

Wayne County MSU Extension Issues Identification 2006

In establishing the Roles and Prioritizing Issue and Opportunities for Research within MSU Extension, the following question was posed: What are the issues and opportunities that you think should be addressed by Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station research and MSU Extension educational programs? This question was addressed in community-based discussions held in every Michigan county during the early part of 2006. The Wayne County Extension Director along with the Extension Educators coordinated the local process by putting together a focus group.

Individuals were invited from various community agencies by the educators from each program area such as Natural Resources, EFNEP, Horticulture, BSF, BFI and 4-H. The group of participants included 18 females and 14 males from local organizations such as The Greening of Detroit, Detroit Public Library, SEMCOG, Friends of the Rouge, New Detroit Coalition, United Way for Southeast MI, Wayne Metropolitan Community Agency as well as a District Liaison from the Michigan Senate.

In the initial session, the participants viewed a video entitled "Strengthening Michigan's Economy". The group was then randomly broken up into three smaller groups and provided the key Extension focus issues such as the Economy and Communities, Land Use and Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources, Health, and Youth & Families. Groups were instructed to brainstorm about issues and opportunities, Wayne County's situation regarding each topic and the role of MSU Extension with respect to each topic.

In the second session the participants were again separated into the three smaller groups, but were allowed to choose the area of their greatest interest. In this grouping, the participants narrowed down their focus and created specific issue/action/outcome statements and then rated them according to how important these issues are to Wayne County.

A number of broad community issues and opportunities were identified in this session. The fifteen priorities identified as the most pressing are as follows:

1. There are deficiencies in the education and training of residents to support the region's changing economy. This has led to high levels of unemployment, and a constant migration of people out of the county. It also leaves the residents at a significant disadvantage to securing future employment, and significantly impacts the county's/region's ability to attract and retain business.
2. There is a lack of promotion or investment in the livable communities, or "cool cities" concept throughout the entire county. This has lead to a seclusion of communities where there is no cohesive nature or feeling throughout the county. Look to build on some of the success in areas like Wayne, Romulus, Westland, and parts of southwest Detroit.

3. The local school systems are facing major challenges with training individuals to help grow and support the current economy. There are many unmet needs in the school system that contribute to this problem, including infrastructure deficiency. It has a major impact on the county's ability to attract business.
4. There is an increase in the number of homeless people in the county. These people have social issues to deal with, and many suffer from some level of untreated mental illnesses. The unmet need of the homeless is a moral issue that should be addressed by the region. It has a definite impact on the county's image and the quality of life and is seen as another deterrent to business attraction.
5. There is a major problem with communication and access to information regarding the process for obtaining, using or leasing vacant land. This has resulted in people and developers not being able to plan projects that could improve the community.
6. There seems to be some form of taxing inequity. Farmland taxation is subject to a practice that may assess taxes based on potential use of land versus actual use. This practice leads to the eradication of medium to small farming operations. It also impacts the state's ability to support local farming and potential "buy Michigan Agriculture" campaigns.
7. There exists a lack of planning and preservation for open space. This has led to an increase in blight and negative economics, as well as a negative perception of the character of our communities.
8. Encourage the reclamation or reuse of abandoned land throughout the county, especially in its core neighborhoods. The abandonment of urban areas like Brownfields for development in Greenfields has led to an increase in regional sprawl.
9. There tends to be low self-esteem and low self-worth among youth and families due to poverty, insecure families, mental health issues etc.
10. Chronic diseases.
11. Too many kids at home alone, with both parents absent for extended periods of time yields the problem of kids parenting themselves.
12. We do not have enough funds to support transportation for youth and families or for other needs.
13. There has been a loss of connection to the environment.
14. There is a need for more healthy environments.

15. There are far too many single parent homes that leave many kids without a father figure.

In addition, there is need for study to be done about the inequity of farmland taxation with respect to its effect on small to medium sized operations and its subsequent effect on the state's ability to support local farming and potential "buy MI agriculture" campaigns.

Through this process, Wayne County MSU Extension identified eleven specific programmatic goals to work on over the next five years. These goals are listed by objective, expected outcome, and specific program to provide leadership. In addition to relying on our own areas of expertise, we partner with grassroots organizations as well as City and County agencies to respond to current and emerging issues facing Wayne County.

Goal	Outcome	Leadership
Improve self-esteem and self worth among youth by expanding 4-H youth development activities that focus on character education, workforce development, urban gardening, and other positive youth development activities. Increase participation in youth development programs throughout Wayne County.	We would like to see increased self-esteem and self worth among 4-H participants in youth development programs.	4-H Program
Reduce chronic diseases by providing limited income families educational knowledge through EFNEP, FNP, and BFI programs that promote healthy lifestyles. Pursue grant funding to expand these programs in the county.	We would like to see an increase in healthy lifestyles for participants and expanded staff support for these programs.	EFNEP/FNP Programs and BFI Programs
Support youth development in single parent households by developing mentoring resources with positive role models.	We would like to see an expansion of opportunities for male led activities in youth development programs.	4-H Mentoring program and Parenting Education Program
Reduce blight and increase the preservation of open space by expanding community awareness and participation in tree planting projects, urban gardening, natural resources and community development programs	We would like to expand participation in natural resources and gardening programs and to see an increase in vegetative cover for open spaces in Wayne County.	Natural Resources, Community & Economic Development, Horticulture & Agriculture and 4-H Urban Gardening Programs

Goal	Outcome	Leadership
Encourage neighborhood redevelopment by providing educational opportunities to residents and potential developers on the acquisition of tax reverted properties in Wayne County.	We would like to make educational resources available to County residents and potential developers on land acquisition through workshops and classroom instruction as well as increased development projects in Wayne County's distressed communities.	Community and Economic Development Program and community-based development groups.
Assist Wayne County youth in the development of job readiness skills by providing educational after school programs that focus on job preparedness and academic achievement. Seek opportunities to expand such programs by collaborating with community-based organizations.	We would like to see an increased job readiness skills and elevated academic achievement among the youth participants in these programs.	4-H Program
Expand employment opportunities for county residents through micro-enterprise development. These activities will focus on increasing business development in areas such as food related enterprises, home daycare operations and other micro-enterprise opportunities.	We would like to see an increase in the number of micro-enterprise businesses in Wayne County in the next five years.	Community and Economic Development Program, BKC and Relative Kid Care
Support the redevelopment of Brownfield sites by collaborating with local units of government, county staff and community based development corporations. Explore educational opportunities for potential developers on available resources.	We would like to see an increase in knowledge about tools and incentives for developers for redeveloping Brownfield sites as well as an overall increase in the number of redeveloped Brownfield sites as a result of educational workshops on Brownfields.	Community and Economic Development Program

Goal	Outcome	Leadership
Work with local communities to assist in the development and implementation of “cool cities” activities in Wayne County.	We would like to see increase in the number of “cool cities” projects in Wayne County.	Community & Economic Development
Collaborate with regional partners to develop and coordinate research of the taxation of farmland in Wayne County.	We would like to see an analysis of taxation in Wayne County and its impact on designated farmland.	Commercial Horticulture, Community and Economic Development Program and MAES
Incorporate transportation costs in youth development grants and other funding sources to expand educational and recreational opportunities for youth participating in Extension programs.	We would like to see an increase in dollars available to support transportation to youth development activities subsequently promoting increased participation in these activities.	Wayne County Extension Educator Staff