Western Region Joint Summer Meeting June – 2024

PRE-WORK RESULTS

Rocking the Boat

Introduction

Prior to attending the Western Region Joint Summer Meeting (WRJSM) in June 2024, participants responded to pre-work questions. Responses to Question 3 and Question 4 were used in an activity in the room. We have consolidated those responses into the themes presented in this document, Pre-Work Results.

Themes in this document were from participants who represent research, Extension, academic programs, administrative heads, and Council on Agriculture Research, Extension, and Teaching (CARET) at university agriculture programs in the Western Region.

In the pages that follow, we provide ideas that other universities could apply to their own context.

It is important to note that not all ideas will be relevant to each university. Rather, the intention is for people to read the information, learn what worked for others, take what is appropriate for where you are, adapt ideas to your context, and generate further discussion and develop more shared ideas.

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Executive Summary

The pre-work responses from participants at the Western Region Joint Summer Meeting provide a view of the individual challenges and opportunities facing individual university agriculture programs.

This document combines the individual perspectives from participants (as they represent their own universities, with their own situations/experiences, and perspectives) and brings them together to highlight shared themes across universities. It provides tangible examples, ideas, and/or actionable solutions/recommendations that have either been tried by universities or are seen as ideas to work towards in the future. It is important to note that some ideas for the future may require a collective approach (multi-state/university/association involvement) and multi-year strategies to achieve.

The intention is to learn from one another, borrow what is relevant and has worked, make changes where appropriate, foster collaboration and a collective approach to excellence, and ensure long-term relevance for land grant universities in a rapidly changing agricultural landscape.

Primary Issues/Concerns

The following are the primary issues and concerns that universities in the Western Region are facing.

1. **Interdisciplinary Collaboration**
    - Breaking down silos has allowed universities to address complex issues such as soil health and environmental resilience. Collaborative efforts have led to increased research impact and improved funding opportunities.
2. **Resource Management Challenges**
    - Declining federal and state funding continues to hinder program growth. Universities are exploring diversified revenue streams, partnerships, and advocacy to mitigate these financial constraints.
3. **Faculty and Student Recruitment and Retention**
    - Challenges persist in attracting and retaining faculty and students. Tailored recruitment strategies and enhanced mentorship opportunities are critical.
4. **Technological and Infrastructure Gaps**
    - Outdated facilities and limited technological resources hinder progress. Investments in digital tools, grants, and partnerships with technology providers are necessary for modernization.
5. **Weather Variability and Sustainability**
    - Extreme weather events necessitate urgent action. Research into resilient and regenerative agriculture, and sustainable farming practices is essential for addressing global challenges.

6. **Community Engagement and Outreach**
    - Strengthening ties with local communities, whether rural or urban, ensures relevance and impact. Tailored outreach programs and digital platforms have proven effective in building trust and accessibility.
7. **Alignment with Workforce and Industry Needs**
    - Collaboration with industry partners ensures academic programs align with workforce demands, bridging gaps between education and employment.

Solving These Problems

Universities have addressed these problems by implementing ideas from the list below.

1. **Enhance Collaboration and Partnerships**
    - Foster interdisciplinary teams and build partnerships with industry, government, and communities to address multifaceted challenges.
2. **Diversify Funding Sources**
    - Advocate for legislative support by aligning programs with state and federal priorities. Pursue philanthropic donations and public-private partnerships.
3. **Strengthen Recruitment and Retention**
    - Develop recruitment strategies that target underserved populations. Enhance mentorship and professional development programs for faculty and students.
4. **Invest in Technology and Infrastructure**
    - Modernize facilities and integrate advanced technologies such as AI and precision agriculture tools to remain competitive and impactful.
5. **Address Extreme and Variable Environmental Challenges**
    - Expand research on environmental resilience and sustainable practices. Train students and farmers on regenerative agriculture and environmental adaptation.
6. **Improve Community Engagement**
    - Tailor programs to address specific local needs and leverage digital platforms for broader outreach and impact.
7. **Proactive Communication and Advocacy**
    - Share success stories using data-driven narratives to engage stakeholders and secure support. Align institutional goals with legislative agendas to strengthen advocacy efforts.

