

**November 11, 2009**

**Memorandum**

**To: ESCOP**

**From: Podesta Group**

**Subject: Second Year Activity Report**

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We are at the halfway mark of the communications and marketing campaign and we have had some success and some setbacks. Going forward, we will enjoy maximum success if individual institutions and stakeholders actively participate in the campaign.

Whether fighting obesity, developing new sources of renewable energy, or improving the conservation of our natural resources, the nation's land-grant institutions are breaking new ground and developing and implementing innovative solutions across the country. When we creatively market our story to our target audience, it is well received and has a lasting impact on decision-makers and thought leaders. On the flip side, a lack of execution results in many worthwhile stories being untold despite significant time and resources spent coordinating messages and messengers. For the system to fully benefit from the marketing campaign, the system needs to be completely engaged and invested in the various components. Combining timely national and regional media placements with targeted grassroots public relations activities is still a sound strategic platform. Regular, coordinated communication with system leaders is needed to bring better accountability and execution to the campaign.

One component that would improve the execution of the campaign is a regularly scheduled call with either the System Communications and Marketing Implementation Committee (SCMIC) or the regional research directors. We have been most successful when we have active deans or regional directors who are willing to contact their colleagues and suggest alternatives when the initial engagement targets are unresponsive. A biweekly or monthly call would provide a regular forum to discuss marketing opportunities across the system and help resolve any institutional barriers to executing a particular component or idea.

Below is a strategic analysis of the work product from the APLU marketing campaign and suggestions for future improvements to the campaign.

### **Media Outreach and Placement**

We have had several media placements in the last 10 months that highlight the research and extension capability of the land-grant system. While there are several high-profile articles that tell positive stories about the work of the land-grant system and the need for more resources, there is a general resistance from individual deans within the system to author advocacy pieces. We have tried to compensate for that resistance by recruiting stakeholders to serve as editorial authors. Below is a compilation of successful and unsuccessful media placement work in the land-grant system over the last 10 months:

- **Multi-Institution Research on Corn-Based Ethanol, 1/23/09:** The Podesta Group worked with University of Nebraska Researcher Dr. Ken Cassman to promote the results of a study published in the *Journal of Industrial Ecology*. This led to the following stories: "Corn ethanol produces half emissions of gas: study," *Dow Jones News Wire*, 1/23/09; "Ethanol not so wasteful, report says," *Omaha World Herald*, 1/27/09; "Ethanol study touts emissions," *Argus Leader*, 1/25/09; "New Study Claims Corn Ethanol Helps the Environment, After All," *Wall Street Journal*, 1/26/09; "Research finds ethanol less a threat to environment," *Grand Island Independent*, 1/25/09.
- **"The Art of Science of Agriculture," *Washington Times*, 3/8/09:** Placed in the Sunday edition of the *Washington Times*, this piece was written by Al Levine, the dean of the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences at the University of Minnesota and edited and placed by the Podesta Group. The piece also ran in *MinnPost.com*, an online newspaper covering the state of Minnesota.
- **"Emerson Works Out With Seniors," *Democrat Argus*, 9/10/09:** A front-page article showcasing the work done by researchers at the University of Missouri Extension was published in a weekly Missouri newspaper. In addition, the article discussed Rep. Jo Ann Emerson's (R-MO) visit, where she participated in a program developed by MU Extension professors and researchers.
- **1890s Presidential Op-eds:** The Podesta Group drafted an editorial for 1890s presidents on how increased funding for USDA research and extension programs fit in with the president's health care agenda. The piece was signed and sent in by Tennessee State University President Dr. Melvin Johnson and successfully published by *The Tennessean*, one of the largest papers in the state. While this was a successful placement, the system missed additional opportunities because other 1890s institutions declined to send similar pieces to their daily papers.
- **Regular blog posting on sustainability issues:** The Podesta Group conducted several calls and drafted an editorial plan, to highlight the research and findings by being done by Dr. Hamm, the C.S. Mott Professor of Sustainable Agriculture at Michigan State University. The Podesta Group reached out to The Huffington Post and other related blogs for possible placement and generated some interest in a regular posting by Dr. Hamm. This project is currently ongoing.
- **Indirect Land Use Congressional Letter signed by several deans of APLU institutions:** The Podesta Group worked with Wendy Wintersteen at Iowa State University to highlight a letter signed by several deans on the issue of indirect land use as it applies to the production of biofuels. The Podesta Group utilized the Renewable Fuels Association to push the letter to dozens of national and trade reporters who report on energy-related issues.
- **Former FDA Commissioner David Kessler child nutrition piece:** The Podesta Group drafted an op-ed in coordination with former FDA Commissioner and current *New York Times* best-selling author David Kessler, focusing on the importance of child nutrition, highlighting the work of several land-grant institutions on the issue and calling for more funding at USDA to enhance their current work in the area. The piece is currently pending before the *Los Angeles Times*.
- **Health Barn founder editorial on child nutrition:** The Podesta Group is drafting a piece for Stacey Antine, the founder of HealthBarn, a child nutrition program funded and staffed partly by the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Service, which stresses the need for more USDA research and

