

# The Environment for Scholarship in Agricultural Economics Extension

Damona Doye

Although opportunities and challenges for the Cooperative Extension Service have been addressed in the agricultural economics literature, little attention has been paid to the extension scholar. This article relates Boyer's scholarship concepts and subsequent scholarship assessment articles to agricultural economics extension and describes some unique features of the extension scholar's operating environment. Organizational framework, leadership, staffing, funding, accountability, and evaluation are addressed. Data from a survey of agricultural economics department heads are used to supplement personal experience in describing the current operating environment and constraints for extension scholars.

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In recent years, the literature on Extension in agricultural economics has focused on ways to improve it (Castle), its relevance and potential for long-run survivability (King and Boehlje; McDowell), its future (Bonnen; Wefald), and its value (Kalambokidis; Roe, Haab, and Sohngen). Hanson identifies opportunities and challenges in Cooperative Extension for agricultural economists, and Martin discusses extension roles in agricultural economics departments. E-Extension (or eXtension, as it is now labeled) and opportunities for electronic delivery of education and information have also re-

ceived attention (eXtension). In his recent Western Agricultural Economics Association (WAEA) presidential address, Dana Hoag lays out economic principles that could help decide the fate of the Extension system, namely that Extension provides public goods and should focus on competitive advantages, privatize when appropriate, manage for the long run, follow good business practices, and be aware of the political economy (Hoag).

Within the larger academic community, the definition of scholarship and the need for engaged institutions have been and are being discussed (Hutchings, Babb, and Bjork; Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities). Ernest Boyer's book, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, initiated a national dialogue on dimensions of scholarship beyond the traditional research emphasis. The *Journal of Extension* has included a variety of articles applying his discussion to extension generally (Adams et al.; Alter; Bushaw and Long; Campbell; Norman; Smith; Weiser and Houg-lum). Smith encourages extension faculty to

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embrace evaluation to show work's impact, to share work with colleagues through presentations and papers, and to develop other partners on campus to share the Extension method of engagement and learn from them. Alter lists six challenges for extension workers: achieving a scholarly mentality; broadening the view of scholarship; understanding and conducting research on the scholarship of engagement; developing and implementing ideas for change; and assessing and documenting outreach scholarship. He calls for action on the challenges through leadership and graduate education reform.

The purpose of this paper is to relate the concept of scholarship to agricultural economics extension and identify unique features of the operating environment for agricultural economics scholars with significant responsibilities in outreach and extension. My review of the literature and personal experience is supplemented by information gathered in a survey of agricultural economics department heads at land-grant universities.

The survey was e-mailed to 86 agricultural economics department heads at land-grant institutions in late December. The request asked them to complete it to the extent they could in the time that they had by January 21. Twenty-seven survey responses were submitted via a website. In some cases, an Extension leader helped complete the survey, but department heads were the primary respondents. My intent is to document activities of extension with a little "e" to include faculty doing outreach without official Cooperative Extension Service (Extension with a capital E is used in referencing it) appointments and universities with outreach but lacking an official Extension affiliation.

### Scholarship in Ag Econ Extension

In *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Boyer noted that the dominant view is that to be a scholar is to be a researcher and that publication is the primary yardstick by which scholarly productivity is measured. He also noted that many professors felt ambivalent about the roles. In redefining scholarship, he advocated 4 distinct

but overlapping functions for scholars: discovery, integration, application, and teaching.<sup>1</sup> The scholarship of discovery is closest to what is traditionally referred to as research, with the process and passion giving meaning to the effort. Integrative scholarship authenticates research by making connections across disciplines, while interpreting, synthesizing, and shedding new light on it. The scholarship of application moves toward engagement and includes service activities tied to a person's field of knowledge. Boyer comments that graduate education could be enhanced through attention to the scholarship of application, helping students see the connections between their work and society.<sup>2</sup> Boyer stresses that the rigor and accountability associated with research activities must be maintained—good citizenship is not sufficient to be scholarly. The scholarship of teaching is not only transmitting knowledge but also transforming and extending it. Boyer describes these four functions as inseparable, dynamic, and interdependent, and he encourages celebrating a "mosaic of talent" in faculty.

Boyer notes that some dimensions of scholarship are universal. Scholars are required to:

1. Establish credentials as researchers.
2. Keep up with current developments in the field of expertise.
3. Maintain high standards of integrity.
4. Have work carefully assessed.

Let me further address each of these points relative to agricultural economics extension.

### Establishing Credentials

Boyer notes that every scholar must demonstrate the capacity to do research and com-

<sup>1</sup> Faculty members at Oregon State University further defined scholarship as "creative work that is validated by peers and communicated" (Weiser) and also modified Boyer's list to five forms of scholarship, expanding "teaching" to "learning and teaching" and adding "creative artistry" (Norman).

<sup>2</sup> To encourage graduate students to apply their agricultural economics research, the AAEA Extension Section has proposed an award to be given to a student with the best outreach plan for his or her research.

municate it, which typically comes through completion of a graduate program. He further asserts that all scholars need not choose "specialized, investigative work on an ongoing basis" (p. 27). Respondents to the departmental surveys indicated that all Extension faculty and staff have either Ph.D. or M.S. degrees. For faculty within agricultural economics, our credentialing period as researchers frequently seems to require a longer time frame, perhaps extending through the career, because regular research publication is expected of faculty at many universities regardless of appointment. In 1993, Purcell noted that the typical young agricultural economist believed that publishing in the discipline's journals is the most important thing required to be promoted and tenured and that the notion persisted regardless of the appointment. In my experience, most conversations with a new faculty member with an extension appointment at professional meetings include an expression of concern about publications. An open-ended question to department heads regarding the most important criteria for promotion of extension faculty to either associate or full professor suggests that publications (and frequently research publications specifically) are a high priority in most departments.

For promotion from assistant professor to associate professor, the most frequent response described programming: effective, strong, successful, recognized, independently-created, positive feedback from stakeholders. Publications followed closely in frequency of mention. Individual comments included notes that the requirements for extension faculty are not different than those for teaching/research faculty, that new faculty members are under more pressure to generate grant funds and publish in peer-reviewed journals than in the past, that the bar has been raised in recent years, and that Extension faculty should contribute to the applied research literature appropriate to their area of expertise. Other comments such as "quality is expected—you know it when you see it. . . ." suggest that some departments ascribe to a different or more flexible yardstick for assignments. For promotion from associate to full professor, the item listed most frequent-

ly was a national reputation, followed by publications and grants. Here, there were fewer instances of publications being described as research.

