

**UCDAVIS**

**AGRICULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE**

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**UC DAVIS AGRICULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE (ASI)  
EXTERNAL ADVISORY BOARD MEETING  
DECEMBER 9-10, 2008**

**MEETING REPORT  
January 16, 2008**

**Prepared by: Karen Thomas with Bev Ransom and Thomas P Tomich**

## SUMMARY



*Back row: Jonathan Kaplan; Richard Rominger; Craig McNamara; Howard Shapiro; Jennifer Ryder Fox; Greg Drescher; Tom Tomich; Front Row: Margaret Worthington; Judith Redmond; Martha Guzman Aceves; Ashley Boren; Noelle Cremers (for Paul Wenger); Cornelius Gallagher; Maggie Lickter*

*Attendees missing from this photo: Neal Van Alfen; A.G. Kawamura*

The inaugural meeting of the Agricultural Sustainability Institute's (ASI) External Advisory Board was held on December 9-10, 2008. Thirteen of the twenty-one board members were able to participate in the meeting, in addition to faculty and staff who joined relevant sessions. The meeting was chaired by Howard Shapiro and facilitated by Nancy White. A dinner was held on the first evening and provided an opportunity for additional staff and faculty, as well as donors to ASI, to become better acquainted with the board. The thought-provoking dialogue, stimulating interactive activities and diverse opinions created a strong collaborative base and many exciting ideas for ASI.

The goals of the meeting are listed below and, using these as a metric, the meeting surpassed our expectations. The group expressed a high degree of excitement for the role that ASI can play in connecting to external stakeholders and bringing real-world, practical sustainability solutions to food and agriculture in California.

### ***Goals of the Meeting:***

*To share, discuss, and explore...*

- *Where we are today - Set the scene of the Institute to date*
- *We need you - building relationships across the board as a motivated team of stakeholders to advise the Institute*
- *The Big Picture - Get advisory board advice on big picture vision and specific priorities for the Institute*
- *Get tactical - Begin working specifically on communications and fundraising strategies*
- *Get concrete - Identify next steps*

The following is a brief summary of key discussion points and action items stemming from the two-day agenda.

## **WELCOME**

The meeting started on a very positive note, with the spirit for the two-day event characterized as “improvisation”. Some background to the establishment of ASI was provided by several board members and the emphasis on stakeholder involvement in this process was commended. It was noted that the advisory board will play an important role in helping ASI continue to make these connections and ensure that our research and activities have an impact on the real world.

## **WHERE ARE WE AT RIGHT NOW?**

As director of ASI, Tom Tomich provided an overview of the big picture issues for the institute, emphasizing that things are still a work in progress and advice from the board will be critical as we progress. Much of the discussion focused on ASI’s current vision statement which is a vision for what the food and agriculture system should be versus a vision that is specific to what ASI, as an institute, should strive for.

### **Key Discussion Points:**

- ASI builds on existing programs and facilities. As a statewide program, SAREP offers unique opportunities.
- Re-establishment of SAREP’s grant program is a key priority; envision long-term, stable funding.
- ASI does not have to do everything for everyone.
- ASI will develop metrics and indicators for its vision and priorities in future years.
- Intention is for ASI’s agenda to be driven by what stakeholders want, balanced with UC Davis needs and resources.
- ASI is exploring ways to consult with stakeholders (e.g. online survey, face-to-face meetings) and will need savvy communications strategies moving forward. The communications and fundraising plans being developed will help frame our approach.
- ASI’s online survey received 651 responses. Results showed that every issue is important to someone; however, 8/10 top ten issues fit within ideas developed by staff, faculty, and students in a separate process, so we appear to be on track.

### ***Action Items/Needs Deliberation:***

- Table SAREP review at next board meeting.
- Revisit language in vision statement. For example, what does “good” food mean? Other suggestions: healthy, nutritious.
- Are the vision and mission for California, the U.S., or the world? Or perhaps California first, then other geographics? (via email from Carl Johnson, December 8, 2008)
- For core values, consider providing a brief definition for each; possibly add a fifth value, “courage”. (via email from Carl Johnson, December 8, 2008)

**CAFÉ CALIFORNIA – BUILDING A PICTURE OF OUR VISION &  
 SETTING PRIORITIES FROM AMONG THE ISSUES**

The assembly split into three workgroups tasked with imagining what people would say about ASI in 10 years time. This was an energetic and interactive session that covered many of the key issues facing ASI in the near-term - what is the vision for ASI specifically? What is ASI’s role? How can ASI prioritize among competing issues and demands? Who are our main audiences and what are their needs? Below is a pictorial representation of this discussion which displays the vision of ASI as the “go-to” place for information, as a connector, and as a navigator for the many different issues and constituencies in sustainable food and agriculture.



