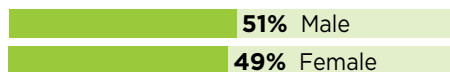


2015 Community Forums

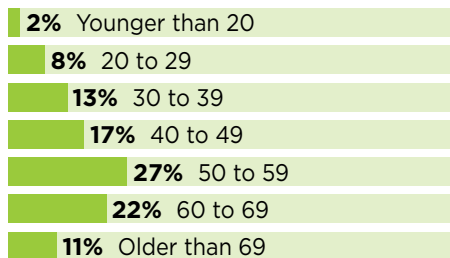
STATEWIDE REPORT

327
PARTICIPANTS

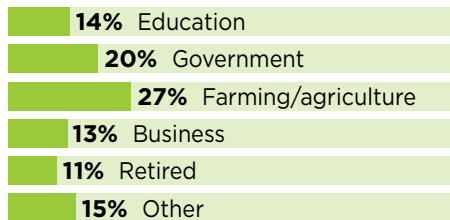
GENDER



AGE



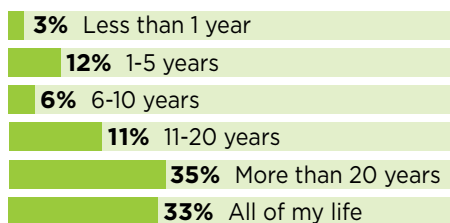
OCCUPATION



ETHNICITY



LIVED IN COMMUNITY



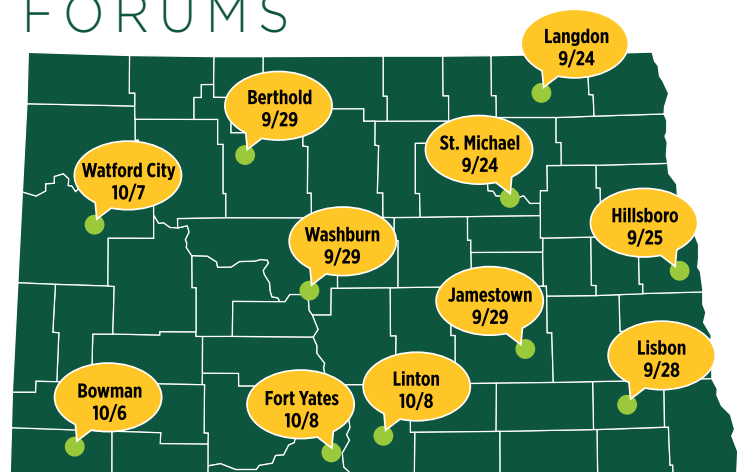
The NDSU Extension Service is listening. NDSU Extension staff recognize that to be most effective, they need to listen to local stakeholders and regularly ask about crucial issues and challenges affecting each region.

Community forums during the fall of 2015 provided an opportunity to listen to North Dakotans across the state as they shared concerns around:



Thank you to the more than 300 people who participated in the 11 community forums. The information will help shape NDSU Extension's strategic planning efforts during the next three to five years and help us create the Extension programs that will most strongly align with the needs and priorities of North Dakota residents.

11 COMMUNITY FORUMS



Priority Issues of Concern to Community Forum Participants



AG ECONOMY

Agriculture is critical to the North Dakota economy. Fluctuations in the agricultural economy bring challenges to farmers, especially in these lean times. More agricultural diversification and value-added products are needed to help farm families and communities.

PUBLIC DISCONNECT WITH AGRICULTURE

We say we can feed the world, yet there is a growing lack of general understanding about where food comes from. Farm-to-table consumer education programs about local foods and food production are needed for all ages.



ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

Fluctuating oil prices can cause dramatic shifts in North Dakota's economy, creating uncertainty. Additional areas of challenge in energy development include protecting natural resources in the Oil Patch Region, developing necessary infrastructure and preparing communities for changing dynamics.

FARM AND BUSINESS TRANSITION

As North Dakota ages, barriers to effectively enter and exit farming operations and other businesses need to be overcome to ensure a successful transition from one generation to the next.



