

June 11, 2020 Middle Managers Committee Quarterly Conference Call (via ZOOM)

Attendance: Blake Lanford, Dr. CJ Williams, Dr. Tom Dobbins, Sharon Reynolds, Jim Stewart, Jeff Young, Mike Martin, Karissa Ulmer, Tom Obreza, Tawyna Holliman, Keith Walters, David Perrin, Pete Vergot, Beth Phelps, Theresa Hand, Curt Lacy, Claude Bess, Jerry Clemons, Jenny Cocanougher, Lonnie Johnson, Nancy Calix, James Henderson, Linda Mitchell.

Blake Lanford called the meeting to order and did a brief review of the agenda and introduced the Advisors to the Middle Manager Committee: Dr. CJ Williams and Dr. Tom Dobbins. Highlights of their discussion include:

DR. CJ WILLIAMS

Encouraged us to take care of ourselves and our families during these trying times.

The association extension administrators postponed the system wide conference until July 2021. Encouraged 1862 colleagues to present and to share in that conference with us.

Finishing proposals for our centers of excellence that were approved in the 2018 farm bill with several universities are working together to make these virtual centers of excellence successful.

DR. THOMAS DOBBINS

PLN Conference: We've already signed a contract for 2021 which will be in Orlando Florida and then we will hopefully we'll go back to Texas in 2022.

Shared appreciation all the work that the middle managers do - most important group that we have an extension keeping our people motivated and moving forward.

Next item on agenda was state updates. A brief summary of updates follows.

Thomas Obreza Florida.

- County Extension offices phased opening based on local government decisions, with groups of less than 10
- County directors put together a reopening plan or resumption of operations plan
- Faculty and staff on campus must get tested before they come back; hope to have most back by mid July

Mike Martin, Georgia

- Three phase plan for re-opening beginning Monday, flexibility for county offices based on local conditions
- No hiring or face to face meetings yet, hope for full return with fall semester
- Anticipating a budget cut in the range of 11 – 14%

Sharon Reynolds Arkansas

- Most of our county faculty have gone back into the offices, except for those employees who have childcare responsibilities, whose daycares are still closed because of COVID or who have health compromised health conditions. Again, we had to navigate between county offices anxious to reopen and the University of Arkansas System who wanted to be a little bit more cautious.
- Most of our county offices are open, not all are open completely to the public. They are allowing people by appointment only
- We have given Master Gardener groups approval to continue work days and some virtual plant sales and also drop through plant sales if they have an approved risk assessment plan. Every county office and every department at our state quarters has to have a an approved risk assessment plan before employees go back into the office.
- The University of Arkansas System purchased the work day enterprise resource planning program and have been working all that time to prepare all of the entities within the system to be on the same accounting and human resource set to take place July 1 - we are intensively training employees and staff to transition from current programs to that program.
- We did to take a small budget, not in dire situation with finances so far. We are not filling positions right now, during the transition period between our current hiring platform to the workday platform.

Curt Lacy Mississippi

- Prepare a 5 – 15% budget cut – could be on the lower end of that. Will holding positions open and maybe reducing some operating costs. The only positions that are being field or in those situations where there's a county with no agents in the office.
- We are actually in our phase one of our return to the offices. Rotating staff with only one person in the office. Everyone will be able to return to the office on June 15.
- individual face to face meetings, either in the office, we would prefer that they be outside like an individual consultation, there are no group meetings, until at least August
- We did move our we actually now have our private applicator training on line - a little larger need in has been there in the past. Led to more agents doing other online trainings
- we're still limited to a non essential travel

ALABAMA – no report.

Jim Stewart Tennessee

- change in leadership – currently have an interim director
- We have a phase in plan for returning to work in our counties and is county based – counties are at different phases based on their specific situation - all three regions are managing that with the county directors
- Agents may attend meetings with their partner organizations, we have a series of questions we go through the ask them as far as safety and following CDC guidelines. we're not currently hosting any meetings with clientele till at least July 31
- Our hope is to try to maintain the level budget, but we have yet to see anything from the state.
- County funding is in trouble – rather than raising taxes, counties are choosing to eliminate programs and they cited extension, soil Conservation Service and others.

