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Extending Excellence

A Plan for Staffing the Minnesota Extension Service

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Definitions

The current of change running through Minnesota Extension Service during recent years has added new terms to our vocabulary. Those listed below are especially pertinent to the report that follows.

CSP

Comprehensive Staffing Plan. A set of strategies for obtaining, assigning, training and retaining the people needed to carry out the mission of Minnesota Extension Service (MES). CSP consists of 25 unit plans and an overall statement of direction embodied in the 10 Staffing Initiatives for the 90s.

Unit Plan

The staffing strategies for each of 18 clusters and seven campus-based units. The seven campus-based units are: Agriculture; Community Economic Development (CEcD); Educational Development System (EDS); 4-H Youth Development; Home Economics; Natural Resources; Administrative and Central Support.

Initiatives

A set of 10 statewide staffing goals to guide those who set policy or administer programs of MES. See pages 4-6.

Cluster

A group of counties—varying from three to seven—formed by county extension committees and extension agents to jointly plan programs, identify issues, share resources and utilize specialized agents to conduct extension programs that respond to needs of the cluster. See map on page 2.

Cluster Committee

Comprised of at least one representative from the extension committee of each county in the cluster, responsible for the planning and coordinating necessary to carry out the mission of the cluster.

Cluster Coordinator

An added responsibility for selected county extension agents, to lead the program planning process and coordinate the other activities necessary to the functioning of the cluster. Normally three per cluster—one from each program area.

Specialization

A set of competencies held by an extension agent and used to develop, implement and evaluate educational programs—usually for a cluster. Considered long-term, to enable an agent to develop deep knowledge of a relevant subject and become the "resident expert" of the cluster. For more on specializations, see page 7.

Issue

A matter of wide public concern arising out of complex human problems. May be temporary problem requiring a rapid and intensive response, or may be more enduring in importance and dealt with in on-going programs.

Issues Programming

Extension's planned response to issues. Implies a more proactive mode. A way of identifying and responding to human problems in their own context, which may or may not reflect traditional extension subject matter, audiences and methods of program delivery.

State Extension Faculty

The faculty of MES who are based on one of the University of Minnesota campuses and who have statewide leadership for extension programs in their subject matter specialties. These faculty, housed primarily in collegiate departments, serve as the primary link between U of M research and extension education.

Message from Pat Borich

Teamwork is the key. Teamwork emerges as the dominant theme of a year-long, intensive look at how the Minnesota Extension Service should be staffed to meet the needs of the 90s.

A cluster of counties working together can support a level of staff expertise that would not be affordable if they acted singly.

Extension agents working across program boundaries and county lines can put together the team of talent needed to deal with complex issues.

At the campus, extension staff drawing from the various disciplines, departments and programs can offer the kind of educational programs that Minnesotans need to cope with critical issues such as environment, drought, food, finance and family crises.

This report—Extending Excellence—briefly summarizes the process, findings and projected actions of the Comprehensive Staffing Plan (CSP). We chose the title of this report after hearing University of Minnesota President Nils Hasselmo proclaim Access to Excellence as the theme of his vision for the university and the people of Minnesota. And we should all be pleased that in his inaugural address he cited Minnesota Extension Service as “an exceptional

model of a statewide infrastructure for problem solving and, through it, access to all the expertise available at the university.”

What you see on these pages is the proverbial tip of the iceberg. The heavy stuff—the nitty gritty details of how the 18 clusters and 7 campus units plan to make the most of their talent—is contained in their respective proposals. For brevity, we've chosen to summarize them in this report.

Even as we commit numbers to paper, we know they'll be outdated quickly. Times change. People move. Jobs change. Needs change. Not so long ago, a long range plan could be compared to a roadmap. Follow the lines and you'd expect to arrive at your destination. Today the plan might better be thought of as the radar screen of an air traffic controller. Expect activity from many directions, constant change and sometimes a need to quickly alter the plan.