### **Keeping Current**

Purcell states that "In an era of downsizing and reduced budgets, in an era that offers differences of opinion as to what constitutes value in our profession and in what it is we should be about, faculty morale is important" (p. 14). He describes morale and faculty development as being closely related, with room to practice comparative advantage while also allowing for specialization. Boyer notes that there are numerous ways to stay current in a profession beyond new research projects. Reading the literature, attending meetings, and staying abreast of events as well as changes in law and policy are also important. Depending on the responsibilities, Extension faculty often must keep current on input prices, product prices, weather and crop forecasts, and changes in related sciences for one or more crop or livestock species, which is a challenge.

A 1989 Carnegie Foundation survey noted that younger faculty were most likely to agree with the statement "I hardly ever get time to give a piece of work the attention it deserves," with an increasing number disagreeing in each advancing age bracket (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching). I would hypothesize a different pattern for extension staff in that the more experience is gained, the more programs have been developed (and rarely are any given up), the more visibility the person has, the more in demand the person is, and the less time the person has to give to any project. Although perhaps it is a failure to say no to enough things, saying no is difficult for extension faculty because they are charged with serving the public. County and regional educators (and perhaps administrators) expect support and timely answers. Every call or e-mail must be handled as if it is from a state legislator who determines future funding for extension, as it very well may be. Although distance education is increasingly used, travel is still a time-consuming com-

**Table 1.** How Important is Participation in the Following for Extension Faculty?

	Very Important (%)	Important (%)	Neutral (%)	Unimportant (%)	Very Unimportant (%)	Response Total
AAEA meetings	19	50	25	6	0	16
SAEA meetings	6	25	31	38	0	16
WAEA meetings	0	19	38	31	12	16
Regional Extension committees	44	50	0	6	0	16
Regional research projects	12	50	25	12	0	16

Source: Department Head Survey, 2006.

ponent of the extension professional's life. Thus, opportunities to go to meetings for professional development and temporarily escape daily demands are an important part of staying current and avoiding being "depreciated out."

Many extension professionals value regional extension committee meetings as an opportunity to share new publications, program ideas, successes, and failures, and to develop collaborative projects. Department heads seem supportive in that nearly all rated these meetings very important or important (Table 1). For department heads, the AAEA meetings were clearly the second most important meetings with regional association meetings rating relatively low. Historically, extension specialists have complained that the AAEA meetings offered little of direct benefit to them in program development. However, the AAEA Extension Section formed in 1999 has annually proposed a track designed to appeal to extension professionals. These sessions have been accepted by the AAEA Board and have been well attended by professionals with outreach interests. SAEA continues to encourage ideas to better meet the needs of its extension members (Jensen) and has also historically been receptive to ideas to cohost alternative professional development opportunities—for instance, a cost of production/enterprise budget preconference.

Institutional policies and/or lack of funding can, however, limit opportunities for professional development (this is not unique to extension faculty). In some institutions, departmental funds are never provided for

out-of-state travel. In most places, financial support is provided if the faculty member is presenting a paper or poster or participating in a symposium or otherwise representing the department. Depending on the interpretations, these policies likely favor travel to AAEA, WAEA, or SAEA meetings. Opportunities to present papers or posters are not always part of regional extension committee meetings, and typically only one person can "officially" serve as the state representative on the regional committee. Meetings outside the profession are especially appropriate for some faculty, given the interdisciplinary nature of much integrative/application/extension work. Funding for professional development from outside sources can be a difficult sell, unless it provides an opportunity to report on a project being funded.

A surprising response was the degree to which department heads lacked enthusiasm for sabbaticals. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being great encouragement given, only one respondent selected greatly encouraged (1 on the scale). Five respondents each selected 2 and 3; three respondents selected not encouraged (5 on the scale). Finding the right professional break in programs and projects is difficult for all faculty and is often compounded by family circumstances. The opportunity to rebuild skills through sabbaticals is a unique benefit available to faculty and should be encouraged at all institutions. An alternative for consideration is exchanges like those facilitated by the Big 12 institutions for 2 weeks of work at another institution. Faculty develop proposals

explaining the objectives of the exchange, proposals are reviewed at the campus level, and successful applicants continue to have salaries and benefits paid and are reimbursed for expenses such as travel and housing. This can be a great way to jump-start or wrap up a project. Consulting is another form of scholarship of application, but in many institutions (62%), faculty with extension appointments are precluded from in-state consulting.

### Maintaining Standards of Integrity

Misuse of data seems to be increasingly in the news. It goes without saying that integrity is expected of faculty and extends beyond academic issues to include being well-prepared for presentations. The Extension culture is interesting in that wide adoption of materials is desirable, in-state, out-of-state, and around the world if possible. I recall being shocked the first time I saw a piece I had written printed verbatim in the local newspaper's agricultural column with no attribution to me. I have come to accept that I write for the extension educators in the state and that they can use materials in any way they choose to promote our programs. Materials get passed around among educator networks and the source sometimes gets lost. With the advent of the Internet and websites, the potential for broad use without the author's knowledge is very possible unless materials are password-protected (countering the outreach philosophy). Making it a practice to notify others when materials are adopted or adapted would help the developers in their self-assessment as well as encourage continuation of their efforts.

### Assessing Scholarship

Assessment is an important component of scholarship, requiring standards for measurement and excellence. Boyer advocates a portfolio to demonstrate to the satisfaction of peers that high standards have been met, with flexibility to include a broad range of communications. A portfolio should demonstrate that the discipline is understood, that key issues have been clearly defined, and that creative

insights have been clarified and well presented in a variety of forms. In addition, self-evaluation along with peer review and evaluation from students, current and former, is recommended. The criteria for peer review should be well defined along with data-gathering procedures.

The report *Scholarship Assessed* followed *Scholarship Reconsidered* and suggests six criteria for evaluating scholarship of all forms: clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique (Glassick, Huber and Maeroff). Because measuring excellence requires a standard for comparison, the criteria and related assessment questions help delineate the standards. Schwab notes that efforts to standardize scholarship assessment will have been an exercise in futility unless universities accept evaluation standards, and she argues that faculty with scholarship activities in extension and engagement must be rewarded for universities to become "engaged."

