

Strategic Plan

Recommendations and Report

December 18, 2020



Table of Contents

- AGRILIFE STRATEGIC PLANNING OVERVIEW 2020-2025 3**
- STRATEGIC PLAN REVIEW 4**
- RECOMMENDATIONS 4**
 - AGRILIFE STEERING COMMITTEE 4
 - A “ROADMAP” FOR ADAPTIVE STRATEGIC PLAN 5
 - REVIEWING THE ENVIRONMENT 6
 - ADJUSTING PRIORITIES 6
 - Rotating Timeline for the Adaptive Strategic Planning in Higher Education..... 6*
 - CREATING ACTION PLANS..... 6
 - IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING 6
 - AGRILIFE’S MISSION 7
 - AGRILIFE’S VISION 7
 - GUIDING PRINCIPLES..... 8
 - ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE – MATRIX MANAGEMENT 9
 - FACTORS SUPPORTING MATRIX MANAGEMENT..... 9
 - LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT..... 10
 - INSPIRING AGRILIFE AMBASSADORSHIP 11
 - EVOLVING CONSTITUENTS 12

AGRILIFE STRATEGIC PLANNING

OVERVIEW 2020-2025

Guiding Principles

To honor the rich land-grant university heritage of Texas A&M and the importance of agriculture within the Texas economy and lives of families, the following principles will guide AgriLife in accomplishing its strategic plans and goals:

- Serve as an unbiased, accurate and reliable science-based source of information.
- Seek to make a lasting, positive impact in line with shifting priorities and available resources.
- Facilitate meaningful engagement with the public that empowers groups and individuals with calls to action.
- Increase engagement with innovations and initiatives through digital education and outreach.
- Build and diversify resources across the state, country, and world.
- Infuse global and international perspectives, work, and outcomes to enrich the lives of Texans.
- Work within functional, programmatic, and geographical groups across AgriLife unit, agency, departmental and organizational lines to create influential, comprehensive, and innovative solutions.
- Hire the best, give them space to use their unique talents, and encourage initiative
- Support topical thought leadership aligned to the Matrix Management approach in achieving the mission and vision.
- Recognize the success of one team member aligned with the mission and vision of AgriLife is success for AgriLife as a whole.
- Value every team member as an AgriLife ambassador.
- Support student growth, engagement, and opportunities which are vital to the longevity of AgriLife’s influence.
- Evaluate the continuous effectiveness and success of actions and resource allocation.

Mission

Enrich Texas with comprehensive agricultural and life sciences knowledge and services to restore connections among people, agriculture, food, science, and the economy.

Vision

Lead by providing influential, innovative, and science-based solutions that position Texas as a national model in connecting agriculture and healthy lives.

Aspirational Statement

AgriLife aspires to serve as an internationally-recognized thought leader and guiding force within the agricultural industry.

Questions to Guide the Adaptive Strategic Planning Process

- Where can we have a positive impact and make a difference?
- Do we have a champion, the principles, resources, and time to make a difference?
- What actions should we take and when should we take these actions to accomplish this impact?
- Who is responsible for carrying out this work and how will we measure the impact?



Launch

Lead

Leverage

Steering Committee
Adaptive Strategic Planning
Matrix Management

Leadership and Professional Development
Inspiring AgriLife Ambassadorship

Engaging Evolving Texas

STRATEGIC PLAN REVIEW

Texas A&M AgriLife commissioned MGT Consulting Group and Martin+Crumpton Group to complete a strategic plan review of AgriLife's mission and vision to become a leading voice in agriculture, natural resources, and life sciences and elevate the AgriLife brand to further serve all Texans. Through an in-depth environmental scan, comprehensive constituent engagement, an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, the team developed the following recommendations to guide AgriLife to become the best recognized national authority in agriculture, natural resources, and life sciences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on constituent engagement as well as feedback on the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats analysis and feedback on the presentation.

