

Meaningful Access to Cooperative Extension Programs for Persons with Limited English Proficiency

The role of Cooperative Extension is to be responsive to changing educational needs in Wisconsin counties. As the societal issues and the demographics of Wisconsin change, the cultural backgrounds and linguistic characteristics of our clientele are changing. We welcome these new clientele and strive to make their educational experience as relevant and effective as Extension education traditionally has been for residents of our state.

In addition to acting on our educational mission, as a recipient of federal financial support, Cooperative Extension has a responsibility to make reasonable steps to provide individuals who have limited English proficiency with meaningful access to educational programs and activities. This responsibility is outlined in Executive Order 13166, issued Aug. 11, 2000. Limited English proficient individuals are those who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak or understand English.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Law of 1964 and its accompanying regulations prohibit Cooperative Extension from discriminating on the basis of race, color or national origin. Language is usually tied to national origin. Discrimination on the basis of national origin can occur if Cooperative Extension does not provide appropriate language assistance to Limited English Proficiency (LEP) because these individuals will not have access to the same benefits, services, information or rights that Cooperative Extension provides to everyone else. No one can be excluded from participation in programs or denied equal employment opportunity because of birthplace, ancestry, culture, or linguistic characteristics common to a specific ethnic group.

The United States Department of Justice provides guidance to federal agencies regarding Title VI prohibition against national origin discrimination affecting limited English proficient persons. Based on this guidance, Cooperative Extension will use the following four factors in determining when educational resources will be translated and interpreted: 1) the number or proportion of limited English proficient persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program, 2) the frequency with which limited English proficient persons come in contact with the program, 3) the nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program to people's lives, and 4) the resources available to the recipient of the federal funds (Cooperative Extension) and costs.