

District Summit Facilitator Outline - 7 December 2011 – Notes from the discussion by District Board Chairs.

INTRODUCTION (Key points)

** Today's discussion will serve a direct benefit in providing you and KSRE administration information to improve programming in existing districts.

** Kansas has been very successful in forming 14 Extension districts encompassing 40 counties thus far. An outcome of this Summit is to keep this positive momentum going in our state.

** Information gathered will help dispel misunderstandings/myths for other counties interested in forming new districts.

** The information gathered will help move towards strengthening programming in districts.

** The discussions will help all learn from each other -- new ideas, ways to get past challenges, etc...

** Today's breakout discussions will be recorded and results will be compiled based on dominant themes. You will not be identified individually based on comments you make during today's Summit.

FACILITATOR'S 'GROUND RULES'

** The two sessions are being audiotaped but you will not be identified by name in public reporting of the responses.

** K-State Research and Extension will store the audio and may contact you in the future for various quotes used in news information and stories, based on your comments.

** There are no wrong answers. All comments are appreciated.

** If you disagree on any points made by facilitators or other participants, please feel free to speak up. As a group, we must agree to disagree for the good of this process. Please understand that if someone disagrees with a point you have made, it is not a personal attack but is intended to help fully discuss an important issue.

** Listen actively -- respect others when they are talking.

** Participate to the fullest of your ability – success of this summit depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.

I. CONCERNS

1. **Every county wants to maintain their identity, their programs.** It takes years to accept the concept of sharing resources.
 - a. It is not a problem with the kids. They don't remember what county they are from. It is the parents who care.
 - b. We have had a problem with some of our older kids.
 - c. Kids were saying they didn't want to drive 60 miles. We drive farther than that for sports games.
 - d. We have kept most of our 4-H separate.
 - e. We still function the way we always did with exceptions like officer training, county club day
 - f. Need project leaders (shooting sports, qualified leader)
 - g. We've got so few 4-Hers in rural areas. Shooting sports was the first we combined. This year we told them we were going to join county club days. Gave them the choice to be county winners. They chose to be a rolling prairie district winner. Also used a bus to camp.
 - h. Our 4-H has blended together well...could be the work of the agents involved. Joint club days, CWF trips, it hasn't been a problem.
 - i. Rude awakening for those from the smaller county that things were going to change. Combining programs and making everyone happy.
 - j. Board meeting with disgruntled parents.
 - k. We work as a unit. We work as a district. This was how our district wanted to go.
 - l. We've come a long way...getting our committees, parents and kids working together.
 - m. I want to erase our county id, I want it to be the extension district. I want to lose the stuff that has to be linked to county. Our goal is to blend it together, our individual county ID is not important anymore.
 - n. It's important to educate and prepare patrons ahead of time; compromise and cooperation. It takes time.
 - o. We went through pre-districting (sp?) twice, how well the agents, how well the communities would mesh. One of the counties was a big rival. That county had more money, sports rivalry, college, etc. Our agent at the time didn't think it would be a good fit.
 - p. It starts with the board members to go into the district mindset. If you don't how will the patrons.

2. **Staffing**
 - a. How will constituents view losing their personal contacts (county agent)?
 - b. The position of our staff members in each of our counties changed, more responsibility on the staff people. Staff have taken on more responsibilities.

- c. We were a one agent county, rural, with a FCS agent. We need someone to help us on the ag side. More of a need rather than a concern.
- d. Would all the agents gel and get along (with more agents working together).
- e. We didn't have expertise in areas we needed.
- f. If you have a good agent, all those will be taken care of. You maintain your ideas, identity. You hire agents for this. How good is your agent?
- g. Anytime people work together, there will be more issues. It's a work in progress. Staff need to know and release some of their power. They are used to covering everything, and have a hard time backing off some things. That is where some of the problems come in. They are stretched too far.
- h. When we first became a district, we had two elderly office prof who didn't want to give up anything. Until they retired, it was hard.
- i. We had one agent not interested in the districting process, and the agent made the boards' job hard for a year. We reflected it on salary and she left.
- j. Even office professionals got addressed well. Not sure the board is all on the same page...which office professionals are responsible for what. We split out ...one does finances, one does website. They still take care of day to day tasks in the county.
- k. Our board understands staff responsibilities.
- l. Agents can focus on what they are good at.
- m. Would be easier to fire them all and hire new agents.

