

DRAFT

Meeting Highlights: Public Awareness & Advocacy

Sam Lawson, Chair

Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation Louisville Office

3/24/09

The Chair welcomed committee members and led self-introductions. In setting the stage for the Committee's work, Mr. Lawson pointed out one step will be to survey Kentucky agricultural assets; also to define the target audiences with whom we want to communicate. There also is an opportunity to work with the other five KAC committees, pairing up efforts with their networks and communications efforts. We should think about ways to reach the broad membership of the organizations that make up the Ky Ag Council, as well as how to get synergy with the marketing and public relations activities they already are undertaking, e.g. the Kentucky Cattlemen or the Pork Producers who appear at many public events.

Ms. Kathy Meyer discussed efforts by the Sheep and Goats organizations: we should understand how they already are promoting wool or lamb. The Parks and Recreation agency in Lexington has proposed a "Wool Festival", at which fiber artists would be on display. This approach may also work at the border collie field trials. The American Sheep Industry (ASI) is the oldest commodity group in the country, and provides money for promotion in individual states.

Mr. Lawson noted that the Kentucky Horticultural Council has between 13 – 17 subgroups. Each of these has its own audience and set of activities.

Jeff Hall noted that there are lots of activities that we probably don't know about. There could be things the KAC could do to help make events better or to get more people to attend. Perhaps there could be a "tag line" regarding Kentucky Agriculture to be used in conjunction with all of these. Another idea was to have a wrapper for food items that carried a common logo, tag line or theme.

The list prepared and distributed by the GOAP staff is very good, but it was acknowledged it may not include every event. Obtaining complete and up-to-date information is a constant challenge, especially at the county or local level.

Mr. Lawson noted that, through activities to help promote Kentucky agriculture, organizations should feel there is value to being a member of the Kentucky Ag Council. If we reach out to more organizations regarding how we can help them promote their efforts, there is a value in "getting asked". How can the KAC help to tie everyone together? This committee should attempt to communicate with all 50 organizations in the KAC regarding their upcoming events.

In contrast, the committee discussed the question of what "level" the KAC efforts should be directed at. Is there a risk of spreading the KAC resources too thin? Currently each commodity group or agency focuses on its own group and goals. We should consider if there is a universal message that could be used everywhere; a tag line. Perhaps it would relate to "jobs" created by Kentucky Agriculture. It was noted that the Ky Farm Bureau Federation already has a slogan: "Agriculture: you can't live without it". Also, there could be banners with such a universal tag line at events or farmers markets; or yard signs could be used.

Mr. Lawson noted that an additional audience is the 138 members of the Kentucky General Assembly. The message there must be very targeted, not shotgun. Dawn Riley suggested that perhaps the strongest route to influencing the General Assembly must be through a grass roots approach. First we may need to do our own awareness-building within the Ky Ag Council membership.

Jeff Hall noted that it has been two years since Governor Fletcher kicked off the strategic planning effort with a call to arms to the KAC. Now the question is how to keep the 50 member organizations engaged; how to show they value they get back from participating in the KAC's activities.

Drew Graham of U of K noted that with respect to the legislature and the executive branch, a precise message is needed to tell them "what you want". The Farm Bureau does a good job of this with its formal legislative agenda. Also, to be effective you have to come as a group, speak with one voice. And, legislators need to know who you are, who you represent. Mr. Lawson noted there may be a need to focus on urban legislators in particular. He noted that the KAC is not a lobbying organization, but it can help coordinate the efforts of others. He also noted the need to get the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce involved.

There was discussion of the challenge of "how to keep the 50 organizations engaged". A universal slogan sounds like a good idea, but may conflict with the messages that individual groups are trying to put out. Other committee members noted the difficulty of even getting their own members to understand the KAC and what it does. The KAC had produced a 2 page summary of top legislative priorities based on the KAC's strategic plan; also a 4 page Executive Summary of the strategic plan. These documents could be disseminated much more widely to the membership of the 50 organizations to there would be greater awareness of the KAC's efforts.

Ms. Blank and Mr. Hall noted the importance of focusing on the KAC's accomplishments, creating an update of all that has been done since the strategic plan was adopted. Ms. Lawson noted that "you can never have too much information: she cited studies that indicate a viewer needs to see an advertisement 6 times in order to remember it.

Ms. Meyer noted that there is turnover in their membership, so there may be value in redistributing some of these documents that were produced last year. She pointed out that KAC has an image problem, because many people remember the KAC "as it used to be", more of social networking organization without an action agenda.

Ms. Meyer asked how the KAC could dovetail its efforts with the current new thrust to promote Ag Tourism. Larry Snell noted that the Ag Tourism effort has ties with the Ag in the Classroom program. Mr. Lawson explained that Ag Tourism is a new form of "diversification" for Kentucky agriculture that has grown out of the Ag Development Board's strategic plan and town hall meetings it originally held. Example of "U-Pick'em" orchards; Bourbon Trail, Wine Trails. There is a regional focus and an effort to promote "Kentucky Farms are Fun. Committee members suggested that Steve Yates from the KDA be invited to join this committee.

Mr. Lawson asked Committee members to summarize the take-aways and action items.

- All KAC member organizations will be contacted to confirm that they are sending notices of their events to the GOAP staff and/or the KAC.

- The 2 and 4 page summaries of KAC legislative priorities and of the Strategic Plan should be resent to the member organizations to encourage wider distribution.
- Jeff Hall suggested an effort to work with all Chambers of Commerce and offering to partner with them; determine if they have an “Ag Day”; strengthen the understanding that the “processing” side of agriculture (which includes businesses traditionally that are members of Chambers) depends on the “production” side of agriculture on the farm.
- Mr. Lawson referenced the idea of going to meet with Editorial Boards of key newspapers across the state to encourage them to cover agricultural issues and good news.
- There is a need to further refine some type of “talking points” that KAC members can use with legislators; focus on facts such as dollars and number of jobs represented by Kentucky agriculture; identify if possible in their home county or district, as well as state-wide data.
- We need to identify how to focus on kids.
- There is a need to reach out to the Soy Bean association in particular.
- A survey should be conducted of all KAC members, with a letter from the Committee Chair, asking their help to identify what type of promotional activities they undertake; we should try to have this information for the next meeting.

Mr. Lawson closed by stating that the key will be to foster synergy between the various agricultural groups to raise the level of awareness of what is occurring in Kentucky agriculture.