

Proposal

A Strategic Communication and Marketing Plan for ESCOP

Rationale and Justification: The ESCOP Communication and Marketing Committee has been charged *with providing guidance in the assessment of impacts resulting from the SAES/ARD system; developing marketing strategies and initiatives when appropriate; and, providing advice and council to ESCOP on advocacy efforts.*

Over the past few years the ESCOP Communication and Marketing Committee has been involved in the commissioning of counterfactual studies that resulted in the timely publication of the ***Formula for Success*** bulletin in the Spring of 2005 and used effectively by CARET in subsequent Hill visits. In addition, the ESCOP Communication and Marketing Committee has taken an active role in the identification of “hot topics” for use by the agriculture communicators in the development of the ***Impact Statements*** used by the system. This committee in on-going discussions with the Director of Communications for CSREES has discussed how to improve and target the impact statement writing process to gain maximum benefit and exposure from this exercise. The ESCOP Communication and Marketing Committee has also taken a strong interest in and suggested changes to ESCOP and NASULGC on the ***Agricultural Science on the Hill*** exhibit, having conveyed its recommendations annually.

Agriculture Science on the Hill, the ***Formula for Success*** bulletin and the ***Impact Statements*** are a good start but they do not fit into a broader plan that addresses long-term marketing need of the SAES and agricultural research in general. Thus, the SAES currently relies on isolated messages and intuition to market a multi-billion dollar global enterprise. A plan is needed to strategically place messages and information in the hands of stakeholders and decision-makers who ultimately impact system-level resources and the fate of publicly-funded agricultural research (i.e., a strategic marketing plan).

Strategic marketing plans have been successfully developed and used in a variety of settings. For example, if we look to The Ohio State University, the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center and the Battelle Study, we will see that an investment made to understand the impacts of research on economic development of a state can have significant return to the system. This investment of time and money led to a broad-based recognition that agricultural research: 1) has measurable and positive impacts on the economy, the environment, and quality of life; 2) is firmly based in science; 3) can and does impact a wide array of value chains far beyond the farm gate; and 4) is an investment with a return that exceeds most others. More importantly, the Ohio plan led to a significant increase in state funding and a “seat at the economic development table”. A major reason for this positive outcome is that a respected third party that could capture and communicate the value that OARDC brings to the state drove the analyses and plan. ESCOP and the SAES should be thinking likewise. Without a strategic plan and some creative thinking it will be difficult to move beyond the messages that are understood and accepted principally by those individuals already firmly embedded in the SAES system.

At this time, the ESCOP Communication and Marketing Committee recommends that ESCOP engage professional assistance to develop *A Strategic Communication and Marketing Plan* for the system. Because the Committee serves in an advisory role it does not embody the expertise needed to develop such a plan, but rather could oversee the process and work closely with marketing and communications professionals. It is time to enlist professional assistance and to develop a plan that will allow us to reach our goals. Any such plan will come with a cost to the system, but to forgo such would be gross oversight on our part. We need to bring in professional help to assist with setting an agenda and a long-term strategic plan for communicating and marketing the SAES agenda into the future. This idea is not a wholly new concept.

See “*Marketing the SAES*” (<http://www.escop.msstate.edu/committee/SAESMarketing.pdf>) by Dr. David McKenzie (2001) that earlier proposed the development of a strategic marketing plan for ESCOP and the SAES’s and why it is important. Paraphrased conclusions from the McKenzie report included the following:

- We need a marketing (and communication) plan for the ESCOP and the SAES’s.
- We need professional help in developing a project that would assist in the marketing of the SAES system to decision-makers. This will require resources, and some attention by our committee to make it work.
- ESCOP can learn by benchmarking the marketing efforts of others. What did the OARDC do right in its Battelle study? How can the SAES’s and ESCOP benefit and learn from this experience. Is this an experience and effort that can be duplicated on a national basis? What does NIH do annually to increase its funding?
- ESCOP needs to get organized so that it can recognize when we have a good story to tell. To many good SAES success stories get little or no attention in the popular press. Why?
- ESCOP needs to find better ways to tell our success stories. The annual preparation of the packet of Impact Statements is a lot of work, and yet we do not know if they are having an impact. Conventional wisdom and anecdotal evidence would suggest that the Impact Statements are not being used effectively, yet we continue to fund this effort. Could some marketing professionals help us develop a better strategy for telling our success stories?
- And, to whom do we or should be directing these messages? How can we segment our various audiences to communicate the value inherent in SAES and positively affect resource decisions?

Recommendation and Action Item: The ESCOP Communication and Marketing Committee requests a commitment of \$10,000 to begin the exploration of the development of a Strategic Communication and Marketing Plan for ESCOP. We propose to enlist the help of private sector communication and marketing professionals to assist in the development of a full plan for your consideration. The requested resources will be used to facilitate travel, meetings, and other costs associated with engaging a marketing firm or professional to develop an outline for a Strategic Communication and Marketing plan along with a full cost estimate.

Timetable: March 2007 for the delivery of a plan of work for consideration.