extension funding for programs like HealthBarn. The piece is being targeted for publication in *The Star-Ledger* or *The (Bergen) Record*.

- **National 4-H Council:** The Podesta Group drafted a piece in consultation with the National 4-H Council highlighting the importance of encouraging the next generation of science leaders by investing additional funding at USDA for 4-H programs. We are currently looking for a signatory for this piece.

### **E-newsletters and Online Communications**

Starting in March of this year we increased our distribution of the e-newsletter from quarterly to monthly and also greatly expanded our distribution list within the land-grant system. The e-newsletters have been well received by the recipients and have been an effective means to gather positive stories throughout the system. Going forward, the Podesta Group and CGA have developed a new design for the [www.land-grant.org](http://www.land-grant.org) site. The new design will highlight and aggregate the work of institutions in a thematic structure that largely reflects the four themes that the Budget and Advocacy Committee developed with USDA for Fiscal Year 2010. The site will also continue to serve as a clearinghouse for advocacy information related to the federal appropriations process. The following is a synopsis of the content and highlights of the e-newsletters sent in 2009:

**Winter 2009:** The winter e-newsletter was sent in mid-March and featured a read-through rate of 20 percent. This newsletter featured an op-ed by Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-GA) on the importance of research and extension funding that highlighted the work of Fort Valley State. It also highlighted the various ways in which APLU's member university cooperative extension services are helping citizens cope in a struggling economy. The e-newsletter also included information on the land-grant institutions that are currently leading the fight against obesity.

**May:** The May e-newsletter was sent mid-month and featured readership rates of 11 percent. The May e-newsletter featured research on organics, highlighting the work being conducted at the University of Hawaii on plant oil pesticides, as well as research on all natural pesticides at the University of Georgia and a monthly organics event at Kentucky State University.

**June:** The June e-newsletter was sent mid-month and featured readership rates of 16 percent, focusing on food safety issues and research. The issue highlights the food safety awareness programs being developed by North Dakota State and the University of Tennessee and summertime food safety tips provided by researchers at Kansas State and Tennessee State.

**July:** The July newsletter was sent mid-month and featured readership rates of 11 percent. It featured research on energy conservation and biofuels, highlighting the work being conducted at the North Carolina Cooperative Extension on the E-Conservation Program, as well as Oregon State University's implementation of a pilot project to perform agricultural assessments of several facilities. The July e-newsletter also highlighted 4-H's efforts, along with University of Wisconsin's, in organizing the second annual 4-H National Youth Science Day.

