



Benefits of Diversity in Cooperative Extension

**The Subcommittee on
Extension Diversity of
The Personnel and Organization
Development Committee**

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Forward

Most individuals have an intrinsic appreciation for biodiversity. It is our hope that you might be able to embrace cultural diversity with a similar appreciation. As biodiversity can add strength and stability to an ecosystem, so can diversity and pluralism add strength to an ecosystem, so can diversity and pluralism add strength to our social systems. Our mobile society is learning to make decisions from a global perspective, whether it's trade, markets, travel or employment. The impact of recent technologies and changing demographics makes it imperative that the research, education and extension systems of the Land-Grant community understand and value the strength and resiliency that can be achieved by "walking the talk" of so many recent publications and presentations.

Benefits of Diversity in Cooperative Extension, is the latest step in the process of maintaining and sustaining diversity and pluralism in the Cooperative Extension System. From the work that has taken place in the system, it appears that managers and leaders in the system are interested in making a change and a blueprint is needed to achieve that change. This document is intended to be a support for the managers and leaders as they move forward with new vision for the system. This paper looks at the benefits that will come to individuals, organizations, and communities that take on the challenge of diversity in a complex world.

The change process suggests that all people in the organization have a reason for wanting the change to occur and have some degree of dissatisfaction with the status quo.

We urge Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) and Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service (CSREES) to incorporate these efforts. We encourage Extension staff and administrators at all levels to use this document in their states for the achievement and sustainability of diversity and pluralism in the system.

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Benefits of Diversity in Cooperative Extension

THE COMMITMENT: The Cooperative Extension System is committed to an emphasis on diversity in mission and vision; workforce; programs; audiences; and relationships with other people, groups and organizations.

*Pathway to Diversity,
October 1991*

Introduction

For the past decade the Cooperative Extension system has been grappling with the best ways to make system change that will undo the divisiveness of our past and create a truly diverse organization. A series of reports have been produced which continue to serve as the foundation for this national change process.¹ The Personnel and Organizational Development Committee's (PODC) Subcommittee on Extension Diversity (SED) has been responsible for the production of these past reports and through this document is continuing to provide the system with a vision for its movement. In addition to a vision, the change process requires that all people in the organization have a reason for wanting the change to occur, and have some degree of dissatisfaction with the status-quo. In order to internalize the motivation to engage in this process, we all need rationale and a clear picture of the viable outcomes. This paper is intended to assist with creating the desire for this change to occur by envisioning what our organization could be like when it is truly valuing diversity and managing the change process.

The challenge for Cooperative Extension is to keep pace with other organizations in our communities, sharing a vision that informs and assists families and individuals to adjust to our diverse and complex world. As a community-based public service organization there is the opportunity to support such efforts in industry, our schools, and other government agencies, and to act as a model for how to implement our democratic ideals. The challenge for the system includes rethinking how we have done things in the past, and developing additional ways of doing things to meet the needs of not only those we have traditionally served well, but also those we have failed to serve. The challenge for the individual includes developing behaviors, attitudes, and skills that will allow us to work effectively across differences with any individual, department, or program. Meeting these challenges will bring us closer to our vision. This paper therefore looks at the benefits that will come to *individuals, organizations and communities* that take on the challenge.

Finally, for change to occur successfully there needs to be a well-defined process for getting there. Like any change it won't happen if left to chance. Therefore, we have included an introduction to the "How To's" of managing diversity through the framework of three initiatives: Profile Improvement, Valuing Differences, and Managing Diversity. Throughout this paper managers should think of this change like other change processes managed within the organization - for example, the introduction of computers. Like the adoption of computer technology, becoming an organization that adopts expertise to manage and tap diverse human capacities with skill and creativity will usher the Cooperative Extension System into the next century stronger and better than ever.

¹Valuing Diversity and Celebrating Diversity, August, 1991; *Pathways to Diversity*, October, 1991; *Commitment to Diversity and Pluralism*, October 1992.

