



## Merrimack Co. Key Issue 2008

**Instructions:** Each county, program area and specialists as a whole are to identify key issues that their programming activities currently address, or should address. For each issue, craft a 2-3 sentence issue statement that outlines, in brief, what the issue at hand is and why it is important or relevant. The issue statements should be crafted based on objective data, as well as input from Specialists, County Educators, Advisory Councils, and input from other key stakeholders.

**1. In a few words, please come up with a title that succinctly defines the issue:**

Ensuring the economic well-being of youth, families and businesses

**Please describe the issue in 2-3 sentences** (i.e. craft an issue statement that describes what the issue at hand is and why it is a significant issue):

Economic consequences have more than a financial effect on families. Our explanation of the issue takes into consideration those consequences in the broadest sense. We have narrowed our selections to this one over-arching issue because we know the sum of our county expertise has the ability to touch on those consequences in some manner and to make a difference in people's lives when they are facing economic challenges and its related concerns.

Increased economic pressure on residents include: basic family survival costs including: fuel, food, housing, transportation, medical, and business operating costs including salaries and benefits, equipment, energy, etc. Intense economic pressures generate consequences that negatively stress and impact all social structures. Anything that weakens the social fabric of families further weakens all aspects of the community as well.

**2. In 2-3 sentences, please describe what the public value for Extension to address this issue is/would be.** (The term public value refers to not only the value of our outreach activities to community *participants*, but, more importantly, the value of these activities to those who do not *directly* benefit from these activities. The purpose of the Public Value approach is to secure support for activities with strong public value and identify those activities that do not have strong public value. The following is an example of a public value statement that addresses the issue of loss of rural landscape to development and other growth-related pressures.)

The Public Value of this initiative: The preservation of a sense of community and community culture, open spaces, and food availability and safety are among but not limited to the benefits extended to those not participating in activities related to this initiative. Overall economic well-being for youth, families, and businesses provides economic, environmental, and social benefits to everyone.

- 3. Identify and summarize key data that help make the case that this is a key issue** (key data might include demographic trend data, University priorities, issues identified in plans/policies of other agencies and organizations, stakeholder input, etc.).

External pressures affecting the economic well-being of families, youth, and businesses can be observed merely by taking a sensitive and critical look around one's surroundings or by taking in the full impact of what the media is reporting daily. Agencies, partners, and other stakeholders report their observations, as well regarding the stresses and consequences on youth, families, and businesses. Among the most acute pressures is the fall-out from the housing and financial industries that is casting a shadow on economic well-being. Also, there are the global factors of which the common person has no control over that are having observable, stressful impacts on youth, families, and businesses. In addition, the complexity of the issue is intensified by the fact that the very definition of "family" is changing, the faces in our communities are changing in that they may look different from us and bring different customs. The nimble, responsive, flexible ways that businesses must operate in order to remain competitive are changing as well. Major local newspapers such as the Concord Monitor report the consequences of negative economic well-being. The rapidly increasing costs for basic commodities, foreclosures, increased unemployment rates, greater reliance on social safety nets such as an increase in food stamp applications, and anti-social behaviors of youth as well as adults under the stressful conditions of our times are at the core of many of the stories being reported. Data from the United Way- Merrimack County and the Carsey Institute provide population trends and other demographics that flesh out the picture that currently reflects the state of the economic well-being of youth, families, and businesses in Merrimack County.

- 4. How does/would addressing this issue tie into UNH Cooperative Extension's Mission?**

Economic well-being in the broadest sense impacts youth, families, natural resource and agriculture-based businesses, and communities of all kinds and sizes.

- 5. What Extension programs/activities, if any, currently address this issue? For each, please succinctly describe how the program/activity addresses the issue.**

Financial Security Now and into the Future  
Meeting with landowners to support natural resource businesses  
High School Financial Planning and workforce preparation  
Help with managing food resources and budgeting  
Parenting during difficult circumstances and practical stress and anger management programs  
Newsletters supporting parents: Cradle Crier, Toddler Tales

- 6. What other organizations/agencies are currently addressing this issue?**

Rural Development  
DRED  
Department of Agriculture

NH Food Bank  
Social Service agencies  
Asset Building Coalitions

- 7. If Extension does not currently address this issue, how might we address this issue in the future?** (Consider staff capacity, financial resources, volunteer capacity, and potential partnerships with other agencies/organizations, etc.).

To better address this issue we would...

- Make it an official interdisciplinary initiative
- Fully define economic well-being and create measurable indicators and tools for evaluation
- Better coordinate efforts and initiatives
- Add more business-oriented expertise in the natural resources areas.
- Better target our audiences to better identify those that are vulnerable (those with a change in economic status or economic well-being as defined through the initiative) and target them with appropriate expertise and resources.
- Seek, develop, or maintain partnerships with the following: community coalitions such as the Asset Building Coalitions, through current initiatives such as Operation Military Kids and Energy Matters, NH Food Banks, NH Housing Finance Authority, Concord Area Trust for Community Housing, Consumer Credit Counseling of NH VT, DRED, DHHS, financial institutions, and non-profit organizations serving youth and families.

**Please Complete and Email to Lisa Townson by October 23, 2008**

**Form Submitted by: Marilyn Sullivan/Debbie Cheever**

**Date: October 6, 2008**

**Representing: Merrimack County Staff**