

Survey Results

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Limitation of this Survey

As one means of finding out how MISA is doing and how it can improve, we sent surveys to 268 people: farmers, nonprofit representatives, government agency staff, faculty members, and community members. Ninety-eight were returned for a 37% response rate. We had planned to send reminder postcards and do follow-up phone calls to boost the response rate but in the midst of preparing for the MISA review, time ran out. Because the response rate is low, the numbers in this survey should be used with caution.

Level of Awareness

Perhaps the most interesting finding is the number of respondents who felt they didn't know enough about MISA to answer the questions, even though surveys were mailed to people whom MISA staff felt were knowledgeable about MISA's activities. About 20% of the respondents said they didn't know enough to rate MISA's effectiveness or staff, and over half said they didn't know enough to rate MISA's board. Clearly, a fair number of people are not as informed about MISA as staff had believed. This might, in part, explain the low response rate.

MISA's Effectiveness

We asked people to rate MISA's effectiveness in accomplishing its goals on a five point scale:

- 5 = Extremely Effective
- 4 = Very Effective
- 3 = Somewhat Effective
- 2 = Not Very Effective
- 1 = Not At All Effective

Mean	Goal
3.7	Bringing people together to address sustainable agriculture issues
3.6	Supporting research on sustainable agriculture issues
3.6	Influencing the education of students in sustainable agriculture
3.5	Increasing faculty members' awareness of sustainable agriculture
3.5	Increasing the amount of university resources

	devoted to sustainable agriculture
3.4	Increasing awareness of sustainable agriculture issues in MN
3.3	Increasing sustainable agriculture community members' influence on the university
3.2	Getting sustainable agriculture information to farmers and other practitioners

On average, respondents said MISA has been "somewhat" to "very" effective in accomplishing each of its goals. It has been most effective in bringing people together, supporting research, and influencing the education of students. People said MISA has been less effective in increasing sustainable agriculture community members' influence on the university and in getting sustainable agriculture information to practitioners.

MISA's Board and Staff

We asked people to rate MISA's board and staff using a four point scale:

- 4 = Excellent
- 3 = Good
- 2 = Fair
- 1 = Poor

Mean		
Staff	Board	Attribute
3.5	NA	Professionalism
3.4	NA	Competency
3.3	3.2	Knowledge of sustainable agriculture
3.3	3.2	Ability to work cooperatively
3.0	2.9	Understanding of community concerns
3.0	2.7	Addressing of priority issues
NA	2.7	Representing all parties concerned
3.0	2.6	Understanding faculty concerns
NA = not asked		

Respondents rated the staff between "good" and "excellent" on all items, giving highest ratings for professionalism and competency. They rated the board slightly lower than staff on each item, with some ratings in the "fair" to "good" range. Ratings for the board and staff are almost identical on each item, except "understanding faculty concerns." Respondents gave the board its lowest rating for this item.

Comments about the Board:

- As mentioned earlier, some people said they just didn't know enough about the board to give an opinion. It seems that if people haven't been on the board they don't know much about the board.
- Other comments pointed to struggles and conflicts of the board but suggested that as MISA is maturing these problems are diminishing.
- Some people praised the board members' generosity in time and work.

Comments about the Staff:

- Most of the comments about the staff were extremely positive. People said staff members work hard, are friendly, helpful, and able to build bridges between the university and community.
- A few people said the staff and their work isn't visible enough.
- A few people said the staff has too much control or influence, particularly in the granting process.

MISA's Greatest Strength

We asked people to tell us about MISA's greatest strength. The most frequently mentioned strength was MISA's ability to bring people together to address sustainable agriculture issues. Several other themes were:

- The diversity of people involved in MISA
- The partnership between the University and the community
- A committed, knowledgeable board and staff
- Being part of the University

MISA's Greatest Weakness

We asked people to describe MISA's greatest weakness. Comments clustered into several areas. Each of these areas seemed to get about the same emphasis:

- Not involving or acknowledging people engaged in traditional agriculture (farmers, agribusiness, faculty)
- "Preaching to the choir." Not enough effort in reaching people who aren't aware or convinced.
- Lack of visibility
- Not enough funding
- Being a part of the University

MISA's Biggest Challenge

People see funding as MISA's biggest challenge in the future. In a time of tight money, MISA must find enough funding to continue what it has started and have significant impact. Here are additional challenges people foresee:

- Getting more farmers and faculty involved
- Making sustainability more than a fringe issue
- Building bridges with other agriculture groups
- Countering corporate agriculture

MISA's Impact

We asked people, "What kind of impact is MISA having on sustainable agriculture in the state?" Over 90% said MISA is having a positive impact on sustainable agriculture in the state.

- 16% great positive impact
- 76% some positive impact
- 7% no real impact
- 0% some negative impact
- 0% great negative impact