

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Re-envisioning Cooperative Extension (7/02)

President Todd, Dean Smith, and Associate Dean Turner have challenged Cooperative Extension to broaden its mission, to “re-envision” itself. Dean Smith and Dr. Turner appointed a Re-envisioning Transition Team to look to the future of Extension programs and structures. This committee met during the spring and summer of 2002, and submitted its report in July 2002. The Re-envisioning Committee collected a great deal of new and existing information and input from personnel in the organization, and from clientele and stakeholders. This input was used to develop program and structural scenarios and recommendations to respond to the charge of the Deans. The results are highlighted in the summary below.

- A general programming approach was developed by the committee to make programs broader and more flexible, and to more easily join the various resources of the organization to focus on program needs. The focus is to strengthen county programs. Regional Issues Committees are recommended to join agents and specialists to identify and prioritize major regional programming issues and anticipate emerging program issues. Multi-county programs will be formed to develop and deliver these priority programs.
- Specific recommendations to strengthen county programs include more specific and flexible program titles for county agents, planning for county Extension office accessibility and scheduling, exploring flexible schedules for agents, shortening the time for agent hiring, and increasing technology support for counties.
- Four possible scenarios for organizing the Extension areas or regions are presented for consideration. All are trying to address the need to reduce the numbers of middle managers while maintaining support for county programs and other essential functions. All of these scenarios have strengths and weaknesses as pointed out by the committee.
- There is a need to further emphasize and support County Extension Councils. This will involve materials, guidelines, member orientation, and agent in-service. It is recommended to eliminate area Extension councils. Active stakeholder support will become even more critical, and a regional, multi-county and state approach for input and involvement is presented.
- State programs must build upon the working relationship of Cooperative Extension between University of Kentucky and Kentucky State University, and broaden and formalize connections with all parts of the universities. Recommendations include assistant Extension directors and KSU representatives taking responsibility for the Regional Issues Committees and increased involvement in Extension programs by department chairs and all land grant faculty.
- Two final recommendations are that there be a re-envisioning implementation committee and implementation process, and an Annual Re-envisioning Review Committee appointed each year to review structure and program implementation and make necessary adjustments.

Re-envisioning Process

The Re-envisioning Cooperative Extension effort began as new University of Kentucky, College of Agriculture, and Cooperative Extension administrative leadership took office during the previous year and a half. All of the new administrators challenged Cooperative Extension to broaden its mission throughout the Commonwealth while streamlining the organization and administration to make the most efficient use of available resources. Rather than just reducing the numbers of administration or staff, however, it was determined that a process to examine the entire organization of Cooperative Extension and its goals, missions, and environment would help guide future decisions and maintain an effective organization that meets the needs of the Commonwealth.

The first discussion took place in February 2002 and included the UK Cooperative Extension administrative staff working with organizational facilitator Carol Anderson. The first task was to assess needs and programs, then build the organizational structure to meet new or revised goals of a broadened Extension organization. The process consisted of several steps: a) an environmental scan of current trends and needs; b) strategic elements compared to current mission, goals, and priorities; c) operational systems, including technology, structure, decision making, people, rewards and recognition, and renewal; d) scenario planning; and e) recommendations for a broadened set of goals and structure.

A Re-envisioning Transition Team was appointed by Dean Smith and Dr. Turner, using a peer nomination and peer selection process. Team members consisted of representatives from various groups of personnel in the organization including clientele, agents, specialists, and administration. Members of the team are:

Jeanne Davis, Pennyrile Area Program Director
David Ditsch, Extension Specialist, Agronomy, Robinson Station
Vivian Gentry, State Extension Council
Janet Johnson, Allen County Extension Agent for Family and Consumer Sciences
Steve Kelly, Fleming County Extension Agent for 4-H/Youth Development
Vivian Lasley-Bibbs, Extension Specialist for Health, Kentucky State University
Lincoln Martin, Marshall County Extension Agent for Agriculture and Natural Resources
Rick Maurer, Assistant Extension Director for Community and Economic Development Programs (selected by group as team chair)
John Mowbray, Louisville Area Program Director
Deborah Murray, Northeast Area Program Director
Steve Riggins, Extension Specialist, Agricultural Economics
Bonnie Tanner, Assistant Extension Director for Family and Consumer Sciences
Larry Turner, Associate Dean and Associate Director of Extension