3. Whether 4-H would stay the same, whether anything would stay the same

- a. On the 4-H side, Meadowlark has the largest 4-H enrollment, we have over 800 kids. Slowly working to more unification. Big deal just to use same enrollment cards. We now have a district 4-H agent. Listed other 4-H positions. Nontraditional programs (military kids, native American) A lot to get parents to buy into. Have to work with the constituents you have (fairs are off limits).
- b. Fair boards are part of the county, they are not part of extension.
- c. The general premise of 4-H does not change. But a lot does change and needs to be expressed (uniform enrollment cards, awards, 4-H councils). Needs to be communicated better. We have employees fighting uniformity in the district. It takes time. Need to act as a district. For the benefits of the kids and the resources available.
- d. We have finally got our 4-H programs completely combined. We had our celebrations of achievement (together).
- e. Rotate counties. Once you do something for 3 times it becomes (accepted more easily)
- f. We don't have 4-H together (17 years as a district). 4-H touches a lot of families.
- g. We chose to hire a 4-H agent, and it crashed and burned. Boards fault. Not the right candidate. Wanted them at every event. Unrealistic expectation. Difficult thing. Should we get somebody? Have a 4H assistant in every county.

- h. It helps if people to understand the district 4H agent is not a traditional 4H agent. The agent is not running the program, but is the face of 4H for our district. The program managers are helping to run the 4H program.

4. More travel for agents.

- a. We lost an agent in the districting process because the agent didn't want to travel

5. The constituents lose that personal relationship

- a. I can call my FCS agent. The constituents don't know the (district) agents as well.
- b. Aging agents.
- c. We've been a district 5 years. The patrons on the ag side are comfortable calling the hort agent or the ag agent, not in their own county. People are accustomed to when the hort agent is in a particular county. It has taken some time; that goes for all the other agents. Patrons know the basic schedule. It's becoming the district identity.
- d. You need to market what you are doing. If you are only in the office one day a week, people need to know that. Every vehicle should have a KSRE sticker in the window. Put a face with a name.
- e. We believe our communities have meshed well, except for 4-H. That's still a hot button.

6. Will we still have our county fair? (Recognizing that county fairs are not the responsibility of the Extension Council, but youth involvement with exhibits and events is vital to the sustainability of a local fair.)

- a. On the fair, we barely have fairs. I would like to have a combined fair because it provides a better learning opportunity. I would much rather stand third in a group of 20 than first in a group of 3. I would love to get our fairs together...one large district fair. Easier on agents, more economical, more fun experience for the kids. It is a sacred cow. It is a struggle for fair boards to be profitable.
- b. In our community, we have a local owned carnival. What do we do if fair moves? What do they do with their carnival?
- c. Agents run themselves ragged during this time.
- d. More economic standpoint for our community. We would run up against opposition if we tried to combine fairs. Pulls money into communities.
- e. Not sure we will ever get to the point where we get to a district fair.
- f. Jewell county, 4H fair only. Each agent has a home county. No open class with 4h only fair. They still might have fair boards.

7. Funding.

- a. We tried to prevent problems by educating our community beforehand; work to eliminate concerns BEFORE forming district. And having commissioners behind us.
- b. Needed to get commissioners permission to form a district. If commissioners don't go along with it, you are spinning your wheels.

- c. Commissioners all agreed that we have freed up money since districts formed.
 - d. Districting offered us financial stability; ability to expand staffing
 - e. Lowered mill levy; we (the taxpayers) are the ones paying for it. Didn't want to overextend; we still tried to keep it as level as we could.
- 8. We were concerned with loss of agents when we formed a district** (we had 4 when we formed a district). People in county were afraid we would cut staff. 4 counties with 6 agents now; we will be 5 with 7.
- a. We've added staff. We hope to add staff. Our hope is we can fill positions.
 - b. Evolution. We are just starting our third year. It's important for us to identify the specialty areas we want to cover.
 - c. Work load is still covered. They just don't think they are functioning at the capacity they were hired to do.
 - d. We lost the agent in our county, but we've added more staff than what we would have.
 - e. Becoming specialized we've been able to meet that need. We have one agent in each county, and an agronomist who travels.
 - f. When we added two counties, we were blind sided by one agent. (As a board member in a different county, it's) easier for me to ask an agent to leave from 3 counties away. Need to be aware of personnel issues.

