



# Southern Region Middle Managers News

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## Strengthening Government Relationships at the State and Local Level

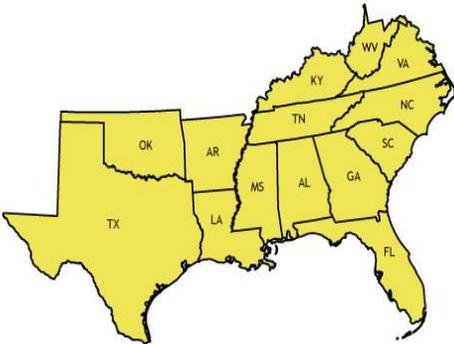
In both 2013 and 2014 the MM subcommittee has stressed strengthening relationships with government officials in their Plan of Work. Hence for this edition of the MM News, we asked representatives from around the southern region to provide a snapshot of what’s working for them in this arena. Many similar efforts are in play across the region and yet others are quite unique to certain states. We hope you find this newsletter of value in planning your future efforts in governmental relationship building.

### UGA Extension/ACCG - A Formal Relationship with County Government by Greg Price, Director of County Operations, UGA

In 2004 the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension created a liaison position with the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG). This position was created in response to an identified need for more over-arching coordination and cooperation between Extension and ACCG at the state level to embrace our ability to meet the needs of county government and the people they serve. The liaison position was co-funded with an office in both organizations. Over time this position has been extremely beneficial. While local county agents have always maintained a strong local relationship with county government, the Extension/ACCG liaison both strengthened local relationships and created a new state level collaboration.

In 2013 the Extension/ACCG agreement matured with a new approach. We are discontinuing the one liaison position and replacing it with multiple one-on-one relationships with different members of the ACCG administration team. Both organizations will identify specific projects or initiatives upon which to collaborate. At least one (maybe two) of our monthly District Director administrative meetings will be held in the ACCG headquarters. This will give us a unique opportunity to enhance our one-on-one relationships. ACCG leadership will also be invited to campus for meetings.

I served in the liaison role before moving into extension administration. The current liaison, also a former county agent, has taken a full time job with ACCG administration. We have not abandoned the liaison role, but may reinvent it as some type of intern opportunity for a county agent. A document is available that describes the relationship in detail. Contact me at [gprice@uga.edu](mailto:gprice@uga.edu) if you would like more information.



## Oklahoma’s “Rule of Seven” for Keeping Your Message in Front of Decision Makers by Claude Bess, SE District Extension Director, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

Reports to decision makers from county extension offices in Oklahoma were typically done on an annual basis for many years. However, about 5-years ago, Dr. Steve Smith, SW District Extension Director (retired), decided that annual reporting just didn’t have the impact that we needed to increase county funding levels during the budget downturn. Dr. Smith encouraged his County Extension Directors to begin sending brief (1 page, front and back) reports on a monthly basis. His theory was based on the old marketing adage that **prospects need to see or hear your message at least seven times before they take action and/or remember your message**. Steve felt that using the rule to market Extension programs should certainly apply to County Commissioners, Excise Board members, other county officials and legislators just the same as if we were marketing a commodity for sale to the public. He encouraged educators to use pictures and brief comments to tell the story of their monthly successes.

Steve’s theory has worked and has been implemented almost statewide now. County Extension Directors report that the decision makers in their counties seem to be better informed of the events and activities of the Extension office and the impact that they are having on the community. Even though county budgets remain tight in Oklahoma, we have been successful in increasing county contributions significantly over the past two years. I attribute much of the success to better marketing use of the “Rule of Seven.”

## Clemson’s Report to the People by Blake Lanford, Economic & Community Development Agent

Clemson Extension deploys a number of resources and methods focused on enhancing relationships with policy makers at the local and state level. One technique pursued by all county offices is the development of the annual Report to the People. This report is compiled jointly by agents and features information related to program activities and impacts in a given geographic area. The final reports are used on an individual and collective basis to demonstrate Extension impacts during budget development process at state and local government levels.

Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service

# Annual Report to the People

December 2012  
Horry County

**Fostering Agribusiness Development**

It should come as no surprise that agribusiness, including both agriculture and forestry, is one of the largest economic clusters in South Carolina. Together, they have a direct and indirect economic impact of \$13.9 billion a year, provide 87.5 billion in labor income, and create and support almost 200,000 jobs in the state.

Agriculture continues to have a significant impact on the economy within Horry County and the surrounding region. Horry County consistently ranks in the top ten of counties statewide as it relates to the value of sales by commodity group. In spite of the fact that today's agricultural sector does not employ near as many individuals as other sectors in the County, the potential to scale up agribusiness activity that further diversifies an overwhelmingly one dimensional economy is evident.

Realizing the potential of agribusiness economic development, the Myrtle Beach Regional Economic Development Corporation has partnered with Clemson to conduct a detailed study of agribusiness assets, needs and growth opportunities in Horry County. Working collaboratively to ensure that agriculture is part of the overall economic development strategy. Extension will ensure that food and fiber demands of the region's citizens are met for years to come.

**Extension Diagnostic Services**

Horry County Extension Service is a valuable source of information for homeowners, farmers, lawn care and golf course managers. Services include soil and water testing, as well as plant problems and disease diagnoses. Samples are brought to the extension office and sent to the Agriculture Service Lab at Clemson University, where testing is done by professionals. Within 10 to 14 days of receiving a sample at the lab, the client will receive a report that includes results, along with lawn and fertility recommendations for your house lawn and/or garden.

Following the guidelines on the report will help prevent problems with over or under fertilization and can save the client from wasting money. The Horry County Extension Service office received over 2200 samples in 2012. Other lab services available through Extension include testing of feed and forage for equine and cattle producers, diagnosis of turf problems, and weed and insect identification. The Horry County Extension office welcomes questions and encourages citizens to make use of these valuable services.

**Mission Statement**

The mission of the Cooperative Extension Service is to provide sound, scientifically based information to South Carolinians and help them use that information to improve the quality of their lives.

Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service offers in-person to people of all ages, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital or family status and to an equal opportunity employer.

**CLEMSON**  
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

A second highly effective technique utilized in many regions is the annual Legislative Appreciation Dinner. Though not always uniform in structure, these events are often the result of collaboration amongst agencies at various levels of government and the private sector. As an example, the event may be jointly hosted by the local Extension office, the NRCS office, the Soil and Water Conservation District or the Farm Bureau and be supported by 4H club volunteers or FFA groups. Invitees generally consist of agricultural producers, agricultural businesses, agricultural agency staff and local policy makers. The program provides an opportunity for basic introductions of key players in the agricultural sector and a showcase of activities pursued by support agencies.

Both the indirect Report to the People and direct Legislative Appreciation Dinner method are a means of communicating program impact and potential to local and state policy makers that make funding decisions in support of programs. Each activity additionally provides a venue and or resource through which traditional advocates may communicate their needs to leaders.

## Utilizing Volunteers in Interpreting Extension Programs by Darrell A. Dromgoole, Associate Director for County Programs, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

The utilization of volunteers is an excellent strategy in the implementation of both formal and informal interpretation (i.e., telling our story) efforts. Elected officials place greater credibility in Extension educational programs when the information is relayed by their constituents. However, volunteers don't provide interpretation by chance-- it happens as a result of planning, training, and design.

The following suggestions related to working with County Extension Agents ensure that every county has a strategy to involve volunteers in the interpretation of Extension programs. In order for volunteers to be effective in interpreting programs they must...

- Be an individual whose opinion is valued and respected by elected officials.
- Be a participant in an effective county program that results in measurable outcomes.
- Have an understanding of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service as an organization.
- Be armed with appropriate data related to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's roles in providing educational programming efforts at the county level.
- Embrace the philosophy that an investment in Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service programs is an investment that provides a return to the county in terms of economic, environmental and/or social outcomes.
- Be equipped with information related to specific program(s) outcomes.

