

Extension: The Next Generation

Good afternoon everyone. It's great to see so many from campus gathered here today in Scheman, as well as all the folks throughout the state who are participating virtually. Although I believe that there are no substitutes for our face-to-face conferences, I appreciate your understanding during these tough budget times for having a virtual conference.

I would like to begin by thanking President Geoffroy for his kind words today, his unending support during the last few months, and also for his encouragement during these very difficult times. And my thanks to Max Gage, as well, for her skilled presentation and sharing her leadership tools with us. I'm especially looking forward to seeing all of you out in your kayaks! I also would like to recognize Connie Hardy and the conference committee for their hard work. I'm guessing that there must have been more work involved in having a virtual conference for the first time than our traditional ones.

It's difficult to adequately express my gratitude to you all for all that you have done. Thank you, Extension staff. Thank you for rising to the moment and being there when Extension needed you. Thank you for hanging in there while we got things sorted out. Thank you for your incredible work ethic and for the sacrifices that you and your families have made during a very difficult time. And thanks to those members of our Extension family who have moved on or will be moving on. You will be greatly missed.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are here today to discuss, to focus upon, and to take action on the future of Extension. And not just the foreseeable future, but the long-range outlook for Extension. I'm sure that you are all aware that we all are responsible for that future, and we all will play a part in whether that great social experiment called Cooperative Extension will be a viable entity twenty years from now. In the words of the great catcher/philosopher Yogi Berra, "The future isn't what it used to be."

To that end, I will be pre-emptive and answer a question that has come up several times over the past few months, and that is, "If the economy recovered tomorrow, would we go back to the way things were? The answer is unequivocally, no. We will not be going back to the old future.

Folks, there is no way to sugar-coat it; our backs have been against the wall, and according to the negative numbers that continue to surface from the State's tax revenues, they will remain so for awhile. We are not anywhere near ready to exhale. Extension has gone through and will continue to go through a period of

transition. There are still some tough times ahead. The symptoms are organizational soul-searching, strategic planning, reorganizations, retrenchments, and defining new priorities. There also have been serious side effects. Many people have lost their positions or taken early retirement as a result of these changes. Several of you have undergone dramatic changes in your job descriptions, especially those of you who are field specialists. On the surface, these symptoms of change and transition appear to be caused by the financial crisis of reduced resources. Beneath the surface, however, there are more fundamental dynamics that reflect larger changes in our society. Although the financial crisis has accelerated these changes, the forces moving Extension from an organization of the past to an organization of the future are more fundamental than financial matters and reach well beyond the Extension Service.

With uncertainty comes stress, as we try to make adjustments in how we function to accommodate the changes. Often, when we need to change, we frequently berate ourselves, believing it to be a sign of failure. Yet, it is not an indication of weakness, but of health, when you regenerate yourself. As with most stress, we can let it become debilitating or we can use it, instead, to sharpen our focus and actions to create opportunities for making the changes essential to continue to be a relevant program for our various audiences.

My vision for Extension for the next ten to twenty years is based on the certainty that we will persist in doing work that has value and relevance to our constituents; that we will bring to bear the best, forward-thinking, and unbiased research that our institution produces. That by reinventing ourselves today, we will stand proudly tomorrow alongside the best educational enterprises in the world.

When you think about it, the Constitution of the United States was written over 200 years ago, and was based on a vision of freedom for the people. That vision was so remarkable that our Constitution has withstood the challenges of time and is still valid today as a vision for democracy. The vision for Extension must parallel the needs of our nation; the vision must recognize both the basic, traditional needs and the ever-evolving needs of our society in a rapidly changing, diverse world.

I've heard some folks refer to it as the "New Extension," but I prefer to dub it the "Next Generation of Extension" or Gen-EX. Gen EX describes a new way of doing business where we will need to mine for new audiences, forge new partnerships and alliances, and change many of our internal processes. This is going to require your experience and expertise, some new thinking, innovative revenue sources, cutting-edge skills, and a refreshed game plan that enables us to become a sustainable educational enterprise. It is also going to entail careful planning and time to evaluate whether we are getting it right. Additionally, it will call for our collective ability to cut through the layers of dust that naturally befall organizations with such a long history.

We will begin by **refreshing our current strategic plan** so it continues to dovetail into both the new, developing strategic plan for the university, while addressing the necessary changes in business operations that have been precipitated by the restructuring. This will entail setting 12-month and 24-month goals and to mount a rigorous implementation schedule. During this period, we will identify a set of short-term critical outcomes and significant results that must be produced for our goals to be reached.

