

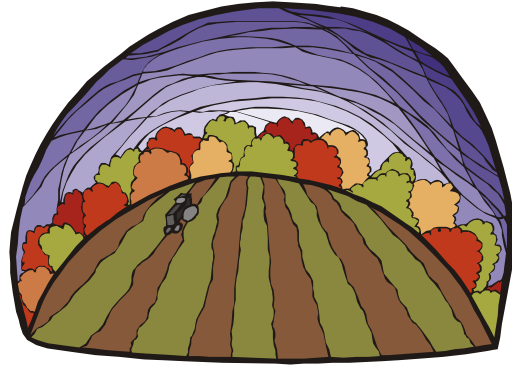
Future of Agriculture in Our Community

The Future of Agriculture in Our Community is a planning and visioning process to develop community priorities for projects to create a supportive economic, social, and political environment for agriculture.

What happens in the program?

The program revolves around the work of a coalition of groups and individuals who are interested in agriculture and their community. This coalition will gather information from farmers about their needs and future plans by holding public meetings and by creating and conducting a confidential survey. Then, using this information, they develop a plan to address community problems they've identified. Over the next year or

so, the coalition members work with other community members to carry out this plan, and develop projects and programs that are intended to improve the environment in which farmers operate their businesses.



What can we do with this program?

Specific projects have included developing agricultural educational materials, farmland preservation efforts, programs to link retiring farmers with younger potential farmers, and developing alternative marketing opportunities (such as cooperatives, farmers markets, and 'buy-local' campaigns). The projects you might create in your community will depend on the type of agriculture you have, local economic conditions, and local agricultural agencies, services, and businesses.

What leads to a successful program?

- The program's success depends on building a broad-based coalition that represents the widest variety possible of community members. Any differences of opinion will ultimately result in wider agreement on priorities and projects for local agriculture.
- Developing a legitimate process is essential to building trust and widespread community support for the program and projects developed.
- Proper planning, clear communication, and sufficient lead time make individuals' experiences positive and encourage continued involvement.
- Each member of the coalition has a set of resources, such as their networks, knowledge, and groups they represent. Drawing on these will widen the number and breadth of people represented in the program.



What are the steps in the program?

Coalition building: Three groups are formed, starting with the Leadership Team. This generally occurs over the summer and early fall.

- Leadership Team guides the whole process, develops the plans and timeline for the program, plans training session for volunteer visitors, organizes the Let's Talk sessions, develops the survey, addresses questions and concerns raised, publicizes the program, recruits volunteers. Largest time commitment.
- Task Force publicizes the program, recruits volunteers, attends Let's Talk sessions, discusses survey results and develops action plan.
- Volunteer visitors make contacts with farmers and interview them on their farms, then turn in completed surveys.

First meetings of Task Force: at the first meeting, this group discusses details of the timeline, sets up meeting times, dates, and places, and considers needed resources.

Let's Talk sessions: about 3 or so open public meetings, at multiple locations within the county, to let farmers talk about their needs and future plans. These sessions have an agenda, or set of questions for the farmers, but are meant to be open discussions. Points raised here may be included in the survey. We recommend that these meetings take place after harvest but before the holidays.

Volunteer Visitor Training: Volunteer visitors from the task force are trained during early January to go out in teams of two to interview randomly selected farmers.

Farmer Interviews: The survey runs during January and early February. Once the surveys are done and the data entered, a team of professional researchers analyzes the data and develops an initial report for the Task Force.

Retreat: a series of meetings (usually in March) to study survey results and develop priority goals.

Commencement: A public meeting follows the Retreat to announce the priority goals. This meeting publicizes the findings and generates volunteers, community support, and resources to work on individual projects.

Plan Implementation: Over the next year or so, subcommittees from the task force (plus additional community members) develop specific projects to work toward the priority goals developed in the plan.