EDEN AGROSECURITY SYMPOSIUM

The University of Kentucky hosted the Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) Agrosecurity Symposium: Building National Networks and Partnerships in Washington, DC, on April 22 – 23, 2013. Participants from 21 states included representatives from federal (DHS, DOD, DOE, DOJ, EPA, USDA), tribal, state (departments of agriculture), and local (animal control, emergency management, first responder, public health) entities; academia (including Extension, research, education); commodity organizations, veterinary medicine, and government contractors.

OVERVIEW

The Symposium was designed to build relationships across a variety of disciplines to synchronize disaster preparedness efforts affecting the food and agriculture sector. On the first day, participants collaborated in working groups to address agricultural challenges in existing preparedness efforts to identify gaps and report their findings. On the second day, participant working groups discussed the identified gaps and proposed strategies to build networks and partnerships at the local, state, tribal, and federal levels to improve preparedness measures and aid response and recovery. A variety of challenges and strategies were identified during the working groups. Some of the main themes included:

CHALLENGE #1:
The importance and vulnerability of food and agriculture is not fully recognized at the federal, tribal, state, or local levels.

Proposed Strategy: Regularly market a message that is simple and clear at federal, tribal, state, and local levels. Engage the whole community, including farmers, families, and youth.

CHALLENGE #2:
Federal and state policies are not understood at the local level due to inconsistent language and changing political environments.

Proposed Strategy: Guide agricultural preparedness efforts based on local needs that inform state and federal initiatives; identify and implement successful models to engage local, state, tribal, and federal collaborative relationships.

CHALLENGE #3:
Critical agricultural infrastructure representatives are not always at the table when federal, tribal, state, and local plans, policies, guidance, and frameworks are developed.

Proposed Strategy: Involve all appropriate agricultural stakeholders when preparedness plans, policies, guidance, and frameworks are developed.

CHALLENGE #4:
Although some support exists to develop agrosecurity training programs, the maintenance process is rarely sustained. The result is unstable training programs and insufficiently trained personnel.

Proposed Strategy: Enlist sustainable support from governmental- and non-governmental agencies and organizations to address agrosecurity preparedness needs at the local, state, tribal, and federal levels.
OUTCOMES

The Symposium captured evaluation data from participants. A total of 64 individuals attended the Symposium; 32 completed the evaluation, for a 50% response rate. Participants agreed or strongly agreed that:

- The Symposium was engaging and beneficial (97%)
- Agricultural preparedness challenges were identified (100%)
- The Symposium offered a unique opportunity to develop solutions to preparedness gaps (84%)
- They plan to implement identified strategies in their work (80%)
- They would attend a future EDEN Agrosecurity Symposium (94%)
- They would recommend this event to a colleague (84%)
- They had an opportunity to create new contacts for future collaboration (94%)
- They have a better understanding of Extension and EDEN (90%)

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

The Agrosecurity Symposium gathered feedback from participants by asking their definition of agricultural preparedness, which stakeholders should be involved in strategies, and how community readiness could be assessed. Participants described preparedness as a “cohesive, flexible system that can adapt rapidly to minimize impacts of emergencies and disasters to maintain continuity of the agricultural businesses and make the recovery process as rapid as possible to keep the food supply flowing safely from farm to consumers with minimal disruption and confusion.” Participants identified that “all stakeholders involved in agricultural preparedness strategies should include emergency response entities and all levels of government working with producers, farm-to-fork industries, allied industries, universities, commodity groups, and rural communities.” Participants indicated “other than conducting after-action analyses of actual events, the best evaluation of community agricultural emergency/disaster preparedness would be through conducting comprehensive local needs assessment, developing local capabilities, writing effective plans, and training for and exercising plans under realistic scenarios to identify gaps in response.”

When asked what resilience at the local level means and how to prepare for resilience, participants responded that resilience at a local level includes the “local capacity to respond and recover rapidly with minimized impact while restoring pre-event quality-of-life and leaving the community better prepared for future challenges.” Participants identified that to prepare communities for resilience, “stakeholders must be brought to the table before events to determine real threats to communities and develop plans that clearly identify roles along with the communication, training, and collaboration needed to sustain a response-oriented system and impact mitigation.” Symposium participants expressed that “other than evaluating post-event recovery, community resilience can only effectively be measured by how plans are updated and realistically exercised within communities with the objectives to restore essential agricultural services and production. One indicator of this readiness is the continued inclusion of agriculture in emergency and government planning functions.” Participants stated “procedures for communications across all levels of public-private collaboration” will indicate how prepared each will be to work with the others to “solicit local input, listen to priorities of different stakeholders”, and implement strategies for effective preparedness and community resilience.

ADDRESSING FUTURE AGROSECURITY NEEDS

Participants identified best practices for future agrosecurity planning (participants identified multiple options per need):

- The most effective means to address agricultural preparedness needs in the US were Symposia like this one (77%), regional conferences (77%), and webinars/online meetings (37%)
- Future EDEN Agrosecurity Symposia should occur every year (60%) or every 2 years (43%)

To sustain the momentum of the dialogue initiated at the Symposium, a post-conference focus group identified the need to develop a multi-disciplinary Working Group. The Working Group will target individuals at all levels (federal, tribal, state, and local) to address stakeholder input and the agrosecurity challenges and strategies identified during the Symposium. The Working Group will also guide future Agrosecurity Symposium events.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) Agrosecurity Symposium was made possible by funding received by the University of Kentucky through the Smith-Lever Special Needs Competitive Grants Program of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), grant # 2012-41210-20062 and the USDA NIFA Food and Agriculture Defense Initiative (FADI). The continued financial support from federal partners helps communities prepare for and increase resiliency to future agricultural disasters.

SYMPOSIUM DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Craig Askim, North Dakota State University
Ray Burden, University of Tennessee
Steve Cain, Purdue University
Scott Cotton, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Billy Dictson, New Mexico State University
Bobby Dictson, New Mexico State University

Robert Dwyer, University of Kentucky
Andrea Higdon, University of Kentucky
Deborah Hill, United States Dept. of Agriculture
Melissa Newman, University of Kentucky
Chelsey Pickens, University of Kentucky
Mike Yoder, North Carolina State University

SYMPOSIUM SUPPORT STAFF

Craig Askim, North Dakota State University
Rick Atterberry, EDEN Chair
Steve Cain, Purdue University
Kim Cassel, North Dakota State University
Scott Cotton, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Tammy Cotton, University of Georgia
Billy Dictson, New Mexico State University
Robert Dwyer, University of Kentucky
Curt Emanuel, Purdue University Extension
Andrea Higdon, University of Kentucky

Abby Hostetler, Purdue University
Sonja Koukel, New Mexico State University
Melissa Newman, University of Kentucky
Chelsey Pickens, University of Kentucky
Jeanne Rankin, Montana State University
Kerry Rood, Utah State University
Nathaniel Tablante, University of Maryland
Sarah Workman, University of Georgia
Mike Yoder, North Carolina State University

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http://www.eden.lsu.edu/s-cap/symposium

For more information, contact:
Andrea Higdon or Chelsey Pickens
(859) 257-7868 – office
andrea.higdon@uky.edu or chelsey.pickens@uky.edu