AGRILIFE STEERING COMMITTEE

Who will set priorities, create action plans, communicate internally, gather feedback, and evaluate impact?

A steering committee, made up of a chief business strategy officer, and members of upper leadership and mid-managers from each AgriLife agency, unit, department and organization, provides the ability to set priorities and run the adaptive strategic planning process while avoiding a top-down approach, but instead aligning as a grassroots organization. A chief business strategy officer would chair the steering committee, work closely with Marketing & Communications to manage analytics and internal communication related to the adaptive strategic plan, promote and maintain connections among units and departments, and oversee profit and loss. Priorities should be set based on emerging market needs, reviewing the environment, and changing resources.

The steering committee members could be chosen through a process of self-identified leaders expressing interest, providing recommendations from their supervisors, and ultimately elected by AgriLife leadership. Committee membership provides opportunities for mentoring, exposure to all AgriLife units, and leadership development. The committee should plan to meet at least once a month with goals to carry out the adaptive strategic planning process. In addition, the committee should:

- Audit priorities from within their unit, agency, department, or organization
- Collaborate with Marketing & Communications to communicate priorities and implementation plans internally
- Determine how to evaluate success of implementation
- Gather real-time feedback from constituents and individual departments, ensuring priorities remain current and relevant to both individuals and the AgriLife organization.

A “ROADMAP” FOR ADAPTIVE STRATEGIC PLAN¹

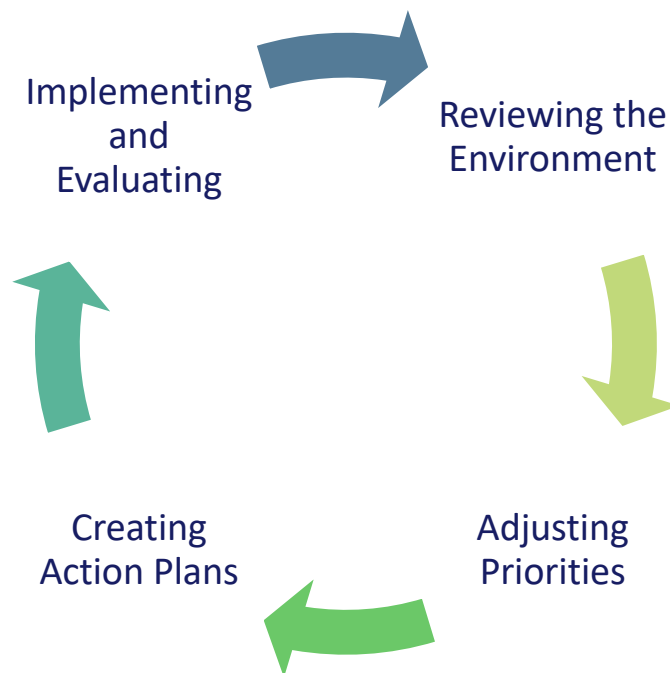
Texas A&M AgriLife is a champion of the combined visions of Texas A&M Research, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the Texas A&M Extension Service, the Texas A&M Forest Service, and the Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Lab. To serve in this coordinating role, AgriLife needs a clear “roadmap” or adaptive strategic plan where decisions start with the value to constituents and include a review of the environment, adjustment of priorities, creation of an action plan and implementation and evaluation of the project. AgriLife’s greatest consideration is existing at the intersection of the environment and life for humans and health.

When it comes to developing strategy in a rapidly changing world, it’s no longer enough to just make a plan and stick to it; organizations instead need to learn to set a direction and make adaptations to it.

- Dana O’Donovan, Gabriel Kasper, and Nicole L. Dobbs

Three concepts characterize adaptive strategic planning: trend analysis, fast-fail experimentation, and full engagement. The key to success for this process will require a Business Strategic Planner who will take responsibility for driving this work. For each phase in this strategic process, questions frame the planning that needs to be accomplished.

