East-Central Regional Advisory Council –
November 12, 2009

The meeting was called to order at 7:45 p.m. by chair Debbie Winder. Volunteers introduced themselves and gave short reports on Extension activities of note in their counties:

Unit Reports

Champaign County – Hispanic population in Champaign County is increasing. To ensure we’re serving that population, we’re offering a 3-week series, Dining with Diabetes. By having participants prepare culturally traditional foods in a family setting, we hope to increase adoption of good eating habits. Fourteen families took part – and a followup diabetes support group is being formed.

Clark County – CED staff member Tiffany Macke helped 3 communities with Asset-Mapping: Casey, Westfield and Martinsville. All three have been struggling for several years. With Tiffany’s help, each community has developed a grass-roots organization that’s really taken hold and is making a difference: festivals, painting projects, cleanup days, opened a volunteer-run resale shop with proceeds going to community projects. Tiffany and Extension have not led these hometown efforts, but have served as a vital catalyst.

Coles County – With help of a bank and crop insurance service, Extension co-opped a deal for a crop survey done in mid-August by Extension Educator Dennis Bowman. They picked 2-3 locations in each township. Had 54 samples and calculated the mean average for projected yield. Dennis mapped the results. Project drew a lot of interest from the community; will repeat next year.

Crawford County – Working with Ameren and electric co-ops to develop home energy conservation programs. May be used in conjunction with home energy audits. Extension Educator Jay Solomon and Specialist Ted Funk will assist. Home energy was ID’d as the #1 interest in the Together We Can survey, and this is a response to that. Programs will also deal with related issues: mold, carbon monoxide, etc.

DeWitt County – Strong Master Gardener program. Offering workshops for adults and Junior Master Gardener program for kids. JMGs grew a garden at the fairgrounds and donated the produce to those who need it locally. MGs also do radio programs. Their Master Food Preserver tested pressure canners and offered a salsa workshop.

Edgar County – 4-H Recycling project has made enough money to subsidize 4-H program fees. Building a new show ring at the fairgrounds that will have everything indoors. Budget’s in the black – and working on establishing special interest clubs.
Effingham County – Effingham hosted 330 at State Master Gardener Conference. Effingham, Coles and Fayette planned tours. Effingham staff and volunteers assisted in many phases of the conference. Conservation Field Days at Ballard Nature Center reach 500 fifth-graders and 200 adult volunteers – an awesome hands-on opportunity for children to learn about natural resources.

Ford-Iroquois Unit – 2nd Annual Youth Science Day. Ethanol plants are new in the area, so they used the opportunity to do Biofuel Blast-off with many local kids – showing how the process of making renewable fuels works. Did it with one school in each county, six different science classes.

Livingston County – Unit Crops Educator compiles a nationwide Soybean Variety Listing of Soybean Cyst Nematode-resistant varieties. He’s done this for the last 21 years, and the listing now includes 1,586 varieties. Growers & seed producers from Canada to Florida & everywhere in-between can use the data to make better production decisions. Hard copies are available for $5, but the list is available for free online.

Macon County – Macon County is in a good situation financially due to good fortune and good management. Farm Progress Show food stand made a lot of money. As a Council we’ve been looking at how we operate – strategically thinking about the future. Disbanded 4-H Foundation in favor of a 4-H and Extension Foundation. Moving from a $5K fundraising operation to a $50K operation, thanks to the Farm Progress Show opportunity. 4-H will continue to be flagship and get money raised in its name – new foundation board is now forming and will be setting goals soon. Will involve local people who know about tax planning, estate planning and how to ask for big checks. Learning a lot from McLean and Edgar Counties. Local clients are warming to the idea of cost-recovery and revenue-generation – programs are attracting people we’ve never attracted before because we look like we offer value. Staff-sharing arrangement with Piatt has been win-win for both counties; does not seem to have added too much more work for staff. New office building at Richland is a green building. Some things are costing more, but we’re much better off and saving money in some ways (energy savings with electricity generated, etc.).

McLean County: Losing part of the 4-H fairgrounds, so will need to re-think some things. Hosting a farm economics multicounty conference on Dec. 15. Extension is a major part of Money Smart week in late April. Unity Center, an after-school program, has 45 youth and 25 families – 26 kids on waiting list. Very diverse group, culturally.

Moultrie-Douglas Unit: A local 4-H club is made up of developmentally disabled adults.

Piatt County – Resource-sharing with Macon County is working well. Model continues to save us money, and has significantly increased programming and cost-recovery opportunities. Four new 4-H clubs in the county this year. Shooting sports has all four needed volunteers. Beginning a major recruitment effort for Master Gardener volunteers; Macon County’s (shared) horticulture educator is assisting with that.
Vermilion County: County Director Stacy Larson and Community Worker Paige Brown have done a super job of rejuvenating 4-H in the county. Extension was on the skids for a while, but they’ve done wonders. 4-H enrollment is up. 4 new clubs including 2 Clover Buds. MGs strong and Internet Masters average age is 55 -- these people who weren’t “born and raised” in Extension are discovering our other programs. Shooting sports program has just exploded. All of the required volunteers are trained and available. Shooting sports has brought in a demographic that never would have been affiliated with Extension in any other way. New program partners, as well. Vermilion County programs and finances are on a strong upward trajectory.

4-H Report

Minutes from spring meeting were approved.

