



A Community Conversation

**The Octorara Area School District
Presents**

“RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS IN AGRICULTURE EDUCATION”

October 27, 2012

**At the Octorara Area School District Campus
Atglen, PA**



Community Conversation facilitated and report provided by:
Chester County 2020

Contents

I.	Executive summary	3 - 4
II.	Identifying and Rating the Discussion Points	4 - 5
III.	Working the Top-Ranked Discussion Points	5 - 6
IV.	Chester County 2020 recommendations	6

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Work Session Topics:

1. Reasons why the Octorara Area School District (OASD) should support its agriculture education (Ag. Ed.) program
2. Actions the Octorara Area School District can take to gain support for its Ag. Ed. program

Sponsor: The Octorara Area School District

Funded By: The Springbank Foundation

Facilitator: Chester County 2020

Attendance: 18

Groups represented: 13th Legislative District, PA House of Representatives; Chester County 2020 Board of Directors; Chester County Agricultural Land Preservation Board; Chester County Conservation District; Chester-Delaware County Farm Bureau; Chester County Food Bank; Delaware Valley College; Maysie's Farm Conservation Center; Octorara Area School District.

Group Discussion:

Facilitators asked the participants to suggest discussion points: reasons for supporting the OASD Ag. Ed., and actions to take to gain support. At the end of the group discussion period, the discussion points were printed on posters for review. The participants and facilitators agreed the discussion points as posted did not need to be edited or consolidated.

Rating the Discussion Points:

The participants rated the discussion points by affixing colored inventory dots on the posters next to the discussion points they considered most important. Each participant had five dots to use for each of two categories: 'Why support Ag. Ed.?' and, 'How to support Ag. Ed.?' Participants were free to affix more than one dot to a single point they felt strongly about.

The following points, 'Why OASD should support Ag. Ed.?', received the highest ratings:

- To increase citizens' awareness of the importance of agriculture in our region
- To increase local food production and promote food security
- To protect a continuing food supply

The following points, 'How to support Ag. Ed.?', received the highest ratings:

- Develop an Ag. Ed. leadership support group
- Develop In-School, Hands-On demonstrations of agricultural activities and career opportunities
- Develop community partnerships
- Make 'A Garden at Every School' a goal
- Create an annual fund-raising, awareness-building event

Initial Follow-up Meeting:

4th quarter, 2012: There will be a follow up meeting to discuss the challenges facing Ag. Ed. in the community beyond OASD. This meeting will include October 27 *Conversation* participants, and others who wished, but were unable, to attend the October 27 meeting.

Initial Follow-up Activity:

Volunteers from the Food Bank, Ches/Del Farm Bureau, Maysie’s Farm, OASD, CC Ag. Pres. Board and CC2020 committed to attending a 4th quarter 2012 meeting of an Ag. Ed. leadership team to begin carrying out the action items developed at the October 27 *Conversation*.

Quality Assessment:

The sponsor will provide a written assessment of this program, including suggestions for improvement, by March 31, 2013.

II. IDENTIFYING AND RATING THE DISCUSSION POINTS:

The full list of suggested discussion points is show below, with the number of rating votes each point received.

Votes	Discussion Points: ‘Why OASD should support Ag. Ed.’
13	NEED AGRICULTURALLY EDUCATED CITIZENRY
10	TO INCREASE LOCAL PRODUCTION & FOOD SECURITY
5	TO PROTECT CONTINUING FOOD SUPPLY
3	ENABLE UNDERSTANDING OF VALUE OF AG
3	HEALTH BENEFITS
3	LEADERSHIP TRAINING
2	JOBS – EMPLOYMENT FOR NEW WORKERS
2	TO PROMOTE SELF-SUFFICIENCY (family gardens)
2	ENTRY INTO ADVANCED HI-TECH HI-GROWTH FIELD
2	PRODUCE WORLD LEADERS FOR FOOD PRODUCTION
2	REAL CAREER OPPORTUNITIES (300 CAREERS+)
2	OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN RESPONSIBILITY
2	PROMOTE ECONOMIC STABILITY
1	JOBS – A SOURCE OF NEEDED WORKERS
0	TO PRESERVE IMPORTANT STATE INDUSTRY (49 BIL+)
0	TO EXPLOIT REGIONAL MARKETS (NYC, DC, PHILLY)
0	TO CREATE NEW VOCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY
0	LOCAL PRODUCTION ADDS VALUE TO OTHER INDUSTRIES
0	A UNIQUE NICHE FOR MANY STUDENTS
0	A PART OF WHO WE ARE

Rating discussion points, continued

Discussion Points: 'How to support Ag. Ed.'