Adaptive Strategic Planning Process



¹ O’Donovan, D. & Flower, N. (2013). The Strategic Plan is Dead. Long Live Strategy. Retrieved from https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_strategic_plan_is_dead_long_live_strategy

REVIEWING THE ENVIRONMENT

Where can we have a positive impact and make a difference?

The first phase of adaptive strategic planning focuses on gathering information from many different aspects of the environment. Information includes qualitative and quantitative data that is formally collected as well as informal and anecdotal details that require further exploration. All involved in the organization share observations of the environment including the desires and needs of constituents. Collecting a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data drives towards a data informed approach, which provides useful information for decision-making and strategic planning, all critical to the success of an Adaptive Strategic Planning Process.

ADJUSTING PRIORITIES

Do we have a champion, the principles, resources, and time to make a difference?

The second phase focuses on the analysis of the collected data to determine priority and the availability of resources including:

- A champion to take responsibility for leading the project or initiative.
- Principles to serve as directional indicators and specific criteria should be established to guide how priorities are determined.
- Resource development is critical to success and will require AgriLife to seek larger grants and varied streams of income.
- The planning is based on a 90-day rotating timeline to evaluate progress towards goals.

The most essential keys to success for adjusting priorities are saying “no,” sunseting projects, and identifying fast fails as determined through ongoing review.

Rotating Timeline for the Adaptive Strategic Planning in Higher Education

Environmental Scan, Prioritization, Action Planning	Implementation and Evaluation
December	January, February, March
April	May, June, July
August	September, October, November

CREATING ACTION PLANS

What actions should we take and when should we take these actions to accomplish this impact?

Action plans are developed in the third phase to outline what will take place and when. Action plans should be detailed and use a structure such as OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) to measure what matters and leads to the desired outcomes.

IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING

Who is responsible for carrying out this work and how will we measure the impact?

Successful implementation completes each step of the action plan to execute the requirements and meet the set timeline. Action Plans are evaluated, and the results of the evaluation are then used as part of the environmental review to share and capture information if additional steps are needed to accomplish further outcomes. Overall, this type of planning will assist with activating and energizing the strategic direction of each entity.

AGRILIFE'S MISSION

AgriLife's current mission: *"Our mission as a member of the state's land-grant system is to be responsive to the needs of all Texans. We improve lives, environments and the Texas economy through education, research, extension and service."*

AgriLife's key constituents used the words "comprehensive," "impactful," "health," "education," "service," "leader," and "science," to describe AgriLife. About half of these constituents believe the current mission mostly captures AgriLife's direction, but many said it is too long, not specific, contains too much academic language, may not resonate with people who are not familiar with A&M AgriLife, is not memorable, and the term "health" is missing in the statement. The constituents suggested the mission statement should include a focus on agriculture, health, innovative and science-based solutions, information, and food. On the other hand, constituents suggested some things should be removed from the statement such as the term "land-grant" and the phrase "responsive to the needs of all Texans."

The constituent's AgriLife's mission should be comprehensive, action-focused, and public-facing to appeal to all target audiences. While academics and producers may identify with a term like "land-grant", consumers may not. With a goal of positively impacting the health of Texas — and ultimately the country and world — the mission should be re-written to reflect the intersection of agriculture and health.

Revised mission statement:

Enrich Texans with comprehensive agricultural and life sciences knowledge and services to restore connections among people, agriculture, food, science, and the economy.

AGRILIFE'S VISION

AgriLife's current vision: *"Our vision is to reach every Texan, making agriculture and life sciences relevant and meaningful in daily life."*

Constituents provided fewer change recommendations for the current AgriLife vision, including shortening the length; adding a nod to international leadership, discovery, and distribution of research; change the words "meaningful" and "making". The vision should expand upon the mission, clarifying the of value and importance of AgriLife its audiences.