District Extension Administrators and County Extension Directors should ensure that every county has an interpretation plan that includes utilization of volunteers in formal and informal interpretation. It is imperative that District Extension Administrators /County Extension Directors provide confident leadership by articulating that a focus on interpretation efforts that will **make a Difference!**

## Strengthening Relationships at the Local Level with a Legislative Event by Danny Peek and Cyndi Marston, District Extension Directors, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Extension has long been called one of Virginia's best kept secrets. In this day of budget constraints and heightened accountability, we cannot remain a "secret"; so under the leadership of Extension Director, Ed Jones, we are reshaping, refocusing, and strengthening state and local extension leadership councils to assist in spreading the good word about Extension's educational programming and impacts. Many of Virginia's 107 county Extension Leadership Councils offer a legislative event annually or more often during the year. County leadership councils work with Extension staff to invite local and state government officials to a "Thanks for Your Support Meal" that highlights Extension programming and impacts.

Often these gatherings focus on locally grown foods and feature folks that have benefitted from Extension programming. Typically, ANR, FCS, and 4-H individually each share a unique success story and the event culminates by highlighting a cross-disciplinary program benefitting the community. In the past, the success stories of county citizens have been the most impactful parts of these meetings. Few can deny the power of 4-H youth demonstrating public speaking skills or a once incarcerated youth discussing new found financial skills or a grower whose crop was saved all the result of Extension training.

These legislative events are best attended when combined with another scheduled government meeting or activity. Some tips for such events: ask to provide breakfast prior to or lunch following a scheduled board meeting and build in your information session; be respectful of their time and feature only five minute presentations; make sure everyone on staff is present and that they are spread throughout the room; actively interact with the legislators, supervisors, and administration in attendance; don't use acronyms and be sure to ask them how Extension can help move their County forward.

## LSU Uses Multiple Approaches by Bobby Fletcher, Jr., Assistant Director, LSU AgCenter

The LSU Office of Governmental Relations serves as a liaison between the AgCenter and all levels of government. Throughout the year, the LSU AgCenter hosts and participates in many events that broaden the awareness of elected

officials to the initiatives, programs and resources available to residents they represent across Louisiana. These include meeting locally with elected officials to discuss topics of interest within their districts. In addition, an informational day at the State Capitol allows supporters an opportunity to interact with state legislators. This also highlights functions with other campuses within the LSU System to show collaborative initiatives among institutions.

Elected officials are also invited to the field days at research stations and cooperators operations where producers attend to learn the latest research initiatives and field trials. In addition, a [4-H Day at the State Capitol](#) brings over 1,500 4-H members to Baton Rouge to engage their elected officials.

Specific outreach for local elected officials at statewide annual meetings is designed to enhance the salary support initiative, supported by the Extension Director and Extension agent professional associations:

- [Police Jury Association of Louisiana](#): Manned exhibit, focus varies based on “Hot Topics.”
- [Louisiana Municipality Association](#): Manned exhibit, focus varies based on “Hot Topics.”
- [Louisiana Sheriff’s Association](#): Manned exhibit, focus is 4-H Outdoor Skills programming.
- [Louisiana Association of School Superintendents](#): breakfast, 4-H mission mandates are represented and 4-H members give remarks.

Parish based faculty implement the following strategies relative to local/state relationships:

- Participation in monthly parish government and school board meetings.
- Reports annually to parish partners both orally and in writing and provide brief written reports quarterly to parish governing bodies.
- Maximize the use of technology and the media to ensure that program impacts are reported to stakeholders.



2013 Police Jury exhibit, Municipality Assoc. meeting, LA Sheriff’s Assoc. meeting respectively.

### **A Grassroots Approach to Strengthening Extension Relationships in Alabama by Jannie Carter, Extension Assistant Director, Alabama Cooperative Extension System**

Building partnerships and fostering strong stakeholder relationships have long been recognized as essential assets to quality Extension outreach programs. Everyone knows that any viable business needs good customer relations to increase revenue and service delivery capacity. Stakeholders and community partners serve as primary connections to Extension’s diverse audiences. They provide vital information to help Extension professionals make important decisions about customer needs and program priorities. Moreover, they lend support to help increase our programming abilities and outcomes through shared goals and resources.