Next, we will continue to **implement the restructuring plan**. The focus will be on making sure that you each have the tools, skills, and a working understanding of your goals and objectives. I am aware that in a restructuring of this magnitude that it's common for certain things to fall through the cracks. During the implementation period, we will work toward identifying and minimizing the non-essential activities and maximizing priorities and efficiencies. Allow me to say a word here about implementation of our restructuring plan. It was *predicated by necessity*, but it was *born from the innovation and creativity of many of you*. I cannot stress enough that **execution of such a plan is never more important than when innovation is at the heart of a strategy**. That's because innovation always involves treading into uncertain waters. Since we are pursuing a new business model, no amount of research can resolve the critical unknowns. All that strategy can do is to give us a plausible starting point. From there, we must experiment, learn, and adapt.

At the same time, we will begin to **evaluate our business processes**. Our purpose here is to examine and challenge conventional approaches to building strategy and to refocus from prioritizing operational efficiency to searching for robust strategies that *deliver sustainable client value*. Changes will be made on two levels: organizational and an individual unit basis.

This will eventually lead to the presentation of a market-based, value-driven model or strategy, which will be founded on a collective vision, market sensing, organizational learning, differentiating core competencies, relationship strategy, and a reinvented organization. This process will culminate in a model that provides Extension leaders with a framework for testing and re-building the fundamental business model that drives the organization, and a process for guiding change initiatives. The backbone of the process is three-fold: **issue management**, which comprises issue recognition-analysis and visioning work to surface and recognize the issues that our organization faces; **issue shaping**, which reduces the list to a manageable number of the most important ones and defining them precisely; and **issue resolution**—identifying possible responses to the important issues, choosing the preferred responses, and turning them into strategic action plans.

Without a doubt, as skilled specialists, you can conceive of many more studies and programs than we can physically accommodate. In order for Extension to

move forward in this new climate of resource scarcity, we will begin to change our current methods of being **reactive-responsive**, in which we assess the current situation, identify existing needs, and develop a program to meet those needs. Instead, we will need to work from a **proactive perspective** in which we *anticipate what the situation and related needs will be during some specified time in the future, help constituents decide what a better alternative future would look like, and develop programs to help people change elements affecting the future so that it will be "better," from their perspectives.*

After we have completed the business applications process review, we will revisit Extension's Strategic Plan and develop strategies for the next decade or longer. Much of this work will be occurring concomitantly with the implementation and other strategic activities, utilizing multiple task forces and a robust measurement system to keep us on track and alert us if our strategies are off-target. Please understand that Extension's Strategic Plan will not be a concept. It will be very real and tangible. It will guide our decisions and our work. It will be clearly delineated and disseminated widely. There will be no secret or ancillary plan that we will *actually* follow—this will be it.

Let's take a look at what the possible **barriers and stumbling blocks** to our successful transition might be.

- Traditional thinking that impedes innovative thought by creating certain blocks—this is probably the most debilitating of the impediments to success. These come in the form of, "We've always done it that way."
- Preoccupation with order and tradition—yes, order is necessary, but too much inhibits innovation.
- Resource myopia—we're only using a fraction of our talent. If we could allow more autonomy coupled with creativity, from support staff, for instance, think what that could mean for our specialists.

More importantly, let's be aware that the **keys to our success** are

- Becoming a totally immersed information-age organization
- Focusing on strategic issues
- Developing and utilizing an interdisciplinary knowledge and partner base
- Initiating and maintaining team accountability
- Being proactive in anticipating issues before they become crises
- Holding a global perspective while informing local action
- Making staff development a priority
- Finding new partners and new audiences

As we close our conference, I want to once more thank and acknowledge all of our wonderful men and women of ISU Extension, including those who have lost their positions, those who are retiring, and those whose positions are changing. It is your dedication, hard work, and sacrifices through these very difficult times that have laid the foundation for our future successes and the Next Generation of

Extension. There is no doubt in my mind that you are a great Extension team, with a superior product, a great brand, and a solid foundation for future success.

I am very cognizant that the course we have taken thus far is unprecedented. I am also aware that there is no one solution, nor is there a magic bullet or panacea that will resolve our challenges. I do know that our best minds continue to work on this and will continue to find innovative solutions for whatever is thrown at us. After all, that is the Extension way. So, I'll leave you with more words of wisdom from Yogi Berra: "When you arrive at a fork in the road, take it."

And now, Connie Hardy is going to provide you with the details of the discussion groups and the facilitators at each location. Connie? Thank you.