

NEW YORK: CORNELL UNIVERSITY (COMBINED)

STAKEHOLDER INPUT PROCESS

This section provides an overview of what the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cornell Cooperative Extension have been doing individually and collaboratively to address stakeholder input needs. Having recognized the value of greater stakeholder input for a long time, including for research support decisions, our efforts predate the legislated requirements called for in the Farm Bill and currently being implemented by USDA. What we report below are activities born out of Cornell's assessment of what the right things are to do, not simply a response to these mandates.

Cornell Cooperative Extension has long had grassroots involvement and ownership in local programs. County extension associations (formally defined in State law) and the New York City extension program are continually working with stakeholders in their communities to provide relevant educational programs with potential for highly beneficial impact locally. Each county extension association is required by law to have a local governance structure drawn from community members. In addition, all county and multi-county extension units have advisory committee structures that guide program direction. Boards of Directors develop local policy and set agendas; local volunteer program advisors ensure relevance of educational programming to local needs. More than 2500 persons are involved in local boards of directors and formal advisory committees. In addition, more than 60,000 persons serve as volunteers in various program delivery modes, providing another significant source of stakeholder involvement. The fact that CCE Associations continue to garner the majority of their program support from local sources and their success in capturing grant support speaks well to their continued attention to stakeholder needs. Annually, county associations are expected to document successful efforts to extend their programs and organization to under-served and under-represented audiences, including through local governance and advisory structures. This information is included in civil rights reporting.

While the extension system of grassroots governance and program advisory activity is widely recognized, the many state-level efforts to gain stakeholder input and support for most CCE and CUAES programs is less well recognized, perhaps because it lacks central organization. We recently assessed the number of advisory boards and committees working with our programs. There are more than 100 such groups involving approximately 1000 individuals. These groups are made up of stakeholders ranging from consumers and community citizens, industry and other clientele representatives, scientists who use the outcomes of our research, and extension educators and policy makers who put our scholarship to immediate use. These advisory and beneficiary groups are found in all major program areas.

Through environmental scanning efforts conducted as part of the statewide extension plan of work process and other built-in system feedback mechanisms, field observations of needs are continuously communicated to campus research and extension faculty. To focus and magnify such communication from the grassroots, about eight years ago our offices jointly created a system of statewide research and extension program committees. These statewide program committees (SPCs) were chartered by the directors of research and extension and are made up of researchers and extension faculty, county-based

extension educators, and stakeholders. From their conception, SPCs were intended to inform both our research and extension effort, and especially to contribute to the integration of the two functions.

We have 11 SPCs (as of June 1999) covering the major programmatic thrusts of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the College of Human Ecology. They play active roles in bringing stakeholder input to research and extension program support decisions. Here are some ways this is accomplished:

1. SPCs annually identify priority areas for applied research and extension program attention. The directors inform the faculty of these priorities in the call for pre-proposals issued annually, and use these when making resource allocation decisions, especially the federal formula funds for research (e.g., Hatch) and extension (i.e., Smith-Lever).
2. SPCs are asked to review the majority of all research and extension project/program pre-proposals requesting federal formula fund support. This review is for "relevancy" and "potential for significant impact." Stakeholders are involved to varying degrees in this pre-proposal review process.
3. The Directors of Research and Extension jointly fund a Research/Extension Integration Grants program that requires attention to SPC-identified priorities, requires local extension association involvement, requires integration of research and extension, and expects multi-disciplinary effort. These are reviewed and rated by the appropriate SPCs. To date we have funded 60 such projects for a total of \$935,500.

Stakeholder input is critical and we believe that Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station are listening to New Yorkers. There is always room for improvement and we continue to review and refine as appropriate our advisory structures and planning processes. We look to stakeholders to help us do the best job possible.