

Thriving in the 21st Century: A Challenge to Cooperative Extension

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I am honored to receive the Epsilon Sigma Phi Ruby Award. It is humbling to join the distinguished list of recipients, including two of my predecessors from Colorado -Lowell Watts, who directed Extension for 23 years during the 70s and 80s, and F.A. Anderson, who preceded him and also served as director for more than 20 years. It is an honor to follow the past two recipients, Walter Walla and Leroy Luft, two gentlemen I hold in high regard in the Cooperative Extension System. On my own behalf, I would like to acknowledge the support of my family -my wife Carol, son Mike, and daughter Michelle. They have made a significant contribution to who I am and what I have done throughout my professional career.

Family, community and friendships have come to be highly valued by many of us in these last months...months when we have witnessed changes in the world we could not imagine a year ago. The events of September 11 have forced us to think differently about many things we have taken for granted as Americans. We must continue to re-order our priorities to address new challenges. We must build personal bridges with members of our communities. We must show compassion in our teamwork. We must act on the best of our humanity. Our role as facilitators of community dialogue will be crucial in the coming months and years ahead. The world has changed and as Extension professionals, as educators, as citizens, as individuals, we must commit to act for peace and education, wherever and whenever we have the opportunity. Extension can play an important role at the local level in developing a peaceful, civil society. This must be part of our work for the future.

As we think about the future, and indeed, we should, we must ask ourselves how we can face the challenge of "Thriving in the 21st Century?" Throughout our history, Extension has been continually challenged to examine and reexamine our mission, role, focus, and purpose. Today, institutions of higher education and most notably the land-grant university system are challenged with reexamining their function and public service role to communities and the nation. And Extension is again faced with redefining its future. Indeed, Extension's challenge is discovering how to thrive in the "knowledge era" of the 21st Century.

I have lived and worked in Colorado for the past 35 years, from my first job as an Assistant Extension Agent in Garfield County out in Western Colorado. When I joined Cooperative Extension, it was a very different world. I never interviewed in the county I was to work in, I didn't meet the county director or the other Extension agent until I actually reported to the office for my first day of work. It was several months until I met members of the Board of County Commissioners. I didn't attend the state university in a time when most, if not all, Cooperative Extension personnel came from the state's land-

grant university. So there I was, the young "foreigner" from Illinois, who grew up on a farm but was never in 4-H, who went to a one-room grade school with no kindergarten, who attended and graduated from the University of Illinois, then roamed west to report to my first job in Garfield County, Colorado, as an Assistant Extension agent with responsibilities for 4-H.

Cooperative Extension then was the only game in town. The county director in Garfield County was known as the "answer man" for the local constituents he served, and he was! The Extension agent covering Home Economics and 4-H was one of the most influential women in Garfield County. I was impressed by that. Henrietta Lake was one of the most outstanding Extension agents I have known throughout my entire career. And 4-H was a traditional program reaching mostly rural kids with animals and cooking projects.

Think of that situation 35 years ago as contrasted to 2001, where Cooperative Extension is just one of many community resources.

- Where most every organization, company and agency today are in the information business and rely on high-tech systems to function. It is estimated that four years from now, more than 80 percent of American management personnel will be knowledge workers. For a successful career in any field, computer competence will be mandatory.
- Where the 21st Century Knowledge Era is inundating us with new information. There has been more information produced in the last 30 years than during the previous 5,000. The information supply available to us doubles every five years. Medical knowledge doubles every eight years. All the technological knowledge we work with today will represent only one percent of the knowledge that will be available in 2050. In electronics, fully half of what students learn as freshmen is obsolete by their senior year.
- Where technology allows information seekers to search the world from their own homes, where it is possible to access and call up on a computer screen millions of volumes of information from most major libraries of the world. By the year 2005, computer competence in U.S. urban areas is expected to approach 100 percent. And by 2010 or sooner, 95 percent of people in the industrialized world and 50 percent of people in the developing world will be online.
- Where "Yahoo" used to be an expression uttered by a bronc rider; "Look Smart" was what you did before a test; "Adobe" was a house-building material and a "fire-wall" was constructed between two condominiums, "Ask Jeeves" was what you did in the hotel lobby to find a good restaurant, and "surf" was what younger Californians did on the weekends.

Out of all this growth in the knowledge industry, the reputation that Cooperative Extension has today still stands out. It is based on its successful work with communities, families and youth over the past 87 years. Our past successes, strong community connections and local visibility have allowed people to know about Cooperative Extension and those who know us come back often to use us. Cooperative Extension

has moved from a proud past, when we were the "answer people" and the only game in town, to a most interesting present where we find ourselves competing in the highly competitive information marketplace and defining our role in higher education.