Within the agricultural economics profession, scholarship assessment is undertaken by department heads, promotion and tenure committees, publication reviewers, meeting and grant proposal reviewers, awards committees of professional societies, and individuals who choose to self-assess. The process for peer review of the scholarship of discovery/research is seemingly well formulated relative to the scholarship of integration and application. Scholars write journal articles based on original research. Venues for publication of journal articles are well known and the process for peer review is clear. Presenting a paper at a meeting is often a first step and public discussion of the future journal article a second step on the path to a journal publication.

Though publications are a common component of extension programs, rarely are external reviews required for them (Table 2). Although some institutions require internal peer review, it is often cursory. Popular press articles that receive wide visibility and circulation typically require no peer review. With the emergence of websites as a tool for information delivery, relatively more information undergoes little scrutiny before being presented

**Table 2.** What Standards for Peer Review Apply to Educational Materials Prior to Publication/Distribution?

	No Peer Review Required (%)	Cursory Internal Peer Review within the Department (%)	Substantive Internal Peer Review within the Department (%)	External Peer Review (Outside Department but within the University) (%)	External Peer Review (Outside Your University) (%)	Response Total
Popular press articles	69	25	6	0	0	16
Newsletters	31	50	12	6	0	16
Extension articles and fact sheets	7	47	47	0	0	15
University bulletins and reports	0	12	50	25	12	16
Regional publications	0	13	33	20	33	15
Proceedings articles	31	19	6	19	25	16
Website material	19	75	6	0	0	16
Software tools	20	53	13	0	13	15
Journal articles	0	6	6	12	75	16

Source: Department Head Survey, 2006.

to the world. Depending on the popularity of the website and its traffic, electronic resources may be viewed as much as or more than popular press articles. Newsletters, extension articles, and fact sheets most often receive a cursory review within the department. University bulletins and reports, regional publications, and proceedings articles are more likely to require external review. Only for journal articles is external peer review prior to publication the norm.

The path for peer review of other communication tools and forms of scholarship is less clear for a variety of reasons, including a lack of outlets for refereed items, few well-formulated methodologies for review of output not in publication form, a lack of incentives to solicit peer review, and a lack of incentives for peers to volunteer to review materials. In recent years, relatively few new publications have been developed by regional Extension committees. The Journal of Extension, an outlet for some Extension scholarship, is very broad-based and not discipline-specific. And publications are by no means the only component of a successful educational program. PowerPoint presentations, brochures, posters, lesson plans, websites, reference notebooks, and other resources, along with grant reports to ensure continued funding, may be more important to the success of a program.

Spending more time on peer review takes time away from other projects, which means less time for existing projects and less time to develop new projects. Having materials reviewed before making them publicly available means a longer turnaround time before material can be used. However, providing extension audiences with higher-quality resources and/or providing one-stop shopping for the "best of the best" has some appeal, in my view. Providing the customer with quality assurance should have value to the customer, which ideally would lead to continued support for extension efforts. And an additional benefit to seeking outside review would be greater awareness in the larger academic community of who is currently working in a specific area.

A variety of reports, some of which might be usefully applied to either portfolio devel-

**Table 3.** Types of Reports Required Annually of Extension Faculty

	Response %	Response Total
Activity reports with hours by program area	40	6
Number of presentations, attendance	80	12
Number of publications	67	10
Number of web pages and traffic counts	33	5
Evidence of adoption of program materials within the state	40	6
Evidence of adoption of program materials beyond state borders	20	3
Independent evaluation of presentation skills and preparation	13	2
Description of new programs developed	67	10
Description of team efforts	60	9
Description of multistate efforts and of time allocated to these efforts	47	7
Written evaluation of in-service training provided	27	4
Written evaluation of individual programs delivered	27	4
Other	20	3

Source: Department Head Survey, 2006.

opment for administrative reviews or self-assessment, are often required of extension faculty. Some, however, are primarily tools for the university to document accountability. The consolidated USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES) requires reports from states on multistate cooperation and team initiatives, for instance, so that need often trickles down to faculty with extension appointments. Table 3 summarizes the agricultural economics statistics for types of extension reports required annually. Most reports focus on measuring inputs and outputs. Though national program leaders complain about a dearth of information available to report regarding contacts and impacts, number of presentations and meeting attendance are the most frequently reported data. Evaluations that lend themselves better to scholarship assessment—evidence of adoption of materials, effectiveness of the presentation, and written evaluation of training provided or programs delivered—are much less common. And it is not clear that outcomes are being evaluated or that impact is being measured for current or past program participants in any of the reports.

Another form of scholarship assessment and one that helps document the regional or national reputation required for promotion and tenure is an award from a professional society. This form of scholarship assessment for ex-

tension programs is underutilized by many institutions; typically, fewer than 8 nominations are received for AAEA awards, and even fewer are received at the regional association level. (It should be noted that some institutions regularly nominate a person, group, or program.) The AAEA now recognizes outstanding career contributions for persons with less than 10 years and more than 10 years experience and also gives a group award; the SAEA focuses on program excellence and the WAEA offers both a project and a career award. Although some effort is required to prepare a nomination packet, none of the application processes are overly burdensome.

All stress the focus on an important problem and the appropriate use of scientific methods and economic principles. The awards vary in their requirements for effective presentation, with the AAEA and WAEA criteria seemingly stressing the target audience, whereas the SAEA criterion clearly emphasizes the need to go beyond the target audience to the academic community. Although subject to award committee members' interpretation, the criteria for awards align fairly well with the *Scholarship Assessed* recommendations, other than lacking a requirement for reflective critique. Having served on the SAEA, WAEA, and AAEA Extension Awards Committees at different times, I can attest that the weakest parts of packages are the documentation of im-

pacts and behavioral change in the target audience. An opportunity exists here to make a great contribution to scholarship.

As eXtension evolves, a variety of scholarship issues are raised. In an early "think tank" session in December 2002, the sometimes perverse incentives built into our system were raised (ADEC Think Tank). Individuals are rewarded for publishing, and sometimes counts are as important as quality. Thus, faculty are rewarded for publishing articles, regardless of how new or inventive. An example used was "How many roach control fact sheets are needed?" but it could easily have been "How many cash flow fact sheets are needed?" The first eXtension call for proposals in fall 2005 sought broad, inclusive, collaborative communities of practice to develop engaging, interactive website content that is synthesized, nonduplicated, and the "best of the best." Are agricultural economists well positioned to compete for funds in this arena? Do we have the institutional framework or incentives needed to promote national cooperation?