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System recognizes the importance of staying connected at the grassroots level, and implements a grassroots meeting process to facilitate garnering stakeholder input. The meetings are comprised of community stakeholders, including community leaders, partners, and Extension professionals. This process allows each of the 67 state counties to provide a forum for sharing information on available services and discussing program needs. Each county is required to hold an annual grassroots meeting that is coordinated by county Extension coordinators. Meeting outcome summaries are shared with program planning teams as a means to provide direct stakeholder feedback. This feedback is also valuable to the program planning and plan of work processes for the Alabama Cooperative Extension

System. The meetings and the resulting summaries have proven quite beneficial as ready resources that support the Extension programming cycle including planning, implementation, evaluation, reporting, and revising.

### Communicating with Decision Makers Training & More by Jeff Young, District Extension Director, UK

Strengthening relations with local and state decision makers is an ongoing topic of strategic emphasis for Kentucky Cooperative Extension. This emphasis takes place at all levels in the organization to educate agents, supporters and the general public regarding the positive impacts Extension brings to local communities.

Kentucky has a high percentage of “newer” Extension agents many of whom lack a complete understanding of Extension and the skills necessary to build successful relationships with local leaders. To address this a **Communicating with Decision Makers Training** is conducted for all agents, and the topic has been and continues to be addressed with Extension supporters at District Forums and State Extension Council gatherings.

In 2008, after 20 years of declining local financial support in the Metro Louisville area (pop. > 1 million), Kentucky hired its first “county coordinator” for the Jefferson County/Metro Louisville community. This county coordinator was assigned specific communication and development tasks:

- Serving as a liaison with Metro Government and other external agencies and organizations
- Providing leadership in budget preparation
- Providing strategic planning for funding
- Sharing program outcomes with community and elected officials to help them understand the value of Extension
- Build collaborations with other agencies and organizations to solve community problems and multiply effectiveness

Since 2008 local financial support has stabilized and Extension has avoided budget cuts imposed on many other agencies. The County Coordinator has helped Extension become a more recognized partner in the community and has become the “face” of Extension locally.

### Arkansas’ Programmatic Impact Pages by Sharon Reynolds, District Director – Ozark, University of Arkansas, Division of Agriculture

As you know, many organizations, non-profits, and agencies are requesting funds through state government, federal sources, local friends and our traditional partners. No one has the market cornered on any of these sources. As such, it is extremely important that we tell our story in numerous ways. We can’t depend on past successes and programs that merely gave the attendee “a good feeling”. Arkansas CES realizes that we can no longer afford to report on “one shot activities” but rather we need to bring our annual sum to bear in a short, concise, impact statement. So, Arkansas CES helped agents by providing a short training on the preparation of an impact statement, designing a template for all offices to use to insure consistency and providing guidelines on how to produce a well written one-pager that is informative, attractive and impactful! Each programmatic area in an office is expected to produce an impact statement for distribution. CES then empowers clientele and Extension users to take our message to our supervisors, commissioners, legislators, funders, and the general public about the great work we do. In 2013 county impact reports that will be used to interpret Arkansas CES programs and strengthen relationships at the local and state level.

**FY2012 Family & Consumer Sciences Impact**  
**Families Making Lifestyle Changes**  
 Ashley County

Program Overview Ashley County	
Educational Contacts	4,913
Volunteers	126
Value of Volunteer Hours (\$)	\$27,869

Increased Knowledge	1800
Increased Physical Activity	309
Reduced Chronic Disease Risk	349
Adopted Healthier Behaviors	734
Increased Fruits & Vegetables	867
Increased Health Well-Being	1940

*"In the last 8 months since beginning this program, I have seen noticeable improvement in upper and lower body strength, flexibility and an increase in overall stamina. I have lost 11 lbs and am sleeping better, feel more energetic and simply enjoying life more."  
 -- Bob Bridges, Strong Women & Men*

*"I have learned so many things through this program. I learned how to eat healthy, not only making the choice for me, but for my kids as well. I can happily say I have lost 12 pounds since I took Mrs. Pfleger's advice."  
 -- Stephanie Best*

**Relevance**  
 Obesity is a major health problem in Ashley County with 34% of adults being obese. Thirty three percent youth in the Cozart and Hamburg school districts are either at risk for overweight or overweight, which lead to diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and many other problems. The goal is to decrease incidence of overweight and obesity.

