**Impact Statement**
 **Project Title: Development of a new 4-H and Conference Center in Tennessee**

**Issue:** For many decades, Tennessee has operated four 4-H Centers in the state. In 2009, the Center in West Tennessee was closed due to disrepair and budget challenges. In 2010, we initiated the process to create a new 4-H and Conference Center in Tennessee.

**What has been done:**

A Vision Committee was convened in the spring of 2011, comprised of Extension personnel and external supporters, to develop a comprehensive vision for the Center. Based on visits to other facilities, discussions with external groups, and many internal discussions, the Committee drafted a vision for the Center that called for 1) a multi-purpose, modern, attractive facility that could generate positive net revenue while also serving our educational mission and 2) would highlight agriculture, natural resources, and family & consumer sciences.

In 2012-13, 37 meetings were conducted across the Western Region (all of West TN and 10 counties in Middle TN), which involved about 1,000 Extension personnel, 4-H volunteers and alumni, community leaders, and other key supporters. At these meetings, the vision for the new Center was discussed, and the invitation was made to submit locations for consideration as the home for a future 4-H and Conference Center. Through this process, 19 different potential sites for the Center were identified, which were narrowed to three finalists based on the vision document. A nine-member Site Selection Team selected Lone Oaks Farm in Hardeman County as the clear preference and the property that would best support the Vision for the Center.

From 2013-15, I led a grassroots effort to build political and financial support for the acquisition and development of Lone Oaks Farm. That effort led the project to being named the #1 capital project priority of the University of Tennessee system, and the #2 priority on the Governor’s priority list of all higher education in Tennessee. The Tennessee legislature appropriated $16 million for acquisition on July 1, 2015. To date, we have raised over $4 million in private funds for additional development.

**Impacts/New Partnerships:**

This project is an excellent example of what happens with true grassroots support. Over 1,000 people have visited the Farm during the past 2 years, and over 8,000 people made legislative contacts during the past legislative session to advocate for the project. The majority of these are new UT advocates – people who have never contacted their legislatures before on behalf of UT initiatives.

**Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life)**

This project will create the best 4-H Center in the country. As a working farm, Lone Oaks will expose youth to agriculture, natural resources, the outdoors, and foodways in new and powerful ways. We expect it to become a regional hub for STEM education, while also serving as a significant tool to convince high school students to consider careers in agriculture, natural resources, nutrition, veterinary medicine, and other like-minded pursuits. In addition, the events, hospitality, and conferencing aspect of the Farm will allow us to generate significant revenue, sufficient for the facility to be self-sustaining.

**How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience?**

Nearly every aspect of FSLI was relevant to this project at some point. The knowledge of my own tendencies and weaknesses, particularly during times of stress, were something I considered often. The material on political savvy and risk communication came into play in many places. The material presented about stress management were also a big help, especially during the legislative session!

**Contact information:**

Ben West

731-487-9812

benwest@utk.edu