

Las Cruces Town Hall Meeting
Nov. 1, 2007

Charlie Siepel convened the meeting at 10:15 a.m. by introducing Southwest District faculty present and the dean, who in turn gave the associate deans the floor to introduce their programs. Dean Lowell Catlett opened the floor for questions or comments.

Mary Thompson, a master gardener from Doña Ana County, said there was not enough awareness of the good work the College was doing and asked who was in charge of public relations. She said too much information on the college Web site was just for farmers. (She was guided to NMSU home horticulture sources on the Web including Plant Clinic).

Christina Little, from the Interagency Council, said she works with many social service providers. She said too many such providers do not think of Extension, even though her experience is that their services are desirable. She urged that Extension's services be made more prominent.

Dean Horton of Las Uvas Dairy, said a lot of good research is done, but the information is not getting to producers, because industry and university professionals do not come together. As a result, producers end up hiring expensive consultants. He added that the college needed to fill the pipeline for food production jobs. He encouraged lining up internships starting in high school on agricultural production operations. He said he has 18 such interns on his operation.

Povy Bigbee said that there was a great need for large animal veterinarians and she hoped the college would get that message to the largely female pre-vet students who overwhelmingly go into small animal and companion animal practice.

Terry Gutierrez, a graduate student in the college, said there was a need to connect mentors from the community and industry with NMSU students. She also said the international component in the college was deficient.

Joe Delk of the Extension and Research Support Council, said he is working to develop an active college alumni chapter locally and would like to get them involved in mentoring. Response was slow, however. He said a livestock judging alumni group was active and he thought an Extension alumni group would be viable. He called for Extension to get back to personal calls on ranches as he was concerned that not enough ranchers were familiar with their agents. He expressed concern that there was not an adequate work ethic in this upcoming generation.

Martha Sayles, president of the extension and Research Support Council, said she was concerned about rumors that Extension specialists were going to be incorporated into academic departments. (The Dean said there was no mandate or pressure to move people. Both incorporated and separate departments were in the college.)

Mary Ellen McKay, emeritus faculty member, asked how much of Extension's programming was being driven by grants and contracts. (Director Gutierrez said 48% of a \$34 million budget was grants and contracts. He added that he was concerned about service to base programs and was embarking on aggressive staff development to address it. He affirmed his commitment to agricultural and rural programs.)

Jim Money of Otero County, urged that Extension get back to traditional programs. He thought agents were distracted by too much paperwork. He lauded the Town Meeting idea, and said they should continue. (Dean Catlett noted the decline in positions devoted to supporting traditional programs since the 1970s. He said the base funding request was aimed at working on that problem.)

Barbara Berger of Las Cruces Public schools food and health services, said she appreciated Extension's help including grant funding accessed through Extension. She urged Extension to merge agricultural and health programming.

Dickie Ogaz, a Doña Ana County farmer, lamented the loss of good researchers and breeding programs in cotton, alfalfa, and peanuts. He asked about changes related to the New Mexico Crop Improvement Association. (Associate Dean Daugherty addressed responses to changes in the field, including on-going programs in alfalfa and peanuts and the move to transgenic cotton.)

Jan Settles, of the Extension and Research Support Council, decried slow hiring practices which threaten to kill the 4-H program. (Dean Catlett said he and other deans submitted a report to the president on the subject, declaring the system to be broken.)

David Salopek, Doña Ana County farmer, expressed concern about the negative publicity around U.S. agriculture and the lack of awareness in the public of the importance of America agriculture to consumers, particularly those who want to know that food is being grown properly for consumption. He wants the college to play a role in affirming the importance and goodness of buying American and New Mexican farm products and emphasizing their healthfulness.

Loren Horton of Las Uvas Dairy, complimented the work of the dairy specialists working out the Clovis agricultural Science Center.

Sylvia Sierra of Doña Ana County Health and Human Services, said Extension was meeting needs they identified. She urged more bilingual information , however.

Emma Amendieris , director of the Las Cruces Public Schools bilingual Migrant Program, asked what was being done to recruit children of migrant farm workers to college. (Programs cited to her included the ASSURED, CAMP, ENLACE and HSI grant programs)

Buddy Viramontes, a Doña Ana County farmer, expressed concern that farm land was being lost in the Mesilla Valley, and something needed to be done to keep farming alive in the valley.

Suggestion Box comments (anonymous) included concern that extension resources had been diverted away from college CES programs and decried the loss of Agricultural Communications as a major reason that there were problems with marketing.