Globalizing Extension -- A National Initiative for U.S. Land Grant Universities

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Abstract

This paper describes a current national initiative to strengthen the international dimension of the U.S. Cooperative Extension System (CES). This system consists of a partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Cooperative, State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES); state extension services at land-grant colleges and universities in every state and territory; and local extension offices in more than 3,000 counties. In today’s era of heightened globalization, this system is increasingly viewed as a tremendous resource in helping citizens better understand the implications of a globally interdependent world. In addition to describing the national initiative, the paper discusses the rationale for extension services engaging in this effort, describes states’ past and current attempts to internationalize programs, analyzes a survey of state extension directors concerning their practices and attitudes toward globalizing their extension services, and outlines some of the obstacles hindering the internationalization process.

The authors emphasize the need to demonstrate the benefits to local clientele that result from internationalizing extension programs. They also stress the importance of linking international activities to multicultural programs, thereby serving diverse domestic audiences and immigrant populations here in the U.S. Recognizing the added challenge of dwindling state budgets, the authors conclude that domestic and international concerns can no longer be dealt with effectively in isolation of one another; therefore, dedicating resources to internationalizing extension is not a luxury, it is an integral part of meeting the needs of CES’ clientele.
Introduction and Purpose

As we enter the 21st Century, we are asked by AIAEE conference organizers to address the theme of “Going Forward in Agricultural and Extension Education: Trends, Policies, and Designs Worldwide.” This paper and the presentation are designed to share progress on a national initiative to strengthen the global dimension of state extension services in the United States. USDA’s Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), in collaboration with land-grant universities nationwide, is planning to build upon successful efforts already underway in a number of states, as well as develop new models for internationalizing extension programs. A steering committee has been formed representing all regions of the country and a national conference is planned for March 2003. CSREES has committed an initial $200,000 to fund the initiative over a two-year period. Michigan State University Extension serves as the managing entity for this initiative.

For more than twenty years, Extension leaders have offered a vision for international extension. Some states have initiated efforts and interest is growing, but financial challenges at the local, state and federal level are limiting factors. Up until now, there has not been a concerted effort to share best practices among states, nor has there been a systematic approach to improving existing models and developing new, cost-effective ones. The paper will examine attempts states have made to internationalize extension; discuss results of a recent national survey of extension directors concerning globalization; identify obstacles impeding the internationalization process and outline appropriate ways to overcome obstacles.

The U.S. Cooperative Extension System (CES) is uniquely poised to help Americans deal with complex issues related to globalization – as well as influence how the public perceives the rest of the world and our country’s role in it. Whether it entails increasing market opportunities overseas, understanding the implications of international trade agreements, acting responsibly in a global environment that knows no boundaries, or using cross-cultural skills to better serve diverse domestic audiences, extension agents and specialists can play a critical role.

The Mandate to Internationalize Extension

The need to strengthen the international dimension of the extension system has been recognized for some time. In 1984, the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) identified an international mission for the CES. Although much of the mission statement was related to expanding overseas activities, the following domestic agenda items were also included:

- To broaden the experience base and enhance the professional capabilities of U.S. Extension personnel;
- To improve the ability of the Cooperative Extension System to explain and interpret the global market and its effects upon U.S. agriculture.

That same year, USDA’s Extension Service (now CSREES) cooperated with the Consortium for International Cooperation in Higher Education (CICHE) to initiate a project
aimed at enhancing citizens’ understanding of issues related to world hunger, international development, and trade. Through the publication of resource materials, regional workshops, and a mini-grants program, the project was aimed at integrating international perspectives into ongoing CES programs.

A 1989 publication entitled Global Perspectives for Extension claimed that “CES can help the U.S. public understand how the global marketplace functions and how the economic health of the U.S. agricultural community is connected with international development.”

More recently, ensuring that “international awareness is an integral part of appropriate outreach and extension activities,” was one of seven national goals outlined by the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) in a 2000 vision statement. They went on to say that extension staff should be provided incentives to “become involved in community-based activities and to help sensitize the community to international issues.” The statement claimed that “even the smallest business and the most provincial farm are no longer insulated from the effects of international forces.” In a 2002 report entitled, “The Extension System: A Vision for the 21st Century,” ECOP stated that “the challenge for extension is to provide leadership to demonstrate local implications and potential consequences of an interdependent world.”