The charge to the committee by Dean Smith was to assess the Kentucky Cooperative Extension system and develop recommendations that will position Kentucky Cooperative Extension for the 21st century to be more flexible and responsive to local needs, streamline administration, and enhance out connections with the broader university while remaining true to base programs within the College. Five major goals summarize the charge:

1. Strengthen and enhance support for county agents and local programs, including improvement of the connection between campus specialists and faculty and agents and clientele in the field.
2. Assess and develop recommendations for improvements to strengthen the current county advisory system.
3. Develop two to three recommended scenarios for possible administrative structures that both support the other re-envisioning goals and “flatten” or streamline the Extension administration from the current fourteen-area model.
4. Consider recommendations and systems that will broaden the scope of Cooperative Extension to enhance connections, linkages and partnerships with other parts of the universities, and other agencies and organizations, while supporting base programs.
5. Allow for a re-envisioned Cooperative Extension system which is more flexible, adaptable, and responsive to rapidly changing issues and needs.

The committee used a great deal of information that had already been collected by various efforts of the organization. These included results of the Speak Out On Extension process, State Extension Council program priorities, county Extension council data, 4-H Centennial Conversations, and many others.

Additional information gathered by the committee included a survey of specialists, a survey of county Extension council presidents and other members, a survey of county Extension office clerical staff, a series of five council member and stakeholder forums across the state, a retreat and discussions of the administrative staff, and two separate discussions by agents held at area staff meetings. In addition, several groups and many individuals in the organization and clientele took the time to give individual input to the committee by letter, posting on the web pages, or personal visit.

The committee met several times from March through July of 2002 to gather information and develop scenarios and recommendations. The results of the committee work are presented in this report, organized as follows:

- Executive Summary
- Re-envisioning process description
- General programming approach
- Recommendations on strengthening county programs

- Possible regional scenarios
- Recommendations on the council system
- State and universities issues
- Other issues
- Implementation and future review
- Appendices

Programming Approach, Organizational Structure

The mission of Kentucky Cooperative Extension is as relevant today as when Extension was begun. Our mission is:

“The Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service serves as a link between the counties of the Commonwealth and the state’s land grant universities to help people improve their lives through an educational process focusing on their issues and needs.”

To fulfill our mission, the approach to Extension programming we use is a critical component of how we “do” Extension to accomplish our mission. The Re-envisioning Team developed a potential programming approach from which the appropriate organizational structure can be developed to ensure we fulfill our mission and focus on issues and needs of clientele. The accompanying chart and following text describe this general approach. The text items correspond to major blocks within the programming chart presented to describe the functions of each component in our Extension programming effort.

The general programming approach proposed here addressed several objectives and situations that arose during the committee process and collection of input to the committee:

- County programs and support to county programs are the first priority of this approach.
- County programs will be broader and need to be more flexible. This will require additional faculty, specialist, administrative, and in-service support. It is recognized that part of a county agent’s responsibilities are service-related and not always directly related to educational program delivery.
- The Extension system is often perceived as slow to respond to emerging issues.
- There is a need for a better working system between agents and faculty, specialists, and associates.
- The role of Extension will involve other parts of the universities in addition to the UK College of Agriculture and KSU Land Grant Programs.
- Research and instruction faculty and department chairs need to be included in programs.
- Working on public support and public relations should be continuous efforts.
- There is a disconnection between state and county Extension councils. Support for county Extension councils need to be strengthened.
- The number of Area Program Directors or comparable positions will be reduced.

County Extension Agents/Staff, working with ***County Extension Councils*** and ***County Clientele, partnerships, and coalitions*** will identify emerging issues affecting local communities for Extension educational programming. Specific resource needs will be communicated to ***Regional Issues Committees***. County Extension Councils will be strengthened to provide more leadership in issue identification, program development and local delivery, futuring and anticipating emerging program issues, public relations, and

funding support and acquisition. Area Extension Councils will be eliminated with county or regional representatives serving on a revised **State Stakeholder Support Committee**. The primary tasks of the State Stakeholder Support Committee will be public relations and funding support.

