Extension Leadership System (ELS)

What Is ELS?
The Extension Leadership System (ELS) in Georgia is a statewide network of county-based volunteers working to support, and advocate for, Extension programming at all levels. All County Extension Agents assemble and work with a Program Development Team (PDT) designed to support the work they do in their respective Extension program area (4-H Youth Development, Family and Consumer Sciences, and/or Agriculture and Natural Resources). In addition to the PDT’s, an overall county council serves to coordinate efforts for advocacy and support of the total county Cooperative Extension program.

Philosophy and Purpose
Social, economic, and environmental forces are constantly in motion and challenging communities to respond in order to maintain a quality of life that a community’s citizens have come to expect. The Extension Leadership System is designed to help focus the resources of the University of Georgia on a county’s most critical needs and opportunities. PDT’s provide guidance, assistance, and leadership for the designated program area.

Cooperative Extension’s educational programs are based on the needs identified in communities and emerging issues of the surrounding area. It is the purpose of the PDT to make sure these local, regional, and national needs are reflected in programs, and that educational resources to address the needs are identified and mobilized. More specifically, the purposes of the Program Development Team are to:

- Determine general program direction and goals
- Review current program efforts and evaluate their progress and effectiveness
- Provide leadership and counsel in development of countywide programs
- Advise program development by establishing priorities based on countywide needs
- Encourage, coordinate, and recognize Extension volunteer efforts
- Coordinate and/or support the efforts of the working groups and/or issue teams
- Link Extension programs with other groups and agencies
- Identify and target Extension programs for historically under-represented populations
- Communicate the Extension program to the community

How Does It Work?
Cooperative Extension professionals set goals for their program areas at the local level and select PDT and County Council members with the skills to help achieve those goals. Each team/council is comprised of stakeholders who are involved in the community and committed to improving the quality of life for the people who live there. Program Development Teams help identify key needs and opportunities in the county, set priorities for UGA Cooperative Extension programs to address those issues, conduct those programs and evaluate their effectiveness. Teams/councils meet a minimum of 3-5 times per year, and each meeting features a review of accomplishments and goals, an educational session, planning for future programming including team member involvement. Members are asked to serve a three-year term of service.

What Does Success Look Like?
For numerous examples of how ELS has positively impacted Extension programming across Georgia, please visit the ‘Success Stories’ section of our Website at: http://www.caes.uga.edu/intranet/coextopr/proodevelop/ELSuccess.html

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