Jennifer Cocanougher Kentucky

- Phased return of public access to our county offices, so technically our county offices never officially closed. District directors worked with each county to develop their extension facility plan. Most counties only essential face to face meetings are fewer than 10 people; no more than 50% of the staff in the office at any one time; protections for office staff. Expect to be able to have more people in the offices and face to face meetings in July.
- Most county fairs cancelled, but a state fair, with limitations, will be held in August.
- Currently in a hiring pause which has also impacted our plans for our administrative structure change.
- Have received a significant budget cut - 11.2% directly to extension.
- For our county budgets were are pretty good right now the problem is with our state cuts.
- UK is hoping to have a regular fall semester start.

Nancy Calix KENTUCKY STATE UNIVERSITY

- main campus we have had absolutely no contact - even our county agents. They've remained working remotely.

Claude Bess Oklahoma

- phase three of the governor's reopening plan and and essentially means our offices can be open, depending on what county government is doing. The issue with face-to-face meetings is having the facility that will allow the CDC guidelines as far as social distancing.
- a lot of admiration for educators in the creativity that by hand during this this time to to continue to do programming and it's it's pretty pretty amazing.
- We had a 4% reduction in our funding from the state legislature came at a bad time for us. Of course it could have been a lot worse.
- We're not advertising positions.
- They do plan to have a fall semester. It's been interesting to watch that unfold and and all the precautions and limited seating arrangements.

Keith Walters North Carolina

- 5 county offices that are still closed. 43 are open to the public and are now offering some face to face program - agents are being creative with pesticide trainings, to rotate people through and allow trainings that have to occur by deadline to happen.
- Those of us that work on campus have been encouraged to continue to telework and not come to campus. Planning for a shortened fall semester.
- Nikki Kirby, our HR director, is serving as interim director of county operations. Clinton McRae as our lead district director to coordinate meetings for our other five district
- career ladder increase for our agents that cost us about \$1.9 million, of course, half of that was covered by our county partners, we were

- How to return to work safely and each county has reported are in different phases of what that looks like. And it really depends on where the counties are as in regard to their numbers and looking at those individually.

Blake Lanford South Carolina

- We're in phase one for all counties - None are open to the public, closed to programming meetings, etc. In some cases, staff had been had been allowed to reemerge into the offices, but they remain closed until we get through phase three - that could be august could be into the fall
- County budgets looking pretty tough,
- No mention of state cuts, just yet that we're aware of.

CJ Williams Texas

- Expecting a 5% in our budget, however, we just received a \$750,000 grant from the chancellor of the Texas A & M system for outreach work in Houston.
- May 18 started back on campus.
- Several of our county offices have not opened back to the public
- To come back on campus we will provide all of the sanitizing and it is mandatory on this campus that everybody wears a mask

Jeff Young gave an update on **NUEL**. the southern region NUEL Conference that was scheduled for Houston has been postponed to another year.

NUEL coordinated with County Farm Bureaus listening sessions for USDA on Urban Agriculture Issues. 240 folks from across the country that sit in on those listening sessions and gave feedback regarding a \$40 million grant RFP that we expect to come out in September. Michigan State is tabulating and summarizing that feedback.

Jim Stewart shared the decision to hold **PLN conference** in a virtual format. Discussed ideas for virtual format such as written state reports, plan of work process and upcoming middle managers conference. Blake, Mike and Jenny will meet to develop committee agenda.

Leadership Opportunities: **Secretary** role. This person will serve as secretary in 2021, then can serve as vice-chair and finally chair of the committee; and **1890 representative on PLC** (three year commitment).

Reminder to email changes in contact information to Laura Narmour, laura.narmour@msstate.edu, by July 1st.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Minutes submitted by Jenny Cocanougher

Link to ZOOM recording of meeting:

https://clemson.zoom.us/rec/share/zNRfBq3c70JObY3c5h6PRLcHAKbVX6a80CkW8_pezx0-NXqBY2BqROJIOTrFJoEi