

PROGRESS REPORT
MARCH 31, 2021

TASK FORCE 6: TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE RESEARCH STRATEGIC PLAN

MEMBERS:

Rick Vierling, Brent Auvermann, David Stelly, David Baltensperger, Debra Cummings, Rebecca Seguin-Fowler, Clare Gill, Cliff Lamb, Roel Lopez, Carl Muntean, Marco Palma, Elizabeth Parker, Elsa Murano, David Ragsdale, David Stelly, Max Sturdivant, Josh Wand, Angela Bailey, Juan Landivar (Chair).

CHARGE:

- The AgriLife Research Strategic Plan Task Force 6 will finish developing a five-year strategic plan that aligns the AgriLife Research Mission, Vision and Priorities (*roadmap*).
- The strategic plan should be aspirational (*ambitious, motivated, outcome-oriented*) as opposed to prescriptive (*narrow, rigid, inflexible*).
- Consistent with scenario planning (*futuristic, identify trends, driving forces*);
- and with an adaptive approach (i.e. a loop to iteratively *learn – evaluate – adapt*), See Figure 1.
- The process should include faculty, students, staff, and stakeholder input gathered through forums, surveys, and similar inclusive mechanisms.
- Prior to developing the final report, Task Force 6 will meet with the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Strategic Plan and the International Research and Development in AgriLife Task Forces to harmonize relevant areas of the strategic plan.

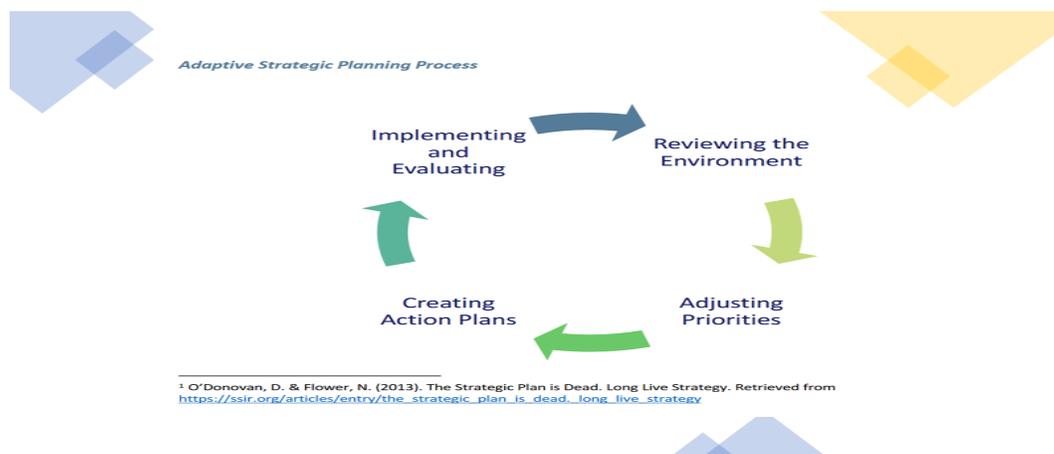


Figure 1. Adaptive Strategic Plan (learn – adapt – evaluate)

Scenarios, driving forces or the environment

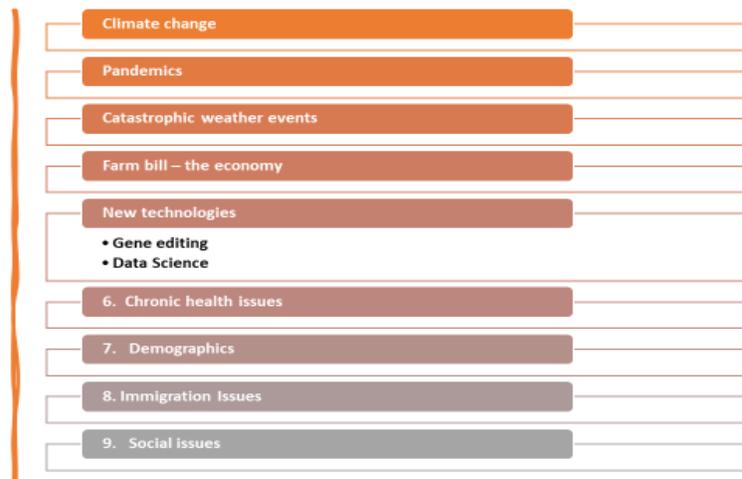


Figure 2. Driving forces discussed with member which can be consider in the development of an adaptive strategic plan (learn – adapt – evaluate).

