

# **Reporting on the Land Grant Stakeholder Rule:**

## **A Commentary from the Northeast U.S.**

**The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group  
January 2006**

# **Reporting on the Land Grant Stakeholder Rule:**

## **A Commentary from the Northeast U.S.**

### **The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group**

Kathryn Z. Ruhf  
NESAWG Coordinator  
Project manager and writer

Sue Ellen Johnson  
Researcher and writer

Miranda Smith  
Editor

Forward by Vernon Grubinger  
Director, Center for Sustainable Agriculture  
University of Vermont

With appreciation to our Land Grant colleagues and manuscript reviewers. Supported by grants to NESAWG from the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation and the Lawson Valentine Foundation.

© NESAWG 2006

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG) is a network of organizations and individuals working together to promote a more sustainable and secure regional food system for the Northeast. Members represent farm, environmental, consumer, education, food security, government and other constituencies. The NESAWG region includes Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont and West Virginia.

NESAWG focuses on public education, local, state and federal policy development, food systems development, public institution accountability and member capacity building. Since its founding in 1992, NESAWG has worked to foster dialogue and collaboration between the region's Land Grant and other educational institutions, and community stakeholders.

NESAWG produces publications, issues electronic and hardcopy newsletters, holds conferences and meetings, manages and collaborates on special projects, manages a website and list serve, and conducts outreach, organizing and advocacy activities.

NESAWG  
P.O. Box 11  
Belchertown, MA 01007  
Phone/fax: 413-323-9878  
E-mail: [nesawg@nesawg.org](mailto:nesawg@nesawg.org)  
[www.nesawg.org](http://www.nesawg.org)

# Reporting on the Land Grant Stakeholder Rule:

## A Commentary from the Northeast U.S.

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Forward	p.	4
Executive Summary	p.	6
I. Introduction	p.	7
II. Background	p.	11
III. Stakeholder Input Process	p.	14
IV. Soliciting Stakeholder Input	p.	19
V. Consideration of Stakeholder Input	p.	25
VI. Conclusion and Recommendations	p.	31
VII. Appendices	p.	35
A. The Statute		
B. The Rule		
C. Land Grant institution Plans of Work		
D. Identify, Solicit and Consider, examples, by state.		

# FORWARD

## What Stakeholder Input Really Means and Why It Matters

*Vern Grubinger, Director, Center for Sustainable Agriculture, University of Vermont*

This report offers Northeast Land Grant institutions a unique opportunity to explore – and improve – processes for working with their various stakeholders. It is a constructive tool – both a mirror on the stakeholder input process as it has been implemented by our region’s Land Grant institutions and an invitation to do more.

Implicit in the federal government’s call for Land Grant stakeholder input are several concepts that are axiomatic to a healthy democracy:

- 1) *Fairness* in the way public resources are utilized promotes public participation
- 2) *Equality* in the ability of citizens to participate builds a strong and just society
- 3) *Adaptability* to new ideas and situations leads to social and economic progress
- 4) *Diversity* of views and experiences leads to technical, spiritual and cultural enrichment.

While these powerful concepts are implied in the 1998 law known as the Stakeholder Rule, the Rule lacks meaningful instruction on who stakeholders are, how to get their input, or what to do with it. Those questions need to be answered by the Land Grant institutions individually or collectively, if they are to effectively benefit from stakeholder input.

In addition, the process of engaging stakeholder will be much more meaningful and productive if land grant institutions seek specific answers to these fundamental questions: why should we get stakeholder input, what are our goals in doing so, and how will we know if we’re successful?

Land Grant institutions do have a choice. They can ‘go through the motions’ of collecting stakeholder input by using mechanisms that are already in place, and then documenting it simply because the government requires them to. Or, they can recognize the potential benefits of a truly meaningful stakeholder input process and critically evaluate current practices in order to improve them.

The motivation for Land Grant institutions to do the latter can be found in the fundamental answer to *why stakeholder input matters*: it is the path to relevance, societal support, and organizational sustainability. Land Grants already ‘get this’ to a large extent, for example when they plan new courses and degree programs to meet student interests and job market needs. They ‘get this’ when they conduct research with the goal of developing new products or processes that will solve problems that concern the public, or when they provide advice and recommendations to help people make decisions that help them and society as a whole, such as avoiding unnecessary agri-chemical applications, or improving dietary habits to achieve better health. The challenge is to stay ahead of the curve and earnestly seek out emerging and unmet needs and consider – with meaningful input – possible ways to address them. In addition, existing programs

that were created to address certain needs of the past must be honestly evaluated with the help of a wide range of stakeholders.

Of course, everything cannot be ‘up for grabs’ in the stakeholder input process. Separate processes must be set up for strategic, tactical and operational issues. The core mission of the Land Grant institutions along with their human resources and physical infrastructure is to bring big-picture, long-term forces to bear in meeting broad societal needs. Discussions about shorter-term issues around programming should generally be viewed as related but distinct.

So, as the Stakeholder Rule encourages but does not specify, Land Grants need to identify some very clear processes that articulate *what* they want input on – needs, trends, current programs and objectives, allocation of funds – in the short- and long-term. *Who* gives that input can also be guided in ways that lead to inclusion of a range of representatives. The demographics of inclusion are complex. They include age, ethnicity, gender, race, and geography as well as factors with special relevance to the Land Grants such as farming experience and philosophy, land tenure, economic status, and political viewpoint.

Finally, measurable goals, benchmarks and accountability are essential to obtaining and considering stakeholder input. These should be publicly articulated and their fulfillment celebrated. Involving new constituencies as stakeholders, collecting innovative ideas and feedback, and responding with sincerity, transparency, and creativity will help assure that Land Grant institutions remain a powerful and productive force for the greater public good.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The “Stakeholder Rule” was passed by the U.S. Congress as part of the 1998 Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act. Its purpose was to “encourage broader and more transparent roles for stakeholders in the system of Agricultural Experiment Stations, Land Grant Universities, and Cooperative Extension.” The Rule for its implementation was published in 2000, reflecting USDA’s mandate to “*solicit and consider input and recommendations from persons who conduct or use agricultural research, extension or education*” in establishing priorities for agricultural research, extension and education activities conducted or funded by the Department. Land Grant institutions are required to establish and implement a process for obtaining input from stakeholders concerning the use of their federal formula funds, and to report on such in their Plans of Work.

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG) is a network of over 60 diverse organizations and institutions in the twelve Northeast states that work together to promote a more sustainable and secure food and agriculture system for the region. Since its founding in 1992, NESAWG has worked to foster communication, mutual engagement and accountability between the region’s Land Grant institutions and its producer and community stakeholders. NESAWG saw the Stakeholder Rule as an opportunity to advance these goals.

This report presents an overview of the first reports that the 14 formula-funded institutions in the Northeast submitted to USDA-CSREES in response to the Stakeholder Rule. NESAWG analyzed the Plans of Work for these institutions, focusing on the methods institutions reported they used to comply with the Rule. Based on the reports, the report discusses how Land Grant institutions: 1) identified stakeholders; 2) solicited input from stakeholders; and 3) considered the input they collected from stakeholders. The report addresses the complexities and challenges associated with the Stakeholder Rule process and includes recommendations.

The purpose of this report is to encourage land grant institutions *and* stakeholders to further enhance the opportunities for, and the effectiveness and transparency of their dialogue. The Stakeholder Rule process can be seen as a two-way street – to build responsiveness and accountability on the part of our public institutions and to inform and engage the public so that it will champion support for these institutions.

# I. INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Congress first proposed the section of law known as the Stakeholder Rule as a part of the 1998 Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act (AREERA; 7 U.S.C. 7612). The final rule prescribing how the section of the law was to be implemented was published in the Federal Register on February 8, 2000—after the Cooperative State Research Extension and Education Service (USDA-CSREES), acting for the executive branch of the federal government, had drafted the regulations for its implementation. (AREERA s. 7612 and the Rule as published are in Appendix A.) The rule is the expression of a public campaign and USDA commitment **to encourage broader and more transparent roles for stakeholders in the system of Agricultural Experiment Stations, Land Grant Universities, and Cooperative Extension.** The legislation originated in the office of Richard Lugar of Indiana and the Senate Agriculture Committee.

