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TAKING THE  
UNIVERSITY  
TO THE  
PEOPLE

*Seventy-five Years of Cooperative Extension*

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*Wayne D. Rasmussen* grew up on a ranch near Lavina, Montana. He worked as a ranch hand, surveyor, and country school teacher before graduating from the University of Montana in 1937 and moving to Washington, D.C., to work for the Department of Agriculture. After serving four years in the Army during World War II, he was the Historian for the Department of Agriculture until his retirement in 1986. He earned a Ph.D. degree from George Washington University in 1950 and was awarded honorary doctorates by George Washington University and the University of Montana in 1987 and 1988, respectively. He has received the Department of Agriculture's Distinguished Service Award and is a Fellow of the American Agricultural Economics Association. Past President of the Agricultural History Society, he is currently its Executive Secretary-Treasurer. He is the author of numerous books, bulletins, and articles, and the editor of the four-volume work, *Agriculture in the United States: A Documentary History* (1975).

FRONTISPIECE. The Norman Rockwell painting of a county agent demonstrating a Guernsey heifer with a 4-H member and family looking on became a famous visual for county agent work and Extension Service programs. It still hangs in many county Extension offices. (Printed by permission of the Estate of Norman Rockwell. Copyright © 1948 Estate of Norman Rockwell)

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## CHAPTER ONE

# *Cooperative Extension: Taking the University to the People*

*Introduction.* It was a warm spring day in Washington on May 8, 1914, when President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Lever Act, establishing the Cooperative Extension Service. The local papers reported on the weather the next day, but said nothing about the new legislation that was to bring the university to the people. And even after seventy-five years, Extension people remain among the unsung heroes of the nation.

The Cooperative Extension System today is a unique achievement in American education. It is an agency for change and for problem solving, a catalyst for individual and group action with a history of seventy-five years of public service. Extension brings the rewards of higher education into the lives of all segments of our extraordinarily diverse population. At first, higher education in America was available only to the children of the well-to-do—the elite. The land-grant universities established under the provisions of the first and second Morrill Land-Grant College Acts in 1862 and 1890 provided an opportunity for the children of the working man to secure a higher education. Then came a new concept, which Cooperative Extension embodied, that the knowledge within the land-grant institutions should be made available to those not attending those institutions and should continue to be available throughout one's life. Thus was the university brought to the people.

Cooperative Extension includes professionals in America's 1862 land-grant universities in each of the fifty states, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, Northern Mariannas, Micronesia, and the District of Columbia, in Tuskegee University and sixteen 1890 land-grant universities in sixteen states and in the federal Extension Service. With few exceptions, at least one professional Extension staff member works in each of the nation's 3,150 counties. In addition, thousands of paraprofessional staff and about 2.9 million volunteers assist in bringing programs to the people, working under the direction of the professional staff.

### *Extension Is Cooperation*

COOPERATION WITHIN THE SYSTEM. Extension was designed as a partnership of the land-grant universities and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). However, the provisions of the law were broad enough that the states were able to bring their counties into the system as a third legal partner. Today, Extension is truly a cooperative undertaking, with the county, state, and federal partners interdependent, yet with each having considerable independence in funding, staffing, and programming. Each partner performs distinct functions essential to the operation of the total system. Extension's organization and division of responsibilities and authorities can be compared to the American government, with its county, state, and federal units of government, each with its own responsibilities and authorities, and each with responsibilities for the nationwide system. And, like state and county governments, state and county Extension Services vary in organization but share a common mission.

Extension's educational program makes the results of research in the land-grant universities, the state agricultural experiment stations, and USDA available to all who need them. In turn, Extension reports problems facing its clientele to researchers and administrators. This cooperative two-way communication provides direction for research and education and speeds the application of research results.

The Cooperative Extension System's statement of mission is simple and straightforward: "The Cooperative Extension System helps people improve their lives through an educational process which uses scientific knowledge focused on issues and needs."