**Key Discussion Points:**

- ASI should strive to bring people together who normally do not work in partnership – hence the need for coordination, communication, and collaboration.
- Ensure that language used by ASI is inclusive; this will facilitate trust and help people relate to the ideas.
- Deal with the “us-them” mentality.
- Public should be the ultimate beneficiary of activities. Stakeholder involvement is critical to establish trust in ASI.
- How will the social aspects of sustainability (e.g. labor, access to food) be addressed by ASI?
- Role of ASI as a bridge between thinking and doing.
- Who are ASI’s customers? To determine best role for ASI, should look to their needs and see what resources are missing.

### **Summary:**

There were many suggestions on what *unique role* ASI can play in sustainable food and agriculture. Within these, some clear categories emerged (as represented in the picture above). On the second day Tom Tomich revisited these categories and, to make things more tangible, provided examples of current or planned activities that fit within the various roles for ASI.

#### • **Convenor**

- ASI acts as a forum for safe dialogue; bring everyone on the continuum together to work towards sustainability as a common goal.
- Need to be inclusive, unbiased, legitimate, and diverse in perspectives.
- Relationships and dialogue should flow two-ways.
- ASI can connect people, both internally within UC Davis and externally.
- *Examples of ASI activities:* national symposium on March 24-26 – day 1 is a symposium that will bring together media and policymakers with leaders and academics; day 2 is a policy roundtable; day 3 is a meeting of national network of leaders; under Packard grant, ASI will meet with stakeholders to understand their assessment of needs and how information can be used; explore opportunities for water niche for ASI as water was identified as a key issue in our online survey.

#### • **Thought-leadership**

- ASI needs to connect researchers and facilitate interdisciplinary work that represents all three (or four) pillars of sustainability. (It was proposed that the fourth pillar of sustainability is education)
- Facilitate research and applied science that will have an impact on farming practices.
- Identify priorities. Given limited resources, ASI cannot do it all; may need to focus on collecting and analyzing other research and thinking about how to best disseminate it to relevant groups.
- How can ASI be a leader and utilize the resources and capacity of UC Davis?
- *Examples of ASI activities:* nitrogen assessment research under the Packard grant will link nitrogen and climate change as policy issues for AB32; energy in the food system.

#### • **Information-sharing**

- ASI as a clearinghouse to coordinate between research and information exchange; but need to determine parameters of *what* and *for whom*.
- Focus on practical information and solutions for applied learning.
- Impact policy by educating policymakers; help define big issues for debate by providing credible and unbiased information.
- Information should flow both ways; need to understand what the needs are of our stakeholders.
- *Examples of ASI activities:* website redesign is a high priority and will contain links to other resources as well as information on ASI's research; institutional "maps" of what is going on and who to connect with at UC Davis, UC, and UCCE institutions.

- **“Do”- tank**

- In addition to being a coordinator/clearinghouse, ASI also needs to drive the agenda.
- Take early action on major issues, especially those that are controversial and where ASI can act as a champion.
- Need to develop action oriented initiatives.
- *Examples of ASI activities:* SAREP grants program (may be opportunities to invest in social issues here); under the Packard grant, assessment of technologies and best practices and strategies to get this information disseminated to stakeholders.

- **Nurture leadership**

- Have successful undergraduate program in sustainable food and agriculture with 500 students at any given time; students move easily into careers.
- How can ASI fit in with (and help drive changes to reinvent) cooperative extension and create better linkages to farmers?
- Build next generation of leaders; nurture career development to attract the best and brightest to agriculture industry.
- Facilitate opportunities for practical experience for students; include representatives of the community, farmers, and other stakeholders on projects (e.g. fellowships across UC system, internships with local farmers).
- Do we need a new farmers corps and how can we make this happen?
- *Examples of ASI activities:* new undergraduate major; new leadership award; school garden-based learning programs.

