

More Than a Taste of Extension

Well, we have come to the end of another Extension conference and I hope that your time together has been worthwhile. Again, I thank Tom Duncan and his Conference Organizing Committee for a job well done. The theme that they gave us this year, “a taste of Extension,” is a clever one and a way to get our clientele more engaged and to attract new customers. But then, just a taste will never be enough. We will have to give them more — more online courses, more field days, more one-on-one consultations, more workshops — more of all the great educational programs that Extension has to offer that improve Iowans’ quality of life.

Now, we’ve got many things in our favor:

- First, we’re involved in the relevant issues of the day.
- Second, we’re there for Iowans when times are tough.
- And third, we’re building our core competencies to do an even better job of serving Iowans.

These strengths align us well with President Geoffroy’s goals for the university and provide a good base from which to launch Extension’s marketing campaign next February. In his convocation address last month, President Geoffroy took a very long-range view of what Iowa State wants to achieve, looking toward the year 2050. He shared his impact goals, and I quote: “By 2050, Iowa State should be known around the world for the significant impact that our faculty, staff, and students have made, and are continuing to make, in addressing the major problems facing our planet, especially ... food, energy, infrastructure, water, and sustainability.” These indeed are relevant issues of the day, they are “green” issues, and they are areas in which Extension can increase the significant impact of the university.

I believe it was Kermit the Frog, who sang, “It’s not that easy being green.” It very well may not be easy, but it’s the right thing to do as we continue our commitment to building healthy families, healthy economies, and healthy environments. Iowans will want more than a taste of Extension when they see that we are involved — and that through Extension they can become involved — in these relevant issues that make a difference in their lives.

The **bioeconomy** definitely is tied to a host of “green” as well as economic development issues and remains one of the university’s top priorities. In Extension we are continuing our ongoing effort to help Iowans understand the facts surrounding the economic, social, and environmental ramifications of the bioeconomy. With ever increasing prices for both food and fuel, many Iowans

face tough and unwelcome choices as they struggle to feed their families and also fill the gas tank.

The food and fuel issue continues to be debated in the popular press, but the discussion often has lacked good scientific information to back up the claims being made. Food and fuel is *not* an “us vs. them” argument. Extension can provide the research perspective that has been missing from much of the popular repartee surrounding the bioeconomy. You all would have been very proud of your fellow Extension colleagues who participated in two panel discussions during the Iowa Hunger Summit at this year's World Food Prize conference. The first panel consisted of John Lawrence, Chad Hart, and Cindy Fletcher, and they discussed the food, fuel, and feed issue. The second panel was led by Kim Greder and the participants were Iowans who are categorized as “Food Insecure.”

Next month Extension will be hosting community conversations to help Iowans understand the facts regarding Iowa's role in meeting national demands for food, feed, and fuel. Just think about it — in every county in Iowa, 15 to 20 community leaders will come together for an hour and half for a pointed discussion about the bioeconomy. They'll have the chance to *really talk* about the opportunities and the challenges associated with food security, feed production, fuel prices, and the growth in the renewable fuels industry. Imagine — grain and livestock producers, local investors in ethanol and bio-diesel plants, human service providers, elected officials, financial lenders, ministerial representatives, chamber of commerce and business leaders, and other Iowans all engaged in identifying research needs, policy issues, and educational concerns.

These conversations will provide Iowans with much more than a taste of Extension. For decisions made and actions taken here in Iowa have not only local implications, but also global significance — just as worldwide events are influencing and challenging Iowa's citizens, soil, and producers of both crops and livestock. My thanks to so many of you who are involved in these issues and especially to Jerry Miller and Paul Brown for coordinating much of the effort.

