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CAFES Lab Farm Stakeholder Feedback Report

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Survey Research Center Report 2013/19
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We would like to thank Laura Walsh for her assistance throughout the questionnaire development and data gathering process. Finally, we thank CAFES' lab farm stakeholders who took the time to complete the survey

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Executive Summary

In late June 2013, 72 lab farm stakeholders were invited to take a short, on-line survey. The email list was compiled by Ms. Laura Walsh based on feedback from department chairs and other faculty and staff in CAFES. In addition to the initial invitation, non-respondents received one reminder email. A total of 29 people (40% of the target population) responded to CAFES' request that they provide feedback on the future development of our laboratory farms.

Respondents to this survey clearly seemed to understand that the primary focus of CAFES is on our students and value the laboratory farms most profoundly for the hands-on experiences they afford them. That being said, a majority said that all of the uses identified for the farms (hands-on experiences, research, technology demonstrations, professional networking, and professional development) were important or very important to them.

Somewhat surprisingly, despite being rated the least important current and future lab farm activity, using the lab farms as venues for professional development was identified by the largest proportion of respondents as a top priority for CAFES if it wants to deepen connections with external stakeholders.

The bold ideas identified by this set of stakeholders suggest that these stakeholders were also interested in deepening relations with CAFES and its lab farms. Many of these ideas explicitly identified increasing industry collaboration as an important strategy for CAFES and its lab farms or may have done so implicitly (e.g. adoption of technologies such as robotic milking machines which might be accomplished via industry contributions, increased professional development offerings in terms of precision agriculture, and research done in collaboration with industry).

Survey Purpose and Methods

The College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences (CAFES) is in the midst of creating a master plan to guide the future of our laboratory farms. As part of that process, external stakeholders who use the laboratory farms or might use them in the future were asked to provide their input on what aspects of the farms are most important to them and what bold ideas CAFES should consider for the future of the farms.

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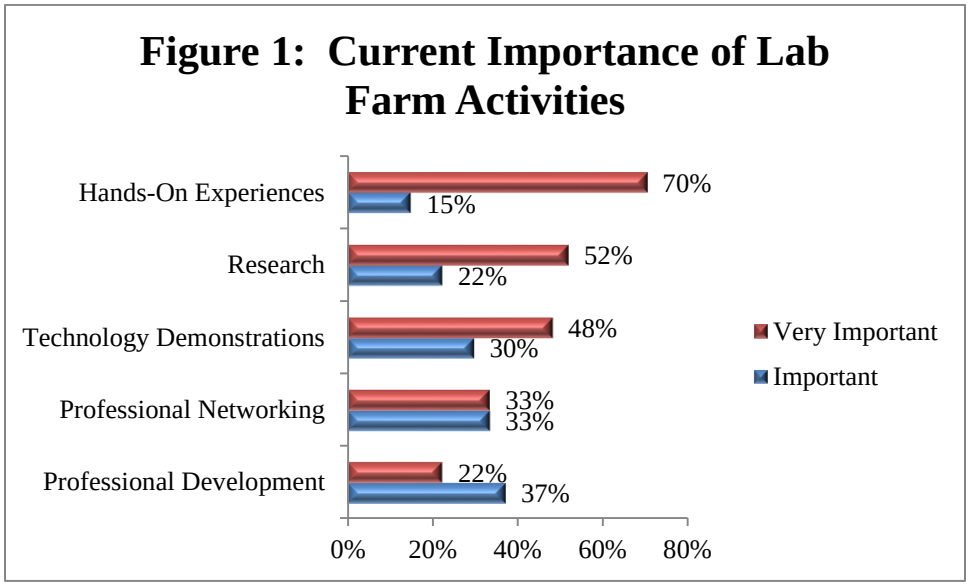
Survey Results