In Colorado, I like to talk about today's Extension challenges in terms of relevance and excellence. Critical questions for us to answer in order to fully understand ourselves are: "who are we?, what do we do?, whom do we serve? and how well do we do it?" Clearly communicating these answers is important in order for customers, stakeholders and decision makers to know who we are, what we do, and whom we serve and how effective are we? Put another way, it is critical to define our strengths, communicate our priorities, market our accomplishments and be accountable for the public's investment in us.

A landmark work that has provided challenges to higher education, and food for thought for Extension's present and future work, is the Kellogg Commission report titled "Returning to our Roots: The Engaged Institution." A phrase on the front page of that document states "we can and must do better." We all should pay attention to this. We do have a proud past on which we can build, we are doing better today, but we must do even better in the future!

It was interesting to me as I addressed the Western Region Cooperative Extension Middle Managers Conference last summer, I referenced the "Engaged Institution Report," and asked how many in attendance were aware of it or had read it. I was disappointed that fewer than all of the hands in the room were raised. I believe it is a publication that must be on our desks, must be in our minds, and must be before those in our institutions who provide leadership for Cooperative Extension. This 1999 document challenges the leaders of state and land-grant universities to "go beyond outreach and service to what the Kellogg Commission defines as 'engagement'...the redesign of teaching, research, extension and service functions to become even more sympathetically and productively involved with their communities."

In the report, it says that an 'Engaged Institution' must accomplish at least three things:

1. organize to respond to the needs of today's and tomorrow's students, not yesterday's.
2. enrich students' experiences by bringing research and engagement into the curriculum, and offer practical opportunities for them to prepare for the world they will live in.
3. put critical resources (knowledge and expertise) to work on the problems its local communities face.

The report mentions students, preparation for life, and putting knowledge to work. Those are also central to Cooperative Extension's responsibility and mission. Community clientele are our students', and putting knowledge to work' is our work! The "Engaged Institution Report" as well as recent federal legislation--AREERA--talks continually about interdisciplinary, inter-institutional, interagency cooperation. We must

'do even better' in building partnerships, working in teams, being responsive, facilitating two-way sharing and reciprocal relationships, creating collaborations and coalitions; and engaging' the university as we fulfill our mission through work with clientele, partners and stakeholders.

The recommendation section of the "Engaged Institution" document states: "The engaged institution, one that is responsive, respectful of its partners' needs, accessible and relatively neutral, while successfully integrating institutional service into research and teaching and finding sufficient resources for the effort, "does not create itself." There is considerable food for thought in that statement, as there is in the report's seven-part test of guiding characteristics that define an engaged institution. I encourage you to locate a copy of the document, look over the seven-part test yourself and reflect on it. I believe answers to those seven questions are critical to Cooperative Extension and in turn, to our land-grant institutions. Land-grant universities are unique because of a mission focused on serving the people of the state. Yes, students in classrooms on campus are important and traditional university research is important; however, one of the principle and primary reasons why a land-grant university is different than any other publicly supported institution is its linkage to the people of the state through its Cooperative Extension network. The idea that was in the minds of those who founded the land-grant concept; that there should be a problem-solving responsibility to the people of the state through the land-grant university, must remain true today. We must connect more closely with communities, expand our partnerships, increase our knowledge base, assist in building a civil, inclusive and educated society, and be even more responsive to our customers.

Let me now turn to another pervasive question that comes up from time-to-time among stakeholders, clientele, and indeed, within our own Cooperative Extension organizations. That question, "is Extension needed?" It is often asked in reference to "have we outlived our usefulness?" Or often, it refers to our information responsibility, referencing the rapid growth of information on the Internet, and can we keep up? Repeatedly, I get questions about Extension's role in topics like public policy, issues of civility, "social programs"....and others. Often those who say we are straying from our mission, are uninformed or misinformed about what our mission was in 1914 and continues to be today. Some of our key external stakeholders are among this group, as are some of our "Institutional Leaders." I argue that we are needed now more than ever.

We must guard against the internal haranguing about our mission, is it agriculture, or is family and consumer science important? 4-H seems to escape than discussion. I believe all are important and must continue to be priorities in our mission as was true in 1914. Remember the Smith-Lever language "Agriculture, home economics and related fields." We must remain true to this regardless of NASULGC or university structures that some want to use to control our efforts and directions. With the bombardment of consumers with information available through print and electronic sources, from all around the world, what is needed is information people can trust. The initial high ethical standards that were present at the early stages of the Web have not held firm. The classic New Yorker joke that stated "on the Internet, no one knows you're a dog" is

taking on new meaning in the growing epidemic of fraudulent sales practices, underhanded marketing tactics, over abundance of unqualified "experts" offering millions of pages of questionable advice, and thousands of new Websites every day offering an overload of commercially-biased information. Generating knowledge through research is still what state and land-grant universities do exceptionally well; and disseminating that knowledge is still what Cooperative Extension is designed to do best - our local community connections are part of what is strongest about our system - helping assess, evaluate and add credibility to information that people need. In other words, despite the rush of life and people's expectations of instant access to information, they still want information they can trust. They still revel in finding someone they can trust to help them.

