

Writing a Successful Integrated Competitive Proposal: *Tips From a Funded Project on Promoting Value-Added Enterprises in Alabama*

Presented by

James O. Bukenya, Associate Professor

Department of Agribusiness

School of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences

Alabama A&M University

At the

CSREES/Integrated Competitive Programs Grantsmanship Workshop

March 10-11, 2008

Memphis, TN



Presentation Outline

- Writing an Integrated Proposal
 - Resources
 - Team Building
 - Project Development
 - Project Management
 - Challenges/Opportunities

- Tips from a Funded Integrated Project
 - Problem-focused
 - Stakeholder-driven
 - Outcome-oriented

Overview

■ Resources:

- Time and supporting staff

■ Team Building:

- Team members and their roles
- Pre-existing team or new team

■ Developing the Project and Writing the Proposal:

- How long does this take?
- Role played by each team member
- Time and resource allocation for each project function

Overview

■ **Managing the Project:**

- Project management plan
- Forms of communication
- Handling progress reports

■ **Project Challenges and Opportunities:**

- Identifying the challenges and how to overcome them
- Dealing with unexpected benefits or barriers?



TIPS FROM A FUNDED INTEGRATED PROJECT:

Promoting Value-Added Enterprises Among
Small-and Medium-sized Farms in Alabama

Components of the Proposal

A. Introduction

- (i) Long-term goals**
- (ii) Identification of the Research Problem**
- (iii) Current Research and Related Activities**
- (iv) Literature Review**

B. Rationale and Significance

- (i) Project Justification**
- (ii) Innovation**

C. Proposed Approach

- (a) Plan of Operation and Methodology**
 - (i) Project Objectives**
 - (ii) Proposed Approach**
 - Research Activities**
 - Extension Activities**
 - Education Activities**

(b) Expected Output: Logic Model

(c) How Results will be used

(d) Possible Pitfalls

(e) Limitations to Proposed Procedures

(f) Dissemination & Assessment Plan

(g) Timetable

(h) Evaluation Plans

(i) Continuation Plan

PROBLEM-FOCUSED

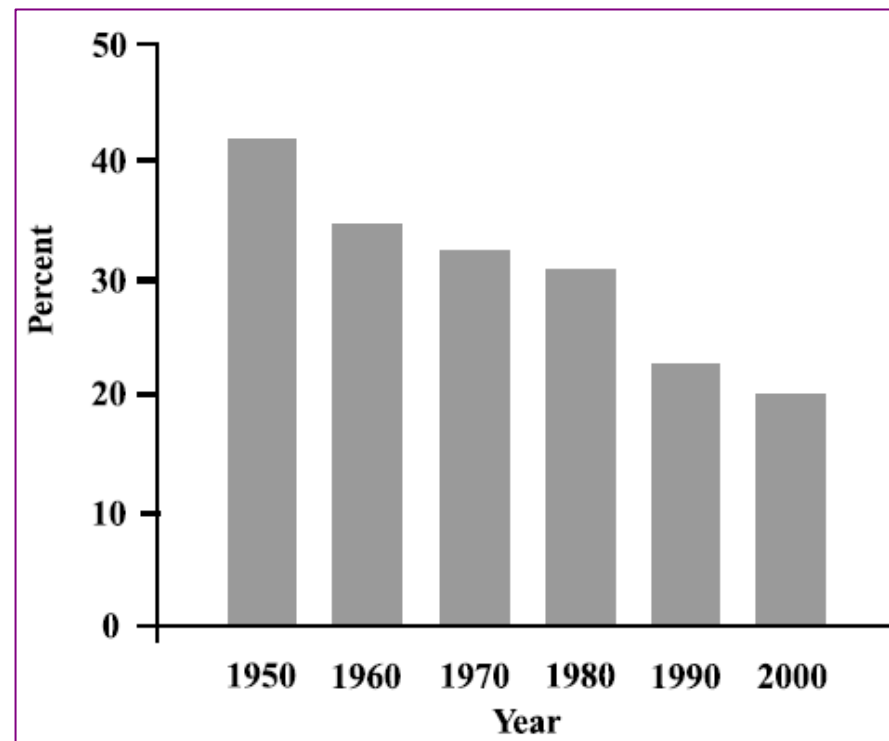
- What is the problem addressed by the project?
- What process did we use to identify the problem?

What is the Problem/Opportunity?

Overall Problem

- The percentage of the food dollar received by farmers continues to decline.
- As agricultural producers find it more difficult to make ends meet with diminishing profit margins, more emphasis is being placed on **adding value to those products.**

Figure 1: Farm Share of the Food Dollar



Sources: USDA (1999b). Food cost review, 1950-97. Washington, D.C.: ERS, Agricultural Economic Report No. 780 and USDA (Sept., 2001).