Deliverables.

Task Force 6 will develop an aspirational, motivated, adaptive strategic plan (roadmap), including mechanisms to learn, adapt and evaluate outcomes (Figure 1.) and nimbly respond to scenarios or driving forces such as those listed in Figure 2.

The team will draft a new Vision and Mission statement for the Agency, reflecting the thoughts and undertaking of an aspirational strategic plan.

The Task Force 6 will revise and fine-tune the following list of priorities (defined by previous strategic planning team) as base-priorities:

- **Priority #1 (focused on generating cutting-edge discoveries)**
Create and facilitate the adoption of evolving innovations, technologies, and science-based data to proactively provide solutions to continually enhance agricultural and ecological systems, and the life sciences.
- **Priority #2 (focused on agriculture production, including environmental sustainability)**
Provide the fundamental and translational research for the development and production of high-quality, safe, and sustainable food and fiber systems with local, national, and global impact.

- **Priority #3 (focused on economic strength)**
Enhance and extend the efficiency and profitability of Agriculture and food systems in the state of Texas and beyond.
- **Priority #4 (focused on human health)**
Create and disseminate scientific evidence at the intersection of human health and agriculture.
- **Priority #5 (focused on a specific rider in our Bill Pattern)**
Detect, monitor, and mitigate threats to Agriculture and Public Health.

Action Plan and Team Activities:

The full task force met two times (March 18, and March 25). During the first meeting the team defined the two strategic activities listed below.

Strategy one. Develop an internal and external survey with the objectives of obtaining information from AgriLife faculty at COALS departments, Research and Extension Centers and institutes, graduate students, and staff to define the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats (SWOT) for AgriLife-Research.

The information will be used to (1) define/ fine-tune research priorities for our strategic plan and (2) to guide the linkage or coordination of the AgriLife-Research strategic plan with the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and other AgriLife Units, Texas A&M University, and the Texas A&M System.

The subcommittee developing the questionnaire for both, the internal and external surveys is composed by Marco Palma, Richard Vierling, Carl Muntean, Elizabeth Parker, David Stelly and Juan Landivar. Discussions are underway with other Task Force fellows to coordinate surveys to the extent possible.

The subcommittee met twice during the month of March. Members reviewed questions for both, an internal and an external survey for key stakeholders. The committee discussed the pros and cons of open-ended questions vs. providing built-in categories, including the option to add other comments in boxes. The team opted for developing a list of predefined options for each question, including the option to type alternative answers and comments not included in the main list.

These activities are currently underway. A final list of questions and response options will be presented to all member of the Task Force for input in early April. We expect to have revised versions of the internal and external questionnaires by the end of April. The survey instrument will be distributed to faculty and stakeholders in early May. The data analysis will be conducted in late May/early June. The results will be tabulated and reported in June.

Strategy two: A subcommittee was assembled to revise our *mission* and *vision* statement. The subcommittee members are Elizabeth Parker, Rebecca Seguin-Fowler, Brent Auvermann, Elsa Murano, Cliff Lamb, Joseph Cox, Maxwell Sturdivant, David Ragsdale, and Juan Landivar. The subcommittee is currently evaluating options for a *vision* and *mission* statement and reviewing the previous AgriLife Research Strategic Plan and 2019/2020 steering committee work on mission/vision/priorities, the new AgriLife Strategic Plan, TAMU and System strategic plans to use as reference.

The proposed modifications to the *vision* and *mission* statements will be presented to the full Task Force in April for review and discussion. We expect to finalize the revised statements by the end of April.

