

**Kentucky Advisory Council for Sustainable Agriculture  
Initial Planning Meeting  
Hardin County CES Office  
Elizabethtown, KY  
June 26, 2006**

**Meeting Notes**

Attendees introduced themselves and provided short personal definitions of sustainable agriculture.

Dr. Henning – Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) provides funding for Professional Development Programs (PDP) at the state level. PDP efforts focus on training professionals such as UK County Extension Agents, KSU Small Farm Assistants, USDA personnel in NRCS and FSA, etc. This Council will guide efforts to enhance Kentucky's state PDP plan. Dr. Henning characterized sustainable agriculture (SA) as sound practices that keep farm families on the farm.

Arthur Young (producer) mentioned healthy food, decent income, and environmental soundness as parts of SA.

Rick Greenwell (Ag Agent) included the environment and profitability in his definition.

Dan Grigson (Ag Agent) listed sound practices and diversified enterprises.

Steve Moore (Ag Agent) searched SA on Google and found 59 million hits. Common themes include environmental stewardship, profitability, and community involvement. Generational farming and people-based priorities are part of SA.

Mary Young (producer) finds SARE programs helpful to producers. Providing healthy food to people while making a profit is SA.

Jimmy Sidebottom (producer) is on the SARE Administrative Council, and chairs a project review committee. He defines SA as the ability to farm and produce perpetually. Any outside inputs should be available indefinitely, and non-renewable resources should be avoided.

Jackie Bowen (Green River Cattle Company) feels the environment, profitability, and social responsibility should be included in any definition of SA; success in SA represents a significant challenge to producers.

Janet Johnson (FCS Agent) echoed many of the others' thoughts on SA; she feels the effective use of farm resources, in partnership with consumers and the community, constitutes SA.

Carol LaFaver (Horticulture Agent) listed management, marketing, strategy, farm preservation, environment, and the community as components of SA.

Marion Simon (KSU) provided the SARE definition: economically sustainable (profitable), socially acceptable, environmentally friendly.

Liz Kingsland (FCS Agent) mentioned healthy food and the consumer as integral parts of SA.

Charlene Jacobs (UK) included best management practices, environmental soundness, social acceptability, and preservation of family farms in her definition of SA.

Lee Meyer (UK) is a member of Southern SARE; he sees challenges in the transition going on in agriculture today, resulting in tension. Changes in agriculture require everyone to set new goals.

Gae Broadwater (KSU) sees important roles for the consumer, communities, and local economic systems in SA.

Ron Catchen (Ag Agent) sees SA practitioners as professional, competent, and capable of sustaining a “way of life” for future generations.

Phillip Bean (producer) grows row crops; he thinks SA involves economics and ecology. SA represents a challenge for this and future generations.

Curt Judy (Ag Agent) is receiving more profitability calls from clients. Over 30 years, he has seen many farmers go out of business. Environmental advances (e.g. no-till) indicate we are doing many things well.

Rossneau Elam (producer) also considers himself a consumer. Farming brings him joy; being new at it provides a different perspective. He believes in producing quality produce for the community, and involves his grandchildren on the farm. Rossneau plans to expand with high tunnel greenhouses in the future.

Martin Richards (Community Farm Alliance) reflected on economics, the capability to pass farms to succeeding generations, and community-scale impacts (similar to tobacco) as components of SA.

Tehran Jewel (KSU) suggested financial tools to increase income, decreased inputs, the farmer’s “way of life,” and safe food are all parts of SA.

Michael Barbour (FSA) agreed with other comments; SA allows farmers to produce while protecting the environment/land.

Ronald Buntin (producer) sees sustainability linked to profitability and service to the community.

Danny Adams (KSU) thinks SA allows individuals/families to farm with less risk (debt); many also need off-farm income, and farm part-time.

Daniel Wilson (UK) feels SA allows farmers to farm, and consumers to consume the products.

Jeff Henderson (Ag Agent) believes SA allows production that perfectly complements the land, and lowers chemical inputs.

Ricky Yeargan (UK) shared a view generated from a previous meeting that SA allows “survivability” of farming operations, regardless of scale.

Gayle Arnold (producer) suggested SA represents profitable farming, even though some consider that term an oxymoron. Passing the family farm to the next generation is an important aspect of SA.

Terry Gilbert (Women in Agriculture) feels SA allows her to farm while knowing future generations can as well.

Rod Grusy (Ag Agent) noted that his first meeting on the job in Extension in 1984 was about SA, and that similar discussion occurred. Agriculture is changing, requiring flexibility; government programs drive what happens in the field. Agricultural policy is also constantly changing. How can we empower people to address change – education?

