

# **Iowa AgSTATE**

## **A Think Tank for Iowa Agriculture**

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### **2015 VISION FOR IOWA AGRICULTURE AND RURAL IOWA RELEASED**

An Iowa agricultural think tank has developed a new vision for agriculture and rural Iowa for 2015. "We hope to encourage young people to enter agriculture, and give existing farmers new ideas," said Phil Sundblad, a farmer from Albert City who is the current chair of Iowa AgSTATE. "And we hope our optimism about the future comes through clearly."

The group was formed in the spring of 1997. AgSTATE is an acronym for "Agricultural Strategic Thinkers Acting Together Effectively."

"With the vision document, we wanted to identify ways to capitalize on our tremendous ability to produce commodity crops and livestock, while also identifying ways for smaller, more specialized agricultural operations to expand and thrive," Sundblad said. "We hope this vision will improve the public's understanding and appreciation of Iowa agriculture."

The group worked throughout 2005 on the vision document. Seminars were held where guest speakers talked about supply-side and demand-side drivers of change in Iowa agriculture. Some of the key drivers of change identified by the group are new technology, changes in consumer demand, competition from other countries, consolidation, changing demographics and government policies and regulations.

Vision statements were written in seven categories, and action recommendations developed to help make the vision statements reality. Some examples:

- **A NEW ATTITUDE – Vision:** Producers are optimistic about the future and actively search for new opportunities to add value to the commodities they produce. **Actions:** Look for opportunities for agriculture groups to partner with non-farm groups, local officials and developers to address environmental, economic development and other community goals. Develop new programs that help connect producers with consumers through such things as identity preservation and “buy-local” campaigns.
- **PRODUCER PROFILE – Vision:** Producers are entrepreneurial, business-orientated, and recognized by other business leaders and their peers as professionals. **Actions:** Work with Iowa State University and community colleges to develop statewide business and leadership education and certification programs for farm managers and farm workers and assisting producers interested in mentoring young farmers or offering apprenticeships.
- **AGRICULTURE BUSINESS – Vision:** Light manufacturing and biorefining are two key engines driving Iowa’s rural economy. **Actions:** Promote the development of agricultural “clusters” where complementary entities would be located. An example might be an ethanol plant, livestock operations to consume the co-products, a digester to process animal manure into fuel for the ethanol plant and cropland where the remaining manure nutrients could be spread to grow crops for the ethanol plant.
- **A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT – Vision:** Producers address environmental concerns by voluntarily adopting comprehensive nutrient management plans and using best management practices. **Actions:** Use the next farm bill to advance sound, performance-based environmental programs. Examples include direct payments tied to conservation efforts; incentives for whole-farm planning that takes into account erosion, water quality and air quality; incentives that promote entrepreneurial activity and less reliance on row crops.
- **TECHNOLOGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE – Vision:** An adequate transportation infrastructure is in place to support Iowa’s current and future growth. **Actions:** Study the need for infrastructure investment designed to transport biofuels, such as ethanol pipelines.
- **QUALITY OF LIFE – Vision:** Rural Iowa offers a high quality of life, with good recreational and cultural opportunities and a clean environment. **Actions:** Expand

non-farm employment opportunities for rural people and farm households in local communities. Develop more state and privately owned resort and outdoor recreation opportunities and destinations.

- **PUBLIC POLICY – Vision:** Iowa leads the nation in encouraging the use of renewable fuels because of its strong renewable fuels policy. **Actions:** Find innovative ways to increase the production and consumption of renewable energy in Iowa. Target farm subsidies towards conservation, rural development and value-added investments, rather than commodities.

The group's report was unveiled to the boards of directors of participating organizations at a meeting Nov. 18. "Each of the organizations will use this report as they develop policies and establish priorities," Sundblad said. He said it also may serve as a guide as Iowa legislators and other policymakers look at changes in laws or regulations that would help make the group's vision for 2015 a reality.

The vision document and more information about Iowa AgSTATE is available online at <http://www.econ.iastate.edu/outreach/agriculture/agstate/>.

Iowa AgSTATE includes representatives from the Agribusiness Association of Iowa, Iowa Cattlemen's Association, Iowa Corn Growers Association, Iowa Dairy Products Association, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa Department of Economic Development, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, Iowa Institute for Cooperatives, Iowa Pork Producers Association, Iowa Poultry Association, Iowa Soybean Association, Iowa State Dairy Association, Iowa State University College of Agriculture, Iowa Turkey Federation and Practical Farmers of Iowa.