August 11, 2010

Dr. J. Scott Angle  
Dean and Director  
CAES  
101 Conner Hall  
Athens, GA 30602-7501

Dear Dean Angle,

As you know, Georgia Farm Bureau recently held its annual Commodity Conference at the University of Georgia Tifton Campus. Georgia Farm Bureau members, representing a cross section of commodity interest, came together from across the state. Many members enjoyed getting research updates from the Row Crop, Livestock and Specialty Crop specialists. Dr. Joe West and his staff were very helpful in putting together a successful conference.

In addition to receiving research updates, we were given an update on the financial challenges facing the Cooperative Extension Service from Dr. Steve Brown. Attendees were charged with the task to complete the attached questionnaire regarding the Cooperative Extension Service in their respective home county, and I would like to share some of the results with you.

Attached you will find a blank form that we passed out to each attendee of the conference, as well as an analysis of each question's response with either quantitative results in chart form or a representative sample of comments for that particular question.

Georgia farmers and agriculture obviously need the services provided by the Cooperative Extension Service. The knowledge agents have, and the support by University of Georgia researchers across the state, is an invaluable tool to Georgia agriculture. I would be happy to discuss in greater detail the results of the questionnaire at your convenience.

Thank you for allowing our organization to comment on the importance of Cooperative Extension. If you need any further help from Georgia Farm Bureau members, please let us know.

Sincerely,

Zippy Duvall, President  
Georgia Farm Bureau

Attachments (2): Blank questionnaire  
Analysis of responses
2010 COMMODITY CONFERENCE
EXTENSION QUESTIONNAIRE

The Cooperative Extension Service is a resource that benefits farmers in Georgia. Please answer the following questions so we can make proper recommendations to the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences about how to best utilize Cooperative Extension.

County: ___________________________________________

Primary Commodities Grown: __________________________

What services offered by the Cooperative Extension Service do you find most beneficial? ____________________________________________

What changes could be made to make Cooperative Extension more efficient? ____________________________________________

What type of information have you gained in the last several years from Cooperative Extension that has had a positive impact on your farm?

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________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

In your opinion, would your county officials continue to offer support to a county agent working in multiple counties?

________________________________________________________________________

Do you currently have an Ag Agent in your county?__________________________________________

Do you currently have a 4-H Agent in your county?__________________________________________

Other Comments__________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INPUT REGARDING THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE!
What services offered by the Cooperative Extension Service do you find most beneficial?

These responses represent the top 5 most frequently listed items. Approximately 30% of all responses replied that General Production Information was the most beneficial service provided by county agents. General Production information may include field visits, consulting, crop management and providing timely information. Soil and Water testing was the most specific response that appeared most frequent, with approximately 25% of the questionnaires having this response. Insect and Disease control were the second most frequent individual items answered, with approximately 20% of the responses. Research and Weed Control were at 15% and 12%, respectively.

What changes could be made to make Cooperative Extension more efficient?

This question received a variety a responses. Here is a representative sample of some comments from the questionnaires:

- A county agent should be used like a doctor to help correct problems, not as a weekly scout to find problems. Some producers use agents like a scout, taking time away from others.
- Cut salaries at the top to fund additional ag agents.
- Make emphasis on research for production agriculture and less on urban improvements.
- Agents should spend less time on paperwork, computer reporting, etc. and more time helping farmers and producers. Use volunteers to assist with basic, homeowner questions.
• Rotate agents through joining counties to give access to different experts and have more experience. Push for more volunteer workers to take up some slack.

• I believe each agent should be prepared and trained to offer a full service approach. Example: each agent participate in 4-H instead of having a 4-H specialist.

• As more funding cuts are incurred, consolidation of county offices, especially small offices, may offer the greatest relief. Cuts in research should be a last resort.

• Do away with tenure. More farm contacts.

• Have classes for new agents so they will have more knowledge of the main commodities grown in their area.

• Our agent needs to be more accessible. We only have him one day a week because he is shared with other counties.

What type of information have you gained in the last several years from Cooperative Extension that has had a positive impact on your farm?

Again, there were a variety of responses to this question. Here are some comments:

• Pig weed management help. Checking crops in time for harvest, etc...

