

**Summary Minutes from the
“Renewing an Agriculture-of-the-Middle” Task Force
Initial Meeting November 7-9, 2003
(Wingspread Conference Center, Racine WI)**

Friday Evening (11/07/03)

- Following introductions of the twenty-one Task Force members assembled, Fred Kirschenmann presented the background and an overview of the project. (See “Why Worry About the Agriculture of the Middle?” and “Renewing the Agriculture of the Middle: A Planning Grant Request to Develop and Implement a National Strategy” on this web-site.)
- Recent survey research data was presented that indicated that consumers registered very high positive associations with food products labeled as locally grown by family farmers.
- Emphasis was placed on the importance of addressing new production and marketing systems, as well as supportive public policies. Particular attention was directed to the importance of research and education support for new food value chains.

Saturday AM (11/08/03)

- Ferd Hoefner provided a sobering analysis of the political landscape with which the project will be interacting.
- Many pieces of the last farm bill are under budgetary attack, and passage of new initiatives targeted to particular sectors of the agri-food system will be very challenging.
- To be successful, the project will need to create a strong constituency for agriculture-of-the-middle issues and an effective leadership structure in Washington DC.
- Larry Yee presented a model for a national marketing effort built upon an association of family farms. Envisioned as a parallel initiative to our project, Larry will create an electronic site for further dialogue.
- The morning concluded with regional break-out sessions discussing the status of the agriculture-of-the-middle and the identification of middle-market food enterprises or policies to be used as case studies to support the project’s final action plan.

Saturday PM (11/08/03)

- Regional groups reported on their discussions with all groups indicating the need to further sharpen the definition and parameters of what we mean by the “agriculture-of-the middle.”
- Differences between regions became evident as the South emphasized the importance of agricultural contracts and the loss of middle-supporting crops like peanuts and tobacco, the Northeast emphasized middle-scaled direct marketing strategies, the West emphasized family management and the role of agricultural

- labor, and the North Central emphasized the existence of successful middle-marketing enterprises like the Organic Valley co-operative.
- A wide range of potential enterprises for case studies were identified, including several policy-oriented cases.
 - Fred Buttel shared a list of potential topics for the “research volume” that will accompany and support the project’s final action plan. Among others, these topics include deeper analyses of the status of “the middle” and a “realistic” rationale for supporting this sector, the renewal of competitive markets, the role of cooperatives, the case studies of consumer-supported food value chains, and the importance of policy innovations at multiple levels.
 - Steve Stevenson led a discussion of the project’s web site and between-meeting, Task Force communications.

Sunday AM (11/09/03)

- The concluding part of the meeting focused on next steps & responsibilities for two areas of work to be accomplished prior to the next Task Force meeting.
- The first area involves moving ahead with the following project documents:
 - Continued refinement of the project’s white paper, “Why Worry About the Agriculture of the Middle?” [Comments from all Task Force members & others interested in the project],
 - A two-page condensation of the white paper for use with federal legislators [First draft by Fred Kirschenmann],
 - Recruiting additional authors for chapters of the “research volume” [coordinated by Fred Buttel],
 - Establishing a process and schedule for selecting and writing the regional case studies [Coordinated by Steve Stevenson], and
 - Posting relevant background materials on the project’s web site [Task Force members to submit materials to Steve Stevenson and Cris Carusi]
- The second area involves selecting resource persons for the next Task Force meeting:
 - Invite resource persons related to political strategies [Fred Kirschenmann, Steve Stevenson, Ferd Hoefner, and Chuck Hassebrook]
 - Invite resource persons related to the construction of an alternative agri-food system of the middle [Fred Kirschenmann, Steve Stevenson, and Theresa Marquez].
- Second Task Force meeting (February 20-22, 2004)...Using input from resource persons and from regional case studies, confirm research agenda and begin formulating final action plan.
- Third Task Force meeting (July 16-18, 2004)...Finalize research agenda and fine tune action plan for implementation.

Minutes submitted by Steve Stevenson, November 19, 2004.