**Action Items/Needs Deliberation:**

- Decide on operational definition of sustainability. Are there four pillars or three?
- How will the social aspect be addressed by ASI? What do we mean by “social”?
- What role can the board play in helping ASI establish priorities? What role can the board play in helping ASI prioritize at a programmatic level?
- Consider hosting a water symposium using Australia as a learning lab.
- Make a “map” of all UC Davis centers and organizations and how they relate to ASI’s goals to identify gaps and areas of overlap. Identify “sister” groups to partner with and determine the most effective flowpaths for joint work (e.g., monthly coffee meetings, co-sponsor events).



**FIELD TRIPS**

The group spent the afternoon “getting their feet dirty” on a tour of the Russell Ranch Sustainable Agriculture Facility and the Student Farm. This provided an opportunity to learn about some of ASI’s on-the-ground programs.

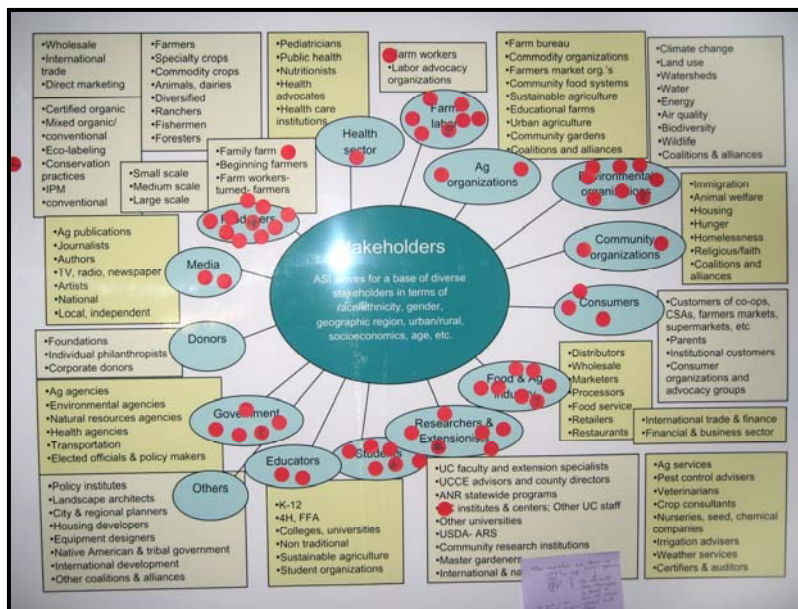


Russell Ranch Sustainable Agriculture Facility



Student Farm

**LOOKING AT OUR STAKEHOLDERS**



Day two started with a discussion of ASI’s stakeholders. The group reviewed ASI’s stakeholder diagram and then participated in a “dotmocracy” activity in which they identified who they saw as ASI’s two-to-three primary stakeholders. The results, as shown at left, were dispersed, although there was clear consensus that some groups were not viewed as a high priority. It was agreed that this is an area that needs more deliberation in order to identify key leverage points to activate

as a whole network, and the board’s advice on prioritizing among stakeholders and making connections to their constituencies will be invaluable.

### **Key Discussion Points:**

- The composition of the board was designed to try to reflect the diversity of ASI's stakeholders.
- The range of stakeholders can seem daunting; ASI cannot be all things for all people and needs to strategically focus on key partners and leverage points.
- Again, language was identified as a key issue. Choosing the right language to relate to different constituencies is important.
- Idea of sustainability as a continuum; we may not all be in the same place along the spectrum, but are all working in the same direction. Perhaps ASI should focus on areas where most people are on this continuum.
- Ensure that these relationships flow two-way and facilitate a co-learning community.

### **Action Items/Needs Deliberation:**

- How to define ASI's stakeholders – e.g. customers, constituencies, primary beneficiaries, partners, network, or all of the above?
- Need to look at our stakeholders in terms of leverage points and how to activate as a whole network.
- How much of the continuum can/should ASI serve?
- Think about depth and breadth; where to go deep with specific constituencies and where to be broad.