As you will see in the next section, a number of individual land-grant institutions have also recognized the need to provide their extension staff with an understanding of global issues and their local implications. CSREES’ current national initiative will share various models and best practices developed by state universities over the years. The rapid rate of globalization and the changing demographics here at home during the past twenty years have heightened the need for the CES to take a more systematic approach to internationalizing programs for its clientele.

### Past State Approaches to Internationalizing Extension

Over the years, state extension services have developed innovative approaches aimed at better understanding global interdependence and its local implications. This section outlines actions by some states recognized for their early efforts in internationalization. Michigan State University Extension has had an International Extension Training Program (ITEP) since 1980 and has trained more than 200 agents and state specialists. Program objectives include preparing state extension staff to develop international outreach programs for local clientele, responding to the needs of individuals and communities impacted by cultural diversity, and improving local county programs by helping extension personnel apply their expanded knowledge and increased cultural sensitivity to local problems and programs. Like several state programs, an overseas experience is a key part of the training.

The North Carolina Extension Service developed “North Carolina Agriculture in the World” in 1989. The four-part program for extension staff included training seminars, visits to multinational corporations and government officials in Washington, DC, a 2-week study tour of six European countries, and a two-day review and program development session.
The Ohio State University Extension Service initiated internationalizing efforts with the formation of an International Committee in 1989. This committee provided direction to the internationalization efforts establishing goals and relate to expanding exchanges with professionals from other countries, focusing on efforts that benefit Ohio’s clientele and professional staff development opportunities. OSU Extension has developed a variety of guidelines which support internationalization efforts, including short term out-of-country assignments, hosting international guests, participation in international conferences, and development of studies. In 2000, Extension and the International Programs in Agriculture Office established a competitive internationalizing mini grants program.

Washington State University has been a national leader in promoting the internationalizing of research, education, and extension programs. One example is its International Marketing Program for Agricultural Commodities and Trade (IMPACT) Center aimed at enhancing competitiveness in the global marketplace. The Center develops and, with the help of extension agents, provides information to Washington businesses to assist them in marketing and exporting agricultural commodities.

From 1990-95, USDA’s Extension Service developed and managed the Polish-American Extension Project that utilized more than 100 extension personnel from 31 land-grant systems. The considerable domestic impact that these staff had upon their return to the U.S. has been documented by Andrews, Place, and Crago (2001).

Montana State University has developed courses, such as “Follow the Grain,” that provides students, extension staff, and private sector employees a first-hand look at how agricultural products are produced, processed, marketed, and exported overseas. By traveling to see this entire process, participants better understand the complexities of international trade and the impact on local producers and communities.

A number of states have linked international understanding and cross-cultural competency. Recognizing the need to understand better the cultural heritage of its growing Hispanic population, the Pennsylvania State University Extension Service has taken extension staff to Costa Rica. The University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension sent agricultural producers to Central America to visit the families of immigrants working on their Wisconsin dairy farms. Purdue University hired a graduate assistant to work on multicultural training workshops and international programs for extension in Indiana. The West Virginia University Extension Service holds annual Multicultural Camps for students to learn more about other countries and global issues and bring this knowledge back to their schools and communities.

These cited cases are by no means an exhaustive list, but merely represent the types of activities states have undertaken to internationalize their programs. 4-H youth exchanges, partnering with other international organizations, participating in development projects abroad, and hosting foreign visitors are some other ways that extension is working to enhance global understanding and the close connection between domestic and international concerns.
Extension Directors Surveyed

A study initiated by Mike McGirr, Program Leader, International Extension USDA/CSREES, and the Steering Committee for Globalizing Extension during the fall of 2002 sought information from Extension Directors on the current status of their international efforts. An electronic survey instrument consisting of 10 items asked directors or their designees to describe the current state situation related to internationalization and to share comments.

Thirty-two states responded to the survey instrument, a 64% response rate. The results document existing efforts and practices critical to the internationalizing initiative. A summary of the 2002 Study (McGirr) reports that although most states responding to the questionnaire claimed they are committed to strengthening the international dimension of their extension programs, most indicated that efforts were sporadic, ad hoc, and carried out by only a small group of interested faculty or staff. An area for further study is a follow up with nonrespondents to determine if nonresponse is indicative of a lack of interest in internationalizing programs.

