

Improving the public perception of the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry Carrie Castille

Issue: Over the past decade, the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) has experienced a negative public perception. Much of this due to the wrong-doings of the previous Commissioner of Agriculture who misspent public tax dollars in the year's past. In 2008, a new Commissioner was elected and has since made significant improvements to the department.

Goal: To conduct outreach sessions across the state to educate the public on the mission and responsibilities of the LDAF and assess the current perception through an informal survey and identify specific programs of high value to the agricultural stakeholders.

Progress toward Goal: In March 2010, the LDAF hosted nine outreach sessions throughout Louisiana to inform the agricultural community, decision-makers and the public about LDAF's mission and responsibilities and address the pressing needs regarding agriculture and rural economic development.

During these outreach sessions, the agriculture industry and the public completed surveys indicating their level of frequency utilizing LDAF services, satisfaction with LDAF services, and identification of the specific services utilized. Results indicated that 28 percent of respondents utilize our services on a monthly basis, 25 percent on a weekly basis, and 16 percent on a daily basis.

Survey results also suggested high levels of satisfaction of LDAF services, with 96 percent of respondents indicating that LDAF services are very important to them and their quality of life.

Challenges Encountered:

- Low participation at outreach sessions
- Most of the participants of the outreach sessions were agricultural stakeholders and citizens that understand the importance of the LDAF services
- Results were biased
- LDAF needs to do a better job of educating the general public that the services that are provided affect them
- Still some negative criticism towards the LDAF