

The Cooperative Extension System In 2010

What will be the role of the Cooperative Extension System in this new century? Will it continue on a path similar to its illustrious history or will it take a dramatic turn in a different direction? Do Extension professionals have any input or control over the system's future? What role will you play now and in the years ahead?

The Personnel and Organizational Development Committee (PODC), in cooperation with the Strategic Planning Council (SPC), surveyed the system in June of 1999 for help in articulating visions for the future of the Cooperative Extension System. The goal of the project was to help the system move through change faster and test the use of scenarios as one technique.

A subcommittee developed three scenarios for Extension in the year 2010. These were sent, along with several questions, to a targeted group of Extension professionals in the field. The participants represented leaders and future leaders across the country. Of those returning the surveys, 30% selected #1, 15% chose #2 and 55% responded to #3.

Common themes mentioned in all three scenarios are:

- Fewer long term employees
- Less job security
- Increased use of contract employees
- Fewer employees with a history and loyalty to Cooperative Extension
- Less emphasis on agriculture
- More demand for family, youth and community programming
- Community based systems approach to programming

In addition, several competencies for Extension educators were consistent for all three scenarios. Competencies include skills in communication, facilitation, resource management and use of technology. Other competencies cited are ability to identify resources and access information, organizational skills, effective utilization of the political process, and creative/critical thinking.

Now that you know the background of the project, there is an opportunity for you to become involved. Start by reading each of the three scenarios. Then choose the one you believe is most likely to occur. Spend some time reflecting on these four questions and then share your thoughts with co-workers.

1. How will this scenario change the land-grant system in your state?
2. How will this scenario impact your program area and current position?
3. What publics do you see being served and under served under this scenario? Why and in what ways?
4. What implications are there for personnel under this scenario?

The sub-committee hopes Extension professionals will use these scenarios to stimulate individual reflection and discussion with co-workers. This can help everyone involved better prepare for the future of the Cooperative Extension System.

If you wish additional information about the scenario process or results, contact Bill Peterson, chair of the sub-committee on Organizational Culture and Change at bpeters@ag.arizona.edu.

Sub-committee Members:

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Sidebar

ECOP is a standing committee created by the Cooperative Extension Section of the Board on Agriculture of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC). ECOP represents the entire extension system in policy decisions and provides nationwide program and organizational leadership. PODC is one of five committees functioning under ECOP. The mission of PODC is to provide system-wide leadership for individual and organizational excellence throughout Cooperative Extension.

Scenario #1

In 2010, the disparity among county programs is the direct result of increasing numbers of mandated programs, increasing demand for lower taxes, and declining financial support for Extension. Local Cooperative Extension System (CES) county programs continue to exist in politically well-positioned counties with sound local funding bases and excellent marketing systems. Other counties are served by individuals from universities and private colleges with outreach efforts. Where Extension programs continue to flourish, changes have occurred. Attention is being given to better coordination, duplication of research has eventually been eliminated, diversity of customer base has increased, and credible accountability and marketing of the Cooperative Extension System is occurring. The research agenda is established and driven by the private sector.

Federal dollars for CES have evaporated in the past decade. Outreach functions of universities in some states integrate Cooperative Extension into their university outreach, while in other states Cooperative Extension is the major outreach arm of the university. Universities are supporting programs deemed significant for their own survival. New federal dollars are available to all public higher education system.

The client receives information via expensive technological equipment owned primarily by wealthy individuals and corporations. Cooperative Extension employees with specialized skills are employed by communities or large corporations in a contractual basis.

Scenario #2

In 2010 the public and private university system is addressing the educational needs of a worldwide audience. The Cooperative Extension System (CES) is serving as the premier model for establishing linkages at the community and local level which facilitates delivery of programmatic outreach nationally and internationally. Universities are engaged in sharing research, educational and evaluation expertise. Led by Cooperative Extension, the total University is involved in outreach providing communities with support necessary to achieve maximum quality of life. All public universities are accountable to the public for educating the citizenry of the world and resolving critical issues through appropriate educational intervention. CES uses world expertise to resolve critical issues. State of the art educational technology exists at all levels for educational program delivery.

Funding to support educational outreach is a combination of public, private, and international sources. CES is partnering with agencies and organizations at global, national and community levels appropriate to address identified needs.

Contract workers are hired to facilitate, identify local needs, write grants, conduct research, and deliver educational programs. Overall accountability and administrative/organizational management of the CES system is streamlined and managed at the state level.

Scenario #3

The year 2010 finds the Extension System moving into new territory by working with individuals who have not been part of its traditional audience. Research indicates that communities that use broad-based input by a wide range of people are more successful in identifying strengths, securing resources and reaching common goals.

The expertise of the citizenry is instrumental in problem identification and in utilizing their knowledge and experiences as part of the team that generates solutions through research and transfer of new technologies. All community members are involved on an ongoing basis to identify the current issues, needs, and goals of the learning community. The ability to work without defined boundaries is essential to the delivery of educational programs for families, businesses, and individuals.

Far from the days of a county agent traveling out to the farm or home to meet one-on-one with a client, today's Cooperative Extension System uses a full complex of technology coupled with the personal touch, to deliver programs and services to anyone, anywhere, at any time. Local Extension units have moved from having a single focus to being a mix of multi-county or multi-state information and technology centers to support community learning centers.

Extension community learning centers have one or more community educators whose purposes are to educate, facilitate, and provide the connectedness of the community and customers to the land-grant university. Centers have access to the latest technology used not only to identify local needs and provide information but to provide the underserved clientele access to the university. The land-grant university continues to be the "home" of the system and provides the core of Extension educators and researchers to support community based programs.

Contracted workers are well trained to carry basic information to the people that need educational assistance to better meet the needs of healthy living. Educational intervention helps to move these people from a non-productive segment to one that adds value to decision making at the community level. The special outreach methods employed in this effort have made a lot of people uneasy. Some of the trust that is taken for granted in traditional approaches has taken months or years to develop. Leaders from all segments of the community have a positive impact on identifying community issues and decision making. New collaborations and partnerships are developing with the public assistance groups at both the local and state level.

Government funding continues from federal, state and local sources and institutions of higher education; however, all federal and state dollars are now competitive and open to all universities and others with a strict adherence to accountability. The land-grant system has a much strong competitive edge in searching for private dollars; however, this has raised serious questions about the bias of research and proprietary interests. Not all local governments are on board, primarily due to the lack of resources to support land grant education efforts. Communities identify issues, develop and support permanent funding plans, and train volunteers to sustain the community centers.