

EXTENSION: EXTENDING INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

Ruby Lecture by Gordon Guyer, President Emeritus,
Michigan State University, at Ruby Award Ceremony, 1993.

I am most grateful and most appreciative of this wonderful recognition. Being selected for an award by colleagues and peers is a most satisfying and humbling experience.

I accept the award on behalf of colleagues and friends over the years and over the miles.

Extension has long been a part of my life; I was doing Extension work as an entomologist even before I was officially an Extension staff member, and I became more involved in 1963 when I became chair of the Department of Entomology and worked to establish integrated pest management as a practical tool for agriculture. It was a special privilege to be identified to direct the Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service in 1973.

I am pleased that our son, Dan, a young professor in the Department of Agricultural Engineering at Michigan State, has a major Extension appointment. It is a wonderful career opportunity for young faculty members. Indeed, there is no higher calling.

Through the years, I've very much valued the many leadership opportunities that Extension has provided and the support I've received, no time more than when we initiated many new and creative programs.

I treasure the friendship of Extension colleagues across the Cooperative Extension System and recognize that I am standing here today, receiving this high honor, because of their wise counsel and the many projects we've undertaken together.

Although I am now officially retired, I was recently asked to participate on the National Research Council's Land-Grant **Study Committee. I look** forward to serving with **this outstanding group of people, who will be meeting for the first time in January under the leadership of Anthony Earl, former governor of Wisconsin --** and, I might add, an alumnus of Michigan State.

That's one thing about being an Extension professional -- the opportunities to contribute are endless. And service -- lifelong service -- is at the heart of our profession.

Extension and the land-grant system are facing tremendous challenges as we look to the future. Society today is undergoing massive changes affecting all aspects of our lives -- social, demographic, political, economic, cultural and even spiritual. This societal change is provoking fundamental change in all of our social institutions: business and industry, K-12 education, health care, churches, government, agriculture and surely higher education.

We live in a time in which many of the old rules no longer apply. There is a saying that the time is right for change when you can no longer avoid it. Well, we in extension and higher education can no longer avoid it. The world is changing and we must change with it.

Through the years, Extension and the land-grant system have viewed themselves -Â- and been viewed -- as problem solvers, but today the problems are very complex and require that we seek solutions in new and different ways. The times call for our best efforts and require that we seek new partners and develop new and often very complex strategies suitable for the century ahead.

There was a time, perhaps, when we could "go it alone," but that time has long since passed. The problems that confront our society are too complex and our resources are too limited. We need to develop new partnerships and collaborations while maintaining those that have served us so well in the past.

Today, we have access to new technologies that can help us better serve the people of our respective states and the nation. Satellite downlinks, two-way interactive television and computer networking, coupled with more personal contacts and study programs, can assist us in helping citizens meet their learning needs and objectives. For many in Extension, this represents a new way of doing things.

Extension, like the university itself, must reinvent itself as it adapts to a society in transition. Change is not easy, but it is the sign of a healthy and vital organization. And I believe Extension is a healthy vital organization.

Agriculture and natural resources have always been a cornerstone of Extension work and must remain so. But while food production will always be of critical importance, it is essential that we look beyond production and consider the entire food system, attending also to marketing, processing and other value-added aspects. Environmental considerations must be front and center, too.

We must serve our traditional agricultural clientele better and in more effective ways. They need us if they are to remain profitable, competitive and environmentally responsible in the global community in which we now find ourselves.

To better serve our agricultural and forestry customers, we need to seek expertise in other areas of the university and even beyond the confines of our home university. What can other colleges and universities offer? What about the resources that exist in community colleges?

The rapid development of Internet and other electronic highways, and the fast- growing array of highly interactive communication technologies make accessing knowledge resources around the world practical as well as possible. Extension professionals must learn to use these tools and help others access and evaluate these expanding information sources.

There are many opportunities for us to broaden our horizons and provide educational interventions that work in confronting the needs of other sectors of our society.

In the '70s, I saw a need to expand Extension's outreach to urban audiences as well as those with strong traditional ties to Extension: producers, farm families, 4-H members/leaders and Extension homemakers. We made the decision to serve inner-city young people and their families. That was not a popular stance to take.

But once we loaded some of our farm organizations' leaders on a bus and took them to downtown Detroit so they could see firsthand what we were trying to accomplish, these opinion leaders came to understand the needs we were trying to meet, the Legislative support we were anxious to establish and believe in the appropriateness of our work in cities. Extension was focusing on youth at risk long before that term came into popular usage. We took positive steps to intervene in the lives of young people because Extension has always known that prevention carries a low price tag while remediation is a major cost.

By working with the Department of Social Services, we were able to obtain a \$1,000,000 allocation to help Extension work with urban, limited-income and/or minority families. That allocation was subsequently transferred to the Extension budget, where it

..has remained since the late 1970s. Our urban programs have continued to garner new resources from nontraditional sources as well as general political support and recognition.