The statute requires the USDA Secretary, in establishing priorities for agricultural research, extension and education activities conducted or funded by the Department, to *“solicit and consider input and recommendations from persons who conduct or use agricultural research, extension or education.”* In order to obtain federal “formula funds” for agricultural research, extension, and education—the 1862, 1890, and 1994 Land Grant Institutions—are required to *“establish and implement a process for obtaining input from [such persons] concerning the use of the funds.”* In the Rule, such persons are defined as stakeholders. The Rule (7 CFR Part 3418) lays out the process institutions are required to follow. The institutions affected by the Rule submitted their first reports in 2001. To date, no governmental agency has disseminated an analysis of these Stakeholder Reports to the public.

## **NESAWG members as stakeholders**

The Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG) network includes over 60 diverse organizations and institutions in the twelve Northeast states that work together to promote a more sustainable and secure food and agriculture system for the region. NESAWG defines the food system as all elements in the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food as well as non-food agricultural products such as nursery and fiber. NESAWG addresses farming systems and the structure of agriculture as well as the role of agriculture in rural – and urban – communities. Some NESAWG member groups conduct agricultural research, extension, and education themselves, and all of them use—directly or indirectly—agricultural research, extension, and education services. Consequently, every NESAWG member is a stakeholder in our regional food system as well as a stakeholder in the public institutions that support and influence it.

As stakeholders, NESAWG members believe that the land grant system plays a vital role in serving and shaping the food system. And, as engaged stakeholders, members seek opportunities to work in productive relationships with their land grant institutions to foster dialogue, shared agendas and fruitful collaborations. From the research for this paper, we confirmed that there is a firm foundation of good will and commitment to the “stakeholder process among the institutions and many stakeholder sectors.”

**The purpose of this report is to encourage land grant institutions *and* stakeholders to further enhance the opportunities for, and the effectiveness and transparency of, their dialogue.** The Stakeholder Rule process can be seen as a two-way street – to build responsiveness and accountability on the part of our public institutions, and to inform and engage the public so that it will champion support for these institutions.

## **Contents of this Report**

NESAWG has prepared this paper to summarize and comment on the reports for the Land Grant institutions in the twelve Northeast states. This paper presents an overview of the first reports that the 14 formula-funded institutions in the Northeast submitted to USDA-CSREES in response to the Stakeholder Rule. Each state has one or more reports from an 1862 Land Grant Institution and an Agricultural Experiment Station. The two 1890 institutions (University of Maryland Eastern Shore and Delaware State University) reported jointly with their 1862 counterparts. There are no 1994 formula-funded (American Indian) institutions in the Northeast.

This paper concentrates on the methods institutions reported they used to comply with the Rule. Based on the reports, it discusses how Land Grant institutions: 1. identified stakeholders; 2. solicited input from stakeholders; and 3. considered the input they collected from stakeholders. This paper also discusses:

- the formal and informal channels used by stakeholders to provide input;
- the interaction between the federally formula-funded activities and activities funded by other sources;
- the influence of structural issues such as promotion and tenure;
- the influence of programmatic issues such as an ability to attract funding and talent based on current disciplinary trends;
- the quality of stakeholder input;
- the determination of research, extension, and education agendas.

This analysis reviews the institutional reports. It does not focus on the actions of individual departments or programs. However, it was clear that at some universities, some departments or colleges were much more engaged with stakeholder processes than other departments at the same institution.

One objective of this review is to prompt institutions and the Land Grant system to continue to develop innovative ways to approach and engage all of their stakeholders and to help stakeholders understand the importance of—and opportunities for—becoming participants in the Land Grant system. In addition, we believe that this analysis can be a mechanism for Land Grant institutions to learn from their sister institutions.

This paper does not evaluate the effects or impacts of the Stakeholder Rule; it does not evaluate institutional programming. Nor do we judge the composition of the stakeholder pool as reported by each institution. Neither does this paper discuss the influence of specific input from particular stakeholders, or report on the actual allocation of resources with regard to various stakeholder interests and priorities. In reviewing these materials it was impossible not to make

some interpretations and critiques; we have made every effort to assure that these comments are distinguished as such.

This analysis reflects NESAWG's interest in fostering productive dialogue between Land Grant institutions and their stakeholders. It does not directly address or challenge the complicated issue of programmatic changes that many Land Grants have made in response to changes in demographics, environmental priorities, and public demands on public universities—the “mission shift” away from agriculture and nutrition toward programs such as lawn care or activities directed toward urban communities. We remain focused on the future contributions of the Land Grant system to the Northeast agriculture and food system.

## **Our Approach**

We collected the 2000 and 2001 annual reports updating the five-year Plans of Work (POW) from 12 institutions in the Northeast states. These annual reports were required (by federal mandate in the Stakeholder Rule) to include a section reporting on stakeholder input, specifically to provide information on: a) actions taken to *seek* stakeholder input that encourages their participation; b) the process used to identify individual and group stakeholders and *collect* input from them; and c) how the input was *considered* (italics added). (sec. 3418.4) To provide context for the annual reports, we also collected the five-year POW for the period 1999-2004. Because both of the Northeast 1890 institutions reported jointly on stakeholder input with their 1862 Land Grant university counterparts, we had information from each of the 14 Land Grant institutions in the twelve Northeast states.

In many states, research and extension submitted joint reports, indicating some shared processes and decision-making. However, several submitted separate annual reports for research and extension, each describing distinct stakeholder processes. It is interesting to note that some Agricultural Experiment Stations (AES) report they assign all responsibility for stakeholder identification and solicitation to Extension.

As public documents, Land Grant colleges' plans of work or annual reports of progress are available through USDA-CSREES or the Dean's office at each Land Grant university's College of Agriculture. In certain cases, these and current reports may be easily accessible—even available on the internet—while others may only be available upon direct request from the institution.

In addition to the reports, we also held telephone or face-to-face conversations with administrators who had responsibility for the five-year POWs or annual reports at several institutions, including those in Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Maryland, and Massachusetts. These conversations have informed and helped to shape this paper. Many administrators emphasized the importance of informal mechanisms for gathering and considering input, but only a few reports clearly articulated informal mechanisms for input. Many administrators were genuinely interested in describing and discussing their institution's stakeholder identification, solicitation, and consideration processes. A few were dismissive of the reporting process, and some seemed to be reluctant to discuss their methods, reporting, and agenda.

It is also fair to note that almost every administrator indicated that the annual reporting on the POW for formula funding was not the only forum for reporting, nor were the reports the only information available about interactions with stakeholders. Some indicated that the Annual Report of Accomplishments and Results was not "comprehensive", and that the section on stakeholder input was illustrative, not exhaustive. Several indicated that their institutions had stakeholder activities that were not reported.

## II. BACKGROUND

To help to put the Stakeholder Rule and this paper in context, it's helpful to review a brief history of government funding for Land Grant agricultural research and extension.

### **Origins of the Land Grant System and Formula Funding**

In 1862, through legislation known as the Morrill Act, Congress gave land to each state to provide an endowment for establishing colleges where the “leading object shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts.” The amount of land was determined by the same formula that determines each state’s number of Congressional representatives; 30,000 acres were allocated for each Congressional seat. Congress expected the states to sell some of the land and use the proceeds to set up these “land grant” colleges. They also expected each state to invest the money that wasn’t immediately required and use the profits from these investments to provide ongoing financial support to the colleges.

However, the money was inadequate. Consequently, Congress passed The Morrill Act of 1890. This act provided operating funds to each Land Grant institution each year. The Morrill Act of 1890 also stipulated that recipient institutions be open to applicants of all races, or that states create and provide equal support to racially segregated institutions. Consequently, two “1890” colleges were established in the Northeast – in Delaware and Maryland. (In 1994, Tribal Colleges, serving American Indians, attained Land Grant status. There are no Tribal Colleges in the Northeast States. )

### **Origin of Formula Funds**

#### **Hatch Act**

In 1887, Congress passed the Hatch Act, the legislation that provides federal funds to support state level Agricultural Experiment Stations (AES). The stated Congressional policy supporting the Hatch Act reads (*italics added*):

SEC. 2. It is further the policy of the Congress to *promote the efficient production, marketing, distribution, and utilization of products of the farm as essential to the health and welfare of our peoples and to promote a sound and prosperous agriculture and rural life as indispensable to the maintenance of maximum employment and national prosperity and security.* It is also the intent of Congress to assure agriculture a position in research equal to that of industry, which will aid in maintaining an equitable balance between agriculture and other segments of our economy. It shall be the object and duty of the State agricultural experiment stations through the expenditure of the appropriations hereinafter authorized to *conduct original and other researches, investigations, and experiments bearing directly on and contributing to the establishment and maintenance of a permanent and effective agricultural industry of the United States,* including researches basic to the problems of agriculture in its broadest aspects, and such investigations as have for *their purpose the development and improvement of the rural home and*

*rural life and the maximum contribution by agriculture to the welfare of the consumer*, as may be deemed advisable, having due regard to the varying conditions and needs of the respective States.