So the most valuable part of this planning effort might be the process itself. Perhaps our most valid staffing plan is our state of mind. We've been forced to think about future needs. As individuals, in small groups of extension committee members or staff, or in a room full of extension policy makers

and educators, we've taken the time to examine every position and weigh it against client needs now and in the future.

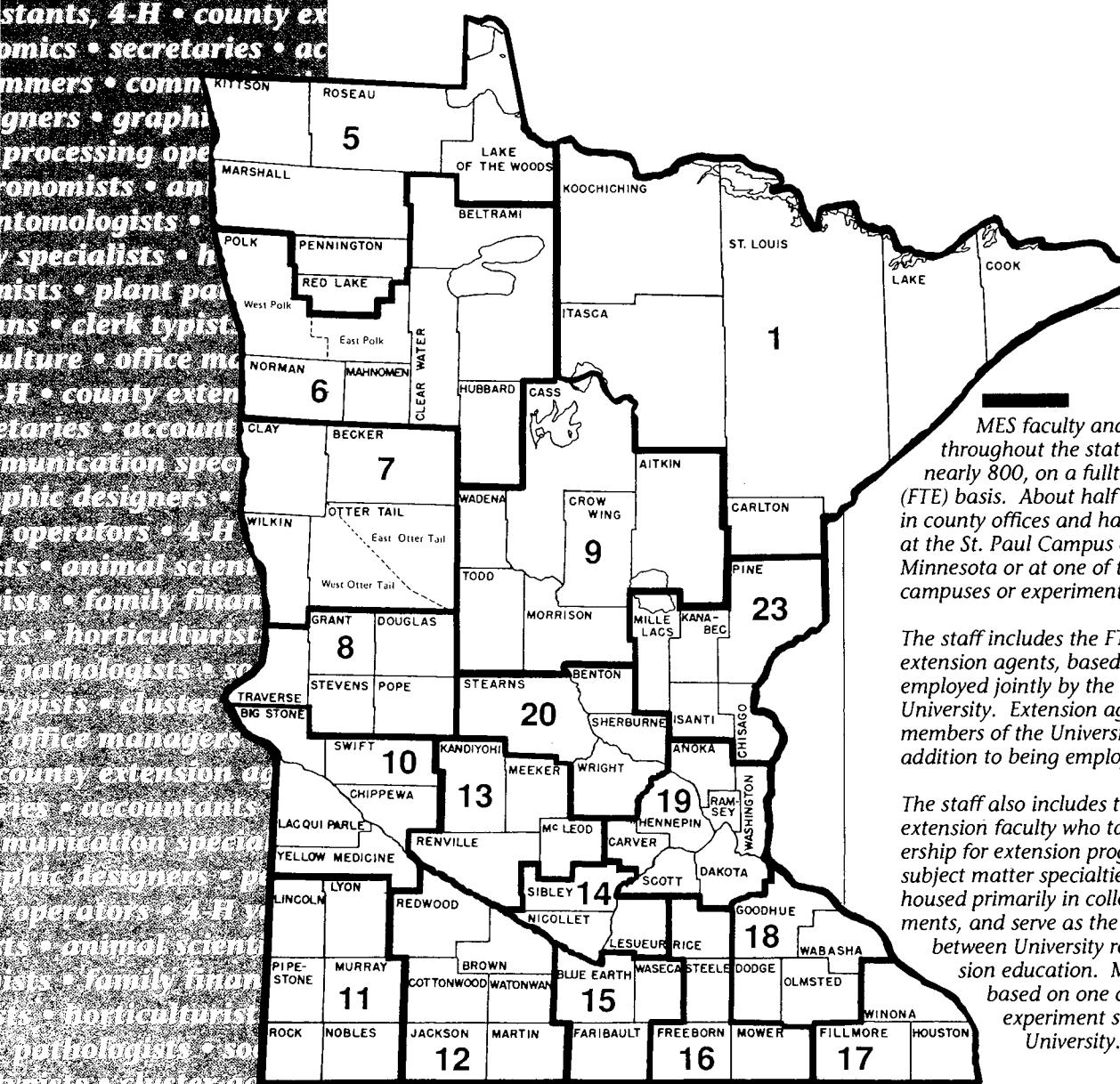
There is no better way to assure a dynamic plan than to keep our mind focused on the future. We'll keep the detailed, position by position plans of the clusters and campus units in a format that can be reviewed and updated regularly. In this mode, we'll anticipate and respond to needs of Minnesotans. And Minnesota Extension Service will be noted for relevance, quality and reliability, now and in the years ahead.



