

Talking Points:

1. Why is Colorado State University Extension regionalizing? What is the problem we are trying to solve?

Background

For nearly 100 years, CSU Extension has delivered quality, research-based information and education to individuals, families, producers, volunteers and citizens state wide. This has been accomplished through a network of county based offices, Extension agents and campus specialists with expertise in youth development; horticulture; health, wellness and nutrition; financial management; production agriculture; community development and natural resources working together to address local needs. Extension has relied on strong partnerships with and fiscal support from Colorado counties, the State of Colorado and the federal government to provide quality programming.

The current economy has people using the resources of Extension to address changes in their own lives and communities. Since 2001, Extension's state budget has diminished from approximately \$9.7 to \$8.3 million dollars; a \$1.4 million decrease. In addition, state budget reductions are anticipated for higher education over the next three years; a minimum 3% annually. During this same time, federal funding for Extension has remained flat, a trend that is expected to continue. Combined, the state and federal Extension allocation can no longer support the same level of staffing in county offices or on campus. County budgets are also generally impacted by declining revenues as property values are re-assessed and the lagging economy affects sales and construction. Demand for quality information and programming in Colorado has not decreased.

In light of changing economic conditions, Extension is focusing its attention and resources on its statewide goals of: 1) delivering a broad base of programs 2) providing citizens with access to the information and expertise they need, 3) maintaining an Extension presence in each partnering county, and 4) delivering a strong 4-H youth development program in every county.

Regionalization

Regionalization is the sharing of expertise across counties to connect Colorado citizens with the resources they need. This is not a new concept for CSU Extension. Informally, when different expertise or assistance is needed, agents have looked to a colleague in a neighboring county to provide it. More formally, four multi-county groups (22 counties in all), known in CSU Extension as "areas," currently work together to plan and deliver broad based Extension programming. Each county houses staff with different expertise – together they address the needs of the whole. The local governments in these four areas have developed working and financial relationships that suit their needs.

The Approach

There are currently gaps in Extension staffing statewide caused by decreased funding and prolonged by a state hiring freeze. Instead of ignoring this situation, CSU Extension administration is asking counties and Extension staff to work together in a more planned and deliberate way to make expert knowledge available to the citizens of Colorado who are seeking it.

Through regionalization, agents share programming and expertise primarily within a cluster of counties that make sense in terms of locale, local politics and issues, relationships, programming needs, and interests. County clusters are fluid to accommodate changes in needs. Agents work from their local county office and spend a portion of their time in support of efforts in other counties. Exchanges across program clusters are expected to be equitable.

Extension will use technology as appropriate to teach, train, learn and share information and minimize the need for travel. Clients will be encouraged to access information 24/7 from local and state Extension websites, national resources and through online-education. Extension will continue to train and engage volunteers to deliver quality information and educational opportunities to youth and adult audiences statewide.

2. What will be the impact of regionalizing Extension on County budgets?

CSU Extension and each of its county partners currently operate under the guidance of a Memorandum of Understanding. Regionalization provides Extension and Counties with an opportunity to update these agreements.

CSU Extension will begin to implement the regionalization process in September 2009. There is currently a hiring freeze on all state-funded Extension positions and vacancies will not be filled until the freeze is lifted. Once the freeze is lifted, Extension positions that provide expertise across multiple counties will be filled on a priority basis statewide. The number of positions filled is dependent upon funds available.

Beginning August 1, 2009, locally generated user fees are being retained wholly at the local level instead of a portion of those fees being sent to the central Extension budget on campus. The annually updated user fee targets for each county will remain in effect and support implementation of local control beginning August 1, 2009. Using these targets as a starting point, counties will work together in clusters and develop shared funding requirements necessary to implement the multi-county effort. This funding could be used to support travel, technology, or in some other manner to advance the multi-county effort. This self-directed team approach will provide a new mechanism to enhance multi-county program delivery. Counties would continue to provide travel expenses associated with the use of County vehicles and cost associated with educational programming.

3. How does Extension plan to address the travel costs associated with regionalization? How will the technology required to work and teach across distances be funded?

Extension is working to minimize travel needs through the use of technology and other appropriate means. Local offices may also commit their user fees to support travel, technology and other costs associated with multi-county programming.

4. What areas of expertise will Extension make available to Coloradoans through its agents and campus based specialists?

The areas of expertise that CSU Extension supports with on campus specialists and county based agents include:

- 4-H Youth Development – club programs and outreach programs
 - Internal expertise: volunteer management, leadership development, livestock, Family and Consumer, general projects, natural resources, equine, shooting sports...
- Horticulture – both commercial and home
 - Internal expertise: plant pathology, entomology, gardening, trees, turf, irrigation...
- Production Agriculture - field crops, livestock, small farm production and agricultural business management
 - Internal expertise: entomology, pest management, cropping systems, agronomy, beef, sheep, swine, alternative crops, organic production, row crops...
- Family and Consumer Sciences – Health, Wellness and Nutrition, Food Safety and Family Financial Security
- Community Development including community capacity building
 - Internal – agro-tourism, economic development, leadership development, strategic planning, facilitation, renewable energy and energy conservation.
- Natural Resources - range management, water resources, forestry and small acreages, wildlife and sustainable landscapes

5. What does it mean when Extension says its agents will “specialize?” How will this enhance programming and the delivery of information locally?

Each Extension agent is hired with a programmatic specialty, most with a Master’s degree in a discipline. This plan will enable agents to utilize the specialized expertise and extend it to a greater number of people. In return, neighboring agents will share their expertise.

6. What is the timeline for regionalization?

- Summer '09: Gather input from stakeholder groups on regionalization concepts and program clusters.
- September 1, 2009: Initial program clustered identified.
- September 2009 – Initial programming and expertise needs of clusters determined. Begin search process to fill priority, multi-county, positions.
- Fall 2009: Agents work within program cluster to identify priority program areas they will address; agent job description are rewritten to reflect specialization and multi-county programming assignments and Plans to Invest are developed that identify programming efforts by agents within the program cluster and for the cluster as a whole.
- January 1, 2010: Agents begin to implement multi-county plans to invest.
- Ongoing and periodic: evaluate effectiveness of regionalization effort, report to stakeholders, modify as needed.

7. How will regionalization affect county support staff?

Support staff will continue to do what they do - provide program support in their counties. This may include support to an outside agent that is bringing a program to the county or helping a local agent prepare programming. As expertise is identified among support staff, they may also specialize in exchange for support from another cluster county. It is expected that any such exchange would be equitable and agreed upon. Support staff will also have a larger team of agents to consider when connecting citizens with the expertise needed. Extension will make every effort to provide on-going training to support staff statewide so they can continue to be both efficient and effective in support of Extension and their county.

8. What is a CSU Regional Center?

In addition to the delivery of programs to multi-county clusters through Extension, CSU is proposing to pilot a CSU Regional Center in Northeast CO for a three year period. The proposed center will provide an additional layer of research based expertise and expanded opportunities for Northeast Coloradoans to connect with CSU on important issues. The Center will serve as a front door to the CSU System, offering recruitment and application materials and assistance for CSU-Fort Collins, CSU-Pueblo and CSU Global Campus. Additional Extension Specialists will also be housed at the center and will work with Agents to further research, capacity building and educational efforts critical to Eastern Colorado.