Conclusion: These areas highlight the common issues (and solutions) facing land grant universities in the West.

Results for Pre-Work Question 3

Below are 9 themes that emerged when participants *shared an experience from their university that others may be able to learn from and potentially apply to their own university and context*.

The results include the theme, a brief description of that theme, and then highlights what universities were able to accomplish. It also provides ideas on what worked, what helped them to be successful, and what you may opt to try at your own institution. Note that the approaches outlined will need to be modified to fit your own institutional context.

1. Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Integration

Many universities have successfully broken-down silos and fostered cross-disciplinary collaborations to address complex agricultural and societal challenges. Interdisciplinary teamwork has enhanced research impact and increased funding opportunities for many institutions.

- **Why it Worked for Others**: Combining varied perspectives helped institutions foster innovation and address challenges holistically. Collaborative research also met funding agencies' preferences for interdisciplinary initiatives.
- **What Contributed to Success**: Stakeholder engagement, leadership support, and frameworks promoting collaboration across institutional boundaries.
- **Challenges Others Overcame**: Resistance to change, funding limitations, and traditional disciplinary silos.
- **How This Could Work for You**: Evaluate the specific needs and resources of your institution to adapt these practices, ensuring they align with your mission and objectives.
- **What to Try**: Consider forming interdisciplinary teams or programs to tackle multifaceted issues like sustainability, soil health, or precision technology. Explore partnerships across departments to leverage expertise and create unity.

2. Improving Communication and Impact Reporting

Streamlined communication and transparent impact reporting have helped many universities demonstrate their value and align faculty efforts with strategic goals. These strategies have been especially effective when tailored to institutional contexts.

- **Why it Worked for Others**: Clear communication helped foster shared goals, enhance transparency, and strengthen advocacy and funding efforts.
- **What Contributed to Success**: Involving faculty in shaping tools, ensuring frequent updates, and aligning initiatives with strategic goals.
- **Challenges Others Overcame**: Resistance to changing reporting practices and fragmented communication systems.
- **How This Could Work for You**: Assess current reporting processes at your institution and identify opportunities for simplification and clarity while emphasizing societal impact.
- **What to Try**: Introduce tools to define public value statements and streamline reporting processes. Provide training to support faculty in aligning their work with institutional goals.

3. Leveraging Indigenous and Local Knowledge

Many universities have successfully integrated indigenous and local knowledge into programs to create culturally relevant and sustainable solutions. However, the effectiveness of this approach depends on tailoring efforts to the local community's unique needs and strengths.

- **Why it Worked for Others**: Contextual solutions were more effective and built trust within communities, leading to stronger collaborations.
- **What Contributed to Success**: Respectful engagement, tailored approaches, and a focus on cultural sensitivity.
- **Challenges Others Overcame**: Financial constraints and capacity-building limitations.
- **How This Could Work for You**: Engage deeply with local stakeholders to understand their needs and strengths. Adapt approaches to your community’s unique context to ensure mutual benefits.
- **What to Try**: Build partnerships with local communities to integrate indigenous practices into sustainability and research initiatives. Co-create solutions that reflect the specific context and contribute to meritocratic efforts.

4. Advancing a Supportive, Collaborative Environment

Universities that have prioritized supportive, collaborative environments have reported stronger community connections and improved access for resource-limited populations. These initiatives often need to be tailored to address unique institutional challenges and opportunities.

- **Why it Worked for Others**: Supportive and collaborative efforts expanded access, fostered varying perspectives, and enriched campus communities.
- **What Contributed to Success**: Leadership commitment, dedicated funding, and partnerships with other, similarly focused, organizations.
- **Challenges Others Overcame**: Logistical hurdles, funding constraints, and skepticism about new initiatives.
- **How This Could Work for You**: Begin with small-scale initiatives to build trust and support. Expand as you evaluate their fit within your institution's context.
- **What to Try**: Create faculty and student exchange programs, introduce supportive/collaborative related awards, and target outreach to certain communities to create unity.