Patrick J. Borich

Dean and Director, Minnesota Extension Service

Staffing Plan In



County Clusters

as of January 1, 199

MES STAR

MES faculty and support staff work throughout the state. They number nearly 800, on a fulltime equivalent (FTE) basis. About half of these are based in county offices and half are based either at the St. Paul Campus of the University of Minnesota or at one of the other University campuses or experiment stations.

The staff includes the FTE of 260 county extension agents, based in counties and employed jointly by the county and the University. Extension agents are faculty members of the University of Minnesota addition to being employees of the cou

The staff also includes the FTE of 173 state extension faculty who take statewide leadership for extension programs in their subject matter specialties. They are housed primarily in collegiate departments, and serve as the primary link between University research and extension education. Most of them are based on one of the campuses or experiment stations of the University.

ork Currently the MES faculty—by FTE and including county and state—work in programs as follows:

- 162 or 37% in Agriculture
 - 116 or 27% in 4-H Youth Development
 - 93 or 22% in Home Economics
 - 37 or 8% in Community Economic Development
 - 25 or 6% in Natural Resources

The MES staff also includes the FTE of about 360 support staff who represent a broad range of technical skills needed to help produce and deliver educational programs in counties and at the University.

Altogether, the faculty and support staff constitute a broad array of talent, as displayed in the job titles listed in this report. In terms of the total population of the state, we have one extension faculty member for every 10,000 citizens. Fortunately, some 40,000 volunteers help deliver educational programs and conduct extension activities.

Perspective

This is the third major step in a continuing process to make sure Minnesota Extension Service stays in tune with the times and prepared for the future.

The first step was Focus on People, the strategic plan adopted in 1986. It expressed a vision and signalled the trend toward flexibility to deal with emerging issues. Step two was the restructuring plan in 1987. It established clusters of counties, and specializations for agents.

Extending Excellence, the third step, is a staffing plan aimed at making sure the right people are in the right place at the right time, to keep moving in the direction indicated by the strategic plan.

MES staffing evolves out of a partnership between the University of Minnesota and each of the 87 counties. Extension agents live and work in each county. Increasingly, they also work across county lines to share their expertise within a cluster. Other extension faculty, along with support people of many types, work at the St. Paul campus or at other University facilities. Campus faculty conduct research, teach and deliver educational programs statewide. A cooperative relationship exists within the University also, where many faculty members teach and do research in a department of their college and in MES.

In preparing a staffing plan we have not changed the strategic plan, nor the mission statement, administrative structure or specializations. Nor have we attempted to add or subtract positions in this process. We have called it "resource neutral" but asked the planning groups to also consider how they would respond if they were to deal with more or fewer resources in the future.

While the basic mission and structure of MES remains the same, some redirection of effort has occurred and will continue to occur. Agriculture agents are still agriculture agents, and they'll continue to serve this key sector of Minnesota's economy. But many of them deal with issues that extend well beyond the production of food and fiber...issues such as farm finance, environment, food policy and community leadership. The same is true for home economics agents and 4-H agents. Their basic mission doesn't change, but emerging issues call for some redirection of effort.