What could be done to reduce the concern?

1. Communication (don't say "nothing is going to change")
2. Cooperation
3. More education/awareness
4. Understand that it takes time
5. Plan for strengths/understanding current staff strengths
6. K-State (centrally) should provide a template when forming districts; don't want each agent in each county doing the same thing – the "template" must be flexible, one-size does not fit all. We need **commonalities** so that we are speaking the same language. District directors can help with input, based on experience.
7. Understand that things will change. Take advantage of the changes...lessening work load of agents; focus on better serving the people in the long run; But all of this takes time...

II. What was your greatest hope or motivation for joining a district?

- 1) **We hoped to target a broader constituency...not just farmers**
 - a. Homemakers
 - b. Targeting seniors that we couldn't have done as a county.
 - c. Many more sub-groups out there who we could reach

- 2) **Financial.** The financial end has been tremendous
 - a. Vehicle was old; electronics, able to update computers, copiers, vehicles, and have in more of all of that in each county; would have been impossible before.
 - b. Raised the mill slightly; the efficiency of the district has helped; programming has increased for constituents in all counties of the district
 - c. We are updating, new vehicles, new technology; it has been good in that respect
 - d. Efficiency has increased; number of programs available has increased

- 3) **Getting a second agent back**
 - a. We actually got even more out of it.
 - b. We have four agents in 3 counties.
 - c. Our hope was to get another agent hired; have not done that yet.

- 4) **We could be a model for county government in Kansas**
 - a. Legislators were pushing for this 17 years ago; districts for county governments; we would like to see this progress even into our county govt. No reason to have with diminishing demographics
 - b. In the western part of the state, we don't need full time people in county govt. who get full time pay for 2 days of work
 - c. FSA offices closing; no sign of county government combining
 - d. Same thing with county schools

- 5) **Avoiding problems associated with employee turnover**
 - a. Are you stuck in Wallace county with an FCS agent because that was what was there before; maybe instead we need an ag/4H agent
 - b. Replacing areas of "specialty" as opposed to agents who are generalized
 - c. When staff leave, should their programs remain or should we seek different need?

- 6) **Support for agents**
 - a. To keep the program, need to have different agents; Manhattan doesn't always have a clue;
 - b. I think our agents still go to Manhattan a lot, they know who to call; come back with a better rapport with the experts in Manhattan; we get a better response; because of their specialized knowledge

- c. As long as you have a well qualified agent with an adequate assistant, clients needs are met
- d. Can't replace agents with program managers or assistants
 - i. NOTE: Program mgrs. = full time; Program asst. = part time (typically); more common with 4-H programming
 - ii. Program assistants help with fair; they don't do programming, helper, grunt work
 - iii. Program managers have more responsibility, are paid more; wealth of experience in 4H, knowledge and gumption; manager hired by board; benefits paid by district
 - iv. Looking at assistant for other agents, would allow agents to branch out
- e. Connected, personal touch....better than leaving a message; implements programs with agents;

Unexpected consequences associated with becoming a district

- 1) Our office has always been at the courthouse where we didn't have to pay rent. Commissioners decided they needed that space for 911 equipment; we hadn't planned for rent in our budget. Had to find us a place to go. Long process finding a space in Norton that we could afford. We were lucky...but now we pay rent.
 - a. Move will be better...on Main Street more visible, windows and signage.
 - b. Operational agreement, one year's notice for rent.
 - c. We are looking at putting a branch office in an area with more traffic.
- 2) Combined youth trips. Some counties still want to keep their tradition – for their county's kids.
 - a. Hasn't gone well...it is their trip; we are butting in. Six years in. Still happening.
 - b. Parents often are more difficult to convince than youth

Key concepts regarding motivations for forming a district

- 1) Reaching more people
- 2) Solving financial issues
- 3) Increasing efficiencies
- 4) Personnel management
- 5) Be a model for local government
- 6) Location changes
- 7) Concern with potential rent
- 8) Important to Communicate value of extension
- 9) Potential tax

