Charting DANR's future

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Last month, 45 researchers and educators from all three
Division campuses — Berkeley, Davis and Riverside —
and more than a dozen county offices gathered at the
Vallombrosa Retreat Center in Menlo Park to consider fu-
ture directions for Division of Agriculture and Natural Re-
sources (DANR) research and extension programs. These
Agricultural Experiment Station faculty and Cooperative
Extension Specialists and Advisors met as members of the
newly organized DANR Program Planning and Advisory
Committees (PPACs). Chosen for their scientific expertise
and insight into the technological and social changes that
are shaping California’s future, each of these individuals
serves on a committee — Agricultural Resources, Human
Resources, or Natural Resources — charged with recom-
mending Division-wide program priorities within their re-
spective subject areas. Five members of each of these com-
nittees also serve on the Program Integration committee,
which will identify cross-subject matter issues and goals and
recommend overall program priorities for the Division.

Although constituted as four individual committees
PPAC members chose to meet jointly at Vallombrosa. They
took this collaborative approach recognizing that if the Di-
vision is to successfully meet the challenges of the next cen-
tury, program planning must be coordinated across all sub-
ject-matter areas. Further, they recognize that Division-
wide planning cannot depend exclusively on the insights of
45 individuals. Rather, all members of the Division should
participate in the formulation of program priorities
adopted for the organization as a whole. The PPACs also
seek guidance from people affected by our work — the
many clientele groups who participate in our programs,
our colleagues in other organizations, and the public at
large. Thus, the PPACs regard their task as a process of in-
quiry — requiring exploration and synthesis of the values
and perceptions held by all the Division’s “stakeholders.”

The Vallombrosa meeting concluded with a commitment
by the PPAC members to actively seek input reflecting a di-
versity of perspectives on the question, “What are the prior-
ity needs that the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources
should address in the areas of agricultural, human and natural
resources?”

PPAC members are aware that planning is ongoing at all
levels within the organization. For example, each of the Di-
vision colleges and regional offices are engaged in assess-
ing needs and setting priorities for their respective units, as
are campus departments, county offices, Division workgroups
and individual staff members. The conclusions reached
through these localized planning efforts will be assimilated by
the PPACs as they derive overall priorities for the Division
as a whole. The PPACs plan to develop their preliminary
recommendations by June, and expect to finalize their first-
year report of recommended Division-wide program priori-
ties in September 1995.

The PPACs’ efforts to identify Division-wide program is-
issues and goals coincide with other new initiatives in our
strategic planning process. In May, the first in a planned se-
ries of “focus group” meetings will be conducted. Bringing
together Division members from all subject fields and orga-
nizational units, along with a diverse sample of individuals
from our public constituencies, these meetings will elicit
new ideas for doing business in response to the challenges
of the 21st century. Such changes might entail new kinds of
programs as well as new organizational structures. Over the
next six months, 100 to 200 individuals will participate in one
of these focus groups.

Thus, Division planning is simultaneously underway at
two levels: While the PPACs are leading an assessment of
current and imminent issues specific to particular subject
matters, the focus groups will yield recommendations
for long-range repositioning of the Division, both in terms
of program content and the way in which its programs are
administered and conducted. The outputs of these two
planning processes, reflecting the collective wisdom of the
Division’s diverse membership and constituencies, will
converge in an ongoing series of strategic recommendations
upon which DANR leadership can rely in charting a course for
the future.

Although often perceived as a responsibility of adminis-
trators, strategic planning in fact begins with the people
most involved in and most affected by the Division’s pro-
grams. Further, strategic planning is not a one-time exer-
cise, but an ongoing process. Given the unprecedented pace
of technological, social and political change in our society,
public institutions such as DANR must constantly reassess
the role they are best suited to serve and how best to adapt
to changing needs. The PPACs are committed to leading
the Division in a continuing cycle of annual review and up-
dating of program priorities. The result will be a strategic
plan that is always current — a “living document” that pro-
vides immediate direction for our research and educational
programs, as well as a long-term vision for our organization.

I encourage anyone interested in the Division’s research
and extension priorities to share his or her ideas with PPAC
members. The four PPAC Chairs are identified below:

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