MAELC
Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council

2030 Minnesota Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources Education Blueprint

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The 2030 Minnesota AFNR Education Blueprint was published in January 2025 and created by:

Sarah Dornink, MAELC Executive Director
Kari Schwab, MAELC Program Coordinator

In consultation with:
True North Strategy, LLC
Amanda Whittemore & Chris Fastner

About the Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council (MAELC):

Established in 1997, MAELC is a 16-member legislative council that provides leadership to promote and expand agricultural education in Minnesota. The state legislature, agricultural educators, and agriculture industry leaders are all represented on the council.

218 Ruttan Hall
1994 Buford Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108

www.mn.gov/maelc

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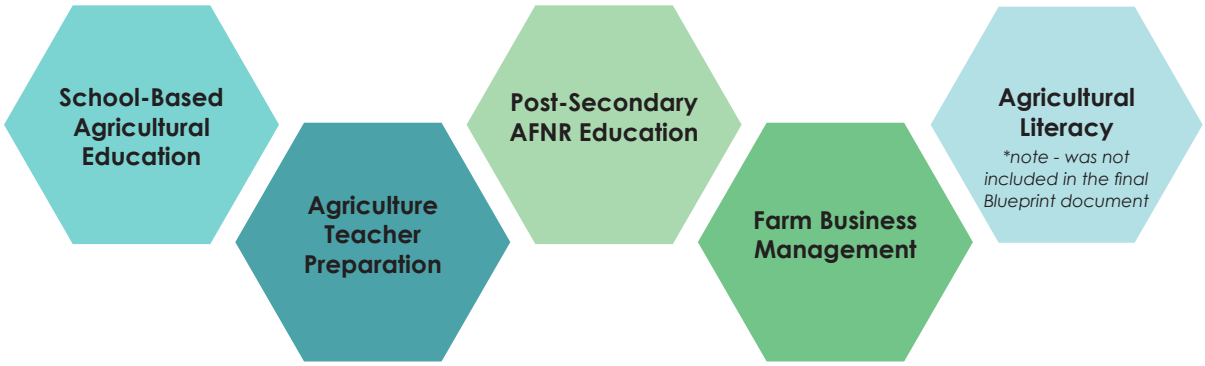
Executive Summary

The Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council (MAELC) provides leadership to promote and expand agricultural education in Minnesota. The 2030 Minnesota Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) Education Blueprint is a MAELC initiative creating a statewide strategic plan to continue improving AFNR education across the state. The Blueprint also builds on the previous processes of creating, implementing, and monitoring the 2025 and 2017 Blueprints. It provides a status report of AFNR education in the state, develops a vision for AFNR Education over the next five years, and determines what actionable strategies should be implemented to achieve this vision.

AFNR Education in Minnesota focuses on five sectors:



The Blueprint was developed through stakeholder input and strategy development around these five sectors, starting with six listening sessions convened around the state in June 2024. Additional input was collected through surveys and an abbreviated session with high school educators during the Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators' summer conference. Participants focused on three overarching goals across all educational sectors, including:

- Increasing ***STUDENT*** access, awareness, and participation
- Improving ***PROGRAMMING*** content, meeting facilities and equipment needs, and providing the best methods of instruction to meet the needs of the AFNR industry
- Recruiting, retaining, and supporting highly qualified ***INSTRUCTORS***

Participants identified current and future trends affecting AFNR education in each of the sectors, with common themes emerging across all areas. AFNR education will need to continue to evolve and adapt in response to shifting demographics and societal norms, technological advancements, industry demands, student interests, instructor needs, policy changes, and economic challenges to remain relevant and effective in preparing future AFNR professionals.

Groups also discussed actionable strategies that will improve AFNR education in the next five years. Ideas developed were related to increasing capacity to support new programming, growing efforts to attract and retain quality instructors, increasing communications about opportunities available across all sectors, and securing resources to ensure Minnesota students at all levels have access to industry-aligned technology, equipment and facilities.

