

Agriculture: Sustainable Rural Communities

PWA1: Understanding Community Vitality

Rationale

The people, places and natural resources of rural America play a vital role in the nation's economy and culture. Yet rural communities are facing unique challenges in their ability to address the forces that transform rural places in ways that threaten community viability and well-being. They are concerned with the loss of their futures, in the form of living wage jobs and educational opportunities for, and flight of, their young people. Rural Oregonians share these concerns: they are significantly more likely than urban Oregonians to list the economy, lack of jobs/unemployment, education, and health care as the most important issues facing the country. In order to develop successful strategies for improving community well-being and vitality, communities must understand both their assets and limitations and the external global and national forces that reinforce and constrain their efforts.

Stake Holder Input

The Extension Community Vitality Working Group (CVWG) relies extensively on the input of stakeholders including, but not limited to, other Colleges and Departments, other Universities, state and local government officials, rural communities, and statewide foundations and nongovernmental organizations. Stakeholder input is used to develop strategic plans and revise program activities and goals. Extension faculty travel statewide and have regular contact with individuals and groups to talk about community issues and educational needs and request input from stakeholders at the local level. The Working Group holds an annual planning meeting at which this input is discussed.

How Stake Holder Input was used to create this PWA

Extension CVWG faculty use stakeholder input to plan and implement programming based on the needs expressed by local stakeholders. At the same time, Extension CVWG faculty inform stakeholders about pressing needs in rural communities that may not be a priority for the local community. This interaction between stakeholders and Agriculture professionals ensures that programming is relevant to the local community while reflecting the needs and concerns of producers throughout the state.

Long Term Outcome

Rural communities will better understand their assets and opportunities, and the challenges facing their communities and rural places generally.

Indicators of Successful Achievement of this Outcome

The CVWG has several projects underway to develop community indicators to measure community vitality and well-being. The community indicators consider economic, social, and environmental indicators in understanding the vitality of community and will track well-being across place and time. Among the indicators of successful achievement of this outcome are: number of communities and community leaders participating in educational programs that expand knowledge of community assets, opportunities and challenges; number of website hits and pageviews on the Rural Community Explorer website portal and on the County Monitor website; number of communities with whom we have formal partnerships, externally funded projects and contracts; number of media stories about our work or that credit us as an information source

PWA2: Developing Community Strategies and Policies

Rationale

The people, places and natural resources of rural America play a vital role in the nation's economy and culture. Yet rural communities are facing unique challenges in their ability to address the forces that transform rural places in ways that threaten community viability and well-being. They are concerned with the loss of their futures, in the form of living wage jobs and educational opportunities for, and flight of, their young people. Rural Oregonians share these concerns: they are significantly more likely than urban Oregonians to list the economy, lack of jobs/unemployment, education, and health care as the most important issues facing the country. There is still much to be learned about what works and what doesn't in improving the economic and social conditions in rural places, about how community actions or outside policy makers can strengthen the economic and social fabric in rural communities. We do, however, have some research-based knowledge that can be useful to rural communities in developing strategies for overcoming the disadvantages that come with lack of scale and geographic isolation. And we will work with communities to learn more about these strategies.

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How Stake Holder Input was used to create this PWA

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ensures that programming is relevant to the local community while reflecting the needs and concerns of producers throughout the state.

Long Term Outcome

Rural communities will become economically and socially stronger by using new knowledge about the challenges facing rural communities and what policies work best in rural places for achieving sustainability.

Indicators of Successful Achievement of these Outcomes

Among the indicators of successful achievement of this outcome are: number of communities and community leaders participating in educational programs about community development strategies; number of communities with whom we have formal partnerships, externally funded projects and contracts that result in positive changes in communities; number of media stories or other reports about positive change in communities in which we have worked that credit us as an information source

Created 2009