What is the Specific Problem?

- While value-adding initiative can help to support and sustain agriculture, many small-and medium-sized farmers in Alabama:
 - have inadequate information and limited capacity to assess these emerging value-added opportunities.
- Some of the interrelated problems include:
 1. Small-and medium-sized farmers in Alabama that are uninformed about the different approaches and procedures necessary to establish or organize these value-chains; and
 2. Individual producers who have little experience in working together to produce a value-enhanced product, with certain quality specifications, for these emerging markets.

Long-term Goal

- To identify and promote value-enhanced/added agricultural and food systems in Alabama, including new types of cooperative ventures, which have the potential to help small-and medium-sized producers increase farm income; and to have a positive impact on rural communities.
 - The project is designed to examine the emerging markets from the perspective of consumers and end-users, as well as assess how local groups of farmers and other economic development practitioners can facilitate the marketing and/or processing of high-value agricultural products.

Project Objective

1. Assess the potential for small-to medium-sized farm families to produce value-added specialty products, by gaining a better understanding of what is occurring, what works well, what does not, and how these value chains impact farmers.
2. Identify the impact that the production of high value commodities, including the role of collaborative producer associations and small agro-processing firms, can have on the development of rural communities.
3. Determine the profitability of these value chains, including collaborative ventures for the different types of enterprises.
4. Develop and implement an operational outreach and technical assistance program to enhance awareness of, and increase participation in value-added enterprises among small-and medium-sized farmers.

How was the Problem Identified?

Through Current Research and Related Activities:

- **NRI Bridge Grant**
 - **Enabled us to conduct community level focus group discussions that centered broadly on community-supported agricultural efforts; and the types of agricultural-based enterprises that might best contribute to rural development.**

- **AALGA Funding**
 - **Enabled us to meet with a group of stakeholders in Birmingham, Alabama to discuss our research ideas.**
 - **The group confirmed our observations that there were in fact opportunities for capitalizing on new markets and new products, and they provided several local examples.**
 - **Also, it was pointed out that small and medium-size farmers may be in a better position than large farmers to produce high-value commodities.**

How was the Problem Identified?

- While the stakeholder meeting was mainly a "reality-test" of our initial research ideas, the receptivity of the group to our discussions resulted in their willingness to engage in future meetings to review, and possibly, participate in the proposed research program.
- The stakeholder meeting convinced us that there was considerable merit in research projects that examine value-added initiatives.
 - The need for more information and data, more coordination among farmers, and research on the types of changes occurring on the demand side were highlighted.



STAKEHOLDER-DRIVEN

- Who will benefit from the solution we create?
- How did we gather and use their input?

Stakeholder-Driven

- **Who were the stakeholders involved?**
 - **Two staff members of the Alabama Cooperative Extension Sys.**
 - **The president of Jefferson County Truck Growers Association**
 - **The manager of Birmingham farmers' market**
 - **The director of the Alabama Farmers' Market Authority**
 - **Four farmers involved in producing value-added products**
 - **Two fruit and vegetable growers**
 - **A producer of organic grain and livestock**
 - **A representative of groups attempting to exploit new domestic and foreign markets**
 - **One representative of the Alabama Tri-Star Rabbit Association**
 - **One representative of the Alabama Sheep and Goat Association**
 - **One representative from the Alabama Dept. of Agriculture**
 - **Two representatives from AALGA**

Stakeholder-Driven Research Approach

I. Survey Approach:

- **Alabama farmers**, including detailed follow-up studies of farmers producing selected high value commodities;
- **Alabama markets for value-enhanced commodities**, including elevators and other grain handling operations, as well as non-traditional markets for specialized products;
- **Collaborative ventures**, such as producer alliances, and agri-business firms created to process and/or market specialty grains and other high value products; and
- **Economic development organizations** within Alabama to determine their role in helping to organize and promote the processing and marketing of high value farm products.

Stakeholder-Driven Research Approach

II. Case Studies:

- In-depth case studies will be conducted of both successful and unsuccessful production, processing and/or marketing systems for selected high value commodities to determine the factors that appear to be most important to the success of these value chains and systems;

III. Pilot Projects

- Information from both the surveys and case studies will be used to design two *pilot projects* in different parts of Alabama where the research team will partner with local leadership teams to jointly investigate opportunities for developing several new value chains within a pilot project area.

