

Vice President's Conversation on The Future of OSU Extension

A shared vision for the 2nd century

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Ohio State University Extension is one of Ohio's great resources with more than 600 faculty and staff and over 30,000 volunteers, serving as the front door to the vast knowledge, expertise and resources of The Ohio State University. In 2014, the country will celebrate the 100-year anniversary of the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. Celebrating the 100-year anniversary of one of the nation's great legislative acts provides an opportunity to recognize our historical accomplishments, and to envision the exciting accomplishments that will highlight a celebration of the 200-year anniversary.

Accepting and acknowledging the significant accomplishments and deep impact that OSU Extension has had on communities and in the lives of Ohioans provides a great springboard for the future. A significant component of Ohio's celebration in 2014 will be a year-long process focused on the future. The primary work this year will center on futuring – asking questions about and envisioning the long term future of OSU Extension as well as the role the organization should play in shaping and positively impacting Ohio and Ohio residents.

Rather than the three-legged stool, think of it as a ladder: “the uprights are teaching and learning and discovery and research; the thing that turns two sticks into a tool is the translation, the connection, which is exactly what you do. You're educators who do everything you do based on science. Those rungs add value to two things that independently are worth something, but they are not worth as much as when they are put together into a functional tool”. (Bruce A. McPheron)

In a 2006 article in *Strategy and Leadership*, Stephen Millett characterizes futuring as “a rigorous process of thinking about the future in order to form well considered expectations....It is about making a better tomorrow rather than waiting to see what ‘fate’ brings us.” What an exciting opportunity, on the eve of the organization's second century, to begin to envision a future that will allow OSU Extension to continue to be relevant and dynamic to the citizens and communities in Ohio.

Led by the Vice President for Agricultural Administration & Dean of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences, The VP Conversation on the Future of OSU Extension is a futuring project focused on developing a vision for the extension education system for the next century. Through a series of participatory conversations, stakeholders will engage to explore and analyze important issues, trends and societal drivers, and describe possibilities for the future.

Key objectives for the 2014-2015 futuring process:

- (1) Describe the current context and position of OSU Extension (e.g., funders and their expectations; mission-mandate; political context, etc.);
- (2) Develop and foster an organizational understanding and practice of futuring;
- (3) Identify the major forces, as well as industry and societal trends, driving change and the potential, related impact for Extension education in Ohio;
- (4) Explore the major issues that Ohio communities and residents will face in the short- and long-term that OSU Extension can and should be positioned to help address; and
- (5) Identify and describe a compelling vision for the future of OSU Extension, with particular attention the societal trends and critical issues that will impact program priorities, delivery systems, financial models, and staffing.



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Key characteristics of this process will include:

(1) discovery and education at all stages and within all engaged groups, including staff, stakeholders, partners, and external experts; (2) stakeholder (broadly defined) engagement; (3) civil discourse; (4) external (not viewed as stakeholders) expertise engagement; and (5) benchmarking focused on forces driving change.

Key Deliverables

1. The development and utilization of educational components to help expand the knowledge and understanding of the concept and practice of futuring with all individuals engaged in the process (an effort to build a culture of individuals who are comfortable with and engaged in futuring on a regular basis— adding value to this process by building organizational capacity beyond the yearlong VP Conversation process).
2. Develop, discuss, and deliver, through an engaged, open thinking process, a comprehensive vision of the future and OSU Extension’s role in positively impacting that future. This process will include engaging a variety of participants throughout the year in honest, open dialogue about the future. The vision will be shared through intentional communication (utilizing a variety of media...written, web-based, social media, etc.) to maintain open communication as well as document and share the process.
3. Position OSU and CFAES as thought leaders on the future of Extension work. CFAES will be recognized as a leader in transforming organizational culture to include a regular, ongoing examination of the future.
4. A report to the VP that summarizes the information learned from the dialogue process. The report will highlight industry and societal trends, ideas for addressing emerging critical issues facing Ohioans and Ohio communities, a vision for building organizational sustainability, ideas for innovative funding partnerships and other thoughts contributing to a compelling vision of OSU Extension’s 2ndCentury.

Future Action (Beyond VP Conversation)

This vision will inform and prepare the organization as we think strategically about next steps to deliberately move into that desired future. The VP Conversation and ongoing critical thinking about the future should inform future action and decisions regarding program priorities and scope; delivery systems; partnerships; financial models; and staffing.

Steering Committee

Graham Cochran, Co-Chair
Becky Nesbitt, Co-Chair
Emily Adams
Bruce Clevenger
Susan Colbert
Greg Davis
Dan Herms
Mark Light
Jamie Seger

Futuring is “a rigorous process of thinking about the future in order to form well considered expectations....It is about making a better tomorrow rather than waiting to see what ‘fate’ brings us”

Stephen Millett

Rev. 3/2014

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Bruce McPheron, Ph.D., Vice President for Agricultural Administration & Dean

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