Other questions that are raised by my reflection on scholarship include: Do the scholarships of integration, application and teaching/learning require written publications? Do outlets exist to feature such writing? Can peer review of nonwritten scholarship be conducted? If so, what is the most effective procedure? Does the lack of peer review for many extension materials contribute to a lack of scholarly respect? Are our audiences getting the best possible resource if the resource has not been reviewed? Must young faculty with Extension appointments focus on journal publications early in their careers, postponing Extension scholarship for the tenured portion of their careers? Do senior faculty who have significant Extension/teaching appointments receive the recognition they deserve as scholars within the profession? How can departments, regional committees, regional associations, the AAEA, and sections of the AAEA better foster the scholarships of integration, application, learning and teaching?

### **The Environment for Agricultural Economics Extension Scholars**

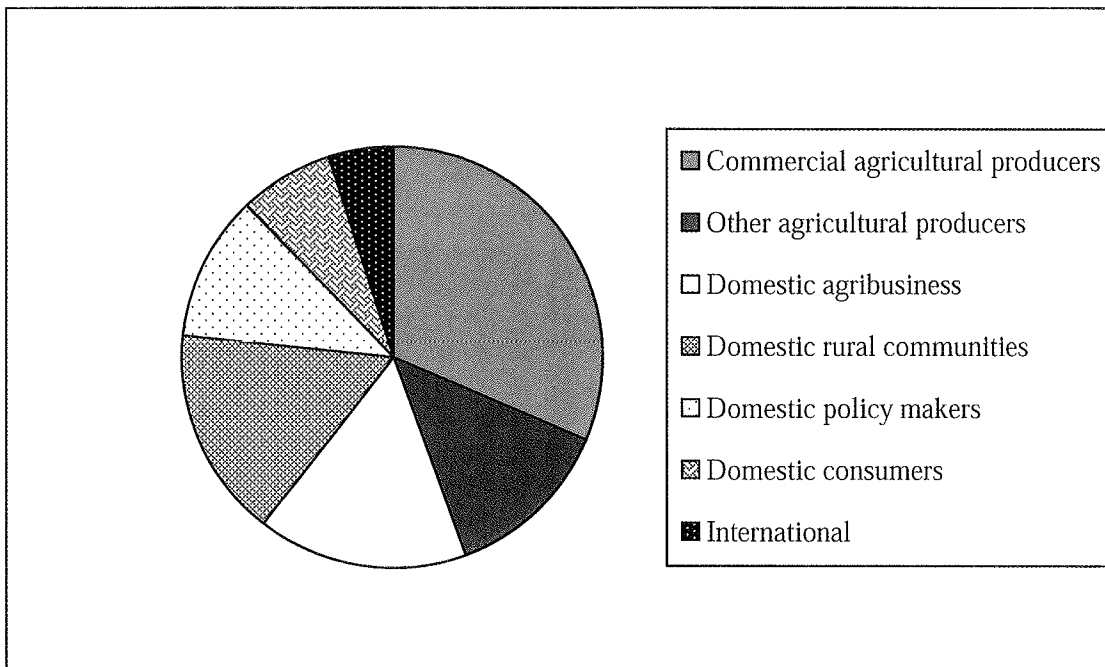
Although a significant amount of programming continues to address needs of commercial agricultural producers, agricultural economics extension has a diverse portfolio. Figure 1 shows the average across reporting institutions for estimated percentage of total programs by target audience. Different institutions have very different mixes for programming with respect to target audience (Figure 2) and with respect to depth of programming (Figure 3). High-depth programs were defined as intensive courses spanning 20 or more contact hours with participants; low-depth programs were described as a two-page fact sheet or a 30-minute talk on a program.

What individual extension scholars do evolves from the position description under which the person is hired, responding to changing signals and reflecting what is personally interesting and rewarding. The appointment (teaching/research/extension [T/R/E] split), direction from leaders, demands from audiences, funding incentives/constraints, personal interests, and collegial collaborations all impact program choices. Further discussion of a few key and unique features of the environment that impact the extension scholar follows: the organizational framework for extension, funding, and accountability and evaluation. Although the environment can positively contribute to scholastic development, it can also impose constraints. Though administrative structures and leadership do not necessarily impact the extension scholar in day-to-day activities, they do shape the work world in a more global sense. Reductions in base funding necessitate fund-raising to support programs, taking time away from scholarly efforts. Responding to demands for evidence of accountability and program impact is also time-consuming. Changes in the environment require adaptation by the scholar.

### **The Organizational Framework for Agricultural Economics Extension**

The Extension Service (ES) is under the leadership of CSREES. It accomplishes its mission





**Figure 1.** Target Audiences for Agricultural Economics Extension Programs (Source: Department Head Survey, 2006)

through national program leadership, formula funding and competitive grant funding to universities, and varied partnerships and collaborations. CSREES programs in the Economics & Commerce area “promote increased prosperity and economic security for individuals and families, farmers and ranchers, entrepreneurs, and consumers across the nation.” Because national program leaders typically have no budgets for programming other than responsibility for grants and partnership agreements that flow through them, they fulfill their extension leadership roles through participation in regional and national meetings and through collaboration with state specialists, primarily electronically.

Though research, extension, and education are under consolidated leadership at the national level, within states extension and research missions are often managed separately, which can lead to less than ideal meshing of plans and initiatives. Within the university, extension scholars operate within a variety of organizational models and administrative struc-

tures. In some states, extension faculty serve under different administrators in separate geographic locations. Appointments influence the individual’s scholarly path. Eleven responses to the survey included one institution with 100% extension appointments only, one with three-way T/R/E splits only, two with either 100% extension or three-way T/R/E splits, and three with every combination. Three of the 11 had no three-way splits. Whether the appointment split is a matter of policy or happenstance is unknown. Some universities with Agricultural Economics departments have no official links with ES because they are not land grant universities, but faculty engage in outreach work (14 of 17 survey respondents said that faculty who do not have formal extension appointments are expected to conduct outreach programs and activities).

