LISTENING AT THE GRASS-ROOTS LEVEL

by Martha Jackson

UK’s Cooperative Extension Service has always emphasized the role of volunteers, and that role is being strengthened even more with a renewed focus on county extension councils.

We’re the grass-roots people,” said Vivian Gentry, who is president of the State Extension Council. “We’re the ones who are asked what the issues are and how should we go about trying to solve these issues,” said Gentry, of Bowling Green, who began a lifelong involvement with Cooperative Extension as a 4-H’er.

Now, with Re-Envisioning (an organizational self-study completed last year), county extension councils are more important than ever. “We always need feedback so we can determine whether issues are being addressed and make sure they are,” Gentry said.

Statewide advisory groups for agriculture, family and consumer sciences, and 4-H now have a vote on the State Extension Council—an other change that has been brought about through Re-Envisioning.

Extension is planning to support members of the state council in providing leadership development for county councils.

Full-Time Leadership Development

Ralph Prince, longtime 4-H agent in Fulton County and an area program director for 10 years, has a new job. He is assigned full-time to assist agents in strengthening county councils.

Prince thinks it is essential that a county council “be representative of the county demographically and geographically and that its members represent some group of clientele.”

In his on-site work with counties across the state, Prince sees “a new commitment among agents and leaders to make sure council membership is what it needs to be.” A Web site with resources that counties can use also is available.

Prince said the leadership development “has been a team effort across the board” of district directors, regional coordinators, and the program and staff development group.”

County council members “believe in what they’re doing,” Prince said. “They multiply our efforts, and they shorten our learning curve.”

—Paul Warner, Assistant Director for Program and Staff Development, contributed to this article.

To view the Web site with resources for county councils, go to www.ca.uky.edu, link to Extension, then use a Quick Link to reach Kentucky Cooperative Extension Advisory System.

Ralph Prince talks with the Logan County Extension Council.
From Across the Commonwealth

Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service programs are locally defined and locally administered. Here are a few examples of county Extension programs that are making a difference in people’s lives.

Rural Health Scholars
The Webster County Cooperative Extension Service promotes rural health in a traditionally underserved county by partnering with the West Area Health Education Center. Together, they help rising high school seniors who are interested in and qualified for a career in health professions. The program provides these students the opportunity for hands-on experience with local health professionals so that the young people get a “try-on” experience in a health career to see if it fits their career needs. Students selected for the program receive a stipend to participate.

Visions of a Better Community
The Carroll County Extension Service Visioning 2020 survey allowed 300 residents to express their concerns about the future of Carroll County. Following the tabulations of the survey, Extension personnel held a breakfast to present the data to county leaders and interested residents. Four topics emerged as primary concerns of the citizens surveyed: education, communication, land use planning for smart growth, and beautification. As an outcome, committees have been formed to address each of these concerns.

New Cooperative Nursery
The cooperative Kentucky West Nursery has been established. The 20 members of the cooperative set some 50,000 trees last year as nursery stock. Extension service personnel in Graves and Calloway counties helped train the members in integrated pest management techniques, with which growers were able to protect their nursery stock and save money by using pesticides only when necessary.

Teaching Begins at Home
The Letcher County Cooperative Extension Service’s Parents as Teachers (PAT) project is a real help for low-income families. The curriculum used with these families emphasizes the importance of parents being their child’s first, and most closely involved, teachers. The early boost given to youngsters by their parents as teachers can make a real difference in the rest of their lives.

Keeping the Environment Clean
Farmers use the contents of all manner of containers, and those containers need to be cleaned and recycled to help maintain a clean environment. In Christian County, the Cooperative Extension Service established a pickup site for rinsed, used containers so that farmers could dispose of them safely. Last year, nearly 19,000 pounds of pesticide containers were rinsed and recycled through the program. The result is a cleaner environment in Christian County.

Farm-Fresh at the Market
Rockcastle County Cooperative Extension Service helped local farmers diversify and develop new sources of income by working to establish a local farmers market. Nine growers, working with Extension agents and elected officials, have organized to offer a farmers market on Wednesdays at the county fairgrounds and on Saturdays at Renfro Valley’s festival field. Farmers have a new market, and consumers have a new place to buy fresh-from-the-farm produce.

Retooling for Immigrants
The Hispanic population in Kentucky has grown 173 percent during the last decade and now totals more than 60,000 persons. In response to this changing demographic, the Grayson County Cooperative Extension Service prepared Extension Homemaker lessons about immigration trends and their economic and social consequences. Nearly 40 Homemaker leaders were trained in five counties. Several of the participants said they wanted to help the immigrants, and some said they wanted to learn Spanish.
Training Beef Producers
With the increased need of income to replace lost revenue from the reduction in tobacco quota, farmers in Fayette County want to increase beef production. In a joint venture with Extension programs in Bourbon, Harrison, Nicholas and Clark counties, the Fayette County Cooperative Extension Service initiated a Master Cattlemen program. It educated producers in all areas of beef cattle production—genetics, reproduction, facilities, animal behavior, management skills, nutrition, and industry issues, among others. Program outcomes have been positive, with graduates increasing revenues between $6 and $10 per hundredweight of cattle.