Activities planned for April 2021 :

1. Complete revisions of the questionnaire and alternative answers for each question of both, the internal and external surveys.
2. The Complete revisions of the new roadmap for AgriLife Research (vision, mission, and base-strategies).
3. Communicate activities of Task force 6 to the chairs of other Task Forces.

The chair thanks the valuable contributions of Ms. Cathy Cardwell (Texas A&M AgriLife-Corpus Christi) and Ms. Angela Bailey in the preparation, distribution of documents and organizing meetings for this group.

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Strategic Plan

The “College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Strategic Plan” task force has had three meetings to date (March 17, March 23 and March 29) regarding “College Policies for Graduate Education”. The members reviewed and discussed the task force charge in both meetings. There was some concern around if COALS stakeholders really want us to be visionary and why we would only limit ourselves to five years. However, it was noted that this strategic plan is a requirement of the state, and also for COALS reporting on TAMUs priorities, which somewhat constrains the scope. It was also noted our charge, being COALS and not AgriLife, should primarily focus on the undergraduate and graduate missions, including off campus (but not on graduate education policy, which is a separate task force). At the second meeting the members decided to accept the charge without modification. At the first meeting there was substantial discussion around expanding membership of the task force, considering additions to: represent all departments, graduate / undergraduate program committees, undergraduates, administrative assistants, staff and underrepresented groups. At the second meeting it was determined that these groups voices could be better included through targeted processes gathering their input; task force membership was not necessary and would make the group less nimble in decision making. The task force decided to proceed with the membership as assigned.

The task force brainstormed specific stakeholders in the second meeting as a first step in our process to gather their input, as some require different communication strategies than others. For example reaching parents and employers, huge groups without formalized connections to TAMU, would require different strategies versus current students and donors or boosters who have direct TAMU roles and contacts. The taskforce began to brainstorm processes that might be used around gathering data, surveying these stakeholders, and other methods to collect input. There was agreement than any survey must have targeted questions to get the input needed and not waste stakeholders time. Considering institutional review board review, a survey could easily take two months to send out and longer to obtain and understand feedback so we must be deliberate. In the interest of soliciting input from all stakeholders as soon as possible, giving everyone a voice, and informing the survey questions, we discussed including an open ended web submission form at the college for anyone to provide input. This could be done immediately, the task force would be informed by quality input and disregard irrelevant input, and would ensure anyone with input would have an official way to communicate it.

In third meeting the task force reviewed existing strategic plans (past COALS, current TAMU, current TAMUS, current AgriLife) to have more discussion about the process we would take to get to a surveying stakeholders. It was determined that since COALS reporting must align to the TAMU strategic plan, we should start with task force members conducting a SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results) analysis reflecting each of the six TAMU plan priorities, plus additional reflections unique to COALS. The committee members individual SOAR analysis will be combined and discussed in our fourth meeting to inform the next steps in our process.

College Policies for Graduate Education

The task force has had two meetings to date (March 17 and March 26) regarding “College Policies for Graduate Education”. The members reviewed and discussed the task force’s charge in both meetings. There was some concern about evaluating MS programs income generation as part of the charge, since some felt that this was a matter that should be handled at the Department level. However, there was agreement that if the task force left this in the charge that handling it at the Department level could be part of the recommendation. In the second meeting the task force decided to accept the charge as it was given. The task force reviewed and discussed membership at both meetings and considered including a postdoctoral scholar and junior faculty. At the second meeting the task force decided that there were already enough voting members and that other representatives would be more effectively engaged as stakeholders targeted for their input. With the charge and membership agreed upon, the task force then brainstormed a comprehensive list of primary stakeholders from whom input should be gathered, once task force goals and questions are better defined. Given the diversity of stakeholders it is likely multiple types of outreach will be needed to reach each group of stakeholders (e.g. academic advisors associated with TAMU, versus alumni, future students and employers not currently associated with TAMU). For the next step in our process the task force decided that breaking the charge into individual components to be addressed separately would be most effective, since each sub-charge requires different data and has different stakeholders and types of input needed. It is anticipated that a process for gathering input on each component of the charge will be determined well before the next report (end of April).