Our customers, the people in the states who we serve, face incredible challenges: coping with the pace of life, the speed of change and growth, the transformation of the world economy, the Walmartization of our rural areas, the evolution to an urbanized society, the information bombardment, learning how to become a world community, the rapidity of innovation! Extension professionals are not just a knowledge resource, we are facilitators, politicians, citizens, educators, communicators, neighbors and friends. In this high-tech, high-speed age, we still provide a human touch.

Let's think about professionalism for a moment, that is, our own and that of our organization. Our professional associations and JCEP, the Joint Council of Extension Professionals, are resources that can be very helpful to us as we do this daily human work. I served as the liaison from ECOP, the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy to JCEP for several years and was impressed by the leadership of the professional associations, the vision they were showing, their ability to face challenges and lift the level of professionalism of their membership.

Because I served as a 4-H agent for 14 years in the early part of my career and because I have some of my fondest memories of the work I did as a 4-H agent, I'll use it as an example. Think about the daunting task and responsibility of the Extension agent responsible for 4-H today. It's not just about working with kids, but it's also about the concerns people have about the issues of competition or venturing toward values as we work with young leaders in our counties and in our states. It's about developing youth, building character, teaching tolerance, and making good citizens. A recent major evaluation study of one of our successful coalition efforts - Character Counts, in South Dakota, showed that character education altered attitudes towards violence and reduced youth crime, drug use and cheating. Building character-skills works. This is the "stuff" of 4-H! The job of the 4-H agent is ever complex. It is incredibly demanding and it is highly responsible. It's one that we must support, value, ensure the highest levels of professionalism in, and succeed in for the youth of the nation. For it is through the youth of the nation that we will make a difference in civility, ethical behavior, personal integrity and positive social change. We must serve as role models and teachers of civil behavior, tolerance and character. We must, each one of us, lead the way to a more civil and peaceful society.

Efforts like the National Extension Leadership Development program, regional leadership programs, and the Public Issues Leadership Development Conference are serving important needs for the Cooperative Extension System in developing character and leadership skills for the future. Efforts to recognize, define and reward the scholarship required of Extension educators for their work in community education and the development of community social capital are also vitally important. By building skills in our professional staff, we help build skills and capacity in our clientele - which in turn helps people work together to solve emerging problems and address future issues.

And as we think about the future, we might consider what some recent Futurist Magazine predictions may have in store for us:

- Virtual farms and ranches where consumers can choose their own meat and produce and have it delivered direct;
- Voice-response computers that give anyone access to the world's expanding knowledge, regardless of ability to read or write printed words; user-friendly computers that respond to our voices and tell us what we want to know; (Boy, do I need that one!)
- Gene therapies that improve people's learning abilities, reverse the effects of aging on memory, increase ability to solve problems and help people retain information;
- Portable information devices, allowing web-browsing capabilities wherever you go
- Precision farming, computerized management of crops and animals;
- Integrated services and electronic self-help systems offered around the clock via the Internet at a single electronic location;
- Business investments in education and training to support learning or re-training needed by future workers;
- Virtual assistants - sophisticated computer programs that can sift through information, solve problems, and manage your entire information environment;
- Genetically-modified organisms to increase food production and ability to feed growing populations, but are suspect for their long-term implications and ethical dilemmas;
- Increasing life-spans and an aging population—by 2030, over half of all U.S. adults will be age 50 or older; most will be healthy and interested enough to keep working as traditional notions about retirement disappear;
- A world that grows smaller, where continuing fragmentation and tensions in developing countries, where water and food shortages, low standards of living, and environmental degradation will provide continuing challenges to critical, creative thinkers and leaders in education, business and government.

