

**THE IMPORTANCE OF FACULTY AND UNIT INVOLVEMENT IN THE
EXTENSION LONG-RANGE PLANNING PROCESS
For 2004 -2007**

Howard Ladewig¹

Introduction

"The Extension System: A Vision for the 21st Century"²—a report prepared for the Extension Committee on Policy (ECOP)³—states that the new century provides a symbolic beginning that compels all institutions to reflect upon their purpose, to examine their vision and to determine whether they are prepared to cope with the changing world. The authors contend that Extension is no exception and that if Extension is to thrive, it must understand and adjust to rapid changes and emerging challenges.

The report explains that Extension was created in response to early 20th Century needs when the economy was primarily agricultural, the population was predominately rural, and the drivers of social change appeared contained in the boundaries of our nation. Today the United States is primarily a heterogeneous, urban society dominated by technological and communication advances and changes are driven by a global economy. The challenge for Extension is to put its century-old orientation to traditional audiences, delivery methods, and issues into proper perspective as we help people cope with the issues of the 21st Century.

Reflecting on change, purpose and vision is one thing. Agreeing on what we see and where it takes us is quite another. To further complicate the value of such reflections and perspectives on future directions can be biased by those who participate in the process. For example, in an effort to equate long-range planning with "thinking outside the box," some educational institutions overlook one of their most valued assets—their faculty. The common argument for not involving faculty in long-range planning is that faculty will want to do what they have always done. Consequently, they "will get what they have always got."

As UF Extension undertakes the long-range planning process, we believe that a variety of sources—including our faculty—should help translate Extension's

¹ Extension Program Leader, Program Development and Evaluation and Professor, Agricultural Education and Communication, University of Florida. December, 2002.

² Report prepared by the Extension Vision for the 21st Century Committee. A committee of ECOP of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. February, 2002

³ ECOP is an elected committee which represents the 57 state and territorial cooperative extension systems in policy decisions, and provides nationwide program and organizational leadership.

purpose, vision and strategy into tangible future results. We believe that the richness of interaction will identify areas in need of change as well as programs of excellence. In support of that task, listening sessions will be conducted with the following groups:

1. Target audiences of Extension programs (both current and potential). This group of ultimate users must find relevance in our products and services or they will not use them. One way to insure relevance of purpose and direction of our educational programs is to ask those for whom such programs are targeted.
2. Extension advisory committees. Individual committee members who understand both the Extension program development process and the needs and concerns of their community can be a most valuable asset. In addition, their involvement in planning can foster greater commitment to programs they help develop.
3. Research, Teaching and Extension faculty. One of the missions of the land-grant university is to enhance economic well-being and quality of life of those the university is charged to serve. Keeping people abreast of current and emerging research and the educational experiences resulting from adaptations of that research is crucial to this mission.
4. Stakeholders of local, state and national priorities. Stakeholders (external and internal) play a key role in providing financial and other support for Extension programs. Listening sessions provide an opportunity to both obtain their input and make them aware of effective programs and changes/challenges that may impact Extension.

Although all four groups are important sources of information, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the involvement of faculty in the Extension long-range planning process.⁴ Because faculty work primarily through disciplinary Departments and/or research and education centers (RECs) in providing support for Extension programming, obtaining the collective voices of faculty also will be addressed.

Faculty Involvement in Long-range Planning

One of the important roles for faculty is keeping people abreast of current and emerging research and the educational experiences resulting from adaptations of that research. Faculty not only develop research-based recommendations, they

⁴ For more information on county and stakeholder listening sessions see http://pdec.ifas.ufl.edu/longrange/Ext_LRP_2004.htm

also help prepare targeted audiences for transitions and challenges. In this time of rapid change and emerging challenges, faculty can play a vital role in helping to develop a long-range plan that is both relevant and flexible.

In addition to the knowledge, experience and creativity they bring to the “planning table,” faculty often are expected to develop a framework for program evaluation. It is during the planning process that appropriate methods of evaluation are best developed that describe and measure the accomplishments expected during the period covered by the Extension long-range plan.