### **Smith-Lever Act**

The Smith-Lever Act, which provides federal funds for agricultural extension programs, was enacted in 1914. This Act gave official federal government sanction to a plan providing for the cooperation of federal, state, and county governments *with local people* in planning, financing, and conducting a system of rural education. This act put into operation the “largest system of organized adult agricultural education in the world.” The intended use of Smith-Lever funds is stated as (italics added):

SEC. 2. Cooperative agricultural extension work shall consist of the *development of practical applications of research knowledge and giving of instruction and practical demonstrations of existing or improved practices or technologies in agriculture, uses of solar energy with respect to agriculture, home economics, and rural energy, and subjects relating thereto* to persons not attending or resident in said colleges in the several communities, and imparting information on said subjects through demonstrations, publications, and otherwise and for the necessary printing and distribution of information in connection with the foregoing; and this work shall be carried on in such manner as may be mutually agreed upon by the Secretary of Agriculture and the State agricultural college or colleges or Territory or possession receiving the benefits of this Act.

### **Expanding Federal Support**

Over the years, Congress has passed legislation that affects both the level of federal support land grant institutions receive as well as the programs to be supported. For example, in 1961, Congress added Section 3(d) of the Smith-Lever Amendment to allow funding for special programs such as resource and community development, farm safety, urban gardening, pest management, and non-point pollution control.

### **Allocation and Matching of Hatch and Smith-Lever Funds**

The federal funds dedicated through these programs are known as “formula funds” because a formula, calculated from each state's rural and farm populations according to the latest census, is used to determine how much funding each institution receives. To be eligible for the Hatch and Smith-Lever funds, a state must provide a matching amount to their Land Grant institutions.

The **USDA- ERS 2002 Farm Bill Glossary** definition of *formula funds*: Funds allocated equally to all States and funds allocated by formula. The Amended Hatch Act (1955) established a formula for distributing Hatch Act funds based (among other things) on the number of farms and percentage of rural population in a State. In addition to Hatch funds, the McIntire-Stennis Act provided additional research funds to State Agricultural Experiment Stations and forestry schools.

The Federal government does not determine *how* the funds are to be used; the individual institutions develop their own criteria to allocate funding among departments, programs, projects, and researchers. In many institutions there is internal competition for at least some of the formula funds.

The USDA reports that, on average, Smith-Lever funds account for 30% of each state's extension budget, and Hatch funds support approximately 10% of a Land Grant's agricultural research activity. Consequently, formula funds are reliable seed monies, but do not fully fund research or extension programs. Recently, formula funds have tended to account for a decreasing percentage of total agricultural research funding.

### **Other Funding for Land Grant University Research and Extension**

Additional, sometimes substantial, funding for Land Grant food and agricultural research and extension activities comes from state budget allocations, grants and contracts from industry groups, foundations, and federal and state agencies. Many grants are awarded through an open and competitive process among institutions; others are the result of direct negotiations between a donor and an institution. Much of this funding is designated for specific projects or programs. These additional funds stretch the value of federal formula monies as well as any state-mandated funding, because federal and state funds, even combined, are rarely adequate to execute programs or projects. Consequently, project-designated funds often influence the use of general taxpayer dollars (a practice referred to as "leveraging"). If the entity that grants supplementary funds designates the money for a particular project, their funds will also tend to influence how the formula funds allocated to the institution are used. In addition, since such funds are often part of the "match" required for some grant awards, this process can have a very great influence on programming.

Formula funds are not the only Land Grant asset subject to leveraging. Outside funding can also leverage state-funded infrastructure, and faculty expertise, time and attention in addition to formula funds themselves, because faculty assigned or awarded those funds must manage and implement those projects. Thus administratively, leveraging is a valuable tool, because outside financing is essential to the operation of contemporary Land Grant institutions. It is important to note that leveraging can improve the financial stake or profit-making capacity of a technology sector or industry, or a particular corporation. Since leveraging can determine a Land Grant's research and programming agenda as well as its use of public funds, transparency in these aspects of program and project funding at our Land Grant universities should be part of the stakeholder process.

### III. STAKEHOLDER INPUT PROCESSES

The Stakeholder Rule mandates that institutions *identify, seek, and consider stakeholder input*. The Rule defines “stakeholder” (see below) but does not define the terms “identify”, “seek”, “consider” or “input”. The statute requires solicitation and consideration of both “input” and “recommendations”, thereby making a distinction between the two. The Rule, however, does not address the distinction. For the purposes of this discussion the authors combine them and use this working definition for “input”: *the advice, opinion, or comment provided by stakeholders regarding activities, allocations, programming, projects, oversight of personnel, and/or short- and long-term direction of a program, department or institution.*

The statute uses the word “solicit”, while the Rule uses the word “seek”; we will assume these are interchangeable in their intent, which we interpret as “to *reach out to and find* stakeholders and *actively ask for* their input.”

#### Identifying Stakeholders

##### Defining Stakeholder

The first requirement of the Stakeholder Rule, identifying stakeholders, hinges on an understanding of the term “stakeholder.” The Rule describes stakeholders as people “*who conduct or use agricultural research, extension, or education.*” How do institutions determine who conducts and uses agricultural research, extension or education? Is the definition restricted to individuals or entities that *directly* conduct or use these programs or does it include those who are secondary users – people such as senior land grant administrators or consumers? Is the public the ultimate end-user, and if so, how is its use of Land Grant products and services to be understood?

Should the definition encompass all the players with any “stake” in the direction, activities, allocations, and future of the institution; including organizations that fund agricultural research or demonstrations? Is a “stake” financial? (If this is the case; industry and employees, including faculty and administrators, are primary stakeholders of the Land Grants.) In a larger sense, taxpayers—who may have no direct interaction with the institution, its programs, or with agriculture—can be considered stakeholders because they provide the federal and state resources for the infrastructure and operation of the institution. As consumers and dependents of the US agriculture and food system, every citizen has a stake in the mission and activities of the Land Grant system and the food and agricultural system it shapes even though they may not “use” Land Grant-generated services or products.

For this discussion, NESAWG considers stakeholders as those who conduct or use agricultural research, extension, or education, with the assumption that “users” of Land Grant products and services are *both* direct and indirect recipients so as to include a broader community of interests. In this paper, NESAWG recognizes 3 general categories of stakeholders in the Land Grant System: 1. Internal stakeholders: academic professionals, researchers, administrators, field agents, educators and collaborators and others directly

responsible for conducting programming. 2. External stakeholders: including the targeted audiences, beneficiaries or direct participants in programs including clients (such as farmers) and, although less directly, consumers. 3. Groups that fund specific programs and projects: industry, commodity groups and other organizations providing grants or other support. The USDA might also be included. This third group occupies a curious niche between internal and external stakeholders. Individuals can belong to more than one stakeholder group.

In their reports, institutions varied in the ways they used the term stakeholder. In many reports, the term was used synonymously with clientele, customers or targeted beneficiaries, and in some, it could be construed to mean constituencies (including funding agents or faculty). Institutions variously acknowledged stakeholders as producers, consumers, industries, university students, groups who solicit activities from Land Grant institutions for specific research agendas, and populations with problems that society expects public institutions to address. One institution considered stakeholders to be direct clients or consumers of extension and research services. Another discusses stakeholders in terms of audiences. A third distinguishes stakeholders from faculty, staff and students. Some institutions recognized their faculty as stakeholders; at least one included all university employees, including staff and support personnel, in the definition. Land Grant institutions sometimes recognized other Land Grants as stakeholders, probably in that they could be collaborators for federal and private resources.