III. What has gone well and not-so-well for you as a district?

Gone well

1. Ability to bring youth together from all counties in district
 - a. Small vs. Large County – like the small county feel (comforting)
 - b. Moderate success in easing concerns of those in smaller areas
2. Working across county lines for programming
 - a. We have agents who travel well...works good.
 - b. Agents have done a good job developing personal relationships with constituents in all counties. People get to know them. Senior centers, schools, etc...
3. Collegiality among agents, working off each other's strengths
 - a. One district "had to dis-employ an agent" who wasn't a team member
 - b. If agents are open to districting, the model works well
 - c. This applies to office professionals also; most have been willing to play as part of a team
4. Communication with the public
 - a. We do a newsletter that is inserted in the official newspaper in each county twice a year
 - i. Helps to reach beyond extension clientele
 - b. Agents encouraged to stay out there, keep communication open with everyone
 - c. Communicating with constituents has gone well
 - d. Can do newsletters online; this is happening more and more

Not gone well

1. Anything combining youth from all counties in district
 - a. Difficult for small community to accept large community
 - b. Counties unwilling to "cross the line" – lack of cooperation
 - c. Need to get your foot in the door; I've been successful in the last few years, but it took a long time to get those relationships started
 - d. Patrons were used to going to a particular office; is there some way to get people to go to a smaller area
 - e. Need to help people understand it's okay to get answers from somewhere else
2. Differences in policies between counties in a district
 - a. For example, covering offices when two of the counties are closed between Christmas and New Years; frustrating for those of us on the board and have to revisit again

3. Meeting locations

- a. Have to understand how people move: I can naturally go to Salina, but can't get anyone to go to Mankato
- b. Important to think about how people travel
- c. Have one meeting a year in each county.
- d. We do phone meetings. I hate them. We pay mileage for board members.
- e. Where do you have board meetings, one location, but meet in all counties once a year. More phone meetings.
- f. When we were two counties, we met in the middle (neutral location); now that we have 3 counties, always meet in one place; occasionally by phone

4. Working across county lines for programming

- a. If you have an agent who balks and doesn't leave home county, detriment to programming and constituents
- b. The further you get away from your home office, the more that goes wrong
 - i. An attitude that your home county is your comfort area.

5. Agents spend less time in the office because they have more area to cover

- a. The agents more or less plan their own schedules; "office hours" didn't work well...we tried that. It was a disaster. (Meeting comes up at time you had hours scheduled in office)
- b. Younger farmers communicate well with email; older constituents want to see a warm body; we have two ag agents for four counties; a lot of times they are someplace else
- c. Now we say they have to spend two days a month in each county. They growled about it. They can be at the sale barn, at the coffee shop, in the office, but they need to be in that county all day; we ask them to travel quite a bit
- d. Economics aside, it's a tradeoff (between agents). Example, with 3 FCS agents, one might take care of part of 4H; one livestock; one agronomy; will gain an agronomy agent; director (70 percent 4H); the FCS agents complain...give and take, they're in that county a lot...all of our agents do a good job getting to meetings, in senior centers (important to do that because of aging population); and a couple of schools where they're able to work with young girls

IV. What has changed in programming as a result of becoming a district?

1. Programming
 - a. More specialized
 - b. Greater number of programs
 - c. Higher quality of programs
 - d. More participants in programs because you can draw from a district (regional meetings or programs, instead of single county)

2. Agents
 - a. More travel
 - b. More specialized
 - c. Agents now have their own cars (good thing)
 - d. Agents are all accessible by phone (we provide cell phones; new IRS deal with cell phone, we can pay for the service; Our agents decide what they want)

3. Hiring practices
 - a. Can hire for area of void – where we think we need programming
 - i. e.g. may have a livestock ag agent, but can hire for a different ag specialty
 - b. Able to be more competitive in hiring; can offer a slightly higher salary
 - c. Have been able to increase salaries of current agents too

4. Staffing
 - a. Able to hire a 4-H agent (county didn't have one before)
 - b. Able to utilize 4-H assistants and program managers
 - c. Able to add staff for local programs