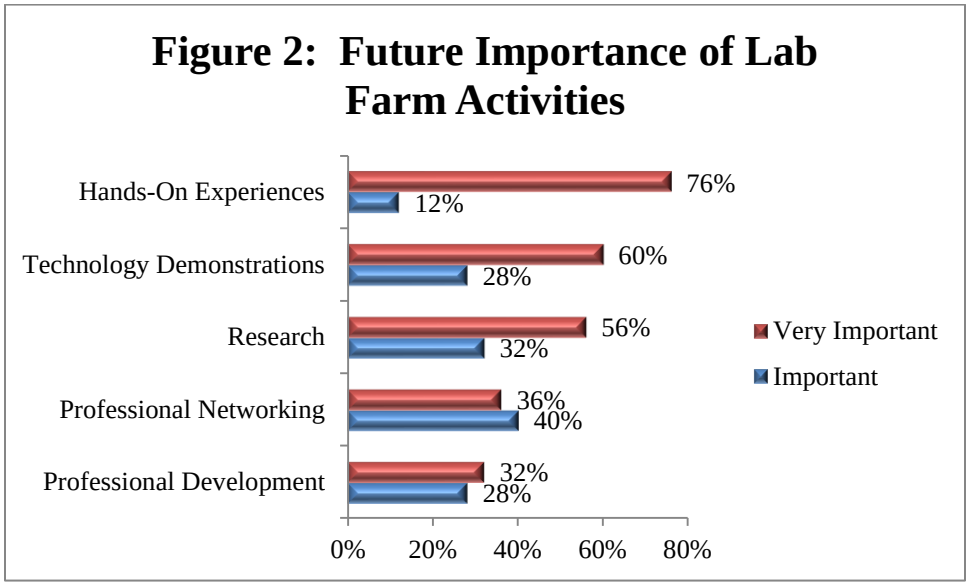
The first question asked how important, currently, the set of potential uses of the farm are to the respondent or his/her organization. Answer options included very important, important, neutral/no opinion, unimportant and very unimportant. As shown in Figure 1, 85% of the respondents said that the hands-on experience that UWRF students get from working on the farm is currently important or very important to them or their organization. About three-quarters of all respondents said that the research conducted on the lab farms and technology demonstrations are important to them/their organizations. Two-thirds currently use the farms as a venue for professional interactions with their peers. Slightly more than half currently use the farms as a venue for their on-going professional development.



Three respondents provided written comments about aspects of the farm they currently find valuable. One reiterated the importance of students' hands-on experiences, one emphasized the

on-farm research done for a specific agribusiness and the third complimented the leadership and workers on the farm for being good collaborators.

The second question in the survey asked about the future importance of the activities listed in Figure 1. The same answer options were available to respondents as in the first question. While the hands-on experiences of future UWRF students is still seen as very important to the largest percentage of respondents, 86% of respondents said that hands-on experiences of students, the farms as venues for technology demonstrations and research done on the farms will be important or very important to them/their organization. Three-quarters said the farms will be an important or very important venue of professional networking and 60% feel that they will be important or very important venues for their professional development.



Two respondents provided additional written comments about future activities on the farms that they believe will be important to them; on-going research done by their business and increased corporate partnering/collaboration.

Priorities for Deepening Connections with Stakeholders

Respondents were asked which items in Table 1 would, in their opinion, result in deeper connections between them/their organization and the lab farms. They were asked to identify their first, second and third highest priorities from this list (plus an "other" option). Only about two-thirds of the respondents answered this question. As Table 1 indicates, none of the options included are clearly dominant in terms of the top priority for strengthening ties between external stakeholders and the farms. Interestingly, the item with the largest number of respondents identifying it as one of the top three priorities was using the farms as a venue for professional development. This result is fairly surprising given that professional development was the least important current (Figure 1) and future (Figure 2) activity at the farms according to this group of stakeholders. One interpretation might be that, while these stakeholders haven't participated in professional development offerings on the farms and don't necessarily expect to, these experiences have great potential to boost their connection to the lab farms.

Table 1: Priorities for Deepening Stakeholder Connections				
	First	Second	Third	Total
Professional Development	5	9	4	18
Event Invitations	4	5	4	13
Industry Meeting Venue	5	3	4	12
Incubator	4	4	4	12
Venue for My Business Meetings	3	2	5	10
Newsletter	4	2	3	9

Bold Ideas for the Lab Farms

The final question in the survey asked respondents for their bold ideas for the farm that would result in new, high-impact activities. Sixteen respondents provided their thoughts about bold strokes that CAFES should take. The majority focused on either adopting specific technologies or increasing collaboration with industry. These comments are included in Table 2.