Revised vision statement:

Lead by providing influential, innovative, and science-based solutions that position Texas as a national model in connecting agriculture and healthy lives.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

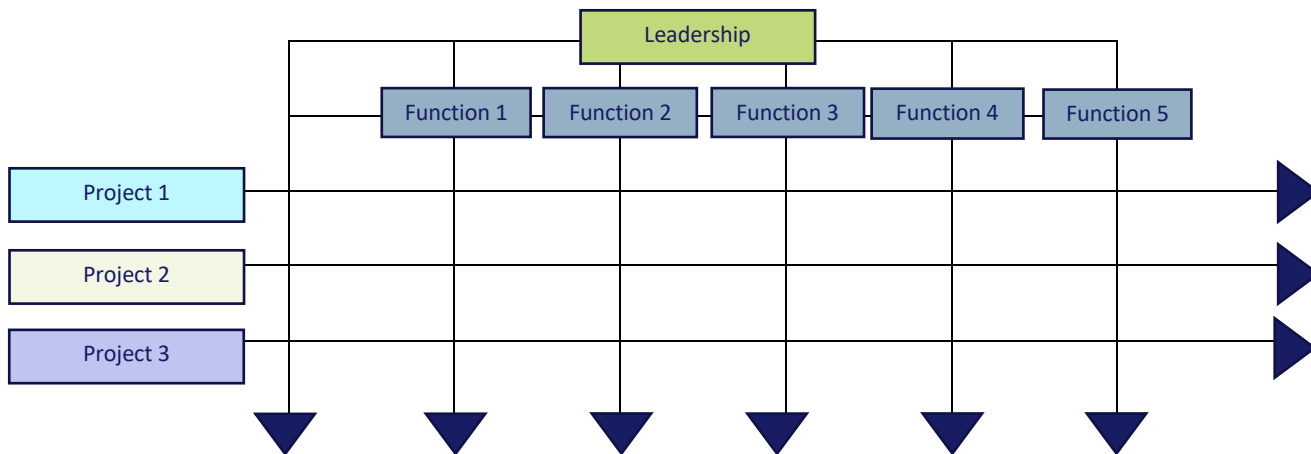
In lieu of providing the “what” such as rigid priorities from leadership that prevent individuality and flexibility, one of the unique strengths of AgriLife, guiding principles instead provide the “how” for everyone from top leadership to mid-managers to regional agents to student-workers for their day-to-day objectives and overarching goals.

To honor the rich heritage of Texas A&M as a land grant university and the importance of agricultural in the economies and lives of families in Texas, the following will guide AgriLife in accomplishing the strategic planning initiatives:

- Serve as an unbiased, accurate and reliable science-based source of information.
- Seek to make a lasting, positive impact in line with shifting priorities and available resources.
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ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE – MATRIX MANAGEMENT

As AgriLife seeks to create more synergy among agencies, units, and departments a matrix management organizational structure is recommended to meet this goal. Following is an example indicating how the matrix is structured.



Adapted from: “Understanding Organizational Structures” dated 11/30/2015 from Society of Human Resources Management. Retrieved on 11/09/2015 at <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/understandingorganizationalstructures.aspx>.

FACTORS SUPPORTING MATRIX MANAGEMENT

The following skills and conditions should be in place to help ensure the success of matrix-style organizational structures:

Critical Skills for Staff

- Negotiation and conflict management.
- Informal and political influence.
- Flexibility, adaptability, and tolerance for ambiguity.
- Serve as catalyst for clarity.
- Communication.
- Credibility and objectivity.
- Cultural awareness.

Conditions for Success

- Clear rationale for the matrix structure.
- Clear objectives and metrics.
- Expected leadership behavior is identified, communicated, and monitored.
- Open access to information by all parties.
- Performance management system that facilitates dual input.
- Line of sight for accountability.

Source: Krell, E. Managing the Matrix: Effective use of complex organizational structures requires significant assistance from HR professionals.

LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Developing leadership and supporting employees through formal and informal practices creates an environment focused on success. To advance AgriLife and create the future, aspiring AgriLife leaders need support to build skills and grow with his or her peers as a supervisor, manager, functional leader, and organizational leader.

