

National Cooperative Extension System plays important role

Introduction

All universities engage in research and teaching, but the nation's more than 100 land-grant colleges and universities, have a third critical mission extension. "Extension" means "reaching out," and along with teaching and research land-grant institutions "extend" their resources, solving public needs with college or university resources through non-formal, non-credit programs.

These programs are largely administered through thousands of county and regional extension offices, which bring land-grant expertise to the most local of levels. And both the universities and their local offices are supported by NIFA, the federal partner in the Cooperative Extension System (CES). NIFA plays a key role in the land-grant extension mission by distributing annual Congressional appropriated formula grants to supplement state and county funds. NIFA affects how these formula grants are used through national program leadership to help identify timely national priorities and ways to address them.

Congress created the extension system nearly a century ago to address exclusively rural, agricultural issues. At that time, more than 50 percent of the U.S. population lived in rural areas, and 30 percent of the workforce was engaged in farming. Extension's engagement with rural America helped make possible the American agricultural revolution, which dramatically increased farm productivity:

In 1945, it took up to 14 labor-hours to produce 100 bushels of corn on 2 acres of land.

By 1987, it took just under 3 labor-hours to produce that same 100 bushels of corn on just over 1 acre.

In 2002, that same 100 bushels of corn were produced on less than 1 acre.

That increase in productivity has allowed fewer farmers to produce more food.

Fewer than 2 percent of Americans farm for a living today, and only 17 percent of Americans now live in rural areas. Yet, the extension service still plays an important role in American life rural, urban, and suburban. With its unprecedented reach with an office in or near most of the nation's approximately 3,000 counties, extension agents help farmers grow crops, homeowners plan and maintain their homes, and children learn skills to become

tomorrow's leaders.

Despite the decline in the population and economic importance of rural America, the national Cooperative Extension System remains an important player in American life. It increasingly addresses urban, suburban, in addition to rural issues, and it has responded to information technology changes in America by developing a national Web presence.

History

The roots of U.S. agricultural extension go back to the early years of our country. There were agricultural societies and clubs after the American Revolution, and in 1810 came the first Farm Journal. It survived for only 2 years, but in 1819 John Stuart Skinner of Baltimore began publishing the American Farmer. Farmers were encouraged to report on their achievements and their methods of solving problems. Some worthwhile ideas, along with some utterly useless ones, appeared on the pages of the publication.

The Morrill Act of 1862 established land-grant universities to educate citizens in agriculture, home economics, mechanical arts, and other practical professions. Extension was formalized in 1914, with the Smith-Lever Act (link to that topic in About Us). It established the partnership between the agricultural colleges and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to provide for cooperative agricultural extension work. At the heart of agricultural extension work, according to the Act, was:

Developing practical applications of research knowledge.

Giving instruction of existing or improved practices or technologies in agriculture.

Smith-Lever mandated that the Federal Government (through USDA) provide each state with funds based on a population-related formula. Today, NIFA distributes these so-called formula grants annually.

The extension service's first big test came during World War I, when it helped the nation meet its wartime needs by:

Increasing wheat acreage significantly, from an average of 47 million acres annually in 1913 to 74 million in 1919.

Helping the USDA implement its new authority to encourage farm production, marketing, and conserving of perishable products by canning, drying, and preserving.

Helping to address war-related

farm labor shortages at harvest time by organizing the Women's Land Army and the Boys' Working Reserve.

More generally, extension's role in WWI helped it expand its reputation as an educational entity to one that also emphasized service for individuals, organizations, and the Federal Government.

During the Great Depression, state colleges and the USDA emphasized farm management for individual farmers. Extension agents taught farmers about marketing and helped farm groups organize both buying and selling cooperatives. At the same time, extension home economists taught farm women who traditionally maintained the household good nutrition, canning surplus foods, house gardening, home poultry production, home nursing, furniture refinishing, and sewing skills that helped many farm families survive the years of economic depression and drought.

During World War II, the extension service again worked with farmers and their families, along with 4-H club members, to secure the production increases essential to the war effort. Each year for 5 years, total food production increased. In 1944, food production was 38 percent above the 1935-1939 average.

The Victory Garden Program was one of the most popular programs in the war period, and extension agents developed programs to provide seed, fertilizer, and simple gardening tools for victory gardeners. An estimated 15 million families planted victory gardens in 1942, and in 1943 some 20 million victory gardens produced more than 40 percent of the vegetables grown for that year's fresh consumption.

Between 1950 and 1997, the number of farms in the U.S. declined dramatically from 5.4 million to 1.9 million. Because the amount of farmland did not decrease as much as the number of farms, the remaining farms have a larger average acreage. During the same period, farm production increased from one farmer supporting the food needs of 15.5 persons in 1950 to one farmer supporting 100 persons in 1990. By 1997, one farmer supported the food needs of almost 140 U.S. citizens. That increased productivity, despite the decline in farm numbers, resulted from increased mechanization, commercial fertilizers, new hybrid seeds, and other technologies. Extension played an important role in extending these new technologies

to U.S. farmers and ranchers.