LABOR FORCE

Recruiting and retaining an effective workforce across the state is a growing challenge. Adequate wages and benefits, and options for worker flexibility are two key factors. Retention of a young and vital workforce also requires affordable housing, good-quality child care and local community amenities.

NATURAL RESOURCES PROTECTION

Adequate water supplies, good-quality air and water, soil health and tree renovation are concerns. Being good stewards of the state's natural resources and using green technology, such as wind and other renewables, is recommended, as is expansion of local recycling programs.



REGULATIONS

Sustaining industry is viewed as difficult because of existing and proposed regulations in energy development and agriculture. One-size-fits-all federal agency regulations don't take into consideration variables that are unique to location. Oversight or flexibility at the state or local level is preferred.

RURAL COMMUNITIES

Keeping main streets viable through succession planning for businesses, economic development and updates to infrastructure are essential to sustain rural communities. Quality-of-life amenities are needed to attract and keep people in rural North Dakota.



Priority Issues of Concern to Community Forum Participants



HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Awareness education about chemical and other addictions, mental health issues and physical health is needed. Access to and quality of health care is a major concern, particularly in rural areas where medical personnel and emergency medical services volunteers are limited or not available. Also of concern is the increase of unhealthy lifestyles, and ongoing inaccessibility to nutritious foods and exercise programs or facilities.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Gaps exist in participation and commitment at the local level. Positive changes in communities happen when adults and youth are engaged civically as volunteers and leaders. Successful community involvement and volunteerism hinges on the development of leadership skills and mentoring.



SUCCESSFUL FAMILIES

Many families are struggling. Families today are bombarded with competing priorities that are changing family dynamics. Frequently heard are that youth are overscheduled, changing cultures and technology are limiting family time, good-quality child care can't be found, and morals and ethics are on the decline. Financial security also is a major concern with an increase in poverty and the difficult challenges it causes.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Improvement to infrastructure is needed for the long-term development and resiliency of North Dakota. Housing, roads, child-care facilities, schools and public buildings need attention for safety reasons and because a lack of sufficient infrastructure impedes the recruitment and retention of the rural workforce.



CRIME AND SAFETY

Sex trafficking, drug and alcohol abuse, burglaries, sex offenders and an increase in crime are huge concerns, especially in western North Dakota. Ranking just as high, however, is Internet, social media and texting safety, and the increasing prevalence of cyber-bullying and sexting, especially among youth.

EDUCATION

Additional support is needed for pre-K through 12th-grade education systems, including more teachers and programs in many areas. Overcrowding of schools in some communities and declining enrollments in others is creating unique challenges, with discussion of regional collaboration more important than ever in some areas.



The NDSU Extension Service mission is to provide research-based information to improve the quality of life of North Dakotans. Based on concerns of North Dakotans involved in the 11 community forums, three critical areas emerged: **economic prosperity, community engagement** and **healthy citizens**.



Potential Extension responses based on the community forum suggestions include:

ECONOMIC PROSPERITY:



Education for informed decisions and profitable economies

- Enhance agricultural diversification programs to include entrepreneurship and value-added components
- Educate about financial security to help sustain farm and ranch operations and small business, and to assist families with household budgeting
- Partner with organizations to help rural communities plan for their future
- Educate on the benefits of best management practices to sustain good-quality air, soil, water and other natural resources

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:



Education for engaged, productive North Dakotans

- Strengthen character and ethics education for youth and adults, with parents as first teachers
- Reinforce local leadership training for adults and youth to develop skills and confidence in leading and becoming more civically engaged
- Facilitate succession planning to equip generations for successfully transitioning farm and ranch operations, and other businesses
- Mobilize communities around issues of concern such as protecting natural resources, updating infrastructure, developing the workforce and managing change

HEALTHY CITIZENS:



Education on food production, nutrition and healthful living

- Strengthen farm-to-table-related programs for youth, adults and urban communities
- Educate about safe food production and consumption, and the importance of good nutrition and wellness
- Convene conversations to address addictions, and mental and physical health challenges
- Focus on safety for youth, family and the farm
- Facilitate the development of healthful environments at the community level

As Extension considers these needs, we remain committed to our current successful programs in agriculture, natural resources, 4-H, families and communities.

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