The following recommendations address these opportunities:

- **Create a uniform Professional Development platform for AgriLife as a whole.** This would require dedicated resources to develop a re-envisioned formal training plan and process. The University model for Progressive Leadership Development offers the right framework by recognizing where trainees are in their career paths and customizing training accordingly, but much could be gained from conducting a similar process focused on AgriLife's current and future leaders, where College and agency staff could grow together and build relationships across current institutional silos and support matrix management approaches.
- **Consider more condensed, intensive training academies.** Staff learn more when distractions are eliminated. Develop academies offering one- to two-week sessions in which staff are isolated from their regular work and have the support of their management to cover work back at the office. Academy settings require multidisciplinary teams to work through case studies, role play, engage in current issues that are affecting AgriLife, and develop takeaway lessons and tools that will impact the rest of their careers. The impact of short-term, intensive trainings is more immediate.
- **Adapt online training practices.** The current online supervisor training is self-led, yet we know that digital education is evolving to become more interactive. If travel restrictions remain in place, Texas A&M will be positioned to offering training to its current and future leaders by deploying practices being developed in the Digital Education unit to design courses for online interaction.
- **Reinforce training by encouraging leadership opportunities in day-to-day practices.** Leadership opportunities outside of standardized training may include mentoring opportunities for new employees and students, participation in committees, offering presentations to internal and external audiences, and engagement with University-wide efforts.
- **Deploy other leadership practices commonly used in the private sector.** Employees are seeking more direction and reassurance as the environment they work in becomes more complex. C-Suite-like briefings such as regular video messages, online townhall meetings, or live chat sessions should be deployed to increase communication to employees and give them a stronger sense of high-level direction and access to leadership. Furthermore, measurement of employee engagement by benchmarking employee Net Promoter Scores and 360 evaluations of leadership are equally as important as traditional staff performance evaluations.
- **Engage students earning degrees in Agricultural Leadership and Development.** Another valuable resource to AgriLife, its students, are focusing their studies on leadership topics. Why not incorporate participation from these future leaders in each of the recommendations above?

INSPIRING AGRILIFE AMBASSADORSHIP

AgriLife synthesizes diverse and talented skillsets across a vast range of interconnected organizations. These talented organizations within AgriLife are all situated to offer not just additive contributions but multiplicative contributions as a team. To achieve this, everyone in AgriLife should consider how they serve as ambassadors of the mission and vision. Ambassadorship at all levels can help establish internal unity of command and produce greater effectiveness and efficiency serving external constituents and benefactors.

- **Internal Transparency, Communication, and Collaboration:** Currently, faculty and staff have limited lateral awareness of what other teams are working on, particularly at more granular levels of the organization. This may be a daunting challenge, but it is also a significant opportunity to improve synergy and efficiency through engagement among units. Leadership has the responsibility to create conditions for all team members to serve as ambassadors of AgriLife's mission and vision.
- **Proactive Training:** AgriLife should consider the adoption of more common training criteria for all faculty and staff. A common training curriculum for new and existing employees provides leadership the opportunity to inculcate core values, skills, and standards that bind the mission and vision across all elements of the institution.
- **Leadership & Guidance:** Leadership – at all levels - has the imperative to enhance their work culture by aligning precepts of initiative, transparency, and collaboration to the bedrock of the mission and vision. This is no small task, however cultural shifts towards a common AgriLife ambassador mentality can accelerate this rapidly.
- **Prioritization and Consistency:** Building off the two previous themes, leaders at all levels should carefully establish expectations for how their teams contribute to their organizational or department mission. They should simultaneously assess how their organization or department advances the AgriLife mission and vision. Leaders and team members should then execute their responsibilities in accordance with priorities that best contribute to the mission and vision and empower AgriLife's engagement with the public.
- **Collaboration Reinforcement:** AgriLife Leadership as well as agency directors and mid-managers have an opportunity to recognize and reinforce all the existing areas of collaboration between departments and teams. Consistent leadership encouragement in this area - at all levels - can identify and positively reinforce organic examples of group efforts existing across organizational boundaries.



