

## Iowa State University Extension and Outreach History

In the mid-1800s, a movement was underway to create colleges to educate the “sons and daughters of the working class.” This resulted in legislation in 1862 creating the land-grant college system. Iowa was the first state to accept the provisions of the law for its college in Ames. These colleges became known as the “people’s colleges.” Because of the strong agricultural orientation of the United States, agriculture was one of the main courses of study at the colleges. This need grew and in 1887 Congress passed legislation providing funds for states to create agricultural research stations. This set the stage for the creation of extension. Many states had attempted various methods to encourage farmers to adopt new farming methods and techniques. In many cases, these efforts depended on the interest of the college instructor, an inquiry from a group of people, or a crisis. In 1914, Congress enacted the Smith-Lever Act, creating the Cooperative Extension Service. It was to be a partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture and the states. Funds were made available to each state if the state provided matching funds.

Iowa was a leader in the land-grant college movement and provided leadership for the extension movement. About as early as students started attending classes at the frontier college in Ames, information and educational activities were taken off campus. In 1869, a farmer’s short course was conducted in Black Hawk County. In 1903, the first county-wide farm demonstration was established in Sioux County. The demonstration, established at the request of local farmers, received support from the state and federal governments through Iowa’s land-grant college. In 1906, the Iowa Legislature enacted the Agricultural Extension Act, making funds available for extension projects. It is believed this was the first specific legislation establishing state extension work.

By 1912, the need for full-time extension agents was becoming apparent. In response, the Iowa Legislature enacted the Farm Aid Association Act of 1913. The law permitted and later required each county to appropriate funds for county extension work. The bill required each county to have a local sponsor and the county Farm Bureau offices filled that role. When the Smith-Lever Act was passed in 1914, Iowa was ready to accept the provisions of the new law. By 1918, each county had a county extension worker in place. Staff positions were soon developed to provide leadership for home economics and the 4-H program.

The legal framework remained relatively unchanged from 1914 to 1955. At this time, the current County Agricultural Extension Law was enacted by the Iowa Legislature. The law created county extension councils as the local governing boards, replacing local Farm Bureau boards, and established a local tax to support extension efforts. In 1990, the law was amended to significantly change the council election process. The size of the councils was set at nine members and elected at large as part of the general election.