Stakeholder-Driven Research Approach

IV. Feasibility Studies:

- Feasibility studies will be conducted to evaluate the economic viability of high value products that appear promising for each pilot project area;
- The income and employment *impacts* of these value chains will be analyzed to determine the economic and other benefits that accrue to producers, farm groups, rural communities, consumers and the environment;

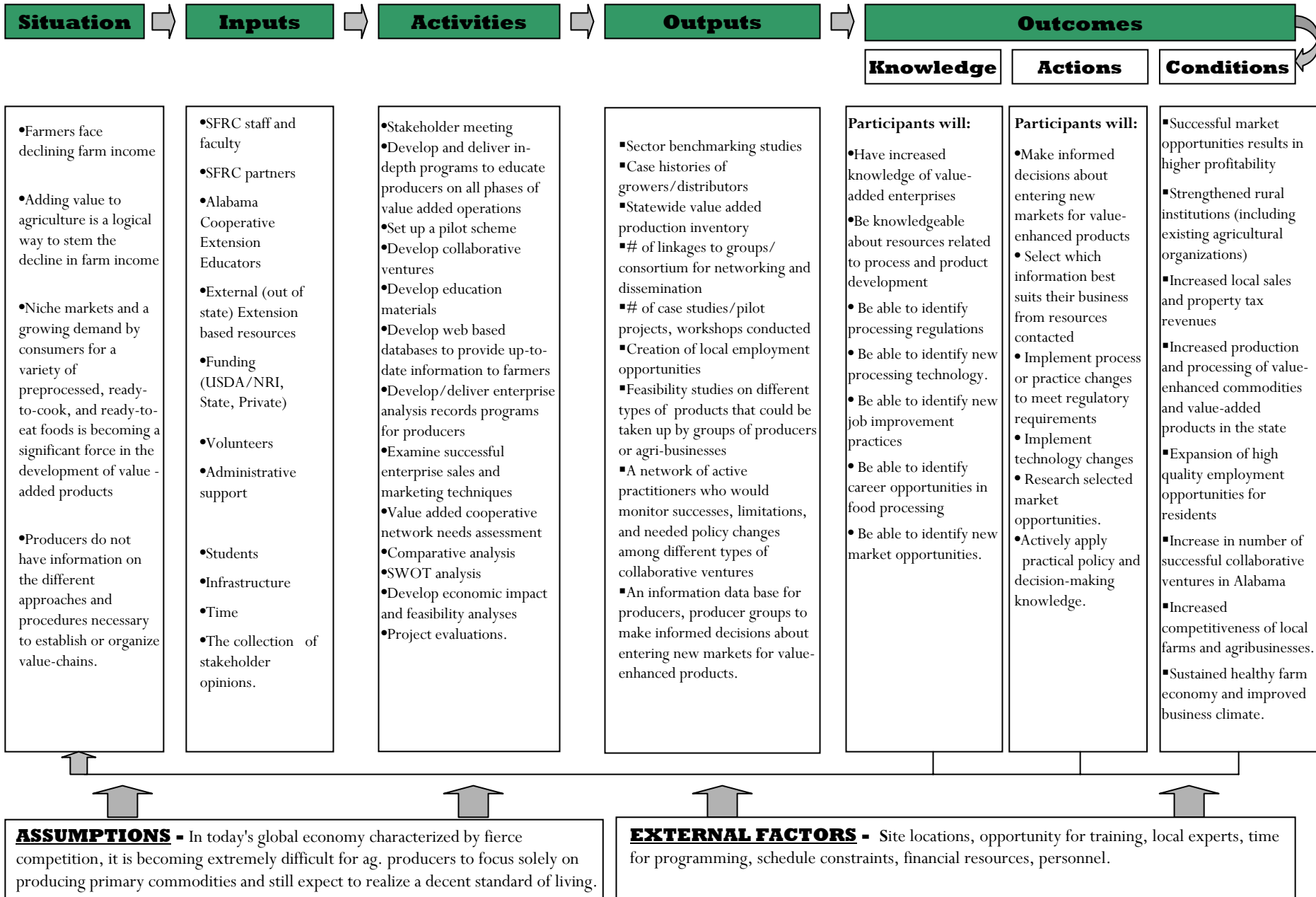
V. Extension and Outreach:

- The information gathered from the surveys, case studies, pilot projects and feasibility studies will be used to design and carryout the proposed extension, outreach and education efforts.

OUTCOME-ORIENTED

- What are the outcomes we expect to achieve?
- How will we measure and assess our progress toward achieving these outcomes?

Promoting Value Added Enterprises in Alabama



How is Project Progress Measured?

- Using quantitative and qualitative evaluative techniques.
- These techniques are:
 - self-administered surveys,
 - focus groups,
 - direct observations,
 - case studies and pilot projects, and
 - review of records.
- Progress will also be measured by the changes made in the new and existing production-processing and marketing techniques.
 - Data will be provided by the farmers, during personal visits and group meetings.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

*Thank you
For
Your Attention.*