

A Time for Vision: Extension's Role in Iowa Agriculture

Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me to be with you at this summit. Before offering my remarks today I want to take a moment to acknowledge the great leadership of our Dean of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Wendy Wintersteen, who I am proud to call my colleague and friend. Our continued success in Extension to Agriculture and Natural Resources much depends on a good working relationship between my office and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and we certainly have that and more. Maybe it is because for a long time Wendy was one of us as an ISU Extension entomologist, but it really is because she recognizes the importance of the work that all of you do and the value you bring to Iowa's quality of life and the reputation of Iowa State University.

I also want to acknowledge the strong leadership of "General" Miller, who also has become a good friend. Jerry does a great job in keeping the developing issues in front of us. I have a one-on-one meeting each month with Jerry and Paul Brown, as I do with all of the program leaders in Extension, more to keep me informed of what is happening with the program and what is going on out in the state of Iowa. It is from these meetings as well as visits that I get to make out in the state that I have been able to see the "big picture" view of what's going on in ANR Extension these days. I know that:

- We're growing Iowa's bioeconomy.
- We're advancing economic development in agriculture.
- We're supporting beginning farmers and the next generation of agriculturists.
- We're helping Iowans develop new agricultural enterprises, opportunities, and linkages.
- We're working to improve our state's natural resources and environmental stewardship.
- And last, but certainly not least, we're playing a key role in revitalizing rural/urban communication and relationships.

I'm pleased to see that Extension to Agriculture and Natural Resources is tackling these priorities for Iowa. These are *exactly* the things we should be doing to remain a viable, relevant force not only in Iowa agriculture, but also in the state overall. From our smallest towns to our largest cities, our overarching goal must be that Iowans see ISU Extension as relevant to them in everything we do — that Iowans recognize these issues as not "just ag" issues, but as *Iowa* issues. The good work you're doing helps Iowans make the connection between agriculture and their everyday lives, and keeps Extension in sync with Iowa's greatest challenges.

When I talk about ISU Extension — whether within our state or beyond our borders — I often speak of healthy people, healthy environments, and healthy economies.

- Extension promotes healthy people and lifestyles by providing education on public issues, food and nutrition, health, financial management, youth development, and family relationships across the lifespan.
- Extension advances safe, sustainable, and healthy environments by helping to enhance the value of Iowa's agricultural industry, providing recreational opportunities, and disseminating research and education aimed at protecting the state's natural resources.
- Extension advances healthy economies by supporting growth and working to improve quality of life through encouraging business development, helping to create jobs, and expanding entrepreneurial activity.

Iowans value health people, healthy environments, and healthy economies — and ANR Extension plays key roles in supporting these values — from sociology to plant pathology, from ag economics to ag engineering, and everything in between.

Our mission for Extension to Agriculture and Natural Resources supports profitable and efficient agricultural producers and businesses, rural vitality and development, value-added opportunities and assistance, and protection and enhancement of natural resources. These are the cornerstones of our base programming areas and remain fundamental to the land-grant mission of applying and sharing knowledge grounded in the best science.

Our vision, however, has changed and will continue to change to reflect 21st century needs. Just as we are constantly reminded of the need for our lawmakers to “reach across the aisle,” Ag Extension is reaching across the aisle to Natural Resources Extension. We are forging new partnerships, finding innovative ways to meet and sustain both the needs of our environment and the food and energy requirements of a rapidly growing world population. Additionally, we are transcending the constraints of state and national boundaries and we are delivering our expertise to the world. And, Extension is now squarely in the energy business with many of the same challenges and opportunities heretofore associated with the fossil-fuel industry.

The pace of change in the organization, functions, strategies, and approaches of Extension to Agriculture and Natural Resources is clearly accelerating and our strategies and role will change to meet those needs.