**Response**  
 Multiple educational approaches were used to respond to issues related to chronic illness and obesity. Multi-media lessons focusing on health and wellness were offered to Ashley County youth and adult residents. Educational programs included *ReShape Yourself*, *Walk Across Arkansas*, *Strong Women & Men*, *Healthy Cookin' Classes*, *Nutrition Education Seminars*, and *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education* programs. Through these efforts, 213 educational sessions were conducted that reached 1940 individuals.

**Results**  
 Participants in the *ReShape Yourself* program lost 78 pounds, decreased their blood pressure, blood glucose levels and cholesterol. Two hundred eighty one participants in *Walk Across Arkansas* lost 183.5 pounds and recorded exercising 644,987 minutes, which potentially saved \$62,399.00 in health care costs. Results from the *Strong Women and Men* program indicate the following economic impact: Cost savings from fat reductions \$48,300; Medicare savings \$33,638; Hospitalizations from hip fracture prevention \$30,130. The 494 participants in the nutrition education programs reported an increase in knowledge and skills, with 73% indicating an intent to make a positive dietary change.

**U.A. DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE RESEARCH & EXTENSION**  
 University of Arkansas System

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## Mississippi's Annual Accountability Event by Patricia Knight, Head Coastal Research & Extension Center and Extension/Research Professor of Horticulture MSU

Mississippi State University encourages the county staffs to develop relationships with the County Board of Supervisors. Because all of our counties are rural based on the PLN definition of urban, everyone tends to know everyone else, and the Extension offices tend to have very good relationships with the BOS. Even in the more heavily populated counties, the BOS's are familiar with Extension and the local staff and the relationships are good.

Of the county staff, only the County Coordinator is authorized to represent MSU with the BOS. All requests related to MSU needs, whether it is 4-H, CRD, FCS, or Ag, are made through the County Coordinator. Counties host an Accountability Event with the BOS on an annual basis. Most host this event at lunch and provide a staff-prepared meal for the BOS and County Administrator. A few events may occur at other times of day. Most counties prepare a handout of varying detail outlining Extension activities within the county. This information is generally presented visually at the event with the printed material as a bragging right that each official can take back to the office.

## UF's Varied Approach by Charlie Vavrina, District Extension Director, So. Central Region

UF/IFAS Extension, like many others, uses a multitude of approaches to strengthen relations at the local and state government level, though obviously not in every case or in every county. To name a few of these efforts:

- Letters to new state legislators informing them of Extension's impact in their districts with an offer of assistance
- Letters to county admin. thanking them for their support and offering aid from UF's campus-wide resources
- Annual visits with county commissioners and invitations to local events
- Presentations (proclamations) at commission meetings
- Annual reports
- Success stories forwarded to commissioners/legislators
- Commissioner luncheons
- Efforts to align Extension programming with county 5 year plans or mission statements
- Annual excel files of programs marketed directly to county government audiences
- The Gateway Gathering, an annual 3 hr. program **for and by** county admin./ass't admin. who espouse what Extension is doing for them and includes an onsite needs assessment to help set the Extension agenda for the coming year

So there you have it! Extension's continuing efforts across the SE at strengthening government relations at the state and local level in a snapshot. We hope you've found an option that might be useful in your state through this discourse and I'm sure any of our authors would be glad to correspond with you concerning nuances of the approaches mentioned. I do heartily thank those who contributed to this newsletter for their steadfast support and excellent reporting. We're all in this together and it's good to know we work so well along the way. Thanks everyone!

Respectfully submitted:  
Charlie Vavrina, DED, UF