5. Fostering Innovation Through Strategic Positioning

Some universities have positioned themselves as leaders in innovation by embracing bold initiatives outside traditional structures. While these strategies require significant planning and adaptation, they have proven effective in addressing unmet needs and fostering institutional growth.

- **Why it Worked for Others**: These approaches helped institutions address societal needs while providing flexibility for innovation.
- **What Contributed to Success**: Visionary leadership, external partnerships, and innovative funding approaches.
- **Challenges Others Overcame**: Financial constraints, internal skepticism, and external resistance.
- **How This Could Work for You**: Identify areas where your institution could take bold action, then adapt these strategies to fit your available resources and context.
- **What to Try**: Launch new programs, campuses, or initiatives aimed at addressing emerging challenges or underserved regions. Create environments that encourage experimentation and risk-taking.

6. Engaging and Retaining Faculty and Staff

Universities that focused on faculty and staff engagement reported improved morale and retention. Successful strategies were adapted to address institutional culture and specific needs.

- **Why it Worked for Others**: Engaged employees contributed meaningfully to institutional goals and reported greater satisfaction with their roles.
- **What Contributed to Success**: Leadership responsiveness, actionable feedback, and clear communication about growth opportunities.
- **Challenges Others Overcame**: Resource limitations and resistance to new methodologies.
- **How This Could Work for You**: Tailor engagement strategies to your faculty and staff needs, ensuring alignment with institutional goals and culture.
- **What to Try**: Use surveys to assess workplace environment and create specialized roles or career pathways for professional growth.

7. Enhancing Student Experiences

Institutions have reimagined student engagement programs to improve belonging, retention, and overall satisfaction. Success depended on aligning efforts with evolving student needs and expectations.

- **Why it Worked for Others**: Positive student experiences improved retention rates, community bonds, and institutional loyalty.
- **What Contributed to Success**: Feedback from students, alumni, and faculty, combined with thoughtful program design.
- **Challenges Others Overcame**: Balancing traditional practices with the need for modernization.
- **How This Could Work for You**: Evaluate your current student engagement efforts and consider opportunities for innovation that reflect your institution's unique culture.
- **What to Try**: Use surveys to assess student experiences, redesign traditions to promote engagement, and introduce initiatives fostering belonging.

8. Strengthening Extension and Outreach

Modernizing extension efforts has helped many universities expand their community impact. Success relied on integrating digital tools and aligning outreach activities with institutional goals.

- **Why it Worked for Others**: Digital platforms increased accessibility and enhanced community impact.
- **What Contributed to Success**: Leveraging institutional resources, staff training, and partnerships.
- **Challenges Others Overcame**: Resistance to adopting new technologies and adapting traditional materials for online use.
- **How This Could Work for You**: Assess your community's needs and adapt these practices to modernize outreach while maintaining alignment with your mission.
- **What to Try**: Transition programs to online platforms, create roles focused on targeted community engagement, and ensure extension activities align with broader strategies.

9. Addressing Workforce Needs and Industry Partnerships

Universities that developed programs aligned with workforce demands successfully bridged gaps between academia and employment. Adaptation to local workforce needs was key to success.

- **Why it Worked for Others**: Programs met employer expectations, prepared students for careers, and enhanced institutional reputations.
- **What Contributed to Success**: Faculty champions, strong industry partnerships, and innovative funding approaches.
- **Challenges Others Overcame**: Budget constraints, internal resistance, and academic barriers.
- **How This Could Work for You**: Engage industry partners early to ensure your programs address workforce needs and align with your region’s employment landscape.
- **What to Try**: Create workforce-aligned certifications and programs, such as leadership or technical training, tailored to specific industry needs.

Conclusion: These examples showcase successful approaches that worked in a variety of institutional settings. While the strategies may need to be adjusted to fit your unique context, they provide a strong set of ideas for addressing your unique challenges and enhancing impact.

Results for Pre-Work Question 4

This section integrates lessons participants mentioned as past challenges and opportunities, with what was mentioned as future challenges and opportunities. The "future outlook" in each theme explains potential expected trends, hurdles, or growth areas universities may face in the coming years. And the proposed solutions are suggested actions (or noted opportunities) universities could try as they chart a path forward.