**COOPERATION WITH PEOPLE.** Cooperation is the hallmark of Extension's relations with people. Its educational programs are available to anyone who wishes to participate, but no one is forced to take part. Within this voluntary cooperative framework, Extension, drawing upon research-based knowledge, teaches people to identify problems, to analyze information, to decide among alternative courses of action for dealing with those problems, and to locate the resources to accomplish a preferred course of action. The educational programs it undertakes most often arise as a response to needs identified on the local level. In addition to basic educational programs, Extension staff members and volunteers meet local needs by organizing such activities as weed and insect identification clinics, providing materials on the conservation of natural resources, distributing information about diet and health, and encouraging participation, especially by youth, in the educational aspects of county and state fairs.

### *Organizing within the System*

**THE FEDERAL PARTNER.** The federal Extension Service is headed by an administrator, who is a member of the Senior Executive Service and is appointed by the secretary of agriculture. The administrator is usually, but not always, chosen from among state directors of Extension. The first administrator, Clyde W. Warburton, served seventeen years. No one else has approached that record. Within USDA, the administrator reports to the assistant secretary for science and education. Most of the professional staff work within such major areas of responsibility as agriculture, home economics, youth, natural resources, and rural and community development, emphasizing national concerns within these areas. Overall, the staff mutually agrees on state plans of work and directs the allocation of federal funds, coordinates national initiatives, provides program leadership, maintains contact and interaction with USDA, other federal agencies, the Congress and national organizations, and assures accountability.

In 1988 Extension Service, USDA, adopted a mission statement: "The mission of Extension Service is to assure an effective nationwide Cooperative Extension System that is responsive to priority needs and the Federal interests and policies with quality information, education, and problem-solving programs."

THE STATE PARTNER. State Extension Services in the land-grant universities created by the 1862 legislation usually are headed by directors, appointed by the universities with the concurrence of the secretary of agriculture. The Extension Services in the 1890 institutions and Tuskegee University usually are headed by administrators. These directors and administrators normally report to the dean of the College of Agriculture, although directors in states as diverse as Maine and California report to university vice-presidents. There is no fixed pattern for the organization of state Extension offices. All have staff members assigned to the major program areas within Extension, and many have specialists assigned to specific areas of importance within the state. Most of the specialists work within academic disciplines and most are members of academic departments.

Some states have specialists assigned to regional offices. Others assign specialists to county offices but make them responsible for their specialty in two or more counties. This latter means of assigning specialists' responsibilities occurs particularly frequently in states in which problems differ greatly in different areas of the state. For example, such significant differences exist between eastern and western Massachusetts. These specialists are readily available to the county Extension staffs.

Relationships between the federal Extension Service and the state Extension Services are outlined in memorandums of understanding between USDA and each of the 1862 and 1890 institutions. These standard memorandums are in effect in all but two states. In general, they outline division of responsibilities and include two basic agreements. First, each year every state will prepare a plan of work jointly approved by the state director in the 1862 institution and the administrator in the 1890 institution in the states where that institution exists and the administrator of the Extension Service, USDA. Second, the federal government will not run a competing direct national operation unless it is jointly worked out with the states. In addition, USDA and each state agree on an annual budget. The memorandum sets up a concept of joint employment that provides the state Extension Service access to the federal structure but with insulation from the political and regulatory functions of government at both the federal and state levels. It also provides for accountability, reporting, auditing, and sanctions for those who fail.

In 1977 Congress provided that not less than 4 percent of the total amount appropriated annually under authority of the Smith-Lever Act should be assigned to the 1890 institutions and Tuskegee University. Effective in 1983, the allocation was increased to 6 percent. The memorandum of understanding between each of the 1890 universities and Tuskegee University and USDA provides that the university maintain an administrative office for the conduct of Extension work. The 1862 and the 1890 institutions in each state mutually develop a plan of work for their state. This plan is reviewed and approved by the federal administrator of Extension.

**THE COUNTY PARTNER.** In 1946 B. H. Crocheron, longtime director of the California Extension Service, said to the staff: “. . . to you who have known the long dark roads, the night meetings in lonely schoolhouses, the rain, the heat, the mud, the endless round of the daily task; to you who have worked so hard, to you who have accomplished so much; to you we say ‘Well done!’ ” It is the men and women at the county level—the local agriculturalist, home economist, 4-H leader, community and rural development specialist—who actually carry the university to the people. But they do more. Howard G. Diesslin, retired executive director for Extension, National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), put it this way: “County Extension agents constantly live amid and encourage change in people and their surroundings.” Director Crocheron explained earlier: “. . . when farmers testify as to the value of the Extension Service it is not the savings and increased income that they so often bring forward as that the Extension Service has been a counselor, adviser, and friend. It is the human values of Extension work that are cited more frequently than any others.” Or, as historian Barbara R. Cotton commented about the work of black agents in Florida before 1965: “When progress did come . . . it illuminated, for thousands of Blacks in Florida, the path for a journey into a better quality of living.”

