One sure sign of summer is the seemingly endless “cone zones” of road construction. Like most of you, I eagerly await the end of the detours and delays that accompany them. But the end result is usually well worth the temporary inconvenience. The changes provide necessary improvements as well as a foundation to accommodate future expansion.

This past summer marked the completion of three construction projects for Purdue Agriculture that will play a pivotal role in keeping us at the forefront of teaching, research and outreach.

The $22 million Food Science Building opened in time to welcome our students for the fall semester. The building (see page 8) was formally dedicated in September in a ceremonial event that allowed us to publicly thank our state legislators for funding and our private donors for their generous gifts.

The facility houses more than $6 million in equipment in its 36 research and teaching labs, which include a 9,000-square-foot pilot plant and a computer-integrated manufacturing lab.

This state-of-the-art building sets the benchmark for food science programs, not only for its teaching and research resources but also for the technical assistance it can provide to food manufacturing companies.

In the pilot lab, we can test new methods or processes that are vital to the food industry without significant initial start-up delays or costs. Students and manufacturers alike can see how a process functions before putting it into production.

Linked to the pilot laboratory, the Computer-Integrated Food Manufacturing Center gives students hands-on experience in integrating management, quality control, computers and food processing.

The new horticulture greenhouses, which you may remember from a story in the spring issue of Agicultures, also provide expanded research and teaching opportunities. This facility, too, is a front-runner in technology. A computerized environmental control system monitors the greenhouses and makes adjustments as necessary. In our growth rooms, we can re-create nearly any environmental condition in the world.

The Birck Boilermaker Golf Complex is much more than an opportunity to engage in one of America’s favorite pastimes, no matter how much we might enjoy the game. A key component of the complex is the Daniel Turfgrass Research and Diagnostic Center, a living laboratory for students in turf management and the first comprehensive turfgrass research facility in the country. Initial research projects already are under way.

Our landscape architecture students also helped develop the master planting plan for the course, which was designed by the legendary Pete Dye.

These facilities that were once just a vision for the future are now a part of the road that will carry Purdue Agriculture into the 21st century. Look for stories originating from them in future issues of Agicultures.
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24 Purdue Extension—keeping connected

Cover photo by Tom Campbell
Are we on target? How do we know when we are? We in Purdue Extension ask ourselves these questions often—whether we work in counties or on campus.

Here’s our standard answer: “We live and work in every Indiana county. We are close to our customers. They tell us their concerns. That’s the backbone of Extension as a community-based organization. We know people of our communities are worried about those unresolved questions where easily available answers are just not good enough. This is what drives our educational programs.”

Not bad, but is the standard answer good enough these days? To make sure, we periodically need to check ourselves, our information and our analysis.

Typically, we engage in a major program planning effort every five years or so, which we call “plan of work.” This gives us a comprehensive sense of what is important across the state. Let me tell you a little about it.

During fall/winter 1997-98, we talked with people from all walks of life in every county. We asked two questions. First, what are the high-priority issues in your community? And second, what difference should we make with our educational programs?

The planning process has four parts: 1) Obtain ideas and opinions from each county about issues of greatest concern; 2) Find common issues and major themes across counties; 3) Assign teams of Extension specialists and educators to suggest how we can address each major theme; and 4) Develop a state plan of work that can be used in each county as a framework for specific county action plans.

We invited a broad cross section of leaders and interested citizens to meetings in each county. Attendance varied from 20 to more than 100, with some 5,000 people involved across the state. The responses we received were both enlightening and fascinating.

Compiling the issues identified in each county into major statewide themes was a difficult task. We had many long discussions about how to do this without losing the county dynamic. We finally concluded that a majority of the issues could be grouped under 16 major themes: agricultural awareness and understanding; agricultural competitiveness; alternative agricultural opportunities; community and economic development; environmental stewardship and natural resources conservation and protection; financial management; food safety and quality; forest and woodland stewardship, management and utilization; horticulture and turf; human safety; land use; leadership development; life skills, work readiness and career development; nutrition, health and wellness; resilient, self-reliant families; and youth development.

Interdisciplinary teams of specialists and educators have worked diligently to develop a statewide plan of work for each theme. But that is only the beginning. Each theme will be broken down into its basic elements. Campus faculty and county-based educators will form issues teams to develop educational programs and related learning materials for each specific element of the statewide plan. Over time, we anticipate these ongoing programs will include new scientific developments, and new issues may be added if warranted.

Why do a comprehensive plan of work? First, we want to know what problems or issues are of greatest concern to people across the state.

Why? Because this information helps Extension specialists and educators focus on educational programs that address the most important concerns statewide.

Why is that important? We know that everything mentioned during a county meeting is important to somebody. But we don’t have the resources to be all things to all people. After considering the problems and issues of each county, we set priorities. Priorities largely are determined by the complexity and scope of the issues that affect the most people.

Does this mean that all of our work must fall within those priorities? No. We ask our staff to plan 50 percent of their work within these priorities. Beyond that, they add specific issues of importance locally or situations that were not anticipated but clearly must be addressed. County Extension boards play an important role in helping establish priorities, and they provide another check to make sure we are working on problems that are important to people in their community.

The bottom line is that we in Purdue Extension must identify the most troublesome questions confronting the people we serve and build our programs on the best that science has to offer. If we can’t, we aren’t ‘professional’ educators in the fullest sense of the word. We must stay connected to people where they work, where they live and where they raise their families to ensure that we understand their needs. Only then can we conduct the educational programs necessary to provide them with the knowledge to make decisions critical to the success of their businesses, their families and their communities...your business, your family and your community.