

Leadership Program Planning: Assessing the Needs and Interests of the Agricultural Community

Eric K. Kaufman

Assistant Professor

Department of Agricultural and Extension Education
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

2270 Litton Reaves Hall (0343)

Blacksburg, VA 24061

(540) 231-6258

FAX: (540) 231-3824

ekaufman@vt.edu

Richard J. Rateau

Graduate Research Assistant

Department of Agricultural and Extension Education
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

2270 Litton Reaves Hall (0343)

Blacksburg, VA 24061

(540) 231-6258

FAX: (540) 231-3824

rrateau@vt.edu

Keyana C. Ellis

Graduate Research Assistant

Department of Agricultural and Extension Education
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

2270 Litton Reaves Hall (0343)

Blacksburg, VA 24061

(540) 231-6258

FAX: (540) 231-3824

keyellis@vt.edu

Holly Jo Kasperbauer

Graduate Research Assistant

Department of Agricultural and Extension Education
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

2270 Litton Reaves Hall (0343)

Blacksburg, VA 24061

(540) 231-6258

FAX: (540) 231-3824

hollyjo@vt.edu

Laura R. Stacklin

Graduate Research Assistant

Department of Agricultural and Extension Education

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

2270 Litton Reaves Hall (0343)

Blacksburg, VA 24061

(540) 231-6258

FAX: (540) 231-3824

lrs14@vt.edu

Abstract

Needs assessment is the first step in developing a leadership education program. During the spring of 2008 researchers and program planners conducted focus groups sessions with representatives from Virginia's agricultural community with the goal of assessing the leadership development interests and needs of that community. As one focus group participant shared, "I've had leadership programs all along... they didn't use examples that were real in my world." The findings of this qualitative study suggest that an agricultural leadership development program should focus on three areas: (a) knowledge of the changing industry; (b) relationship building across industry sectors; and, (c) practical, transferable skill development. The skill areas of interest include creative problem solving, political advocacy, and communication. These findings are similar to previous research on grassroots leadership development, yet they lead to important recommendations for further research and practice.

Introduction

The primary goal of leadership development is to build leadership capacity as a proactive measure against unforeseen challenges or developments. Leader development, on the other hand, is focused on human capital that allows the leader to act in new ways and is created by learning individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with formal leadership roles. To build the leadership capacity necessary for a successful organization or community, the learning environment and activities must nurture both individual leader and collective leadership development (Day, 2000). This is certainly true in the agricultural community, and it is the reason why many agricultural leadership programs were founded. However, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (1999) argues that grassroots leadership is specific and distinct from other forms of leadership.

Are the broader goals agricultural leadership programs and other niche programs the same as main-stream leadership programs?

According to Casciani (2000), most leadership programs have three common elements: (a) building and sustaining learning networks, (b) creating access to new information and skills, and (c) enhancing personal leadership visions. The target audience for agricultural leadership programs may have different outcomes in mind. When designing any educational program, context is an important consideration (Cervero & Wilson, 2006). Furthermore, Zachary (2000) suggests the “curriculum for grassroots leadership training needs to begin with a conception of leadership that *fits* the needs and everyday realities of grassroots leaders in their organizations and communities” (pp. 72-73).

Agricultural professionals face challenges in the form of commodity markets, regulatory requirements, changing demographics, agricultural illiteracy, natural resource depletion, and economic survival. Agricultural communities need leaders to effectively address such situations; the success of the industry depends on grassroots leaders who are facing these challenges daily (Diem & Nikola, 2005; Horner, 1984). Unfortunately, people in the agriculture industry and rural communities may have little social capital or individual leadership skills on which to rely (Kaufman & Carter, 2005). To address this need, many states have created agricultural leadership development programs (Helstowski, 2001). Evaluations of those programs suggest that graduates experience increased community involvement, increased awareness of the value of their time, and improved business and decision making skills (Black, 2006). All are essential to effective agricultural leadership.

In Virginia, agriculture and its related industries are an important part of the state’s economic base, accounting for almost \$79 billion in total industry output in 2006 (Rephann, 2008). According to Rephann, every job created in agriculture results in an additional 1.5 jobs in the state and every value-added dollar results in another \$1.75 entering the state economy. Although the agricultural sector has had steady production in recent years, numerous factors threaten future growth, including “production technology, consumer demand, energy, urban population growth, government policy, and the global economy” (p. 4). Despite indicators of the agricultural industry’s importance and threats to the future of the industry, Virginia does not have a leadership development program tailored for its agricultural community. The purpose of this study was to assess the leadership development needs and interests of the agricultural community in Virginia.