• Data and publication on invasive species.

• Tomato research and field trials.

• The latest would be how to control resistant weeds and soil fertility, and the test conducted on best amounts of fertilizer to apply for each crop. Work done on different commodities.

• Without agents, prices would go up for analysis: scouting work would increase and we would need to hire a consultant.

• Soil testing has helped save money due to reduced fertilizer cost. Hay testing identified high nitrate hay which could have potentially killed cows. Nutrition management training and planning has helped manage poultry litter in a more environmentally responsible manner.

• Add county agents to improve the delivery of the findings that the University Scientist come up with. The Extension Service has given me the proper information over the years and has given me the opportunity to make a profit.

• Even though we enjoy a great relationship with our agent, the delivery mode for sharing information may be outdated and not affordable.
In your opinion, would your county officials continue to offer support to a county agent working in multiple counties?

A majority of responses were “yes” (34 yes responses to 34 no responses). The “yes” responses focused on the importance of agriculture in the county, and the county leadership would need to keep the offices open. Comments on 20 out of the 34 “no” responses indicated that county officials wouldn’t support sharing agents over multiple counties for fear that all counties would not be treated equally, and that the county governments would not want to support an agent that would not be working solely in their own county.

Here are some comments speaking to the positive benefits of having county officials fund agents in multiple counties:

- Yes, but only if no other choice. Too important to our county.

- Yes, and may ask city to contribute also.

- Yes, because it may be the only way to have these services.

- I am a county commissioner and would like to keep at least one county agent in our county—we really need 2 in our county.
Below are some comments that illustrate that county officials wouldn’t fund multi-county agents for fear of their county not getting proper attention:

- This will be a problem with some county officials. It could result in a domino effect; if one county pulls out, others may follow.

- It would be extremely difficult for our county to continue to support—remember that local agents are part of their community.

- Not as well—what person, problem or county gets the priority? Probably the home county!

- If my county was equally served by a multi-county agent, I think they would offer support.

Do you currently have an Ag Agent in your county?

Approximately 88% of responses said they did have an agent in their county. Only a few specified whether the agents were retired/rehired or half time.
Do you currently have a 4-H Agent in your county?

Approximately 86% of questionnaires said that their county had a 4-H Agent. Again, only a few questionnaires specified if the agents were retire/rehire, part time or school board funded.

Other Comments:

Here are some other miscellaneous comments that are a good representative sample of the overall feelings of the group:

- I seek advice 2 or 3 times per week from our county agent. Significant part of my farm operation.

- Extension agents must work after 5:00 pm if they are going to develop a 4-H program.

- High salaries need to be cut in Athens.

- Peanut hull scrape (when to dig peanuts) is the most beneficial service from the Cooperative Extension Service.

- Agents and/or specialist come to our farm to help with problems and find solutions. County meetings to get current research to use on farms.

- Soil and Tissue sampling, scout training and supervision, and crop and pest advisory are the most beneficial services from Cooperative Extension.
• Must keep 4-H alive and inform students beyond 5th grade that 4-H is available.

• Workshops, information, soil testing, pamphlets, 4-H programs, Master Gardener programs, weekly newspaper articles in local paper, connection to UGA and knowledge of agriculture are all services of Cooperative Extension that are beneficial.

• 4-H is very valuable character building leadership in the schools. It needs dedicated leaders.

• Without agents on the county level 4-H will go away.

• Soil sample testing, chicken litter test identification of various insects and diseases on our crops and information about new products and chemicals are beneficial to my operation.

• We need advice from county agents when a disaster strikes our county at any time. Where to get help for droughts, floods, tornadoes, high wind, etc...

• We need to decide the direction of the 4-H programs; it can help determine the direction of ag.

• If Extension is rendered irrelevant through budget cuts, what's the need for unbiased research and education?

• Would regional experts in some areas be more effective in providing assistance? Some counties may justify having their own agent based on the type and amount of agriculture in their county.

• I strongly support keeping the 4-H Program supported.

• We are very blessed to have our agents and we know that without them, our children and farmers would not be as educated as they are.

• We want to keep Extension alive to keep working for our rural economy.

• Our agent provides a ready source of information as needed. He is the University of Georgia in our county.