### **Categorizing Stakeholders**

The reports indicate that institutions tend to group stakeholders into categories. Earlier in this paper we referred to internal, external, and funding stakeholders. Institutions also discuss three other broad categories: individuals, such as specific producers or faculty members; formal organizations, such as the Farm Bureau or the Union of University Field and Lab Technicians; and broader groups, such as “dairy producers”, “hobby farmers” or “conventional farmers”. In general, they defined stakeholder groups very broadly, for example, as “industry” or “vegetable farmers.”

Many institutions struggle to balance service to specific stakeholders such as individual producers, companies, or faculty members, with service to broad stakeholder sectors (e.g., green industry; school children). Reports from a few institutions used broad client category groupings such as “commodity”, “alternative agriculture”, “consumer”, and “minority”. We feel that it might be important to distinguish input from an individual producer from input from an entire industry.

The authors also think it would be beneficial to more proactively recognize and identify (and gather input from) discrete niches and groups within the broader categories (for example: if “input suppliers” is a broad category, then “pesticide vendors” are a different stakeholder group than seed producing businesses). The reports we reviewed did not appear to address this level, and we acknowledge that this approach can be a “slippery slope”.

### **Processes for Identifying Stakeholders**

The Stakeholder Rule specifies that recipient institutions must “provide a brief statement of the *process used* to identify individuals and groups who are stakeholders” (emphasis added) (s. 3418.4). In the reports, the mechanisms for identifying stakeholders ranged from “identified

by Extension based on working relationships," to "political appointees," to "self-identified." Reporters from many institutions simply listed stakeholder groups or individuals, *rather than describing the processes by which they identified these groups or individuals*. While in many cases the enumeration of stakeholder groups was thoughtful and thorough, we had hoped that reports, in addition to listing stakeholders, would be clearer about the process itself – indicating *who was responsible* for identifying stakeholder groups, *how* they identified the groups, and *how* representatives of each group *were recruited or selected* and the relevant characteristics of those representatives. The authors believe that reports would be strengthened by more clearly articulating – and thereby making transparent – *the process* of stakeholder identification.

**Working and Existing Relationships.** The format of the reports suggested that personnel at most Land Grant institutions already know and recognize many stakeholders from whom they should be gathering input. Reporters used adjectives such as "major," "key," and "important" to describe particular stakeholder representatives and groups. The reports suggest to us that most institutions consider existing traditional clients for research and extension as the main stakeholder group. They also indicated that their institutions interacted with stakeholder “leaders”. Generally, they did not address how stakeholders were categorized as being "major," "key," or "important," or how they identified leaders. For example, one report identified and listed advisory committee members. But there was no explanation of *how* these individuals were selected, nor was there a description of how these representative stakeholders characterize the group they represent. This may be because it is common or local knowledge, but this information is not clear to outsiders. It does not indicate whether they are volunteers, invitees, externally appointed, or elected through a political process internal to a group that they represent.

**Politically Appointed Stakeholders.** Legislation in several Northeast states dictates the affiliations of the members of a politically (usually gubernatorially) appointed board to advise AES and Extension. As well, many Extension services rely on locally elected or nominated representatives to local, county and state committees or boards for input, but AES does not have a parallel mechanism.

**Self-Identification.** According to the majority of reports, self-identification is a common route to becoming recognized (if not consulted) as a stakeholder. The reports do not detail the processes stakeholders use to identify themselves. This doesn't mean there is no entry into the system, only that it is not clearly defined in the reports. Attendance at informational meetings and other activities is a likely opportunity.

**“Non-traditional” stakeholders: Students and faculty.** Only a few institutions acknowledged students as stakeholders. There is little doubt that there is a relationship between student enrollment and research and extension programming, and that students “use” LGU products and services. To a certain extent, the interests and availability of students drives research options, and funding for graduate students is a key building block of programs. Faculty and administrators are important stakeholders in the overall system (and to varying degrees would qualify as conducting research, extension and/or education), but since they are not perceived of as *clients*, only a few reports acknowledged their stakeholder identity.

Similarly, although the USDA emphasized multi-state initiatives in Hatch and Smith-Lever funding rules as well as in competitive grant criteria, the reports from only two institutions addressed the input of stakeholders living or working in other states.

**Expanding the Pool.** A close reading of the reports indicates that most of the institutions are not actively working to identify *new* agricultural stakeholders. However, several reports describe efforts to sample the general public, which they recognized as their ultimate stakeholder population. Some institutions used surveys targeted to particular types of citizens, usually potential audiences. Open meetings and listening sessions were other mechanisms that were employed to allow stakeholders to identify themselves and to become recognized.

The reports did not mention other processes used to identify unrecognized stakeholder groups. Such groups might include stakeholders who may be identifiable as a group but whose input does not appear to be solicited, and groups who have interacted with the system in the past, but are not currently active. For example the number of poultry producers in the New England states has declined dramatically; their decline in numbers, lapses in leadership and diminished organized capacity may have erased them from the stakeholder radar screen. Some sectors may have "given up" on the University, Extension or AES system. The authors think that it is important to identify, acknowledge and possibly engage or re-engage these groups.

### **Challenges**

**Non-organized constituencies.** Many stakeholder identification methods presuppose the independent, formal organization of stakeholder interests, and an entity from which a representative can be invited to participate in a process. However, many stakeholder groups are not organized, either formally or informally. For example, many part-time farm owner-operators are Land Grant institution stakeholders, but they have rarely formed organizations around their part-time identity that interact with the Land Grant universities or Ag Experiment Stations. It appears to the authors that the organization and resources of stakeholder groups and the investment they are willing to make to provide input has enormous influence on the opportunities they have to provide input. An alternative interpretation is that organizing to have input is not seen as a priority by such amorphous groups, because input is not seen as having impact.

Another challenge institutions face is finding spokespersons for broad stakeholder groups such as consumers, taxpayers, and citizens whose primary interest is public benefit, but who are rarely organized, and unlikely to organize into distinct membership groups, particularly regarding input into Land Grant university activities. Of course, consumers and taxpayers may not be regarded by decision-makers as *direct users* of the institution's programs.

Difficulties obtaining input: a two-way street. Some administrators voiced understandable frustration over not receiving input when it had been invited from a particular stakeholder group. One solution to this problem might be to modify the method of solicitation and the way that solicited information is handled. At the same time, stakeholder groups must take responsibility for speaking up, being heard and developing the relationships throughout the institutional decision-making hierarchy.

Another difficulty obtaining input occurs when the stakeholder group is diffuse; for example it is reportedly difficult to solicit “average consumer” input. True enough. Creativity is required to orchestrate methods of input. However, if active consumers wish to be heard and to influence their public institution, they may need to organize or otherwise proactively seek opportunities to participate. The authors feel it is important for the institutions – and their stakeholders – to find each other.

**“Good” committee members.** Informally, several administrators spoke about the challenge of selecting "good" committee members, whom they defined as individuals who can and will participate (not just nominal participants), who make thoughtful, representative contributions, and who are "not obstructionist." They spoke about the need to identify effective representatives of stakeholder groups while maintaining an open, accessible, dynamic forum for input. Many were concerned that, by default, some groups were "represented" by fringe or extreme individuals rather than people who might be more representative of the group. They also reported that senior or retired farmers often constituted the membership of program advisory committees, and were often disproportionately over-represented compared with younger adults. In part, this may be attributed to older persons having more time to serve on committees, and/or having more seniority and say on the farm. Appropriate age representation is a significant concern, because younger sub-groups may have different priorities and are more likely to be affected by future programming.

**Representation.** Except in a few states, the selection of representative, informed individuals of broad groups is not discussed. How do institutions assure they are receiving truly representative input? Is it possible to ever make that claim? Within one stakeholder group, there may be different philosophical models with competing research or extension objectives. For example, who speaks for "vegetable growers"? Do part-time farmers need an independent voice? Do start-up farmers? Should more than one organization represent some commodities? In some states, longstanding established organizations may no longer be representative, yet a new entity has yet to be organized or recognized at the stakeholder table.

**Structural differences.** It is worth noting that there is considerable state-by-state variation in the structure of the administrative and advisory systems guiding Land Grant university research and extension. This variation affects stakeholder input processes within each institution, and across institutions. This cross-institutional variation is not insignificant because of the relationship between stakeholder input and the allocation and use of formula funds.

