

YEAR 4 ANNUAL PROGRESS AND COLLABORATION REPORT

DEC 2024

This document provides an overview of the results of the AFRI SAS Soil to Society Progress and Collaboration Survey Report. OEIE received complete responses from 33 of 55 team members, achieving a **60.0% response rate**.

Progress and Satisfaction

Respondents indicated that they felt that objectives 2, 3, and 4 were on schedule, while objectives 1, 5, 6, and 7 earned mean ratings indicating they were falling somewhat behind schedule.



Reasons for being behind schedule:

- Sample processing/analysis delays ($n=5$)
- Delays in obtaining necessary information or materials from other objective teams ($n=3$)



Mitigation strategies included:

- Enhancing communication ($n=4$), providing technical support for operating equipment, hiring additional personnel, and learning from similar projects ($n=1$ for each after communication) were mentioned as possible mitigation strategies to address project delays.

While team members were generally satisfied with the implementation of the project, collaboration with external partners and integration between objectives emerged as key areas to focus on as the project develops strategies for sharing new knowledge and promoting its products.

Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Researchers

Graduate students and postdoctoral researchers highlighted several benefits from participating in the S2S project. Most students ($n=10$) reported...

- Considerable growth in project-related research knowledge.
- Gains in teamwork skills (e.g., collaboration, communication, networking, experience working on large projects) and specialized skills (e.g., analytical techniques, presentation and teaching skills) ($n=4$ for each).

Individual respondents also mentioned exposure to systems thinking and opportunities to present research and win awards as project benefits. However fewer students felt they were building their professional networks, and one expressed difficulty identifying which full time team members to approach for help.

Asset Assessment

The Soil to Society team members identified project assets across four domains:

Skills/Knowledge

Expertise across a number of project research-related disciplines and technical and professional skills

Social/Network

Connections with researchers, organizations, and end-users and invested parties (schools, farmers, industry/manufacturing)

Physical

Laboratories, equipment, education and meeting spaces, and land for farms or gardens

Capital

Personnel, funding, and access to external experts in relevant disciplines

Most respondents ($n=15$) reported no additional resources were needed to achieve project goals. However, a few noted needs, including financial resources ($n=3$), more personnel ($n=2$), time ($n=2$), and specific items like specialized equipment, statistical support, and bilingual translation resources.

Asset-mapping results from Year 4 align closely with those at the end of Year 1; team members provide knowledge and skill assets across a number of project research-related disciplines, as well as technical and professional skills.

Sustainability

Team members provided their perspectives on what project sustainability means to them. They described continuing interdisciplinary collaborations, advancing research and applying findings, changing consumer behavior, and maintaining sustainable agricultural practices. They emphasized promoting sustainability through research to influence policies, serving as leaders in innovation that industry can follow, product development, and securing funding.

Suggestions to enhance efforts included fostering team collaboration, addressing emerging research needs, increasing stakeholder engagement, planning dissemination strategies, and inviting new speakers to project meetings. Team member feedback indicates that to respondents, sustainability includes an appreciation for the soil ecosystem, industry adoption, and maintenance of the seed library as key sustainability aspects.

Suggestions and Final Thoughts

Team members highlighted expanded interdisciplinary collaboration opportunities ($n=18$) as the most significant benefit of participating in the S2S project, followed by expanding professional networks ($n=7$) and broadening knowledge in project-related research ($n=6$). They identified fostering collaborations ($n=10$) and achieving project goals ($n=5$) as key successes and recommended prioritizing research dissemination ($n=9$) and team integration ($n=8$).

"I think we are making good progress in each of the groups and we have chosen advisory board members who will be able to help us a lot at the next stage of work."

"Being a part of and learning about a team of passionate individuals who want to better understand the science and nutrition behind farm-to-fork is exciting and inspiring."

"I would say pushing more information out there from the project. I hadn't heard a lot about it until I decided to go to grad school and I think it would be worthwhile."



OBSERVATIONS



There has been progress made toward enhancing project work through transdisciplinary research.

"We have reached out to others in regards to product design/formulation in an attempt to inform teams on what we understand are preferences from the school food service perspective."



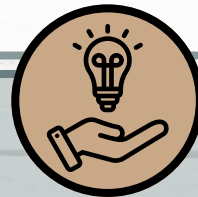
The S2S team has sufficient assets to carry out project goals, but noted a few needs to sustain project initiatives.

The students and the greater team reported a host of assets they provide, including skills and knowledge across multiple disciplines, strong professional networks, physical assets like research equipment and meeting spaces, and capital assets such as funding and external expertise. Team members reported needing additional financial resources, personnel, and specialized equipment to enhance project work.



Respondents noted the need to prioritize dissemination efforts.

"We should look for opportunities to plan dissemination of our findings in a way that increases their uptake/relevance. For example, with the new dietary guidelines coming out soon, there will be a buzz about nutrition and trying to find ways to change diets. We can disseminate into that [buzz]. To do it will require advance planning"



RECOMMENDATIONS



- Develop a structured process for managing the flow of information and materials to address inter-team delays and improve integration efforts.
- Engage with objective teams to identify resources to help individual teams overcome challenges and stay on schedule.



- Review the reported assets and prioritize addressing identified gaps by exploring opportunities to secure additional funding to manufacture and distribute products and to sustain project work.
- Develop a repository of collaborators within academia, industry, and related fields that contains contact information for primary collaborators and designated team members responsible for maintaining these connections.



- Consider appointing a team of project members who will take point in developing S2S project dissemination materials and consider how to best engage students, both graduate and undergraduate interns, in developing and disseminating project materials using both traditional and non-traditional platforms.