On the campus, virtually all MES staff members remain attached to their units and working in their disciplines. The change that has been seen—and will be accelerated with this staffing plan—is that they will increasingly team up with others to mount an educational effort that is multi-dimensional. The emerging issues demand an assortment of talent. Consider the issue of water quality, as an example. It's a concern of everyone, and its complexity de-

mands the skill and knowledge of many different types of educators within extension and other agencies both public and private. Teamwork is the answer. Teamwork is the dominant theme of the staffing plan.

Clusters constructed their staffing plans primarily by considering the type and number of specializations needed. This was logical, since it was the first attempt any of us have made to plan for staffing on a cluster basis. And an agent's specialization is intended to benefit the entire cluster. But for most agents, as much as three-fourths or more of their time is spent within a county, conducting the ongoing educational programs within their program area. One of our tasks in the year ahead will be to make sure we are examining the full range of responsibilities of each agent. We'll present a plan for doing so soon.

Each of Minnesota's 87 counties has its own identity. Different circumstances spell different needs and opportunities. A statewide staffing plan for extension can adopt principles and indicate general directions and goals, but it cannot set hard and fast rules or formulas to apply to each county or to each cluster. Keep this in mind as you examine the initiatives and next steps described on the pages that follow.

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A black and white photograph showing two men in hard hats and dark jackets standing outdoors. They are holding and examining several large, round objects, likely potatoes or similar agricultural products. In the background, there is a factory building with visible smokestacks emitting smoke. The man on the right is looking directly at the camera, while the man on the left is looking down at the objects they are holding.

Staffing Initiatives for the 90s

BY 1995 OR SOONER, MES STAFFING
WILL BE CHARACTERIZED BY:

More emphasis on leadership education, community economic development, natural resources and environment.

We'll seek additional funds and also redirect some current staff in order to do this. Responsibilities in these areas fall on all staff, whether they work primarily in agriculture, home economics or youth development.

EXAMPLES: Many proposals recommend: cluster positions in CEcD and environmental quality; increasing the number of agents specialized in CEcD and NR, from 18 now to 36 in the future; the creation of two cluster positions in water quality and one in community leadership through reallocation and with external funding; increasing state staff in community leadership and finding way to permanently fund those positions now supported by Bush grants; an effort to put cold climate housing program on more permanent funding; the assignment of a state faculty position to coordinate efforts of those with leader-

ship expertise and responsibilities throughout MES; exploring the creation of a leadership institute with other University units.

Collaboration with other agencies, transferring programs if appropriate.

After a careful review of priorities, initiate discussion with other institutions, agencies or private businesses to look for ways to jointly participate in program development and delivery, in order to adequately fund emerging programs. Seek to transfer all or some of the program responsibilities where appropriate, in order to focus on MES strengths.

EXAMPLES: One model is for MES to develop an educational program, then train people in other agencies to continue the program. Among the programs where this has been done are Dairy Herd Improvement Association (DHIA) and Financial Management Consultant (FMC) program.

Greater proportion of staff located throughout the state.

Currently, about half of the staff is based at one of the campuses of the University of Minnesota—predominantly in St. Paul. Most campus-based faculty serve every area of the state, either directly or indirectly. In some instances, their service could be enhanced by closer proximity to their clients. An office at one of the University's coordinate campuses or experiment stations would be one such approach. Also, more direct support from campus-based staff will be provided to agents and other faculty working in counties and clusters.

EXAMPLES: CEcD sharing of faculty positions with Crookston, Duluth and Waseca campuses; joint extension/research positions at experiment stations at Crookston, Grand Rapids, Lamberton, Morris and Waseca; proposed home economics contract faculty at Crookston; EDS plan to support clusters, either with people or funds.

Agents spending more time on their specialization. Agents hired by specialization.

Agents will acquire a greater depth of knowledge in their specialty area and



will spend a greater amount of their time applying that knowledge throughout a cluster of counties. Competence in a needed specialization will be of primary consideration in hiring new agents.

EXAMPLES: Most cluster plans call for more of agents' time to be spent in specialization, some to as much as 50%. List of 14 specializations will stay the same for now, be reviewed in 1990. Criteria for hiring, provision for advanced education will be developed with help of academic departments.