A third role for faculty relates to public accountability and establishment of measures of public value. In the publication, “Colleges of Agriculture at the Land Grant Universities: Public Service and Public Policy,” the Committee on the Future of Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture⁵ wrote that the expenditure of federal funds is justified for research and extension that meets two basic criteria:

1. it addresses national needs and priorities and
2. it is aimed at generating public goods

Although the focus of the Committee was on national needs and priorities, the same argument could be made for the expenditure of state funds for state needs and priorities. Also, the Committee’s definition of public goods would apply at both state and federal levels.

The classic characteristics of public goods applied to educational information means that use of the information by any one person need not diminish the quantity used by anyone else and it is impossible to confine the benefits of the information to selected persons (Ahern, Yee, and Bottum)⁶. Examples of public goods in the context of the food and agricultural system⁷ include the following:

1. Fundamental knowledge (often embodied in best management practices)
2. Environmental quality
3. Knowledge about food and product safety risks and protection from undue risks
4. Improve dietary health
5. Protection against genuine national food security risks

⁵ Colleges of Agriculture at the Land Grant Universities: Public Service and Public Policy. Committee on the Future of Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture, Board on Agriculture, National Research Council. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press (1996).

⁶ Ahern, Mary; Jet Yee, and John Bottum. “Regional trends in Extension resources.” Paper presented at the 2002 Southern Agricultural Economics Association Meeting, (Feb.), Orlando, FL.

⁷ Committee on the Future of Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture, Board on Agriculture (1966).

6. Knowledge essential to the accomplishment of public goals such as social equity, economic efficiency and informed public policy making.

REC/Academic Department Listening Sessions

The steering committee for the UF Extension long-range planning process asks each REC and academic Department to schedule listening sessions to obtain the collective voice of faculty within the Department or REC. Those Departments or RECs who wish to obtain inputs from advisory committees and/or county Extension agents should feel free to do so.

The listening session provides an opportunity for faculty to reflect on their REC or Departmental purpose, vision and strategies for carrying out educational activities in support of Extension's mission and long-range objectives. It also is a time for envisioning issues and trends that could impact the unit's future activities. By reflecting on the past while envisioning the future, a REC or Department can better determine how well-prepared it is to cope with the changing world of those Extension is charged to serve.

Each Department and REC will be asked to address the following points⁸:

- Define the unit's mission and purpose as it relates to the UF Extension mission and purpose⁹
- Describe programs of excellence in support of current Extension long-range objectives.¹⁰
- Identify and prioritize trends and transitional issues that could affect both traditional audiences served by the unit and new audiences that could be served by the unit.
- Formulate long-range objectives for 2004-2007 and indicate the measures of accountability that will be used to measure progress toward attainment of those long-range objectives.

⁸ See http://pdec.ifas.ufl.edu/longrange/Ext_LRP_2004.htm (REC/Academic Dept Listening Session navigation bar button) for report guidelines and a template for recording answers.

⁹ **Mission of UF Extension:** To provide research-based knowledge and educational programs that enable people to make practical decisions to improve their quality of life.

¹⁰ **Long-Range Objective:** to develop educational programs of relevance and excellence designed to help Floridians:

- Realize a better quality of life, both personally and professionally;
- Produce responsible and productive young people;
- Develop economically sound and environmentally sustainable agribusinesses, forestry operations, ranches, groves, small businesses and communities;
- Develop leadership skills among diverse inhabitants, both in rural and urban settings; and
- Sustain our fragile natural resources, particularly irreplaceable coastal areas.

After listening sessions have been completed by counties, RECs and Departments; each will be asked to develop Extension long-range objectives that reflect the needs of currently targeted audiences and emerging issue priorities identified through the listening session process. Extension Administration will hold a series of regional listening sessions where counties, RECs and academic Departments will be invited to present and discuss their long-range objectives.

UF Extension, in turn, will utilize these long-range objectives as the foundation for developing a statewide long-range plan that reflects future directions and appropriate avenues for getting there. In addition, the expertise of design teams will be called upon to develop and/or enhance educational materials in support of programs to be conducted during 2004-2007.