Guiding Literature

Leadership training is grounded in the establishment of network structures that have long-term positive effects on issues (Fredricks, 2003). Leadership programs, like all education and training programs, focus on three main types of change (Caffarella, 2002):

- Individual change related to acquisition of new knowledge and skills and examination of personal values and beliefs.
- Organizational change resulting in new or revised policies, procedures and ways of working.
- Community and social change that allows for differing segments of society to respond to the world around them in differing ways.

Although agricultural leadership programs started over 70 years ago (Kelsey & Wall, 2003), most current programs trace their roots to the Kellogg Farmers Study Program (KFSP) which began at Michigan State University in 1965 (Carter, 1999; Case IH, 2005; Helstowski, 2001). Founders of the KFSP recognized that agriculture was becoming more complex and effective leadership was needed to protect and guide the future of the industry (Miller, 1976). From the beginning, the KFSP consisted of “workshops and travel seminars intended to provide participants with an understanding of the social, economic, cultural, and political dimensions of public problems” (Howell et al., 1982, p. 2). “The goal of the program was to provide young agricultural and rural leaders with a broader view of society, as well as a greater sense of the world and how they fit into the bigger picture” (Helstowski, p. 1).

The focus of the KFSP aligns more closely with grassroots leadership development than traditional or mainstream leadership development. According to the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (1999), grassroots leadership is characterized by the following criteria:

- Draws on personalities and people who do not fit into traditional corporate or mainstream community leader molds.
- Employs techniques that are unconventional by traditional leadership standards and sometimes perceived as threatening to mainstream leadership.
- Motivated more by passion than money.
- Seeks to achieve shared leadership as opposed to traditional hierarchical leadership.

Many present-day agricultural leadership development programs emerged throughout the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, modeling their curricula after the KFSP

model. In an analysis of these programs, Howell, Weir, and Cook (1982) found the following common educational objectives:

- Develop participants' ability to analyze public problems critically and objectively.
- Develop participants' understanding of the economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions of public problems.
- Increase participants' ability to solve public problems by improving leadership and group participation skills.
- Increase participants' understanding of important local, state, national, and international issues.

The International Association of Programs for Agricultural Leaders has targeted several states and countries for continued expansion of agricultural leadership development programming. One of those states is Virginia. Currently, 38 agricultural leadership development programs operate on a structure similar to the KFSP model. These include 32 state and 6 international programs (Helstowski, 2001). By the year 2000, agricultural leadership programs in the United States graduated over 7,200 participants and received over \$15 million in financial support (Case IH, 2005; Helstowski).

While several published studies have reviewed existing agricultural leadership programs, needs assessments prior to program implementation seem to be lacking. According to Miller's (1969) systems concept of leadership training, needs assessment is the first process involved in developing a leadership training program. "Needs are defined as the discrepancy between learners' current state of knowledge, performance, or attitude and some desired state; empirical evidence must be collected to verify this discrepancy or 'gap'" (Cervero & Wilson, 2006, p. 107). A needs assessment is more than a collection of evidence. A needs assessment is a consideration of stakeholders' interests and judgments about the stakeholders' educational and political needs (Cervero & Wilson).

Research Methods

Researchers focused this needs assessment on the following research questions.

Q1: To what degree does Virginia's agricultural community have an interest or need for leadership development?

Q2: What are the desired outcomes for such a leadership development program?

Q3: How should a leadership development program be structured and delivered to meet the expected outcomes?

Qualitative research is often used to understand human or social perspectives that may involve many variables or require rich descriptions of those variables (Sogunro, 2001). Among qualitative research techniques, focus groups have an advantage in their ability to leverage the opinions of more than one person through interaction and discussion among participants (Byrne & Rees, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Morgan, 1997). The researchers employed focus groups in this study to gain deeper insights into the development of an agricultural leadership program in Virginia.