Dr. Nigel Austin introduced himself – he has been interim regional director for just over a year. “Thank you for all you do for Extension – without your input and participation, the programs mentioned in the reports would not be possible.”

Nigel also introduced Dr. Denise Legvold, the new State 4-H Director, who returned to Illinois in May. Most recently she was with 4-H in Alabama, but before that she served as a County Director in northeastern Illinois.

Denise: “We are about being a volunteer-led, staff-assisted youth development organization.” Excited volunteers bring more resources, volunteers and members – really do extend our reach. Staff are involved in Everyone Ready – a professional development opportunity on a national level to help staff work more effectively with volunteers. Denise urged Council members to ask their county staff how they’re involved in Everyone Ready.

4-H work in Illinois falls into three recently defined “product lines”:

- **1st product line**: Positive Youth Development: members in community clubs, clubs for kids of military families and SPIN clubs SPIN (Special Interest) clubs. All it takes to establish a SPIN club is 1 adult and 5 or more youth meeting 6 or more times. The hope is that youth who are attracted to new SPIN clubs may grow interested in community clubs. SPIN clubs can focus on just about any topic of interest to kids, as long as there’s a caring adult who can provide guidance: robotics, theater arts, fishing, shooting sports, environment, etc.

- **2nd product line**: Youth Education – five initiatives: employability, physical fitness, thinking green, healthy relationships, science-excited. Sometimes are one-time events/activities. Youth Science Day is a good example. Looking for ways to aggregate data that shows these programs are making a difference. We must be able to define impact: the **so what?**
• 3rd product line: We have experts who are highly qualified to train other experts. Going to get better about marketing that expertise and collecting revenue when we go out to external groups – Scout leaders, teachers, church youth group leaders, etc. -- and offer in-service education for them on a fee-for-service basis.

Statewide, we are emphasizing BIG-M: the four elements that are critical to accomplishing positive youth development: belonging, independence, generosity, mastery. BIG-M has to be present in any and every club we have.

Denise has instituted a “5-punch program” for counties. Six dollars of the new $20 4-H program fee comes to the state – at that money pre-buys five visits from educators each year to cover travel expenses. Denise encourages Council members to ask their local staff how they plan to get the most out of their five punches.

New color flyer available, promoting the VALUE of 4-H. Based on a Tufts University study that shows 4-H members are more likely to go to college, less likely to engage in risky behaviors, and so on.

Extension State Advisory Council (ESAC) Report

Brian Basting and Karen Hawthorne are on ESAC, and Brian is serving as chair. The Former Dean of ACES, Dr. Bob Easter, is now Interim Provost & Interim Chancellor. Dr. Dennis Campion is gone from Extension and Dr. Bob Hoeft is now Interim Associate Dean and Extension Director. Dr. Hoeft is committed to building a stronger relationship between campus and field. Need to connect from the top down and the bottom up – taking research-based programming to the field, and getting feedback from the field to be sure the research is meeting a need.

Brian spoke of Extension Partners, a grassroots voice for Extension statewide and in Springfield. Extension Partners was vital to Extension obtaining 09 and FY10 funding. To continue to do the work they do, and perhaps more, they could use more memberships. 10 new memberships per county is a goal – that would be 1000 statewide. Individual membership is $20; group membership is $50. Hope council reps will go back to their counties and encourage everyone to donate $3-4 to fund a group membership for every council.

Election of Officers for the 2009-2010 program year

Debbie Winder, Piatt County – chair
Mark Sturgell, Macon County – vice-chair
Norma Calvert, Clark County – secretary
Interim Regional Director’s Administrative Update

New Extension Director – Bob Hoeft – has served as Crop Sciences Department Head on campus. Dr. Hoeft has been at U of I for 36 years -- came to the University as an Extension specialist, and started as Director in September.

As Brian mentioned earlier, Dean Easter has been named Interim Provost & now Interim Chancellor. Board of Trustees is beginning a search for President. Campus interim roles and search outcomes may directly or indirectly affect Extension.

Master Gardener Conference hosted by Effingham County was really good – encourage MGs throughout the state to attend those conferences when they have a chance.

Fiscal outlook is not very rosy, especially with state funding. State owes the U of I many millions of dollars – so we’re having a cash-flow problem. We don’t know where County Board Match will be this year – whether it will come in at all, or what the percentage will be. That’s why Extension Partners is so important. Based on projections from last year, it’s going to be difficult for some units – some are very challenged right now, and will not be sustainable “as is” with further funding cuts. Please talk with your councils and County Director about how local programs can be fiscally sustainable over the long run. Need to begin having dialogue about how we’re going to continue delivering quality programs even if state funding (CBM) or other funding keeps declining. We need to think about sharing resources – not outright mergers – with neighboring counties. It’s working very well for Macon and Piatt Counties right now.

Fiscal problems also affect hiring practices. University is restricting hiring of staff through Jan. 1 unless a position is absolutely critical. Had a small window of opportunity to do some hiring. The following positions are on hold til at least Jan. 1: Livingston County Director; Ford-Iroquois Ag and Natural Resources Educator, Champaign County Health, Wellness and Youth Educator; Champaign Center Youth Development Educator; and SPIN Club Youth Educator to be based in Newton (serving our southern counties). Given that these positions were approved before they were put on hold, hopefully we can get them through the system shortly after January 1.

Be sure councils have discussions with staff about being closed (or not) between Christmas and New Year’s.