COALS Individualized Major in the College

To date the task force has had two meetings (March 19 and March 26) regarding “COALS individualized Major in the College”. After the first meeting the task force voted that they wanted to add three voting members Rebecca Hapes (ENTO) to represent academic advisors, Conner Neuman (AGEC) undergraduate to represent COALS Council, and Greg Stark (BAEN) to represent entrepreneurship as well as to request further information on the charge provided by Dean Stover. In the second meeting the task force agreed that they are comfortable with their charge and seek no more changes nor any changes in membership. The task force then identified a very long list of primary stakeholders who we will reach out to (likely through focus groups) later in the process once we have well-defined goals and questions. The task force’s next step (meeting #3) is to look at colleges with existing “choose your own major” programs as well as to look at peer-reviewed publications on the value of such programs. Based on what is learned, the task force will likely then formulate targeted questions for different identified groups of stakeholders to gather a wider spectrum of opinions on what should be considered.

International Research and Development in AgriLife (Task Force 9) Progress Report - March 2021

The International Research and Development in AgriLife Task Force held its inaugural committee meeting via TEAMS on 29 March 2021. In attendance were Task Force members Elsa Murano, Vikash Mishra, Heather Simmons, Daniel Leskovar, Juliana Rangel, Tim Davis, Russell Cross, Jeff Gwyn, Ky Pohler, Muthukumar Bagavathiannan, Kirk Winemiller, Elizabeth Parker, and Megha Parajulee (Chair). Executive Assistant Angela Bailey helped with the meeting logistics. Following are the discussion points that took place during the organizational meeting.

- A. Charge** - Review current AgriLife international activities and generate an options report that includes: 1) mechanisms to **increase the international portfolio** of the College, AgriLife Research and AgriLife Extension and **incentivize** unit and faculty participation; 2) an assessment of **future opportunities** and faculty needs to engage in international research, and 3) a **strategic approach and options for better administration and coordination** of international activities. The charge for the Task Force was discussed and expected deliverables were highlighted.
- B. Process** – Members of the Task Force engaged in a brainstorming session to express individual views and share international experiences relevant to the charge. The current International Activity Summary Report from 2020 was also reviewed and recognized as a valuable resource that should be used to gather already existing data on international liaisons and work being performed by AgriLife personnel.
- C. Issues** – The group highlighted the following points in relation to our discussion of Texas A&M AgriLife’s International Research and Development program:
- How to capture and compile the extensive amount of international work that is currently being done throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.
 - Engagement of units versus individual faculty (perhaps mix of both for synergy and IDC for the unit) in international activities.
 - Credit, reward, and recognition for international engagement.
 - Proper role of international activities in Land Grant System – How international programs support our land grant mission.
 - Our problems, specifically food security and economic opportunity, are global in nature. How can we best address this global issue?
 - Need to describe and catalog what we are doing today and clearly articulate where we want to go from here. Review the international programs and activities in our peer institutions to relate with our strength, scope, and future possibilities.
 - Structure of the university’s international program that serves two agencies and COALS for increased synergy.
 - Coordination of international programs amongst other colleges, universities, and agencies within the TAMU System (i.e., possible, relevant, important to AgriLife?).

- Return on investment of our international work is important.
- System should not be too intrusive but facilitate toward opportunities, as it seems to currently operate mostly from a bottom-up approach.