Fifty percent of the directors described their current activities aimed at internationalizing their extension system as significant. These efforts are reported in Table 1.
Table 1. Current Practices and Approaches

**Local Programs to Create Global Awareness**

- X Ethnic crops
- X Training international visitors on American agriculture
- X Sustainable agriculture
- X 4-H youth development projects and curriculum
- X International educational program targeting county faculty and including a travel component
- X Latino Outreach Conference
- X International extension workshop for Extension Annual Conference
- X Formation of international extension working groups or committees
- X Innovative programs for local clientele, community development exchanges, integration with state’s cultural diversity initiative,
- X In-depth training programs, conferences and workshops
- X Integration into leadership development programs for future leaders to develop skills in understanding the forces affecting change, including international forces

**Involvement in International Programs**

- X International projects abroad
- X International exchange programs (example: Poland Exchange)
- X Ukraine project of establishing extension systems in a transition economy environment
- X MOUs with universities in Asia and formal/informal collaborative relations with counterparts in Japan, Philippines

**Publications**

- X Publications and agriculture and development handbooks to help staff integrate international content into programming
- X Development of fact sheets and informational packets
- X Guidelines for international visits and visitors

**Conferences**

- X Participation in international conferences and developing study tours

**International Travel Opportunities**

- X International competitive mini grants program for travel and development
- X Travel to learn from colleagues in other countries (example: New Zealand to learn about rotational grazing, Eastern Europe to learn about Zebra mussel infestations, Ireland to support community development.)
Multi-state efforts were not evident although Michigan State University Extension has invited states in the North Central region to participate in its International Extension Training Program.

One of the positive benefits of involvement in international projects was the professional development opportunity these provided to extension professionals, particularly county-based staff. This supports the work of Andrews, Place and Crago in the book, *Agricultural Extension Systems: An International Perspective* (2001)

Sixty percent of the states responding have identified an extension person who was providing leadership in the area of internationalizing extension. Three directors reported that committees provide leadership for extension international programming in their states. A smaller number of states (25%) reported that their current extension plan of work included an international component.

The current attitude of directors to internationalizing extension was measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1 being not at all important and 5 being very important. The mean reported was 3.32, which would place the rating closest to somewhat important. Interest in participating in the national initiative was guarded with most state directors responding “perhaps.” Three responded with a positive yes and one responded “no.” The survey did not clearly state what “participation” in the initiative would entail – this may have added to the hesitancy to commit on the part of some directors. Through open-ended comments it became clear that international components incorporated into programming for local clientele took priority over out-of-country projects where the benefits to clientele were not as evident.

Although a different survey instrument was used, the results were compared to Ludwig’s (2001) study of U.S. Extension directors who described efforts of their extension system to globalize, which had a 98% response rate. Similar patterns emerged from both studies. Directors in the 2000 study reported they were moving toward globalizing. Barriers identified in both studies were tied to limited financial resources available to support the effort and the priority of serving “clientele at home.”

**Best Practices Shared and Compared.** States were invited to share how they have approached capacity building, policy articulation, and support for an international dimension in Extension at the March 2003 Conference on Global Perspectives: Internationalizing Extension. The goal of the conference supported the overall intent of the CSREES projects: to assist states and the national extension system in bringing an international or global focus to our work with domestic audiences. Targeted as participants were individuals who served in leadership roles in Extension systems and spokespersons for internationalizing extension. State teams were also encouraged to attend the conference.

The results of this conference will be summarized for inclusion in the presentation. Papers presented at the conference cover a wide range of topics related to internationalizing extension. Included topics related to best practices; innovative approaches; funding opportunities; obstacles to internationalizing; gaining support from university administrators,
extension clientele, and other stakeholders. Also identified were ideas on how to share international experiences effectively with domestic audiences, building partnerships with global organizations and foreign institutions, professional development for extension staff, and enhancing cross-cultural understanding.

**Mini-grants.** Announcement of an opportunity to compete for mini-grants to help fund staff training and outreach efforts is planned for the 2003 AIAEE Conference. The outcome of projects funded by these grants must be to enhance individual states and the national CES in bringing an international or global focus to our work with domestic audiences. This may include enhanced institutional capacity, outreach to meet educational needs of local communities, or piloting a new relationship that could lead to future partnering.

Innovativeness and creativity in approaches plus the potential for sustainability will be criteria used in evaluating proposals. Extension services from land grant institutions will be invited to compete. Multi-state efforts are encouraged and while more than one proposal can come from an institution, the second proposal must be as a minor partner or multi-state partner. Collaboration can include either two or more units within an institution, a land grant institution with a private sector or NGO partner, or two or more land grant institutions. Specific guidelines will be finalized prior to the national conference and will be shared as a handout during the AIAEE presentation. Proposals will be due in June of 2003 with announcement of funding in July 2003. The grant period will be from July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004. A second national conference, scheduled for the fall of 2004, will follow the completion of mini-grant funded efforts to examine lessons learned and project next steps.