Overview

We now know that diversity goes beyond issues of race and gender discrimination to include all forms of division. It means more than changing either individuals or systems, but, instead, both. It is not about changing the last to arrive, but it is about the mutual adaptation of all in the new mixture.² There is something of benefit for everyone, including white men. It is definitely more than just affirmative action and includes valuing differences education and managing diversity initiatives. Learning to work effectively is a long term effort, possibly forever. It definitely goes beyond eating ethnic foods and adding the word diversity to the mission statement to changing our power dynamics, policies and practices. *Diversity*, if done well, can transform an organization to fully include everyone, thus maximizing our organization's outcomes to their fullest potential, and ending our historic divisions.

Individual Benefits:

The CES challenge is to acknowledge and confirm the value of diversity and pluralism by including all staff as full and influential members of the organization by providing educational opportunities for current and potential audiences using existing and diverse staff and innovative programs.

*Pathway to Diversity,
October 1991*

Work Force:

Every person involved with the Extension system will benefit from Extension becoming an organization that values diversity. We will know how to work effectively in all communities, we would have supportive work environments for our own diverse identities, and we would be comfortable knowing that in the work place and community there would be interpersonal and cultural behaviors that champion members of all groups. Overall, we each would expand our capacity to work with all audiences on subjects to improve the quality of life and effective living in a multicultural society.

As individuals we would be more confident in our ability to work well with colleagues across differences, and we would be able to see the unique assets and skills that each brings. Healthy workplace relationships across differences will produce a more stable work environment, higher retention rates, and therefore less work time spent on recruitment, orientation and training of new employees.

The complex skills of working in a multicultural organization would transfer to other aspects of the workplace creating managers and other workers who can manage all forms of diversity and cross-functional coordination from programs to departments, age groups to work environments. We would know how to make diverse mixtures work both in social and in work situations.

²Thomas Roosevelt Redefining Diversity

In this climate of “partnership” across all group power differences individuals would learn how to expand cooperative skills and decrease competitive skills leading to increased self-esteem and individual empowerment. We would naturally be assertive in our interactions and enter negotiations to achieve a win-win outcome. Respect and dignity will be received as well as given, thus enhancing personal job satisfaction. In an atmosphere that supports risk taking and cooperation, personal power dependent on personal responsibility and creativity would increase. We would learn to hear, see, and understand different points of view, and expand creativity because all people can be fully themselves. Finally, we would be proud of our identification with an organization that is seen by all groups as fair, inclusive, and equitable - true to our mission as a public agency we would be meeting our obligation to serve all people in our community.

Audience:

Diverse groups of people would feel welcomed, respected, and, through representation, create a learning environment where all gain a broader perspective and understanding about human similarities and cultural, social, and economic differences. They would be understood and provided relevant and effective services and products.

Customers who perceive an organization to be inclusive see it as a good place to be and offer a broader informal recruitment network that helps to attract the best talent.

Happy customers feel positive about sharing and offering word-of-mouth marketing feedback and are motivated to support the organization’s goals and express their satisfaction via providing external political and financial support. Expanded audiences and higher service numbers provide the foundation for expanded public funding to meet the identified needs.

Organizational Benefits

Historically, responsiveness to change—to the needs of people where they live and work is a strength of the Cooperative Extension System. As the population and workforce continue to change, diversity and pluralism become the bottom line for the system increased productivity, relevance, and effectiveness; enhanced creativity and innovation—all are additional benefits of this organizational investment and commitment to diversity.

*Pathway to Diversity
October 1991*

Every Extension office is an organizational system that would benefit from increased emphasis and commitment to diversity. A survey conducted by Hagberg Consulting Group in Foster City, Calif., found that companies with diverse workforce tend to be innovative and creative. According to the survey, diverse teams also proved to be more productive.³ Organizations have benefited⁴ from valuing diversity in terms of enhanced teamwork, innovation, motivation, and profitability. A recently funded action-research project designed to help farmers gain access to ethnic markets in New York City is a good example of this kind of innovation and teamwork leading to increased profits for customers⁵ In this era of shrinking resources, increased collaboration with groups across the spectrum of the community is also insurance for securing ongoing financial support.

