

# Here's to another century of service

**W**HERE would we be without Extension?

For those of us growing up and working in rural areas, it's hard to imagine life without county and state Extension. Farmer education, 4-H and homemaker programs permeated our culture. We saw it in action when the county agent came to the farm to talk about crops or when the home economist held a pressure-canning workshop. As children, we lived and breathed 4-H all summer as we tended gardens, coaxed stubborn heifers to lead and received rewards for our efforts at the county fair.

Yes, those were the good ol' days. I cherish my memories of those simpler times. I also owe my career in part to 4-H. For several years, photography was one of my 4-H projects, and one year, I received a state fair ribbon. My first out-of-state trip was with 4-H to Gettysburg, Pa., and Washington, D.C. And as a teenager, I attended 4-H Expo for two summers at Michigan State University. Those campus experiences quickly narrowed down my college choice. I applied only to MSU and was accepted. My intention was to major in journalism. However, when I explored the college catalog, I learned about something better and tailored more to my interests — agriculture and natural resources communications. While at MSU, I worked for the campus newspaper and yearbook. And I



## Farm Talk

By **PAULA MOHR**  
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had the opportunity to be the ag comm department's first student intern at the Michigan Farm Bureau and the first student editor for the MSU ag experiment station's newsletter, *The Messenger*.

### Eager to help

Soon after landing my first journalism job as a daily news reporter in Cadillac, Mich., I contacted the county agents in Wexford, Osceola and Missaukee county Extension offices. Initially, we talked about story ideas. Later, I asked them if they'd be willing to write rotating columns for the farm page I was starting. They eagerly agreed.

County Extension agents and state Extension scientists continued to be my main sources for interviews and story leads in my previous job as a national dairy magazine editor. Before I scheduled an out-state trip, I consulted my well-worn "County Extension Directory." This book provided names, addresses and phone numbers of Extension folks across the U.S. I would call the county agent in the area in which I planned to travel and chat some about story ideas and farmers to visit. Usually, I ended up

stopping at a couple of extra dairy farms on those trips based on the county agent's suggestions.

Extension continues to be a strong, reliable source of story ideas for me today. Why? I appreciate the research-based, independent point of view. Extension professionals are not selling me a product or service. They know what farmers are thinking about, dealing with and trying out. They are interested in helping farmers improve their farm-business profitability. Plus, they are good, down-to-earth people.

Extension has changed a lot, especially in the last couple of decades. The title "county agent" was buried awhile ago. Dwindling farm numbers caused reorganization that reduced county Extension staff. Some 4-H programs have been tailored more for urban communi-

## We want to hear from you!

**D**O you have a story to share about how Extension has helped your farm and family?

Send your comments to —

E-mail: pmohr@farmprogress.com

Write to: *The Farmer*, 18725 St. Francis Blvd., Anoka, MN 55303

All letters must include your name, address and telephone number for verification purposes. Please limit your comments to 300 words or less.

ties. Some still lament those changes. It is time to move on. Extension must evolve with state demographics, technology and economic status. We need Extension around for another century.

## U.S. representatives hatch monstrous threat to farming

By **JOHN VOGEL**

**J**UST when you might think Congress would be slowing down its takeover of the American enterprise system, these elected ladies and gents come up with another huge threat — the Food Safety Modernization Act of 2009. In early February, while they were dreaming up new economic stimulus earmarks, 39 House representatives introduced this rehatched and expanded version of what Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Illinois, introduced a year ago.

At first I thought it might be an early-arriving April Fools' Day joke. But H.R. 875 is a real thing. You need to read it for yourself at: [www.opencongress.org/bill/111-h875/text](http://www.opencongress.org/bill/111-h875/text).

These elected representatives seem to have no common sense about unintended consequences, have egos swelled by their power, have never balanced a checkbook, or think that money grows on trees — or all the aforementioned. Nonetheless, they're out of control and spending your children's earnings and inheritance like there's no tomorrow!

If Congress and the president hadn't already approved two budget-busting pieces of legislation, I might have dismissed this one as political grandstanding. But taxpayers have already paid a lot of money to have this legislation written. And you haven't "seen nothing yet" of H.R. 875's real cost.

Ringleader of this proposed law was Connecticut's Rosa DeLauro. A handful of Midwest representatives signed on as co-sponsors, including Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn.

### What I'm gyrating about

Let's "get to the meat." FSMA would establish a new federal agency — yes, another one — to police every food-producing establishment all the way down to, and including, your farm, ranch, orchard, vineyard, aquaculture

facility or confined animal feeding operation.

This Food Safety Administration would extract all regulatory authority — and funding — away from the Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture and others. As proposed, it would give Food Safety Administration agents authority to physically access your farm, copy all farm documents and require customer lists from all farms selling direct to consumers.

Yes, there are a lot of nasty bugs, not to mention potential food terrorism elements, that theoretically could invade our food system. But the far greatest present danger is destroying individual and private incentive, and the opportunity for producing fresh and local foods.

### More federal jobs, no money

The legislation specifies that appropriations could not exceed that already budgeted for already authorized federal agencies. Duh!

So let's get this straight: It would create yet another government agency, requiring still more federal jobs for which there's no money to hire. FDA and USDA inspection systems have been hamstrung by the lack of funding for years. That's the biggest reason why Americans are suffering from food safety issues.

By his own admission, Sen. Durbin acknowledges that our food safety inspection system is "underfunded and overwhelmed" by the sheer volume of domestic and imported foods.

Push your representatives in the House to find and gather their common sense. Right now, it's clearly missing in action.

Let's fix what we have! Rip a few billion away from insurance giant bonuses, and put it to work where it's needed. But don't create an even bigger federal monster!

*Vogel is editor of American Agriculturist, a sister publication.*

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