D. Action Plan – Task Force members discussed the process and scope of data collection and agreed to the following:

- Outline the prospective final report and deliverables that fully addresses the charge and expectations of this Task Force.
- Develop a fairly high-level (broad) outline that integrates both strategic and functional recommendations.
- The team recognizes that the only likely way to get a more complete picture of international activity across AgriLife would be through a detailed survey. Therefore, a survey questionnaire will be developed to generate data that will address the issues highlighted in Section C. However, the 2020 Summary Report and its survey structure will serve as the basis for the new and improved survey. Possibility of using a Qualtrics type of survey tool was also discussed. Also, the possibility of collaborating with Task Force #6 for a combined survey is being considered.
- We have already begun identifying data sources and initiating the collection of stored/available information. Dr. Leskovar is already coordinating with Dr. Jenna Kurten to extract information on international activities across AgriLife in Interfolio F180. While the quality of data will depend on how thorough faculty have been supplying details in F180, the data available on that platform should provide good information that will be complementary to the 2020 Summary Report. This will also help streamline our survey questionnaire.
- The team has designated Dr. Juliana Rangel as a co-chair who will coordinate the questionnaire development and survey work. Task Force members will be actively engaged in collecting information and will request Unit Heads across AgriLife to help maximize the survey response and assist in information gathering.
- We plan to meet at approximately two-week intervals via TEAMS and will also continue to work through email and other online platforms between the “face-to-face” TEAMS meetings.

Promotion Guidance for AgriLife Research Faculty Task Force

Progress Report - March 2021

This Task Force convened its committee meeting via TEAMS on 25 March 2021. In attendance were Task Force members Michael Brewer, Jane Dever, Kerri Gehring, Lee Tarpley, David Ragsdale, and Megha Parajulee (Chair). Angela Bailey helped with the meeting logistics.

The charge for the Task Force was presented and discussed. Specifically, the committee is expected to develop a **Consensus Promotion Guidance for AgriLife Research faculty**. The document should provide clarity and guidance on expectations for promotion to Associate Professor and Full Professor ranks and for peer evaluation of faculty achievements.

Task Force members discussed the process and scope of data collection and agreed to the following:

1. Contact P&T Chairs and Department Heads and seek their input on current promotion process and any limitations on the current document in serving AgriLife Research faculty career path and promotion. Selected faculty members may also be contacted if Department P&T Chairs and DH suggest. A standardized question set will be prepared, and Task Force members will contact these individuals.
2. Contact recently promoted faculty members and those who underwent the mid-term reviews for their input. A different set of standardized questions will be developed where each individual will have the opportunity to share their career development experience during their time in the rank and clarity/usefulness of the available information and what they felt was deficient in the current guidelines. Task Force members will individually visit with these individuals for their input.
3. Departmental P&T guidelines and current College P&T guideline will be reviewed to examine the promotion requirement and expectations across departments. Center Directors may also be contacted to seek their input.

The Committee has obtained information on recently promoted and mid-term reviewed AgriLife Research faculty and departmental contacts for DH and P&T Chairs. We are in the process of developing standardized question sets for interviewing individuals in #1 and #2 items above. We plan to have those questions finalized and gather data within the next two weeks and discuss that information in our next TEAMS meeting. Task Force members will be assigned with about equal number of individuals to survey and solicit feedback from these individuals. We plan to meet at approximately 2-week intervals but continue to work through email and other online platforms between the “face-to-face” TEAMS meetings.

Report 1 – March 31

Promotion Guidance for College Academic Professional Track

The task force has had two meetings to date (March 17 and March 26) regarding “Promotion Guidance for College Academic Professional Track”. The task force enthusiastically accepted the charge as outlined at <https://agrillife.tamu.edu/task-force-committees/promotion-guidance-for-college-academic-professional-track/> in their first meeting. We reviewed the charge during our second meeting to help us focus our discussions and approaches at meeting the charge.

In both meetings, we discussed and identified the audiences that would be impacted by this task force charge including adding additional members. Dr. Vicky Salin was added to our team given her experience as a former P&T chair in a department with several APT faculty. With the charge and membership agreed upon, the task force identified four audiences to gather input and recommendations to the document outlined in our charge:

1. College APT faculty;
2. Department Heads
3. Department P&T chairs
4. Associate Department Heads

We began brainstorming potential questions to our audiences during our March 26th meeting. Our task force decided to utilize a Qualtrics instrument to collect data. To date, our team has developed an eighteen-item mixed-methods Qualtrics instrument to collect data from the aforementioned audiences as input to construct our deliverable. We anticipate the instrument growing but questions are specific to title, and therefore, some questions will not be appropriate for all audiences. Hopefully, reducing the time to instrument completion and improving the response rate.