Today, the county agent, whatever his or her speciality, must often hold evening and weekend meetings at various locations and must be available constantly for consultation on a wide variety of topics. Every agent must be a communications expert, providing the link between the university and the people. The agent, however, is well prepared. Nearly

all have bachelor's degrees, many have master's degrees, and some a doctorate. Several states now require that a new agent have a master's degree before consideration for appointment.

The way appointments to county professional staffs are made varies from state to state. Some states select staff members and assign them to counties, usually subject to the approval of the county governing body. Others send lists of qualified persons to the counties, where the selection is made. In still other states, the county board recruits and hires the person, subject to the approval of the state director.

The state director is responsible for the technical supervision of the county agent; the local community, often through an advisory board, usually is responsible for advising regarding the kinds of work the agent carries out. Salaries are paid sometimes by the state and sometimes by the local government. The local government usually is responsible for providing support staff and office space. The nature of the relationship of the county agent to USDA has varied over time, but in general, communication between the two is carried out through the office of the state director.

Communication is the key to the operations of the county Extension office. More and more county Extension offices are turning to computers and other electronic technology to improve the quality of communications with the state offices and with university specialists, as well as with the people they serve. Virginia Extension, for example, is using a computerized office project to integrate the new technology into the delivery of Extension educational programs. County Extension then encourages the use of computers by farmers, rural and small-town businessmen, local governments, and others. The success of the project in the Chesterfield County Extension Office is encouraging others to adopt it.

The county agent has changed over the past seventy-five years, but the successful agent still works to meet peoples' educational needs. As Marvin Anderson, former director of the Iowa Cooperative Extension Service wrote: "The agent is not so much the subject matter specialist but now needs to know more about people's needs, their problems, not to give answers but to mobilize the staff and resources to meet them."

### *Financing and Extension's Staff*

**FINANCES.** The Cooperative Extension System is financed primarily by federal, state, and local taxes, although substantial sums are contributed to Extension—mainly to 4-H—by private individuals and institutions. Volunteer services add greatly to the effectiveness of Extension's programs. In addition, the results of research carried on by the land-grant institutions and USDA provide the foundation for Extension's educational work.

The total Cooperative Extension System receives a bit more than \$1 billion each year. In 1986 32 percent of this came from federal sources, 47 percent from state funds, 18 percent from local governments, and 3 percent from private contributions. In addition, Extension estimates that the total value of "in kind" and volunteer services is the equivalent of more than \$4 billion.

**THE STAFF.** The funding available provides the equivalent of about 170 full-time professional and support positions at the federal level. States and counties have the equivalent of some 16,500 full-time professional Extension agents and specialists developing and delivering educational programs, approximately two-thirds of whom are located in county Extension offices. About 3,300 nutrition aides work with low-income families on programs related to nutrition, diet, and health. Volunteers contribute varying periods of time to different types of programs.

*Organizations in Support of Extension.* A number of organizations support Extension in various ways. These groups include a policy development and planning body, farm and other national organizations, program-oriented clubs of users, and professional organizations of Extension staff members. Many of these groups are discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

**EXTENSION COMMITTEE ON ORGANIZATION AND POLICY.** The state Extension Services depend on the Extension Committee on Or-

ganization and Policy (ECOP) of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) as their national-level policy development and planning body. An outgrowth of earlier committees, ECOP dates back to 1915. It consists of fourteen voting members, three elected from each of four regional associations and two from the 1890 institutions, and two ex-officio nonvoting members—the administrator of the Extension Service, USDA, and the executive director of ECOP. The committee operates through standing and ad hoc subcommittees and task forces, which make recommendations to the committee. The committee in turn makes recommendations to NASULGC and advises the Extension Service, USDA. ECOP is a guiding force in developing Extension policies and in providing comprehensive program leadership. The committee's stated mission "is to provide nationwide program and organization leadership and to make and communicate policy decisions."

