

Strategic Planning Alternatives for ESCOP and the SAES System

Discussion Paper
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Background

- The last comprehensive strategic planning process for the SAES system was completed nearly ten years ago in 1998 and focused on the period 1999 – 2003. This “Medium Term Strategic Plan” followed and built upon the “Issues to Action” process. “Issues to Action” was an integrated approach to cross-functional planning including teaching, research and Extension. It involved a series of regional listening sessions followed by a synthesis of issues and a plan of action. Previous strategic planning primarily focused on developing a strategic agenda of research priorities.
- An ESCOP and NASULGC task force of nationally recognized scholars prepared “A Science Roadmap for Agriculture” in 2001 which identified research opportunities for agricultural science for a 10 to 20 year time frame. The task force focused on “opportunities to enact positive change and help to set a course of research activity that would better serve the needs of our stakeholders.” In 2004, a survey of land grant research, Extension and academic program directors was conducted and the challenge areas and objectives of the Science Roadmap were updated.
- Over the ten years since the last strategic plan was developed, a number of significant changes have occurred in the economy, society, politics and science. Some of these changes include:
 - September 11, 2001 and a renewed interest in national security and, in particular, biosecurity
 - Escalated prices for petroleum based products and a more competitive market for bio-based fuels and products
 - Increasing concerns over the impacts of global warming
 - A better understanding of the relationships between food, nutrition and health and growing concerns over obesity
 - Increasing call for changes in federal funding mechanisms and increased accountability in the use of public funds
 - Higher budget deficits and limited flexibility in budget development and appropriations
 - The development of the CREATE 21 proposal
 - A new Farm Bill with emphasis on bio-energy and specialty crops
 - Continual decline in the economic and political clout of traditional agriculture
 - Changes in the political arena and the absence of a statesman or woman who has the interest and ability to champion agriculture

- A growing need to partner with the private sector to support agricultural initiatives

Planning Alternatives

- Development of an ESCOP Operational Plan
 - Advantages:
 - Identifies short-term priorities and strategies
 - Keeps ESCOP focused
 - Not costly in terms of time and effort
 - Disadvantages:
 - Fails to identify long-term priorities and strategies
 - Does not include extensive external input and buy-in
 - Does not assist in developing strategic funding path
 - Could result in “rearranging the chairs on the Titanic”

- Development of a SAES System Strategic Plan
 - Advantages
 - Identifies top line, high priority issues
 - Positions SAES system for increased support
 - Provides opportunities for stakeholder and legislator input and buy-in
 - Will provide longer-term guiding principles
 - Addresses quantum changes that are occurring
 - Disadvantages
 - Requires considerable time (one to two years) and effort
 - The term “strategic planning” often results in directors’ eyes glazing over
 - Does not provide immediate focus of effort

- Development of Both a Short-Term ESCOP Operational and a Longer-Term SAES System Strategic Plan
 - Advantages
 - Allows time to properly launch a strategic planning effort while providing immediate focus
 - Identifies short-term and longer-term priorities and strategies
 - Provides opportunities for external input and support
 - Disadvantages
 - Requires significant commitment on part of the SAES system

- Doing Nothing
 - Advantages
 - Requires no commitment of time or effort
 - Disadvantages
 - Missed opportunities for funding and support
 - Lack of focus on priorities