

**2012 Member Organization Survey
KAC Task Force for the Future of Agriculture
Summary of Responses to Open Ended Questions
May 2012**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While this summarizes the open-ended comments, it is important to note the overlap with the ranked responses to the survey as well as the comments offered at the earlier summit. Due to the considerable overlap in responses, this Executive Summary merges the responses to the general question on the “critical challenge and/or best emerging opportunity for all agriculture sectors” with those for the more specific question on the “critical challenge and/or the best emerging opportunity for your sector of agriculture in Kentucky.”

As has already been noted, a challenge is just an opportunity waiting to be acted on. This is very true for how the member organizations answered the two questions on critical challenges and emerging opportunities for Kentucky’s agricultural sectors.

New market development/expansion of existing markets

The development of new markets and/or the expansion of existing markets are seen as keys to the future growth of Kentucky’s agriculture. There are emerging markets (e.g., local/regional food systems, international demand, alternative crops and bio-energy) that offer new opportunities for Kentucky’s farmers.

What will be required to capture the value of these new markets? The following are identified as critical components of a market access strategy: Research and information are needed to “to identify the right crops and practices while recruiting end users.” In other words, it is imperative to define the nature of emerging and expanding markets so as to produce and sell what is needed, desired and economically competitive. Then, there must be the infrastructure to move new market commodities from the farm gate to the end user, and this infrastructure must be accessible to all producers and with reasonable regulatory limits. Finally, farmers must be willing “to change - do it differently, maybe even do a different "it," if this strategy for growth is to succeed.

Enhancing public understanding of agriculture as a business, a driver of economic growth, and a way of life

In the absence of grounded information from those involved in the agricultural sector, all the public knows about agriculture and the food they eat is what the headlines tells them, or doesn’t tell them. Though this has been said for decades, now truly is the time for the agricultural sector to speak with one voice a unified message that is designed to tell the story of the families who raise the food we put on our tables and the businesses that help them do this. This knowledge is essential to insure that nonfarmers, especially those who set public policies and establish regulations, have an informed context for these decisions.

This informational campaign must begin at a general level (e.g., food production systems, the role of agriculture in sustaining the environment and as a factor in economic growth) in K-12 and then move into

more focused messages to consumers and policy-makers that reflect the needs and interests of Kentucky's agriculture.

What will be needed to achieve a greater public understanding of the agricultural sector? First, there is a need for consensus on the information to be communicated; in other words what are the core components of the message? Second, there is a critical need for the information and the public messages to be correctly crafted, continuously updated, and transmitted in a variety of ways (from formal classroom settings to media campaigns). This will only happen if the industry members support the acquisition of professional staff time to develop the core content and the means to effectively deliver it (both outlets and funds to disseminate). This means that "state ag leaders need to engage commodity groups to better understand their programs and their capacity to partner on other projects." Finally, to be effective, this effort demands a consistently uniform presentation by all those within agriculture, for this is the foundation of political influence.

Several respondents noted the importance of a shared message and keeping a focus on the goals of the successful collaborations that have enabled KAC and others to accomplish so much already. One noted: "Ag must speak with one voice. We are fractured: small vs large, enviro vs conventional, organic vs. conventional. One fights the other at the other's expense and no one wins," and another noted that under the Kentucky agriculture tent, no one group should try to carve a market share out of another's market, because growth is good for all.

The next generation of farm operators and farm labor

In the early 1980s, the theme of a National Ag Day was the poignant question: Who will farm the land? This question is even more relevant today as both a challenge and an opportunity as the current generation ages out of their production roles. Participants in this survey note that finding ways to enable young adults who want to farm to gain access to farmland (i.e., access to credit, availability of affordable land, mentoring) and to have the business management skills to succeed. Moreover, farming requires access to qualified and affordable labor and there is a concern that immigration restrictions on top of the perception that working on a farm is an undesirable job is and will continue to produce labor shortages.

