



Conducting an Agriculture Summit

*The Agriculture Summit is a one-day program that brings together stakeholders in a specialty agriculture region to develop a **shared vision and mission**.*

Establish a core group

This should include growers, farm organization representatives, tourism and economic development reps (such as from the county Industrial Development Authority), Cooperative Extension, historians and historical society reps. One organization may take on leadership in terms of hosting meetings, taking notes, and other administration.

- With at least three months' head start, pick a date at which the most growers will be able to attend. The core group will probably meet once a month during this preparation period, although subcommittees might be formed depending on how the group chooses to proceed.
- Heavily market the meeting; personally invite key individuals and follow up with a phone call to ensure their participation.
- Emphasize that the focus of this meeting is something everyone in the region has in common: its heritage. Heritage is generally a nonthreatening word and is a great entrée into other areas of collaboration, such as land use and economic development. But for the purposes of this summit, there is no other agenda.
- While the preparation will take months, the summit itself is only one day — that is, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with lunch provided.
- Typically a professional facilitator who has no stake in the outcome of the summit is hired to consult on the process and facilitate during the summit.
- The results of the summit can be used to develop a plan of work for an agricluster, or regional heritage development campaign, or any number of programs that might be developed. The vision statement can be used to inform a mission statement that describes the mission of the group as it works toward achieving its vision. Any ideas, issues, challenges or opportunities that come out of the vision and strategies exercises, but are not related to heritage tourism, can be archived for future use.

The day's events can vary greatly, but typically they include the following:

- Welcome and background by host organizations;
- Introductions (may use get-to-know-you exercise); and
- Outline of the day's activities, managed by the facilitator.

Day's activities:

- ***STEP 1. "Reviewing Our Past" Exercise.*** This can be done in different ways. One is to have a long horizontal sheet of paper with decades listed (sometimes this goes around the room) and have attendees write or draw images of the key businesses established and events that happened over the historical course of the region. This is usually very fun and engaging. Once this is completed the facilitator reviews the highlights of what has been documented. Clarifications and omissions are addressed. The facilitator encourage discussions of the history to elicit a sense of pride and community among participants.
- ***STEP 2. Conduct a Visioning Exercise.*** This can also be done in many ways. A common approach is to have the participants break into small groups that are heterogeneous — that is, growers, agencies and organizations represented in each group. The groups are asked to answer one simple question: "What do you hope the region will be like in 10 years?" Individuals in each group use sticky notes to generate as many answers to the question as they wish. Once everyone has completed their sticky notes within a group, they iteratively share their comments with a group facilitator who gathers the ideas generated into clusters on a tablet of paper. After the groups have completed this process, they share their clusters of visions with the other groups, taking their cluster to the front of the group. Similar clusters can be grouped together. During a break, the facilitator reviews all the vision clusters on the wall and give them "vision theme" names, such as "Young Families," or "Strong Family Farms."
- ***STEP 3. Affirm vision themes and produce a vision statement.*** Facilitator asks the group to tweak the theme names to their liking and asks if there are any additional themes that might have been left out. Once the affirmation is completed and the group is satisfied that they have an exhaustive group of themes, the small groups reconvene (this time mixing the participants up) and draft a vision statement. Once each group is ready, members present their statement to the large group. After all the statements are read, representatives of each small group convene briefly in a separate room and craft a single draft statement. This is presented to the large group for discussion, redrafting and affirmation.

- **STEP 4. In small groups, brainstorm a list of strategies for achieving or working toward the shared vision statement.** The small groups address the question: “How can we capitalize on our rich regional heritage to help us move toward or ultimately achieve our vision?” If there is time, the facilitator groups the ideas. If not, this can be done later by the core group, which will also prioritize the strategies.

- **STEP 5. Participants are encouraged to sign up on a contact sheet to participate in committees.** These individuals will be recruited later to sit on project committees that are formed based on the group strategies.

- **STEP 6. Thanks, final comments from hosts, and adjournment.**