

# Catherine Albert

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SBARE  
NDSU Dept 7520  
PO Box 6050  
Fargo, ND 58108-6050

VP Agricultural Affairs

CC: SBARE committee

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am writing to you today to **propose two alternative viewpoints on the NDSU Extension budget shortfall**. I understand that the NDSU budget has been cut by over 4 million dollars, and that population has been used as an arbitrary means of determining fund allocation.

**First, I propose that NDSU Extension funds be allocated using Extension's documented program priorities as a guide.** Perform a community needs assessment on each extension agent's territory. Determine to what degree each extension territory has need of and fulfills the documented extension priorities. A weighted ranking system could be used, thus giving more points to counties in need of or fulfilling extension's top priorities. The top five (of ten) NDSU Extension program priorities, as listed at <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/about-us>, are:

1. Community Vitality
2. Livestock Management
3. Farm Business Management
4. Crop Management
5. Natural Resources Management

I would like to point out of three of the top five program priority needs are inversely related to population size (Livestock Management, Farm Business Management, and Crop Management). The Community Vitality and Natural Resource Management priority needs are likely equally important to both urban and rural communities.

Base funding percentages on the weighted score from the community needs assessment instead on population alone. Offer the territories with the highest scores the 60% state - 40% county paid funding ratio, and offer lower scoring counties the second-tier funding ratio of 40% state – 60% county paid.

**My alternative proposal is to have rural extension agents support urban areas in addition to their home territory.** I understand that SBARE views population centers as hubs, that folks in rural areas should travel to the hubs for services. After all, rural folks already travel to the hubs for shopping and entertainment.

It has been my personal experience that extension services from an urban hub do not incorporate the same hands-on agriculture experiences that rural extension agents provide. I will use Steele and Cass Counties as examples. Cass County's version of a hands-on activity is a mystery holiday workshop, where youth convene to make holiday crafts. Steele County's version of a hands-on activity is to bring a lamb to an elementary school. Both exercises develop our youth, only one incorporates agriculture.

In this example, the Steele County Agent brought agriculture to a Cass County classroom that serves both Cass and Steele County students.

Steele County's agents are often called upon to provide services to this rural Cass County school. I propose that we expand this calling, and assign them more territory outside of their home county. Continuing this example, I propose reassigning the northwest quarter of Cass County to Steele County Extension. This would alleviate some of the strain on urban agents without removing services from our rural communities.

**In tangent, I suggest that 4-H Youth Development is undervalued on extension's program priority list.** Removing extension from rural areas will negatively impact all of NDSU Extension's program priorities. Some extension services, such as Crop Management, can also be obtained from rural crop consultants and seed companies. However, extension's youth programs are not duplicated elsewhere in rural counties.

I am very concerned with how the absence of extension will affect rural youth development. Urban youth have access to many sources of youth development (such as YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, Karate, Dance, etc). Many rural youth have only two options: the extension-led 4-H youth program and school activities.

The disparity of need between rural and urban youth is reflected in 4-H youth participation rates. This year, Cass County had difficulty getting 150 kids to enroll in their Mystery Holiday Workshop. They could not entice 150 kids to participate out of the 51 schools in Cass County. Steele County 4-H has 79 active 4-H members from just four school districts. Three of these schools are located in adjacent counties, but include Steele County in their districts.

Rural youth do not have urban options. If 4-H was removed, it would be very difficult to replace. Removing rural 4-H will not only negatively impact today's youth, it will hinder the growth of tomorrow's leaders.

Theoretically, 4-H could continue without a local agent. Youth could travel to the urban hubs for events. Realistically, this is not likely. The club my family is part of recently changed counties so members would not have to drive so far to events. More youth joined our 4-H club because we changed counties. This indicates that, if events moved further away, fewer youth would participate in 4-H. I suggest that other rural communities would respond similarly.

**Regardless of what method you choose to allocate funding, I ask you to consider that removing extension from rural areas counteracts the original purpose of extension.** Land-grant universities, according to the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, are to focus on practical sciences. Their role has been to provide all residents a chance to improve themselves through education. The Smith-Lever act of 1914 (which created extension) envisioned that extension would consist of *"the giving of instruction and practical demonstrations in agriculture and home economics to persons not attending or resident in said colleges."* By removing extension from rural areas, NDSU will counteract the original purpose the land-grant universities and extension partnership.

Thank you for entertaining my suggestions.

Sincerely,



Catherine Albert