³Eng, Sherri *Diversity good for business.*

⁴Loden, Marilyn *Implementing Diversity*

⁵Farming Alternatives Newsletter, Rural Sociology, Cornell University, Vol 5, No. 4, Fall, 1997, p. 10.

Recruitment, hiring, and retention of a qualified and productive workforce is a major organizational responsibility. Demographic information tells us that the shift in the U.S. workforce will result in the majority of new workers being women, people of color, and immigrants by the year 2000. Without plans for this transition, turnover can become a costly and persistent problem, with the employer realizing a poor return on investment. Workforce productivity and work outcomes are at stake in an organization that doesn't address diversity and establish a healthy diverse climate. There are a multitude of examples of this reduced efficiency. Some employees will leave to take other jobs, others may stay using their learned survival techniques to get along. For example one woman who was experiencing sexual harassment by a man whose desk she had to pass on her way to the copier, avoided doing the copying she needed to do to complete her work. Others have complained about the daily mental toll it takes to be in an environment where they feel excluded. This toll hinders their ability to be completely productive.

In the USDA Civil Rights Report, item #42 in the list of recommendations states: *Require land grant institutions and major CSREES, ARS, ERS, FS and NRCS programs to identify and give priority to the research and educational needs of the socially disadvantaged.*⁶ Organizations will experience improved customer service with diverse customers. The more knowledge institutions acquire about their diverse customers and clients, the more successful they can be in customizing and personalizing their marketing, messages. Extension would be able to effectively tap all available resources within our communities. With diverse staff, audiences, perspectives, and an openness to new ways of doing things, resources we are now unable to see will become apparent. These resources will have a direct impact on our ability to serve those populations that through historic exclusion are most in need. These unserved audiences are one of the keys to our future growth and expansion.

Benefits to Programs

Excellence in Extension is attained by developing educational programs with the highest standards of quality. As educational programs are designed, it is important to balance traditional wisdom about sound educational practices, contemporary royalties, and issues with changing societal needs. With the change to a more diverse workplace, marketplace, and population base, Extension programs must demonstrate a responsiveness to diverse audiences and meet the specific, identified needs of the audience served.

Programs will be of a higher quality when they are designed and implemented with a diverse team of program educators and partners. The team, composed of individuals from various backgrounds including the target audience, will be critical to implementing a program that has worth and value. The ability to form teams in an environment of organizational diversity has become paramount. Extension educators who are strong team builders are essential and appreciated colleagues. A diverse program planning team brings a richer background to the planning process. A program planned with strong community and agency partnerships, a proactive advisory system, and diverse clientele involvement in all phases of the program is considered to have a higher level of quality and responsiveness to diversity.

⁶*Civil Rights* at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, February 1997 p. 73.

A successful program will model a variety of techniques and educational approaches, both traditional and innovative, which maximize the effectiveness of the program. Creative approaches will be evident because of the diverse experiences and knowledge of the planning team. The end result for Extension is a program that enhances the institution, building respect and visibility, and is recognized, understood, and appreciated by clientele, decision-makers, and funders.

Benefits to the Community

Discrimination is eliminated across the Cooperative Extension system in programs, in relationships with audiences and other people, groups, and organizations. Recognition, power, privilege, and opportunity are extended to all people because they are valued for aspects of their age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and other dimensions of human diversity.

*Pathway to Diversity,
October 1991*

Cooperative Extension takes pride in its mission to foster the development of strong communities. The key to the success of this mission is to build strong communities that include all groups of people regardless of race, class, gender, spiritual practice, etc. in the decision-making processes. Strong communities are able to find solutions to complex problems by engaging a diversity of ideas to help meet the needs of all diverse populations. As a result, people are able to gain better insights to community and societal issues because a number of perspectives are valued in clarifying the issue and developing educational programs to help citizens explore action options. Programming is the reflection of community issues. For example, one northeastern community made a special effort to contact and include African Americans in a food and nutrition research project by hiring African American engineering students to collect the data. Persons from the community contacted the county office to thank the university because they had never before been contacted regarding their opinions on these issues. The food and nutrition program that was being developed would be effective with this historically excluded audience. Strong communities are built when the contribution of all groups is valued and respected as we go about the business of finding solutions to the complex problems.