As I pondered similar predictions for Cooperative Extension I asked Myron Johnsrud, ECOP Executive Director, Extension and Outreach-National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC), and Lyla Houghlum, Chair-Elect of ECOP and Cooperative Extension Director at Oregon State University, their predictions

as to what Cooperative Extension will look like in 25 years. Following are some of their thoughts with some of mine included:

- e-Extension is the largest and fastest growing part of the original Cooperative Extension Service. There will have been major expansion in the use of technology, how people access it, and the extent to which both we and they use it.
- Extension continues to focus on economic and community development and is the primary provider for teaching people to apply new information technologies to the development of small enterprises.
- Extension continues to work on food production, safety, and supply issues but these issues are addressed within the context of consumer demand and assuring a healthy environment.
- Over 60% of the funding for Extension programs comes from private fund-raising and fee-for-service. This will drive our organization to take on three to five year projects that we complete and then move on to the next new priority.
- Extension faculty are well integrated into all colleges of the higher education system and many have joint appointments funded from Extension, research and credit teaching budgets. Cooperative Extension staff will look very different. We will not have the 20-30 year employee. We will pay differently because of the specialities needed on a short-term basis. Overall the staff will be very good. Cooperative Extension will be an integral part of the total university.
- Cooperative Extension faculty and staff research is conducted in their local regions and the courses they teach are delivered primarily through holographic technology. Cooperative Extension will be much more involved in applied research and will have a very different relation with the Agricultural Experiment Station branch stations across the country.
- There will be huge cadre of volunteers, many of whom are retirees since by now 40% of the population is 100 years or older. This cadre of volunteers will be highly professional and will contribute significantly to the Cooperative Extension mission.
- The complexity of issues will be unprecedented. Partnerships will prevail, collaboration and cooperation will be the norm.

As Cooperative Extension greets the challenge of working in communities to address these kinds of critical issues of the 21st Century, we must have the courage to realign ourselves and get out in front with new ways to solve problems and deliver information and education. Consider this excerpt from Colorado Cooperative Extension's Year 2000 strategic planning effort, "Charting the Course for Change:"

"Cooperative Extension must ensure that our organizational culture is capable of dealing with a rapidly changing world. In the words of the sage philosopher Wayne Gretsky:

"To succeed, you must skate to where the puck is going to be."

For Cooperative Extension to skate to the puck, that is, remain relevant to those it serves, it must continue to evolve. It must assess its relationships with those it serves in order to help society move successfully into the next century and it must examine, renew and fortify its relationship with the university if it is to continue to respond successfully of the needs of the day."

Scott Peters in his article titled, "Public Scholarship and the Land-Grant Idea," reflected on the thinking of one of the great architects of the Cooperative Extension System, as well as a remarkably public-spirited scientist, Liberty Hyde Bailey, who served as dean of the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University from 1903 to 1913. Bailey envisioned the mission of the land-grant university and especially Cooperative Extension as not only helping residents with technology but also developing "an active citizenship which might help build a vital society." Peters noted also that the shape of this mission was captured in one of the first major books about Cooperative Extension, authored in 1930 by Clarence Smith and Meredith Wilson (The Agricultural Extension System of the United States). They wrote:

"Important and helpful knowledge is resident in every community that, if generally applied, would greatly improve agriculture there. This local knowledge may be as significant for the up-building of the community as anything the government may bring in from the outside. The county agent and other extension forces find out and spread this local knowledge."

Smith and Wilson called for citizens and agents of government to meet around a "common council table" where they could systematically discuss problems and needs and where technical knowledge would come together with the community's "social capital." What would arise would be a "common plan of work for the benefit of the community."

Peters also noted that authors Harry C. Boyte and Nancy N. Kari in their 1996 book, *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work*, wrote that "Cooperative Extension work was understood as a kind of public work, where the visible, creative efforts of a mix of people would produce things of lasting public value not only for local communities but for the nation as a whole." Peters pointed out that engaging citizens in the co-creation of knowledge through what can be called "public scholarship" was clearly a key part of this work.

In this time of change and world challenges, it will benefit us to remember that Extension's civic mission is an important part of our legacy -though over the years it was often pushed aside by the pursuit of scientific expertise, technical efficiency and the standard university approach of "applied research." By forging collaborations at the community level, strengthening local social capital, bringing our best resources (including our research and extension dollars; our network of citizens, scientists and educators; our cadre of volunteers; and our university expertise) to bear on the problems local communities face, we can shape "public scholarship" as a powerful force for the 21st Century. Human-generated knowledge built on active partnerships and

shared responsibilities between university faculty, extension educators and community members is our most important product. We must go boldly about the task of generating it! We must develop strategies to get us "to where the puck is going to be."

I believe Epsilon Sigma Phi's Ruby lecturers have provided a series of papers that have outlined many such strategies....each of us should read them again and again. Just reflect on these titles, Luft: "Excellence in Times of Change"...Walla: "Building Bridges"...Paige: "High Tech, High Touch, High Time"...Buchanan: "It Takes All of Us"...a statement that could not be more true today.

Throughout our history, Cooperative Extension has been challenged to continually examine and reexamine our mission, role, focus, function, purpose and priorities. By valuing our roots, capitalizing on our present strengths and successes, and defining a vision - we can boldly march ahead to shape our future, indeed, to "Thrive in the 21st Century!"

Thank you.