

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

You may know the University of Wisconsin-Extension, Cooperative Extension through the 4-H club your children joined, or the nutrition education classes presented at their school once a month. Maybe you connected through a leadership program, or you've worked with your county agriculture agent to improve your family's farm. However you connect to Cooperative Extension – as millions of Wisconsinites do every year – you may not know the organization is amidst significant change to make it even more valuable to you and your family.

Since early 2016, Cooperative Extension has been working on a reorganization process to address state budget cuts. We have received many questions from clients, partners, and even staff members around the state inquiring why Cooperative Extension is undertaking this endeavor and how the reorganization is progressing. With nearly a year of the reorganization process under our belts, we are more confident than ever that Cooperative Extension is a vital resource for Wisconsin. This process offers a unique opportunity to reshape this beloved organization.

As part of the 2015-17 Wisconsin state budget, the Wisconsin legislature passed a \$250 million cut to UW System, impacting every UW campus and program in the state. For Cooperative Extension, this meant a permanent \$3.6 million annual budget deficit. Recognizing that the organization could not sustain its current operations with a cut this large while remaining good partners with county leadership, we embarked on the reorganization project to streamline Cooperative Extension and position ourselves to better meet Wisconsin's changing needs.

As the many Cooperative Extension colleagues and external partners involved with the reorganization consider how to help us meet our new budget reality, we want to keep the focus on building a flexible, relevant, and digital extension resource. We must be flexible enough to address the drastic changes in funding and create a structure that allows us to tackle emerging issues in Wisconsin with timely research and education. Building a flexible structure will allow us to develop relevant programming to anticipate and address challenges facing communities across our state.

Consistently embracing and implementing digital programming solutions will also help us provide critical educational resources to more people across the state. We know that more than 50 percent of Wisconsin residents use smartphones to communicate and learn – a number that is continuously rising. Our focus will be on maximizing the effectiveness of our digital communications and education while recognizing the continued importance of traditional face-to-face interactions at your county Extension office.

Most importantly, this reorganization process will ensure we are accountable and transparent stewards of taxpayer dollars. Cooperative Extension is supported by state and county contributions. We will continue to make sure every dollar is used efficiently and effectively, and that Wisconsinites see the benefits their investments bring to their communities.

We want to thank Wisconsin communities for your ongoing support of Cooperative Extension. Thank you to the millions who use our programs every year, to the thousands who volunteer with 4-H Youth Development or Master Gardeners, and to the hundreds who provided feedback about the reorganization process. We are so grateful for your support of and engagement with this organization

that has served Wisconsin for more than 100 years. As we work on shaping the future of Cooperative Extension, we do so with an eye towards continuing to be an important resource for Wisconsin for at least 100 years more.

Sincerely,

Cathy Sandeen, *UW Colleges/UW-Extension Chancellor*

Karl Martin, *Cooperative Extension Dean & Director*