There also is much significance and relevance in providing opportunities for families and communities to prosper. For example, Extension's **Horizons** program is helping communities take charge and build stronger leaders to address poverty, economic decline, and the exodus of young adults. Twenty rural communities completed the 18-month community leadership program in June, and another 15 communities started in September. These Iowans got a taste of their own capacity for leadership and as a result they're setting up volunteer programs to mitigate local poverty issues. They're forming not-for-profits to assist with funding their poverty reduction efforts. They're pooling their resources with other communities, and they're getting elected to office. For Horizons participants, a taste of Extension definitely was not enough. An opportunity provided by Extension helped them take a stand for their communities and

ensure their very survival. And I congratulate our Families Extension staff for their outstanding work in this area.

Another area in which we must use all the imagination and creativity at our disposal to increase our relevance is in our **urban programming**. As Iowa becomes more urban, more of our state legislators are coming from urban areas. And they want to know what Extension is doing for their constituents. The demographic and political trends are clear — Extension must have a current, relevant, and expanding urban presence. But just as the bioeconomy isn't a matter of food vs. fuel, this is not a case of rural vs. urban. Rather, expanding our urban presence is the necessary response to the growing political, economic, and environmental symbiotic relationship between rural and urban Iowa. ISU Extension needs both strong rural *and* urban programming to survive and succeed.

Earlier this month I shared with you the report of Extension's Urban Initiatives Task Force. I strongly encourage you to read it carefully. The task force is calling on us to recognize that delivering services in urban areas requires a different model than what we are used to in serving rural areas. We need different staff skills, different marketing, different programming options, and very likely different funding mechanisms to meet the needs of urban audiences. The task force admits that these recommendations aren't new concepts — they are supported by almost 20 years of the scientific literature. We are but one of many extension services that are coming to grips with the need to better serve urban residents — but come to grips with it, we must.

The Urban Initiatives Task Force is making plans to bring together county extension council members and extension education directors for an urban summit to discuss the report and its recommendations and to design a pilot project for urban programming. I heartily thank the task force for their report, which was chaired by Don Broshar, and their continuing efforts in this critical area. All of our program areas will be involved in this effort and I especially appreciate the leadership of our Communities Extension and Families Extension Programs staffs in this area.

As we give Iowans more than a taste of Extension with our work in relevant issues like the bioeconomy, the Horizons program, and our urban initiatives, Extension will indeed increase the significant impact of the university.

President Geoffroy also stated that by 2050, "Iowa State University must be regarded as a treasured resource for Iowa, our nation, and the world, because of the impact we have in improving people's lives." This aligns so closely with our mission of improving quality of life and contributing to healthy people, healthy economies, and healthy environments that I would argue that Extension also must be regarded as a treasured resource. And I would like to see this goal realized long before the year 2050.

Now, there are many definitions of a treasure, but what seems most fitting for Extension is definition number 3 from the American Heritage Dictionary: "one considered especially precious or valuable." So, how does Extension become considered especially precious or valuable to the people of Iowa? Let me give you an example.

Think about the Parkersburg tornados, or the floods, or even the ups and downs of the Dow Jones industrial average. Extension has shown time and again that we're there for Iowans when times are tough. When we show we care, when by our actions we demonstrate human kindness and compassion, when Extension work becomes more than just "doing our job" — that is when we have an opportunity to truly be a treasure to the people of Iowa. It is a terrific feeling I get when I receive letters from state agency heads or NGOs praising the efforts of our staff, such as the ones I received about Kathy Vance's efforts in Louisa County and Linda Bigley's efforts in Linn County regarding the floods.

ISU Extension continues to be involved in the day-to-day recovery from this year's tornados and floods — assisting families and businesses with cleanup concerns; helping farmers deal with damage to facilities, crops, and livestock; and helping communities manage long-term rebuilding and relocation issues. There will be continued tough times ahead related to these natural disasters as Iowans consider whether they can rebuild their damaged homes and businesses, or whether they should relocate entire neighborhoods or communities.

Turning to a human-made disaster, I daresay we'll help Iowans pick up the pieces from the current crisis on Wall Street as well. But that's our job. The real heroes are the people who have been affected by these disasters. With their unmatched Iowa strength and courage, they *will* cope and re-build their lives. But Extension will be there, in every way we can, to help with Iowans' continuing recovery. We can offer Iowans a taste of Extension's care and compassion in tough times — and they'll remember — and they'll want more from Extension in the future.

