Review of Extension Steering Committee September 2010

Review of County Operations
Refining UGA Cooperative Extension Program Delivery
Beverly Sparks, Associate Dean of Extension

Background

Over the past two years state funding to University of Georgia Cooperative Extension dropped by about 23 percent, including the current 4 percent holdback of FY11 funds. These budget cuts were absorbed through furloughs, operating and travel budgets reductions, retirement incentives and returning all vacant Extension agent and state specialist positions.

This loss of funding and people has had a profound impact on Extension county operations. From July 2008 through July 2010 we lost 80 county agent and 25 specialist positions. We expect to lose 8 more agents to retirement before Jan. 1, 2011. In addition, the State 4-H Director, two District Directors and two district Program Development Coordinator positions are currently filled by an interim or a part-time rehire. To date, we have minimized the impact of the loss of people from the system through temporary rehire of recent retirees. Additional budget cuts will impact our ability to continue all of the rehires into FY11. And, as we begin the fiscal year, we expect additional budget cuts.

Thus, in March 2010 we began a “Review of County Operations.” Following is the committee’s action report and recommendations.
**Review Steps**

To complete a thorough review, these steps were taken by administration:

- Appointed a steering committee to help facilitate the process. The committee was charged to ensure every Extension employee had the opportunity to give meaningful input on the future structure of county delivery of programs.

- Developed a website to keep employees informed about the process with a goal of being completely open and sharing information. [http://www.caes.uga.edu/intranet/coextopr/review/](http://www.caes.uga.edu/intranet/coextopr/review/)

- Posted information on the Extension budget situation, maps showing where agent positions had been lost, previous strategic plans for Extension as well as other pertinent information to the website and shared with all employees.

**Guiding Principles**

These guiding principles were applied to each step of the review process and were used as criteria by which to evaluate the quality of the process and the final suggestions:

- **Clients first.** Focus on what is best for clients -- and the diversity of clients -- not just best for the system.

- **Build local and state ownership of CES.** This principle includes the possibility there are many different ways to maintain local ownership: physical presence, funding from local sources, office in local area, and local advisory groups are just a few examples. ("Local" may refer to county, city, multi-county, school system, etc.) At the same time, CES must increase statewide ownership of CES.

- **Clarify and focus on the mission.** At all stages, this process should seek to clarify and communicate the mission of CES, including the importance of service, not just the transfer of information.

- **No "cookie-cutter" approach.** While consistency and program focus are important, improvements or changes in program delivery, staffing and organization can vary by districts or programs.

- **Demonstrate impact.** Any anticipated changes should have measurable impacts at the county, state and national levels.

- **Improve unity.** Enhance the unity and identity of CES without diminishing
unity with teaching and research; enhance the intersection of CES with UGA. Serve the university more broadly.

- **Continuous improvement.** This principle encourages all involved in the process to become better informed about different models of Extension program delivery in other states. Ask hard questions about relative strengths and weaknesses of UGA Extension and other forms of program delivery. Look to other models for benchmarking and comparison of quality. Don't copy, adapt to Georgia.

- **Involve others.** Include stakeholders, both outside CES and UGA and within UGA. Make sure the involvement is substantive and significantly impacts the outcome, not just attending meetings.

- **Build capacity.** All possible improvements or changes should build the capacity to deliver all three programs (Agriculture & Natural Resources, 4-H, and Family & Consumer Sciences) in all counties.

- **Develop new resources.** Enhance sources of support from both traditional and non-traditional sources.

**Work of the Steering Committee**

On March 11-12, 2010 a 20-member steering committee met at Rock Eagle and began discussing how to develop and implement a process to garner information from employees and external stakeholders on the future structure of county extension delivery. During the meeting, the group explored facts relating to our current situation, defined the issues to be addressed, and designed a process to engage the entire organization. Sherri Lawless of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government facilitated the meeting.