This study included nine groups throughout the state of Virginia. Each represented a different perspective on the leadership development needs of Virginia's agricultural community. The focus groups included:

- Undergraduate students majoring in agriculture.
- A young farmers and ranchers group.
- Women in agriculture.
- A women's committee for a professional agricultural organization.
- Senior managers in a meat processing facility.
- Other leaders in the meat processing industry.
- A forest industry advisory group.
- Agricultural Extension agents.
- Employees with a government agency that works with the agricultural community.

Although each group was purposefully selected, convenience sampling was also applied. The researchers attempted to involve other groups and individuals, but constraints on the timing of the research limited the opportunities for recruitment. The final sample included 74 participants.

Each of the nine focus groups was conducted separately, with some overlap in facilitators. All of the facilitators used the same semi-structured focus group protocol. All focus groups sessions included these questions:

- What past experiences have you had with leadership development or leadership education programs?
- What leadership development programs does your organization currently offer or engage in?
- What other leadership education efforts are you aware of for agricultural industry professionals?
- What additional opportunities for leadership development would you like to see?
- If Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension offered a leadership education program for agricultural industry representatives, what would it look like?

Focus group discussions were captured through digital audio recording and detailed written field notes. In each case, one member of the research team served as a facilitator for the session and a second member took notes. Audio files allowed for repeated review to ensure a deep understanding of context and delivery. Note taking allowed for identification of non-verbal cues (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The audio files were transcribed verbatim and used as the primary data source. To maintain confidentiality, participants' names were not identified in the final transcripts.

Data analyses were a collaborative research effort. The team of researchers engaged in content analysis, a qualitative research technique that arranges and abridges data into significant and manageable topics or categories (Patton, 1987). Researchers triangulated the data by comparing responses within and across each focus group. Dependability was addressed through detailed record-keeping. Researchers reviewed these records at key points in the research process to ensure that the findings remained true to the raw data. Confirmability was addressed by reporting thick descriptions, direct quotes, and excerpts from the raw data that support both interpretation and conclusions drawn by researchers. To maintain confidentiality, direct quotes from the transcripts were coded and reported by focus group number only (i.e., "FG1").

Findings

The research team's analysis of the focus group data revealed key findings related to leadership development program interests, desired outcomes, and preferred structure.

Leadership Development Program Interests

Focus group participants generally believed leadership development is needed in the agricultural industry. Their concern was in gaining participation in the program from those who would benefit most. For example, one participant shared:

“Most farmers are not going to go to a leadership training, in my opinion. They might go; I mean, I think the people who might go to that, they probably have leadership training... There’s probably a big need for leadership in young farmers maybe who are not, have not gone to a university. And maybe farmers who didn’t participate in FFA or don’t participate in Young Farmers now... And I think you would have to group your leadership training in with something else... I think if there’s like a big [industry] symposium where you’ve got lots of good valuable information, they’re going to find out about their industry specifically, maybe if you’ve got leadership training grouped into that, maybe they will participate.” (FG2)

Focus group participants had a strong interest in programming that would be focused on emerging leaders. In particular, participants expressed concern with recruiting people into leadership positions and getting them started in the “leadership pipeline.” As one participant said:

“I’ve had very poor luck trying to recruit people into a leadership position, and either I don’t know how to pick them or I just haven’t had any success. It seems to me the self-made and the self-motivated, that’s the only way I know of unless they’re something I’m missing. It’s hard to create that kind of person. You can teach them some skills, but that leadership takes an internal motivation.” (FG7)

These points were elaborated further with the following statement:

“There are a lot of courses out there that somebody who is already a leader can make them better and give them more skill sets. So it’s either you want a way to make leaders better or to try to get people into that leadership pipeline. And I think that’s probably what we need more of is more people to get into the pipeline of becoming leaders.” (FG7)

Participants indicated that agricultural leaders must have a sense of confidence in their own abilities and be able to instill confidence in others. One participant said:

“Leadership is [being] confident; and that’s having and knowing that there’s somebody that’s up here that’s leading you towards whatever that goal may be... [The whole industry is] wondering really how we are going to survive... So I’m sure from a leadership standpoint, you know, when I talked about confidence – you’re really confident in what’s really happening in this industry. And I think we, right now, have got to be looking at our leadership as what’s going to happen here. What are we going to do to – is it right to ship or whatever the case may be? How are we going to deal with the next couple of years?” (FG6)

Overall, participants had little doubt about the need for effective leaders and the need to develop more leaders for a successful future. In most focus groups, discussion quickly moved to statements about appropriate content and outcomes for an agricultural leadership program.

