The Value of Consensus Building: Cross Disciplinary Participation to Develop Effective Programs

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Consensus

• Consensus depends on participants having shared values and goals, and on having broad agreement on specific issues...

• Consensus implies that everyone accepts and supports the decision, and understands the reasons for making it...

Businessdictionary.com
Benefits to Program Development

• Identify concerns BEFORE implementation
  ▪ Opportunity to address the issue
  ▪ Decrease chances a large issue is missed or overlooked
  ▪ Less expensive to fix an issue before it is a problem

• Increase in transparency
  ▪ People have more confidence
  ▪ Less likely to create opposition
  ▪ Better ability to defend program because nothing is perfect

Result is a more robust program!
Challenges to Consensus Building

• Must be a focused, committed effort
• Complicated
  • Identify disciplines beneficial to the process
  • Requires working with people who have different points of view, expertise, and communication methods
• Time Consuming
  • Identify individuals with needed expertise
  • Fit into their busy schedules
A Few More Challenges

- Can be uncomfortable
  - Should be facilitated by someone who is not defensive
- Extreme differences and interesting dynamics within groups
- Staying on topic / target
- Controlling human nature
  - The ogre and the wallflower
  - Manage frustration implosion
Example:
Developing a nationwide produce safety curriculum to meet the FSMA Produce Rule grower training requirement
Identifying GAPs Challenges

- Asked WC members to think broadly and openly about challenges to both understanding and implementing GAPs with a focus on small scale operations.
- A big, complex, time consuming exercise.
- Many things were not a surprise but it provided an opportunity for new things to be identified and discussed.
- Process built to be inclusive of all farmers as well as produce industry professionals, researchers, extension educators, and state and federal government personnel.
## Working Committee Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working Committee</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Meetings Held</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>WC 1 General Topics</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>WC 2 Common Issues</td>
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<td>WC 3 Farm Review</td>
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<td>WC 4 Production</td>
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<td>WC 5 Harvest</td>
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<td>WC 6 Postharvest</td>
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<td>WC 7 Train-the-Trainer</td>
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<td>WC 8 Outreach- Farmers &amp; Trainers</td>
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<tr>
<td>WC 9 Outreach- Regs &amp; Trainers</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WC 10 Certification</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 178 Unique WC Members
- 549 Total WC Members
Challenges

• Despite immense effort, did not have individuals from all 50 states

• Some participants had sporadic participation

• An extreme amount of work, time, and organizational effort
  – We herded many cats!

• After 1.5 years of meetings and outreach, many people were still unaware of the process and missed out
The very good news!

- Each group produced a summary report and prioritized a list of topics to identify the most critical areas in each working group
- Created goals to provide a structure for the curriculum and training development
- Had good representation across the stakeholder groups
- Successfully built a curriculum using the results
- Ready to launch the program nationally
Another Evolving Example: Racial Equity and Food Justice

Equality

Equity
The Data Story of Race and Equity
Sample Indicators

Started with collaboration and focusing on disaggregating data to get a better picture
Key Elements of Success

- **Leadership**
  - Someone dedicated to seeing it through
  - Blend of patience and decisiveness

- **Resources**
  - Ways to recruit and meet
  - Detailed indications of progress

- **Clear objectives**
  - MUST know the goal

- **Commitment**
  - Diverse group interested in the goal
Consider Value of Consensus

- Check me
  - Did programs you think are successful use consensus during their development?
- Consider projects that could benefit from cross disciplinary input
- Try using consensus
  - Something small to gauge value and best management steps for your organization
Questions?

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