## **HOW DO WE SUPPORT THIS VISION? (DRAFT FUNDRAISING PLAN)**



Melissa Haworth, director of major gifts in the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (CA&ES), is working with ASI on developing a fundraising strategy and in identifying and cultivating opportunities for significant gifts. To implement the long-term vision for ASI, a \$50 million campaign for philanthropic gifts was proposed to provide long-term stability for ASI's programs and activities. Although the group agreed that this is an ambitious goal, there was overall support that it is an appropriate target in

order to implement the vision for ASI. A draft case statement for support has been prepared and, once finalized, will be used to try to match donors with activities/programs that fit their interests. Advice from the board on the fundraising plan and case statement will be incorporated into ASI's next steps.



**Key Discussion Points:**

- The ASI fundraising plan nests within the larger campus campaign to raise \$900 million (of which CA&ES is \$211 million). But, we need to coordinate efforts across campus so we are not competing against each other.
- Strategy is to look for a mix of big gifts and smaller donations (e.g., membership program). The key is to match people with activities/programs that speak to them.
- “Friend development” could play a key role.
- Need to be careful to preserve the integrity of science in the public interest.
- Look to ways to build off the SAREP grants/projects or explore opportunities for student exchanges with international groups.
- A gap analysis of existing research and how it is funded may reveal what is missing.
- A number of ideas on potential donors were generated for follow-up.

**Action Items:**

- Melissa and Tom will call upon board members to help open doors with prospective donors.
- Board members will contact Melissa and Tom about potential prospects or suggestions for events or activities where we can raise awareness of ASI and/or create linkages (e.g. speaking opportunities, dinners).
- Board members will promote ASI to potential donors they meet.
- Volunteers to review the case statement: Craig McNamara, Judith Redmond, Greg Drescher, Rich Rominger, Amparo Perez-Cook (subsequent to the meeting).

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**HOW DO WE REACH OUR STAKEHOLDERS? (DRAFT COMMUNICATIONS PLAN)**

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ASI has retained Fenton Communications to draft a communications strategy for ASI to frame our outreach and engagement activities over the next few years. Based on a review of ASI’s collateral and strategic documents, assessment of peer organizations, a media audit, and survey and interviews with key staff and stakeholders, Fenton tabled their preliminary suggestions on ASI’s primary audiences and opportunities for effective communications. Advice from the board will be incorporated into the final report and will assist ASI in prioritizing next steps.

**Key Discussion Points:**

- ASI is in a unique position to be a convenor and help forge common ground. Need to work on better cohesion among ASI’s “parts” to improve effectiveness.
- Given ASI’s limited staff and resources, need to be strategic and establish a strong foundation over next two years from which we can expand.

- Suggest ASI use signature initiatives and related signature products as a way to package activities; something that people will associate with ASI. What these activities and products will be depends on how ASI sets its priorities.
- Find new ways to engage the public (e.g., visits to Russell Ranch and Student Farm).

***Action Items/Needs Deliberation:***

- Consider including processors/distributors/retailers in primary audiences.
- Revisit language. The language used can help build trust or trigger distrust. Specific terms identified as sensitive to some audiences: sustainability, social equity, “good” food, stakeholders.
- How to “brand” ASI so its function and role is clear to others, but also draws upon the established reputation of UC and UC Davis.
- Think about how to define ASI’s role as it relates to our stakeholders - e.g., navigator.
- Think about what ASI’s signature initiatives and products should be and what audiences these should focus on.
- Need to do a better job of promoting media attention on ASI successes (e.g., publications, building stories, milestones among faculty).

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**NEXT STEPS**

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In addition to action actions and areas that need further deliberation already identified, some additional next steps were discussed, mainly relating to the role of the advisory board and how they can best assist ASI.

- It was agreed that another face-to-face board meeting will be planned for late May/early June.
- ASI will explore other ways to engage board members on a more regular basis (e.g., e-meetings, conference calls).
- Think about 5-6 strategic priorities for short, medium, and long term and how they can be implemented. How can the board provide feedback on the development of ASI’s strategic initiatives and their implementation plan (i.e. the tactical action plan)?
- Need to clarify boundaries regarding individuals’ role as advisory board member versus partner; overall need to clarify roles of advisory board members.

***Action Items:***

- Solicit feedback from board on communications plan once submitted by Fenton.
- Clarify expectations for the board regarding SAREP.
- ASI follow-up with absent board members.
- ASI will prepare formal appointment letters for board members.
- For next board meeting, continue conversation regarding specific activities and the overall ASI workplan and how the board can best be involved.

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