**Steering Committee for Review of County Operations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tony Tyson – Chair</th>
<th>Steve Brown</th>
<th>Ken Lewis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lannie Lanier</td>
<td>John Parks</td>
<td>Greg Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arch Smith</td>
<td>Jorge Atiles</td>
<td>Sheldon Hammond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura Perry Johnson</td>
<td>Laurie Cantrell</td>
<td>Sidney Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Siebert</td>
<td>Grace Garnier</td>
<td>Jenny Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gail Hanula</td>
<td>Dennis Hancock</td>
<td>Travis Zetterower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith Peppers</td>
<td>David Langston</td>
<td>Nick Fuhrman – Advisor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to garner the information needed:

**Process for input from internal stakeholders**

- Electronic survey of all employees - survey developed by subcommittee with input from program leaders and Dr. Nick Furhman
- Listening sessions for each district
- Listening sessions for State Staff Specialists in Athens, Griffin and Tifton
- Listening session with Family and Consumer Sciences Extension faculty and staff
- Listening session with Archway Professionals
- Listening session for CAES department heads

**Process for input from external stakeholders**

- County Administrators and County Commissioners Survey - electronic survey of elected and appointed county officials with follow up interviews. *Jeff Christie*
- Education Community Survey - electronic survey of superintendents, principals, teachers with follow up interviews. *Judy Ashley*
- Surveys and listening sessions among agriculture industry Commodity Groups
  - Cotton
  - Peanut
  - Fruit and Vegetables
  - Poultry
  - Corn
  - Beef Cattle
  - Equine
  - Green Industry-MALTA and GGIA surveys/listening sessions
  - Urban Ag Center Advisory Group-listening session
- Farm Bureau-survey/listening session
- Fort Valley State University Extension Administration/listening session
- ELS Groups

**Recommendations for Action**

Based on responses to surveys, listening sessions and other input information, the steering committee considered myriad options for effective, efficient Extension program and service delivery. After careful consideration, they make these recommendations:
Develop a tiered system of Extension program and service delivery.
Counties are ranked based on several relevant criteria and assigned a tier.*
Services and educational programs increase at higher tiers.

Tier 1 County
- No local Extension office
- Basic 4-H program offered in school system through part time/full time employee supervised by agent housed in surrounding county
- County contributes at least 50 percent of funding plus travel

Tier 2 County
- Exempt professional employee in office providing:
  1. Access to area agent programs
  2. Diagnostic services: soil, water, radon, etc.
  3. Information about regional trainings/meetings
  4. Access to publications and online resources
  5. Regular office hours for half day/4-H half day
  6. Core 4-H program
  7. For-sale publications
- Assign CEC from another county to serve as administrator**
- Assign ANR and FACS agent to be resources, but would not generally offer programs or make client visits in this county
- County contributes at least 50 percent of funding plus travel

Tier 3 County
- Shared agent from surrounding county spends portion of time in office
- At least one exempt classified professional staff in each county providing:
  1. Access to area agent programs
  2. Diagnostic services: soil, water, radon
  3. Information about regional trainings/meetings
  4. Access to publications and online resources
  5. Regular office hours for half day/4-H half day
  6. Core 4-H program
  7. For-sale publications
  8. Educational programs conducted in the program area of the shared agent
- County contributes at least 50 percent of funding for staff positions, a portion of salary and benefits for agent, plus travel
Tier 4 County
• One agent (county-based) providing educational programs; (agent may work ANR, 4H or FACS or split between program areas.)
• Agent may serve as CEC or CEC from another county may serve as the administrator
• At least one exempt classified professional staff in each county providing:
  1. Access to area agent programs
  2. Diagnostic services: soil, water, radon
  3. Information about regional trainings/meetings
  4. Access to publications and online resources
  5. Regular office hours for half day/ may assist with 4-H half day. If at least two staff positions are available, one may serve as resource specialist and maintain full-day office hours, and the other will provide 4-H programming.
  6. For sale publications
• County contributes at least 50 percent of funding for staff positions, a portion of salary and benefits for agent, plus travel