It is important to note that not all themes will align with all institutions, nor will all proposed solutions be relevant for each university. The intention is to adapt these ideas to your own unique contexts and needs.

It is relevant to note that some solutions provided are aspirational; they may require significant funding, policy alignment and multi-stakeholder collaboration and may take years to implement fully.

1. Funding and Resource Management

- **Challenges (Past)**: Many universities have struggled with reduced state and federal funding, rising costs, and reliance on short-term grants. These financial strains limit infrastructure development and program expansion.

- **Opportunities (Past)**: Successful public-private partnerships, philanthropic support, and advocacy aligned with legislative priorities like sustainability and workforce development.

    - **Why It Was an Opportunity**: Collaborating with industry, government, and community stakeholders provided new funding opportunities, increased program visibility, and created mutual support for advocacy. These partnerships often aligned university goals with broader societal needs, which made them appealing to external funders and supporters.

- **Future Outlook**: Financial uncertainty will persist, necessitating creative solutions for long-term stability.

- **What to try in the future**: Universities can assess potential industry or community stakeholders whose missions align with their own and propose collaborative projects that demonstrate mutual benefits.

    - Collaborations enable universities to access broader resources and tackle large-scale challenges that require collective expertise and shared goals like sustainability and workforce development. These collaborations can bring additional funding, resources, and expertise to enhance their impact.

- **If we were successful**, the following are potential problems we may be addressing and what we may do to solve them:

    - **Problem 1**: Fragmented efforts to address food insecurity across regions.
    - **Solution**: Universities could collaborate with community organizations, government agencies, and industry leaders to establish region-specific food systems that prioritize accessibility and affordability, leveraging resources from each partner.

    - **Problem 2**: Limited alignment between agriculture research and practical application.
    - **Solution**: Joint projects with industry and government could fast-track the translation of research findings into on-farm practices, enhancing productivity and sustainability.

2. Recruitment and Retention

- **Challenges (Past)**: Recruiting and retaining talented faculty and students has been challenging due to limited resources, rural locations, and competitive job markets.

- **Opportunities (Past)**: Programs targeted resource-limited populations, offered professional development opportunities, and emphasized interdisciplinary research to improve engagement.

- **Future Outlook**: Universities will need to further expand their recruitment strategies and provide better support systems to attract and retain faculty and students.

- **What to try in the future**: Strong recruitment and retention strategies build a solid foundation for sustained innovation and academic excellence. Showcase the societal and innovation potential of agricultural careers to attract varied talent.

    - Institutions could develop initiatives such as scholarships, mentorship programs, and professional development opportunities to attract and retain a broad range of talent. Highlighting institutional strengths and offering competitive benefits can also enhance recruitment efforts and attract top talent.

- **If we were successful**, the following are potential problems we may be addressing and what we may do to solve them:

    - **Problem 1**: Declining interest in agricultural careers among youth.
    - **Solution**: Launch mentorship programs, scholarships, and internships showcasing the innovative and impactful aspects of modern agriculture to attract varied talent.

    - **Problem 2**: Loss of experienced agricultural faculty to other sectors.
    - **Solution**: Implement competitive retention packages, including professional development opportunities and research funding, to keep skilled educators and researchers engaged.

3. Infrastructure and Technology

- **Challenges (Past)**: Aging facilities and limited access to advanced technology hindered research, education, and outreach efforts.

- **Opportunities (Past)**: Grants and partnerships have enabled upgrades to facilities and the adoption of digital platforms for education and outreach.

- **Future Outlook**: Ongoing technological advancements will require sustained investments and collaborations. Institutions that embrace scalable, cost-effective technology will lead innovation.

- **What to try in the future**: Advanced tools and systems allow universities to modernize their approach, ensuring efficiency and competitiveness. The integration of new technologies, such as AI, precision agriculture, or advanced data tools, is expected to enhance education, research, and outreach capabilities. These tools can improve efficiency, foster innovation, and increase institutional impact.

    - Universities can seek funding to adopt relevant technologies and train staff to use them effectively. Collaboration with tech companies or grant opportunities could help other institutions integrate these advancements into their programs.

