East-Central Regional Advisory Council meeting notes

May 6, 2010

Attending via TeleNet: Pat Hildebrand (Jasper, Cumberland, Clay, Fayette), Debbie Winder (Piatt), Woody Rinehart (Coles), Paul Ruff (Edgar), Diane Feasley (McLean), Aaron Carlin (Champaign), Kenny Crane (Crawford), Bob Westendorf (Effingham), Kathy Sancken (Livingston), Sheila Gruelle (Moultrie-Douglas), Nigel Austin (EC Interim Regional Director), Kathy Reiser (Associate Regional Director).

President Debbie Winder called the meeting to order shortly after 7 p.m. Minutes of the Fall 2009 meeting were reviewed and approved.

Nigel Austin – Administrative Update

Interim Extension Director Bob Hoeft held a series of 12 public meetings earlier this year with clients, public officials and staff. The general plan for Extension reorganization was introduced at that time, and now some of the details are beginning to be fleshed out:

- Plan will be rolled out in phases: Phase 1 was announced a few weeks ago. It includes the establishment of multi-county units for 101 of our 102 counties and reducing the number of County Directors from 76 to about 30. Multi-county units will be from 3 to 5 counties; only Cook County will stand alone. County Directors are working on plans for potential configurations that involve their counties. Some submitted multiple plans that would be acceptable to local residents.
- Plans are due on campus on May 10. On May 19, County Directors will be notified whether their proposals are accepted, or changes need to be made.
- Center closures are also part of Phase 1. On June 30, the Effingham Center will be closed. Champaign Center will close in June of 2011 when their lease expires. Effingham Center Educators will be housed temporarily in Units or will work from home. This will be a transition year, with some temporary office assignments.
- The number of Regional Offices will be reduced in a later phase; we don’t yet know how many there will be. Currently we have five Regions and five Regional Offices.
- All Educators and County Directors will be given layoff notices sometime in June. There will be fewer positions available in the new system, but everyone will have the opportunity to apply for those positions. Selection process has not yet been determined, but admin has pledged it will be fair, transparent and open to everyone who’s qualified within the system.
- Dr. Hoeft continues to meet with our stakeholders, and has been in meetings with legislators in the past few weeks. He reports legislators are supportive of efforts to make Extension more sustainable and take it in a new direction.
- Everything relating to the reorganization should be in place by June 30 of 2011.
The four Statewide Program Leaders are developing lists of program priorities for the new Extension organization, and those priorities will guide many of our local programming efforts.

Long-term sustainability is the goal of the reorganization – not just financially, but in terms of programs that will meet societal needs.

Clients, volunteers, other stakeholders and staff should continue to send ideas and suggestions to Dr. Hoeft via uiefeedback@illinois.edu

Phase 2 will include staffing, technology, professional development support, etc. More details to come in 4 to 6 weeks.

Please continue to engage your fellow council members and County staff as the reorganization continues to unfold.

ECRAC Member questions:

Will all of the searches for County Director and Educator positions be internal? Yes.

Do we have projections of what the reorg will save Extension? Projected deficit is $4 to $7 million and we have to eliminate that deficit.

Can multi-county units keep 3 offices open? That is quite feasible. We will look at leases and local resources and will do everything possible to keep that local presence. The local office may be scaled back in operation from what it is currently.

ECRAC Member Reports

PIATT – Model rocketry workshop was a success – co-sponsored by Hobbico, which provided kits and an instructor. Great experience for the kids!

EFFINGHAM – Offering classes for first-time home-buyers and prospective homeowners. It’s a 4-class series – offered in morning and evening, with each session lasting 2 to 2 ½ hours. Topics include goal-setting, determining how much house you can afford, spending habits, home values, basic home maintenance, how to avoid foreclosure once you buy the home, etc.

JASPER
Ken Larimore recognized for outstanding leadership in CED. Youth program provides support for 200 Jasper County kids – shooting sports is growing. Recycling and waste management are an HCE program. Fourth-grade safety day – 10th annual – reached 115 youth. Ag Defensive Driving presented to all Newton HS Students, in cooperation with Farm Bureau.
McLEAN
Co-sponsored a multicultural leadership program with Heartland Community College. Twenty-three participants met biweekly for 8 months. They learned about public speaking, teambuilding, crisis management and many other topics designed to enhance their leadership skills. At the end, participants were given an opportunity to get acquainted with various organizations that could use their leadership skills.

CHAMPAIGN
Moon Walk – walking competition vs. Peoria County and Quad Cities, to see which county can get to the moon (238,000 miles) first. Encourages people to set aside time every day to walk and wear a pedometer all day, every day. 1800 people – more than 140 teams. The idea is that small changes can make a big difference when we stick to them over time.

COLES
Served as a site for a soil and water management teleconference. Attendance was bolstered by availability of Certified Crop Advisor credits; about 2/3 of the participants filled out the paperwork for those credits. People travel from some distance to attend this meeting. Also hosted Spring into Gardening day sponsored by Coles County Master Gardeners – it filled up in no time!

CRAWFORD
Still working with energy conservation – been in contact with campus and Pat Hildebrand and commercial sponsors (electric companies and co-ops). Sponsors have provided a small number of devices that help people calculate energy use/loss; homeowners use them for a short time, and then they’re passed along to someone else. Energy was a big topic on the Together We Can survey last year, and it’s a program priority for the county.