## IV. SOLICITING STAKEHOLDER INPUT

In the previous section, we examined how institutions identify stakeholders. In this section we review how institutions *solicit* their input. In fact, the reports described processes used to solicit input more clearly and with more detail than they discussed the processes for identifying stakeholders or considering their input. For this discussion, the words “seek,” “encourage,” “get,” and “receive” were all used to describe the required solicitation activities.

Based on NESAWG’s understanding of the rule, we expected the reports to highlight each institution’s most important and influential solicitation activities. By reading the reports we wanted to better understand:

- What formal and informal solicitation activities were used (reported) by the institutions;
- What types of ongoing/continuing activities are used and what unique/occasional activities were used;
- Why each activity was conducted, and the role of the input or (the intended use of the input) for that activity;
- Who (the positions and types of stakeholders) is doing the soliciting and who is being solicited in each activity (not individual names, but the involved groups); and
- How the solicitation activities are conducted (frequency, form of communication, facilitation, venue).

As already noted, the stakeholder reports varied greatly in their content and format; most did not provide all of this information. We have done our best to interpret, summarize and discuss important aspects of stakeholder solicitation.

### **Solicitation Approaches**

Most institutions reported reliance on both formal and informal opportunities to solicit and gather input. Many reports suggest that input gathered informally is as influential as that gathered through formal solicitation activities. But the relative influence – and measurement – of formal and informal input is difficult to assess. Allowing for and accounting for both formal and informal information gathering and collating seems critical to an open and dynamic stakeholder input process.

The Land Grant institutions in our region have been active and creative in their approach to soliciting input. The reports describe a wide array of ambitious initiatives designed to solicit stakeholder input. These may have been in response to the Stakeholder Rule or simply because particular institutions recognized all along the need to hear from their constituencies.

Several institutions reported on unique one-time solicitation activities (e.g., state-level meetings or surveys), as well as ongoing mechanisms and relationships (e.g., commodity committees). Many reported that solicitation mechanisms require an ongoing commitment by a stakeholder group and/or an individual, with numerous face-to face meetings that require lots of travel and time. Other solicitation is based on single or infrequent encounters requiring minimal

commitment from the stakeholder. Several states reported on surveys and annual meetings where the main objective was soliciting input.

### **INPUT and OUTREACH**

The Stakeholder Rule does not explicitly define the term “input,” so it is not surprising that the institutions included in this analysis have differing definitions for the word. As noted above, **in this analysis we also use the word flexibly, reflecting the ways that the various Land Grant institutions have used it.** This paper’s authors note, however, that several reports seemed to confuse input and outreach processes. While these activities are often complementary, an outreach process does not automatically assure stakeholder input. For example, several Land Grant institutions indicated that they have embarked on institutional marketing, promotional, and public relations campaigns. Some mentioned public awareness campaigns in their stakeholder reports. While outreach is important and useful, events designed to showcase or promote current activities are not equal to events designed to seek input. Of course, such campaigns may encourage some stakeholders to approach an institution, and in this way, may be strategies to help to foster input.

Informal discussions with administrators indicated that some marketing initiatives were initiated to expand, clarify and inform the stakeholder base as a response to frustrations with not being able to consistently and regularly connect with particular stakeholder groups. Administrators are often aware of groups that do not recognize or organize themselves as a “stakeholder group.” (Consumers and part-time farmers are examples.)

### **Objectives of Solicitation**

Mechanisms for soliciting stakeholder input are designed to serve a variety of purposes. Some solicitation approaches invite stakeholders to approve or oversee the broad outlines of programs, some elicit information, some ask direction and others confirm agendas. Although not always articulated in the reports, mechanisms cited that are intended to solicit input also seemed to have been designed to: provide broad program oversight; gain approval for specific activities or agendas; obtain general information; give definitive direction; or promote programs and activities. In general, the Stakeholder Reports did not discuss the intent of each solicitation activity or distinguish whether the roles of stakeholders were informative, consultative, or directive. It appears that at some institutions, input is used innovatively for program and personnel evaluation. The importance – politically and qualitatively – of stakeholders in evaluating specific projects or overall institutions deserves recognition. Overall, how Land Grant leaders define the objectives of stakeholder processes for gathering input clearly shapes the opportunities that are created for input and consequently the quality and impact of the input. (See box on the Vroom Jago model).

### **A Business Model for Input**

Business leadership decision-making models can be useful in the discussion of stakeholder input. The Vroom-Jago Model (1987) outlines a continuum of participation in decision-making from the perspective of management and subordinates. Vroom-Jago describes decision-making as being autocratic, consultative, or democratic. We have adapted the model to include stakeholders broadly defined to include clients, customers, funders, and administrators. For this paper, we (Johnson, unpublished) propose a model of participation styles, or more explicitly, participation *objectives* that recognizes five possible roles for stakeholders in any particular input solicitation and decision-making process. "Input" can provide:

- Information
- Validation or confirmation (or "approval" or oversight)
- Consultation
- Direction (including shared decision-making responsibility)
- Evaluation

These objectives shape the methods used to solicit input and the use of that input.

The reports did not mention solicitation of a very different sort – when institutions solicit individuals or organizations for cash contributions or political support for particular university programs. It is the authors' observation that these are the only organized solicitations many stakeholders experience. As their only contact, and decoupled from opportunities for substantial programmatic input, this "solicitation" is likely to, at least, miss an opportunity for greater connection and, at most, alienate some stakeholders.

### **Methods of Solicitation**

**Public Forums.** Several institutions reported they conducted "widely publicized" open meetings or "listening sessions" to gather input from individual stakeholders. Most states did not report these open forums as regular and recurrent activities, but as an occasional extra effort (perhaps prompted by the Stakeholder Rule). Such forums have been conducted to solicit input from both internal and external stakeholders. Some states have employed external facilitators to lead large meetings. To a large extent, the scale, number, timing, and location of these activities, as well as the manner in which they are conducted determines their effectiveness.

These solicitation efforts might be seen as heroically trying to gather input from every possible stakeholder group and/or as an earnest effort to improve awareness and the profile of the Land Grant Institution. It is possible the forums serve as a recruiting ground for new groups and individuals to be incorporated into ongoing relationships. As such, these activities are valuable, but there is the question of the long-term sustainability of such costly initiatives. Additionally, it seems that an even bigger challenge than gathering input from such meetings is in processing and utilizing – *considering* – the input (see the next section). We – as well as those conducting such events – might benefit from a better understanding of the costs, benefits and impacts of such activities.

**Surveys.** Several states have funded targeted and stratified surveys of varying levels of scope and ambition. Some of these efforts were directed at general citizens, the very broadest stakeholder population, and were conducted as random surveys. Other surveys have targeted particular stakeholder groups, both external, such as members of a particular demographic, and internal, such as faculty and professional staff. The effective use of the input depends on the survey design (and intent), the interpretation of the results and the communication of them to decision-makers throughout the institutional hierarchy. This communication depends on each university's decision-making structure. Surveys have an intrinsic appeal to research institutions, but they have their shortcomings.

**Ongoing Relationships: Collaborators, Partners, Donors, Other Institutions.** Broad surveys and large open meetings are methods for cross-checking long-term institutional course or programmatic trends or content, but they seem unlikely to be very effective as ways to obtain feedback from ongoing institutional, professional, and personal relationships. The influence of direct contacts and input gathered in the course of daily interactions and events was frequently mentioned in the reports and conversations. It is an open question whether it is important to occasionally formalize this input and formally identify the sources of input, particularly when such input is guiding program decisions. Many solicitation processes rely on long-term relationships, some of which are working collaborations that have primary purposes other than soliciting or providing input. Farm tours and educational meetings are recurrent activities that are reported to provide opportunity for informal as well as formal input.

Local county committees and boards also have working relationships with and are stakeholders of the central Land Grant institution. The interactions between local and central institutions may be primarily administrative, but these relationships might be further mined as a source of stakeholder input.

Although specific inter-institutional solicitation mechanisms were described by only one institution, collaborating and competing institutional stakeholders can be important sources of input. Because of the importance USDA and other funding sources give to multi-state and regional initiatives, the input and relationships among institutional stakeholders need to be acknowledged.

As previously discussed, financially based partnerships can leverage agendas as well as provide needed funding for an institution. Leveraging is a form of active and interactive input. However, with a few exceptions, the reports did not address external or industry funding in the section on stakeholder input. Similarly, although producer associations were discussed, the solicitation of corporate input (and associated funding) was not mentioned in the reports.

