



The South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service plays a major role in everyday life, ranging from research to 4-H and youth programs. South Dakota State University (SDSU) was forced last to initiate budget cuts and reorganization, resulting in new ways of delivering the same mission. **LEFT:** Two Yankton County 4-Hers are riding high on the hog — or at least trying to maneuver the porkers — during Achievement Days in August at the Yankton fairgrounds and arena. (Photo By Emily Niebrugge) **ABOVE:** Extension personnel and area producers share some thoughts while waiting for the flatbed tour during this summer's field day at the Southeast South Dakota Research Farm near Beresford. (Photo By Randy Dockendorf)

Extending Into The Future

In The Wake Of Recent Budget Cuts, SDSU Extension Is Working To Serve Farmers Across The State

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Jim Krantz was surprised when he picked up the phone at his Extension office in Mitchell. Krantz, a cow-calf field specialist, was located in the east-central part of the state, but he was receiving calls from farmers and ranchers all across South Dakota. "We were giving out information about heat stress for livestock during this summer's drought," he said. "I started getting calls from Veblen, Mobridge and Chamberlain."

It's all part of the adjustment for Krantz and other South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension personnel following last year's statewide reorganization. Budget cuts, new technology and changing demographics — including an older, declining population in much of the state — led to the change from county-based offices to regional centers.

While one of the state's largest cities, Yankton wasn't chosen for a regional center. Residents of southeast South Dakota are served by centers in Mitchell and Sioux Falls. A lack of funding didn't allow for establishing a regional center in Yankton, but the possibility remains open if resources become available in the future, said Karla Trautman, Extension associate director.

"We are continuing to propose regional centers of learning," she said. "A vision of ours is to open new centers across the state, but right now we don't have that ability. When we stabilize the funding, it will go on our wish list."

As an alternative to traveling to a regional center, residents could email photos of a crop sample, for example, to the center for analysis, Trautman said.

Extension will continue to offer the same services that South Dakotans have known for generations, she added.

RESPONDING IN NEW WAYS

Krantz remembers the impact of Extension agents while he was growing up on a farm near Howard. "Miner County is my home county, and I have lived there all of my life," he said. "A lot of Miner County people are used to Extension. We have had a history of really good county agents, going way back."

"My mom used to think the county agent was like a god," he added with a chuckle.

Krantz himself pursued an Extension career, serving as Miner County agent while continuing to farm. He even anticipated finishing his career with the Extension office in Howard.

Then came reorganization with its elimination of county offices, and Krantz faced a crossroads. He

applied for one of the jobs as field specialist and was hired for the Mitchell regional center. He went from running an office by himself, focused on several subjects for a smaller geographic area, to working with a staff and fielding inquiries from across the state.

The regional centers are set up so the Extension specialists don't need to travel more than 70 miles in most cases, Krantz said. However, he does hold statewide responsibilities and must be prepared to travel elsewhere if needed.

"For me, the biggest changes have come in travel and technology. I would never have bet, at my age, I would make the adjustment to technology like I have, but people now rely on it," he said. "They say, 'If you don't mind, email it.' A lot of people don't want to take the time to make phone calls. They can contact me through our website, and I can send the information right back to them."

The public's demand for quicker responses doesn't surprise Trautman.

The core mission for Extension remains the same, but the method of delivering information has changed based on how people prefer to receive their information, she said.

"When you look at the old system, people didn't go out of town as much. And of course, the Internet didn't exist," she said. "When you look at today's audience, whatever their age, they receive their information instantaneously at their fingertips. We have been challenged, and we are reaching out with our new reorganization, in how we put that information into people hands."

In response to the demand for quick data, the Extension service instituted its website www.iGrow.org, Trautman said.

"We have the e-Extension framework. We have iGrow with some of that information. People can go there to access apps, podcasts and video conferencing. It all flows through to others," she said.

"We refresh that information constantly to meet the challenges that producers are faced with now, such as how to handle drought-stressed corn. It's not a library, because we are refreshing a series of information. We have up-to-the-minute news releases."

Extension also uses technology for statewide forums, Krantz said. For example, this summer's drought meeting used video conferencing. Each of the eight regional centers hosted a meeting site.