LIVINGSTON
Extension recently co-sponsored a Farmers’ Market Vendor Workshop with several other local groups, with 33 participants. Speaker Terra Brockman went into detail on displaying produce to its best advantage, and offered advice for first-time and prospective vendors. A member of the Pontiac PROUD group described efforts to get more foot traffic to the downtown area on farmers’ market day and talked about helping vendors make the most of advertising grants.

MOULTRE-Douglas
Live Well-Be Well chronic disease self-management program has begun presentations to Home Extension units and others. Extension has been asked by the Area Agency on Aging to provide it for the Amish community. It’s also being offered through the community mental health center.
EDGAR
Crestwood Elementary School was part of Illinois 4-H Health Jam program teaching healthy lifestyles, fitness, nutrition, health-related careers, etc. It’s an 8-week classroom program. Kids exercise 30 minutes a day and log their time — and use a formula to convert it to miles. Grant was from Wal-Mart. There was a 2-day camp at the end of the program in March for Crestwood and other schools that got similar grants in other counties. Emphasis at the camp was on health careers.

FORD-IROQUOIS
Local civic leaders submitted a Community Matters application seeking Extension’s help in community planning and enhancement. Extension staff and local leaders did a presentation a group of graduate students in the U of I Department of Urban and Regional Planning. One student has expressed interest in designing his capstone class project on enhancement of Iroquois County. This will involve focus groups, surveys, community visits and a compilation of local efforts to enhance quality of life. The student’s final report will include recommendations for applying the findings within the county.

MACON
AG Rescue and Grain Bin Extraction. New program — co-sponsored with Piatt County Extension and the Illinois Fire Services Institute. This is a new audience for us. Training is marketed and designed for small volunteer fire departments needing training in AG Rescue. Event will take place on June 26th at the Macon County Fair Grounds. This will be a hands on training for the firefighters.

CLAY
Conservation Field Day, hunter safety education, Welcome to the Real World, woodworking workshop, dog obedience classes. Preparing the 150 local 4-H’ers for summer events. HEA sewing adult-size bibs for area nursing homes.

CUMBERLAND
4-H Barbecue coming up — county’s main fundraiser for scholarships. Safety day for Neoga HS students. Been in Elementary schools with butterfly program. HCE, with help of Farm Bureau, did an informational program on wills and passing the family farm down to the next generation. About 125 4-H kids in the county.
FAYETTE
FNP programming in schools and Head Start reaches 520 kids monthly. FNP staff make weekly visits to food pantry and offered a 6-week cooking class at alternative ed school. MGs working with Vandalia’s Community Garden to provide fresh produce local food pantry and flowers to long-term care facilities. 180 4-H kids getting ready for summer events.

EXTENSION STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL – Brian Basting (report submitted via email)
U of I Extension sent 15 people to the Public Issues leadership Development (PILD) Conference in Washington in late April – mostly ESAC members, with several staff representing their professional organizations. PILD conference was on Monday and Tuesday, and members of ESAC presented at one of the Monday breakouts. Wednesday was for Capitol Hill visits – a very productive day. Illinois delegation members were well-received by Congressional reps and staffers, who were familiar with Extension’s work. ESAC members talked about Extension programs and asked for an increase in federal formula (Smith-Lever) funds for Extension work.

Future Local Programming Ideas
Nigel asked group members to mention any program partners or audiences they would like to see their local Extension office work with . . . and/or programs we don’t currently offer that might be a good fit for the reorganized Extension and our local communities.

Sheila from Moultrie-Douglas: Would really appreciate good information about the healthcare reform program. People look to Extension for solid, reliable research-based information. Healthcare reform will affect all Americans – some very dramatically – and the topics cut across health, wellness, family economics and other disciplines.

Woody from Coles: Would second Sheila’s idea. Council recently discussed money management for families, and the healthcare change may bring a need for much more healthcare-related financial information broken down by age group: older folks, those just starting out, people with young families, etc. Insurance coverage will be expensive – a big investment. People at different life stages will have very different needs for information and education.

Debbie from Piatt: Obesity and nutrition. Maybe an activity-based program involving children and adults simultaneously – something they can do together.
Aaron from Champaign: Saving money through energy generation. We hear a lot about wind farms and wind energy on a macro scale – but is there anything people can do on a micro-scale to generate their own energy? Can commercial technologies be adapted for home use?

Kathy from Livingston: It’s graduation time and a lot of kids are not going to college and assuming they’ll find work somewhere, somehow. Around town, I see a lot of 20-somethings who still don’t work; they’re floundering, lacking focus. Schools don’t seem to be teaching about developing a resume, interviewing skills, dressing as if you want to be hired, etc. Could Extension fill that void?

Diane from McLean: A large number of people will be retiring in the near future; workplaces will be losing so many skills. Could Extension start a volunteerism clearinghouse for people who have skills and want to use them to help their communities? Maybe model something after the Master Gardener program? (Sheila from Mo-do: “Encore careers” is an emerging research field in gerontology; there’s a real push to move retirees and people who have been downsized from corporate careers into the nonprofit sector. Woody from Coles: Could we bring “encore careers” people into 4-H afterschool programming? Looks like a lot of potential there…

Next meeting date/time

The Fall 2010 ECRAC meeting will be at 6 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 11 in Champaign. Supper will be provided.