Daniel Smith (producer) thinks SA does not always lead to lowest cost or highest efficiency. Grow local, buy local – inputs and farm products. Involve neighbors and the community; in a global economy, someone will produce cheaper products.

(?) (The Farmer’s Pride newspaper) believes SA leads to a sustainable farm; profit, the environment, and conservation of resources are all important qualities of SA.

Upon request, producers summarized their farming enterprises.

Gayle Arnold – beef, tobacco, greenhouse production

Ronald Buntin – grain (1900 acres row crops), tobacco, cattle

Martin Richards – tobacco, cattle, sheep, goats, organic produce, cut flowers, hay

Rossneau Elam – vegetables (2 acres) for farmers’ market, value-added (canned)

Phillip Bean – grain (2700 acres row crops)

Daniel Wilson – (family) beef (750 brood cows; steers and replacement heifers), alfalfa hay for horse market

Jackie Bowen – Green River Cattle Company – beef: source verified; wholesale sub-primal cuts; retail; value-added (BBQ, jerky)

Jimmy Sidebottom – dairy (120 cows, all feed except supplements, 200 acres row crops (double-crop wheat/corn), total 350 acres

Mary Young – goats on 50 acres, involved with sheep industry

Arthur Young – forages for beef/sheep market, open to other sustainable enterprises

Terry Gilbert – (family) backgrounds beef feeder cattle, hay, corn silage

Four groups formed for breakout discussions; two groups were primarily composed of farmers, and two groups contained public sector personnel.

**The first topic of discussion: What are we doing well in sustainable agriculture?**

**Results**

**1. Producer group responses to discussion topic: “What are we doing well?”**

(the group included producers in row crops, forages, vegetable/flowers/value added, greenhouse and beef (meat) marketing)

Adoption of no-till and conservation tillage (which is driven more by fuel/machinery costs and lack of labor, than by environmental concerns), strip cropping, contour tillage, BMPs, reduced insecticide and chemical use; adoption of crop rotations and use of soil test information;

Organic production of vegetables;

Safety programs on use of chemicals;

Improved water quality through use of riparian buffers and appropriate disposal of dead animals;

Keeping the table supplied with an abundant food supply;

Food quality – consumer interest in production methods and health characteristics of food products; excitement about environmental stewardship practices leading to support of farms;

Changing farm levels attitudes toward protecting the environment – neighbors used to snicker at producers who adopted environmental practices, but not as much now;

Assistance through government farm payments to crop producers;

Change in orientation of Extension – less production focus, more marketing

Groups can discuss sustainability now, there was too much conflict to do this 13 years ago;

Producers are developing marketing strategies and business plans before branching out;

Expansion of farmers’ markets

HB611 – helping in transition from commodity orientation to market orientation

Improved dialogue between producers and consumers;

Maintaining commercial agriculture in Kentucky, (but since this was based on tobacco, are at risk of losing)

Also: both Extension and the GOAP were praised for providing important assistance in delivering programs which are helping to make agriculture more sustainable in Kentucky.

## **2. Second producer group response to “What are we doing well?”**

Third Thursday – KSU

Tess Caudill – KDA (goats)

Conservation practices, e.g. no-till

Small, minority farmers’ conference at KSU in fall

County agents contribute to my success – Extension programs throughout the state

Farmers’ markets > promote community involvement

Farmer: farmer activities, e.g. bred heifer sales, CPH sales, farm visits

HB 391 for small-scale production and sales (home processing)

Animal ID process – education, potential, consumer confidence

Marketing education – producers

Web-based resources for producers – Janet Eaton KDA site

New Crop Opportunities Program

Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SSAWG) annual conference

Help for farmers to diversify/transition from tobacco to other areas

NRCS, CRP

Ag Development Board programs – fencing, animal genetics, forage improvements

Agritourism

### **3. Public sector (CES) response to “What are we doing well?”**

KSU Small Farm Program – producers to conferences, esp. financial tools

Transition – tobacco > other enterprises; cost-share programs

Environmental improvements, e.g. no-till > less erosion

Changes in USDA programs

- Mandatory conservation practices

- Payments (e.g. LDP) based upon market conditions

Consumer education, e.g. farmers’ market collaboration with hospitals, businesses, CES to promote/market healthy food; significance of agriculture to local economy

CES stressing importance of diversified enterprises, esp. on small acreage farms; encouraging partnerships between communities and farms

Ag Development Fund (ADF) programs

CES emphasizing forage base > livestock production

Farmers’ market development

Master Cattleman, Grazer, etc, Sheep Profit, association meetings, field days, Third Thursday, etc, for every producer

Enterprise budgets – profitability?

