ISU Extension and Outreach: Historical Timeline

As we review some of the events in the history of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, we look forward to being part of a better future for all Iowans. Together we will build a #StrongIowa.

1903  Sioux County farmers and Iowa State College establish the basis for cooperative extension work.

1904  Keokuk County Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs organize, continuing the movement begun in Page County in 1901—the beginnings of Iowa 4-H and extension youth work.

1904–1914  Extension uses trains to deliver education about corn, livestock, and other topics to Iowans.

1905  Iowa State's first local short course is held at Red Oak.

1906  The Agricultural Extension Act becomes law in Iowa.

1912  Clinton County hires the first county extension agent in Iowa. Over the next several years, all counties organize for extension work.

1914  The Smith-Lever Act brings together federal, state, and county governments as Cooperative Extension.

1916  Iowa’s first extension home demonstration agent is hired for Black Hawk County.

1921  Extension and county Farm Bureaus cooperate to develop county programs of work.

1931  Community clubs enroll more than 27,000 rural youth, teaching them how to run a farm and manage a home.

1946  Extension begins public affairs education.

1955  The Iowa Legislature creates county agricultural extension districts. Extension councils are elected in every county.

1961  Extension begins addressing area economic development.

1965  The first area extension office is established in Ottumwa.

1966  Iowa State creates University Extension, combining Cooperative Extension, Engineering Extension, the Center for Industrial Research and Service (CIRAS), and the Agriculture Short Course Office.

1970  4-H reaches urban and rural youth, emphasizing personal development, citizenship, and leadership.

1977  The first ISU Extension Master Gardener class is held in Scott County.

1985  Rural Concern Hotline begins, 800-447-1985 (later renamed Iowa Concern).


1995  The ISU Extension Information Network is the first statewide extension computer network in the nation.

1998  Iowa Association of County Extension Councils is created (renamed Iowa Extension Council Association in 2016).

2002  4-H celebrates its centennial nationwide.

2002  ISU Extension breaks ground on the Extension 4-H Youth Building.
2003  ISU Extension celebrates 100 years.

2009  ISU Extension restructures from a geographically based structure to an issues-based model, eliminating area offices and moving from county to regional directors.

2011  ISU Extension becomes ISU Extension and Outreach, strengthening our role with the rest of the university.

2012  ISU Extension and Outreach begins celebrating 100 years of county extension work.

2016  The Land Grant Legacy project begins, identifying the original land grant parcels that funded Iowa State, as well as the stories of Iowans’ connections to their land-grant university.

2020  After nearly two years of careful planning, ISU Extension and Outreach launched a new regional structure to standardize expectations, improve communication, and increase consistency throughout the state.

2021  Building upon lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, ISU Extension and Outreach uses more virtual and hybrid education strategies to engage with Iowans remotely and respond to their changing needs for accessing information.

**Directors of Extension**

- Ralph K. Bliss 1914-1946
- Herbert H. Kildee 1946-1949
- Floyd A. Andre 1949-1966
- Marvin A. Anderson 1966-1974
- Ronald C. Powers 1988-1989 (interim)
- W. John Johnson 1989 (interim)
- Elizabeth A. Elliot 1989-1990 (interim)
- Nolan R. Hartwig 1995-1996 (interim)
- Stanley R. Johnson 1996-2006
- Jack Payne 2006-2010 1st Vice President for Extension and Outreach
- Gerald Miller 2010-2011 (interim)
- Cathann A. Kress 2011-2017
- John D. Lawrence 2017-2018 (interim), 2018-2023
- Jason Henderson 2023-