
**A SUMMARY OF YOUR FEEDBACK ON
THE FUTURE OF CUMBERLAND COUNTY AGRICULTURE**

Dear FOCCA Participant,

Recently you shared your thoughts with us about the *Future of Cumberland County Agriculture* by filling out and returning a mail survey we sent to you (*The Future of Cumberland County Agriculture, Where have we been? Where are we going?*) We've had a chance to read through your responses and the responses of the other participants, and wanted to share the results with you.

First, however, we want to thank you for working so hard during the development of the FOCCA program and for your continued work on the goals of the program. We believe that FOCCA will have a strong, positive impact on agriculture in Cumberland County.

Second, thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with us about FOCCA by filling out and returning the survey. We sincerely appreciate your efforts, as your feedback will help us further develop the program for other counties across Pennsylvania.

This report describes what FOCCA participants thought of the program, what kind of impact it has had, and how it can be improved. As promised, what is reported here are only statistical summaries. Your confidentiality has been maintained. We welcome any additional thoughts you may have about FOCCA and this evaluation, and invite you to contact us at any time (our contact information is at the end of this report).

Review of Program Goals

While the FOCCA program had the visible goal of improving the business climate for agriculture, we felt that it might have a few less visible impacts on each of you and on Cumberland County as a community. For example, we wondered if participation would increase the likelihood that farmers and non-farmers would interact on a regular basis, or if participants would be more likely to become involved in other agriculture and non-agriculture community projects.

We also thought that the practice you've had at gathering information, identifying people and resources in the community, and developing solutions to problems might be skills that would carry over into other projects. These are goals of the program that can have a lasting impact on the community, but may not always be recognized as a potential outcome. We wanted to be sure to document these more subtle program effects, in addition to the more obvious goals of the program. The rest of this report describes some of these impacts.

Who Responded to the Survey?

We started with a list of 146 people who had ever signed up for FOCCA. Of these, 21 people contacted us to say that they were not really involved in the program. In the end, we received 55 completed surveys. We think that these are likely the individuals most involved in FOCCA.

Participation in FOCCA

One of the basic questions we wanted to know is why people would want to participate in FOCCA. Most people took part in the program out of a concern for farming in the county as well as an interest in the preservation of farmland. Also, over

half of the participants got involved in the program out of concern for the quality of life in the county. This tells us that the reasons people got involved in the program were similar to the program's goals.

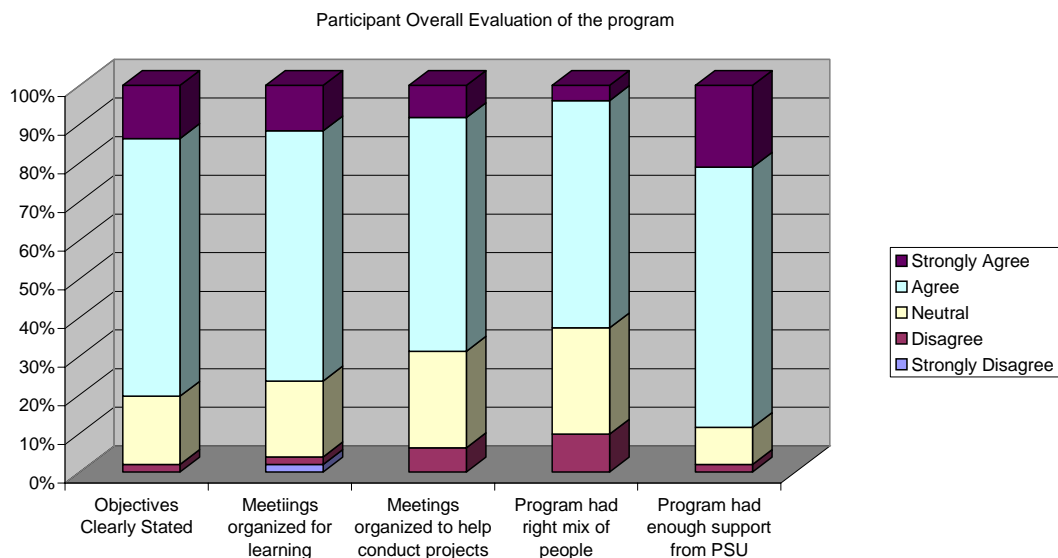
Concern for farming and agriculture in Cumberland County	83.3%
Concern for the preservation of agricultural land	74.1%
Commitment to improving the quality of life in Cumberland County	55.6%
Concern for the preservation of the natural environment	44.4%
Opportunity to meet new people	7.4%