Additional comments regarding agent positions

1. Support from Manhattan and KSRE is good
 - a. Local agents know those in their area of specialty, which gives local agent a network of contacts, experts to help in local programming
2. Program managers (typically full-time) are good complement to agents, esp. in 4-H programs
3. Programs assistants (typically part-time) provide important support for programs (again, esp. 4-H)
4. Don't replace agents with program managers or assistants – this is happening already.
5. Post Rock District: Have looked at splitting up 1 agent salary to hire three county program assistants in 4-H (one for each county in the district)

V. What do you think still needs to happen to realize the vision and improve your district?

Some related/follow-up questions

- What advice would you offer to county councils interested in becoming a district?
 - What advice would you offer to other districts in how they currently operate?
 - How would your district board receive a request to add a county to your district?
1. **Try new things.** Don't shy from trying something just because someone says it won't work.
 - a. Example: SHICK program, which provides assistance in filling out forms Medicare prescription drugs. "I never pictured extension doing it...this has a high need throughout the state."
 2. Need system that can feed **state and national programming** into local offices
 - a. Teleconferencing, interactive TV, or worldwide. Our society is global.
 3. **Improve technological capabilities**
 - a. Look at delivery methods; young people are always studying their phones. Be prepared to get the message out the way they will receive
 - b. Digital delivery, apps, Web products, online conferencing
 - c. There is a digital divide in our target audiences: Some people want to see you, others want to meet you on Facebook.
 - d. Need to present the digital programming in ways that older people are comfortable with
 - e. Need a technology agent.
 4. **Fill gap created by budget cuts in schools**
 - a. Budget cuts create an opportunity for 4-H and others (recreation, nutrition, engineering). Extension can pick up some of that void
 - b. Can look at sciences and arts as areas where we have information and schools have a need. Arts are the first ones they are cutting; schools often will do away with band before the ballgames
 - c. Our agent goes into local schools to offer programming.
 5. **Seek partnerships with community organizations**
 - a. Some examples include banks, county governments, private businesses, Kansas Farm Bureau.
 - b. Find out what programming we have that others can benefit from.
 - c. Go to funding sources, provide programming. Seek ways to share resources, cut expenses.
 - d. Capitalize on partnerships to further build the volunteer network
 - e. Farm Bureau could be a good partner; both organizations cross over the same lines.
 - i. County farm bureaus can write for grant money

- ii. Farm bureau has good resources available; why double up when you can share resources

6. Increase visibility

- a. Example: Walk Kansas is a missed opportunity
 - i. Need to make us more visible in our communities
 - ii. Walk Kansas participation mushrooms each year (97 teams this year)
 - iii. A lot of people are exposed to KSRE in one program. Just think how many people this program alone is reaching.
 - iv. I know it is big statewide; positive focus statewide; when you can get a program that reaches a diverse audience, this is good.

7. Target marketing

- a. Districts have the luxury/opportunity of identifying target audiences more easily
- b. It's important that KSRE also reflects diversity in our personnel
 - i. We have among us in Kansas people who don't speak English; for example, the football team at one of our high schools is all Hispanic: For each student there is a little mama at home who is raising all the kids; we have an opportunity to reach her with our programs. Dad is learning English on the job, kids at school; moms at home don't have that luxury
 - ii. Hispanics are not the only ethnic group we are not reaching
 - iii. We could be offering ESL classes; homebound classes; incorporate nutrition info, FCS info, etc... with language-learning classes.
 - iv. Even just finding resources for people is helpful. Sharing resources would be more cost effective.

How do we get to the future

1. Develop partnerships in the communities we serve

2. Conduct needs assessment surveys

- a. Go ask residents, "What do you want?" This is the way to improve the future
- b. Our ag agent does it all the time
- c. Some people are raring to go with economic development but don't know where to go

3. Identify commonalities; how can our districts be a "team" that helps each other?

- a. How can the 14 districts support each other?

4. Develop communication technology methods that go beyond the U.S. Post Office

- a. What are the key electronic delivery methods we should be using?
- b. How can we make it easier, more convenient for people to get our information?
- c. It's important to be more forward thinking in how we're delivering information
- d. Still, a lot of people like something they can hold in their hands (printed materials)

5. Continue to live the land-grant mission

- a. I think a lot of what we are doing is right: personalized service, meeting needs, servicing patrons; that is what extension is about.
- b. Make ourselves indispensable; that's job security
- c. Extension is there to provide a service when needed to residents, and we need them as our cheering squad
- d. During times when there are state budget cuts, we need people saying don't cut Extension -- they are doing important thing. Need to work to position ourselves as such now.

