



**The Agriculture Network Information Center (AgNIC) and e-Extension:
Commonalities and Opportunities**

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AgNIC's Vision: “to be a premier comprehensive web portal for agriculture and the related sciences using state-of-the-art technologies. The AgNIC Alliance will serve as a model for collaborative and synergistic provision of discipline-specific electronic information.”

AgNIC Strengths:

- 1) continually growing “alliance” since 1995; currently involves 44 partners land-grant universities, the National Agricultural Library, Cooperative Extension, and others
- 2) successful collaborative model based on voluntary “bottom-up” participation with limited funding
- 3) established organizational structure providing central, identifying image, while also maintaining “brands” of individual partners
- 4) growing record of successful competitive grants
- 5) established technical foundation including standards for metadata, controlled vocabulary, customizable portal applications, ADA compliance, and new web services applications
- 6) operational central database of distributed links and information resources
- 7) provision of online reference services linking users to experts

e-Extension's Vision: to re-establish Extension's brand and purpose and to satisfy new customer base and societal needs

“plan and implement a national web-based information and education network for current and new Extension clientele that will support just-in-time learning by providing coordinated access to LGU expertise”

e-Extension Strengths:

- 1) strong “top-down” leadership with an articulate and persuasive vision for Extension's survival by using technology to bring trusted and valued agriculture-related information to U.S. citizens
- 2) based on historical successes and widespread reputation in diffusing research and knowledge from the land-grant system to taxpayers
- 3) potentially could link information and resources from 3,000 local outlets
- 4) well-defined plan for a content management system involving a metadata database and interface, format management, peer-review, use of templates and automated publishing
- 5) allocation of Smith-Lever funds from five out of six states to fund first year of development (2004-05); newly hired Director and two Associate Directors for Technology and Content Development

AgNIC Issues and Opportunities:

- 1) stable core funding for maintaining servers, up-dating central web site, and providing incentives for partners to cost-share
- 2) expanded content areas to include all agriculture, natural resources and the environment, and related health and nutrition subjects
- 3) development of original, high-quality content, learning tools, and advanced educational applications
- 4) improved marketing, visibility, and buy-in strategies

e-Extension Issues and Opportunities:

- 1) stable funding to continue to develop core technologies and central web services
- 2) further devising the technical plan and taking it to an operational level
- 4) training Extension personnel to utilize the system and to promote it to clientele

Potential Benefits for AgNIC/e-Extension Collaboration (see also “Opportunities for Collaboration to Develop a Digital Land-Grant Information System” Heatley and Gardner, 2003):

- 1) Improved and expanded informational and educational products
- 2) Increased user access to and awareness of products
- 3) Elimination of duplication of effort
- 4) Improved efficiency and cost-effectiveness
- 3) Ensured long-term public access to the products

Underlying Questions:

- 1) Can collaboration between AgNIC and e-Extension benefit both without negating their individual uniqueness and strengths?
- 2) Why is it important for AgNIC and e-Extension to survive? (If we don't do it, the marketplace will and the public and USDA will lose).
- 3) Could a collaboration form the basis for a national agricultural information system and computing grid on the order of a Medline Plus or a WebMD?