Overall, those who responded to the survey estimated that they gave 1126 hours in total to FOCCA, between November, 2002 and April, 2003 (up to Commencement). On average, those who participate in any of the Action Teams and Leadership Teams report giving the most hours, both approximately 45 hours in total. Those serving on the Task Force and Volunteer Visitor team reported fewer hours, about 10 fewer on average than those in the action and leadership teams.

These contributions represent a major commitment to addressing the needs of farmers and improving the quality of life in Cumberland County. Of those who couldn't participate as much as they'd like, the primary reasons given were work (48%) and family commitments (32%).

Your Views on FOCCA

Next we talk about your views on the quality of the program. Questions include: program elements appreciated the most, whether you would take part in future programs and whether you would recommend the program for other counties.

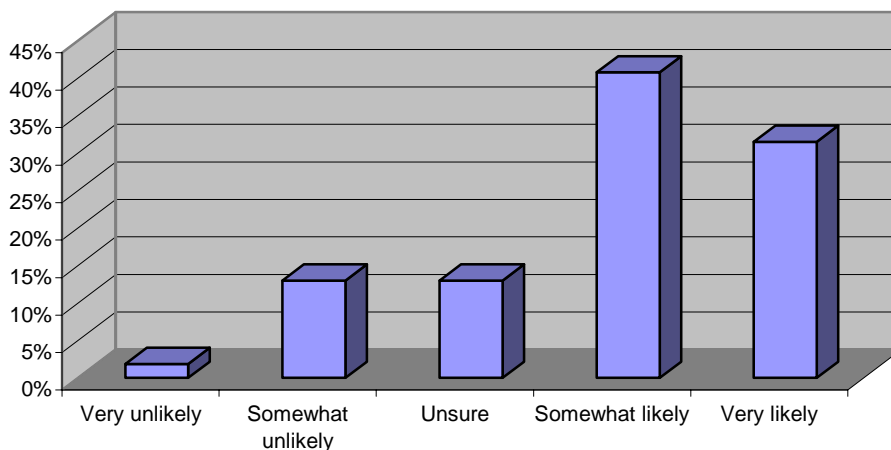


Most respondents gave positive evaluations of the program. In general, most participants thought that the objectives had been clearly stated (over 80%) and that the program had the right amount of support from PSU Cooperative Extension (nearly 90%). Some people were either neutral or concerned about the structure of the meetings, with over 20% not agreeing that the meetings were organized for learning and nearly 30% not agreeing that meetings were organized to conduct projects.

Similarly, some concerns were raised about the mix of people involved in the program, with nearly 35% not agreeing with this statement. This tells us that while the objectives set for the program and support provided were appropriate, more effort needed to be invested into organizing the meetings and recruiting a diverse mix of people as program volunteers.