CPH, produce auctions, graded goat sales, breeding stock sales; CES/KDA/association collaboration for marketing

Constantly increasing productivity; genetic potential; improves competitiveness

CES – willing to embrace diversification (esp. through ADF programs)

ADF – builds capacity/leadership among producers; increases quality, competitiveness in Kentucky – other states have not invested MTSA \$ in agriculture

Networking – research/demonstration work, UK/KSU – all scales of production, using resources from other states/institutions

#### **4. Second public sector group response to “What are we doing well?”**

Working with new partners – forming alliances

KDA > interagency

Increased awareness of farmland preservation, land use management, green space retention, smart growth

Consumer education – better aware of media and utilizing them better

Positive legislation – HB 391 (home processing), HB 669 (state agencies buying KY-grown agricultural products when possible)

State parks buying locally – KY PROUD

Begun to address marketing

Understand value of value-added, including agritourism

Education – good job, with more to come; resources available

Commercial recognition of local products

Phase I monies

Addressing the issue

Better understanding of sustainable agriculture

Improved/changed mindset of sustainable agriculture; more inclusive

Agriculture – more environmentally friendly – chemicals, IRM, vaccinating

Whole products – consumers

BQA, IPM

Diversification of family farm

## **The second topic of discussion: What are we doing not so well in sustainable agriculture?**

### **Results**

#### **Producer's group response to "What are we doing not so well?"**

Land cost and technology themes emerged

Lack of opportunities for young people to transition (generational – family farms)

Not diversifying – quitting (tobacco issue)

Family farms – not carrying on

Loss of farmland (in most parts of the state)

Poor land use management (building on good land)

Too much emphasis on chemicals and fuel – intensive agriculture

Society and local foods (type of foods, understanding)

Apathy among farmers (but a few can make a difference)

Still promoting cheap food policy

Lack of using technology in a sustainable manner – moral issue, like global warming – family farms/community – synthetic fertilizer/chemical use

Issue: sustainable agriculture in context of sustainable economy; bring to local level, e.g. agent/farmer advice in context of sustainable agriculture

Aren't using opportunities of connections – agriculture and community development

Understanding of soils – chemical use, N, tissue testing, food quality evaluation – need knowledge to adopt sustainable agriculture practices

IPM not extended to cropping

Marketing – too few resources (production isn't the problem)

Enforce/implement programs – HB 611 > active role of state

## **Second producer group response to “What are we doing not so well?”**

Diversification programs (e.g. vegetables) few and far between – not easy to find a sponsor, no state assistance to carry over until sponsor found

Marketing – more education for producers; risk management, time management, soil management, business planning

Ongoing education – across board for producers and consumers

Need more attention for mid- to large-size farms > sustainable agriculture works better for small and organic farms

Perception that western Kentucky (outside Louisville, Lexington) is not interested in other production such as vegetables, other sustainable crops

Third Thursday needs to expand to other parts of state

Use of educational technology (satellite, DVD, video) – new approaches to reach far corners of state

KSU/UK need to inform farmers that grants are available and help to learn how to apply/write grants

Sometimes ag agents are not up to date – have lots to keep up with

Farmers need to take initiative to stay in touch to create rapport

Increase interaction between and among all universities – go beyond land grant schools

Family farms go beyond small scale

Thinking: “get big or get out” is choking many farmers

Infrastructure to support expansion for small-scale producers not in place

Technology applications for developing marketing opportunities – web site, e-mail, e.g. hay sales

Ag agents could give more attention to alternative enterprises

Producers need to support each other

## **Public sector (CES) response to “What are we doing not so well?”**

Marketing – need more collaborative efforts – KDA, CES, associations, etc. Producers need to cooperate

Local program delivery – counties, on-farm, more locations, time-friendly

Cooperatives not working – overhead, competition (lower prices), inconsistent supply, members selling top quality products elsewhere (farmers’ markets), business plans inadequate

Lack of young farmers – farm families with “suburban lifestyles” – youth not farming

Land values – farming vs. development, hunting rights > competition

Increase funding/support for 4-H, other programs for youth – consumer education

Education on development costs

Producer education – public policy, consumer marketing

Educate public about agriculture’s contribution to everyone’s quality of life, and what agriculture is about

Make some management practices mandatory, e.g. premises ID, BQA for CPH

## **Second public sector response to “What are we doing not so well?”**

Not enough value-added promotion; add curriculum-based education – need accreditation; certification programs

More team effort across disciplines; Advanced Master Cattleman is a positive example

At county level, CES needs to have coordinated approach to SA

Not always reaching the older, traditional farmers/agents, etc

Not impacting policy for SA – farming vs. cheap food policies; can’t change policy

Improve marketing – comprehensive marketing plan

Not educating producers enough about quality products – red ribbon quality gets nothing in today’s market (your loss)

GMO – poor understanding – low public education – “any pesticide is bad”

Continue to educate public about environmental issues

Not doing SA well – losing producers in each community – policy issues – AWAY from cheap food to money in farmer's pocket

Not educating – listening – discussing these issues with consumers; what do they want – locally grown vs. cheap food; family farms – big picture

Help producers on a local level – reach a market

Dependency – do we want a more independent system to feed ourselves?