"At Mitchell, we had 40 here. We had people from 60 miles away, and a few from 100 miles away," he said. "We sat in a room and had speakers from around the state. We asked email questions, and



Chris Hay, with the South Dakota State University (SDSU) College of Agriculture and Biosystems Engineering, remains in demand as a speaker on the subject of drainage. He is shown between his presentations on tile drainage at the summer field day held in July at the Southeast South Dakota Research Farm near Beresford.

they were able to tap into resources all over the state (at one time)."

The drought meeting shows the ability to use technology to break down distance barriers and unite groups of people, Trautman said.

"We look at our work as a community of learners. If you have an audience with concerns about a particular topic, we can connect them from around the state," she said. "We aren't leaving behind our audience that we have served for years. It's really just a shift in thinking about topics and the way of delivering that information."

LINKING THE PAST, FUTURE

With technology and regional centers, Extension can respond more quickly to the public's needs, said Barry Dunn, SDSU Extension director and dean of the SDSU College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences at Brookings.

"Under the old system, the criticism was that Extension was not nimble enough for the times we live in. The old county system just couldn't be nimble enough," he said. "So we released a lot of intellectual energy from our staff. We have our focus and expertise at the regional centers."

Dunn acknowledges the public needed to buy into the system to make it work. In addition, the counties were asked to contribute financially and, if necessary, form multi-county partnerships for 4-H advisors.

"It only works if the people want it to work. The reality of the new system took a little bit of adjustment," he said. "The counties are also under incredible budget pressure. But this is driven by the decision to make changes by the leadership at the state and county level."

Dunn foresees even more changes in coming years as many rural counties see a declining,

graying population.

"Over time, as demographics continue to change, particularly in the western part of the state, I think you will see some mergers of Achievement Days between counties," he said. "We have some counties with 1,000 or 1,200 people, and the distances are so large out there."

After only one year at its Mitchell location, the Extension regional center is preparing for a move, Dunn said. The center, located at the downtown Mitchell Technical Institute (MTI) campus, will move to the new MTI building when it is completed — tentatively set for fall 2013 — on the south side of Mitchell.

The sharing of a building is just one of the new partnerships between Extension and other entities, Dunn said.

"Our regional center at Mitchell is working closely with Mitchell Technical Institute, and their leadership has just been tremendous," he said. "We have done a lot of programming with Mitchell and Watertown (Lake Area Technical Institute). It shows how we are working with other institutions, and it helps leverage our state resources as best we can. It's a great success story."

The creation of Extension regional centers reflects the trend of recent decades in which commerce, professional services and other needs are served on a regional basis, Dunn said.

"Our neighbors in Minnesota and Iowa had already moved to (Extension) regional centers," he said. "The system works and has been in place in other states for a number of years."

Gov. Dennis Daugaard and Board of Regents Executive Director Jack Warner have been supportive of the changes, Dunn said.

"Around October, our first anniversary (for reorganization), we will have a good benchmark of what

we saw and what will be the trends in the future," Dunn said.

He looks for even better things in the future, particularly as South Dakota agriculture helps find new ways to feed, clothe and provide energy for 10 billion people around the globe.

"I am very excited and positive about things. I see us entering a golden age for agriculture," he said. "I know it was very difficult to make the (Extension) transition, but it has tremendous potential for South Dakota to run things more effectively and more efficiently. The target is to make changes in order to adapt the world changing around us."

In addition, Extension will continue to conduct unbiased research that serves the best interests of producers, Krantz said.

"When you go to some sources, they financially benefit from what they are telling you," he said. "That's not so with Extension, and that remains really valuable with us."

While Extension may change in many ways, it continues to serve South Dakotans with the same personal touch as has been found the past century, Krantz said.

"I really enjoy my job. I have always enjoyed the youth, and I still get to help with it through things like judging at the state contests," he said. "And it's rewarding when people struggle with things like drought, and you've got some information to help guys get through it. They really appreciate the help."

For those reasons, Krantz remains optimistic about the continued demand for extension services and information, even amidst its changing face.

"It takes an adjustment for everyone, but I think it's going to work well," he said.

For more information on SDSU Extension news and programs, visit online at www.iGrow.org.

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