Inclusive communities have several characteristics that permit them to thrive and grow. Inclusive communities exhibit less tension, intergenerational partnerships, less conflict, pride in ownership, and full participation. In one community, several churches with people from different races came together in a day of community service. Individuals from the churches worked as teams on various community service projects. These kinds of projects can be developed and led by the Cooperative Extension office.

Unique Challenges: Creating a Vision for Agriculture

Like all organizations Extension has its unique challenges. Its working structure developed over time to meet the needs of all aspects of the community, has very focused yet segmented program areas with each having specialized knowledge and skills - Agriculture, Human Development and Consumer Economics, and Youth. For families and youth the connections with the work of diversity initiatives has been more obvious, but until now we have not been able to create the vision for the agricultural branch of this system. With the publication of Civil Rights, at the United States Department of Agriculture in February, 1997, the connections have become more obvious. So, what will be the benefit of diversity to the agricultural system and community?

Agriculture is sustained by diversity from the variety of products to the variety of cultural groups who work to produce our food. Decisions in agriculture have outcomes that affect all aspects of the community. For example, since the advent of the agricultural technology for large-scale production of pork and poultry, many rural communities have seen an increase in Latino residents who work on these farms. Also the Midwestern meat packing industries have greatly increased the numbers of Latino and Asian workers, virtually changing the face of some communities.⁷ Farmers have unique agricultural concerns from language communication to immigration issues. Since women are now permanent members of the national labor force - their numbers are also increasing as managers of farms and labor crews. Agricultural agents with full knowledge of a community's inclusion issues and with attitudes that place equal value on the input of all people will be more valuable professionals. Their recommendations will include the welfare of all groups in the community - resulting, in the long run, in healthy community and agricultural systems. Agricultural agents need to develop the skills to become ambassadors for unifying our ever changing communities through sound recommendations, whether it be pesticide application, wage standards, or hiring practices.

The original mission of the Extension system acknowledged the exclusion of a segment of our society from the benefits enjoyed by those with more formal education or with more economic security. Congress' Morrill Acts of 1864 and 1890 assured that people at all socio-economic and educational levels would have access to information and knowledge - promising equal opportunity for success. Because of socio-economic divisions, many people in the Extension system have little social contact with people from lower socio-economic groups. This is even true for those individuals who at one time came from these groups. Agents and specialists with exposure to techniques that bridge these divisions can feel good about remaining true to the earliest goals of the Extension mission - effectively reaching limited-resource farmers/ranchers.

Finally, we keep hearing that we are in a global marketplace. Agriculture is one of the players in this world-wide trade. Agricultural agents who can think and act from this level of knowledge about the diversity of the world's people will be better able to guide the future success of U.S. agricultural interests abroad.

Multicultural Organizational Development: A path to organizational transformation

Multicultural Organizations are defined as organizations that value human differences as competitive advantage; have pluralistic culture that reflects the interests, contributions, and values of members of diverse groups; have full and influential participation by all members of the organization in decisions and policies that shape the organization; and eliminate discrimination throughout the organization.

*Pathway to Diversity
October 1991*

⁷Ruggles. Rick *Impact of Meat packing Plants Studied*

According to Samuel Betances, a Managing Diversity consultant, there are three conditions for change:⁸

- Dissatisfaction with the status quo
- Vision of where we need to go
- Process by which we get there

From Extension's data on hiring and retention, the USDA Civil Rights Report and the endless anecdotal stories of exclusion by present and former employees it is overwhelmingly clear that for many of us dissatisfaction with the status quo makes sense. This paper has provided a vision of what it could be like for everyone when systemic change occurs. What remains is the process by which we get there. Some for-profit corporations such as Corning, Xerox, and others have been seriously working on this question for a long time and a substantial body of literature has been generated to guide the way. Some of the literature has been referenced in this article. In this section we have selected one framework by which to begin. It has been developed by Roosevelt Thomas in his book *Beyond Race and Gender*, and expanded in his subsequent book *Redefining Diversity*⁹ Other authors and practitioners have adapted this framework and are included. This framework consists of three distinct initiatives:

1. ***Profile Improvement:*** Profile improvement is an ongoing process for assessing inclusion. It includes, but is not limited to, pictures on the wall, professional journals, recruitment, hiring, retention and promotion patterns. This initiative involves counting for inclusion within all these areas, it is a tool for creating environments that reflect U. S. diversity. Based upon our inherited divisions individuals will continue to recreate the exclusions unless this conscious strategy is consistently applied.
2. ***Valuing Differences:*** Having acknowledged the historical divisions between groups, it becomes evident that based on widespread racism, sexism, classism, and ableism, individuals in our society have not learned the skills for working well with people who are different.

Valuing differences education is a staff development initiative aimed at:

- fostering awareness and acceptance of differences,
- fostering an understanding of the nature and dynamics of differences,
- assisting individuals in understanding and shifting their feelings and attitudes around differences,
- developing a common language to discuss difference,
- exploring how differences might be tapped as assets in the workplace, enhancing work relations between people who are different

Valuing differences should be a consistent part of every individual's ongoing staff development. Valuing differences education should be tailored to meet the different and often changing needs of individuals as well as the needs of the organization. Valuing differences education is not a one time generic experience that all staff attend.

⁸Diversity: Weaving a competitive advantage (a conference on workplace diversity), March 28. 1996. Rochester NY.

⁹Thomas, Roosevelt. *Beyond Race and Gender. Redefining Diversity*

3. ***Managing Diversity:*** Managing diversity is a comprehensive managerial process for developing an environment that works for all employees. Managing diversity involves everyone. It is not something that is defined by race or gender. It extends to age, personal and educational background, function, personality, lifestyle, sexual preference, geographic origin, tenure with the organization, exempt or nonexempt status, management or staff. Managing diversity includes all employees, including white males.

Managing diversity acknowledges the historical reality of exclusion by assessing the cultural roots of an organization and making the systemic changes necessary to create an environment that honors difference while maintaining necessary organizational outcomes. This systemic change process requires executive level leadership with strategic planning and implementation that affect the entire organization. Both formal and informal structures are scrutinized including personnel policies and procedures, regulations, job descriptions, and staff development.

Managing diversity requires skill development. Managers require considerable investment since much of what happens within organizations is governed in some way by management. Teaching managers the skills necessary for managing the complexity/diversity they face every day including, managing different funding requirements for multiple programs, improving interdepartmental collaboration, for example, collaboration between the fiscal department and program staff, expanding interagency collaboration to include organizations serving historically excluded audiences with the potential for marked program expansion. These few examples illustrate both the far reaching application of managing diversity skills as well as the need to develop these skills in managers.

Finally, managing diversity skills must be developed within each staff member. Every person within an organization deals with diversity and complexity every day. Managing diversity skills enhances personal productivity assisting individuals in meeting the needs of their job: an Extension agent assisting a grower in working effectively with a new group of workers, a program coordinator retaining EFNEP outreach workers because of his or her efforts to foster mutual adaptation between them and office staff, an Extension office secretary providing appropriate support to all of the programs within the office. Managing diversity skill development teaches individuals to think outside of their daily functions and to be open to solutions they have never tried.

Managing diversity education helps individuals move away from the dichotomous thinking that locks them into thinking there is only one right way. The managing diversity initiative embraces the idea that there is always more than one solution, and more than one way of doing things. In fact, most issues require multiple solutions to achieve desired organizational outcomes.

When implemented across systems as a new paradigm Multicultural Organizational Development initiatives can be the path for Extension to achieve our mission and redefine our role as a critical element in all communities as we enter the 21st century.

Conclusion

Like all transitions and change, there will be a continuum of responses from enthusiasm to resistance. Our task as leaders is to continue to create the vision, guide the process, and have the courage to build equitable partnerships to the benefit of all. The time for action is now.

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