Innovative Approaches to Internationalizing U.S. Extension Programs

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Abstract
The purpose of this carousel discussion is to inform conference participants about recent initiatives to strengthen the international dimension of state and local extension programs. It is also intended to solicit new ideas concerning effective outreach efforts that place local issues in the context of global interdependence. In addition to examining international events and trends that effect domestic communities, the presenters will also address how changing demographics within the U.S. necessitates new approaches to effectively serve an increasingly diverse audience. Although discussion will be focused on extension’s experiences in the U.S., the need to include a global approach to extension programming is worldwide. Other countries are operating in a global environment and are also faced with changes in domestic populations.

USDA’s Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), in cooperation with U.S. land-grant institutions, launched an initiative in 2003 to strengthen the international dimension of state extension services nationwide. With leadership from Michigan State University, the initiative sponsored two national conferences, supported a competitive grants program, developed a web site and began to build a network of committed extension professionals throughout the U.S. Providing leadership in a global society has been a reoccurring theme recently in state and regional extension conferences. Several states have designated staff to act as liaisons for internationalizing extension and support for this has grown among extension’s professional organizations. Recent paper presentations at AIAEE have highlighted states’ experiences to internationalize their extension service.

Since its inception, the U.S. Cooperative Extension System has succeeded to the degree that it has successfully adapted to societal changes. In recent years, those changes have increasingly been influenced by trends and events occurring beyond our borders. In today’s globally interconnected world, even the most remote rural community in this country is impacted by globalization. Here at home, changing demographics in many communities are creating new audiences for extension. 47 million people in the U.S. speak a language other than English at home and 12% of our population is foreign-born. Unless extension strengthens the international dimension of its programs, it will not be able to fully serve the changing needs of its local clientele. Whether it entails increasing market opportunities overseas, understanding
environmental and health issues that know no national boundaries, or using cross-cultural skills to better serve diverse domestic audiences, extension can play a critical role.

The following are examples of topics that will be raised during the carousel discussion:

- Successful state/local approaches to internationalizing extension
- Applying foreign cross-cultural experiences to serving domestic clientele
- Incorporating new communication technologies
- Barriers to internationalizing extension (and how to overcome them)
- Countering public misperceptions concerning global interdependence

Handouts providing resource information on strengthening the international aspects of extension programming will be provided to all carousel participants.

Keywords: International, extension, land-grant, multicultural