Most agricultural economics extension units consist of primarily tenure-track faculty. In some states, though, extension faculty are not tenured even if they have PhDs. Two of 14 departments reported having nontenure-

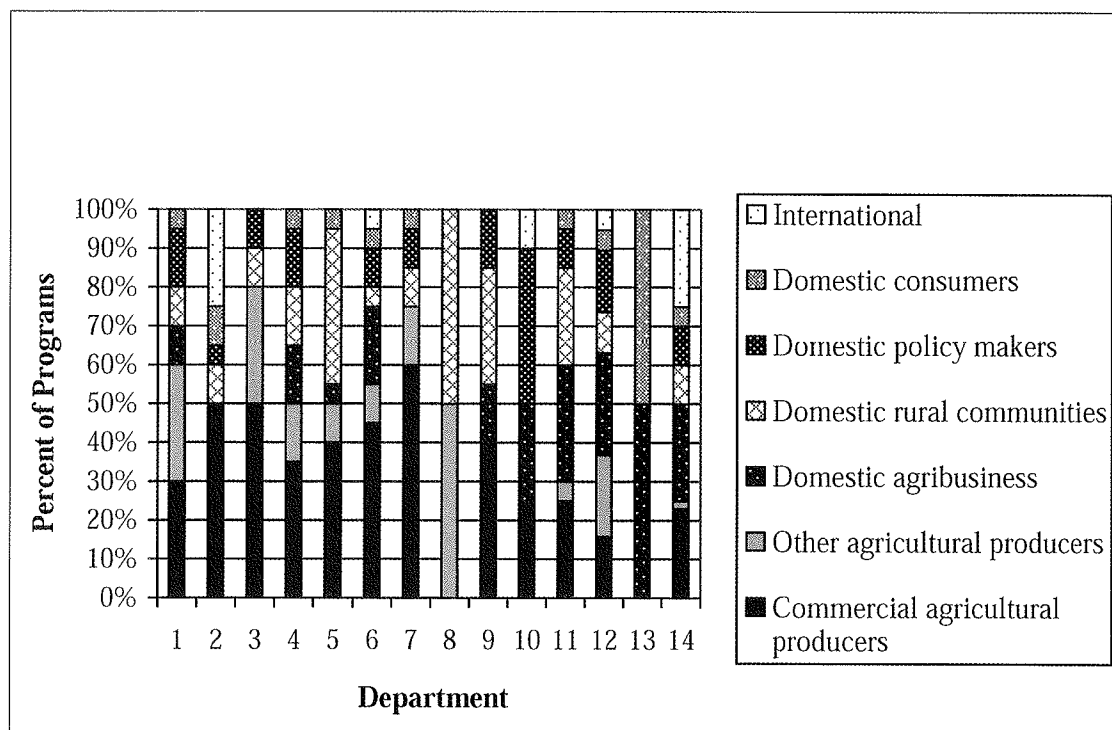


Figure 2. Target Audiences for Agricultural Economics Extension Programs by Institution (Source: Department Head Survey, 2006)

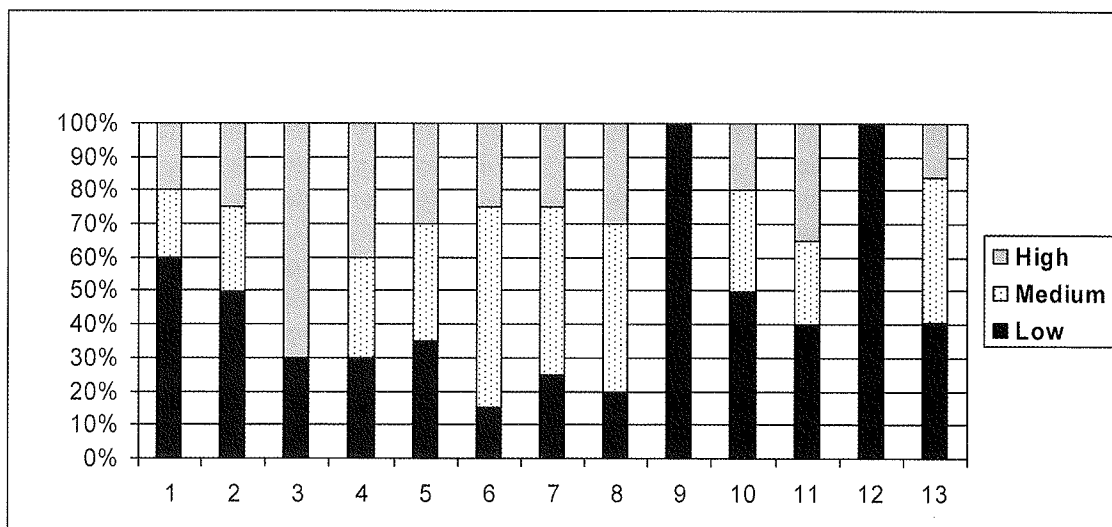
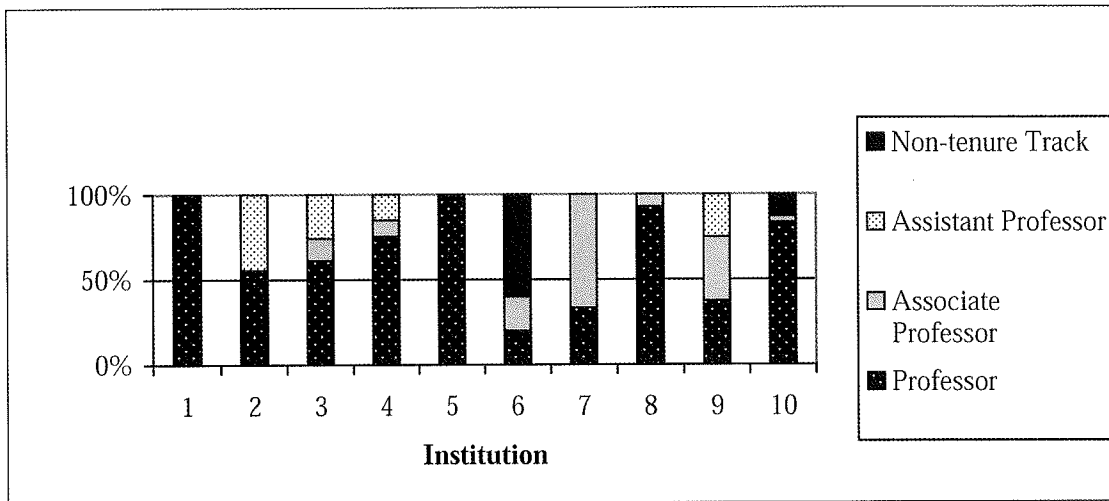


