EAST CENTRAL EXTENSION MEETING
May 5, 2011

The East Central Regional Advisory Council met via teleconference on Thursday, May 5, 2011 starting at 6:35 p.m. Kathy Reiser, Associate Regional Director opened the meeting with Brian Basting directing the business meeting. Those participating on the call were: Nigel Austin, Interim Regional Director; Kathy Reiser, Associate Regional Director, Karen Hawthorne, Extension State Advisory Council/Piatt County; Brian Basting, Extension State Advisory Council; Aaron Carlin, Champaign County; Norma Calvert, Clark County; Bill Uphoff, Coles County; Bob Westendorf, Effingham County; Vivian Hallett, Jasper-Cumberland Counties; Warren Zehr, Livingston County; Mike Bartimus, Macon County; Lyn Ash, McLean County; Jan Wenke, Piatt County and Jack Pfaffmann, Woodford County. Counties not represented included: Clay-Fayette, Crawford, DeWitt, Ford-Iroquois, Moultrie-Douglas, Shelby and Vermillion.

Approval of Council Minutes: Minutes of the November 11, 2010 minutes were reviewed and approved.

Regional Director Update: Interim Regional Director, Nigel Austin, provided an update on the reorganization of Extension. He thanked all unit representatives for the work they are doing for Extension and ask that they continue to lead and support the reorganization efforts.

All 27 unit directors are now in place and effort is underway to fill the remaining 13 open educator positions. They are currently reviewing credentials and hope to conduct interviews within the next month with a goal of having the Educators in place by July 1. Four of the 13 open positions are in this region (McClean/Livingston Unit and Champaign/Vermillions/Iroquois Unit).

The Champaign center will close effective June 30, 2011. Some of the staff were laid off and some moved to units in capacities for which they were hired last year. As of October 2011, the state 4-H office will be located in the Center’s building. Civil Service positions are being addressed. The Unit Directors were asked to submit staffing plans for approval and these plans are being reviewed by Staff and Human Resources for final decisions. In accordance with the Union contracts, the staff determinations will be impacted by seniority. For those being dismissed, their last day will be June 30, 2011. Due to the bumping process, there will be domino effects, resulting in a complicated process.

The number of regions will be reduced from five to three. The East Central and Southern regions will collapse into one. The Northwest and North Central Regions will be consolidated. The Northeast Region will see very little change. It is expected the realignment of regions will take place shortly after July 1, 2011.

Fiscal Update: Funding is currently being considered in the Illinois Senate Appropriations Committee. Kathy Reiser stressed it is critical for everyone to contact their legislators to request their support of Extension. Brian Bastings reiterated that is time to once again “rally the troops” for contacting the decision makers in Springfield. One-fourth of the FY2011 funds were received in March. Nigel emphasized the important role Extension Partners has played in the budget process in Springfield and encouraged everyone to join the coalition.

Extension Update by Dr. Hoef: Dr. Hoef provided an update of Extension activities at the State level. Dr. Hoef reported that on May 3, he received a call that the Senate was working on the appropriations budget and there had been amendment presented that would zero out the County Board Match and Cook County Initiative. He was not sure if there had been a vote on the amendment, which was proposed by the Appropriations Sub-Committee. Dr. Hoef reported that the Illinois House had not acted on their appropriations to date. It is believed they will support the
recommendation proposed by the Department of Agricultural. If the Senate Bill passed is different from that passed from the House, they will have to reconcile the two bills which would be difficult when starting with zero (per Senate proposal).

Dr. Hoeft also stressed the urgency of contacting our legislators. He will post information received from Pam Weber of Extension Partners that can be used to tell the Extension Story. Every county is encouraged to ask the constituents to contact legislators and using the information from Extension Partners share the many accomplishments of Extension. Kathy Reiser has provided talking points to program leaders that will also be helpful in contacting the decision makers. Dr. Hoeft shared his disappointment that Extension was not being recognized for the reorganization (staff reductions) and cost-cutting efforts they have been focusing on during this last year. Further budgetary reductions could result in elimination of educator positions.

The legislative leadership in Springfield would like to have the budget finalized by May 20, so they can move on to redistricting. To be effective we need to be reaching out to people early next week.

Dr. Hoeft shared his thoughts about the reality that Extension is the only network with the ability and capacity to deliver education materials for all ages and all kinds of activities. We can bring out research that could lead to new industries and creation of jobs. Karen Hawthorne shared that while attending a conference in Washington, D.C. one point made was that Extension has the infrastructure to deliver educational programs to everyone across the nation. Dr. Hoeft shared that Extension is in conversation with the College of Engineering regarding their efforts to put together a much needed, Center on Energy. There is research being done on campus that needs to reach the public.

Financial Management, for businesses and individuals, as well as nutrition and health, are major problems facing our country. Extension could help develop beneficial programs to address these issues and get the message out thru our programs. Dr. Hoeft reiterated his hope that Extension will be allowed the opportunity to show what we can do. He is very disappointed that the legislators are considering reductions in appropriations that would have further impact to the organization.

As a part of a Committee appointed by the Chancellor over a year ago, Dr. Hoeft has been working on a report to identify ways to make Extension better. The report is in draft form at this time. The primary recommendations in the report are: 1) Management of Extension be moved to campus level instead of college level. 2) Redesign the reporting structure for Extension, to include two deans, one director, two faculty members of ACES and two directors. 3) Allow Director to control dollars going to campus in addition to those going to the field. This would allow us to address more problems across the state and at the same time work with ACES.

A proposal is also being submitted to request money to reclaim some of the specialists we’ve lost over the past few years. Currently we are down 21 FTEs in specialists, including food science, agricultural engineering, and crop science.

Dr. Hoeft closed his overview by thanking everyone for volunteering and working through this last year.

State Advisory Council Update: Karen Hawthorne, Jack Pfaffmann and Brian Basting shared their experiences in Washington D.C. where they attended a Public Issues Leadership Development Conference prior to representing Extension on the Hill. While on the Hill they met with staffers and aids. Their meeting with Representative Johnson was very positive. Rep. Johnson was well-informed on Extension with good questions and a voice of support. The aid for Representative Aaron Shock was not familiar with Extension, but Rep. Shock was and has been supportive in the
past. Jack reported that he came away with a feeling that we need to communicate with the legislative offices on a regular basis to keep them informed and promote Extension, rather than call on them once a year. Brian mentioned that 4-H’ers were there at the same time and they are great advocates. He concurred with Jack’s comments about the importance of maintaining a relationship throughout the year, rather than just during budget crisis times. He suggested the congressmen be invited to attend functions at our home bases so they can see and participate.

**County/Unit Representative Reports:** County representatives in attendance provided an update on reorganization activities or special programs being conducted in their district.

**Other Business:** Kathy Reiser led discussion regarding plans for the Regional Office in the future. She will no longer be on staff in the regional office, but her contract has been extended for one year to focus on web development and communications programs. Nigel Austin and Monika Hammerschmidt will remain in the regional office. Nigel expressed his appreciation for all of Kathy’s good work and wished her the best in her new adventures.

**Date for Fall Meeting:** The Fall 2011 meeting will be held November 10. Details regarding time, place, etc. will be provided upon finalization.

**Adjournment:** The May 5, 2011 meeting was adjourned on a motion by Bill Uphoff and second by Jack Pfaffmann.