

## AAEA EXTENSION/COSBAE SYMPOSIUM

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### *Cooperative Extension Restructuring and Organizational Changes in the Land-Grant System: “The Impact on the Role of Extension Professionals”*

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Before I begin my comments, I would like to thank the organizing committee that put together today's AAEA Extension/COSBAE Symposium and for the opportunity to participate as a panel member. I do apologize for my absence from the meeting and for my participation in the panel discussion, via the use of media. Although I am not physically present, please know that this has not dampened my enthusiasm and desire to engage you in a dialogue about the changes that are happening in Cooperative Extension and how those changes are impacting the role of Extension professionals.

Without question, the U. S. and the world have seen significant changes in economics, energy, food and environment, social demographic, etc. and the list goes on and on. As with the economy and the other aforementioned factors, the national Cooperative Extension System has faced its fair share of challenges related to mission and organizational structure and culture. Regardless as to your geographic location in the U.S., whether in the South, Midwest, Northeast or West, you have heard the question asked, **“Is Extension Still Relevant and Needed Today.”**

This a reasonable question to ask given all the innovations and changes that have occurred in the private sector and business world. Much of the

debate around this question stems from the rapid advancements that have been made in the area of information technology; information's availability, our easy access of it and the ever-changing needs of the public. If Cooperative Extension's mission and purpose were the same as it was in 1914 (93 yrs ago) and it had not evolved with time, it might in fact be a dinosaur and out of date today. But, this is not the case. Cooperative Extension has continued to evolve as have other industries and businesses in an effort to meet the needs of today's public. Today's Extension is not the same organization that our parents and grandparents knew.

In 2002, the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) commissioned a committee and charged it with formulating a vision for Extension that considered the impact of changing demographics, advances in technology and profound social changes that confront our society.

- Using as its basis, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of the Land-Grant Universities compelling report "Returning to our Roots", the nine member panel authored a report entitled "A Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" which connected and envisioned Extension as an integral part of university-wide engagement.
- In connecting itself to Kellogg's concept of university-wide engagement, the Cooperative Extension System also embraced the 7 guiding characteristics of engagement, which compose the seven-part test of engagement. Those being:

**Responsiveness** – Extension, through its network of community-based centers and offices, can connect people with ideas and foster accomplishments.

**Respect for Partners-** Extension has a history of respect and can be a major player in helping universities to work with people and communities and to build new partnerships.

**Academic Neutrality** – Extension can be sustained only in an atmosphere of academic neutrality if it is to help people put knowledge to work.

**Accessibility** - Extension's presence in local communities conveniently provided accessibility to the knowledge and expertise that resided within the land-grant university system.

**Integration** – Extension has the capability of bringing together all facets of the university to solve the needs and issues of the public.

**Coordination** – Extension has the capacity to coordinate a myriad of programs and activities to help fulfill the university's mission relative to outreach and engagement.

**Resource Partnerships** – Extension has the fiscal, human and intellectual resources to bring to the table and to be a full partner in university-wide engagement.

- The committee presented several recommendations that would change how Extension operated on its campuses as well as to how it integrated itself with other aspects of the university, community and future partnerships. Critical to this new way of thinking/doing business was:
  - Involve and expand its scope of stakeholders and partners to reflect the faces of the communities and persons of its states.
  - Hire leaders that not only understand but also embrace engagement and its capacity to bring about change in the public sector. Also, hire faculty who understand the importance and potential of university-wide engagement and to commit them to a training/professional development program that will enhance

- their competencies and capacity of engagement and critical issues.
- Establish new partnerships that are strategic, multi-state/multi-institutional that lead to shared resources, rapid responses to needs and expectations and recognize and honor contributions.
  - Greater coordination of university-wide funding strategies for university engagement. The development of new revenue streams/partnerships with foundations and corporations based upon common interest and strategic alliances.
  - Implement effective electronic technologies which lead to greater information access, sharing and distribution among the populous.
  - Lead in the defining and development of measures of scholarship to ensure that engagement works and accomplishments are valued and respect as are teaching and research activities in mainstream academia.

## **OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS OF NEW STRATEGIC FOCUS**

- Extension has been elevated to cabinet level at many universities. Universities are now operating with variations of Vice Chancellors/Presidents of University Extension, Engagement and(or) Outreach. Extension is being recognized and valued as partner and driver for greater involvement of the university in the community and in providing solutions to issues and concerns.
- Many Extension Directors/Administrators have taken on more prominent roles in University leadership. Some have had their positions upgraded and some have had their positions upgraded as

well as expanded to university-wide responsibility for extension, outreach and engagement.

- The scholarship of extension and engagement is gaining wider acceptance into the mainstream of academia. Where as Extension activities were not totally accepted as scholarly works and weighed equal to that of teaching and research, it is being treated more equitably today in the hiring and tenure process.
- Expanded partnerships have developed with communities and corporations, which recognize the whole concept of engagement and allows for co-facilitation and leadership of problem-solving at the local level. No longer does Extension have to be seen as the sole entity in bring about change at the local level.
- ECOP has commissioned a committee on Marketing. In an effort to further define Extension's mission, vision and function, a committee of Cooperative Extension faculty was appointed and given the charge/challenge of identifying ways to better market Extension's and vast array of program accomplishments and involvements nationally.
- ECOP has appointed a Taskforce on Extension Priorities. This taskforce was charged with the design and development of a process by which to identify those critical issues confronting Extension nationally. Once identified, the committee was to prioritize the issues into a listing of high priority issues which would serve as programming priorities for the system nationally.

### **IMPACT ON ROLE OF EXTENSION PROFESSIONALS**

- Extension professionals must adapt to the changing landscape of Extension and to the climate that it must now function within. Thus, they must be flexible and highly adaptive.

- No longer is Extension professionals viewed as the sole source of relevant information. Electronic technologies have placed at the fingertips of the public vast amounts of information from various sources. However, Extension DOES remain as the major source of unbiased research-based information, emanating from America's land-grant universities.
- Professionals must begin to accept their role as co-facilitators in the learning process. They must accept the fact that there does exist a knowledge base within the community on various issues. Thus, we must respect that knowledge and learn to work collaboratively with it in problem-solving.
- Professionals must become more integrated and multi-disciplinary in their approach to solving the needs and issues of the community. They must engage a broader and more diverse group of stakeholders in defining and setting the goals and objectives of the research and outreach agenda. Gone are the days of setting the goals and agenda in isolation without the input of clientele relative to their interest and perspective.
- Scholarship remains critically important to acceptance in the academy. There is no substitute for well-defined, high quality programs and publications. Promotion and tenure are still based upon scholarship and productivity.

In summary, the Cooperative Extension System of today is dynamic and is seeking dynamic individuals interested in working in a collaborative mode and manner. Is Extension still relevant? Yes, it is and will remain so given the ever-increasing needs and issues of today's society. Extension will remain relevant as long as its universities, leaders and workforce remain relevant and do not become stagnant in its thoughts and approach to outreach and engagement. It is no longer the sole player as to university outreach, but rather a partner in the greater university-

wide endeavor of Extension, Engagement and Outreach. This is where it belongs and will remain for the foreseeable future.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to engage you in a dialogue concerning the Cooperative Extension System. I hope that the remainder of your conference is productive and fruitful and I look forward to meeting and partnering with many of you as we navigate this broader University agenda called **ENGAGEMENT**.

**THANK YOU!**