



Lee Ann Clark
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News Release

Alabama Cooperative Extension System **Listening to Citizens About Its Future**

As the Alabama Cooperative Extension System embarks on a five-year journey of organizational renewal, it will be turning to its core constituency group for critical guidance and support — its grassroots stakeholders.

Between now and Aug. 31, Extension educators throughout the state will conduct conversations with some of our stakeholders. What is learned from these exchanges, known as Future Talks, will form a vital element of Extension's new five-year plan — a comprehensive re-envisioning of Extension's role in helping Alabamians identify the most significant issues facing the state at this point in our history and make positive changes for the future.

Stakeholders who do not participate in one of these face-to-face conversations are encouraged to take an online survey via Extension's website: www.aces.edu.

"The citizens of this state know what their most critical needs are," says Dr. Paul Brown, Alabama Extension associate director on the Auburn campus, who is jointly overseeing this statewide initiative, "and we are listening."

The effort follows a similar assessment of 200 key Extension stakeholders — government, business, professional and commodity group leaders — to identify the most critical issues facing the people of Alabama, according to Dr. Virginia Caples, Extension interim associate director on the Alabama A&M University campus.

"Through these discussions, several topics emerged again and again," says Caples. "These are the kinds of topics on which we will focus and that we plan to address as a system. "The discussion with grassroots stakeholders will help us identify which among these topics represent the most critical needs."

Brown perceives the Future Talk conversations as "a series of candid discussions about changes in the ways people think, live and work and how Extension can reorder programming priorities to meet these needs more effectively."

Groups that will be reached through the conversations will include established county advisory committees, program advisory committees and other traditional Extension groups.

However, Extension professionals at all levels are making a special effort to identify people who previously have not been considered traditional clients. "What we want to do with this assessment is to identify as diverse an audience as possible with the goal of enlisting new client groups, networks and partners," Brown says.

He and other Extension administrators anticipate that the data gathered through the online survey will enhance these efforts. The results of the conversations and survey will be used to identify between five and seven strategic initiatives that will be reflected throughout all of Extension's programming areas as well as additional concerns that can be addressed through local or regional programming.

Caples says the statewide assessment and the new five-year plan will ensure that Extension is better equipped to respond to rapidly changing needs, to leverage its limited resources through enhanced public and private partnerships, to capitalize on new sources of funding and to increase the visibility of its programming efforts throughout the state. Extension administrators intend for the assessment of needs and priorities to be ongoing.

"The needs of grassroots Alabamians are constantly changing and so must our mission," Caples says. "These Future Talks will help us put this mission into clearer focus."

For more information about how to participate and provide your input in Extension's Grassroots Needs Assessment please contact Lee Ann Clark, County Extension Coordinator in St. Clair County at (205) 338-9416 or email clarkla@aces.edu.