I don't think that we can involve ourselves in all these great efforts without discussing the impact of bigger issues like globalization and climate change. As we are all still digesting the earth-shattering economic events of the last few weeks, think about the implications. Three trillion dollars worth of financial assets have evaporated. Wall Street has been effectively nationalized. The Federal Reserve and the Treasury Department are making all the major strategic decisions in the financial sector and, with the rescue of the American International Group (AIG), the U.S. government now runs the world's biggest insurance company. Not to mention that the biggest bailout since the Great Depression has been desperately cobbled together to save the global financial system. Along with these monumental changes, the saying, "Politicians make the

media look good" has been also replaced with "Bankers make politicians look good."

If there ever was any doubt about whether Extension should be engaged in global economic efforts, the events of the past three weeks should put them to rest for all-time. Who would have thought that sub-prime lending in the U.S. home mortgage market would be built on a house of cards and become the catalyst for a world banking crisis? Who could have imagined that the success of Iowa's corn and soybean crops and burgeoning bioeconomy, would fall under fire for escalating food prices and be blamed for world hunger? Who knew how inextricably intertwined a barrel of crude oil and our ability to get a car loan would be?

The fact of the matter is that globalization of economies and production has deeply altered the Iowa landscape. Manufacturing, a mainstay of rural economies, is in decline, and many industries have moved overseas, attracted by wage structures and lax environmental standards that dramatically lower production costs. And I don't have to tell you that shrinking economies have forced many rural residents, often the "best and the brightest," to leave rural areas in search of greater opportunity elsewhere.

Climate change is a topic that was discussed at this year's conference. Pumping ever more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere as a result of industry, transportation, and other human activities will affect the planet from the Arctic Sea to the Amazon rainforest, sparing no region. That was well-punctuated by our esteemed keynote speakers, Drs. Michael Crimmins and Chester Koblinsky. But what do we *need to talk about* when we talk about global warming? It'll get hotter, that's a safe bet; polar ice caps will be melting, and wildlife that can't adapt to warmer temperatures, such as polar bears, could be on the way out. But what does it really mean for the health of us, the human race? What we do know has scientists increasingly worried: a rising risk of death from heat waves, the spread of tropical diseases like malaria into previously untouched areas, worsened water-borne diseases, to name a few. And if there ever was any doubt whether Extension should be engaged in global climate change efforts, consider how environmental stresses in more vulnerable nations could possibly pose challenges for food security, cause mass migrations due to shifting international patterns of food supply and demand, and produce unimaginable health threats.

In the words of Dr. Michael Quinn Patton, an International Programs Specialist with the University of Minnesota Extension: "An international dimension is basic to effective Extension programs. Not secondary. Not a luxury. Not an afterthought. Not an add-on. But basic." What is most interesting about Dr. Patton's comments is that they were made in 1982.

The next president of the United States is going to wake up in the White House on January 21st with an unprecedented global agenda before him: He will need

to find a way to resolve and unravel the impact of two wars. He will need to cure a failing economy in which the US has not only lost money, but world leadership credibility. He will need to find solutions for global climate changes that will also allow for healthy economic growth. He will need to develop a plan which will provide health care coverage for all Americans. He will need to find both long-term and short-term solutions for foreign oil dependency. He will need to find a way to help starving people worldwide. In essence, even this partial list of responsibilities could be described as a *global-sized* version of healthy people, healthy economies, and healthy environments.

The 21st Century Report (ECOP, 2001) identified globalization of the financial, service, manufacturing and agricultural sectors of our economy as having a "profound influence on all facets of American society." The report adds that "the challenge for Extension is to provide leadership to demonstrate local implications and potential consequences of an interdependent world." I submit that the events of late verify that we must ramp up our efforts and create an internationalized Extension in order to provide the level of service essential to be effective in today's world. In order to internationalize Extension, it will be necessary to glean a collective vision of what a global-sized Extension will look like and how the organization could measure its efforts. In other words, if we can agree on a global-sized vision, then it might be easier for us to focus our energies to make the necessary changes.