Tier 5 County
• Two or more agents providing educational programs (one serves as CEC)
• At least one exempt/classified support position, most likely a 4-H educator/secretary, providing:
  1. Access to area agent programs
  2. Diagnostic services: soil, water, radon
  3. Information about regional trainings/meetings
  4. Access to publications and online resources
  5. Regular office hours for half day/may assist with 4-H half day. If at least two staff positions are available, one may serve as resource specialist and maintain full-day office hours, and the other will provide 4-H programming.
  6. Core 4-H program
  7. For-sale publications
• County contributes at least 50 percent of funding for staff positions, a portion of salary and benefits for agent, plus travel

Tier 6 County
• CEC with multiple county agents jointly funded
• Funding comes from various sources including state, county, grants
• Administrative support for infrastructure in county office including full-day office hours.
• Program assistants or exempt classified employees to assist with program delivery. County or grants will provide at least half of the funding per classified position.

*Tier System and agent position distribution criteria:

ANR agents – As of Aug. 23, we have 116 ANR agents
  • County Farm Gate Value
  • Value/size of green industry/service industries
  • County population
  • County support/funding available
  • Agricultural expertise needed in the county
  • Potential to share ANR agent across county lines
  • Potential to cover needs of county with area agents/potential to address critical issues with area programming
  • Potential to split program area ANR-4-H

4-H Agents – As of Aug. 23, we have 96 4-H agents
  • Population of school-age children
  • Placement of 4-H educator/program specialists, area program management needs
  • County support for 4-H
  • Potential to split program with ANR-4-H or FACS-4-H
  • Presence of service delivery person in county
  • Capability of agent to manage multiple county programs
  • County support/funding available

FACS Agents – As of Aug. 23, we have 36 FACS agents
  • County support for FACS programs
  • Potential for regional impact
  • FACS expertise needed in the county/area, e.g., perhaps due to low public health or medical infrastructure for providing nutrition and food safety education or counseling.
  • Bankruptcy and foreclosure rates
  • Persistent poverty
  • Child care resource and referral agencies ability to service child care
  • Clusters of specific populations that could benefit from life-skills household education (nutrition, food, money management, parenting skills)
  • Location of regional educational centers
  • Access to mass media centers
District teams develop staff patterns, propose staffing plan to Extension.

Tools available to develop plans include:

- Area ANR agents for geographically defined agricultural crops such as peaches, onions, blueberries, vegetables, apples, wine grapes
- Area agents to cover very specific programs with large geographic distribution such as poultry, water issues, energy, food safety, nutrition, financial literacy
- Exempt status educational program specialist as service or resource specialist to staff lower-tier counties
- Split appointments across program areas where appropriate (AG-4-H; FACS-4-H; or ANR-FACS)
- Rehires for area agents where appropriate and take advantage of expertise and mentoring capabilities
- Drop lower-priority programs or those no longer supported within CAES.
- Partner with FVSU to provide expertise in ANR, FACS and 4-H in some counties and in programming related to aquaculture and small ruminants
- Establish multiple sites for area Extension education meetings across the state; create education centers with OIT support at each location

Addressing Urban Extension Challenges

Define Urban Extension Programs and a more efficient structure

- Have more opportunities for regionalization in metro Atlanta area
- Develop more cooperative planning and coordination
- Advertise programs across metro Atlanta
- Explore potential to use more educators/program assistants
- Expand the Center for Urban Agriculture’s mission to support urban extension at county level
- Enhance and improve Master Gardener program
- Long-term program plans encouraging area collaboration and marketing
Administrative Structure
Examine CES administrative structure; streamline where possible. Examine eight identified district- and state-level positions for possible combination, reduction or elimination.

Potential Alternative Funding Solutions
• For-sale publications; examine using Amazon.com
• Accept credit cards for camp fees
• Charge for special programs such as diagnostics, commercial workshops, in-service training for teachers, school food service training, license and certification programs
• For-fee sales of/subscriptions to new wireless applications
• Solicit sponsorship for regional training centers; general Extension programs
• Look for local partnerships with cities, Chambers of Commerce, hospitals, development authorities
• Get grant development help to generate more grant funds
• Expand VISTA program
• Work with specialists to include more agents in grants (salary, travel and training opportunities)