Desired Outcomes

Common themes emerged when discussing the desirable outcomes for an agricultural leadership development program. These themes included knowledge of the changing industry and relationship building across industry sectors, both of which relate to the need for practical, transferable skills (Figure 1).

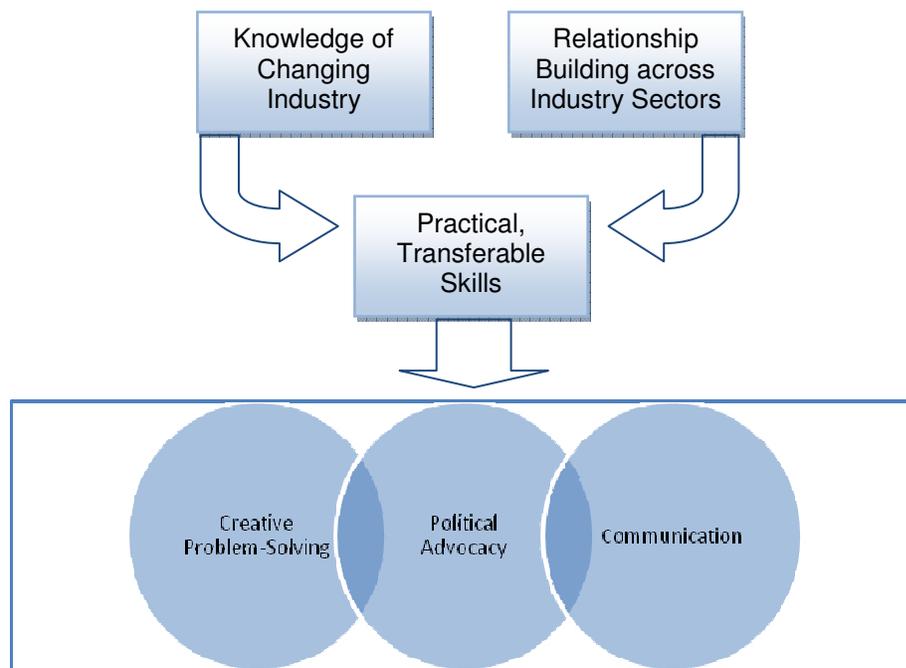


Figure 1: Desired outcomes for an agricultural leadership development program.

Knowledge of the Changing Industry

Participants noted the need for agricultural professionals to make intelligent decisions and investments within the agricultural industry, based on experience and knowledge of the industry. As one participant said:

“Obviously if you’re going to be a leader in a specific field it helps to have some level of knowledge, either that you’ve gained through education or that you’ve picked up on your own as you go through the process of being a leader.” (FG7)

However, rapid changes make it difficult for agricultural professionals to keep abreast of all of the issues and be prepared to face current challenges. One participant expressed this concern:

“Just being able to stay like on the front end of things and keep up with what’s new to make sure that you run your business effectively, cause right now, our economy is not very good, so we’re gonna have to be real good at what we do if we want to make it.” (FG1)

Another focus group participant added:

“I think [agricultural leaders] also need to be in touch with... you know, environmental issues, those things that could potentially impact the company, industry, etc.” (FG6)

For several participants, the issues related to technological advances. As one participant said:

“I think they also have to understand technological advances and be up-to-date and be able to lead us through that kind of thing. I mean, there’s always need in agriculture or any other business to move ahead, and there’s always things that are happening out there that are moving agriculture ahead, and I think we have to have leaders in the State of Virginia that understand that kind of thing and what it takes for a company to move ahead and how to acquire that technology.” (FG6)

Relationship Building Across Industry Sectors

Participants discussed the advantage of and necessity for relationship building and networking across agricultural sectors. One participant shared:

“I think there is a lot of opportunity there to just pull from other people and benefit from their experiences.” (FG5)

As one participant said:

“Another big part of leadership, I think, is being able to network and outsource and resource among leaders of different organizations. [There is a need for] organizations that involve people from different backgrounds or different aspects of agriculture that are all coming together or even individualized industry organizations like [Specialty Crop] Association or Cattleman’s or things like that where you come together then and share ideas and you have people sort of stepping out of their box a little bit to help other people learn from their mistakes or share experiences...” (FG4)

