The NDSU Extension Service is committed to maintaining an extension presence in all counties if the county provides a minimum financial commitment, and a county presence is desired by local interests. The minimum financial commitment includes having the county pay 50 percent of the salary costs for the county extension agents and all the operating expenses. NDSU pays the other 50 percent of the salaries and all fringe benefits. Operating expenses include office space, travel, telephone, secretarial support and other costs relating to running an office such as paper, copying costs, mail, office supplies, etc. Computer equipment and other technology costs may be covered through a combination of state and county funds as predetermined by both parties. Annual county budget requests, initiated by the county extension chair in consultation with NDSU Extension Service administration, are acted upon by the Board of County Commissioners.

The 50% salary sharing affects only vacant positions, except when it comes to annual salary adjustments. Current policy has the NDSU Extension Service pay one-half of the actual salary increase and invoice the other one-half to the county. By doing this the county and NDSU are sharing equally in the actual salary increase paid to extension agents.

Annual salary adjustments for county extension agents are directed by the North Dakota Legislature, and/or President of North Dakota State University. Consequently, counties are asked to budget salary adjustments for extension agents according to this guideline. Counties are automatically invoiced for this salary adjustment even if the county budget doesn't reflect the increase. If the county is unable to pay the increase, the balance will be carried until such a time that the county has adequate funding to cover the increase.

* This policy was unanimously supported by a committee appointed by North Dakota County Commissioners Association (NDCCA), North Dakota Association of Counties (NDACo) and the NDSU Extension Service in October 1998, and was reviewed and updated in consultation with the North Dakota County Commissioners Association Board of Directors 2004, 2011.
**FUNDING OPTIONS WHEN COUNTY IS UNABLE TO MEET FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS**

In the event that a county is unable to meet the minimum financial requirement, as outlined in the NDSU Extension base policy, it was recommended that extension work with counties individually to either subsidize funding from other local sources or make adjustments in the program. The following options may be considered.

- Possibly charge more fees for service, such as workshop fees, horticulture home visit fees, charging for major publications, pesticide certification fees, etc. However, the committee recognized that this might limit the availability of programs to some audiences because of their inability to pay.

- Solicit sponsorships, grants, partnerships or affiliated membership fees from groups who utilize ongoing extension programs.

- Identify other roles within county government that extension could take on in order to enhance funding from general fund monies. Two options the committee identified included having extension staff serve as the technology coordinator for the courthouse or possibly sharing support services with other departments in the courthouse.

- Put to a vote of the people the option of increasing the mill levy used to support their local extension program.

- Consolidate or merge county extension programs. This could include organizing a separate taxing district to support the local extension program. The committee did not support any statewide plan to consolidate county extension programs. However, the committee agreed that if this were to happen it should be driven from the local level. If two or more counties were to consider the consolidation of their county extension program, the committee fully recommended utilizing the following guidelines.

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR MERGING COUNTY EXTENSION PROGRAMS

In the event that counties consider merging extension programs, open dialogue that includes diverse citizen input should be initiated between county commissioners and the NDSU Extension Service.

# Past history shows that having extension agents work out of more than one office location is inefficient and undesirable to the extension agents. Therefore, when merging extension programs, no more than one office location for extension agents is recommended.

# One office location, for two or more counties, could result in significant cost savings. This arrangement may also make available additional resources for increased programming and/or technology/computer enhancement.

# If one county office location was designated to serve two or more counties, a bulletin distribution and computer access site could possibly still be maintained in the other county.

# Many extension programs such as 4-H, Crop Improvement, FCE, etc., require a high degree of organization and maintenance. If two counties were to merge, it would be required that these programs also be merged.

# The merged counties would continue to pay 50 percent of the salary cost for the extension agent(s). NDSU Extension would pay the other 50 percent plus all fringe benefits. The merged counties would continue to pay all operating costs.

# All counties involved would contribute to a single operating budget. Possibly organize a separate taxing district, between two or more counties, to support the local extension budget.

# Specific program areas may need to be diminished or eliminated if two or more counties were to merge. NDSU Extension would continue to emphasize its commitment to equitable programming by extension agents in the areas of agriculture, youth and family as these program changes are determined.

# If two or more counties were to merge, the agent's collaboration efforts with other county specific groups and agencies (Chamber of Commerce, FSA, NRCS, SCD, Weed Board, Township Officers, FCE, etc.) may be diminished.

# It's recommended that mergers or consolidations be considered only when staff vacancies exist.

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