- **If we were successful**, the following are potential problems we may be addressing and what we may do to solve them:

    - **Problem 1**: Water scarcity and inefficient irrigation practices.
    - **Solution**: Deploy precision irrigation systems using IoT sensors and AI algorithms, ensuring optimized water use tailored to specific crop needs.

    - **Problem 2**: Barriers to the adoption of advanced technology by smallholder farmers.
    - **Solution**: Universities could create extension programs that provide training and subsidized access to scalable technologies like drone-based crop monitoring.

4. Agriculture Resilience and Sustainability

- **Challenges (Past)**: Extreme weather events and environmental pressures required adaptive agricultural practices.

- **Opportunities (Past)**: Universities have led research on regenerative farming, resilient crops, and soil health, creating impactful solutions.

- **Future Outlook**: Universities will continue to play a central role in developing resilient agricultural practices.

- **What to try in the future**: Proactive strategies ensure universities are equipped to address unforeseen challenges and long-term societal shifts effectively. Addressing societal challenges like post-pandemic recovery, adaptation to changing environments, or economic shifts allows universities to remain relevant and impactful.

- **If we were successful**, the following are potential problems we may be addressing and what we may do to solve them:

    - **Problem 1**: Increasing frequency of extreme weather events affecting agriculture.
    - **Solution**: Develop comprehensive water and landscape resilience strategies, including drought-resistant crop research and disaster recovery programs for farmers.

    - **Problem 2**: Vulnerabilities in global food supply chains.
    - **Solution**: Focus on research and education promoting localized and decentralized food production systems to reduce dependence on global supply chains.

5. Community Engagement and Outreach

- **Challenges (Past)**: Limited resources and shifting demographics made it difficult to connect with rural and urban communities.

- **Opportunities (Past)**: Tailored outreach programs and digital platforms improved trust and accessibility. Targeted initiatives that addressed specific local challenges (e.g., food security, resilience to extreme/variable weather) helped build trust with communities and positioned universities as vital resources. This often led to increased support and stronger connections with stakeholders.

- **Future Outlook**: Expanding engagement with underserved populations will require innovative approaches.

- **What to try in the future**: Community-Centric Initiatives: Universities can identify specific community needs and tailor their outreach programs to address them. Engaging communities more directly in program design and delivery ensures that efforts are meaningful and impactful. Building long-term relationships through consistent engagement and transparency can help universities establish themselves as true partners.

- **If we were successful**, the following are potential problems we may be addressing and what we may do to solve them:

    - **Problem 1**: Limited outreach to underrepresented rural and urban communities.
    - **Solution**: Establish tailored programs that address local needs, such as urban farming initiatives in cities or soil health education in rural areas, or food security programs to build trust and capacity.

    - **Problem 2**: Disconnection between universities and the public's understanding of agriculture's role.
    - **Solution**: Create public education campaigns and interactive workshops that bridge the gap, focusing on topics like sustainability and food systems.

6. Legislative and Political Context

- **Challenges (Past)**: Misalignment between institutional goals and political priorities hindered funding and program support.

- **Opportunities (Past)**: Advocacy campaigns that highlighted the societal benefits of agricultural research gained traction with policymakers.

    - Successfully demonstrating the ROI of programs and aligning with legislative priorities led to increased funding and legislative support. Advocacy efforts also raised awareness about the value of agricultural research and extension services.

- **Future Outlook**: Building coalitions and aligning initiatives with legislative priorities will be essential in navigating differing political perspectives.

- **What to try in the future**: Effective engagement with policymakers ensures programs align with broader societal priorities and receive necessary support. By aligning programs with state and federal priorities, such as sustainability or workforce training, universities expect to secure additional funding and policy support. Engaging legislators early could shape more favorable outcomes.

    - Institutions could monitor legislative agendas and align their priorities with government goals (such as rural development or environmental stewardship) to gain advocacy traction. Collaborating with community advocates and stakeholders can also help amplify their case for funding or policy changes. Demonstrating to legislators the value of interdisciplinary partnerships that include research, academic programs and extension/outreach efforts may garner more support.