This is going to entail working across program areas, counties, and levels of responsibility. It will also require working in interdisciplinary teams and taking a systems perspective on important issues of the day. These issues must be understood in a global context, with the ability to deal with complexity and ambiguity without becoming overwhelmed.

Let me repeat the words of President Geoffroy in his convocation address last month when he took a very long-range view of what Iowa State wants to achieve, looking toward the year 2050. He said: "By 2050, Iowa State should be known around the world for the significant impact that our faculty, staff, and students have made, and are continuing to make, in addressing the major problems facing our planet, especially ... food, energy, infrastructure, water, and sustainability." These are the global-sized issues of the day and they are areas in which Extension can increase the significant impact of the university.

President Geoffroy went on to say that Iowa State also must be "a magnet for attracting world-class faculty to teach, conduct research, and advance their scholarly interests, with the support of staff who are among the best in their areas of expertise."

We must have excellent research in order to have excellent extension and outreach. And we must have world-class extension staff to carry it out. World-

class extension staff take professional development seriously, whether building their subject matter expertise or strengthening their core competencies.

This annual conference gave you a taste of core competencies for Extension. It's essential that we build our core competencies to do an even better job of serving all Iowans. Several months ago, I charged a group within Extension to identify and create professional development training that would increase ISU Extension staff's core competencies in written and verbal communications. That committee also was to develop training to help staff improve their use of technology and delivery methods for supporting educational programs and guiding behavior change among Extension learners. Now with the information you've gleaned from this conference and the core competency professional goals you've set, you can make your selection from the training options that are available. We always can become better by honing our communications skills. I look forward to your feedback on how this program is working and how we might improve such offerings in the years to come.

Allow me to comment on one more of the President's goals, one that also has significant impact for Extension. By 2050, and I quote, "Iowa State University must be a powerful magnet for attracting truly outstanding students to join us to study and learn." I believe it's fair to say our Iowa 4-H'ers are among the most outstanding students in the state, the nation, and the world. So we must continue our efforts to get more of them to choose Iowa State for their higher education. Let's prove that a taste of Extension can lead to a degree from Iowa State.

Extension's new marketing campaign will help all of us spread the word about Extension. The launch is planned for February 2009, and the campaign will run through April 2009. The objective is to build awareness of ISU Extension's role in economic development to secure new clientele who may not have traditionally looked to Extension as a resource. We also want to bring new relevance to our existing audiences.

The campaign will include a statewide media campaign as well as targeted public relations efforts and affinity marketing — that is, we'll be working through and with our partner organizations. There will be county level support such as print templates, radio spots, and talking points, as well as assistance from Extension's external relations specialists. Tracking and measurement components will be built in to the campaign wherever possible to determine impact and return on investment. These are steps we must take. For with new clientele along with existing audiences who are recommitted to Extension, we will increase our market share and guarantee that our clients will want more than a taste of Extension.

So do not settle for a taste of Extension. And do not be satisfied giving your clients only a taste of Extension. An old Portuguese proverb states, "For each mouth, a different soup." I'd wager that the Extension kettle has a lot to offer.

When Henry David Thoreau talked of getting a taste, he meant far more than taking a sample, and I quote: "Live each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each."

Likewise, it was Eleanor Roosevelt who said, "The purpose of life, after all, is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experiences."

Thoreau and Roosevelt believed in living life to the fullest. If we apply that belief to our work in Extension, then without a doubt, we will make sure we are involved in the relevant issues that make a difference in people's lives, whether they live in Iowa's largest cities or most remote rural areas. We will continue to serve the people of Iowa with care and compassion through the tough times as well as the good. We'll keep President Geoffroy's goals for the university in front of us as we make the commitment to improving our own skills and abilities — not to merely keep up, but to excel at our craft, to become world class. From *carpe diem* to *carpe Extension* — let us seize for ourselves and for our clients much more than a taste of Extension.

Thank you.