

Programs With Purpose: Setting Priorities in Extension

Programming for impact is a priority for Kansas State University Research and Extension (KSRE) specialist, agents, local unit board and program development committee (PDC) members, program funders and stakeholders. The following questions and criteria provide guidance when prioritizing how extension professionals and local extension units use resources to impact individuals, families, businesses, and communities.

Does it address the Grand Challenges?

Through a series of meetings with stakeholders, K-State Research and Extension identified the following five grand challenges facing the state. At least one should be identified when prioritizing programs and/or efforts supported by extension resources.



- **Global food systems**
- **Water**
- **Health**
- **Developing tomorrow's leaders**
- **Community vitality**

Does it support Extension's Vision and Purpose?

Vision: KSRE will be the valued and trusted provider of *Knowledge for Life* and educational solutions needed by the people of Kansas, the nation, and the world.

Purpose: With a presence in every county, KSRE develops and delivers engaged educational programs in partnership with the people of Kansas that provide solutions for the Grand Challenges of water, health, global food systems, community vitality and developing tomorrow's leaders.

Criteria supportive of extension's values

The following criteria reflect values that are widely supported by extension stakeholders. Most ought to be true about programs and/or events supported by extension resources when establishing priorities.

- Is the program/effort supported by research?
- Is there evidence that the program/effort impacts individuals, families, businesses, and/or communities.
- Will it influence policy, systems, or environmental change?
- Is there KSRE system support and commitment to provide training, specialists, materials, expertise that will support the program/effort?

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Programs With Purpose: Perception, Reality and Image

Extension Professionals as Change Agents

An agent's role in the community, with local boards, program development committees, community coalitions, and stakeholder groups, is much like a School Superintendent's role is to a school district. Extension professionals should help lead local extension units and communities toward impactful programs and efforts that result in positive change. A change agent is anyone who helps an organization transform by improving processes and interpersonal interactions.

Budgets are Tight Everywhere

Over the years, when budgets are tight or cut, extension programming is often used as a way of justifying cuts. Some funders at all levels have targeted Extension for not always providing programming that is educational, research-based, and/or has evidence of long term impact.

The Reality

KSRE resources and efforts need to focus on educational programs that address the KSRE Grand Challenges and that will help people, families, businesses, and/or communities in Kansas improve and become healthier. As budgets tighten, additional emphasis is placed on extension professionals to be more accountable than ever for the use of tax payer dollars.

While some program activities might be fun and may bring people to your offices or meetings, these types of programs may produce an image we cannot afford. Let's figure out ways to impact your communities with some high quality, impactful programming.

Image Matters

Sometimes it is how the program or event is presented on promotional flyers or social media that is the issue, not what is offered: for example, the current trendy lesson on pressure cookers. The educational objectives of that lesson are supported by research and include evidence-based strategies that are supportive of living a healthy lifestyle. Those include:

- Meals eaten at home are generally lower in calories
- Home prepared meals contain more fruits and vegetables
- Supports and encourages family meal time
- Reduce energy consumption
- Provide healthy foods at home in less time

Kansas extension no longer supports research on home appliances so we do not have the resources and unbiased research to make recommendations on the equipment. Teaching busy consumers how to make healthy, home prepared meals, in less time and including healthy recipes is the intent of this lesson and should be promoted.