

Developing youths' potential, stimulating communities, supporting a profitable agriculture, helping build strong families, protecting the environment – these are all results the Extension Service strives to achieve as it carries out its responsibility as part of North Dakota State University (NDSU). As a vibrant, modern educational network it helps North Dakotans improve their quality of life. Extension offers knowledge that's based on the latest research at NDSU and other universities across the country and around the world.

Background

As a land-grant university, NDSU has a three-part responsibility of engaging in research, teaching and Extension. "Extension" means reaching out and that responsibility is entrusted to the NDSU Extension Service. NDSU extends its resources by having the entire state serve as the campus and the Extension Service providing a link between the university and the citizens of the state.

The NDSU Extension Service is part of the Cooperative Extension System, a nationwide partnership composed of:

- the *federal partner*, the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) of the U. S. Department of Agriculture
- the *state partner*, NDSU, a public institution of higher education in North Dakota
- the *county partner*, the 53 units of county government across North Dakota

It is a system of interdependent yet independent partners, sharing funding, staffing and programming. Each partner performs distinct functions essential to the total system.

Our Mission

The NDSU Extension Service mission is "to create learning partnerships that help adults and youth enhance their lives and communities." This complements the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service's (our federal partner) mission "to advance knowledge for agriculture, the environment, human health and well-being, and communities."

To create learning partnerships we develop educational environments by collaborating with others. Research-based and local knowledge provide the basis for learning. We help people explore solutions and discover new opportunities. Identifying needs and potential answers is key! Our work benefits both youth and adults. A significant audience for us is youth—our future. We strive to positively enhance what already exists. We provide opportunities that promote positive change for people in their lives and communities, recognizing that communities can be a group with a common interest or place.

Too, we are committed to the creation of an inclusive and multicultural organization that serves appropriately all the people of North Dakota. We want the NDSU Extension Service to reach beyond legal requirements to incorporate a recognition and appreciation of the values and benefits that diversity contributes to our organization's life and mission.

Citizen Engagement

Extension work benefits from a high degree of citizen engagement. This assures that Extension programs address key issues, and help guide and maintain strong local advocacy and social influence. All Extension educators are expected to utilize some form of organized citizen engagement as they plan and deliver programs.

Program Areas

Agriculture and natural resources; community development and leadership; nutrition, family and consumer programs, and youth development are all the foundation of the NDSU Extension Service's work. High quality, relevant educational programs are brought to the citizens of North Dakota based on local issues and needs identified at the grass-roots level.

Planned programs. The Extension Service uses an ongoing program development process. This process typically consists of needs assessment, program planning team meetings, program development, and program implementation. This process occurs at different times of the year depending on the issue being addressed. As part of this process, the NDSU Extension Service forms partnerships with groups and individuals to identify the issues and deliver programs. Local advisory committees often identify needs that must be addressed. Specialists and researchers may identify emerging issues they believe should be discussed with citizens. Other states or our federal partners may identify an issue in one part of the country that has implications for North Dakota. At the county level, an Extension agent may observe a situation that calls for a program.

Program planning teams guide the program development process. These teams consist of county, area and state staff, and include researchers at NDSU and Research Extension Centers. Many teams involve representation from the public. This representation could include agency members and clientele. Current program planning areas:

- Community, Economic Development and Leadership
- Competitiveness and Profitability of Animal Systems
- Cropping Systems in the 21st Century
- Farm and Family Economics
- 4-H Youth Development
- Human Development and Family Science
- Natural Resources and Environmental Management
- Nutrition, Food Safety and Health

Planners identify needs, determine objectives or learner outcomes, choose delivery methods and determine the impacts made by the program. Most programs include large- and small-group meetings, mass media, newsletters, individual consultation with clients, cooperation with other agencies and groups, and various applications of technology.

Responsive programs. Often, programs must address an urgent situation that has occurred. Examples include excessive rain, hail, tornadoes, floods, serious financial problems, a child abduction or food-borne illnesses. The NDSU Extension Service has an excellent track record in quickly and effectively addressing these issues. Urgent situations require that the Extension Service be ready for action with little preparation time.