Then, in mid-August, 32 individuals came together to form committees based on their subject-matter expertise. Committees reviewed the trends and strategies suggested during the listening sessions, along with survey feedback, and began to develop the highest priority strategies for the Blueprint. Committees were limited to only four strategies per goal to truly prioritize the strategies that will make the most impact by 2030. After committees determined the final strategies, MAELC staff developed performance indicators by the three goal areas to determine progress in each area.

The final strategies found in this Blueprint are specific to each AFNR educational sector, however, there were general recommendations within each goal area that surfaced across the sectors.

To increase ***STUDENT*** access, awareness, and participation in the AFNR educational sectors, strategies focused on improving student engagement, broadening opportunities for applied learning, and creating pathways for successful futures. Suggestions ranged from creating engaging marketing and communication resources for recruitment to strengthening partnerships and building cross-sector collaborations. This would create a more seamless transition for students between sectors and improve program offerings. Students should feel connected and supported, therefore strategies were recommended for offering peer cohorts, and networking and mentoring opportunities with alumni and industry professionals. Finally, financial support will continue to be important to ensure that economic barriers do not prevent students from pursuing educational programming.

To support ***PROGRAMMING*** success, the strategies identified revolved around ensuring educational programs align with industry standards, enhancing student learning, and providing the resources necessary for success. Curriculum should be developed to align with educational and industry standards, guided by statewide advisory committees. Also, advisories and other facilitated discussions, along with advocacy efforts, should be utilized to support equipment and facility upgrades. Each sector also needs to continue to explore alternative instruction models, integrate technology when appropriate, and build partnerships to offer students opportunities to gain leadership, career readiness and technical skills.

Strategies related to retaining and supporting highly qualified ***INSTRUCTORS*** were centered around professional development, mentorship, financial incentives, and creating a supportive and collaborative environment. Continuing and strengthening current mentorship programs for early-career instructors is important, as well as providing ongoing professional development and teacher cohort opportunities. Hiring regional and professional development coordinators was encouraged as well as financial incentives for serving as mentors and pursuing continuing education. Recruitment is also key, and strategies were developed around connecting with non-traditional and underrepresented populations in the AFNR teaching field, utilizing adjunct instructors, and reviewing and supporting instructors through the credentialing process.

The strategies in the Blueprint will serve as a foundation for MAELC's work and are intended to guide all AFNR education efforts while increasing collaboration among stakeholders. MAELC staff will engage with its numerous partners to implement this vision over the next five years.

2030 Minnesota AFNR Education Blueprint Background

The 2030 Minnesota Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) Education Blueprint is a statewide strategic plan for promoting, improving and expanding AFNR education across the state. The Blueprint provides a status report of AFNR education in the state, develops a vision for AFNR education over the next five years, and determines what actionable strategies should be implemented to achieve this vision. Its intent is to guide all AFNR education efforts and increase collaboration among stakeholders. It will also be utilized to increase support for AFNR programming from the local level up to the state legislature. This plan will be implemented by the MAELC board in partnership with stakeholder organizations.

Approximately every five years, leaders who are engaged in education, government, non-profits, community groups, and business and industry come together to determine the future of Minnesota AFNR Education. With two previous Blueprints executed, MAELC staff first spent time analyzing previous development processes as well as progress and successes from the 2025 AFNR Education Blueprint. The process for creating the 2030 AFNR Education Blueprint included a similar methodology as well as new strategies for facilitation and engagement.

The overall project consisted of conducting listening sessions, gathering survey input, utilizing committees of experts within the field, analyzing results, and authoring the Blueprint. MAELC staff worked closely with consultants, True North Strategy, throughout the process.

Listening Sessions

In June 2024, over 140 people attended six listening sessions throughout the state (Brainerd, Detroit Lakes, Mankato, Marshall, St. Paul, and Willmar). These sessions provided individuals the opportunity to share input and develop strategies for the future of AFNR education across Minnesota.

During the sessions, participants broke into one of five sectors depending on their expertise and interest including Agricultural Literacy, School-Based Agricultural Education, Post-Secondary AFNR Education, Agriculture Teacher Preparation, and Farm Business Management. With guidance from facilitators (Appendix B), groups spent time looking back at progress made in their specific sector since the implementation of the 2025 AFNR Education Blueprint, identifying current and future trends affecting AFNR education, and brainstorming new actionable strategies that will have the most impact in the next five years. All participants then had an opportunity to review the work of one other sector and add their own suggested strategies.