**FARM ORGANIZATIONS.** In its early days, Extension depended upon local organizations of farmers to sponsor county agents. In most states, formal relationships developed with state and local farm bureaus. However, particularly after protests from other farm organizations, these relationships came to an end. In some states local farm groups continue to advise and work with their county Extension staffs.

**4-H ORGANIZATIONS.** The National 4-H Council was established in 1976 as a consolidation of the National 4-H Service Committee and the National 4-H Foundation. It operates the National 4-H Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland, as a training center for young people and for adults, both volunteers and staff. The center also serves as the site for National 4-H Conferences. The 4-H Council complements the Cooperative Extension Service, drawing upon private funding for its work.

The Extension Service carries on much of its youth activity through 4-H groups, organized and overseen by 4-H or other agents in county Extension offices. However, much of the work with 4-H'ers is carried out by adult and teen volunteer leaders. In 1987 the Cooperative Extension System reported that it had more than 600,000 volunteer 4-H leaders.

**NATIONAL EXTENSION HOMEMAKERS COUNCIL.** The National Extension Homemakers Council, organized in 1936, is made up of 30,000 homemakers clubs with some 500,000 members. The clubs often are organized by the home economist on the county Extension staff, but leadership and program activities are carried out in large part by volunteers, with the home economist serving as a resource person. The council, dedicated to improving the quality of family life, advises and gives support to Extension's home economics programs.

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY AGRICULTURAL AGENTS.** The National Association of County Agricultural Agents was organized in 1915, the first professional association in the Cooperative Extension System. It is an organization of state associations of county agricultural agents. Its primary concern is to maintain and improve professional standards, and it has had marked success in meeting this goal. The association publishes a quarterly journal, the *County Agent*. It has some 5,200 members.

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EXTENSION HOME ECONOMISTS.** The National Association of Extension Home Economists, organized in 1933, was the second professional organization in the Cooperative Extension System. An important force in strengthening professionalism in the field of home economics, the association publishes a quarterly journal, the *Reporter*. Its membership totals about 3,700.

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EXTENSION 4-H AGENTS.** The National Association of Extension 4-H Agents was organized in 1946. It, like the other professional organizations of Extension workers, has sought to enhance the professional status of its members and to promote cooperation among all Extension personnel. The association publishes a quarterly newsletter, *News and Views*. It has about 3,000 members.

**SECTIONS WITHIN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS.** Extension specialists in such fields as agricultural economics, animal husbandry,

communications, community development, dairying, rural sociology, and soil conservation maintain interest groups within professional associations devoted to particular disciplines. These groups often hold sessions devoted to Extension's activities within the particular discipline.

**EPSILON SIGMA PHI.** Epsilon Sigma Phi is primarily a Cooperative Extension System honor society, based on tenure and quality of service. The society was organized in 1927, after W. A. Lloyd, then of the Montana Extension Service, corresponded with a number of veteran Extension workers about motivation and found that most of these individuals were characterized by a deep idealism. He proposed to ECOP that this idealism be recognized by the creation of an honor society. ECOP endorsed the idea, which was then approved by NASULGC, and state chapters were rapidly organized. In 1934 Epsilon Sigma Phi adopted a national award program, with the highest honor being the Distinguished Service Ruby. No more than one such award is made each year. The society promotes a fraternal relationship among Extension workers as well as a highly professional attitude. It numbers 11,200 members.

Epsilon Sigma Phi commemorated the founding of Extension through the Wilson and Knapp Memorial Arches in Washington, D.C., honoring the services of James Wilson, Secretary of Agriculture 1897–1913, and Seaman A. Knapp, key figure in the organization of the Cooperative Extension System. The arches over Independence Avenue connect the two major buildings of the USDA. When they were dedicated in 1937, Congressman A. Frank Lever, joint author of the Smith-Lever Act, said in speaking of Wilson and Knapp: "To them, the mechanics of the farm were important only as incidental in the enrichment of the lives of the men and women, boys and girls, engaged in it. Their first concern was with broad humanities—People."

