

Rodney J. Brown
Deputy Undersecretary for Research, Education, and Economics
U.S. Department of Agriculture

3rd Natural Resource Extension Professionals Conference
Revolutionizing or Evolutionizing Extension Programming?
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I am happy to be here with you. Having spent half of last year in CSREES-NRE, I feel like I am home again.

Your conference theme, “Revolutionizing or Evolutionizing Extension Programming?” is particularly timely.

For just a few minutes, I will share some of my thoughts on translating the challenges we face in the Cooperative Extension System into opportunities.

Unbiased, research-based, and community-based Extension education programs have been long recognized as reliable and credible sources of information.

When the Land-Grant System was established, agriculture was the business of the day. Half the population lived on farms. Sixty percent of all jobs were connected to agriculture.

We now live in a very different world.

Farming is no longer the largest element in the economic base of most rural communities. The relationship between agriculture and natural resources has changed. Natural resource values and income opportunities are becoming more important to farmers, ranchers, other landowners, and their communities.

Demographic changes and changing social values provide a constant supply of new challenges. Public demand for natural resource products and services continues to grow. Pressures on land and resources are increasing, competing, and frequently conflicting.

The future sustainability of our natural resources depends on use and management decisions made by private individuals, who own more than two-thirds of the Nation’s land and water resources, and by public land managers, who control the other one-third.

Communities need to base their land-use decisions on the best scientific knowledge available—knowledge that enables them to maximize the balance between short- and long-term economic and resource tradeoffs.

The applied integration of research, education, and Extension in the Land-Grant System has allowed us to contribute to our Nation’s remarkable quality of life. Extension has played a critical role by identifying problems in the field, bringing those problems to the attention of researchers, then effectively transferring research results and recommendations to customers.

More than ever, people need to understand the issues and their options. With a broader spectrum of the public actively engaged in the environmental arena, Extension has a crucial role in helping them address issues from an informed, research-based perspective.

To continue making a valuable contribution, Extension must continue both to be and to be recognized as a credible, unbiased source of science-based information.

How does Extension grow and change? How does Extension actively and effectively participate in the creation of a dynamic new future? These basic questions have captured the attention of policymakers, both in the Extension System and in the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) recently released a report, "The Extension System: A Vision for the 21st Century." This report takes a serious look at a number of issues directly related to the viability of the Extension System.

- Do our traditional ways hinder the ability to respond to new challenges?
- How do you engage the expertise of the total university and become a catalyst for connecting individuals, organizations, and communities?
- How do you use the latest information technology to stimulate active learning, critical thinking, and problem solving?
- Does Extension have the flexibility to be a fully effective partner?
- Where are additional resources?

The answers to many of these questions have far-reaching effects, especially on Extension's reputation as a credible, unbiased source of science-based information.

U.S.D.A. has a strong interest in the success of Extension. However, in recent years, U.S.D.A. has not received substantial funding increases for Extension, and state and local funds are increasingly difficult to obtain. Meanwhile, the number of topics Extension is asked to cover steadily increases. U.S.D.A. must decide what kind of Extension System fits U.S.D.A.'s mission.

Therefore, in addition to the ECOP report, Secretary Ann M. Veneman has directed that a review be done of Extension's role and mission in the 21st Century. This review will look at a few questions beyond those covered in the ECOP report.

- What strengths does Extension bring to U.S.D.A. that no other agency can provide?
- How can these strengths be funded and marketed?
- Should Extension seek grants from other U.S.D.A. agencies and other Federal partners?
- Should Extension collaborate with other Federal agencies, not just for funding, but also to enhance the capacity of both?
- Would Extension be more effective assisting other Federal agencies than by providing services directly to customers?
- If so, would this enhance application of new technologies and enable Extension to better respond to new opportunities?

In the area of Natural Resource Management, there are additional questions such as:

- Should other U.S.D.A. agencies, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service, seek Extension support for delivery services?
- Should Extension consider expanding its relationships with the Department of Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency, NASA, and others?

As you can see, this will be a serious examination, and finding the answers to these many questions is something we will do together. The results of this review will underpin our efforts to increase Extension funding from within U.S.D.A. and to bolster our efforts to obtain additional Extension funding from other sources. Please look at this review as a positive activity for Extension.

Research-based information in the hands of decision makers is essential to optimizing opportunities, even those that look like challenges at first glance. In addition to providing information to natural resource decision makers, we have a very personal challenge—making the changes necessary to optimize our efforts in Extension. I am confident of our success.

Thank you.