

November 3, 2021

JoAnn Rodenbiker, Rock Lake, ND  
Extension Citizens Advisory Council  
Small business owner  
Former SBARE member

I am here to encourage your support for all four Extension initiatives - **Growing a Stronger Workforce, Increasing Food Security and Prosperity, Expanding and Protecting Livestock and Building Resilient Communities and People**. All are extremely important, but I am going to focus on two areas that are particularly important and relevant to me.

**Growing a Stronger Workforce.** In my previous life, I spent over 40 years in the field of community and economic development. Workforce development wasn't always a priority – job creation was. In the past decade more emphasis on development of STEM skills and workforce retention has become critical to supporting ND businesses. 4-H is uniquely positioned to help improve these skills for youth, particularly in rural areas where there is less access to vocational and technical training in K-12 schools and 4-H is often the only group youth activity outside of school.

I also spent the greater part of my work in business retention – and as we boomers reached retirement age, business transition became an increasingly important part of that strategy. I was frustrated with my lack of training to assist business owners and they were equally frustrated with their lack of knowledge in how and what to prepare to exit a business. Many times, their retirement plan was the cash from the successful sale of their business. As a current small business owner, I am confident I can reach out to Extension for assistance as we prepare to transition and will be able to retain the business in our community. I want that experience for all.

**Increasing Food Security and Prosperity.** I grew up on a farm, continued my education at NDSU in Ag Economics and married a farmer. I was always close to my food source. The recent issues in the food supply chain, exacerbated by the pandemic, has increased others interest in locally produced, sustainable food sources and increased popularity in horticulture. I have experienced this first-hand in our family-owned and operated greenhouse. 2020 was our 10<sup>th</sup> year in business and we started the year with many unknowns – would anyone leave their homes to pick up flowers, vegetables, seeds, and trees during a “lock-down”? When May 1 hit, our worries were erased as families flocked to their yards and our business. We sold everything we had grown within 30 days! There were many new gardeners who had so many questions. We turned to Extension resources to provide those answers, as we always have over our 10 years. In our case, our county ANR agents are the go-to person for horticultural information – one more hat they must wear.

We didn't know what 2021 would bring – would that interest continue – but no worries – another record year, with customers enthusiastically returning to grow their own fruits and vegetables. Additional support for horticulture agents and the specialists to support them is critical to our greenhouse's continued success.

While I am on the topic of horticulture, I am going to detour from Extension initiatives for a moment and ask for your consideration to replace the Lord and Burnham South Horticulture Greenhouse that will be demolished soon after the new Peltier Complex is constructed. Removal of the greenhouse, with no plans for replacement, will greatly limit research. Dr. Todd West's tree breeding and selection program will be unable to research, propagate and release trees and shrubs that are disease resistant and adapted to North Dakota's climate. Research and development of value-added fruits and vegetable crops for the region will be restricted. We spend a considerable amount of time each summer in the campus garden and bedding plant research trials to help in our selection of plants that will be successful for our customers. Without the greenhouse, this will go away.

Extension's role is to "Extend Knowledge" – without solid research-based knowledge from NDSU, the role Extension plays in providing that knowledge will be limited to sources outside our state. And lastly, students in horticulture will be unable to gain experience in greenhouse crop production and we will lose a valuable source of well-trained employees and future business owners.

I will conclude with a request for your consideration of the four Extension initiatives, thank you for indulging my detour into a request for capital considerations for horticultural research and wish you continued success in addressing the needs of NDSU Research and Extension.