

News Article

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Date: February 12, 2018

Please use by: February 22, 2018

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What is Purdue Extension? The Cooperative Extension Service

The last couple of weeks I've been discussing Purdue Extension and land-grant institutions. This week we conclude this mini-history lesson by delving into the forming of USDA's Cooperative Extension System.

In 1914, the Smith-Lever Extension Act was passed by congress. This Act established the Cooperative Extension Service within USDA, and began a Federal-State system of adult and youth education that has been a world model. The Cooperative Extension Service formalized the system by which land-grant universities could conduct educational outreach to local residents.

The Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service (Purdue Extension, for short) serves as the outreach arm of USDA's Cooperative Extension System in Indiana. As I stated last week, in Indiana, Purdue University is Indiana's sole land-grant institution.

It is believed that the first agricultural agent employed in a county began his work in Smith County, Texas in 1906. The movement spread rapidly, with Indiana establishing its first county agricultural agent in LaPorte County in 1912. Likewise, the first Indiana Home Demonstration Agent was appointed in Vanderburgh County in 1917. Assistant County Agents were an innovation in Indiana in 1928, several being employed that year with the assistance of federal funds to serve local youth.

Older youth groups were organized in Blackford, Parke, and Tipton Counties in 1934. In 1935 the Extension Service offered statewide assistance to out-of-school youth (18 to 28 years of age) by organizing clubs of "older rural youth." State Rural Youth meetings were held at Purdue University starting in 1937. At one time or another, every Indiana county has had a Rural Youth club.

In Whitley County, I have recently tried to ascertain our first county agents. According to what I can find from existing records, B.L. Hummel was hired as the first County Agent in Whitley County in 1917. R.V. Klepinger was hired as the first Assistant County Agent in Whitley County in 1935. And, Margaret Rosentrader was hired as the first Home Demonstration Agent in Whitley County in 1956. (My apologies to the local Rotary Club – I think I misspoke about this at a recent meeting).

The county Extension professional staff grew to about 260 field staff and 125 specialist staff members in 1962. At this time, an Agricultural Agent was placed in each county and most counties had a Home Demonstration Agent. Some counties also had an Assistant County Agent.

To better reflect the change which had occurred in the constituency of Extension, in 1963 the name was changed from Agricultural Extension Service to Cooperative Extension Service. In July of 1993 the County Extension Agent designation was changed to County Extension Educator.

Program area titles have undergone several changes from the early days, when they were known as Agricultural Agents, Home Demonstration Agents, and Assistant County Agents. These areas of responsibility are now known as: Agriculture and Natural Resources, Health and Human Sciences, and 4-H Youth Development. Additionally, Purdue Extension has the program area of Community Development.

Purdue Extension's Mission Statement: We deliver practical, research-based information that transforms lives and livelihoods.

Purdue Extension's Vision Statement: We will be a leader in providing relevant, high-impact educational programs that transform the lives and livelihoods of individuals and communities in Indiana and the world.

It is the policy of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service that all persons have equal opportunity and access to its educational programs, services, activities, and facilities without regard to race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, disability or status as a veteran.

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