Growing Tourism
Tourism is a big industry in Pike County, with revenues exceeding $48 million annually. The Pike County Cooperative Extension Service, through its community and economic development program, worked closely with the Pikeville-Pike County Tourism Commission, Pike County Chamber of Commerce, and the Pike County Judge Executive’s office to promote tourism in the county. Extension organized planning meetings for festivals held in the area and is helping develop self-guided tours of areas of historical interest. Through these programs, tourism is expected to increase.

Learning about Country Hams
For the past several years, the Lincoln County Cooperative Extension Service has organized a 4-H country ham project to teach youngsters a variety of skills associated with curing a country ham, including sanitation, science, and history. The project also has helped the young people with public speaking, since information learned can be used in the speech that is required if they exhibit their cured hams at the state fair.

Healthy Kids, Healthy Adults
Today 20 percent of children have been labeled as either overweight or obese, two conditions that can lead to health problems later in life. The Bullitt County Cooperative Extension Service is doing something about overweight and obese children through a program called Be Fit for Your Heart’s Sake, which rewards physical activity in children and adults. The 16-week program was attended by 29 adults and 110 children who learned the importance of proper nutrition and exercise for a healthy life.

Making Heart Health # 1
According to the Kentucky Department of Vital Statistics, more than a third of Green County deaths are caused by heart disease. The Green County Cooperative Extension Service, working with the Lake Cumberland Extension Homemakers, made heart health the number one priority. More than 80 community leaders were trained in the eight-county area about cooking with less fat, salt, and sugar and how to shop for a heart-healthy diet. Did it make a difference? Absolutely. Ninety-eight percent of those trained planned to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables, and 95 percent planned to consume less fat in their diets through eating more fish and beans.

Maintaining the Ag Heritage
A survey conducted by the Bracken County Cooperative Extension Service showed that community residents identified maintaining the county’s agricultural heritage and retaining youth in agricultural fields as major issues. As a result, Extension, working with the local FFA chapter, the 4-H Council, the Bracken County Ag Advancement Council, and the Phase I Development Council, created a youth agricultural grant program. In the program, youth interested in carrying out an agricultural project could apply for a matching grant of up to $500 to complete it. Through the program, 34 youth received grants.

Thinking Green
To help people learn ways to protect the environment on an everyday basis, the Metcalfe County Cooperative Extension Service provided a program called Think Green—A Look at New Home Products. More than 1,600 families learned to make consumer decisions based on environmental concerns, including simple habits such as using energy-saving lighting and appliances and using environment-friendly cleaning products.
Volunteers Make a Difference

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.
—Winston Churchill

Winston Churchill didn’t know it, but he was describing the impact that Kentucky Cooperative Extension volunteers and lay leaders have in Kentucky. Working together, our staff and volunteers carry out our mission of making a positive difference in the lives of Kentuckians through research-based education.

Our volunteers and lay leaders include those serving on boards and councils, 4-H club leaders, home-maker volunteers, and others.

The scope and importance of the volunteer efforts in Kentucky Cooperative Extension was clear at several recent events I attended. One, in early February, was a meeting of the State Extension Council, a group that gives of its time to help us “make the best better” in all of our Extension programming. I continue to be impressed by and grateful for the efforts of this group.

Another was a meeting of the 4-H Volunteer Leaders Forum, also in February. At that forum, about 600 volunteer leaders and staff gathered in Lexington over two days to learn how to do a better job of being leaders and mentors for Kentucky’s youth. Many of them received service awards to mark the years they have spent giving back to the community through 4-H.

Members of county Extension councils and Extension district boards across the state perform the same kind of great service in each of Kentucky’s 120 counties.

Our volunteers also perform valuable service nationally. In March, the national Council for Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching (CARET) met in Washington, D.C., to discuss how to communicate the importance of our land grant mission to Congress. Again, we had volunteers from Kentucky in attendance, including official CARET delegates Patti Ann Morehead and Larry Jeffries and State Extension Council President Vivian Gentry. These folks gave of their time to help make the case with our congressional members’ staffs of the importance of supporting extension and the other land grant missions of the University of Kentucky.

Although not easily measured, the impact made by our volunteer leadership is real. And, to steal a phrase from Winston Churchill, our volunteers are “making a life by what they give” daily in Kentucky. These contributions are greatly appreciated.

—Larry W. Turner, Associate Director, Cooperative Extension Service

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—Winston Churchill

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