

## Strengthening Michigan's Economy: Roles for the Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station and MSU Extension

### Findings from MSU Faculty Focus Groups

Presented by C. Vogt 1/31/06

Forty-five members of the MSU academic community participated in focus group discussions organized to help MSU Extension (MSUE) and Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station (MAES) better understand potential education and research opportunities. The findings from these discussions provided a set of themes for an on-line survey that will be available to all MSU faculty and academic staff during the winter of 2006.

The faculty focus groups and on-line survey are just two parts of the multi-faceted issue identification and planning process: *Strengthening Michigan's Economy: Roles for MAES and MSUE*. Other aspects of the process include Area of Expertise team discussions with stakeholder groups, focus group discussions in all 83 counties, an on-line survey open to the general public, and on-line survey open to everyone with Extension appointments.

The five 90-minute faculty focus group sessions were held in November 2005 in the Detroit College of Law conference room. Deans recruited their faculty members and everyone came who had agreed to participate. The directors of MSUE and MAES (Tom Coon and acting director John Baker) asked each dean at the university to nominate faculty or academic professionals who would be interested and willing to participate in this process. Two sessions were dedicated to the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources; the other three sessions were discipline focused (not college specific) – social sciences, humanities and natural, biological and physical sciences.

Dr. Christine Vogt, a faculty member from the MSU Department of the Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies, moderated all of the sessions. Judy von Bernuth was host and note taker. Sessions were not taped and instead, worksheets, flip charts, and verbal conversation were transcribed.

The table shows the themes that were articulated during the focus group sessions.

Themes From Faculty Focus Group Discussions	Humanities	Social Sciences and Professions	Natural, Physical and Biological Sciences	Ag and Natural Resources
<p><b>Agriculture and Natural Resource Industry Development.</b> Advance the science of technologies to reduce the cost of production in Michigan’s food and fiber industries. Advance management techniques to reduce labor, other costs and environmental impacts, and increase revenue. Create new value-added enterprises based around Michigan products. Increase the diversity of Michigan’s agriculture and natural resource based industries.</p>				X
<p><b>Community Development.</b> Help communities adjust to changing economic circumstances, including more mobile population, smaller families, increasing pace of technical change, aging population, globalization pressures, and environmental tradeoffs.</p>		X		
<p><b>Culture.</b> Learn how to increase the cultural opportunities in Michigan as a means to producing greater respect among groups of varied backgrounds, reduce out-migration, make Michigan an attractive destination for new residents, create economic opportunities, and enrich the quality of life for existing residents.</p>	X			
<p><b>Economic Development.</b> Research and education to help individuals, companies, and communities appropriately use strategies and technology to achieve sustainable economic vitality.</p>	X	X	X	X
<p><b>Education.</b> Improve techniques for delivery of educational services to learners of all ages. Help society raise overall levels of education and life skills in the general population and make better connections between public and private investments in education and social outcomes.</p>		X		
<p><b>Environmental Stewardship.</b> Help individuals, businesses, communities, and governments make better decisions about management of Michigan’s environment. Increase our knowledge of techniques and processes to foster better environmental outcomes and economic development. Help create rapid responses to emerging environmental threats.</p>			X	X

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<p><b>Health.</b> Address current public health threats, including increasing rates of obesity, diabetes, and certain infectious diseases, as well as the increasing overall costs of health care.</p> <p><b>Information Industries.</b> Expand Michigan’s economy by learning how to use emerging communications technologies in new ways to stimulate dialog, increase marketability of Michigan products, or to improve the overall quality of life. Find ways to increase Michigan’s competitive edge in supporting knowledge work.</p> <p><b>Leadership and Youth Development.</b> Research and education on the most appropriate techniques for creating and supporting the next generation of leaders for Michigan communities and industries. Develop tools for leaders to use to achieve consensus and set goals.</p> <p><b>Learning Environments</b> Create and test new and engaging ways to increase the effectiveness of techniques used to teach students of all ages and situations (pre-school through retiree).</p> <p><b>Public Discourse</b> Find new ways to create a culture that encourages leadership development, and engagement of the general population in informed public policy decision-making. Help resolve conflicts between environmental and economic development objectives. Encourage corporate and individual philanthropy to meet Michigan objectives.</p> <p><b>Social Equity.</b> Create and apply natural science-based information to help disadvantaged groups and regions in Michigan attain quality of life goals.</p>	<p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p> <p>X</p>	<p>X</p> <p>X (Research and education to increase overall participation rates in public debates and the level of dialog and consensus-building between groups with differing perspectives.)</p>	<p>X (Description for <u>this group only.</u> Increase understanding of relationship between food choices, environmental quality, lifestyle, and heredity with human health outcomes.)</p> <p>X</p>	<p>X</p> <p>X (Create and apply agricultural and natural resource-based information to help disadvantaged groups and regions in Michigan attain quality of life goals)</p>

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<p><b>Science-Oriented Youth.</b> Engage youth in the K-12 age range in experiential learning through teacher training or direct delivery to foster increased interest in scientific or technical careers.</p> <p><b>Technology Development.</b> Research and education on how to adjust individual, corporate, and community strategies to make full use of emerging technologies, including bio-systems, engineering, and informatics.</p> <p><b>Tourism and Recreation Development.</b> Research and education to help make Michigan a better place for residents to recreate and a more attractive destination for non-resident tourists. Reduce the number of Michiganians who travel outside the state for leisure activities and reverse the brain drain by strengthening the tourism and recreation sectors.</p> <p><b>Create Your Own Theme</b></p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p> <p>X (Create and adapt emerging technologies in biological, engineering, and information sciences to enhance the lives of Michigan residents.)</p>	<p>X (Create and adapt emerging technologies in agriculture, natural resources, communities and the out-of-doors to enhance the lives of Michigan residents.)</p> <p>X</p>
<p><b>Other topics mentioned during focus groups</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy</li> <li>• Urban redevelopment – vibrant city</li> <li>• Immigrant populations/native languages</li> <li>• Conversations about social problems (drinking, drugs)</li> <li>• Technology – games, entertainment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food and nutrition</li> <li>• Urban issues – crime</li> <li>• Research and commercialization</li> <li>• Fostering innovative thinking</li> <li>• Job retraining in manufacturing</li> <li>• Poverty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food, local markets, organics, gmfoods</li> <li>• Energy, bio</li> <li>• Infectious diseases from wildlife and livestock</li> <li>• Sensor technology</li> <li>• Research and commercialization</li> <li>• Assistance with environmental compliance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Native American – tribal decision making, tech. assistance</li> <li>• Aging/Seniors</li> <li>• Climate change</li> <li>• Land use planning and education</li> <li>• Energy</li> <li>• Globalization and local preferences</li> </ul>