In each Extension region, a **Regional Issues Committee** will be formed. The Regional Issues Committee (RIC) will be an interdisciplinary committee of agents from all program areas and specialists (UK and KSU). Specifically, the RIC will have approximately 10-12 members, _ of whom will be agents from all program areas, and _ of whom will be specialists, research faculty, department chairs or Extension coordinators, and other KSU representatives. An **Assistant Extension Director** or **KSU counterpart** or a **Regional Program Administrator** (a new type of position included in some of the regional scenarios) will coordinate all RIC group efforts and responses to issues. Each **RIC** will meet twice a year to identify and prioritize Extension programming issues and increase communications and accountability between Universities' personnel and Extension agents concerning regional program needs and efforts. Specific functions of the RIC include identifying and prioritizing major regional programming issues and futuring and anticipating emerging program issues. Interdisciplinary approaches related to specific issues affecting clientele will result in identifying Extension resources to address program needs, better research connections, other educational resources, identifying agent training and professional development needs, and identifying staffing needs. The focus will be localized programs for rapid response, stronger program delivery, and greater program impact for diverse clientele groups.

As a result of increased multi-county and interdisciplinary programming discussions and increased interactions among agents, specialists, and stakeholders, **multi-county programs** and **multi-county program committees** will be formed to ultimately deliver regional, multi-county, and other niche educational programs. Programs may be based on county, regional, and state program priorities. This type of program development and team implementation will provide for a more effective, concentrated use of resources resulting in larger program impact in counties with similar need.

Regional/Multi-County Stakeholder Support/PR Committees will be formed to provide a state network to secure legislative support on the state and federal levels. County leaders, agents, and specialists will serve on committees, aligned with state and congressional legislative districts, to publicize issue based program impact to elected officials on an ongoing, proactive basis. This regionalized approach will demonstrate the effectiveness of Cooperative Extension to positively affect constituent quality of life and will result in stronger legislative support. Efforts will be coordinated by regional administrators along with state administrative leadership.

County Extension Agents/Staff will work cooperatively with **regional administrators** on staff issues, hiring, new agent orientation, training, and other issues related to internal staff office management.

UK College of Agriculture and KSU Cooperative Extension Program administrative group includes the ***Dean, Administrator, Associate Director, Assistant Administrator, Assistant Directors and Department Chairs***. This administrative group will provide leadership in facilitating University and internal UK/KSU partnerships, along with external partners, to provide critical applied research and educational resources and support for proactive issue based programming. By developing a stronger internal communication network and increased accountability expectations, a stronger link between research, teaching, and Extension delivery will result in the impact necessary to meet clientele needs and increase support. Better communications and accountability between UK and KSU regarding issue program resource development will avoid ineffective use of resources and duplication. ***Department Chairs and Departmental Extension Coordinators*** will coordinate and be directly accountable for applied research and specialist resource support to Extension program delivery. ***Assistant Directors and Regional Directors*** will work extensively with Staff Development to provide agent support, including in-service training, new agent training, and grant writing.

UK/KSU College Partnerships will broaden connections to the total Universities' colleges and units in support of Extension educational programming. These connections will include identifying subjects and people for agent contact for resources and further development of university-wide web resources. University-wide partnerships will focus on issue programming areas by expanding the available subject matter support across both campuses.

Strengthen County Programs

Strengthening county programs is the underlying goal of the proposed programming approach and the recommendations that are presented in this report. In order to strengthen county programs, several organizational outcomes must remain in the forefront of our decisions. Cooperative Extension must address program issues, building on our base programs. We must be more responsive to emerging issues, and be flexible enough to meet the diversity of regional and county program needs. We must continue to move toward a county team approach to be able to respond to interdisciplinary program needs, and strengthen the educational role of the county agent team. We must continuously build our leadership base and work to secure stakeholder support.

Specific recommendations to strengthen county programs are:

Agent Titles: There is no need to change the title of “County Extension Agent” since it is a recognizable name in the counties. The committee considered the implications of dropping all program areas on the agent title (i.e., ANR, FCS, 4-H/YD, etc.) but decided that having a recognized area of expertise is very important and valuable. It is recommended that program areas on the titles could be more specific and flexible, if appropriate to the particular county position, to more accurately describe the area of expertise and program responsibility.

County Office Accessibility: County Extension offices need a plan to address office accessibility and office schedules to meet the needs of local clientele. The plan should be based on local staffing capabilities, funding, clientele needs, and the input of local leadership. Stakeholder input indicates both a willingness to support flexible office accessibility and recognition of the need to continue to offer programs at times and locations when clientele are available.

Flexible Schedules/Comp Time: The organization should examine the possibility of a formal flexible scheduling or compensatory time system for agents. While there is recognition that these jobs require more than 40 hours per week, the organization needs to help protect some personal and family time for monthly employees.