Stakeholders with well-defined business and financial interests or broader social agendas may or may not be formally solicited. In either case, they are influential in that they may offer resources to faculty, departments or higher levels of the administration. They may fund positions or programs or particular projects. These stakeholders are increasingly important given the overall fiscal reality of agricultural research and extension. Many such relationships are longstanding. Their input is often prioritized. Because of their unique role, transparency regarding their input is especially warranted.

**Committees.** Institutions reported having both internal and external committees such as county and state boards, advisory committees, working groups and review committees. Most institutions' departments and programs have a multitude of longstanding "targeted customer" committees that are associated with commodity groups or other client stakeholders. These groups have recurrent activities that serve to solicit input. In many cases these groups are direct clients of, and participate in, programs. There are also internal stakeholder committees whose primary purpose may not be soliciting input, but whose activities provide informal opportunities to offer it.

The reports make it clear that all the institutions rely on committees and advisory groups for input. However, none of the institutions reported on *specific processes* they used within committees to solicit (and process) input or to recruit committee members or the circumstances that prompted them to form new committees, or reconstitute an existing committee. Nor did they state how they determine whether (or assure that) committees – and their input – are representative of a particular population. The level of leadership or influence given to various committees, and the mechanisms for assuring and exerting power, was not discussed in the reports. State-by-state and program-by-program, the frequency of committee meetings varied greatly, from annual to monthly. In most cases, committees appear to be long-term, low-key mechanisms for keeping in touch with certain stakeholders or stakeholder groups.

The quality of input that institutions receive depends on the solicitation mechanisms, the integrity of the stakeholders and the convening entity. The reports did not address the techniques used to assure constructive, critical input in any detail, nor did they articulate whether particular committees were serving as general review and approval bodies, program advocates, or decision-makers that determine program direction. One challenge that the institutions appear to be struggling with is that stakeholder groups may sometimes be segregated from one another through a committee system. A faculty committee may meet and discuss its agenda separately from a farmer or other stakeholder group. Institutions do attempt to balance the input from various sources. To address this, transparency and open discussion of the agendas *across* stakeholder groups might be particularly critical to the input process.

Concerns reported with the committee approach include: too many meetings, often involving the same individuals; sporadic meeting attendance; and the failure of groups to meet as scheduled. Poor attendance may reflect a lack of interest or, in some cases, a sense of futility about the value of a particular forum. The reports did not specifically discuss the effectiveness of committees; however, informally their *utility* was questioned by some administrators, while others stated that they had great confidence in the committee approach. The authors observe that a committee's effectiveness in providing input is shaped by its actual purpose as well as by its convener, leadership and membership, and on the larger institutional culture in which it operates.

Land Grant institutions also have committees and boards whose existence, membership, and influence is defined legislatively—by statute. The input from politically appointed committees or boards is often specified in the law. Typically, they provide input formally on an annual or semi-annual basis. Mechanisms by which these committees solicit individuals' input were not described in the reports.

Several reports noted the importance of appropriate scheduling, geographically dispersed meetings and in some cases, providing childcare. Face-to-face-meetings, particularly if they are scheduled during "work-day hours" may favor participation by professionals for whom attending meetings is part of their job or by senior, semi-retired persons who can take the time from their usual daily activities. Off-hours meetings may allow participation by other large groups of stakeholders, for example consumers or farmers who hold other jobs, or farmers whose own labor is the centerpiece of their operation. These, incidentally, are the majority of farmers in the Northeast and thus are among the major audiences and constituencies of our Land Grant system.

Another complicated issue is duplicative input – by default or by design - where the same individual (or organization) serves on multiple committees or at multiple levels of the consultative hierarchy. This phenomenon was noted by several administrators. In some instances this may be useful and appropriate, but perhaps not every case. Certainly it is problematic if one group or individual is heard throughout the hierarchy while others are not even recognized.

All considered, committees provide continuity and historical context and offer a reliable, venue for stakeholder input, but these advantages need to be balanced with the risks such as "entrenchment" and "insider bias".

### **Approaches to Solicitation**

Two institutions indicated they are experimenting with soliciting input through websites and email, but they do not make it clear how widespread or successful e-solicitation has been, or how they might evaluate the effectiveness of this approach. E-solicitation can be formal or informal, of course, but based on the reports we believe that most of these efforts are informal. Without doubt, individual stakeholders, for example researchers and funders, rely on email for much of their communication. It would not be surprising if electronic methods become more widely employed as a means to collect stakeholder input. If so, every care must be taken to understand the advantages as well as limitations of this approach.

### **Research and Extension Linkages and Stakeholder Input**

According to many reports, the research and Extension branches at Land Grant institutions each receive input, yet how (or if) that input is communicated between branches is only occasionally described in the reports. The linkage between research and Extension decision-making has been a longstanding issue for Land Grants. Often the relationship between research and Extension is criticized as being linear and unidirectional, with information flowing from research to extension. As reported, linkages between research and Extension programs are clearly strong and collaborative in some states, and in some smaller states the same individuals have responsibility for both research and extension. In some states, AES reported that stakeholder input was the sole responsibility of Extension. Some institutions indicated a reliance on Extension for managing input without explaining the approach used by Extension, which suggested to the study authors a lack of researcher involvement with stakeholder processes. It is apparent from many of the reports that efforts to improve interaction between research and Extension and at some institutions, and exploration of new *roles* for research and Extension in terms of the Stakeholder Rule would be fruitful.

## V. CONSIDERATION OF STAKEHOLDER INPUT

The statutory and regulatory language requires Land Grant institutions to gather *and consider* input from stakeholders. For the purpose of the stakeholder process, what might be relevant indicators that input was considered, i.e., thought about *and integrated into decision-making*? It is not necessarily that the input – for example, a specific recommendation – was adopted; but neither would it be ignored. For this process, *who* considered all the stakeholders’ input, and most challenging, *how* was the input considered, both formally and informally? The previous sections discussing stakeholder identification and input solicitation have illustrated the complexity of stakeholder engagement and influence. **Ultimately, the integrity of an institution’s commitment to stakeholder participation depends on how, and by whom, input is considered and utilized in decision-making.** Anything short of this final step could be considered a failure to meet the full intent of the Stakeholder Rule.

This section discusses the mechanisms through which the input of particular stakeholders, and input in the aggregate, are considered. We also discuss how input is communicated, and collated (or culled) throughout the University and AES systems. In the authors’ opinion (and not surprisingly), the reporting on input consideration was the most ambiguous aspect of the reports. For example, how input is considered in decisions affecting the allocation (or elimination) of resources for entire thematic or programmatic areas or positions was barely addressed.

### Level of Input

Different stakeholders’ input appears to be considered at different levels of each institution’s hierarchy; i.e., at the programmatic, departmental or college level. As reported, many solicitation activities gathered external stakeholder client input apparently for use within programs, for example, reviewing allocation of funds to specific projects as suggested by faculty, or a department. The scope of this input and the options such committees are offered are often very focused and not presented in terms of the “bigger picture” of the institution. For example, blueberry producers—assuming they are organized—may influence what type of blueberry research is conducted, by prioritizing a list of possible project options (alternatively they may have simply been asked to endorse particular projects or simply list current production problems.) Clearly, much input from external stakeholders, solicited through project and program committees is considered directly by faculty or perhaps by a faculty led program committee, whose scope is limited to fixed (and immediate) term projects within a specific area.

In another example, agricultural producers may have more input on programmatic expenditures – allocations to projects within a program (funds for projects studying strawberry diseases versus blueberry varieties versus small fruit marketing) compared with the input they have on budget allocations among programs (for example dollars to fruits versus livestock versus human nutrition programs). However, in some states, organized, unified commodity or industry groups are very active in protecting and promoting “their” institutional resources and faculty (for example greenhouse or cranberries). Reports did not make it clear which stakeholders influence which decisions. For example, regarding personnel, producer and consumer involvement and

influence seems less apparent in creating or terminating positions, designing job descriptions, or reviewing promotion and tenure applications.

### **Who Considers the Input?**

While we might assume that most institutions have a system in place for approving and moving projects, programs, and positions forward, based on the reports there appears to be little systematic consideration of stakeholder input in that system. Yet, we can also assume that most university, AES and Extension professionals consider input *informally* as they make decisions.

