

Leadership Roles for US EPA

Forging Solutions for Sustainable Communities

Understanding that the nation's environmental future will, for the most part, be determined locally, US EPA supports community efforts to become sustainable. Their goal is to encourage the use, protection, and restoration of natural resources in ways that will benefit ourselves and future generations. This EPA approach is called Community Based Environmental Protection (CBEP). Program initiatives using this approach include environmental justice, brownfields, volunteer monitoring, and sustainable development.

While it supports community efforts, EPA cannot be directly involved in every community. However, by working with partners it can offer communities access to environmental data, information, training, and grants. Partners can also help EPA work with organizations, community leaders, and educators to strengthen their capacity to address environmental problems effectively.

Cooperative Extension can help connect EPA to a diverse network of community leaders and groups. Cooperative Extension is the outreach and education arm of the US Department of Agriculture's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES).

Cooperative Extension's objective is to improve the economic, environmental and social well-being of collaborating communities by building their capacity to

address community problems. Extension professionals are university-based educators and researchers who work with community leaders and interest groups.

EPA and Cooperative Extension share the objective of linking resources and people, and both believe that:

- Citizen-based efforts make a difference.
- Local efforts are successful when aided by the expertise of both natural resource professionals and education professionals.
- Local, regional, and national partnerships are necessary to provide accurate information and ensure it is disseminated effectively and economically to support local action.

This pamphlet introduces US EPA leaders to Cooperative Extension, describes its capabilities and leadership structure, and outlines joint partnership opportunities.

What is Cooperative Extension?

Cooperative Extension in the United States evolved from the State Land Grant University system which was established in 1862 by the Morrill Act. This Act created public institutions of higher learning to provide on-campus and off-campus education to the American public. They continue to do so to this day. Many of the nation's largest and most prestigious uni-

versities are Land Grant institutions.

Recognizing the enormous potential of science-based agriculture to America's economic future, the Hatch Act of 1887 established agricultural experiment stations at the 1862 institutions. In 1890, the second Morrill Act provided Land Grant status to a number of predominantly Black colleges.

There are usually three related, but often autonomous, Extension organizations at a Land Grant University: University Extension, Cooperative Extension, and Agriculture Experiment Stations. Cooperative Extension and Agriculture Experiment Stations are both part of USDA CSREES, but are funded through separate Legislative Acts.

Extension at a Land Grant University

University Extension is a campus sponsored program which provides professional development and continuing education for the local community.

Cooperative Extension is the county-based outreach program which targets the unique local needs of each community and is supported by identified University specialists.

Agriculture Experiment Stations facilitate research programs focused on regional priorities.

Cooperative Extension is generally understood as the institutional system of non-formal education created by the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. The intent of the Act was to formalize and cooperatively fund a University-based system of practical educators. They would help farmers, ranchers, and rural residents by transferring to them useful research-based information that was generated or interpreted by their Land Grant institutions. Historically, the transferred information pertained to the needs of the rural public served by County Extension agents and emphasized agricultural practice and agriculture-based business.

Contemporary Cooperative Extension efforts continue to support rural communities, but they now offer a broader range of education resources in response to increased community diversity. In many states Cooperative Extension programs address the interests of urban communities in addition to rural ones. Building on Extension's strengths they cover such topics as urban forestry and gardening, community economic development, family nutrition and education, and youth leadership development.

The term "cooperative" refers to the unique partnership of Federal, State, and County governments who fund the Extension enterprise. The system was established by Federal law and is administered by the US Department of Agriculture. The law provides for an annual appropriation which is distributed to designated institutions through an established allocation formula. These Federal "formula" funds must be at least equally matched by State and County funds.

Foundations of Cooperative Extension

The Smith-Lever Act of 1914

The fundamental function of Smith-Lever extension education is the development of rural people themselves. This is accomplished by fostering attitudes of mind and capacities which will enable them to better meet the individual and civic problems with which they are confronted. Unless economic attainment and independence are regarded chiefly as means for advancing the social and cultural life of those living in the open country, the most important purpose of extension education will not be achieved.

– 1930, *Federal Office of Education*,
cited by Scott J. Peters

Mission

In cooperation with our partners and customers, CSREES provides the focus to advance a global system of research, extension and higher education in the food and agricultural sciences and related environmental and human sciences to benefit people, communities, and the Nation.

– "About CSREES" Web Page, 1999,
<www.reeusda.gov/new/about/csreesa2.htm>

Cooperative Extension Model

When educators use the term "Extension" they generally mean: the systematic transfer, adoption, and diffusion of technology and research-based information from a college or university to a targeted user audience. Extension educa-

tion is also called non-formal education, meaning it is voluntary and can take place anywhere. These programs respond to identified needs and interests of the client audience. They are regulated only when they are designed to fulfill specific continuing education requirements (such as for nurses or teachers).

Cooperative Extension does such outreach programming through offices at several levels: national program leaders; state Extension directors, program leaders, and specialists; regional specialists and educators; and county educators. Every level of the Cooperative Extension structure (local to national) can partner with US EPA.