Agent Hiring: It was often expressed to the committee that the agent hiring process is too slow, so that agent vacancies last for some time and have negative impacts on programs. Thus, the hiring process needs to be faster. The agent hiring process should also be more flexible, allowing specific positions to be tailored to more closely fit local program needs.

Technology: Technology will certainly play an increasingly important role in strengthening county programs. Counties need continued and increasing support at the regional level for using technology to deliver local programs. A streamlined administrative structure means that more administrative functions should be conducted through email and web applications. Increased technology capabilities will be necessary for increasing local office accessibility and connecting other parts of the universities outside of our normal program contacts. We should explore the possibility of an “Ask

UK” or “Ask KSU” web search access so that agents and clientele could get questions answered and find available contact people for subject matter outside of the UK College of Agriculture or KSU Cooperative Extension.

Regional Scenarios

Four possible scenarios for changing area and regional administration were determined by the committee. Underlying goals of these options are to reduce the current number of area program director or comparable positions, while providing support for county programs. These came from committee discussions, with a great deal of input from the current administrative group, agent discussions at area staff meetings, and council/stakeholder forum discussions. These are not listed in any order of priority, and each includes a set of pros and cons.

It is assumed in all of the scenarios that Assistant Extension Directors and comparable counterparts at Kentucky State University will become more directly involved in county program support, will coordinate rapid response to Regional Issues Committees' priorities, and will chair one or more of the Regional Issues Committees.

A. 7 Regions (2 areas per region), 1 regional administrative director for each region, Assistant Directors and KSU Counterparts will work directly with R.I.C.'s.

Pros: Fewer APD positions
Retains current area lines
Retains current report structures
System looks the same to agents

Cons: Less program support
Doubling the work load of Regional Directors compared to current APD's

B. 10 New Regions of approximately 12 counties each, 1 regional administrative director for each region, Assistant Directors and KSU Counterparts will work directly with R.I.C.'s.

Pros: More manageable regions
Fewer APD positions
Clear change in geography
Management system looks the same to counties and leaders

Cons: Changes current area lines

C. 7 Regions (2 area per region), 1 regional administrative director for each region, 1 regional program support staff person for each region.

Pros: Retains current area lines
Emphasizes local program support
7 administrators

Cons: Not as clear who the supervisor is
Does not necessarily reduce management numbers

D. 7 Regions (2 areas per region), 1 regional administrative director for each region, 3-4 program support staff added to the system for direct county program support, Assistant Directors and KSU Counterparts will work directly with R.I.C.'s.

Pros: Retains current area lines

Would require a management/administrative team approach (regional director, program support, assistant directors)

Assistant directors more directly involved in county programs

Cons: Unclear role of program support

Large geographic area for program support staff to cover

Observation: Program support staff would have to be worked out very carefully

Council System

As county Extension programs are strengthened and focused, involvement of local clientele and county Extension councils will become even more important. Issues from county clientele and other county citizens are a primary driver of programs through the county Extension council. County Extension councils must be continuously revitalized and strengthened, and trained to be more issue focuses. Functions of county Extension councils include identification of local program issues, futuring and anticipating emerging program issues, public relations support, and funding support.

Specific recommendations regarding the Extension council system are:

Agent Training and Support: A renewed emphasis on county Extension councils will require additional support and in-service training for county agents to work with their councils. This would include updating the council handbook and working with the in-service implementation committee for council training for agents. There is a need to improve orientation of county council members. This orientation program should be developed at the state level for use by county agents and council members.

Area Extension Councils: Area Extension councils should be eliminated. The purpose of the current area councils is unclear, and the area Extension councils are often seen as a barrier to communications between the state Extension council and the county Extension councils.

Stakeholder Support: Regional or multi-county stakeholder support and public relations committees will be formed under the programming proposal. These committees will help coordinate public relations, funding and legislative support, and be the liaison between Extension and public officials. These committees will require Extension or university support to perform advocacy and public relations tasks.

State Extension Council: The revised state Extension council will need to develop a process for county or regional representation to the state council. The functions of the new state council will focus on state level public relations and funding support. The name of this state council should be changed to reflect the new focus, perhaps something like State Stakeholder Support Committee. This public relations and funding support functions should include support for research and instruction at the universities as well.