Figure 3. Depth of Agricultural Economics Extension Programs (Source: Department Head Survey, 2006)



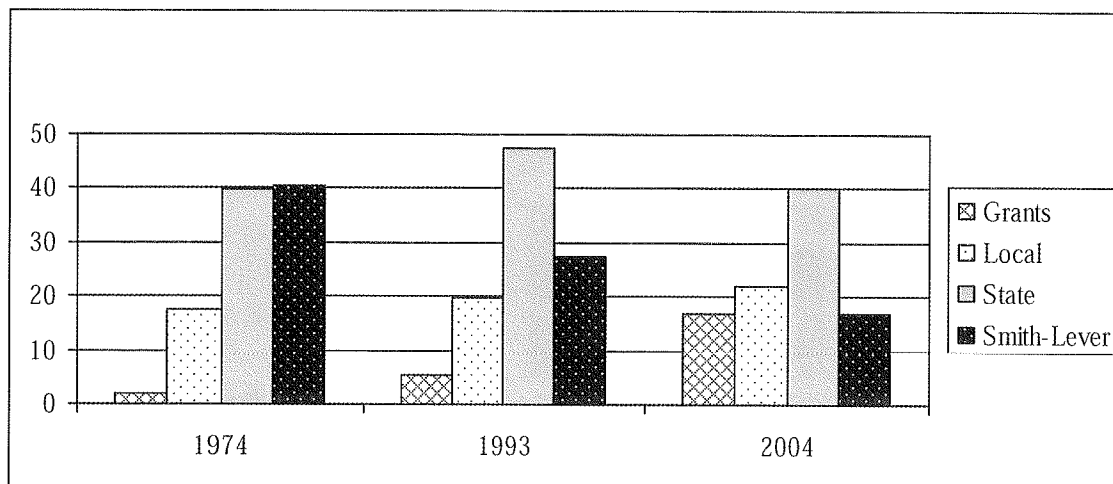
**Figure 4.** Agricultural Economics Extension FTEs by Institution (Source: Department Head Survey, 2006)

track faculty with Extension appointments. An equal number reported having nontenure-track faculty in research and relatively more (5 of 14) had nontenure-track teachers. One of the reporting institutions relies heavily on nontenure-track professionals for extension programming (Figure 4). Although the survey data do not indicate widespread use of nontenure-track positions for extension work currently, conversion of traditional tenure-track positions to nontenure-track positions raises concerns about a failure to value extension scholarship specifically and perhaps scholarship more generally. Though joint appointments with other departments and institutions are regularly discussed as future opportunities, only two departments had campus-based faculty with split appointments with other departments, and only one shared a faculty member with another institution within the state. There is clearly a need for further research on changes in extension staffing.

In most departments, faculty with extension responsibilities report to the department head; however, in some institutions, an Extension leader also has some administrative capacity. Survey results indicate that in approximately half of the states, agricultural economics extension leadership is primarily

provided by the department head; 29% indicated it is primarily provided by an Extension leader within the department appointed by the department head. Others listed agriculture program leaders, department head with agriculture program leader, department head with extension faculty, and planning groups of faculty and Extension administration as having primary leadership. The department head is most often the person responsible for providing input regarding promotion and tenure and salary adjustments (85%) and serves as the liaison with Extension administration (70%).

In response to a question regarding the level of influence on agricultural economics extension programming by individuals or groups, respondents rated individual faculty most highly (55% very significant plus 36% significant). Although the agriculture program leader followed with the next most "very significant" votes (27%), that position was not applicable in 23% of the responses. Industry leaders were notable at 80% for very significant or significant influence; administration (vice president, dean, associate dean, and agriculture program leader) received votes of significant or very significant from 60–65%. Government officials and regional Extension directors were also said to be significant, but



**Figure 5.** Extension Program Funding Mix, United States (Source: Wooton)

advisory committees were mostly not applicable. In only one instance was a departmental advisory committee said to have a very significant level of influence on agricultural economics extension programming. Extension faculty typically set their priorities based on perceived needs and demand for information, with input gathered from many sources, including frequency of phone calls and e-mails. These results concur with my sense that in many departments we have collections of entrepreneurial individuals with extension programs. Thus, although the institution provides the setting and some resources, the individual is largely responsible for the development of an extension program.

### Funding

In responding to the question, "What is the most significant change in your department's Ag Econ extension programming in the last 5 years (delivery method, subject matter, other)?" the most frequently mentioned items by department heads were an increase in use of websites and distance education followed by a decrease in personnel. Many changes are likely budget-driven. Concerns about the share of the national research and extension funding "pie," the size of the pie, and the apparent increase in use of competitive grants for fund-

ing were raised as early as 1979 (Toussaint). Toussaint noted that, as a profession, we were not particularly successful in generating new state funds for our departments, and suggested that we must "exert extra efforts to do good research and extension and to let the right people know of this work if we are to keep from losing even more of the probably smaller pie" (p. 27). (Interestingly, several survey respondents said that marketing extension programs was not applicable as a leadership role.) Faris comments that legislatures often prefer to fund action programs rather than research and educational programs and that personal contact plus delivery of needed programs and research can influence perceptions of needs.

Several current perspectives on Extension funding were provided at the June 2005 Southern Extension Committee meetings (Clouser; Cross; Love; Wooton). Wooton showed changes in the mix of funding for extension programs from 1974 to 2004, pointing out the growing significance of grant funding and the conversion of base funding to integrated projects and "other extension" projects (Figure 5). To retain base funding, state extension administrators must now demonstrate that 25% of those funds are applied to multistate efforts and that 25% of the funds are integrated extension-research efforts.

Clouser noted that though federal funding

has been in a "free fall" as a percentage of overall funding, extension in the Southern region has experienced modest growth in real terms since 1970, primarily because of rapid growth in state funding supplemented by growth in county funding (Figure 6). Most states now derive more than half of their extension budgets from state sources, and state plus local funding account for more than 70% of funds in 9 of 12 southern states (Clouser). Love noted that county money rarely leaves the county, that many states have 85–95% of budgets tied up in salary and related long-term commitments, and that it is not unusual to have a 10% shift in level of funding from year to year.