Group discussions focused on three overarching goals, developed by the MAELC staff, including:

- Increasing ***STUDENT*** access, awareness, and participation
- Improving ***PROGRAMMING*** content, meeting facilities and equipment needs, and providing the best methods of instruction to meet the needs of the AFNR industry
- Recruiting, retaining, and supporting highly qualified ***INSTRUCTORS***

Additional input was gathered through electronic surveys and an abbreviated session with high school educators during the Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators' summer conference. Students were also able to provide written input for the School-Based Agricultural Education and Post-Secondary AFNR Education sectors.

Blueprint Committee Meetings

Sector committees made up of 32 education and AFNR content experts (Appendix B), were convened in August and September 2024 to evaluate the feedback gathered from the listening sessions within the three goal areas: *students, programming, and instructors*. Committees reviewed and refined future trends and strategies suggested during the listening sessions, along with survey feedback, and began to develop the highest priority strategies with the greatest potential to make an impact in the 2030 AFNR Education Blueprint. Although there were many ideas, committees were limited to only four strategies per goal to truly prioritize the most important efforts. From there, committees drafted key, high-level actions steps to implement each strategy. Strategies and action steps are recommendations for AFNR stakeholders to achieve goals and are not necessarily actions MAELC can or should take alone. This Blueprint does not include the action steps; however, they will be utilized as a guide for MAELC staff during the implementation stage.

Overview of the Blueprint Document

Throughout the process of developing the Blueprint, MAELC staff engaged in an iterative process of evaluating and refining goals and strategies to ensure alignment with the organization's broad vision and capacity to achieve measurable results in collaboration with AFNR stakeholders. It should be recognized that these strategies were developed during a specific time period with the best information available. Therefore, priorities may adjust during the life of this document, but the overall goals will still be relevant.

Within each AFNR education sector, the Blueprint provides a brief overview of that area and the top four recommended strategies for achieving each of the goals. Also included in the Blueprint is a list of indicators that will measure the success of each goal by 2030. Appendix A features a summary of the current and future trends affecting AFNR education. Appendix B includes the listening session facilitators and the 2030 Blueprint committee members.

Special note on Agricultural Literacy – Although the Agricultural Literacy sector was included in the listening sessions and a focus of previous Blueprints, it was determined not to move it forward in the committee work and in turn, the final Blueprint. MAELC's focus, based on state statute, is on formal AFNR Education. In addition, Agricultural Literacy in Minnesota is vast and independent, therefore, MAELC staff do not have the capacity to provide leadership for strategy implementation. The input from the listening sessions will be provided to Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom and is also available for public review as requested.

Next Steps

MAELC greatly appreciates the commitment of all those who generously contributed their time, feedback, and expertise in preparing the 2030 AFNR Education Blueprint. MAELC staff will disseminate the Blueprint publicly starting in January 2025 and engage with its numerous partners to implement this vision over the next five years. The Blueprint will be available on the MAELC website: **www.mn.gov/maelc.** *Printed copies available by request.*

School-Based Agricultural Education

Top strategies for increasing *STUDENT* access, awareness, and participation

- Create marketing and communication resources that showcase the current and evolving trends of the AFNR industry and its career opportunities.
- Pursue legislative policy that recognizes FFA as an integral part of School-Based Agricultural Education, which is reflective of the National FFA federal charter.
- Expand middle school student opportunities such as providing more AFNR course options, encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration with other middle school teachers, and increasing participation in the FFA.
- Ensure the FFA affiliate membership model provides equal opportunities for all students to participate.

Top strategies for improving *PROGRAMMING* content, meeting facilities and equipment needs, and providing the best methods of instruction to meet the needs of the AFNR industry

- Develop statewide course layouts (units) that teachers can access, ensuring they are AFNR focused and aligned with Career and Technical Education Table C requirements.
- Collaborate with other youth organizations beyond the FFA to provide more opportunities for students.
- Increase opportunities for students to take AFNR concurrent enrollment courses through their high school experience. This includes increasing awareness of options for agriculture teachers to teach college credit and supporting their efforts to become credentialed.
- Organize a statewide advisory with AFNR industry partners to provide guidance on course content, resources to support learning, and career opportunities.