Another participant added:

“I’d like to see a little more joint type of effort. I mean, I know that [one of my mentors] goes to legislative week at the capital at the same time Farm Bureau is there, but there’s not a whole lot of other cattlemen that I

have ever witnessed being there. And, it's like, well, why doesn't Farm Bureau, the Cattlemen, and Soybean Association, the Corn Group and whoever else go together and work together? I mean Farmer's Union, that's really strong in [one part of the state]. Why don't we all show that we are very strong? I mean, go forward. We do all have a common goal. We may not all agree on all the little details but we do have a common goal of keeping agriculture viable.” (FG4)

As another focus group participant said:

“There's a lot of problems out there and the only way you're going to solve them is to bring people together and have them solve them together. And they're from all difference aspects of life or business. You've got to be able to work with people. And sometimes there are difficult people and you don't agree, but you've got to come together to solve the problem.” (FG7)

Development of Practical, Transferable Skills

Focus group participants noted that a leadership program's focus on relationship building and knowledge of the changing industry must come together in the form of practical, transferable skills. A leadership program's emphasis on skill development is what will enable participants to apply concepts from the leadership program in the workplace and community. As one focus group participant said:

“There's always that difficulty in taking what you do in the classroom, when you do a little exercise, and getting back to using it in your job. I think that all relates back to the expectation. If I come right back to work and there's no expectation for me to change, there's no reinforcement.” (FG6)

Another participant reminisced about past programs that failed to effectively transfer learning to real-world application:

“It's experiential and to what you're into. I've had leadership programs all along and they don't, they didn't use examples that were real in my world and case studies and whatever you want to call them. I mean, I just feel like – and, again, you got a theory or you're not sure where they were going, but you couldn't connect the dots because they weren't using what we were living and seeing and breathing.” (FG8)

The most prominent skills sought by participants can be grouped into three key subthemes: creative problem-solving, political advocacy, and communication.

Creative Problem-Solving

In response to leadership challenges, like changes in the industry, working with limited resources, and facilitating conflict management, participants noted the importance of problem-solving skills that were creative and innovative. As one participant said:

“There are a lot of problems that arise in the agricultural industry and they need to be dealt with. So, [leaders] need to be problem solvers and resourceful to find ways to solve those problems.” (FG1)

Another focus group participant said:

“I think for leadership, you have to have to communicate, so therefore you want people working together. You want people figuring things out, putting their heads together. And there’s different ways of going about that.” (FG2)

One focus participant recalled a positive leadership development experience with his organization:

“How they try to develop you is take the less experienced, put them with the experienced, and really encourage that even though you may not know something about a particular topic or subject, encourage you to think outside of the box and listen and try to solve problems creatively.” (FG7)

Political Advocacy

Participants also believed that leadership program graduates should be prepared to serve as advocates for the industry, particularly in the political arena. For example, one participant said:

“We need a voice in government that’s extremely strong. ’Cause it seems like we are the ones that are taken advantage of. We’re the ones that suffer from some of these decisions that are being made and no one is hearing our voice because we are being phased out...” (FG4)

Another focus group participant explained:

“I think you can give people experiences in dealing with whatever situations that you see in a leadership position, like dealing with legislators... I think we’ve got to get [industry] involved or comfortable talking to legislators, because that’s where a lot of our bread and butter is either made or destroyed.” (FG7)

Another focus group participant said:

“I guess I’m coming from my background of political leadership and the issues that are facing our industry right now, like this gentleman said about rising feed costs. And why do we have rising feed costs? Well, it’s because the Congress sets certain policies that led to the expansion of the ethanol industry and brought that situation around. I think it would be helpful for everyone within agriculture, from farmers to people that work in [food] processing throughout, to be more knowledgeable on political issues and be more involved in the political processes that can bring about positive outcomes for our industry as opposed to some of the negative ones that we are seeing right now.” (FG6)

Communication

The importance of effective communication was highlighted by many of the study participants. For example, one participant said:

“I think that the most important skill is communication, first and foremost: being able to recognize the individuals that we’re coordinating whatever with and being able to communicate well with any individual.” (FG8)