The good news within the profession is that more department heads report that funding increased in the last 5 years than reported decreases. For the seven states reporting an amount, the average dollar amount of extension operating/maintenance funds allocated to individual faculty and staff was approximately \$4,000 (presumably from state and federal sources).<sup>3</sup> Obviously, extension specialists cannot drive around a state extensively and attend more than one professional meeting unless they have supplemental funds. Overall funding for agricultural economics extension programs is quite diverse across institutions (Figure 7). There are perhaps opportunities for us to learn from each other about how to diversify our funding portfolios.

The federal trend to substitute competitive grants for formula funding, combined with increased reliance on state and local funding, user fees for programs, multistate programming, and privatization of some programs has significant implications for scholars. Many research and extension programs do not lend themselves well to short time frames for conception to completion. The focus of grants is subject to political influence and frequent

change. Different kinds of accountability measures may be required with different funding sources. The constant erosion of federal funding may result in programs that lack continuity, and subsequent moves toward short-term funding may result in more short-term employees, with shifts in services provided to a few deliverables and fewer documented contributions as staff shift to new activities (Love).

Identifying, cultivating, and/or capturing funding is likely to become more time-consuming. Licensing curricula and protecting intellectual property rights involves legal experts and, like developing, reviewing, seeking approval, for and administering grants or contracts, is not costless. Establishing user fees also involves transaction costs (both pecuniary and nonpecuniary). Unless administrators shoulder the burden of fund-raising, the need to generate funding, document accountability, and evaluate programs requires significantly more time and effort, which reduces time available for scholarship.

### **Accountability and Evaluation**

Wadsworth states that accountability and evaluation differ in that evaluation documents behavioral change as a result of work whereas accountability measures how well we did relative to our plan of work. The need for increased accountability is something that extension faculty hear frequently. Woods outlined a brief history of extension accountability, beginning with the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977, which required an evaluation of the economic and social consequences of extension service programs. Successive legislation through Farm Bills and the Government Performance and Results Act has continued to reinforce the need for accountability. USDA agencies are not alone in undergoing scrutiny, A November 2005 report on engagement in land grant and state colleges notes that political, education and funding factors are the primary reasons for committing time and expense to measuring the impact of outreach/engagement activities.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics may not be strictly comparable; one department head noted that travel is paid for at the college level at that institution. At another, the allocation is used to pay for phone bills, in-state and out-of-state travel, student assistants, duplicating, postage, and any other expenses incurred in the individual's extension program.

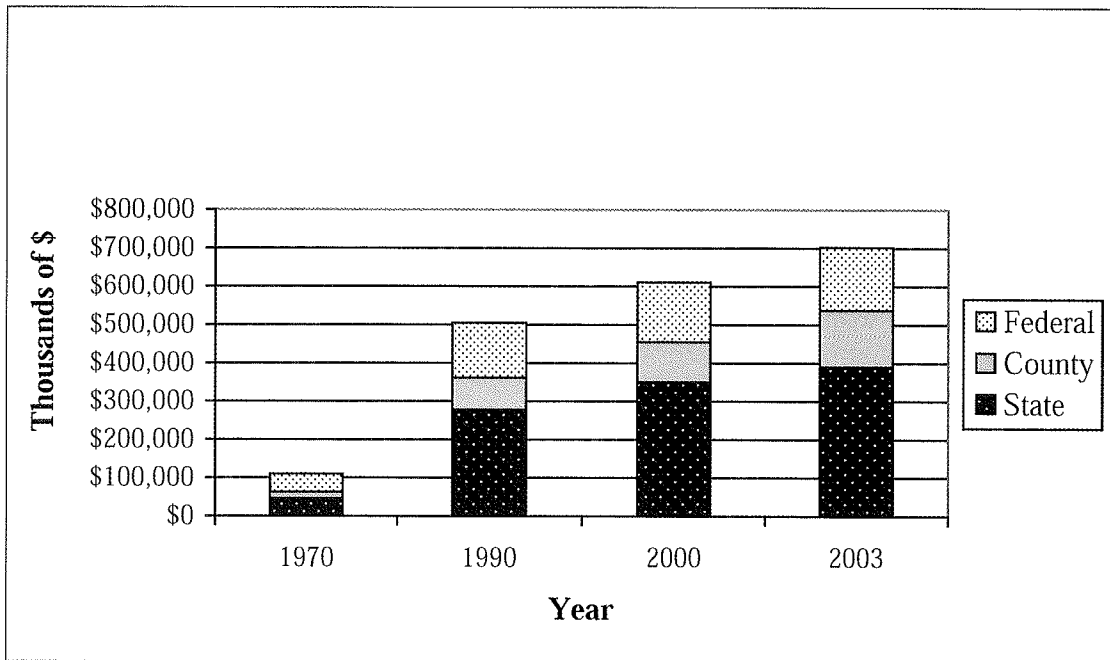


Figure 6. Funding Sources for State Extension Programs, Southern Region (Source: Clouser)

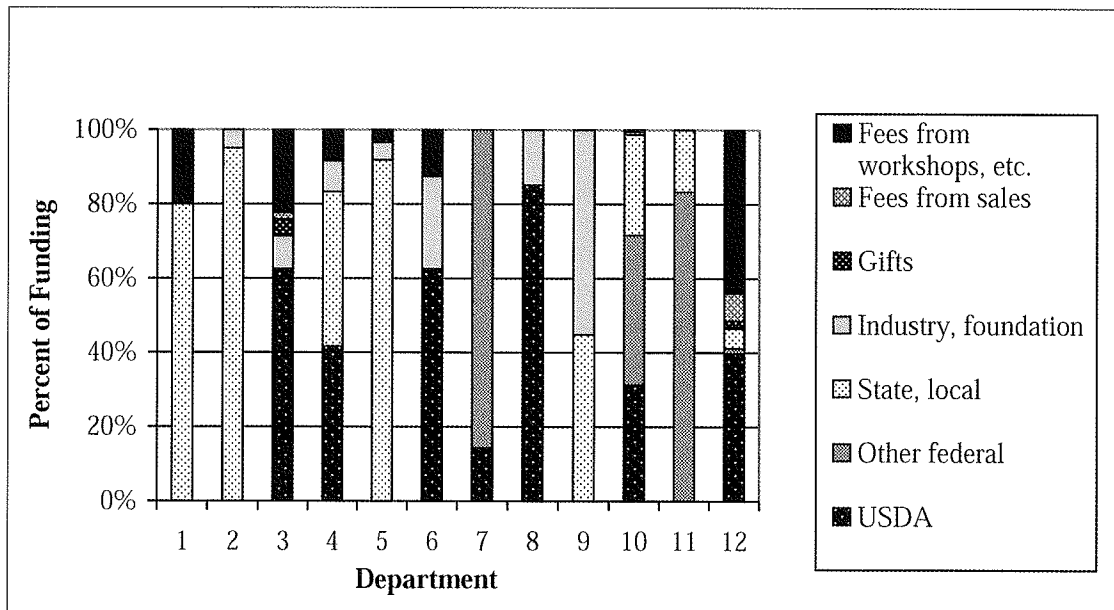


Figure 7. Agricultural Economics Extension Funding (Source: Department Head Survey, 2006)