Top strategies for retaining and supporting highly qualified *INSTRUCTORS*

- Continue support of early career teachers through the AFNR Teacher Induction Program (TIP), and strengthen the professional development programming for instructors in their first five years.
- Hire regional coordinators to support agriculture teachers and develop local partnerships that enhance AFNR programming and the student experience.
- Maintain current professional development programming and expand opportunities for externships and social-emotional learning (SEL) support.
- Organize teacher cohorts within each specific AFNR pathway to provide instructional resources and mentoring for other teachers.

School-Based Agricultural Education Overview

Minnesota is home to approximately 220 school-based agricultural education (SBAE) programs, taught by nearly 340 teachers across the state. Programs are located in urban, suburban and rural school districts. SBAE programs support students in middle and high school by increasing their awareness of AFNR careers, preparing them for employment in the workforce, and building them into leaders for their communities. Every student engages in hands-on classroom instruction, work-based learning and career exploration, and leadership development.

Over 45,000 students, grades 9-12, are enrolled in an AFNR course around seven career pathways (right). School districts have the flexibility to select courses that best meet the needs of their local community, align with student interests, and support district priorities. This includes allowing students to earn science, math, economics or art credit for an AFNR course. Of those students enrolled in AFNR courses, 14,893 chose to participate in the Minnesota FFA, a Career and Technical Education Student Organization (CTSO).

Minnesota works to retain school-based agricultural education teachers through mentorship programs and professional development. Since 1999, the AFNR Teacher Induction Program (TIP), facilitated by the University of Minnesota, has provided professional development, instructional coaching, and regional mentorship for more than 500 first-year teachers. AFNR TIP collaborates with the newly developed Career and Technical Education (CTE) Teacher Induction Program, designed to support CTE teachers on a Tier 1 or Tier 2 license or out of field permission. The structure and format of CTE TIP was developed from the strong foundation established by AFNR TIP.

Agriculture Teacher Preparation

Top strategies for increasing STUDENT access, awareness, and participation

- Organize an Agricultural Education student cohort to foster peer networking and to promote retention within the major prior to entering the teaching profession.
- Provide opportunities to experience teaching for high school students who have shown an interest in the profession.
- Invest in agriculture teacher career promotion and partner with other organizations to build awareness of general education career paths.
- Explore Agricultural Education licensure options such as the use of Career Pathways licenses.

Top strategies for improving PROGRAMMING content, meeting facilities and equipment needs, and providing the best methods of instruction to meet the needs of the AFNR industry

- Develop flexible Agricultural Education degree programs, including building partnerships between Minnesota teacher preparation providers to offer coursework for students to meet teacher licensure requirements.
- Conduct a regular assessment of the teacher preparation curriculum utilizing an advisory of current teachers, administrators and industry professionals to identify updates needed for student success in the profession.
- Expand summer professional development to include collegiate students in order to build their teaching skills and increase AFNR technical content knowledge.
- Increase opportunities for professional development by partnering with professional education organizations beyond AFNR Education.

Top strategies for retaining and supporting highly qualified INSTRUCTORS

- Develop a resource for all agriculture teacher preparation faculty which includes information such as teacher candidate and observation host locations and AFNR content teacher experts.
- Secure funding for faculty to have additional time outside their standard contract in order to offer licensure and graduate coursework along with other educational opportunities for current agriculture teachers.
- Organize and invest in a statewide agriculture teacher preparation faculty, staff, and leader cohort to provide strategic time to connect and collaborate.
- Invest in a statewide faculty or adjunct position to work in conjunction with licensure recommending institutions and assist with student recruitment and retention for agriculture teacher preparation programs.