    - Universities can focus on data-driven storytelling to highlight program impacts and demonstrate alignment with government or societal goals. Engaging community champions to advocate for programs can also strengthen their case for support.

- **If we were successful**, the following are potential problems we may be addressing and what we may do to solve them:

    - **Problem 1**: Misalignment between policy and sustainability practices in agriculture.
    - **Solution**: Advocate for incentive-based policies that support regenerative agriculture, carbon sequestration and capture initiatives, and renewable energy integration on farms.

    - **Problem 2**: Lack of federal investment in rural broadband for digital agriculture.
    - **Solution**: Collaborate with legislators to secure funding for broadband infrastructure to enable smart farming technologies in underserved areas.

7. Workforce Alignment and Program Innovation

- **Challenges (Past)**: Evolving industry needs created skill gaps in precision farming, sustainable supply chains, and emerging technologies.

- **Opportunities (Past)**: Universities developed interdisciplinary curricula and partnered with industry to address these gaps.

    - **Why It Was an Opportunity**: Developing new academic and research programs addressed specific workforce needs or societal issues, allowing universities to attract students, funding, and industry support. These initiatives often aligned with pressing concerns like resilience (and sustainability) to extreme weather variability, making them timely and impactful.

- **Future Outlook**: Programs integrating hands-on learning and aligning with workforce demands will remain competitive.

- **What to try in the future**: Institutions can conduct needs assessments in their regions (or nationally) to identify gaps in workforce training or societal challenges and develop programs (E.g., artificial intelligence in agriculture, interdisciplinary extreme weather variability research, or food security initiatives) that directly address these needs. Partnering with industry to co-design programs/curricula could also help ensure relevance and appeal.

- **If we were successful**, the following are potential problems we may be addressing and what we may do to solve them:

    - **Problem 1**: Workforce gaps in sustainable agriculture and how we can actively prepare for or adjust to the impact of ever-changing environmental landscapes.
    - **Solution**: Develop interdisciplinary programs focused on regenerative farming practices, ecosystem services, and precision agriculture, equipping students with skills for emerging careers.

    - **Problem 2**: Lack of integration between technology and traditional agriculture education.
    - **Solution**: Create academic tracks that combine computer science, engineering, and agriculture to train students in using AI and robotics for farming applications.

8. Leveraging Unique Strengths and Building Partnerships

- **Challenges (Past)**: Universities often underutilized their unique geographic and cultural assets to differentiate themselves.

- **Opportunities (Past)**: Regional resources attracted funding and strengthened niche programs.
  - Programs capitalized on distinct regional or institutional assets, such as Hawaii's varied ecosystems for tropical agriculture, Guam's regional influence, or access to military or industry sectors. These strengths differentiated the universities and attracted attention and funding for specialized initiatives.

- **Future Outlook**: Highlighting institutional strengths will help universities build a competitive edge. Universities working together to combine and leverage their unique strengths will achieve more together than they would independently.
  - Universities should identify and highlight their own unique features—whether geographic, cultural, or programmatic—that can be leveraged for niche programming or specialized research.

- **What to try in the future**: Create a cultural shift across universities and place even more value on strengthening and fostering collaboration.
  - Institutions undergoing transitions might use these moments to re-evaluate and align their strategic goals and foster intentional collaborative efforts. Providing professional development and encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration can improve morale and drive innovation. Positive cultural changes and stronger teams drives collaboration, innovation, and adaptability across institutions.

- **If we were successful**, the following are potential problems we may be addressing and what we may do to solve them:

  - **Problem 1**: Siloed departmental approaches to solving agricultural challenges.
  - **Solution**: Foster interdisciplinary collaboration through joint research initiatives, team-building workshops, and integrated funding opportunities.

  - **Problem 2**: Resistance to implementing supportive and collaborative initiatives.
  - **Solution**: Establish clear goals tied to funding incentives and create mentorship programs to promote supportive and collaborative academic environments.

Conclusion: This section distinguishes between past successes, future outlooks, and proposed solutions, providing a comprehensive roadmap for addressing challenges and seizing opportunities in agricultural education, research and outreach.