Our task force will continue to develop our data collection instrument over the next few weeks. We anticipate collecting responses from our identified audiences between mid-April to early May. We will also continue to focus on our charge identified on the website at each weekly task force meeting to meet our deliverable and be efficient. I mentioned enthusiastic earlier and this task force gives off that vibe as they have equally and openly volunteered in some facet that moves us toward our charge.

Our next task force meeting is **Thursday, April 1st** from 1-2pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Robert Strong Jr.

**Progress Report
March 31, 2021**

The Thomas Ranch – AgriLife Strategic Plan Task Force 8



Members:

Susan Ballabina, Rick Vierling, Brent Auvermann, Dan Hale, Andy Herring, Joshua Johnson, Darlene Locke, Summer Odom, Justin Scheiner, Chris Skaggs, Allyson Tjoelker, Billy Zanolini, Juan Landivar (Chair).

Dr. Bill Oates was invited to join the task force as the request of Juan Landivar. Bill was recommended by Dr. Tom Boggus.

The Charge:

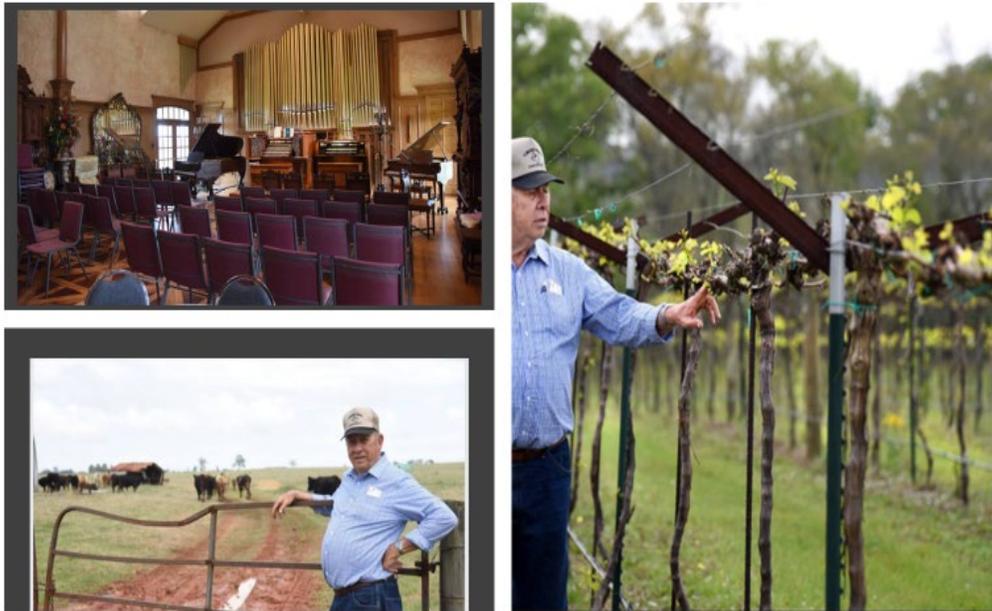
- The Task Force is charged with generating a feasibility assessment and options report for the best use of The Thomas Ranch.
- The options report should include and detail the potential for unique research and extension programming on the property and include a financial plan.
- Task Force 8 should examine the potential for the property:
 - To Educate urban and rural students
 - Explore public-private and corporate partnerships
 - Explore other innovative approaches related to the ranch's mission, programs and finances.

Description of the Ranch (source <http://give.am/a62DxRN>)

- Located approximately an hour drive from downtown Houston (Richards, Texas)
- 3,000-acre ranch is populated with more than 700 cows and their calves,
- 4,500 grape plants in a six-acre vineyard.
- Mr. Bill Thomas has a small concert hall in his residence that seats 150 people

In addition to the information found at the link above, Ms. Allyson Tjoelker provided information about the status of the transfer of the property to Texas A&M University. She estimated that the process may take 8-10 months. She also discussed the expectations of the Thomas Family on the management and purposes of the ranch. I extend my thanks to Allyson for the excellent presentation and description of the ranch.

