

**PROGRAM REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION PLAN  
ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT  
Department of Agricultural Economics  
2022-2023**

**Recommendation 1.** Develop a strategic vision ahead of key position transitions within the department including providing leadership training for those in or considering leadership roles. Diversity should be a key point of consideration in future hires and targets (race, gender, etc.). Also need to ensure competitiveness in hiring as most agricultural economic departments have moved to 9-month faculty positions for at least research/teaching positions.

**Assessment method:** Observation is the most practical means of assessing progress. When available, data will be used.

**Results:** This implementation plan was approved only about five weeks ago, so results are preliminary.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** Departmental faculty and staff regularly discuss future goals for our various Land-Grant mission areas to develop, maintain, and update our collective strategic vision. However, we agree that it would be valuable to commit that vision to a written form. The university offers various academic leadership training programs. Interested faculty are encouraged to apply for those programs. The department has long made efforts to promote diversity in faculty hiring pools. Should the College allow it, we are willing to consider future instruction and/or research faculty hires as 9-month appointments. However, this change must be introduced in a manner that is also equitable for faculty with primary Extension appointments.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** The undergraduate committee, graduate/research committee, and extension committee have each been asked to develop vision statements for their areas of responsibility. These vision statements will be shared with the faculty for feedback. The goal is to have these ready to share with candidates for the chair position.

**Recommendation 2.** Conduct undergraduate curriculum review and revision with an explicit plan for continual periodic reviews to ensure relevance and competitiveness in a constantly evolving job market.

**Assessment method:** See response for recommendation 1.

**Results:** This implementation plan was approved only about five weeks ago, so results are preliminary. A departmental undergraduate retreat occurred in August 2023 to initiate “big picture” thinking about modifications to our undergraduate curriculum.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** The undergraduate review will be comprehensive and address several different issues. However, a theme that emerged from the retreat was an increased emphasis on “professional and career development” both in curricular and extracurricular formats.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** The undergraduate committee shared an initial set of recommendations with the faculty at the October 2023 faculty meeting. Faculty have been asked to review the recommendations and provide the committee with feedback.

**Recommendation 3.** Prioritize finalizing, approving, and implementing changes in the graduate program that have been initiated.

**Assessment method:** See response for recommendation 1.

**Results:** The graduate/research committee presented proposed MS program changes at the October 2023 faculty meeting. After a brief discussion, the committee was asked to make some minor modifications and then again present the proposed changes for a faculty vote.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** The department is committed to offering an outstanding MS program. Further discussion regarding the future of the PhD program has been postponed until after the MS curriculum changes are finalized. There is general agreement among the faculty that we have neither the teaching resources nor the financial resources (following the university's drastic reduction in the number of graduate tuition waivers) to offer a traditional PhD program. At the same time, we see value in being able to offer PhD level training to a small number of students – especially those interested in Extension. The question we are considering is whether it would be possible for us to offer a non-traditional PhD program for a small number of students and whether doing so would be the best use of our limited teaching and financial resources.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** The department will finalize changes to the MS curriculum during fall of 2023 with submission through the University Senate approval process. The graduate/research committee will begin exploration of the potential for non-traditional PhD training immediately after the MS changes are finalized.

**Recommendation 4.** Work with CAFE upper administration and KFBM staff to develop a plan to have more public good output from the KFBM program investment.

**Assessment method:** See response for recommendation 1.

**Results:** This implementation plan was approved only about five weeks ago, so results are preliminary.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** KFBM specialists are aware of the need to generate more “public good” output for the broader KY agricultural community. They are actively discussing strategies for increasing written outputs and Extension presentations.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** KFBM cooperators are currently conducting a study to compare the program in Kentucky with similar programs in other states. While the department did not commission the study, we will have access to the findings, which should provide insights to inform decision-making about future directions for the KFBM program.

**Recommendation 5.** Maintain and enhance existing strong Extension presence and impact throughout Kentucky.

**Assessment method:** See response for recommendation 1.

**Results:** The department is proud of our long history of having an active Extension presence throughout Kentucky. We have every intention of maintaining and, as resources allow, enhancing that

presence.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** The department will remain active throughout Kentucky. The department will continue to be intentional in obtaining input from county agents and stakeholders regarding Extension programming needs. As funding allows, the department will continue to make extensive use of staff in developing and delivering Extension programming. Staff positions will continue to be re-evaluated and reclassified to address needs.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** Departmental Extension faculty and staff meet regularly (approximately three times each year) with the Economics and Community Development Committee of the Kentucky Association of County Agricultural Agents (KACAA) to discuss programming needs. In addition, the chair, Extension coordinator, and all Extension faculty and staff are intentional about maintaining communication with county agents. Departmental Extension faculty and staff meet monthly to plan programming including the annual Economic Subject Matter in-service training. In the summer of 2023, departmental Extension faculty and staff initiated a “new agent” in-service economics training program for county agents with less than five years of experience.

**Recommendation 6.** Enhance external support, scholarship, and research/extension output related to the land-grant mission.

**Assessment method:** See response for recommendation 1.

**Results:** External support has increased in recent years. Approximately three faculty members consistently attract large amounts of grant funding. Others consistently attract smaller amounts of funding that are appropriate for their research/Extension programs.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** Assistant professors and early associate professors have been increasingly successful in attracting funding (including funding from nationally-competitive sources). A concern is that some faculty are limiting grant applications because neither the department nor the university sponsored programs office seem to have sufficient staff bandwidth to adequately support grant recipients.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** All faculty hired in recent years have been mentored regarding the importance of external funding for the development of their research/Extension programs and support of departmental graduate students. The department has hired two time-limited “off-budget” staff members to assist with purchasing (much of which is related to grants). The department and CEDIK will soon advertise for another time-limited “off-budget” position to assist with grants management for CEDIK.

**Recommendation 7.** Departmental leadership and faculty should actively work with the Martin-Gatton CAFE’s Office of Philanthropy and Alumni to pursue funding for endowed positions or distinguished professorships focusing on the department’s three pillars (regional economics/community development, agricultural resource/production economics, marketing/consumer demand).

**Assessment method:** See response for recommendation 1.

**Results:** The department recently received a significant endowment (Brannon Endowment) to

support international engagement. Dr. Kusunose has been asked to administer the use of those funds (application and decision processes, financial management, reporting to the donor, etc.). The department recently agreed to pay for one-third of a time-limited, "off-budget," philanthropy position to be shared with KALP and the Department of Entomology.

**Analysis of results and reflection:** The identified three pillars guide only our hiring of research faculty and recruitment of graduate students. Extension faculty and staff needs are more comprehensive. We agree that funding for endowed positions is becoming more critical for recruiting and retaining outstanding faculty.

**Ongoing improvement actions:** We look forward to implementing processes for use of the Brannon endowment and working with the new dedicated staff person to increase philanthropic giving to the department.