Community issues. Extension staff members are involved in public issues that have many viewpoints and no simple answers. In these situations, the role of the Extension employee is to provide accurate information about all sides of issues and lead communities through a process that can bring about resolution. This work is not easy because communities can become polarized.

Program Delivery

People are lifelong learners and seek information in different ways and places. The NDSU Extension Service reaches people through a number of methods, including publications, workshops, meetings, Web sites, videoconferences, discussions, lessons, news stories, e-mail, phone calls, field tours and individual visits. Determining the most appropriate ways to deliver programs is as important as developing them.

Educational information is made available at a time and by a means that is right for people. As a result, it is made available in multiple ways and the staff uses a variety of approaches. Offices are equipped to reach the technology-proficient learner. Extension is part of a highly competitive information industry which means citizens expect our programs and materials to be of high quality.

While a strong county-based Extension network is the main avenue for program delivery, Extension agents also provide programs that span a particular geographic area or area of interest. Each Extension agent specializes in a program competency area and delivers programs in that competency area within the geographic or interest area. With this arrangement, the NDSU Extension Service brings stronger educational expertise to the local level.

Staffing

County staff. In North Dakota, county staff members who have educator responsibilities carry the job title of Extension agents. They are called agents because their purpose is to serve as change agents. They are local educators who serve all 53 counties in the state and the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation. Their salary is jointly supported, usually 50 percent, with funds from county government. Agents are required to have a bachelor's degree, but a master's degree is preferred. Most agents have a strong academic base in one discipline when they begin their employment. They develop specialized expertise in one of 10 subject matter areas. This supports an agent's capacity to carry out work in a specific geographic area of the state or with a specific subject matter community. Together with district directors, they determine the training needed to prepare for diverse roles at the county level. Some offices also have paraprofessionals that provide programming for the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and the Family Nutrition Program (FNP). These two programs are financed with federal dollars through the USDA and matching county support mostly through in-kind contributions. On occasion there are paraprofessionals working in other subject disciplines and other locations in the state.

Area staff. Area specialists provide a higher level of knowledge and skill to the programs developed by county staff, and they extend the expertise of specialists located on the NDSU campus. Most area Extension specialists have master's or doctorate degrees. They are located at Research Extension Centers across the state or in county and area offices.

State staff. State specialists, most of whom are located on the NDSU campus, usually hold faculty positions within the College of Agriculture, Food Systems and Natural Resources (CAFSNR), or the College of Human Development and Education (CHDE). Several have joint appointments with the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station and/or the CAFSNR. Some Extension specialists are not in faculty positions. These positions focus on specific programs such as pesticides, EFNEP, FNP and 4-H, and may not require a doctorate degree.

Support Staff. Members of the support staff are a part of all Extension offices and are usually the first point of contact for the public. The support staff maintains coordinated, yet flexible, office environments and helps deliver high-quality information and educational programs to the public. Technical staff members help prepare and deliver educational materials through print, audio, video, graphic and computer technology.

Funding

Historically, the NDSU Extension Service has been funded with a blend of federal, state and county dollars. Grants, contracts and agency partnerships are increasing as a fourth source of funds to support the program. Currently, 15 percent of the budget is comprised of federal dollars, most of which are appropriated funds. In the future, more of the federal dollars will be awarded on a competitive basis. Thirty-six percent of NDSU Extension Service resources are obtained from the state legislature. County commissioners support 19 percent of the Extension budget by contributing 50 percent of Extension agents' salaries, as well as all operating expenses for county offices. Thirty percent of Extension funding comes from grants, contracts and partnerships.

The NDSU Extension Service's future is dependent on maintaining its current sources of public funds; its ability to be efficient; its commitment to seek grant funds; and its success in partnering with other entities that can provide financial resources.

Into the Future

As issues facing the people of North Dakota become increasingly complex, the role of the NDSU Extension Service is to continue to meet the needs of the people as they adapt to this changing environment. Extension is committed to being innovative, adaptable, and willing to listen to people's needs and concerns to create new ways of thinking, learning and addressing issues of today and the future.

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