By definition, Co-op Extension involves two-way communication. County faculty (also called Extension Agents), impart research-based technical information to a user audience. The audience in turn communicates its practical needs, and its experiences in using the information, to university-based researchers, usually through the county faculty.

State Specialists, then, use that feedback to refine their investigations so the results are more useful to the client audience.

Specialists operate on the premise that research findings must be "demonstrated" to the ultimate user in practical field situations by professionals who have earned the target community's trust. Otherwise the results will not be widely used or credible. Community may be defined by geography, by interest orientation, or both.

Priorities for a county extension office are usually established by local advisory groups and by the County governing board which supplies an increasing portion of agents' funding. At the state level, Directors establish Extension priorities with input from state Extension advisory groups, the university, the state legislature, and formula and earmarked funding from the US Department of Agriculture.

Cooperative Extension Strengths

- Respect and confidence of the community.
- Access to adult volunteers in the community who, with training, can further extend the educational message.
- The ability to reach many youth through 4-H programs, supplying experiential education in diverse subjects.
- Expertise in a great range of disciplines from the Land Grant University system.
- Experienced educators trained in one of the natural resource, agriculture, business, community planning, or human health sciences.
- Neutrality as an information source. Extension faculty and staff are not regulators. They are bound by the policies of their Universities not by legal policies and directives.
- Extension professionals are required by law to serve all people without regard to their ethnicity, sex, etc. They are accountable to their respective Deans of Extension for performance.

Partnership Opportunities

US EPA and Cooperative Extension share the objective of linking resources and people, and they have complementary resources. Partnerships between them will significantly enrich programs that help communities build their capacity to identify and address local environmental challenges.

Cooperative Extension works directly with communities, defined by place or by interest, within seven program areas. Partnerships are most fruitful when the links between Extension education priorities and specific EPA programming areas are clear.

US EPA staff can benefit from Cooperative Extension strengths when they want to:

- Work in or with specific communities or link with community networks.
- Provide community access to information, data or data interpretation.
- Provide technical assistance for preventing pollution or identify opportunities for voluntary compliance.
- Provide training
- Identify new program emphases.

County Extension staff would likely use EPA resources if they knew about them and if the resources met perceived local needs. However, given their history, structure and mission, it is unlikely that County Extension offices would become a mandated delivery mechanism for EPA resources. Such a role is also inappropriate given what is known about how community members want to learn.

Extension Program Areas

Managed by Program Leaders

- Agriculture
- Community Resources, Economic, and Social Development
- Family Development and Resource Management
- 4-H and Youth Development
- Leadership and Volunteer Development
- Natural Resources and Environmental Management
- Nutrition, Diet and Health

Understanding how Cooperative Extension works will help US EPA staff identify opportunities for joint efforts.

Coordination and Resources

US EPA is a complex organization which offers a wide variety of resources. Success in forming partnerships will benefit from attention to administrative relationships and active dissemination of specific resources.

EPA and Extension administrators can consider four opportunities to strengthen partnerships:

- Formally legitimize Extension/EPA relationships in Washington, DC, and in Regions.
- Implement joint EPA-Extension regional task forces.
- Support programs encouraging EPA and Extension professionals to trade positions or teams.
- Conduct joint in-service training.

US EPA can work to determine which positions in its agency should lead efforts to coordinate activities with Cooperative Extension. CBEP regional coordinators, Brownfields staff and

Superfund staff can likely help because they already work in communities and have many community contacts.

US EPA could also offer specific resources that help Extension staff recognize opportunities for collaboration. For example:

- Overview fact sheets (in print or on the Web) that describe EPA programs, funding mechanisms, and resources.
- “Who to contact” references which name staff positions that relate to specific Extension priorities, such as: forestry and silviculture, animal waste issues, wildlife and endangered species, private waste water treatment, wetlands, environmental health, etc.
- Summaries of environmental monitoring and of technical assistance resources, activities and data.
- Descriptions of steps required for ecosystem management profiling and environmental planning for small communities.

- Research and field testing needs.
Establishing partnerships with Cooperative Extension at many

levels will make EPA’s efforts to build community capacity stronger and more effective.

For Help With	Contact
Statewide project crossing Extension Program Areas	State Extension Director
Research project	State Extension Director State Program Leader for appropriate Program Area (see pg 3) State Experiment Station Director
Program specific to an Extension Program Area	State Program Leader for appropriate Program Area (see pg 3)
County or community program	County educator/agent

References:

Framework for Community-Based Environmental Protection (EPA 237-K-99-001), URL: <http://www.epa.gov/ecocommunity/> has been quoted or paraphrased in several places in this document to represent EPA’s goals and perspective.

The Smith-Lever Act summary was presented at a University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Faculty-Staff Conference, 1999, by Scott J. Peters, Public Scholarship and Public Work Specialist, University of Minnesota and Cornell University Extension.

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