What will be needed to insure an orderly and successful transition to the next generation of farm producers? Agricultural education must be available throughout Kentucky in high schools as well as in our technical schools and universities. Entering farming requires an enormous diversity and depth of knowledge and skills and the future of Kentucky's agricultural economy will depend on how successful we are in preparing tomorrow's farmers and workers. But if you don't have access to credit or the cost of farmland is too high because of competition from urban users, then it is difficult to enter farming. This is why several respondent offered suggestions for different types of incentives that could support this transition.

Third, young farmers have young families and so access to affordable health care and health insurance is critical to young people making this choice. Moreover, since nearly all farm families have both on and off-farm jobs, economically active rural communities that can offer a range of employment choices is also important. Finally, producing the right commodities for the right market and access to the market system that will enable you to sell your products at a fair price also must happen for young persons to successfully transition into farming. As one respondent said: "farming is not easy and it take a lot of capital, but so does starting a viable business in town."

Realistic and supportive government policies and regulations

Clearly, the broad sweep of Kentucky agriculture – individual farmers and representative organizations – must have a clearly defined vision for tomorrow and recommended strategies to implement this vision. But others, especially local, state and federal governments, have a role play. Some issues, such as migrant labor regulations, can only be determined at the federal level.

The state government has important roles to play in ensuring the continued viability of the agricultural sector. Some specific responsibilities mentioned are: continuing to fund both the Governor’s Office of Agricultural Policy (and the Agricultural Development Board) and the PACE program, and offering tax and other incentives for value-added producers and new market development.

Local governments need to consider the impact of their decisions and policies on local farmers because “maintaining the economic viability of the family farm and/or large scale farming operations” is a key “to supporting the economic viability of [many] rural communities.” But to do this, local leaders need to fully understand the role of the agricultural sector in their economic life as well as how growth in farming stimulates retail and manufacturing growth.

What is the most critical challenge and/or the best emerging opportunity for all agriculture sectors in Kentucky to prosper?

CHALLENGES

Developing new markets

Kentucky agriculture must be allowed to and assisted in expanding marketing opportunities domestically and internationally through technology, trade and new idea acceptance

Marketing assistance

Export assistance

Addressing market changes

Rising costs

Energy costs

Feed costs

Available labor

Restrictions on Labor H2A

Securing legal labor

Bringing in the next generation of farmers

Dwindling and aging farm population (especially African Americans)

More efficient production of changes -- less land and more people

Dependence on non-renewable resources and non-sustainable practices

The inability of producers to implement scientific proven facts

Maintaining farmers' freedom to operate by educating consumers and stakeholders about today's farm families

Funding

Unification of the ag industry

Addressing climate and environmental changes

Protection of animal disease and diagnostic centers

OPPORTUNITIES

Expanding markets

Expanding local markets

The buy-local campaigns are helping to build more consumer trust

Diversification

An emerging opportunity would be alternative bio-energy

Global increasing demand for animal protein

Education of the public (2)

Communicating the value of our industry to others, especially young children in urban and metropolitan areas

Agriculture has to continue to tell their story

Educating today's consumers (who are now 2 to 3 generations away from the farm) why agriculture is the most important industry

Ensuring consumers have an accurate/unbiased understanding of food production systems

For all ag organizations to pull together and present a united front to consumers, government and the public

Educating the next generation on production agriculture's role in their lives

Voluntary water quality conservation to prevent regulation

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT MUST HAPPEN TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGE AND/OR TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY?