Participants noted the need for improved public speaking and presentation skills. One participant shared:

“Public speaking would be probably a key, major factor in... a new leadership program. You would have to have different types of public speaking experiences as far as that program to be helpful.” (FG2)

Another said:

“If you can’t communicate effectively with what your point is, then it might not be interpreted the way that you intend for it to be. I think that’s important for a leader to be able to communicate well with the masses. Not necessarily just your peers but people that work for you or people that you work for.” (FG5)

In summary, research participants believed that the desirable outcomes for an agricultural leadership development program include knowledge of the changing industry, relationship building across industry sectors, and skill development in the areas of creative problem-solving, political advocacy, and communication. Additional points of discussion relate to preferences for program structure and delivery methods.

Structure and Program Delivery Preferences

When asked to identify structure and delivery approaches for a successful leadership development program, participants had varying opinions. Participants agreed that a leadership development program should include meaningful, hands-on experiences that act as a catalyst to the application of leadership skills. For example, one participant said:

“I think some kind of experiential learning should be part of any development [program]. And ideally, if you can, get a person outside their comfort zone [and] into a new environment or a new cultural environment.” (FG9)

Another focus group participant shared:

“I do not enjoy going to leadership training classes taught by a professor. That doesn’t work in business. You know, he can sit and talk the talk but that’s different than being in real life.” (FG5)

As another participant explained:

“I consider myself a pretty good leader, but the reason I consider myself a pretty good leader, and good at dealing with people and communicating with people, I’ve been in some situations over the years, some not good situations with associates, but I think you get all that out of experience. I think you learn how to be a leader through experiencing that. So you can put it all on paper and you can do it all in a classroom, but when you do it in a classroom, and even when you’re role playing, it’s not the real thing. It’s not real until you’re out there and you see it in the real world.” (FG6)

Participants lacked consensus on program structure decisions, such as timing of seminars, length of program, the need for international experience, tuition costs, etc. For example, regarding timing of seminars, one participant summarized the discussion by saying:

“There is no a good time for everybody.” (FG4)

Regarding the length of program, one participant said:

“You can’t get the outcomes that you would want to achieve and make them a five-day wonder or a three-wonder or whatever” (FG8)

A member of the same focus group agreed, saying:

“I don’t think it’s something that you can accomplish in a week’s time, maybe even a month’s time, you know. It’s something that you’re looking at over months taking several leadership concepts.” (FG8)

However, some other focus group discussions seemed to suggest a shorter program would be more appropriate. According to one participant:

“Businesses are leaner now and being able to commit larger blocks of time is a hard thing to do.” (FG7)

Financial concerns were raised particularly in regard to prospects for an international trip. One participant said:

“Farmers, obviously they definitely need [to engage globally]. But farmers can’t really take two thousand dollars and go to Europe for a conference or something.” (FG1)

Another explained some of the complexity of pricing a leadership program:

“People pay several hundred dollars to go through [a leadership program]. You know, so as we looked at that, we want to have it at a – at a price where folks would be willing to come. We wanted to cover our costs and at the same time, as we talked about it, we thought, ‘you know, if we make it so cheap then do you, do you wonder if people perceive it to be something less than, you know, a good program.’” (FG8)

In general, the desire was to build a program that has a solid reputation. As one focus group participant said:

“I suspect that for anything like this to work, the first couple of years are going to have to be paid for by somebody other than the participants. I think once you get a track record where you say, where somebody can say, ‘Wow, those people really are moving on. They’re getting a lot of recognition. I’d like to be part of that.’” (FG7)

The focus group sessions ended with a positive discussion of prospects for an agricultural leadership program in Virginia. Participants believed that a leadership development program would be an asset to the agricultural community, provided that it was tailored appropriately to the needs of the community. Specifically, the research participants believed that program should focus on knowledge of the changing industry, relationship building across industry sectors, and skill development in the areas of creative problem-solving, political advocacy, and communication. Participants also believed that program should be based around practical, hands-on experiences.

Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Participants in this study clearly noted that there must be strong leadership for the agricultural community to grow and prosper. This finding is consistent with research on agricultural leadership development in other states (Diem & Nikola, 2005; Horner, 1984). The focus group findings suggest that key outcomes for an agricultural leadership development program should be similar to those of the Kellogg Farmers Study Program (KFSP) model. Focus group participants emphasized the following desired program outcomes:

- Knowledge of the changing industry.
- Relationship building across industry sectors.
- Practical, transferable skills in creative problem-solving, political advocacy, and communication skills.