Increased participation of volunteers.

Thousands of extension-trained state residents already donate time to teaching, service and leadership activities with youth, homemakers,

farmers and gardeners. We'll need more, and we'll need to involve them at every level of activity. This means extension staff will need to devote more time to selecting, training and coordinating the work of volunteers. This applies to campus as well as county.

EXAMPLES: MES will reallocate funds to create a state faculty position with volunteerism as a major responsibility. All staff will give attention to importance of volunteer work in MES.

Master's degree as minimum for new agents, by 1995.

This requirement will apply to new hires of academic staff in county or cluster positions. It is part of a broad effort to enhance the level of education and training of all extension workers, to cope with the needs of the 90s.

EXAMPLES: About 50% of county academic staff now have the master's degree. Several clusters want further discussion of the 1995 requirement. Will work with academic departments to shape master's degree programs. More emphasis on master's degree in recruitment.

More use of short term assignments and positions

Definition of "short term" varies, but generally it means two years or less. It could be two months, or even two weeks. The intent here is to provide flexibility...to enable us to respond quickly with issue-based programming.

Cluster agent assignments will deal with issues and program priorities that do not fit within the current array of specializations.

Appropriate percentage varies with each campus-based unit. CSP guideline requires each unit to have at least 20% of its staff resources supporting positions of a flexible and short term nature. For some units, percentage should be higher.

EXAMPLES: Most cluster plans call for cluster agent assignments for some staffing. EDS and 4-H plans call for strong emphasis on limited term positions. Other campus units need to do likewise. Difficult task, but necessary.

Organizational environment that encourages cultural diversity.

MES is committed to providing educational programs and activities that

meet the needs of Minnesota's diverse population. A related goal is to enrich people's lives through an understanding and appreciation of their differences. Special focus will be given to employment practices and staff training to increase the mix of MES employees in terms of background, race, education, experience and skills.

EXAMPLES: Several agent-at-large positions exist to capitalize on tale and to give extension experience to norities. Several cluster plans call programming to reach minority po tions. Regular training on cultural diversity and some special training staff will be conducted. A stronger commitment will be made to recruitment of minority employees.

Leadership in employment new technology.

This initiative refers primarily to technology such as video, computer, satellite and the like, as used to design, deliver or access extension education programs. Campus-based support units will take leadership in research and testing, and in training those who will use the technologies.

EXAMPLES: EDS is assigned a major leadership role in developing techniques for educational materials and distance education. New systems such as

computer graphics and video teleconferencing are being developed and tested now. More cluster assistance is planned.

More shared staffing arrangements within the total University.

While continuing to draw heavily on faculty talent from the colleges of Agriculture, Home Economics, Natural Resources and Veterinary Medicine, we'll work toward closer working relationships with other collegiate units and with the coordinate campuses. Our ultimate goal is to have an MES presence in each college and campus where a mutual program priority can be identified.

EXAMPLES: Much sharing already is occurring. Staffing plans call for more—specifically with the coordinate campuses at Crookston, Duluth, Morris and Waseca; College of Education; School of Public Health; Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, and each of the members of the State University System.

Specializations



The term "specialization" is a recent addition to the language of extension. It denotes an area of special competence held by an extension agent.

The concept of specialized agents emerged—along with clusters—in the MES restructuring of 1987. It calls for agents to acquire an exceptionally deep knowledge in a defined area of subject matter, and serve as the "resident expert" for a cluster.

Agents spend a part of their time on specialization work. The greater part of their time is spent conducting the ongoing educational programs within their county.

How much is enough? How much time should a county agent devote to work in his or her specialization? The staffing plan's only guideline is: More. Initially, the suggested time in specialization was 25%. That meant the agent would spend the other 75% of his or her time doing their regularly-assigned education work in the county.