Agricultural leadership must recognize communicating the importance of agriculture to the public as a priority

A willingness to share resources on consumer messaging and education

Better promotion

Better links to the press

Develop a common message

Education on issues and common threads that unite all of ag

Give support to agritourism businesses with money and help educate them to do their job better

More ag vocational type education on post-secondary education

Business financial education for high school students needs to be enhanced

Most high school graduates and even higher level young people don't understand economics or how to develop business plans. Incentives, grants etc are fine, but if they can't manage money, they won't make it

Encourage and train young farmers

Mutual respect and understanding on controversial production practices in the ag community by the public

All producers must form and participate in alliances

Marketing of a specific practice or commodities cannot include criticizing other practices of commodities

Legislation that helps farmers secure labor at a reasonable price

Educate Dept of Labor and federal administration on the labor needs in agriculture

A willingness to change - do it differently, maybe even do a different "it"

Farmers must be encouraged to embrace new technology

Farmers understanding that voluntary conservation planning is "insurance" against more regulation

Promote and reward sustainable practices

Farmers must be allowed to implement biotech advancements

No regulations (environmental, labor, zoning) that inhibit growth and ability to operate

Work with WTC-KY on exports

Build a new BVC

WHERE DOES THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS ACTION LIE?

The entire agricultural leadership community is responsible for communicating a unifying message to the public

All sectors of education and agriculture – Many have the mindset that farming is impossible so they paint a wrong picture or have pre-conceived beliefs

Agricultural leadership must inform stakeholders about the importance of agriculture

All KY agriculture sectors should be involved

Leadership in commodity organizations

All ag organizations

All of agriculture

Kentucky ag leaders working together

Kentucky Ag Council

Kentucky Farm Bureau, Kentucky Livestock Coalition, commodity groups

All commodity groups

All of us

Kentucky Dept. of Agriculture (2)

Ag Development Board support building a new BVC

Political leadership

Legislators must be willing to support this implementation

State government must prevent local government from creating unrealistic laws

State legislature allocate money to build a new BVC

President and Congress are the only ones who can address immigrant labor issues

The University of Kentucky College of Agriculture and Extension (2)

Colleges and universities for research, extension and education

The farmers to be willing to change

Individual producers

Farmers and landowners willing to do the “right thing” re conservation planning

The industry to give the farmers alternatives

WHAT RESOURCES ARE NEEDED TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN?

The communications and public relations resources (people) devoting time to collectively develop a messaging strategy

More staff across all groups given time to work on collaborative consumer education projects

Advertising and advocacy programs

The financial resources to "spread" the message on the importance of agriculture
Build better relationships with the press
Agritourism businesses are already doing farm tours and they are the only connection between a lot of consumers and agriculture. Let's give these agritourism businesses some encouragement

Those in Ag Sector working together more effectively

State ag leaders need to engage commodity groups to better understand programs and capacity to partner on other projects
Build better relationships within agriculture
Accountability of groups that unfairly/inaccurately criticize other producers
Grain and animal agriculture working together have shown more unity. The Soybean Board creating and supporting the Kentucky Livestock Coalition
Common contact list of resources and people in ag

Technical assistance

Education (extension service, farmer meetings)
Willingness to stay informed about new ideas and technologies
Educate the educators - farming is not easy and it take a lot of capital, but so does starting a viable business in town
Research and development by industry

Funding – about \$30 m to build a new BVC

Some financial assistance to test and demonstrate new ideas and technologies
Ag Develop Board funds left intact

Open mindedness by regulators

State laws to prevent local laws

Time

Congress and the President

What is the most critical challenge and/or the best emerging opportunity for your sector of agriculture in Kentucky to prosper?

CHALLENGES

Educating at all levels

Keeping young people in high school years involved in ag educational opportunities
Expansion of high school secondary agriculture programs and post-secondary educational opportunities
The inability of producers to implement scientific proven facts

Maintaining markets

The economy affecting our market
Creating new market opportunities

Lack of trained labor force

H2A workers do not qualify for dairy. We need an acceptable plan for accessing labor on dairy operations

Strengthening Kentucky's animal agriculture industry both in terms of farm profitability and consumer perception

Lack of a fair price so that dairy farms can be profitable businesses

Excessive regulations

Limits on the ability to build poultry houses

Restrictions on movement of farm trucks on roads

Infrastructure concerns

Maintaining accredited diagnostic labor to support animal ag producers

Lack of infrastructure for expansion of dairy sector

State lawmakers

Lack of funding for new farmer programs

Access to affordable health care

OPPORTUNITIES

Communication on:

The value of agriculture to Kentucky's overall economy

Why the success of the agriculture industry is important to all citizens

Growth of "Ag Advocates" to tell our story

Market opportunities

The buy-local campaigns are helping to build more consumer trust

Identifying low input biomass crops that can be grown in marginally productive fields

Growing marketing opportunities in tandem with the production of low input biomass crops that create energy markets for these crops

Maximize production potential of small grains in KY

Maximize market expansion opportunities to capitalize on high prices for small grains

Helping farmers and landowners understand the importance and impact of water quality improvement opportunities

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT MUST HAPPEN TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGE AND/OR TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY?

Funding/prices/the economy

Provide funding to support new farmers

Availability of funds to expand ag ed

- More high school ag ed programs
- Recruit more young kids into ag programs
- Changes in lending practices to support investment in agriculture
- A better price for our commodities
- An improved economy
- Increase in discretionary income to support expansion of markets

Government policies

- State financial support for an accredited diagnostic lab
- Less restrictive laws relating to farm trucks on roads
- Less restrictive zoning
- Legislation to control prices of health insurance
- Federal immigration policy must begin to consider the needs of dairy farmers and others in the ag sector who need workers every day, all year

- An approach to identifying right crops and practices while recruiting end users with sound technologies
- Agronomic advances from public and private sources
- More investment in staff resources to recruit new livestock and poultry business opportunities
- Green promotion

- Agricultural leadership has to establish communication with the public as a priority
- Agriculture has to continue to tell their story
- Recruit more women to “tell our story”
- State ag leaders should highlight strengths and weaknesses of members of ag family to learn what to change

- A willingness to adopt new practices by farmers
- Farmers and their employees must embrace change

Relationship-building with markets

WHERE DOES THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS ACTION LIE?

All agricultural organizations have to have a role in greater communication with the public about the value of agriculture

- State ag leaders should highlight strengths and weaknesses of members of ag family to learn what to change
- Advocacy by all segments of the industry
- Increased ties among all ag organizations
- Ag Commodity Groups and Kentucky Farm Bureau must advocate for the labor needs of dairy
- Grain and animal agriculture working together have shown more unity. The Soybean Board creating and supporting the Kentucky Livestock Coalition

- State, regional, federal organizations
- State law makers
- State legislature
- State government

Government officials and local insurance agencies
Legislation supporting expanded ag ed
Congress
Congress sets immigration policy

Producers' willingness to try new methods
Farmers accept changes
Farmers and their employees

Universities producing sound research and recommendations
Land grants to do research

Taxpayers
The public

Technology companies

Some financial assistance from government to mitigate risk and assist with demonstrations

WHAT RESOURCES ARE NEEDED TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN?

Financial resources (2)
Funds/Money (3)
More investment in staff resources to recruit new livestock and poultry business opportunities
Research funding
Funding for promotion and education
Provide for good local ag ed programs and special improvement funds for post-secondary programs

Agricultural organizations committed to some level of support for supporting a unified message for the public about the value of agriculture
Support from the ag community
People with expertise in developing a unifying message about the value of agriculture
Media training

Legislative power
Remove the political posturing and do what is right for everyone. What's the chances of that?

Willing farmers
Technical assistance

Leadership within Kentucky's energy industries

Research collaboration

What is the most critical challenge and/or the best emerging opportunity for our rural communities in Kentucky to prosper?