Participants in this study noted that relationship building across industry sectors would enhance program participants’ ability to remain knowledgeable of the changing industry. However, the knowledge and relationships are of little value unless they are paired with practical leadership skills that apply to a variety of contexts. Creative problem-solving skills are needed to address the new challenges that the agricultural community faces today and in the future. In many cases, the challenges and solutions come in the form of public policy. For this reason, agricultural leaders must serve the role of political advocates. Effective

agricultural leaders will find themselves in conversation with a variety of stakeholders and will need to practice effective communication in order to motivate and persuade support for their vision of a successful future.

As previously reported, Casciani (2000) found that most leadership programs have three common elements: (a) building and sustaining learning networks, (b) creating access to new information and skills, and (c) enhancing personal leadership visions. Based on the desired outcomes identified in this study, the agricultural community places significant value on the first two areas but less value on personal leadership visions. This finding may be result of the line of questioning or perhaps collective culture of agricultural community groups. In either case, program planners need to be aware of this potential discrepancy.

For some leadership educators, the program outcomes that the participants identified may seem unconventional and distant from prominent leadership theory. However, as discussed in the introduction to this research, grassroots leadership is distinct from other forms of leadership and the development process must begin “with a conception of leadership that *fits*” (Zachary, 2000, p. 72). This is the reason why leadership program planners must begin with an appropriate needs assessment and align the program curriculum with the findings from that needs assessment.

With regard to program structure and delivery, this study failed to identify consensus on several important decisions. In particular, the researchers noted differences of opinion on the desired program length, time of year, cost, and overall scope. Decisions must be made on these program details before the program can be implemented.

One area of agreement related to program logistics was that participants clearly believed the program must be practical and hands-on. This finding coincides with Casciani’s (2000) point that grassroots leadership development must be customized to support the immediate needs of the participants. Due to the voluntary nature of grassroots leadership, these leaders often have little tolerance for abstract and theoretical approaches to leadership development. Accordingly, guest speakers and program activities must be selected careful to ensure strong connections to participants needs.

An important limitation of this study is its focus on the state of Virginia. However, the findings lead to important recommendations both within and outside the state of Virginia. First, program planners and advocates in Virginia should share the findings of this study with key stakeholders who can help move a program plan to action. Many of the quotes could be used to persuade further

support. Second, program planners in other states should consider needs assessment approaches that are appropriate for their target population. The use of focus groups can be an effective way to collect rich, insightful data for program planning. For states and organizations that already have an agricultural leadership program in place, the program leaders should consider whether the findings in this study support or contradict their current approach to leadership development. If their current programs are not based upon a recent needs assessment, the program goals and structure may not be appropriately aligned with stakeholder interests and needs.

More research is needed to further explore the specific needs of various grassroots leadership communities. As observed in this study, these groups can have needs and interests that vary from traditional leadership program approaches. Research is also needed to evaluate the impacts of different structural decisions (i.e., program length and cost) when planning and implementing a leadership development program. The KFSP model continues to have appeal for emerging agricultural leadership programs. However, more research is needed to clarify the benefits and consequences of this traditional program model.

Acknowledgement

The authors are grateful for the work of the following contributing researchers: Rose Bradshaw, Thasya Campbell, and Sharon Williams.

References

- Bennis, W., & Nanus, B. (1985). *Leaders: The strategies for taking charge*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Black, A. (2006). *Executive summary analyzing the outcomes of the Ohio LEAD program*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Extension.
- Bryne, J. C., & Rees, R. T. (2006) *The successful leadership development program: How to build it and how to keep it going*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.
- Caffarella, R. S. (2002). *Planning programs for adult learners: A practical guide for educators, trainers, and staff developers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Carter, H. S. F. (1999). *Evaluation of the Florida Leadership Program for Agriculture and Natural Resources*. University of Florida, Gainesville.
- Casciani, C. (2000). Developing grassroots leaders: What's different? A funder/practitioner view. In W. K. Kellogg Foundation (Ed.), *Grassroots leadership development: A guide for grassroots leaders, support organizations, and funders* (pp. 12-14). Battle Creek, MI: W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/GrassrtsSptFndrs2PC_2003_01_21_00439_00814.pdf
- Case IH (2005, Summer). Leading ag's way: Leadership programs develop spokespersons for agriculture. *Farm Forum*, 25. Retrieved from http://www.caseih.com/files/tbl_s33Publications/PublicationPDF128/1111/AGISSU05U.PDF
- Cervero, R. M., & Wilson, A. L. (2006). *Working the planning table: Negotiating democratically for adult, continuing, and workplace education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Day, D. V. (2000). Leadership development: A review in context. *Leadership Quarterly*, 11(4), 581-613. doi:10.1016/S1048-9843(00)00061-8
-