A council issue for further consideration relates to the program area councils at all levels. It was proposed for discussion that all program area councils be eliminated and incorporated as program sub-groups of the overall Extension council. This proposal received both positive and negative reviews, with no clear mandate for a decision. With the renewed focus on county Extension councils, the roles of the program area councils should be reexamined, at the county, area, and state levels. If it is determined that there is a role for these councils to continue, then the functions and relationship with overall state and county Extension councils must be clearly defined.

State Programs and Universities

The programming approach proposed by the committee has several implications for state programs. Two major assumptions are basic to this set of recommendations. One is that we will continue to strengthen the ties and working relationships between Extension programs and personnel at Kentucky State University and University of Kentucky so that we have one Kentucky Cooperative Extension system. The other is that we will reach out to other parts of the universities beyond KSU Land Grant Programs and UK College of Agriculture.

Specific recommendations regarding the state and universities level follow.

Assistant Extension Directors and comparable colleagues from Kentucky State University will preside over, coordinate, and support the functioning of the Regional Issues Committees. Thus it will be a major responsibility of Assistant Directors to increase program interaction between agents and specialists.

Assistant Extension Directors should have increased input into specialists programs and activities, especially with those specialists in academic departments. This would include input into plans of work, program planning and implementation, and personnel evaluation and promotions.

Department Chairs should take responsibility and other research and teaching faculty should be supported and recognized for increased participation in Extension program identification and development. This could take place with the Regional Issues Committees.

In order to increase communications and coordination between specialists and agents, Departmental Extension Coordinators should play a more active role in working with Assistant Directors, agents, and regional administrators.

Filling specialists positions should be more flexible regarding subject matter expertise, and should be based on regional and state program needs.

More formal ties between Extension and other units of the University of Kentucky and Kentucky State University should be established. In order to effectively deal with the challenges of extending the total university through county Extension offices, there should be an assistant extension director for university-wide programs position created to establish and maintain these relationships.

Other Issues, Situations, and Circumstances

During the course of the committee discussions, several current situation, issues, and circumstances of Extension and the Universities were discussed. These situations will be impacted by any changes as a result of the re-envisioning process. While there are not specific recommendations regarding these issues, they will need to be addressed by the organization. These are not listed in any order of priority, but were noted by the committee during discussions.

The agent personnel evaluation system needs to be streamlined, especially in terms of the amount of time spent by the system on this process.

The hiring process needs to be streamlined, especially in terms of the amount of time required to fill some agent vacancies.

There are many in-service requirements as a result of the new programming approach. In-service needs should be coordinated with the existing In-Service Implementation Committee.

The system needs to be involved in futuring, specifically in anticipating and identifying new or emerging program issues.

As state and federal funding becomes tighter and county funds become an increasing source of revenue, the organization will have to be aware that there are counties with abundant resources versus counties with more meager local funds.

Increased public relations and media support will be needed from the state level to continue our public and legislative support.

There should be specific incentives for tenured Extension faculty to address important Extension program issues.

All levels of the organization should have incentives and models of teamwork.

Funding, especially as it relates to salary levels, staffing, and the number of positions that can be funded, will be a long-term issue. As it is difficult to anticipate increased funds for positions in the near future, staffing patterns of agents and specialists should be reviewed and a plan developed to consider staffing for new programming directions.

The program councils and systems will have to be addressed (i.e., 4-H Councils, FSC Councils, Ag Advancement Councils). As the state and area Extension councils are modified, what does that mean for state and area program councils? There was also discussion of combining all program councils under the one umbrella of the Extension Council, but the feedback was mixed about the strengths and weaknesses of that approach.

As the proportion of the total Extension budget that comes from county funds increases, the organization will have to deal with the desire for more local control of local funds.

More technology support will be needed for counties as more program and administrative functions are conducted through technology.

More grant and grant writing support will be needed for counties, regional issues committees, and multi-county and regional programs.

Our current area staff meeting system for county Extension agents needs to be examined, including how technology can contribute to organizational communications. Staff meetings are part of a larger issue of how information flows throughout the Extension system.

We should explore the feasibility of faculty status for agents.

Two Final Recommendations

We recommend that an Implementation Committee and implementation process be formed to guide how any changes in the Extension system take place. This will be similar to the In-Service Implementation Committee process.

We recommend that there be an Annual Re-Envisioning Review Committee appointed each year to review structure and program implementation and make necessary adjustments. This will help the system be more flexible and able to make changes in structure more quickly and easily.