

OFFICE OF AUDITOR OF STATE
STATE OF IOWA

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Recently we received several inquiries regarding the Cougar Mountain accounting system used by County Extension Councils in Iowa. The purpose of this letter is simply to discuss some of the history behind the selection of Cougar Mountain accounting system and some of the reasons for choosing it.

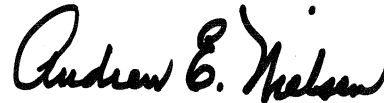
Prior to the implementation of the Cougar Mountain accounting system, County Extension Councils maintained their accounting records on manual systems or various computer software programs. Concerns were raised about the computer software programs in use at the time. Two of the primary concerns were the lack of a permanent audit trail and the lack of an integrated payroll module. The lack of a permanent audit trail allowed individual accounting entries to be edited at any time without leaving a record of the original values. Also, most of the programs did not have the functionality to close and archive the previous fiscal year records which allowed entries to be made or changed well after year end. The lack of an integrated payroll module caused payroll data to be recorded twice, once in an excel spreadsheet and again in the accounting system software. This created additional opportunities for errors and was not an efficient or effective use of staff time.

The search for a uniform accounting system was conducted by the Extension Council Accounting Strategic Planning Committee (Committee), a group of representatives from County Extension Councils, Area Directors, County Directors, Office Assistants and ISU Extension Finance. This Committee met and defined the requirements for a new accounting system to be implemented in all County Extension Districts. These requirements were formalized in a Request for Quotation and a formal bid process was followed through ISU Purchasing. Three vendors were able to provide a cash basis, fund accounting system that met all the requirements of the Committee. The Committee ultimately chose Cougar Mountain as the desired accounting system.

Cougar Mountain provides a permanent audit trail of the financial transactions, closes and archives prior fiscal year financial information and precludes individual accounting entries from being changed without leaving a record of the original values. Cougar Mountain also includes an integrated payroll module, along with all of the other functionalities required by the Committee. Currently all County Extension Councils use Cougar Mountain which helps provide for consistent reporting statewide.

Today ISU Extension supports only the Cougar Mountain accounting system, as this system continues to meet all the functional needs evaluated by the Committee. Changing software requires significant training and report set up time. Researching and implementing software with all the required functionalities is very time-consuming and expensive. Incurring these additional costs does not appear to be prudent when the Cougar Mountain accounting system is meeting the needs of the County Extension Councils. For these reasons the Office of Auditor of State strongly recommends all County Extension Councils continue to use Cougar Mountain as their accounting system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew E. Nielsen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a distinct dot over the 'i' in Nielsen.

Andrew E. Nielsen, CPA
Deputy Auditor of State