- Diem, K. G., & Nikola, M. P. (2005). Evaluating the impact of a community agricultural leadership development program. *Journal of Extension*, 43(6). Retrieved from <http://www.joe.org/joe/2005december/rb5.shtml>
- Fredricks, S. M. (2003). Creating and maintaining networks among leaders: An exploratory case study of two leadership training programs. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 10(1), 45-54. doi:10.1177/107179190301000104
- Helstowski, L. W. (2001). *The legacy of the ag leadership development program: Rich heritage cultivates future opportunities* (Booklet No. 534). Battle Creek, MI: W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.leadershiponlinewkkf.org/learningcenter/pubs/ag_leadership/Ag_Leadership_Booklet.pdf
- Horner, J. T. (1984). Developing effective agricultural leaders. *Journal of Extension*, 22(6). Retrieved from <http://www.joe.org/joe/1984november/a3.html>
- Howell, R. E., Weir, I. L., & Cook, A. K. (1982). *Development of rural leadership: Problems, procedures, and insights*. Battle Creek, MI: W. K. Kellogg Foundation.
- Kaufman, E. K. (2007, February). *Are agricultural leadership development Programs building global leaders?* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Rural Sociology Association, Mobile, AL.
- Kaufman, E. K., & Carter, H. S. (2005). Agricultural leadership development: from networking to application. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 4(2), 66-5. Retrieved from http://www.fhsu.edu/jole/issues/Jole_4_2.pdf
- Kaufman, E. K., & Rudd, R. D. (2006). Local Farm Bureau needs assessment: A qualitative study. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 47(1), 53-63. Retrieved from <http://pubs.aged.tamu.edu/jae/pdf/Vol47/47-01-053.pdf>
- Kelsey, K. D., & Wall, L. J. (2003). Do agricultural leadership programs produce Community leaders? A case study of the impact of an agricultural Leadership program on participants' community involvement. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 44(4), 35-46. Retrieved from <http://pubs.aged.tamu.edu/jae/pdf/vol44/44-04-35.pdf>
-

- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Miller, H. L. (1976) (Ed.). *The Kellogg Farmers Study Program: An experience in rural leadership development*. Battle Creek, MI: W. K. Kellogg Foundation.
- Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Osborne, E. W. (2007) (Ed.). *National research agenda, agricultural education and communication: Research priority areas and initiatives, 2007-2010*: American Association for Agricultural Education.
- Patton, M. Q. (1987). *How to use qualitative methods in evaluation* (2nd ed. Vol. 4). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Rephann, T. J. (2008). *The economic impact of agriculture and forestry on the Commonwealth of Virginia*. Charlottesville, VA: Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, University of Virginia. Retrieved from http://www.dof.virginia.gov/info/resources/2008-09_Econ-Impact-Agriculture-Forestry.pdf
- Sogruno, O. A. (2002). Selecting a quantitative or qualitative research methodology: An experience. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 26(1), 3-10. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=3&hid=15&sid=ffb39243-6677-4d60-9ea4-c400bb043485%40sessionmgr3>
- W. K. Kellogg Foundation (1999). *Grassroots leaders: Growing healthy and sustainable communities* (No. 521). Battle Creek, MI: W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Retrieved from http://www.wkkf.org/Pubs/CCT/Leadership/GrassrtsSptFndrs2PC_2003_01_21.pdf
- Zachary, E. (2000). Grassroots leadership training: A case study of an effort to integrate theory and method. *Journal of Community Practice: Organizing, Planning, Development, and Change*, 7(1), 71-94.
-