

Kenya's extension gap calls for universities, research, development partners, and counties to work together

By Prof Kiringai Kamau

Kenya produces agricultural research, trains graduates and employs extension officers. Yet farmers still struggle to get timely, affordable advice that answers the questions they face on their farms and connects production to markets. At a university leadership meeting held on August 31, 2026, and hosted by the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) through its Kenya implementing partner, Rotooba, this gap became the focus of discussion. NASDA works closely with federal agencies, including the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Participants examined how universities, researchers, counties, and farmers could build a stronger extension system. NASDA representatives stressed that extension must listen as well as teach. Farmers can identify problems, test innovations, and tell researchers what works locally. Research, in turn, must be accessible beyond academic journals and translated into solutions that improve productivity and profitability.

University representatives described practical student training, technical and vocational education, community gardens, tomato-grafting demonstrations, and farmer groups in dairy and macadamia production. These examples show what is possible. The challenge is to connect them systematically to county extension services and take useful practices to more farmers. Participants also raised the need for financing to expand practical programs and link farmers to markets.

The conversation comes at a pivotal



The NASDA Delegation to Kenya pose for a group photo with University Leadership, USDA-FAS and Rotooba staff during the delegation's visit to Kenya in late August 2026. PHOTO CREDIT: MURIMI GITARI

time for higher education. Kenya's first competency-based curriculum cohort is expected to enter university in 2029. Universities should use the intervening period to develop field-based learning and assessment alongside classroom teaching. A student should be able to diagnose a production problem with a farmer, test a solution, assess its costs and explain its market prospects. That requires reliable community learning sites and supervision, not merely revised course titles and descriptors.

Counties can help provide that setting. Universities could work with the Council of Governors and County Governments on curricula and programs responsive to local priorities. Murang'a's proposed Local Enterprise and Services Hub (LESH) model offers one possible way to organize that relationship. Existing cooperatives and producer facilities could host university placements, farmer demonstrations, extension referrals, and youth enterprise assignments. Farmers would help set the agenda; universities would provide research and assess skills; counties would coordinate public services and accountability. Evidence from those assignments should then shape curricula, research priorities and

policy, so each placement improves the next – just what University CBC needs.

Such arrangements could give young people a reason to see agriculture as a business and service opportunity. Digital records could track farmer questions, referrals and results, subject to appropriate safeguards. Private firms and buyers can help turn promising practices into viable products and market access.

The meeting also identified possible U.S.-Kenya exchanges on extension, practical training and livestock genetic improvement. The leaders agreed to explore Kenya-USA program funding.

The next step is to choose a small number of county learning sites, define responsibilities with university partners, and test whether farmers receive better advice, students demonstrate useful skills, and enterprises gain from the connection.

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