It was suggested to organize a field trip for the Task Force to the ranch and possibly to meet with managers of the estate of Mr. Thomas.



Deliverables for the Task Force:

Task Force 8 will generate a feasibility assessment and options report that includes a research, extension, and financial plan for best use of the Bill Thomas Ranch.

Action Plan and Team Activities:

The task force has met twice (March 18 and March 25). During the first meeting, the team defined five potential programmatic activities for the ranch.

1. Livestock/pasture research and production – Leader Dr. Brent Auvermann
2. Viticulture/Horticulture research and production – Leader Dr. Justin Scheiner
3. Urban agriculture research – Leader Dr. Dan Hale
4. Education and outreach – Leader Dr. Billy Zanolini
5. Timberland production and research – Leader Dr. Bill Oates (TFS)

During the second meeting of the task force, all leaders listed above reported on progress made on their assigned activities. Each team leader invited members of this task force and others to join their teams.

Dr. Rick Vierling proposed seven potential revenue streams for the ranch.

1. Teaching fees
2. Farmgate sales
3. Sponsorship
4. Meeting rentals & corporate retreats
5. Outreach & extension fee-based programs
6. Grant income
7. Public private partnerships & leases

As information becomes available, the committee will align programmatic activities and revenue streams

Activities Planned for April 2021:

Activity team leaders will continue assembling their teams, organizing/brainstorming, producing a list of information needed to define the opportunities for the ranch.

Team leaders would consult with Rick Vierling for information he may need to develop a business plan for the ranch. Align programmatic activities and revenue streams listed above.

The chair thanks the valuable contribution of Ms. Cathy Cardwell (Texas A&M AgriLife-Corpus Christi) and Ms. Christi Anderson in the preparation, distribution of documents and organizing meetings for this group.

Youth Development in AgriLife

The task force has had two meetings to date (March 16 and March 23) regarding “Youth Development in AgriLife”. The members reviewed and discussed the task force’s charge in both meetings. There was some concern in our first meeting about the clarity of why we were doing this. The problem was not defined or what we were trying to solve. We examined the charge and discussed approaches to move forward to develop an options report for better administration and coordination of AgriLife youth development programs.

In the second meeting the task force decided to accept the charge as it was given per the information provided at <https://agrilife.tamu.edu/task-force-committees/youth-development-in-agrilife/>. We focused our work to internally examine and document existing AgriLife youth development efforts. The Applied Youth Development academic initiative was presented, discussed, and received feedback.

The task force reviewed and discussed membership at both meetings and considered the current membership would suffice given the charge. Given the diversity of stakeholders it is likely multiple types and forms of outreach will be needed to reach each group of stakeholders. For the next step in our process, the task force decided to break-up responsibilities into groups to investigate the existence and extent youth development efforts occur across AgriLife to build the Inventory.

With the charge and membership agreed upon, the task force has been documenting a comprehensive ongoing list of AgriLife units to understand and record, if any, youth development efforts. To date:

1. We are almost complete with input from all of the Research and Extension Centers.
2. We have a good start on the academic departments efforts but should have those completed in the next two weeks.
3. From Jenna Kurten, we have a spreadsheet containing names of COALS and AgriLife faculty who included “youth” in their bio-sketches or key terms fields in Interfolio.
4. We have a good start on documenting AgriLife Extension/ 4-H Youth Development Program efforts.
5. We have begun to record youth development offerings from Institutes and Centers on-campus but this area has received the list attention so far.

Our task force will continue to examine and document youth development efforts across AgriLife. It is anticipated that a process for examining the final Inventory will be determined before the next report (end of April).

Our next task force meeting is **Wednesday, March 31st** from 3-4pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Robert Strong Jr.