Table 2: Bold Ideas
Technology (6 responses)
• A robotic milking facility • Add precision farming technology to complete a full agronomic cycle • Advance reproductive lab. ET, IVF, Surgical AI • In order to truly prepare the future generations of agriculture students, it is imperative that we continue to focus on new technology, regardless of methodology, to enhance their learning. This would mean providing research and hands on training with current and new technology and by instilling the benefits of said technology. Granted cost is always a factor in what a university can provide their students, but I truly believe there are many agriculture companies who could easily be encouraged to provide resources to help educate. I am not just talking about monetary funds, but rather, equipment, management tools, research items and teaching materials. Students need to understand that agriculture encompasses more than just their home farm or town, but is rather the true mechanism for maintaining the health and growth of our entire population. To be able to expose all students involved in CAFES to as many aspects of tomorrows farming methods and products would be extremely beneficial. • To be viable in the future you need to be relevant to today's students who will be the future farmers, ag business employees, bankers etc. Help the student to understand the newest and future technologies/practices that are being used now and in the developmental pipeline. / this can range from understanding traits to precision farming, new/different management practices, generally helping the students become better acquainted with the tools and technologies available to "todays" farmers. • Start looking at a precision farming course.to teach farmers a refresher on the monitors and what they will do. Mapping techniques- variable rate for planting and fertilizer.

Table 2: Bold Ideas (continued)
Industry Collaboration (4 responses)
• How can the University and Lab Farms collaborate with local industry? This will strengthen local partnerships, get the students to participate, get the faculty to participate, and get the industry to participate. There are many areas where academia and industry can collaborate for the benefit of both. • I believe there could be closer ties to industry/companies. Some companies have been developing business relationships with technical colleges. Recently I have made a career change, and have discovered the great horticulture program at RF, along with the fruit research that is in progress, and believe that could be expanded. • Do a better job of communicating the benefits of the lab farms to allied industry ... e.g., hands-on student experience, placement rates on graduation, follow-up success stories, etc. Also, find a better balance between activities that support practical, modern production practices vs. politically popular pursuits -- e.g., climate change -related concepts, organic, natural, etc. / Finally, avoid decisions that go counter to the needs of allied industry and consumers ... a good example being the recent elimination of the food sciences major at a time when food safety is becoming one of the most important issues in agriculture today. • There's certainly the possibility of expanding demonstration areas for farmers / ag businesses. Think beyond what the bull test already does, as an example. UWRF is a teaching institution at heart, but there may be opportunities for applied research, especially as the land grant colleges go more towards basic research emphasis. Visibility and awareness is something to consider. You're trying to run a farm and student labs, so what times would be available for other activities or groups? I think knowing it's there and communicating its value to local farmers is huge. My experience is many in the area don't know what all is going on and available at the lab farm. It's something those familiar with it take for granted.
Research (3 Responses)
• Continue with on-going lab work. Continue to work with Winfield for our research at the Mann-Valley Farm. Get industry involved with students utilizing the Mann Valley Farm. • Do as many comparisons of practices as possible. The big Ag companies are doing just fine, but from time to time, low tech, low input practices are more cost effective, more sustainable, and more environmentally friendly. Tactfully making comparisons can impact the industry and the students greatly. Many options for agriculture need to be presented, not just the packaged and branded practices. Your teachers have been quite good at this and it is not a new concept. • Development of systems and technologies to sustainably feed 9 billion people worldwide in the near future using good stewardship. Development of the young people that will be needed to accomplish this.

Table 2: Bold Ideas (continued)
Other (3 responses)
• Total Energy independence, a model farm with all alternative energy sources. and Aquaculture, • Continue to get hands on experience for the students to touch and feel the nature of the agriculture professions they will be going into. The college is producing a product, it is called students that are taught the basics of agriculture and how to continue to learn on the job. You must never lose focus of that. The research is good to have, but when you can teach along the way, the end result has more value to our industry. • I really do thank you for this opportunity for me to give you my input. I am the UWRF IHSA Western Show Team coach and IHSA is my concern. 1) IHSA needs a secure, larger place to store and lock up the equipment that we use (besides the saddles) for our practices and competitions that we host. Right now, we're using a small locker and bridles, halters and leads and grooming equipment is all stored and basically shoved into one spot. Obviously, this is the not the best way to store leather equipment and it is hard on everything in the locker. 2) In regards to the facility, our arena (the area that we use to ride) is one of the best in terms of size and footing and it is maintained very well. However, it does not function well as a facility to host horse shows, clinics, etc. Keeping everything under one roof is essential and in inclement weather, people have to walk outside to get to the bleacher end of the building at this time. Extending the side walls out 20 feet on both sides of the building would make a lot of sense to me. 3) I believe and am trying to get funding to build a small show case that can be mounted on the wall just outside the indoor arena to display trophies, ribbons and photos of the students and their accomplishments for all of the equine clubs.

Conclusions

Respondents to this survey clearly seemed to understand that the primary focus of CAFES is on our students and value the laboratory farms most profoundly for the hands-on experiences they afford them. That being said, a majority said that all of the uses identified for the farms (hands-on experiences, research, technology demonstrations, professional networking, and professional development) were important or very important to them.

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