Agriculture Teacher Preparation Overview

College students are prepared for licensure to teach AFNR and work-based learning at three universities (right) and through Minnesota State two-year transfer programs. There are approximately 50 undergraduate students enrolled in teacher preparation programs across the state, and these programs have an 80% conversion rate of graduates to becoming agriculture teachers over the past five years. The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities also has a graduate program that prepares students to become agriculture teachers and supports current teachers with credit offerings (currently nine Masters Initial Licensure students enrolled).

With a shortage of high school agriculture teachers, there is a tremendous need in Minnesota and nationally for students to become licensed to teach AFNR Education. Minnesota, through the work of the State Teach Ag Results (STAR) committee, has developed multiple recruitment and retention strategies to address this shortage. For example, to retain current collegiate students in the Agricultural Education major, 59 students with an interest in teaching AFNR have completed the Agricultural Education internship as of 2024. In this program, interns are paired with current Minnesota agriculture teachers for the summer. Of the interns that have graduated, 84% have entered the agriculture teaching profession. In addition, Minnesota hosts the Midwest Regional Future AgriScience Teacher (FAST) Symposium, with 141 students participating since the program started in 2019. Attendees have the opportunity to engage in professional development while networking with fellow Agricultural Education students and current agriculture teachers.

Post-Secondary AFNR Education

Top strategies for increasing STUDENT access, awareness, and participation

- Create a statewide recruitment plan to increase the conversion of school-based AFNR students from high school to post-secondary. The plan should also increase promotion to those schools without an AFNR program who have an interest in the environment and/or food production.
- Increase and improve opportunities for students to gain post-secondary AFNR credits within the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum Goal Areas. This includes students in concurrent and post-secondary enrollment options (PSEO), as well as those transferring between colleges and universities.
- Increase connections with K-6 students to engage and learn about post-secondary schools utilizing the AFNR career pathways.
- Engage students of non-traditional and underrepresented populations to enroll in post-secondary AFNR education.

Top strategies for improving PROGRAMMING content, meeting facilities and equipment needs, and providing the best methods of instruction to meet the needs of the AFNR industry

- Facilitate discussions and advocate for funding to upgrade facilities and equipment across post-secondary institutions.
- Organize college tours in neighboring states for decision makers and administrators to understand the resources, equipment and talent that competing institutions offer, which need to be prioritized in Minnesota.
- Promote Minnesota colleges to be a preferred choice of education for the AFNR industry.
- Utilize advisory committees with industry partners and administrators to align curriculum, facilities, equipment, and faculty with industry standards.

Top strategies for retaining and supporting highly qualified INSTRUCTORS

- Review the AFNR faculty credentialing process and explore additional options for hiring adjunct instructors.
- Assist faculty with student recruitment and retention for their programs.
- Engage with individuals of non-traditional and underrepresented populations to highlight post-secondary AFNR faculty opportunities.
- Provide financial incentives for hiring and mentoring AFNR faculty.

Post-Secondary AFNR Education Overview

Agriculture plays a crucial role in Minnesota's economy, contributing more than $100 billion annually and supporting over 388,000 jobs. In the state, one in 10 jobs is tied to a wide range of AFNR occupations. With a projected five-year demand for 87,067 new entrants into AFNR occupations, the sector continues to need skilled workers and provides significant employment opportunities for graduates.

Post-secondary AFNR education in Minnesota has a strong focus on career preparation to support students entering the workforce. AFNR education is offered at 32 of the 33 Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (Minnesota State), the University of Minnesota-Crookston (UMC) and the University of Minnesota-College of Food, Agricultural & Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS).

Statewide, there were a total of 7,483 students enrolled across 253 AFNR programs during the 2023-2024 school year, including 2,108 graduates. These post-secondary AFNR programs are led by 576 instructors across the state. The Post-Secondary Instructor Mentorship Program (PIM) supports and mentors new instructors. These instructors usually come from industry and have strong technical skills but require support for pedagogy and classroom management.