Extension today (including eXtension)

Over the last century, extension has adapted to changing times and landscapes, and it continues to address a wide range of human, plant, and animal needs in both urban and rural areas. Today, extension works in six major areas:

4-H Youth Development cultivates important life skills in youth that build character and assist them in making appropriate life and career choices. At-risk youth participate in school retention and enrichment programs. Youth learn science, math, social skills, and much more, through hands-on projects and activities.

Agriculture research and educational programs help individuals learn new ways to produce income through alternative enterprises, improved marketing strategies, and management skills and help farmers and ranchers improve productivity through resource management, controlling crop pests, soil testing, livestock production practices, and marketing.

Leadership Development trains extension professionals and volunteers to deliver programs in gardening, health and safety, family and consumer issues, and 4-H youth development and serve in leadership roles in the community.

Natural Resources teaches landowners and homeowners how to use natural resources wisely and protect the environment with educational programs in water quality, timber management, composting, lawn waste management, and recycling.

Family and Consumer Sciences helps families become resilient and healthy by teaching nutrition, food preparation skills, positive child care, family communication, financial management, and health care strategies.

Community and Economic Development helps local governments investigate and create viable options for economic and community development, such as improved job creation and retention, small and medium-sized business development, effective and coordinated emergency response, solid waste disposal, tourism development, workforce education, and land use planning.

Regardless of the program, extension expertise meets public needs at the local level. Although the number of local extension offices has declined over the years, and some county offices have

consolidated into regional extension centers, there remain approximately 2,900 extension offices nationwide. Increasingly, extension serves a growing, increasingly diverse constituency with fewer and fewer resources.

The extension system also supports the eXtension Web site. One of the goals of eXtension is to develop a coordinated, Internet-

based information system where customers will have round-the-clock access to trustworthy, balanced views of specialized information and education on a wide range of topics. For customers, the value will be personalized, validated information addressing their specific questions, issues, and life events in an aggregated, non-duplicative approach.

Weibert honored as animal sciences and industry distinguished alumnus

Warren Weibert, a 1969 graduate of Kansas State, was honored on Nov. 15 as the recipient of the 2013 K-State Animal Sciences & Industry Distinguished Alumnus Award.

The Distinguished Alumnus Award is given to an outstanding Kansas State University Animal Sciences & Industry alumnus each year. These award winners are successful industry leaders who have been selected by the department faculty.

Weibert has served as president of the Kansas Livestock Association, president of Cattle-Fax and chairman of board for Kansas Agricultural and Rural Leadership (KARL).

Weibert grew up near Durham, Kan. working on his family's farm and cattle feeding business.

"Cattle have been my life," said Weibert, "I've always known feeding cattle is what I wanted to do."

Since 1977, Weibert and his wife, Carol, have operated Decatur County Feed Yard in northwest Kansas near Oberlin. Over the years it has grown from an 18,000 to 40,000 head capacity operation with 130 active ranch customers across the country.

Decatur County Feed Yard is a family business built on three principles:

1. Ranchers retaining ownership of cattle through the feed yard.
2. Managing and marketing cattle as individuals.
3. Providing comprehensive individual animal performance data to ranchers.

Weibert's goal is and always will be to work for the producer and to help cow-calf operations improve their long-term profitability and gain more control over their cattle's performance.

He said that it is strong communication that allows his feed yard to be efficient and successful, but the automation and electronics used in the feed yard are what really sets it apart from the rest.

Weibert believes in the meaning behind "you cannot manage what you do not measure."

In 1994 they implemented the electronic cattle management system, which allows them to track each individual animal from the time it arrives at the feed yard and through the packing plant.

An electronic ear tag is attached to the animal at the time of arrival at the feed yard. This ear tag helps match data to the correct animal and documents it automatically in their system.

Each animal is also individually measured using ultrasound, video imaging and electronic scales to determine back fat, frame score, weight and projected feed efficiency.

When the cattle are ready for market, they are then sorted by the system according to their optimum finish dates.

Cattle are sorted into market groups where they are valued individually according to a value-based grid. This allows producers to be paid based on the value of their beef, not the commodity price set by the market.

After cattle are sold, individual animal reports are sent to the producers. The data included in the report reflects the merit of each animal, including the dollar value, feed efficiency, quality grade, and more, listed from highest to lowest net return. Producers can see exactly what characteristics, costs, and gains were attributed to every animal to better understand why certain animals were more profitable than others.

With this information, ranchers can improve their herd and begin genetic improvement to create a better control over their future revenues.

For more information about Warren (and Carol) Weibert or the Decatur County Feed Yard, visit www.decaturfedyard.com.

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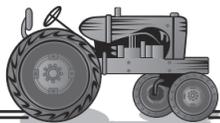
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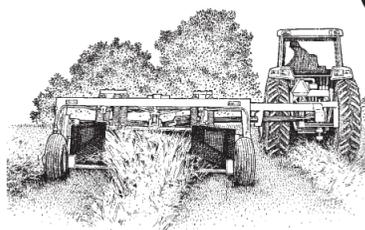
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