development focus groups. Participants highlighted a variety of activities available which provide leadership opportunities for youths, contribute to a sense of belonging, and build strong bonds with other youths in the community. Priorities which emerged are described below.

- Technology and social media present positive and negative aspects. It can be an effective communication tool, informing youths of opportunities to get involved, however it can also increase peer pressure, reduce social interaction, physical activity, and create dangerous situations when not used safely. “We need to make kids aware of what they are putting on social media and aware of the negative impacts that accompany social media.”
- Youth organizations often experience a lack of parent support and involvement. Encouraging parents to get involved creates a vested interest in the program, and appropriate training is important when parents pursue becoming an approved volunteer leader.
- The cost to participate in youth organization activities can become a financial hardship for families.

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