**September:** The September e-newsletter was sent mid-month and featured readership rates of 16 percent. The September e-newsletter focused on nutrition and wellness as well as obesity research. The issue highlights a recent visit made by Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO) to the University of Missouri to discuss health and nutrition programming with MU Extension

administrators. The issue also highlights the fitness programs being developed by University of Georgia and the University of Massachusetts and combating childhood obesity tips provided by researchers at Louisiana State University AgCenter.

**October:** The October e-newsletter was sent mid-month and featured readership rates of 18 percent, with 249 unique readers. This month's e-newsletter focused on sustainability research, highlighting the organic farming practices being put in place at the Washington State University Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources. Two similar programs involving the local food economies being done at North Carolina State University and the University of Maryland Extension were highlighted, as well as West Virginia University's textile recycling campaign. Penn State University's College of Agricultural Sciences, the University of Alaska, Oregon State University and the Alabama Cooperative Extension were also featured in the e-newsletter.

### **Grassroots Strategy and Targets**

Earlier this year we identified several high-value targets for grassroots media outreach. The grassroots component has had the highest value impact on the target audience but has also been the most difficult part of the campaign to execute. Where we have made meaningful contact, members of Congress and their staffs have seen a new side of the land-grant system and been exposed to stories that had they previously had not heard. Specific events have been difficult to orchestrate for a variety of reasons. Below is the list that was identified earlier this year and the Podesta Group, working with Regional Directors, has initiated contact with the relevant institutions in each state and/or district.

#### ➤ Senate

- Senator Ben Nelson (D-NE)
- Senator Jack Reed (D-RI)
- Senator Mark Pryor (D-AK)
- Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS)
- Senator Susan Collins (R-ME)
- Senator John Tester (D-MT)

#### ➤ House

- Rep. Steve Rothman (D-NJ)
- Rep. Sanford D. Bishop, Jr. (D-GA)
- Rep. Lincoln Davis (D-TN)
- Rep. Maurice D. Hinchey (D-NY)
- Rep. Jesse L. Jackson, Jr. (D-IL)
- Rep. Jack Kingston (R-GA)
- Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO)
- Rep. Ben Chandler (D-KY)
- Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK)

Unfortunately, several institutions declined to participate for many, often legitimate, reasons, and in the future, grassroots activities should be driven by the willingness of an institution to participate in the marketing campaign. The strategic location and committee membership of the delegation is important, but with most states having one or more members of their delegation on either the Appropriations Committee or authorizing committee, having a school that is willing to take the initiative to tell a positive story should take

priority over the physical location of the institution. The following are some positive success stories by grassroots contacts in last year:

- **Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO):** Rep. Emerson visited seniors participating in the Stay Strong, Stay Healthy program run by the MU Extension Service. Emerson participated directly in the program with seniors and the visit generated a front-page story titled, "Emerson Works Out With Seniors," which ran in the *Democrat Argus* (9/10/09). The Podesta Group supported the visit by drafting a news advisory highlighting Rep. Emerson's visit to the University of Missouri to discuss health and nutrition programming being conducted by MU Extension administrators and researchers and conducting several conference calls in advance of the visit. The following quote from Rep. Emerson sums up the success of this event, "I'm really excited about all that you're doing in health and nutrition."
- **Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-GA):** The This newsletter featured an op-ed by Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-GA) on the importance research and extension funding that highlighted the international development work of Fort Valley State with USDA in helping improve agriculture performance in Afghanistan. The piece highlight the exclusion of USDA research funding in the stimulus and called for additional resources in the Fiscal Year 2010 budget process.
- **Senator Mark Pryor (D-AK):** Working with Milo Shult at the University of Arkansas, we were able to determine that Senator Pryor wishes to be a strong national advocate for research and extension funding at USDA. The Podesta Group and CGA were able to meet with his office and we are currently drafting an editorial piece focusing on the work of institutions like University of Arkansas in the area of food safety.

### **Conclusion**

The land-grant system has a good story to tell and we have had some success in telling that story. Regular communication with stakeholders in the system will enhance accountability and improve execution of the marketing campaign going forward.