Table 3 summarized the types of reports extension faculty prepare. Extension faculty feel burdened by reporting requirements that may include an accounting of hours by program or initiative, supplemented with counts of publications, meetings, media releases, and contacts by gender and ethnicity. But clearly there is room for improvement in documenting the impacts of our work, and there is a need to do so. For instance, a search of the Science and Education Impact website (<http://impact.csrees.usda.gov/>) using economics for a keyword showed no listings for 2005.

### Challenges and Opportunities

Martin emphasizes that agricultural economics departments must fully embrace the extension mission and create constituencies to prosper. In *Built to Last*, the authors argue that people are inspired by the idea of building a great, enduring organization, that leaders should embrace fundamental concepts that endure, and that productive change need not destroy the foundation of great organizations (Collins and Porras). They maintain that a visionary organization separates core values and purpose, which are universal and enduring within the organization, from operating practices and business strategies, which should necessarily be adapted to the local and changing environment. Perhaps some of Ag Econ extension's operating practices should be reassessed. Just because we've always done things a certain way doesn't mean that we have to continue to do so. It has been said that the tradition of the land grant is being untraditional. Are we upholding the tradition and changing within agricultural economics extension to meet the needs of today?

Some thoughts (a mix of general and specific ideas) on where we might do better with regards to integrative and applied forms of scholarship in agricultural economics follow. Within the profession, more discussion of scholarship at professional meetings and in journals would be beneficial, for example, to debate the notion of applying consistent standards regardless of form of scholarship. Administration as well as promotion and tenure

committees within departments should also be engaged in this discussion. Opportunities to foster professional development should be encouraged in many forms, including sabbaticals and faculty exchanges. Leaders need to understand why investing in scholars' continued professional development is important and should find funds to support it. More peer review of outreach materials, especially websites, should be undertaken. A scholastic investment in project impact assessment would benefit many efforts, because trends in funding and accountability are not independent. More institutions should commit to recognizing applied and integrative scholarly work through existing award channels.

Although the overall extension organizational structure is not likely to change significantly in the short run, continuing to blur the lines (funding and otherwise) between Extension and research makes sense. Individually and collectively, working with CSREES leaders to provide data, reports, and connections is necessary to ensure the profession's visibility in the national arena. Work is needed to reclaim education funding that has gone to other agencies and groups in recent years and to maintain core funding that sustains projects not easily developed and concluded in a year or two. Identifying ways to fund regional projects that are needed but do not lend themselves well to annual grant funding calls would be helpful. Developments in eXtension and other similar special projects funded through CSREES should be monitored to ensure that agricultural economics has an opportunity to contribute

SAEA can contribute to the enhancement of integrative and applied scholarship for members. Workshops could be offered on a variety of topics: effective presentations, reflective critique, adult learning preferences, using the latest technology with different audiences (personal response systems with extension audiences, for example), and effectively and efficiently evaluating programs and assessing their impacts. Though not directly related to scholarship, a session on time management (and/or how to say no to "opportunities") might help some of us find or make

more time for scholarship. Because department heads assign relatively low importance to participation in SAEA meetings for Extension faculty, the SAEA offerings must be appealing enough to faculty members to want to come and to identify funds to do so.

The challenge of developing a nationally recognized extension program can be a bit overwhelming for someone with a newly-minted Ph.D., well-trained with respect to research, but with little training in program development and delivery. Mentoring opportunities in conjunction with annual meetings might be a valuable resource that could be facilitated by SAEA across state lines given the small number of extension faculty within some states and lack of mentoring programs in others. SAEA includes lifetime achievement award winners in a symposium at the annual meeting, which allows participants to benefit from their collective wisdom. Adding a symposium periodically to feature extension and teaching award winners would provide further visibility to the individuals and allow lessons learned to be shared with others.

The southern extension committees have historically done well in collaborating on educational programs related to national initiatives such as a Farm Bill or trade agreement. However, almost annually there are other issues or topics (drought or high fuel and fertilizer prices, for instance) that are timely for which we may not be sharing integrative and applied materials timely. An opportunity to discuss or showcase work at the annual meetings that does not require a submission in August prior to the February meeting might provide additional incentive to do so.

My wildest idea is to convert abstracts of journal articles, if not the articles themselves, to audio files for CD. As extension professionals accumulate windshield time while driving to extension programs, rather than reading the 9/11 Commission Report to be better-informed citizens, we could read the JAAE more regularly and timely and become better informed agricultural economists. ☺<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> On second thought, SAEA probably couldn't afford an insurance policy that would cover accidents caused by a driver falling asleep. . . .

In a 100% Extension position at Oklahoma State University only a few years out of Iowa State University's Ph.D. program, I recall finding comfort in Ladd's article, "Thoughts on Building an Academic Career," that there were many routes to success in agricultural economics (Ladd). Then, as now, I consider myself fortunate to have landed at an institution where extension programming is valued and rewarded. At times, it has been challenging to feel part of the profession's mainstream when publishing journal articles is not your primary focus. In Ladd's article, he stressed finding and using your comparative advantage. A question arises within our academic departments and larger community as to whether we have the flexibility to allow individuals to do just that and whether it is our intent.

Senator Morrill noted, in a speech 25 years after the Morrill Act was passed, that the "design comprehended . . . instruction as any person might need—with the world all before them where to choose . . . higher instruction for the world's business, for the industrial pursuits and professions of life." His vision and the land grant foundation are glorious. As agricultural economists, we must do all that we can, individually and collectively, to continue to nurture scholarship and effectively share its fruits with our many audiences to ensure that this treasure endures.

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