MINNESOTA STATE

Top 3 AFNR Majors

1. Environmental Science
2. Veterinary Technician
3. Agribusiness

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA CROOKSTON

Top 3 AFNR Majors

1. Animal Science
2. Natural Resources
3. Agricultural Business

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Top 3 AFNR Majors

1. Animal Science
2. Environmental Science Policy & Management
3. Fisheries, Wildlife & Conservation Biology

Farm Business Management

Top strategies for increasing STUDENT access, awareness, and participation

- Continue to provide student tuition assistance and scholarships with a priority on emerging and specialty farmers.
- Bring awareness of FBM and foster student referrals by developing partnerships with groups such as lenders, commodity and farm organizations, cooperatives, government agencies, and other educators.
- Develop a state and local college marketing plan to promote FBM, as well as generate communication resources that supporters can share with their audiences.
- Expand FBM connections with school-based agricultural education programs and FFA chapters across the state.

Top strategies for improving PROGRAMMING content, meeting facilities and equipment needs, and providing the best methods of instruction to meet the needs of the AFNR industry

- Continue core educational one-on-one instruction, while also developing an alternative instruction model for urban and lifestyle farmer students.
- Create and incorporate a "student dashboard" or online tool for understanding financial ratios and enterprise reports. This will provide financial information in different formats in order to more readily show the value of the FBM program to new students.
- Ensure FBM instructors have access to and training on specialized technology similar to programs utilized by lenders or their farmer students.
- Integrate financial software programming used by instructors on farms with a funding source pinpointed to address shortcomings of the software.

Top strategies for retaining and supporting highly qualified INSTRUCTORS

- Review the FBM instructor credentialing process with a focus on degree and recency requirements. This includes exploring a more flexible interpretation of external experience, especially for non-traditional candidates.
- Create a Professional Development Coordinator position that supports FBM instructors, including both new hires and existing faculty, along with administrators.
- Promote ongoing funding of the Professional Excellence Program (PEP), and continue to strengthen the mentorship program for instructors in years three to five.
- Support phased retirements through sustainable funding and consistent transition practices to assist new instructors.

Farm Business Management Overview

Minnesota State Agricultural Centers of Excellence

Alexandria Technical & Community College

CLC Central Lakes College

Minnesota West Community & Technical College

Northland Community & Technical College

Riverland Community College

South Central College

St. Cloud Technical & Community College

Farm Business Management (FBM) programs are designed to provide education to farm owners and operators or people interested in farming. The purpose of the program is to assist students in meeting their business and personal goals, helping them to be successful in a competitive agricultural environment. FBM is offered at seven colleges in the Minnesota State system by 62 instructors serving 2,800 students in one-on-one, student-led programming. The Minnesota State Agricultural Centers of Excellence build industry relationships, coordinate faculty professional development, and support data collection for the statewide FBM database which provides information on farm summaries and income.

FBM also provides database benchmarks that support lenders and agency staff in developing plans to best support farmers. Over 2,300 farms completed a farm analysis, and additional sorts were added including organic and specialty crop farmers. These analyses contribute to the FINBIN database used by over 33,000 individuals to guide policy, support lenders, and build business plans for farmers.

The Professional Excellence Program (PEP) is a mentorship and teaching program designed to support on-boarding of faculty with two tracks for both first year instructors and those in years two-through-four in the profession. In the 2023-2024 school year, 14 instructors participated in PEP (22.5% of faculty have less than four years of experience). In addition, a statewide skills inventory helps identify instructor areas of expertise and targeted professional development is provided to all instructors.

Indicators of Success

These anticipated outcomes will provide feedback on progress and overall success:

STUDENTS

Increasing access, awareness, and participation

More students are engaged in Minnesota AFNR education, across all sectors.

Opportunities to participate in AFNR education increase, including in the classroom or through expanded offerings (online, student organizations, etc.)

Marketing and promotion are utilized in order for more individuals to know about AFNR career opportunities and educational programming.

PROGRAMMING

Ensuring that content, facilities and equipment needs, and methods of instruction meet the needs of the AFNR industry

Facilities and equipment are updated and better match current industry standards.

Curriculum content is guided through the use of advisory committees to ensure students have the opportunity to learn the most accurate and relevant information to build future career success.

Instructors receive relevant and timely professional development to reflect the needs of their students.