Once it has been solicited and gathered, input must be directed to those with decision-making responsibilities. Most reports did not explain how solicited information moves through the system or who manages and uses the information. The study authors believe that the ways that input from different stakeholders is handled, collated and communicated throughout the hierarchy impact many decisions made at an institution.

In many instances faculty have the responsibility to synthesize, interpret and make decisions or recommendations to deans or department heads based on whatever information they have at hand. Input may pass through departmental committees that, sometimes democratically, determine the departmental agenda, considering input as they go. They may interpret the input in terms of professional interests and career advancement. A large number of demands face a typical faculty member or administrator; there are innumerable interesting and important topics, but only certain issues will further one's career within the Land Grant or AES system.

The culture and role of the professional charged with directing and implementing a program or project is often demonstrated by program's being identified as "Dr. Smith's program". In this culture, most decisions are made by the "owner" of a program who is responsible for its implementation and/or funding. There may be consultation with external stakeholders including producers or commodity or industry representatives; however, senior administrators and colleagues tend to defer decision-making to the program "owner's" expertise and interests.

In many cases, especially at the program or department level, it appears the person or persons making decisions have been directly involved, formally or informally, with collecting input, and this input is considered on an ongoing basis. In many states the consideration of input reportedly falls to a dean or director in some undefined process leading to significant, presumably defensible, decisions. Of course, at some point individuals get paid to make decisions, and considering the input and interests of all stakeholder groups important to the AES or Extension activities and mission is a complex task. Everyone cannot and should not participate in every decision, nor can every committee's every recommendation be adopted for immediate action. But the process leading to decisions should be transparent and defensible, as should the decisions themselves.

As mentioned above, *consideration* does not imply an obligation to adopt the input; it means that there is some deliberation about it. A critical part of this overall discussion is the appropriate role and rights of different stakeholder groups in determining an institutional agenda

or plan of work. Often this concern relates to the extent of the right of external, even non-expert stakeholder groups and audiences to define an institution's direction. Administrators and scientists, by virtue of their positions and expertise, often have a grasp of wider issues and opportunities important to the institution. The cutting edge is not always apparent to the average stakeholder. Issues of academic freedom, professional aspirations as well as control and accountability come into the discussion. Conversely, internal competition and politics between programs in a period of fiscal constraint make decision-making even more difficult, and a clear process all the more important. In such situations engaging external stakeholders in the consideration process may be a positive strategy; it may also cause considerable obfuscation.

In a competitive university environment, time constraints can discourage listening to, let alone sufficient consideration of, stakeholders, especially those that cannot supply significant financial or political support to an institution or program. How is input from these different types of stakeholders weighed and balanced? There is always the concern that any one stakeholder group, particularly better-funded, organized entities might receive more “consideration”. Or, that input gathered at a single annual formal event with one group of stakeholders can be overridden, subverted, or undermined by recurrent informal consultation with other stakeholders. From the reports, there did not appear to be transparent processes or checks in place to measure or otherwise document the consideration of input from various sources.

Local and regional imperatives underlie the premise of the Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture and Extension. A decentralized system by design, many county extension committees (Maine, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania) determine local Extension programming, but local and county programming can seemingly occur independently of institutional and state level activities. Local programming may not relate to university programs, faculty positions or appointments, or departmental or institutional research priorities. This can isolate local interests from the overall institution in the long term, but can also foster responsiveness and innovation. Some states described clear structures and processes for formal, local input to be communicated “up to” the university level. At other institutions such mechanisms or structures were not reported.

### **How Input is Considered**

The question of *who* is listening – and who is considering – stakeholder input is critical. Equally important, the *process* of consideration (*how* the input is integrated and weighed to create a basis for decisions) is not well explained in most reports. This is understandable, because describing – let alone documenting – the input consideration process, is very difficult. The study authors grappled with what would be useful indicators of “input consideration”. Is hearing or reading the input “considering” it? Is consideration demonstrated in a decision that directly reflects stakeholders’ recommendations? What is the outcome of “consideration” – especially when input can be considered, but not necessarily acted upon for a variety of appropriate reasons?

None of the reports clearly operationalized “consideration”. Few institutions indicated innovative methods of considering or weighing stakeholder input in their reports. Ideally,

consideration and solicitation are dynamic, interactive processes. There is some sense of such dynamism and interaction in some reports. From others, there is no evidence that input is *ever* considered in some states.

Most reports did not address how various stakeholders' input is considered *relative to other factors* influencing the AES and Extension agendas. It would be difficult to fully account for the variety of input that is integrated into any particular decision. The weighting of formal and informal input; internal versus external input; individual versus group input; occasional versus regular input; organized and unorganized groups and new versus longstanding groups; local input versus constituencies formed around non-geographic interests; funders input and financial input; and the role of individuals and personal relationships creates a complex algorithm.

The question that comes next is *how input from different sources is weighed*, be it formally or informally: on a per acre, or per head count (number of farmers or students or voters) basis? Or by dollar: in terms of economic activity in the state or country or in terms of immediate or long-term economic contribution to the university system or the state or region? It was not evident how institutions considered or weighted the input from different categories of stakeholder groups, even when those groups are recognized and their input gathered. In many reports the relative importance given to input from faculty, consumer, government as well as producer and the agriculture support industry was not described nor was how different perspectives are woven into decisions.

How decision makers balance different perspectives was not described in most reports. These critical weightings/decisions determine the range of *future* opportunities and *future* stakeholder pools, yet they are not described. How priorities are perceived and established goes to the heart of leadership and scholarship at public agricultural institutions; and to the point of the Stakeholder Rule which, arguably, is to foster broader and more transparent roles for all the stakeholders in Land Grant agenda and activities. This transparency can ultimately translate to broader public support and feeling of ownership of the institution.

The process used for considering stakeholder input has to be understood in the context of funding and ultimately, discussions of broader institutional interests. What is unclear is how legitimate factors such as the availability/incentive of additional "leveraging" funds to support an activity, and the ability to maintain a sufficient pool of institutional expertise to be effective in a subject area, are balanced against what is important and relevant to regional, state and local stakeholders – producers, industry, consumers and taxpayers.

Actual funding allocations might be one indicator of the influence of stakeholders on programs and projects implemented in the field or lab or on the creation or elimination of positions, or on hiring, promotion and tenure decisions. Linkages between stakeholder input and formula fund allocations are clearly stronger in some states.

## **Additional Issues and Comments Affecting the Consideration of Input**

- **Internal Stakeholders.** By definition, stakeholders are not objective or unbiased. Individuals and groups have a stake – a vested interest – in the activities and outputs of the institution. Faculty and administrators are also stakeholders – whose livelihoods depend on the institutions they serve, and their own input should be formally articulated and considered. Around the region, administrators are increasingly – and understandably – interested in activities that can yield recognition and revenue for the institution. The interests of the institution and of the general public do not always or absolutely coincide. For example, institutional growth may or may not mean better institutional service or effectiveness, although few administrators can build a career on *not* increasing the size or scope of programs. For another example, science professionals often work on a national and international stage and are rewarded for doing so, while external stakeholders or Extension may typically have a more local or regional focus.
- **Promotion and Tenure.** Several administrators and faculty explained to this study's authors how the tenure and promotion reward structure preferentially rewards those individuals who publish academic papers and bring funding into the institution. Some went on to suggest that this evaluation and reward system may not be completely compatible with honoring all stakeholders' input or even identifying, soliciting or considering all stakeholders input. They pointed to tenure and promotion policies that require professionals deliver grants to their institutions – usually most easily available through ongoing partnerships (for example corporate- or company-sponsored foundations). They indicated these relationships and pressures are increasingly important with changes in public funding.
- **Basic and applied research.** There is also the challenge to balance each institution's and each program's emphasis on basic scholarship and applied research, and, as critically, the relationship of basic and applied research and Extension programs. In contemporary Land Grants, basic research is often the precursor of applied research conducted by industry. Often the linkage between ultimate end-user and basic research is not through Extension, but through industry, and this must affect the consideration process. Keeping the public's priorities clear in this environment is a challenge, as corporate research can serve public needs and interests, but can also displace the needs of less consolidated/centralized or organized, and less well-resourced sectors.
- **Fiscal stress.** Administrators repeatedly mentioned the fiscal pressures that shape programs. In such situations, standing personnel policies (and union regulations) may have more influence on programming than stakeholder input. For example, simple attrition may determine changes in positions, as much as stakeholder input, administrators' decisions or internal politics. To the authors this complex reality emphasizes a need for leadership towards broader and increasingly transparent dialogue in cooperation with the full gamut of stakeholders. It presents an opportunity for stakeholders to have real impact, not only on the direction of the institution but as advocates for its very future.