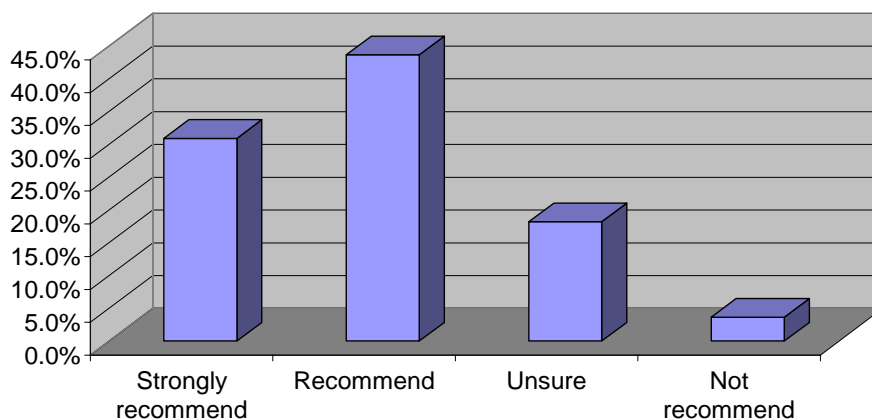
Another measure of participants' experiences is whether or not they would do it all over again. We asked the question in two ways: would they participate in another PSU Cooperative Extension program, and would they recommend that other counties go through a similar program. Nearly 75% said that it was either somewhat or very likely that they would take part in another PSU Extension program.

Likelihood of Participating in Any PSU Cooperative Extension Program Again



Nearly 80% of participants would recommend that other counties conduct a program like Future of Ag.

The extent to which respondents would recommend that other counties conduct a similar program (N = 53)



Features of the program which people said they particularly liked included the team approach and the opportunities they were given to discuss and express ideas. It was also felt that the program was successful in bringing a diverse set of “like minded people” together to solve local problems, which included politicians, farmers, and ordinary citizens. A frequently cited benefit of the program was that of “*Meeting many different, but dedicated farmers*”.

In addition, respondents thought the program had created awareness of agricultural issues, and built an organizational structure to oversee projects. Overall,

people felt the program gave them a chance to demonstrate the community's support for agriculture.

In terms of improving the program, suggestions made included expanding the range of people involved, particularly more farmers, elected officials and young people. It was also felt that more publicity was needed to show off the work people had done within the program and to create more awareness of the issues being addressed in the capitol region and the state. Finally, a number of respondents felt that more advanced preparation should have gone into the meetings, which would have made them shorter and more focused on producing results.

Achievement of Program Goals

One of the initial goals of FOCCA was to increase the knowledge that participants have of agriculture and the community. Nearly half (45.9%) of FOCCA participants who responded to the survey reported that their knowledge of agriculture in Cumberland County increased because of the program. In addition, 42.0% reported an increase in their knowledge of Cumberland County people and businesses.

Programs like FOCCA have additional, sometimes unstated effects on participants' involvement in community life. These 'spillover' effects can have important impacts on the community, by teaching people skills, getting them active, and showing them the potential of community resources and organizations.

FOCCA had some of these spillover effects. Over 40% of respondents said that because of FOCCA they were likely to increase their involvement in local decision-making about agriculture issues. This involvement could take many shapes, including writing to representatives (40.9%), talking to community groups (38.0%), testifying at public meetings (40.0%), and serving on a county committee related to agriculture (34.0%). In addition, about one-third of respondents said that the FOCCA program helped them improve their problem-solving skills, such as identifying the causes and consequences of a local problem, developing a plan to solve a local problem, and organizing a group to work on a local problem.

Another goal of FOCCA was to encourage people to interact with community members they may not otherwise see regularly. About 45% of respondents said that they were likely to talk with farmers and elected officials and community leaders more because of FOCCA.

Conclusion

Overall you reported that the program went well, and achieved many of its stated and unstated goals. We are particularly impressed by how many of you said you would be involved in another PSU Extension program, or recommend a program like FOCCA to other counties, especially considering the number of hours you've dedicated to the program.

Your answers also show us some directions for how to improve the program. For future programs, we are working to improve how we recruit volunteers to the program, organize the meetings, publicize the program and its results, and provide support to action teams in the development of their projects.

The role you've played as the 'pilot community' has meant that you've had a real hand in shaping the program. The success of FOCCA is a testament to your commitment and passion for agriculture and your community. We believe that these successes are just beginning, not only for Cumberland County, but for many communities across the state. Thanks again for your hard work and perseverance.

Sincerely,

Kathy Brasier

Tim Collins

Tim Kelsey