CHALLENGES

Preserving a local agriculture economy that is diverse in size, environmental needs

Maintaining the economic viability of the family farm and/or large scale farming operations in order to support the economic viability of rural communities

Counties must learn to appreciate the economic activities that they have

Recognizing that no one size fits all approach can increase food, fiber and fuel opportunities in Kentucky

Replacing tobacco farmers' income

Increasing the profitability of farming

Ease of entry by new farmers

Assisting young people to start out in farming

Keeping the next generation interested in agriculture

Lack of farm credit availability

The population shift from many rural Kentucky communities to other area creates significant challenges for the future. The loss of "critical mass" for many small businesses could transform rural communities into just rural "areas"

Pressures from urban interests and conflicting value systems

Finding workers that "want" to work

Work ethic

Educated workers

Lack of incentives for economic development

Policy-makers

Lack of affordable health care

OPPORTUNITIES

Market opportunities in agriculture stimulating rural economies

The buy-local campaigns are helping to build more consumer trust

Biomass markets

Adding value to Kentucky's agricultural and forest commodities and the quickest approach to this is utilizing them for energy production

Educating our neighbors on how agriculture is vital to our rural communities. We are making this known but we need to do more to get the message out.

We must educate the consumers

The best emerging opportunity for rural Kentucky is the significant transfer of wealth that is predicted to take place over the next 50 years - some \$707 billion in Kentucky. The opportunity here is to secure a small portion of this wealth to benefit our rural communities

Commodity groups are working together – KY Livestock Coalition is an example

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT MUST HAPPEN TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGE AND/OR TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY?

Economic initiatives

Funding

Incentives

Tax relief on ag property

Resources made available to help college graduates return to the farm

Educate our farm and rural communities to the coming transfer of wealth.

Improve government and tax policies to make it easier for someone to gift a portion of their wealth to a community or local entity

Development of local structures to manage the gift and resources, communities need to consider tools such as Community Foundations

Risk management

Open dialogue that helps producers identify emerging opportunities

Willingness to accept new ideas

Better data on what Kentucky farmers of all sizes and production areas are expecting to invest in the next 5 years

Research

Ag must speak with one voice. We are fractured: small vs large, enviro vs conventional, organic vs. conventional. One fights the other at the other's expense and no one wins

Agriculture has to continue to tell their story

Agricultural education in schools

Entrepreneurship and leadership development with a focus on "service delivery" business ventures could help sustain rural communities

Regional ag partnerships focused on job creation and entrepreneurship

Education about and removal of barriers for young people to enter farming

A health insurance open market

Understanding of the importance of water quality

WHERE DOES THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS ACTION LIE?

State agricultural leaders

With everyone - our agricultural groups, media and community organizations

The ag industry
The Farm Bureau to support access to health care and insurance
We need each other – quit using one to promote self – promote all of us

Government support
Government
Policy makers
USDA
State government to support access to health care and insurance
Legislators

Willing producers
Farmers (2)
Farm employees

University researchers
Universities

Financial sector to assist young persons to enter farming
Banks

Area Development Districts, Regional Extension Councils, Regional Business Innovation Centers, Regional universities, county/city leadership, Chambers of Commerce need to support agricultural leaders in promoting job creation and entrepreneurship

Equipment manufacturers

Public

WHAT RESOURCES ARE NEEDED TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN?

Everyone working together
Kentucky agriculture has had some great years recently and it would be helpful if the producers would continue to combine resources for the next series of challenges which could be trade, weather or regulations
Focused effort of all ag organizations
Staff availability to collect data from different farm groups and rural business organizations
Grain and animal agriculture working together have shown more unity. The Soybean Board creating and supporting the Kentucky Livestock Coalition

Funds
Money to coordinate specific project proposals for economic development in Agriculture
Funding by government and industry
More funding for education

More education to help young people gain access to capital to enter farming
Support or mentoring programs for young entering farmers
Increasing availability of credit for young persons to enter farming

Time and attention to coming transfer of wealth

Agricultural groups should begin to consider the coming transfer of wealth as an issue that needs to be a part of meeting agendas, policy discussions, and future planning

Technical assistance

Information

Local and state education programs

Education

Outreach

Continue promoting our products with resources available – KADF has been a wonderful source to promote ag and ag products

Regulations to help with farm and land transfers

Changes in tax laws

**Items in italics are used to organize similar comments but these exact words were not stated by any respondent*