- **Leveraging funding and matching.** Input is ultimately reflected or rejected in allocation (time and money) decisions. As explained earlier, financial input often allows an entity to leverage federal funds – most particularly faculty time or the orientation of a program or department. From the reports it was unclear how often supplemental funding opportunities determine the use of federal funds, although those few states that detailed every project funded with formula funds are easier to understand than those that do not report thoroughly.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2000 Stakeholder Input Rule requires USDA formula-funded Land Grant institutions to describe how they identify stakeholders, and how they solicit and consider stakeholder input. Our observation is that the Rule has prompted thinking about stakeholders in many Northeast institutions; this thinking runs the gamut from creative to defensive. We believe the Rule has prompted and will continue to prompt greater attention to stakeholder input and to transparency and clarity in the stakeholder processes at Northeast Land Grant institutions. This is a good sign and a great opportunity.

As individuals and organizations, stakeholders are more than the audiences and clients of the university. Our region's institutions recognize this, and, across institutions, there are structures to receive input from some stakeholder groups into some level of the institution. There are ongoing stakeholder relationships with institutions and there are many interactive opportunities with stakeholder groups.

The reports emphasized that stakeholders are identified and solicited both formally and informally. **Overall, Land Grant institutions are better able to describe *how they ask for input* than *what they do with input after they get it*. And they are better able to define *whom they ask for input* than *how they select whom to ask*.** Solicitation is the most well executed and understood activity in the stakeholder process. The responsibility and mechanisms to identify stakeholders and the consideration of stakeholder input were less well described. None of the reports discussed how they determine "representative" stakeholder opinion. How each system sorts the input from these myriad stakeholders is less well articulated and understood.

Weighting of input – an institution's scientists relative to producers relative to consumers, for example – is particularly challenging. There is a need to better distinguish the role assigned or assumed by any one stakeholder group and make these distinctions transparent. Do some stakeholder groups only provide information while others provide direction? The amount of influence certain stakeholders exert on the agenda is a legitimate question and a concern to some inside and outside the institution. Particularly as limited public funds are increasingly leveraged by privately funded projects and programs, questions raised about the balance of stakeholder influence might be best addressed through a more transparent stakeholder process. What remains unclear and is not sufficiently transparent, despite the Stakeholder Rule, is how critical decisions are reached and exactly how stakeholder input is considered in those decisions. One thing that the Stakeholder Rule – and this report – reveal is the enormous complexity of the Land Grant system and the considerable burden these institutions face in remaining viable and responsive in the current environment.

Very few of the numerous activities undertaken to improve the stakeholder processes have been evaluated. Therefore, the impact of stakeholder input and the Stakeholder Rule itself are difficult to determine. How to design and manage each institution offering public service and scholarship so that it provides adequate accountability and full transparency (while honoring

academic independence) without procedures that become too bureaucratic and burdensome, (which could limit communication and responsiveness) is the challenge for both the administration and the stakeholders who are the guardians of our Land Grant institutions.

Stakeholders themselves must be the stewards of the Land Grant mission. It is not just the institutions that bear the burden of charting a responsible course. We as stakeholders in our public institutions bear equal responsibility for participating in the process. The Northeast Land Grant institutions deserve to be proud of their efforts to engage stakeholders. And we as stakeholders commit to active participation in public processes set forth by our Land Grant institutions and to supporting their efforts to engage us.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendations to *Institutions***

#### Stakeholder Identification

- Continue to identify and engage different types and categories of stakeholders, including non-traditional groups and non-formal (unorganized), under-represented groups of stakeholders
- Explore and consider using new solicitation techniques
- Recognize the diversity of stakeholders *within* larger groups e.g., sectors within commodity groups, or tenured vs. non-tenured employees
- Account for the reality that one individual can rarely represent all the perspectives of a stakeholder group
- Recognize the importance of engaging all possible stakeholders in the future of the institution, especially in terms of state level support, without abandoning the land grant mission.

#### Solicitation of Stakeholder Input

- Consider other, more time-efficient and effective ways to gather input, especially e-options.
- Be particularly responsive to groups who may see the input process as a waste of time. Assure that every stakeholder group is made aware of all the possible ways of providing input and encourage groups to use them.
- Ensure a level playing field when soliciting input across stakeholder groups.
- Foster appropriate access to decision-making by relevant stakeholder groups.
- Provide for more focused and smaller input bodies that are engaged in more depth and with greater frequency.
- Open up committee membership opportunities and have more representation on committees.
- Create more opportunities to enhance dialogue *among* stakeholder groups.
- Increase the level of candor about conflicts that sometimes exist between being responsive to all stakeholders and structural realities and policies (i.e., importance of external funding from industry, promotion and tenure system).
- Acknowledge and be open about the realities of decision-making, who sets priorities and how decisions are made that effect the direction of the institution.

- Develop better methods of input collection, avoiding "filtering of input".

#### Consideration of Stakeholder Input

- Strive for transparency – when stakeholders know how the system operates, they will be more inclined to get involved and increase the overall constituency for the system.
- Develop mechanisms to document input consideration.
- As a first step on the way to transparency, formalize the input consideration process and report it.
- Make reports as detailed as possible (and appropriate) down to actual project expenditures, funding by position including match and leveraged funds.
- Develop methods to provide feedback to stakeholder groups about how their input was used.

### **Recommendations to Stakeholders**

#### Stakeholder Identification

- Identify yourselves! Become visible to the institution.
- Cultivate relationships with the institution. You will be most effective as a group or organized constituency.
- Organize to be recognized; make numbers count.
- Ally yourself with other groups when appropriate.
- Create – don't wait for – opportunities.
- Use the media and opportunities to connect with institution partners.
- Choose your leadership and advocates within the system; don't allow the system to assign them without your consultation.
- Ask formally to be kept informed about committee meetings, formation of new committees etc.– all the way up the hierarchy.

#### Solicitation of Stakeholder Input

- Work through formal as well as informal channels.
- Cultivate personal contacts.
- Do your homework; understand the system, the context, the players; learn about the institution.
- Look for formalized input in as many venues (departments/committees) as possible.
- Don't be passive: show up, ask questions, and maintain contact.
- Talk to Extension – but also talk to researchers and administrators.
- Ask for the information you need to be adequately informed.
- Be practical. Understand professional and fiscal realities/environment of your institutions.
- Bring numbers and facts to the table.
- When appropriate, distinguish yourself or your group from other stakeholder groups that may be similar.
- Document your participation and input; keep records and ask for documentation from the institution.
- Be supportive rather than strident or whiny. Use constructive approaches.

- Cultivate alliances; together, multiple stakeholder groups may have more influence than individual ones.
- Find opportunities to champion the institution and/or specific programs.

#### Consideration of Stakeholder Input

- Work at and engage multiple levels of the system/hierarchy.
- Work to frame and present input so that it can reasonably be considered.
- Follow-up on solicitation discussions.
- Ask for Plans of Work and other documents that describe the institution's activities; these can establish a baseline for monitoring future input consideration.
- Encourage, if not insist on, ways to track your input through subsequent decision-making processes. What happened to it? Who considered it? What happened?
- Request information on other input consideration activities besides those you are directly involved with. What can you learn about the institution's consideration of other input?
- Work through state government and the political process to support your Land Grant institution.

## VII. APPENDICES

- A. Statute: AREERA Title I, Section 102.
- B. Rule: USDA/CSREES 7CFR Part 3418, as published in the Federal Register, Vol. 65, No. 26, February 8, 2000. May be found at:  
[http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/14mar20010800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/cfr\\_2002/janqtr/pdf/7cfr3418.1.pdf](http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/14mar20010800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/cfr_2002/janqtr/pdf/7cfr3418.1.pdf)
- C. Land Grant institution Plans of Work may be available via institution websites or by request. For more information on “State Plans of Work Annual Reports” visit <http://www.csrees.usda.gov/business/reporting/planrept/plansofwork.html>
- D. Identify, Solicit and Consider, examples, by state.