INSTRUCTORS

Recruiting, retaining and supporting highly qualified instructors

Fewer instructor positions remain unfilled, including a decrease in failed searches.

The number of instructors remains stable and individuals are retained in the profession, especially in years one through five of their career.

Instructors feel supported and satisfied in their career.

Appendix A:
Trends Affecting AFNR Education

Listening session participants and sector committee members identified current and future trends affecting AFNR education. A summary of each sector's trends is listed below:

School-Based Agricultural Education

Trends most affecting School-Based Agricultural Education include an increased focus on career-readiness, the need to adapt curriculum for emerging sectors within the AFNR industry, addressing the shortage of agriculture teachers while supporting the increase of early career and alternatively certified teachers, and remaining impactful with limited funding and changes in educational policy and administrations.

Agriculture Teacher Preparation

Trends most affecting the Agriculture Teacher Preparation sector include an increase in alternative pathways into the profession, the ability to attract and retain students in Agricultural Education programs, more students choosing to pursue their degree in other states, competition from industry for graduates, the need for flexible course offerings, and the broadening of AFNR content future agriculture teachers will need to learn before joining the profession.

Post-Secondary AFNR Education

Trends most affecting the Post-Secondary AFNR Education sector include rising tuition costs, students choosing to enter the workforce immediately rather than pursue an academic path, the need for more online and hybrid course selections, competition from industry for faculty and internal training programs, and remaining relevant as technologies and industry needs change.

Farm Business Management

Trends most affecting the Farm Business Management sector include the changing demographics of farmers including an increase in lifestyle and specialty crop farmers, continued need for beginning farmers and farm transition support, rising input costs and tighter profit margins, technology advances in farm operations including financial management software, and providing flexible programming for student needs.

Appendix B:

Listening Session Facilitators & Blueprint Committee Members

Thank you to the following individuals for sharing their expertise in creating this Blueprint.

Listening Session Facilitators

Judy Barka
Jessica Blosberg
Jim Boerboom
Lindsey Brockberg
Brad Greiman
Don Hermanson
Sarah Kuschel
Del Lecy
Mike Miron
Eric Sawatzke
Gretchen Schleper
Christa Williamson

Blueprint Committee Members

School-Based Agricultural Education

Val Aarsvold	*Minnesota FFA Foundation*
Judy Barka	*AgCentric*
Lindsey Brockberg	*Minnesota Department of Education*
Jack Crowson	*Hayfield High School*
Jessica Daberkow	*Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators*
Pam Koenen	*Minnesota Association of Agricultural Educators*
Jeremy Wagner	*Sibley East School District*
Tyler Warren	*Eden Valley-Watkins High School*

Agriculture Teacher Preparation

Hally Frandrup	*University of Minnesota*
Elaina Knott	*Osakis High School*
Kristin Kovar	*Southwest Minnesota State University*
Lavyne Rada	*Lakes Country Service Cooperative*
Laura Rice	*University of Minnesota*
Mike Thofson	*Lake Crystal-Wellcome-Memorial School District*
Christa Williamson	*Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunberg High School*

Post-Secondary AFNR Education

Emma Ascheman	*National PAS*
Ryan Cox	*University of Minnesota*
Jill Grams	*Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart High School*
Sarah Lindholm	*University of Minnesota*
ADawn Nelson	*Northland Community and Technical College*
Keith Olander	*AgCentric*
Nick Schiltz	*Riverland Community College*
Curt Yoose	*Ridgewater College*
Sam Ziegler	*GreenSeam*

Farm Business Management

Nathan Converse	*Central Lakes College*
Mo Derheim	*Farmers & Merchants State Bank of Pierz*
Kyle Huneke	*Riverland Community College*
Jerry Hurrle	*USDA, Farm Service Agency*
Tina LeBrun	*Southern Agricultural Center of Excellence*
Doris Mold	*Sunrise Ag Associates, LLC*
Carolyn Olson	*Olson Organics*
Craig Peters	*Minnesota West Community & Technical College*
Pauline Van Nurden	*UMN - Center for Farm Financial Management*

MAELC provides leadership to promote and expand agricultural education in Minnesota