EVOLVING CONSTITUENTS

AgriLife serves a diverse consortium of constituents including producers, consumers, students, businesses, and government entities. These constituencies operate over a vast geographic area and touch all segments of the public within Texas, the United States, and the world. AgriLife is aware of this diversity and offers trusted and effective resources and solutions that meet constituent needs. AgriLife Leadership continues to adapt and improve their interaction with segments of the public as they target future opportunities. AgriLife's talent and excellent reputation positions them well to capitalize on the following opportunities:

Texas Urbanizing and Diversifying: U.S. 2020 Census data indicates 6 of the 15 fast growing cities in the United States are in Texas. Major metroplexes around Dallas, San Antonio, Houston, and Austin are diverse markets of opportunities. Staffing strategies that support a more diverse AgriLife team can better reflect the students and communities they serve and attract the new constituents. Our recommendations included the following:

- Multi-lingual service capabilities can facilitate the delivery of Digital Education, Marketing, Research, Extension, and other content in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. These ethnicities – in aggregate – compose most ethnic demographics within the state. Multi-lingual content can ensure AgriLife reaches and improve the lives of more Texans.
- Consider coalescing and expanding agricultural value chain content and service that many AgriLife leaders contribute to. Topical focus on this area across agencies can inform and empower consumers in urban areas. These populations are not traditional agriculturalists but are the primary benefactors of agricultural production.
- Consider cross-agency initiatives that support the agricultural produce through agricultural value chain resiliency and food security. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and exacerbated food insecurity for many Texans, Americans, and global citizens. Service and education that supports food security can improve the lives of citizens across the state and nation and grow market opportunities for AgriLife and agriculturalist.



Supporting Producers and Informed Consumers: Consumers – ranging from individuals and small businesses, to corporate distributors – play an accelerating role in shaping agricultural production. They increasingly care about how their food was produced, raised, and supplied. Producers and agriculturalists have an unprecedented chance to meet these changes. AgriLife with an opportunity to deliver science-based service and solutions that support the agricultural producer, satisfy the consumer, enhance a sustainable agricultural value chain, and grow the Texas economy.

- The food-consumer market is changing, and it increasingly cares about the way its food is produced and delivered. AgriLife has the opportunity enhance an agricultural value chain that capitalizes on these market changes with science-based information and solutions that support an environmentally sustainable and economically profitably market needs. The producer faces a dynamic market for their goods. Resilience, sustainability, and affordability are key needs for the more selective consumer. AgriLife’s broad network and science-based solutions can help producers identify these needs and inform agile solutions for the producer.
- Synthesizes strategic initiatives between AgriLife agencies that can bind its strengths in talent, research, education, and service and deliver functions-based solutions to meet the needs of the informed consumer. Future focused goals can combine agency function to start solving challenges on the 10-year horizon. AgriLife can enhance internal collaboration while meeting the needs of the state, national, and global marketplace.

A Digital Landscape: The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digitization of the information, economic, and education landscape. Traditional means of engagement between AgriLife and their constituents will always remain, however this shift transformed the way people learn, collaborate, and work. These changes create new access points for AgriLife to serve and inform their partners, customers, and students across all agencies.

- Opportunities exist for strategic initiatives like rural broadband access for Texas. With support from state legislature, rural broadband service expansion and improvement can link rural producers with growing markets in diverse urban centers.
- Enhanced digital communication and education tools can accelerate, and expand AgriLife’s internal and external communication. With a unified process, AgriLife can reach more people, with more content, faster. These focused efforts can help empower AgriLife’s mission and vision as well as produce substantive returns on investment.
- Leveraging new online and digital capabilities can enhance AgriLife’s national and global reach. Texas is an environmentally and economically diverse state. AgriLife has an opportunity to capture widely applicable lessons learned from Texas and deliver that content and service to the world at the speed of light.