

Cooperative Extension: A very brief history

- 1862** The Morrill Act endowed the University of Wisconsin to support instruction in agriculture and the mechanical arts and to establish an agricultural experiment station.
- 1890** In 1890, Prof. S. M. Babcock demonstrated a quick, accurate way to test milk for butterfat. He refused to patent his invention for personal gain, but decided to share it freely with dairy farmers.
- 1909** The first agriculture experiment station was established at Spooner, Washburn County, on 403 acres of sandy loam soil.
- 1912** The first county agent E. L. Luther was hired to work as a county agriculturist in Oneida County. Expenses were shared 50-50 between the county and the state.
- 1914** The Smith Lever Act provided support from USDA for extension functions at the land grant institutions. This was the beginning of the three-way partnership of state, county and federal governments – Cooperative Extension.
- 1917** World War I turned Extension into a disaster force, with Emergency Food Agents hired to encourage more food production – crops, victory gardens and improved milk and poultry production.
- 1920s** Many counties began to employ more agents to teach agriculture, nutrition, youth development and home economics. Important agricultural issues included eradicating bovine TB, farm management, transportation, storage and marketing, cooperatives, nutrition, health and welfare.
- 1930s** Erosion and pest control were critical concerns during the drought years of the depression. Extension encouraged planting windbreaks, woodlots and alfalfa to replace more erosive and drought-intolerant crops. Extension helped with the rural electrification program, bringing federal loans for cooperative power lines to some 5,500 farms in 1937 alone.
- 1940s** Extension-run bureaus placed 172,200 people in canneries and on farms to replace farmers and workers who served in the military. Thousands of 4H-ers worked on war production projects or replaced farmers who went to war.

- 1950s** The post war baby boom brought new programs in child development, family relations and home furnishings. 4-H membership rose as well. Programs were added in community, economic and natural resource development. Extension helped transform the sandy, dust storm-ravaged wasteland of Central Wisconsin into an important vegetable raising and processing center.
- 1960s** The federal War on Poverty enlisted Extension with programs designed to assist women, minorities, the elderly and disadvantaged. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program began in 1968. Extension added programs in public policy - land-use, agricultural production, dairy herd improvement, farm management and marketing.
- 1970s** Cooperative Extension programs focused on new priorities in farm and agribusiness management, human health and nutrition, small business and community economic development as well as education for government and community leaders and for families.
- 1980s** Changing economic conditions in rural America brought severe hardships to many farm families. Extension responded with programs designed to offer financial coping strategies and relieve family stress.
- 1990s** Cooperative Extension built new partnerships with governmental and non-governmental entities and learned to better demonstrate educational outcomes to its partners and funding sources. Extension developed new strategies for public policy education on dynamic issues such as land use.
- 2000s** New relationships focused on distance learning and continued public policy education are strong themes at the start of the new millennium.

For more information about the history of UW-Extension, visit the UW-Extension Web site at: <http://www1.uwex.edu>