During the week of March 23-29 we celebrated Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach “Extension Week” across Iowa. While county extension offices hosted this event annually, 2014 is special, because it marks the 100th anniversary of extension.

The Mission of ISU Extension and Outreach is to engage citizens through research-based educational programs and extend the resources of Iowa State University across Iowa. These goals are accomplished by developing diverse and meaningful partnerships. Through these purposes and partnerships, ISU increases the ability of Iowans to make informed decisions by applying relevant, needs-driven resources, to create significant impact in our state.

Most Iowans don’t realize that the concept of the extension service was actually born in Iowa, more specifically near Hull, Iowa.

In the mid-1800s, a movement was underway to create colleges to educate the ‘sons and daughter of the working classes’. 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-Level Act, creating the Extension Service. It was to be a partnership with the USDA 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, informal 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 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 filled that role. When Smith-Level 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 1914-1955. At this time the current County Agricultural Extension Law was enacted by the Iowa Legislature. The law created the 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 councils was set at nine members and elected at large as part of the general election.

Through the years, a set of principles has guided extension work:

1. The function of the extension service is to make the knowledge base of the land grant university available to the people of the state
2. Extension programs are directed to improve the lives of people through education
3. The responsibility of identifying, planning and directing a program based on the needs of people is shared with the local elected council
4. The legal framework for extension provides stability but also flexibility which enhances local program initiatives
5. The partnership concept upon which extension is based requires continual nurturing.

Your county extension office brings to you the resources of Iowa State University. Extension staff help connect citizens with research based information to improve their lives. We help Iowans feed people,
keep them healthy, help their communities thrive and turn the world over to the next generation better than we found it.

County offices around Iowa have many activities planned to highlight this special week. Contact your local extension office to learn what might be happening in your community. Visit www.extension.iastate.edu.

Contact:
Cheryl Heronemus
Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
400 Central Avenue NW, Suite 700, Orange City, IA 51041
hero@iastate.edu
P 712-737-4230