

Agriculture & Extension Committee Minutes
Thursday, January 20, 2022 5:00pm
Health & Human Services Center & Zoom
303 W. Chapel Street

Dan Nankee called the meeting to order at 4:59PM.

Roll call: Dan and Ricky attended the meeting in person; Kim and Don joined via Zoom. Lynn, Barry, Sarah, Joe, and Tom were at the meeting.

Motion to approve the agenda by Ricky, seconded by Don, motion passed.

Motion to approve the minutes of the November 23, 2021 meeting by Ricky, seconded by Kim. The motion passed.

Reports from Committee Members – Ricky wanted to bring up the topic of minority and women business start-ups...what can be done to increase their numbers and support them? Just something to think about as we move forward.

Area Update from Lynn – Lynn gave an update and handed out information regarding the Regional Agriculture Educator staffing model. There is currently only enough state funding to co-fund 55 positions for 71 counties. This model allows for the three current Agriculture Educators from the four Area 17 counties provide service to all four counties, each in a specialized area (dairy, livestock, and crops/soils). There will also be state-wide resources available in farm business management, horticulture, emerging crops, beef production, swine production, and agriculture water quality. Currently, the educator fee for each county is \$43,600. Because there will be three educators spread over four counties, the flat fee for Iowa County will be reduced to \$32,700. Ricky mentioned that a few other counties are hiring educators for specific areas, but they are having to fund the entire cost themselves. He also indicated the need to develop metrics and set goals in order to measure results. Kim also mentioned the need for accountability, performing a needs assessment to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the producers. Dan questioned what would happen if at some point one of the counties is not happy with the system. Lynn mentioned the need to do an annual check/review, to catch potential issues right away and correct them as quickly as possible.

Lynn then gave an update on the Food Wellness/Nutrition position search. Jessa Engelken has been hired to fill this position, and she will begin on January 31st. She will work out of Donna Peterson's office here in Dodgeville and serve all four counties. She is earning a Master's in public health and currently lives in Dubuque, although she intends to move to Dodgeville. Once she has had a chance to get comfortable/familiar with her position, they will look to fill the FoodWise Educator position (Maria's position). They would like Jessa to be involved in hiring for this position.

Lynn also shared that UW Extension has supplied the offices with K95 masks as a way to offer additional COVID protection, and that Extension is now paying for professional development (training, conferences, workshops, etc); previously, the counties paid for these.

Highlights from Agent Reports

Ruth – Ruth was not able to attend the meeting, but Lynn provided a few updates on some items that Ruth has been working on, including Powerful Tools for Caregivers, an upcoming Aging Mastery Program (in collaboration with Dane County), and upcoming Wise Wisconsin zoom sessions.

Barry – Barry gave an update on the progress of providing broadband to county residents. Iowa County is working with service providers (including MHTC and Light Speed) on applying for grants in the hope of obtaining additional funding from the state. Several organizations, including Prosperity Southwest and WEDC, are working with GEO Partners to determine current broadband speed information. The broadband survey completed by Iowa County and Extension in 2020 captured similar information, but this will provide a centralized location for the information for the entire state so it can be accessed more easily. Barry mentioned meetings he has had with residents in the Green Leaf Glen subdivision just outside of Dodgeville, who have not been able to receive reliable internet access from their homes due to their location. They are very motivated and will participate in surveys and provide letters that will go into the grant application. The residents are even willing to provide funding of their own (\$2,500 per residence) to help get internet access to their homes. He highlighted the need to find additional partners to aid in funding and support (such as hospitals – they may have the technology needed to provide online service, but if their patients cannot access it due to poor internet service, it isn't very helpful). Ricky inquired about the County K project – will that be refilled? Barry said they were working on a write-up now and should know more next week. Kim asked if there was any kind of recourse available with Frontier. Their service map clearly indicates service in their area, and they have been paying for it, but they have not been able to get service. Perhaps file a complaint with the BBB or PSE.

Regarding renewable energy, the most recent infrastructure bill has been passed, but details as to how the funds will be spend have not been hammered out yet. Barry would like to create a renewable energy plan for the county (wind, solar, etc) with energy-efficient options that would facilitate a way to move forward. Don questioned who would be paying for EV charging costs...the customer (using a credit card), the county, someone else? Nothing has been determined yet...that's part of what is still being looked into.

Joe – Joe gave an update on the WDNR Surface Water Grant application, which would provide funding to test soil and study stream bank erosion in the hopes of determining where Phosphorus in area water is coming from. Project partners would work to locate high-risk areas, which would allow them to work with the area landowners in implementing conservation practices focused on stream bank erosion and farm run-off. The Grasslands 2.0 project is a multi-state project based out of Madison that works with area stakeholders through learning hubs to achieve environmental and economic sustainability and improve quality of life. Grassland 2.0 seeks to expand perennial grasses on the landscape and to promote grass-fed dairy and beef. SWIG study update – it is not over, but the final report should be released soon. Previous reports from the study have indicated that much of the bacteria found in private water wells may be the result of failing/old septic systems rather than livestock runoff. If this is the case, people will need to have their septic systems examined. Joe will be working with the Land Conservation departments in the study area to figure out the best way to reach out to the public and communicate this data.

Sarah – Sarah highlighted several projects coming up, including animal science kits that are linked to virtual animal science programs from UW-Madison and that highlight ag production and careers. There are also several art opportunities coming in the next few months, including the Grandview Winter Academy and Day in the Arts. She emphasized moving away from giving youth project kits and telling them how to do things and what happens in favor of encouraging scientific problem solving – getting the youth to experiment and find ways to complete tasks on their own. She demonstrated an airplane made out of paper and straws...children could experiment and figure out how to make it fly farther (adding straws, changing the shape/design of the paper, etc).

The next meeting is scheduled for March 17th at 5:00pm. Don made a motion to adjourn at 6:35PM, Ricky seconded, motion passed.