**Outcomes**

Outcome indicators for the CSREES project include:

1. The development of a national network of state extension systems interested in internationalizing/globalizing their programs.
2. A system change at the state level with a positive change in the level of organizational capacity.
3. Human capacity building with a positive change in the quantity or quality of staff preparation and actions for involvement in international assignments and in educating American audiences.
4. A change in outreach to citizens with international dimensions in programming becoming evident.

**Obstacles Impeding the Internationalization Process**

The obstacle most often cited by extension directors and administrators was a lack of funds to develop and implement programs to internationalize extension. This problem has
grown worse in the last two years due to the severe constraints and cutbacks in state budgets. Organizers of the CSREES initiative hope to demonstrate cost-effective means to internationalize programs and provide decision-makers with research-based information to outline confidently direct benefits to local clientele that result from internationalizing extension. This same information can be utilized by extension staff needing to justify an international experience or by county extension directors needing to convince local governments, boards, and advisory committees about the benefits of a global approach.

When the administrative hierarchy of a university system is supportive of internationalizing research, teaching, and extension programs, an environment conducive to encouragement for faculty involvement in international projects, partnerships, and exchanges with institutions in other countries, and seeking innovative ways to develop international programs will be created. When administrative support is lacking, or when there are negative perceptions concerning the benefits of internationalizing programs, the obstacles grow higher. Many in leadership positions within the land-grant university system still draw clear distinctions between domestic and international priorities and concerns. One of the objectives of this national initiative is to demonstrate that the line between these two areas has become increasingly blurred due to globalization. Neither domestic nor international issues can be addressed in isolation. Unless perspectives and actions change, international activities will always be considered a luxury by many, rather than an integral component in serving local clientele.

The public’s view of foreign competition and resentment concerning U.S. assistance efforts aimed at helping these competitors is reflected in how clientele may perceive internationalization. Ludwig’s (2001) study of directors showed concern about clientele support as one of the major barriers that directors perceive. Public perceptions related to international activities occurring at the expense of local needs also lead to a lack of support. There is a need to demonstrate that globalization can create opportunities as well as problems – and that a globally-informed extension service can assist clients to succeed in today’s interdependent world.

A lack of information and experience in developing effective approaches to internationalize extension can also be an obstacle (Ludwig, 1999). Extension services in some states have had very little experience in attempting to globalize programs and may not have been exposed to approaches used in other states. By sharing successful models and best practices through this national initiative, it is possible that states will realize that there are cost-effective means to internationalize programs and that there will be tangible and beneficial results from doing so.

A final obstacle is that extension staff are already very busy and tend to be pulled in several directions – adding another responsibility to a heavy workload meets resistance. This problem has been intensified by staff reductions in many states. If a new responsibility is viewed as a low priority, not seen as integral to accomplishing programmatic objectives, or not rewarded through performance evaluations, resistance will remain high. The correlation between internationalizing programs and improved program delivery must be demonstrated.
We hope this initiative can help extension staff view international activities as effective ways of meeting clientele needs rather than merely an added burden.

**Implications for Educators**

A recent public opinion poll conducted by the American Council on Education determined that there is broad support for institutes of higher education to expand their role in educating the public about international issues. There was a consensus that expanding this outreach role could pay significant dividends to the institution, the local community, and society at large. Too often we have heard from university administrators that they cannot afford to internationalize their programs. With increasing globalization, it is our contention that they cannot afford not to do so. The gap between domestic and international issues is shrinking and extension cannot fully serve local clientele until it develops effective programs to enhance public understanding of global issues. Information and education under gird our willingness to change. We challenge those who attend the AIAEE presentation to brainstorm on how we can create a truly internationalized CES for the future.

The world is changing fast; what happens on the other side of the world can affect even the most rural areas of the U.S. Likewise, what happens in the U.S. impacts the global community. Economically, socially, environmentally, and, as in the case of September 11, sometimes tragically, we are all inextricably linked. In order to succeed in today’s interdependent society, our citizens must have an understanding of how global issues impact their daily lives. A final product of international capacity building is the integration of international concepts throughout everyday extension programming (Andrews, Place, Crago, 2001). Extension is in a unique position to provide this education at the local level to increasingly diverse clientele – and we hope to enhance the organization’s ability to do just that.

**References**