- 8 DEVELOP AN AG ED LEADERSHIP SUPPORT GROUP
- 8 3rd GRADE TOUR' - In-School, Comprehensive, Hands-On (ref. Twin Valley Distr.)
- 6 COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
- 6 PROMOTE AWARENESS UP AND DOWN K THRU 12
- 6 MAKE A GARDEN AT EVERY SCHOOL A GOAL
- 6 ANNUAL FUNDRAISING EVENTS
- 4 ENGAGE LOCAL NONPROFITS
- 4 EDUCATE THE PUBLIC – AG IS MORE THAN AMBIANCE
- 4 PARTNERSHIPS WITH HIGHER EDUCATION FOR FUNDING AND OUTREACH
- 3 ELIMINATE STEREOTYPES – AG IS 21ST CENTURY
- 3 UTILIZE FARM BUREAU MOBILE AGLAB
- 3 PROMOTE AG FIELD TRIPS AND WORKSHOPS
- 3 TELL THE FULL AG ED STORY
- 2 OUTSIDE FUNDING – SEEK SPONSORSHIP
- 2 BUILD A SUSTAINABLE PROGRAM – PROVIDE FOR THOSE COSTS
- 1 NETWORK WITH COMMUNITY SUCCESS STORIES
- 1 UTILIZE FARM BUREAU AG IN THE CLASSROOM
- 0 NEED IN-DISTRICT LEADERSHIP
- 0 INCLUDE AG IN CURRICULUM (PATHWAYS CAREERS PROGRAM)
- 0 CREATE EVENTS TO INFORM PARENTS & COMMUNITY
- 0 WORK WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES - ACCESS TO FUTURE WORKERS
- 0 LOOK FOR WHAT WE'RE MISSING THAT'S ALREADY HERE
- 0 USE FOOD BANK MIDDLE SCHOOL S.T.E.M. CURRICULUM
- 0 COLLECT SUPPORTING EVIDENCE TO MAKE THE CASE (DVRPC, ETC.)
- 0 FIND MONEY - A SERIOUS PROBLEM – 'the downside of Act 319'
- 0 INFORM LEGISLATORS ABOUT FUNDING PROBLEMS
- 0 SEEK VOLUNTEER WORKERS TO DELIVER AG ED
- 0 EDUCATE FAMILIES – LIFE SKILLS & LEADERSHIP THRU AG ED, 4-H, FFA
- 0 MAKE THE CASE TO THE SCHOOL BOARD
- 0 ADVANCE 'INTERNSHIPS' FOR STUDENT TEACHERS
- 0 EXPAND EXISTING JOB FAIR – INVITE AG EMPLOYERS

III. WORKING THE TOP-RATED DISCUSSION POINTS

The participants divided themselves into two work groups to address the discussion points in further detail. The groups were asked to list prioritized goals and action items to achieve the goals, with deadlines.

Work Group #1 chose to build on the top-rated discussion point 'Why OASD should support its Ag. Ed. program': The need for an agriculturally educated citizenry.

Work Group #1's prioritized goals were:

1. Promote general citizen education on the food system (e.g. production distribution, processing) to create public support for Ag. Ed.

2. Ensure OASD students are aware of the importance of food production and farming.
3. Using education, promote a supply of agricultural careers.

Work Group #1's action items, with deadlines, were:

1. 1st quarter, 2013: Establish a committee to consider community education and outreach
2. 1st quarter, 2013: Partner with organizations aligned with the goals.
3. 1st quarter, 2013: explore existing media/communications tools through OASD
4. 3rd quarter, 2013: develop talking points or a white paper on the benefits of Ag. Ed. for use in community meetings and discussions.

Work Group #2 chose to build on the top-rated discussion point for 'How to support an Ag. Ed. program': Develop an Ag. Ed. leadership support group.

Work Group #1's prioritized goals were:

1. Create an initial Ag. Ed. Support Team (5-10 individuals) to begin the effort
2. Create an Ag. Ed. Booster group of municipal, business and community leaders
3. Create an Executive Committee to carry the effort into the future

Work Group #1's action items, with deadlines, were:

1. 4th quarter, 2012: the initial Ag. Ed. Support Team, made up of volunteers from the October 27th *Conversation*, will meet and identify prospective members for the Booster Group and Executive Committee. The Ag. Ed. Support Team will draft and send a letter inviting prospective members to a general meeting.
2. 1st quarter, 2013: the first general meeting of prospective Boosters and Executive Committee members

V. CHESTER COUNTY 2020 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prepare a 'Growing Farmers' breakout session for the Keep Farming First 2013 conference, with Ag. Ed. Support Team members reporting on outcomes and progress.
2. Do not neglect to 'mine' the full list of discussion points for goals and action items.
3. During group discussion there was much mention of 'low-hanging fruit,' opportunities that could be exploited quickly and at low cost or no cost. The search for 'low-hanging fruit' should be a priority for the Ag. Ed. Support Team.
4. One remark made in group discussion: "Lower tax revenues are the downside of Act 319." It's to the Ag. Ed. Support Team's credit that they are working to supplement other revenues in order to support a valuable program for our youth.