With this staffing plan, there is no magic number. It depends on the needs of the cluster and of the counties. The statewide initiative proposes more emphasis on specialization. A better way of interpreting that is to assume that agents will develop a greater depth

of knowledge in their specialization. The demand for their expertise will increase accordingly.

The 14 specializations listed below are retained in the staffing plan. They'll be carefully examined in the months ahead, to see whether changes are needed.

Community Economic Development

Crops Systems

Educational Design and Delivery

Energy and Environment

Environmental Horticulture

Families in Communities

Family Economic Stability

Farm Management and Marketing

Food, Nutrition and Health

Livestock Systems

Natural Resources

Pest Management and Environmental Issues

Volunteerism

Youth Development

Next Steps

- 1.** The Comprehensive Staffing Plan is adopted, as of January 1, 1990. Units will refer to their respective plans each time there is to be a change in personnel, positions or structure.
- 2.** The staffing plan process will continue. Each cluster and campus unit will regularly review and update their plan, and continue to pursue the goals articulated in the Staffing Initiatives for the 90s.
- 3.** A second phase of the staffing plan process will occur in 1990. It will focus on relating the current plan to demographic and other data from an environmental scan, and producing an integrated staffing plan for MES.
- 4.** Campus-based units will seek increased flexibility, working across the boundaries of disciplines, programs and departments, as well as with many colleges of the University, and other institutions and agencies in Minnesota and neighboring states.
- 5.** Extension committees and agents throughout the state will accelerate efforts to achieve flexibility, working across boundaries of counties, clusters and neighboring states.
- 6.** Extension support units will intensify recruiting and training; identify standards and processes for hiring consulting faculty; develop standards for upgrading of agent skills; better articu-late the guidelines for specializations; develop strategies to enhance cultural diversity; begin long-range plans for implementing the requirement of a master's degree for agents.
- 7.** Extension administration will propose a process and criteria for identifying programs to end or transfer at the statewide, cluster or county level.
- 8.** The Educational Development System (EDS) will provide more communications support to clusters.
- 9.** Positions of area agents will be redesigned, either as cluster agents or extension faculty located at University facilities throughout the state.
- 10.** More volunteers will be recruited, trained and recognized for their service to MES. Special emphasis will be placed on providing opportunities for volunteer work at the state level.

Process

When many participate, the process gets longer but the product gets stronger. We adhered to that credo as the Comprehensive Staffing Plan evolved over the past 16 months.

A 10-person task force initiated the action, beginning in September of 1988. Its members established a timetable, adopted principles and guidelines and set forth a framework for participation by all MES employees, county and cluster committee members and advisory groups.

Eighteen clusters and seven campus-based units were asked to prepare proposals for future staffing in their respective areas. In winter meetings around the state and on campus, they labored to prepare preliminary staffing proposals. Then they sent representatives to a meeting in Minneapolis in April of 1989 to initiate a cross-fertilization of ideas and to fine tune their proposals.

Armed with reams of data and the 25 unit proposals, the task force prepared a set of recommendations and sent its report to the Dean and Director in May of 1989. Through the summer months the Dean and Director worked with his administrative team to analyze the report and propose further refinements. In

addition, the team produced a set of 10 Staffing Initiatives for the 90s and asked the clusters and campus units to once again review their staffing proposals, using the Initiatives as additional guidelines.

Clusters and campus units returned their revised proposals in October. The Dean and Director met individually with each district director and with the head of each of the campus units to conduct an in-depth review of the proposal. Then, with the assistance of the task force and of his administrative team, he prepared this summary report of the Comprehensive Staffing Plan.

Members of the task force included Gregory Hutchins, chair; Sharon Beckes, Larry Coyle, Beverly Durgan, Janice Hogan, Ronald Jones, Susan Meyers, Maria Oderman, Kent Thiesse and Barbara Warren. Russell Tall served as staff person to the task force.

Additional information about the Comprehensive Staffing Plan can be obtained from the Office of the Dean and Director, Minnesota Extension Service, 240 Coffey Hall, 1420 Eckles Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108.

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