6. Market ourselves better

- a. **Advertising.** I don't think we advertise ourselves as much as we should. So many people in our own communities don't know who we are or what we do.
- b. **Personal Contact.** If someone asks me at farmer's markets about extension, I direct them to the extension office
- c. **Media.** Agents do a great job of using local media; we get positive comments
- d. **Targeted programming.** One of our FCS agents developed a Women in Ag series that meets twice a year. A woman sitting by me from 'way out there' (distance from here) found out about it in her local media.
 - i. We need to get info out there. We can't do that just with our local papers. sometimes we have to go 350 miles
 - ii. You can go anywhere in the state and you can find a walk Kansas T-shirt; those not part of extension did not know who sponsored the program. Need to make sure our wordmark/logo is included with all our programs
- e. **Public Service Announcements.** Even in our small communities with all the media; we don't have a big billboard or commercials, maybe we should have...we need some commercials. These are costly, though.
- f. **Social media**
 - i. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn
 - ii. Our 4H program has a Facebook page; claims a number of 4Hers are friends
 - iii. Our agronomist uses Facebook; it is amazing the word you can get out in a short amount of time
 - iv. We put tidbits of information on there in a click; maybe some of the agents need more of that going on
 - v. Social media helps with networking

What advice can you offer to counties that are interested in joining or forming a district?

1. Be proud of your identity; you will be able to keep that

- a. People have pride in where they live, community events, local 4-H program, etc...

b. Your vision is to be a district, and we function as a district... but we have our own identities as a county. Do what is best for your situation.

2. Develop a plan and discuss key issues fully ahead of time

- a. Staffing: decide who is going to do what.
- b. Think through and don't rush the process of becoming a district. Understand
 - i. How to get there
 - ii. Why you are doing it
 - iii. What you want to happen

3. Communicate to the public what this district will mean to them

- a. Commissioners, councils may be on the same page, but general public may not be aware; why do we have to change?
- b. If this change will help make you better off than when you were county-only, what is it we have to help them get through to achieve that?
- c. Wish I would have been more upfront about 4-H; people need to know that we will maintain our program. Needs to be part of the discussion, since 4-H is most visible when things go wrong
- d. The old time 'Green Acres' guy dealt with everything; today's ag agent can't do that. It's good to be specialized
- e. Be sensitive to hot issues, such as impacts to 4-H: "Are you going to take a county and take away their 4H person, that is a slap in the face."

4. Advocacy.

- a. Seek people in current districts or in your community to visit with county commissioners; not to share an administrative view point, but rather a personal perspective
- b. They see it from faces of people who live with it each day; we aren't afraid to tell it like it is.
- c. A lot of independent people out there like to do their own things; they are seeing the writing on the wall in terms of financing.
- d. Look at dollars spent per population; may be putting in more dollars, but may receive more benefits

VI. Do you believe you are serving clients better with the multi-county district? Why or why not?

(NOTE: This question was not discussed at length. Based on nodding heads and simple responses, this group appeared to be unanimous in believing that they are better off as a district compared to when they had a county extension program only. Many of the reasons for this can be assumed by responses to other questions during the day's discussion.)

VII. What are the threats to continued success as a multi-county district?

1. Money/Funding/Budgets
2. Mindset
 - a. apathy,
 - b. close-mindedness, resistance to change
3. Complacency
 - a. It's important to continue understanding needs so that we can continue to improve and grow our programs

WRAPUP ACTIVITY: Based on the day's discussions, what is 1 or 2 take-home ideas or thoughts that you have regarding districts?

1. Communication is crucial
 - a. External (to clientele, etc...)
 - b. Internal (between counties, amongst staff, etc...)
2. Districting is not easy but it is a good move to improve the efficiency of local extension programs
 - a. You will have growing pains
3. Cooperation is crucial
4. The ability to specialize in areas that residents need programming is a plus for districts.
5. Conduct needs assessment surveys.
 - a. Each district will be unique, one size doesn't fit all.
 - b. It's important to listen to the local people and know what they want and need so that you can be relevant.
6. Build email marketing lists