- Extension will need to boost farmers' environmental awareness. We will work to develop infrastructure and measures to replenish depleting soil fertility and toxicity in our water and soils.
- Extension contacts also will play an important role in raising awareness in problems regarding environmental deterioration and livestock welfare.
- Extension will provide socioeconomic guidance that focuses both on means by which farmers might maintain their income levels from their resources, such as introduction of novel crops or livestock and involvement in various rural enterprises, and on the ways of assuring the longer-term welfare of farmers and their families. Agricultural extension services are thus adding a strong social dimension to their activities.
- Extension now has become recognized as an essential mechanism for delivering information and advice as an “input” into modern farming. Since

commercial farmers can derive direct financial benefits from these inputs, there is a trend toward extension units requiring farmers to pay for services that they previously had received free of charge.

The future of education and delivery methods in Extension to Agriculture and Natural Resources is changing as well.

- The need for agricultural and rural information advisory services is likely to intensify in the foreseeable future. In much of the world, agriculture faces the challenge of keeping pace with rapidly increasing population with few reserves of potentially cultivable land. Farmers will have to become more efficient and specialized.
- From a government perspective, whatever priority is given to production, Extension will remain a key policy tool for promoting ecologically and socially sustainable farming practices.
- Some of the most promising developments in Extension methodology will occur where the key agenda is the environment; for example, in the need for the joint management of forests by professionals and local forest users and in integrated pest management.
- The Extension worker no longer will be seen as the sole expert who has all the useful information and technical solutions. The clients' own knowledge and ingenuity, individually and collectively, will be recognized as a major resource, and solutions to local problems will be developed in partnership between the Extension worker and the clients.
- Since the scale at which Extension to Agriculture and Natural Resources support is required is often larger than the individual farm, ANR Extension workers will need new skills of negotiation, conflict resolution, and the nurturing of emerging community organizations.

The future also is likely to witness a further reduction in the levels of public funding. Moreover, a rapid increase can be expected in the use of information technology in support of Extension. The forces for change in these areas will come from four main directions.

1. Extension services will continue to be under pressure to become more efficient, to reduce their expenditure and staff, and to pass on (some of) the costs of provision to their clients who directly benefit financially. Thus charging clients for services is likely to become more widespread, while governments will find it attractive to contract out the operation of services to the private or the volunteer sector.
2. In the future, rural populations will undoubtedly be progressively better educated and have a greater awareness of their situation within a national and international context. However, this exposure will not reduce the need for ANR Extension. Rather, given the changing demands on agricultural producers from population growth, increasing urbanization, legislative changes, and market requirements, the more knowledgeable farming population will require different kinds of Extension services. Social and economic trends within rural areas will therefore necessitate more highly trained, specialized, and technically competent workers, who also know where to obtain relevant information and problem solutions. ANR Extension will need to recognize and serve different types of clients.

3. Extension workers and farmers will be jointly involved in the adaptation of new technology. Thus, ANR Extension workers will collaborate with farmers as experimenters, developers, and adapters of technology and devote more energy on communication within their local areas.
4. The continuing rapid development of telecommunications and computer-based information technology is probably the biggest factor for change in ANR Extension, one that will facilitate and reinforce other changes. There are many possibilities for the potential applications of the technology in ANR Extension. IT will bring new information services to rural areas over which farmers, as users, will have much greater control than over current information channels. However, it will not make Extension workers redundant. Rather, they will be able to concentrate on tasks and services where human interaction is essential — in helping farmers individually and in small groups to diagnose problems, to interpret data, and to apply their meaning.

Indeed, the future will call for more able, more independent, more client-oriented ANR Extension workers. The emphasis will be on the quality of interaction between agent and client rather than on the movement of “messages” through a hierarchical system.

Flexibility and adaptability will be seen as virtues. Paradoxically, these trends will bring us full circle to the early manifestations of Extension where one-on-one interactions were the hallmark of our services. In the future, we will just see more computer-carrying ANR Extension workers who are at ease helping farmers to identify the information they need in order to realize the potential of their farming operations.

No matter what the future brings, I am convinced, given the quality of ISU’s research in these areas and the quality of the men and women in ISU Extension, that your roles as agriculture and natural resource educators will only grow in value and importance as Iowa and our nation go forward in developing new energy sources, working to provide food security and safe distribution systems, protecting our environment, and continuing to bring a higher quality of life to our citizens and our communities. Thank you for your good work, your professionalism, and your dedication to Extension.