

# Tell the value of Extension

By FRAN O'LEARY

If you're concerned that Extension programs in your county may be targeted for cuts during these tough economic times, you're not alone.

Rick Klemme, dean of the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Service, believes what happened in Jefferson County in November is at risk of happening in several more counties in the next couple of years.

"We've been complacent for a long time because our county budgets have never been under this much pressure," Klemme admits. "I fully expected this to have happened in more counties this year."

## Tough choices

The weak economy is leaving many county governments to deal with budget shortfalls. Some county boards are choosing to trim budgets and avoid cutting programs such as Extension, while others are electing to borrow funds to make up the difference and hope for better times. The Jefferson County Board chose to slash funding for programs including Extension to help shore up budget deficits and limit borrowing.

Klemme believes county boards that choose to cut services like Extension are really losing out. State funds pay for 60% of Extension salaries and benefits while county governments pay 40%.

"It's really too bad that they did this [in Jefferson County] because not only are they cutting Extension's valuable services, they're turning their backs on state funding which leverages county Extension programs," Klemme explains.

He also believes county residents are

## Key Points

- The economy is impacting county budgets.
- Farmers need to communicate the value of Extension.
- More farmers need to get elected to county boards.

losing the most in terms of valuable educational resources.

"Extension is about a lot more than just 4-H," Klemme says. "Farmers learn how to manage their crops, their dairy cattle and their farms more efficiently because of Extension, but Extension also empowers urban as well as rural people to build new skills and manage their finances better. Our community development agents work with counties and local governments to develop strategic planning to help that community grow."

"It's valuable to actually have a person who lives in the county to help plan effectively because they live there," he adds. "Plus it saves the county from having to pay a consultant to come in from out of the area and help them plan their growth."

Because newspapers don't find these types of programs exciting, Klemme believes Extension at the state level has its work cut out for it.

"What this really means at the state level is we need to pull together the county administrators, county board chairs, and county Extension people and tell our story," he says. "We need to tell them about the value of Extension. It's important to build relationships and listen to your funding partner, especially when they have a hold on the dollars."



**PLEADING THEIR CASE:** Kathleen Eisenmann, Jefferson County Extension family living agent, and Rick Klemme speak at a Finance Committee hearing on Nov. 4.

Communication, Klemme says, helped avert a similar situation in Columbia County a few years ago.

"One of my favorite quotes I got from listening to Columbia County Board Chair Deb Wopat is she said, 'Extension is a nice program to have.' That sent shivers down my spine. We've had good successes in Columbia County."

## Get involved

Farmers, 4-H members and parents all can get involved in communicating Extension's story.

"People can be won over, but you have to be proactive," Klemme says. "You have to have programs that they [county board members] know about that they can relate to."

Klemme notes fewer farmers are on county boards than 10 or 20 years ago.

"That's not going to change until spring 2010 when we have county board elections," Klemme says. "What we've

seen in Jefferson County is a renewed interest in running for the county board among farmers."

But the 2010 budget will be done in fall 2009. Klemme says farmers can do a number of things to keep what happened in Jefferson County from happening to their county Extension program.

"Get to know your county board member," Klemme says. "Get to know your county Extension program and be able to communicate its value. It's really important to build a relationship with your supervisor, talk about the value of Extension, that you're working with Extension agents and so on. Those are the kinds of things that make sense to me."

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## Milestones in history of Cooperative Extension Service

**1862** President Abraham Lincoln signed three acts significant in shaping U.S. agricultural history: the act authorizing a U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Homestead Act encouraging settlement of public domain lands, and the Morrill Act establishing land-grant colleges in each state and placing instruction in agriculture and home economics in American higher education.

**1887** The Hatch Experiment Station Act established a cooperative bond between USDA and the nation's land-grant colleges by providing annual federal funding for agricultural experiment stations in all the states.

**1918** The Smith-Lever Act provided funds for cooperative administration of agricultural Extension education by USDA and the state land-grant colleges, with the goals of increasing farm productivity and improving rural life. Formula funding intended to encourage placement of county agents was distributed on the basis of rural population.

**1917** The Emergency Food Production Act stimulated wartime production of agricultural commodities

and greatly increased the number of Extension agents throughout the states.

**1928** The Capper-Ketcham Act expanded Extension work and encouraged ag and home economics in 4-H clubs.

**1933** The Agricultural Adjustment Act, the federal government's response to the Great Depression, created "the new USDA." The act provided programs of direct economic assistance to farmers, emphasizing production controls and marking the beginning of government price supports. Extension agents helped implement some of these programs.

**1935** Declaring soil erosion a national menace, Congress established the Soil Conservation Service. It also passed the Bankhead-Jones Act expanding agricultural research and Extension. For the first time, formula funding was based on farm population.

**1942** President Executive Order 9280 gave increased responsibility over food production to the agriculture secretary. From 1943-45 federal funds provided for special additional Extension staff for World War II emergency programs.

**1945** The Bankhead-Flanagan Act expanded federal funding of county Extension work on the basis of farm population.

**1953** Congress amended the Smith-Lever Act, consolidating previous legislation, reformulating the federal share of cooperative funding, and specifying separation of Extension activities from those of the Farm Bureau. The formula was again changed in 1962.

**1961** Section 3(d) of the Smith-Lever Amendment was added to allow funding for special programs such as resource and community development, farm safety, urban gardening, pest management and nonpoint pollution control.

**1990s** Cooperative Extension built new partnerships and learned to better demonstrate educational outcomes to its partners. Extension developed new strategies for dynamic issues such as land use.

**2000s** New relationships focused on distance learning is a strong theme at the start of the new millennium.

*Source: History and Formation of the Cooperative Extension*