Insurance situation for agritourism; value-added – independent market

Help develop financial resources for SA

Third world countries raising our food – is this what we want?

Not enough educational resources

**\*PRIORITY SETTING\***

**For the final discussion of the day, new group assignments were made to ensure a mix of producers and public sector personnel. Groups were charged to develop prioritized action plans to address SA issues.**

### **Action Plan 1**

1. Educate/facilitate producer involvement in developing public policy; training on public policy, especially relating to SA
2. Marketing plans – prioritize marketing avenues (free and paid) to maximize impact of marketing budget
3. Producer networks – market other producer's products; multiple agritourism enterprises in an area create a destination

Other

Training to help producers and agents with grant proposals, e.g. SARE Producer Incentive Grants; sources of grants (UK Office of Sponsored Projects)

Business plans – farmer mentors; utilize UK enterprise budgets; develop budgets for new enterprises (spreadsheet-based to allow variable entries)

Use technology (video links, DVDs) to expand audience for Extension programs; web-based training

**Action Plan 2 (not sure about priority assignments)**

\*(5 #1 votes) – Develop education plan for remaining items – producers, consumers, agents

Use of technology – chemicals, fossil fuels

(2) – Examine federal policies – how to address farm programs

Better knowledge of diversification by visiting sites in other states

Develop entrepreneur center and marketing center as outlined in state legislation

(2) – Increase staff to conduct research on soil conditions, use of synthetic fertilizer vs. organic

(1) – Conduct studies on minimum use of fossil fuels in support of SA

(3) – More on-site/in-field training opportunities in SA @ on-farm level

(2) – Highlight risk-taking, entrepreneurial farm enterprises and value-added products

(2) – Open/expand lines of communication between land grant, SSAWG, ATTRA, independent educators, other groups to address issues together

(3) – Develop a marketing plan to promote SARE locally and within groups, agencies, all partners

(3) – R & D on use of technology for food production with education to follow – guidelines for producers

(2) – Examine value systems that support/promote/inhibit sustainable systems

Foster/facilitate/educate with communities to engage in conversation/dialogue as to importance of agriculture to local economy

Form marketing cooperatives for local community groups and agriculture/farming community

Support for creating local partnerships among producers

(2,3,3,3) – Provide more training on how to develop marketing plans

Build resource library for Extension staff to use to support training and education on market planning

Develop user-friendly templates for business/market plan development

Ask KDA to reevaluate Kentucky Proud program that allows 25% non-local

How do we promote Kentucky Proud through Extension Service? More education for staff, more education for consumers

### **Action Plan 3**

1. Policy discussions with USDA – ag policy is anti-sustainability (cheap food); create practical alternatives
2. Marketing – consumer education on food quality and value; goal – \_\_\_% of Kentucky consumers buy \_\_\_% Kentucky produced foods; purchase of development rights; refocus resources – e.g. KCA, Farm Bureau, UK
3. Community-farmer interactions – to build relationships; build support for farm policy; start with newspaper articles

Other

Regional “Kentucky Pride” stores – full range of Kentucky products (beyond a farmers’ market)

Cash grain/row crops and subsidies – we’re confused

Farm transition – mentoring; on-farm training; business plan, then resources (Kentucky Ag Finance Authority); estate planning; business planning with SBDC (Next Level)

### **Action Plan 4**

1. Marketing – producers aware of special programs – state associations, through CES, articles to local media, newsletters (“Produce Market”)
2. Education –  
Education systems for producers  
Take Third Thursday on the road – even include technology (CD/DVD)  
Make programs transportable – 2 or 3 in different sections of the state  
Work with existing state commodity conferences (e.g. “piggy back” with KCA, Goat Producers)  
Professional development for agents, others in public sector (support system in conjunction with educational programs)  
Funding available for on-farm demonstrations and education

3. Public policy discussions on local level to farm organizations – needs to be handled very carefully, especially with land use planning and farm use preservation; public policy education for municipal leaders; consumer education on public policies issues

4. Marketing to consumers

Local grown

Something like “Beef – it’s what’s for dinner” for goats, turkeys, vegetables, etc

Promotion of farm products – more than Kentucky Proud

Use successful programs to show community at local meetings

Let people know that SA is any ag enterprise – traditional or niche