

Bienville Parish Listening Session Minutes
Monday, February 27, 2012 5:30 p.m.
Bienville Extension Auditorium – Arcadia, LA

Introductory comments were made by LSU AgCenter Extension Agent Diane Uzzle, Bienville Parish Chair. She welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the meeting. A video message from Dr. Paul Coreil, Vice Chancellor and Director of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES) and Dr. John Russin, Vice Chancellor and Director of Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station was watched as they reported on the LSU AgCenter. They stated we have faculty in five regional offices (reduced from eight to five) plus 64 parishes and sixteen research stations. We did have twenty stations but some have been or will be closed due to budget constraints. More may be necessary which would create further reductions in the workforce.

A PowerPoint presentation on the Business Plan (a formal plan adopted by the AgCenter) detailed the impact of the severity of budget cuts and our current funding sources. There was also discussion on the impact of current and proposed budget cuts in Bienville Parish. The LSU AgCenter State Appropriated Funds for fiscal year 2012 come from the following sources:

- State General Direct (Legislature) 67.7%
- Federal Funds (complies with: Hatch, Smith-Lever, McIntire-Stennis Acts) 13.9%
- Statutory Dedicated (Direct Appropriations from the Legislature) 11.1%
- Self-generated Funds (sales of commodities, registration, or use of specific services) 7.3%

(Restricted local funds, gifts and grants are not reflected in these amounts)

Since July 1, 2008, state funding has been reduced by \$30.7 million. We have had a reduction of 25.5% in the workforce including 314 positions that have been lost. Approximately 70% of AgCenter salaries and wages are in faculty (scientists, agents, specialists) and other academic positions. In response to the budget cuts, the LSU AgCenter has prepared a Business Plan. When asked the question, “Are you aware of these changes?”, seven attendees raised their hands. Arcadia Mayor Eugene Smith asked what effect this has on the community. As we face continuing budget reductions, it is much more challenging for the AgCenter to sustain all of its programs. Angela Merritt and Preston Young discussed the livestock projects that have been impacted by not having an Ag & Natural Resources (ANR) agent housed in our parish. We no longer have the Financial Management Program available for adults. Mileage rates and travel allocations have decreased. The Calhoun Research Station has closed and we had to request more local funding from the school board and police jury. The LSU AgCenter continues to benefit greatly from local support for parish extension programs. We are thankful to have met the goal of 20% local support from our school board and police jury.

In addition to regional coordination, many research and extension programs are organized as centers and institutes:

- Audubon Sugar Institute

- Louisiana Institute for Biofuels and Bioprocessing
- Forest Products Development Center
- Center for Natural Resource Economics & Policy
- Callegari Environmental Center
- Louisiana Center for Rural Initiatives (program suspended at this time)

The research and extension commodity focus of the AgCenter is indicated below:

- Forestry and forest products
- Rice
- Sugarcane
- Cotton
- Feed grains and soybean
- Sweet potatoes
- Poultry
- Aquaculture
- Beef and Forages
- Wildlife and fisheries
- Nursery Crops, Landscape & Turf
- Horses

Research and Extension faculty that work in these commodity areas are housed within Academic Departments at the LSU campus in Baton Rouge and on off-campus research stations located throughout the state. Many of these departments are also undergoing changes in structure and staffing. The departments that have undergone changes are listed as follows: Ag Chemistry, Ag Economics & Agribusiness, School of Animal Sciences, Biological & Ag Engineering, Entomology, Experimental Statistics, Food Science, School of Human Ecology, School of Plant, Environmental & Soil Sciences; Department of Plant Pathology & Crop Physiology, School of Renewable Natural Resources and the Department of Veterinary Sciences.

In response to budget cuts, the AgCenter has refocused research and extension efforts. Why the decision to reduce research and extension focus?

- Declining economic impact of the commodity – Either decline in the value of the industry statewide, lack of commodity support, or more reliance on private support.
- Requires financial investment in programs to remain competitive – funds are not available.
- Can share and obtain information from other states – sharing research and extension programming expertise.
- Physical changes (e.g. pecan?) – the Pecan Station will have an interstate traveling through it soon.
- Level of faculty expertise – quality programs

Some of the changes in the LCES:

- Created the 4-H Youth and Family Development Department
 - Target is 95 4-H Agents
 - Nutrition and health programs emphasis (childhood obesity focus)
 - Target is 36 FCS Agents
 - Elimination of family financial management & early childhood programs
- Target is 64 ANR Agents

Our challenge is sustainable funding. The AgCenter was not helped by the Grad Act and we do not benefit from increases in tuition. If we cannot identify a sustainable funding source, we will continue to adjust to future budget cuts. The changes proposed in the Business Plan were generated from the current and future projected budget cuts. If the cuts are deeper, then additional changes will be necessary. The AgCenter is required to have a balanced budget, and we must live within our means, just as families must in your homes. In order for the LSU AgCenter to continue delivering high quality programs, we will have to develop some sustainable funding streams for our priority programs. We have support from the police jury and school board in most parishes.

The Discussion Point was “What are some other possible funding streams we could explore to sustain local programming and offset future budget cuts?” Some of the suggestions were as follows:

- Have an appreciation luncheon for local industry telling the deep cuts
- Have 4-H’ers speak at the Chamber of Commerce dinner and share the impacts with local businesses
- Pledge cards at events
- Clothes line/tree
- Churches
- Tax credit on state taxes
- Do away with some road signs and use this funding for AgCenter
- Have a fish fry/BBQ
- Casino money
- Cigarette money
- Gas money

Important programs:

- Livestock
- Obesity
- Gardening
- 4-H

Other discussion/comments:

Tell the right people and get ideas out.

Good job.

It is our responsibility to get programs to children/find niche`.

Promote our children.

Bienville LCES is the most organized group and works as a team.

The regional Listening Session will be Tuesday, May 8 at 6:00 p.m. at the Hill Farm Research Station. There will also be one in Natchitoches on May 3.