Our work in the inner-cities has not detracted from our responsiveness to traditional audiences. Rather, it has provided an added dimension with reasonable impact.

We are becoming a more diverse society and the world is getting smaller. Extension must be more nurturing of both staff members and clients who reflect these demographic changes and more global perspective.

I take considerable satisfaction in knowing that Extension in Michigan was a leader -- in the '70s -- in providing staff training on diversity and pluralism. I'm also proud of efforts we made to place women and minorities in leadership positions and bring about greater salary equity without regard for gender. We truly provided the leadership and format for the total university.

Extension professionals must not be afraid to identify a few worthy initiatives and seek out creative ways of funding. But we must choose wisely where we invest our scarce resources. We must choose **to** work where we can really make a difference and where Extension is the most appropriate intervention agent.

At times we have been **too willing to accept the status quo and been content to rest on our laurels**. True, others have tried to duplicate our model -- which usually connotes a level of success. We hear about plans to establish an Education Extension

Service or an Engineering or Industrial Extension Service, but to date such efforts have had little success. **Why? The answer, I believe, lies in our efforts to stay close to the people, to know up close what** their concerns and educational needs are. An Extension presence in every county is something other universities and organizations would give anything to have. Are

we making the most of that special capacity? Extension is the front door for every land-grant university. We must make the most of the opportunity that provides.

Last year, MSU Extension and other university outreach staff members worked with broadly constituted advisory committees in every county to undertake a comprehensive statewide issues identification process. **Out of those dialogues came** the identification of three issues of concern that our university is beginning to address in a coordinated way: the environment, economic development, and children, youth and families. I believe that it is essential for us to take the time to really learn what those we serve need, as well as what they want and expect from us.

One of the best things we can do, in my opinion, is to continue programs that provide leadership development for the people with whom we interact. Building human capital is imperative if our country is to succeed in the 21st century, and nobody has more practice and success in that arena than Extension. **But we need to take a hard look at how leadership programs are developed and what they include.** My sense is that the learners need to be more actively involved in planning their learning experiences and that some new models of learning may very well be in order. People learn in different ways, and the learning strategies **that work with children may -- or may not --** be appropriate for 21st century adults.

Funding patterns for Extension have been changing and available dollars eroded. This is a real challenge for Extension and all of higher education. The contribution of our federal partner has been a decreasing proportion of the total Extension budget in most states, and state support in recent years has not been able **to keep pace with organizational** resource needs. Our local government partners in a number of states have continued to increase their funding of Extension. However, this source of revenue is becoming increasingly volatile because of the high demand for local **government to fund mandated** services.

According to MSU Extension Specialist, Dr. Lynn Harvey, "Local governments, both rural and urban, are community institutions under stress. In an attempt to address societal issues of increasing crime, governments are diverting substantial sums of public monies from education and social investment activities **to the construction of jails, prisons and juvenile detention facilities.** Law enforcement and court related activities consume 40-50 percent of general fund expenditures leaving limited dollars at the county level to invest in families and youth-at-risk."

Extension has a long and distinguished history of assisting in the development of the social infrastructure of communities **through human capital investment manifested**

in leadership development, training local governmental officials, improving the problem solving skills of citizens and communities, and helping families help themselves. Extension needs to develop strong partnerships with the court and law enforcement community and to bring to bear the resources of the **land-grant system in addressing community problems. The failure to do so may mean in the long run few if any, dollars to fund county extension programs.**

Is Extension up to the challenge of the 21st century? I say an emphatic "yes!" To be successful, Extension professionals must:

- Honor the past but not be prisoners of it.
- Gain the confidence to take risks and try out some "outrageous ideas."
- Stay in close touch with local needs.
- Maintain quality support groups.
- Focus on programs where they can have an identifiable measurable impact.
- Expand their public and private partnerships.
- Build new linkages to the rest of the land-grant university and to other educational institutions.
- Expand their repertoire of educational interventions.
- Build on and enhance diversity among staff members and clients.
- Seek continual personal and professional improvement through a variety of planned learning strategies.
- Learn to define success in ways that we can have some success; and then celebrate those successes when they are achieved.

One of my MSU colleagues, Dr. James Votruba, vice provost for University Outreach, recently reminded the 1993 Colorado Cooperative Extension Forum that society invented the land-grant universities out of a sense that existing institutions had lost touch with society's needs. "If we strengthen our capacity to serve the advanced knowledge needs of society," he said, "land-grant universities will usher in a whole new era of public confidence and support. We will renew that special covenant that we have enjoyed with the public that we serve. However, if we fail to respond, others will fill the void. Public confidence will continue to diminish and our supporters will gradually desert us for others who are better meeting their needs." I say "That need not happen!"

The stakes are indeed high! **But I am confident that Extension will respond to this challenge.**

Thanks again for this very special honor; I will wear my ruby pin with deep humility -- and, hopefully, grace -- knowing that it came from the organization that is the heart and soul of the land-grant system -- **Extension!**