### *Reaching Out Today*

**REACHING MORE AMERICANS.** County Extension staff members and others in the Cooperative Extension System are reaching more people in more ways than ever before. Extension is taking the univer-

sity to the people by conducting research-based educational programs for many of the diverse groups making up our nation. Insofar as its funding and staff permit, Extension, in addition to its traditional programs with farm families, is working with part-time farmers, rural residents, suburban dwellers, and city people in areas in which it is competent to fill demonstrated needs. However, some needs are not being met simply because funding and staff are not available. Yet Paul D. Warner and James A. Christenson, sociologists and Extension specialists at the University of Kentucky, after a nationwide survey, stated there is public consensus that future support for Extension should be at least as great as it is now. "Users," they say, "are more supportive than nonusers, support increases as the frequency of use increases, and the more satisfied people are with Extension, the more they want it supported." Warner and Christenson conclude that support can be built first by increasing the number of users and second by insuring a high level of satisfaction in users.

Within funding and staffing limitations, Extension staffs are educating city as well as rural people on the importance of diet to health and the need to conserve water and other natural resources. It is showing young people ways they can explore alternative career possibilities, teaching families how to improve their quality of life, helping communities in revitalization efforts, helping small businesses increase efficiency, and improving the competency of local government, as well as taking action to meet other needs. Today, Extension is what Extension does.

EXTENSION AROUND THE WORLD. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the Cooperative Extension System can feel proud because it is the most widely copied abroad of all American governmental institutions. In 1945 M. L. Wilson and Edmund deS. Brunner wrote: ". . . since extension work has been tried successfully in so many parts of the world thus far, it can be valuable to a high degree wherever its underlying principles are applied." Perhaps Wilson and Brunner were overly optimistic, since Extension in most nations has not been as effective as it has been in the United States. Often the problem abroad has been that Extension has simply tried to reinforce governmental policies and has operated from the top down, without the intermediate authority the United States has, in its state and county

Extension services, to modify national policies to meet local needs or to transmit the farmers' needs to higher levels of government.

Nevertheless, Extension is a force for change in many nations. Many leaders of foreign Extension services have been trained in the United States in land-grant universities and in federal, state, and county Extension offices. At the same time, many Extension people have accepted overseas assignments to help developing nations establish Extension services. Frequently other Extension specialists have worked as part of a team recruited by one of the land-grant universities and financed by the Agency for International Development, the World Bank, the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation, or another internationally oriented institution. They have helped nations improve their agriculture, diets, markets, rural infrastructures, and other aspects of life. Extension today is a force for improving the quality of life in many nations.

The International Four-H Youth Exchange (IFYE) helps young people in many nations develop an understanding of people in other parts of the world. Each year, under the sponsorship of the National 4-H Council, young Americans travel overseas and live with families in foreign countries for a month or longer. Similarly, young people from many nations live with American families for varying periods of time. Those taking part, whether from the United States or one of the more than fifty other countries participating, often become ambassadors of good will in their communities and usually maintain long-term ties with families overseas.

*Seventy-five Years of Change.* Through two world wars, the most severe depression the nation has ever seen, drought that sent dust storms rolling across the entire nation, and a farm depression that seriously affected a third of the nation's farms and many rural communities, Extension has been a force for sustained, rational change that improves the quality of American life. It has taken the university to the people. Indeed, it is the university of the people. Extension has been a quiet—perhaps too quiet—influence in assuring the American people a safe, sure supply of healthful food at less cost than in any other industrial nation in the world. Today, less than 3 percent of the work force produces that food, compared with 33 percent seventy-five

years ago. Today, most Americans are aware of the relationship between diet and health, something we were just beginning to understand seventy-five years ago. Today, young people have opportunities to explore alternative occupations, while seventy-five years ago most simply did what their parents had done. Today, Americans are concerned with the wise use of natural resources, while seventy-five years ago they lived in an age in which such resources were carelessly exploited. Seventy-five years ago, Extension served mainly rural people. Today, while Extension serves a larger percentage of the rural population than the urban, it serves overall more urban residents than rural. Today, Extension stands on the threshold of a new beginning. Where Extension has been, where it is now, and where it may be going as it begins its seventy-sixth year of service to the American people is the subject of this book.