

## **Extending the University to Oregon Livestock Producers**

By

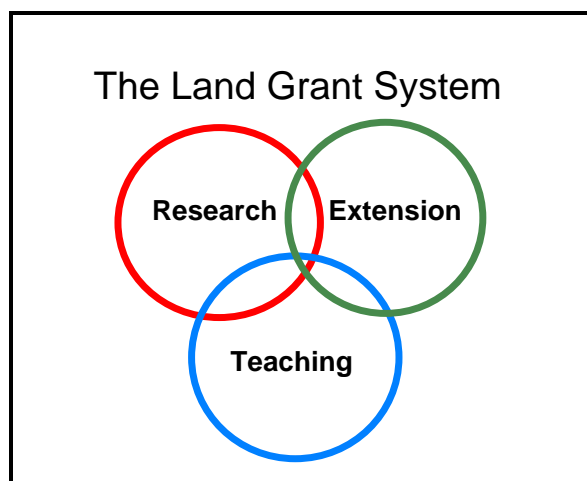
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Extension is one of three key components of the Land Grant Educational System in the United States. The other two are research and teaching. The relationship between these three missions of the Land Grant University system vary among the various states but an ideal relationship is demonstrated in figure 1. Extension in the United States is funded with federal, state and county (local) funds. The portion of each and how they are used to pay salaries and cover support costs varies with each state. Extension personnel are employees of each state Land Grant University. There are people in Extension with state wide and local responsibility. The actual design of this also varies among the states.

At Oregon State University we have an obligation to not only extend information to Oregon producers but also to those beyond its borders. Our mission in the Animal Sciences Department at Oregon State University is to serve animal agriculture and the people of Oregon, the region, nation and world through research and education. Specifically addressing Extension education, our goal is to provide education that serves the needs of Oregon's animal industries and helps them respond to societal concerns. In Animal Sciences at Oregon State University we have tried to structure our faculty to fit in the relationship depicted in figure1.



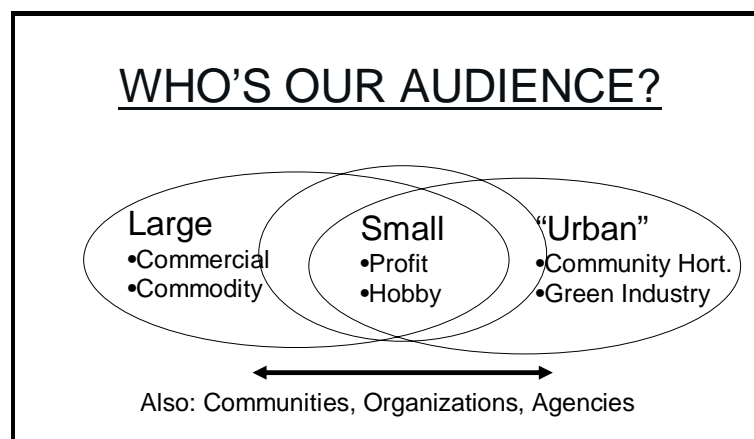
**Figure 1 Ideal relationship among research, teaching and Extension.**

An example of a very successful Extension program we recently implemented in Oregon is Beef Quality Assurance. This educational program is designed to provide certification to producers who successfully undergo the training. The purpose of the program is to enhance beef meat quality by addressing management issues from conception to the plate. The program consists of a four to five hour training program put on by the Extension Beef Specialist and the Extension

Veterinarian. Producers are encouraged to consider their facilities, breeding programs, nutritional programs, and their overall health plan and treatment methods. Accurate record keeping is stressed as an important part of any quality assurance program. The bottom line of the program is that all producers have to share in the responsibility to ensure that they are doing all that can be done to meet the high standards the public expects in food safety. After completing the program, producers can then take an on-line test. If they successfully pass it, they are issued a certificate that they are BQA trained. To date we have had 630 Oregon producers successfully complete the testing. Just as significantly, we have two “branded” niche market beef programs in the state requiring this certification of their cooperating producers. The Oregon program has been identified by our National Cattleman’s Beef Association as one of a handful of model state programs that other states should emulate. We have also recently started similar programs in both sheep and dairy.

### **What does the future hold?**

As we look at the future of the animal Extension program in Oregon we see a number of challenges, but the two largest are identifying our audience and managing contentious issues. Extension as an organization was traditionally agriculture and natural resource based with a strong family and youth component through the 4-H program, and was designed to serve primarily rural communities. As our agricultural production has shifted to more industrialized production we see more of a dichotomy in our potential clients (figure 2). On the one side we have large commercial farms wanting very technically competent, cutting edge information. They are utilizing consultants more and more to handle their needs. On the other side we have small producers that are developing small local niche markets, with an extreme being the “hobby” farmer. Hobby farmers are people that think they like the country life style and buy a few hectares and have one or two cows or sheep or goats or horses. The information needs of these last two groups may be a lot more basic than for the large commercial farms. How do our Extension personnel handle this range?



**Figure 2 Range in audiences that are demanding Extension education.**

The changing demographics in the United States are also changing our political reality. The majority of our voters, and therefore our legislatures, are urban. Many have little or no relationship with Extension and therefore can't be expected to support Extension funding.

The other major issue for Extension is the increasing polarization of our public over contentious issues. These involve animal rights and various environmental concerns related to animal production. We are increasingly being asked to take sides instead of being an impartial source of scientific information. The parties on the various sides of the argument question whose science is better. In other words, if the science doesn't agree with their bias, it is automatically deemed invalid. The Extension faculty are spending much of their time dealing with environmental issues and in many cases getting caught in the middle of very polarized arguments. Faculty members are trained in the disciplines of nutrition, genetics, physiology, or range management; therefore, they are being asked for expertise that is often outside their comfort and interest area. Because of these problems in building consensus, issues mediation has also become a need for our Extension professionals and is an area that will certainly increase in the future.

### INCREASINGLY ASKED TO TAKE SIDES!

- Environmental and other issues in United States becoming very polarized
- My science is right your science is wrong!
- University and Extension asked not be neutral and just present facts, but to be on one side or the other
- Extension gets caught in the middle

**Figure 3 The major challenge facing Extension in Oregon.**

#### **How do we see Extension changing?**

In Animal Sciences at Oregon State University we feel that all faculty have an outreach role. Oregon State University has adopted a system where Extension field faculty have their tenure in academic Departments. Field faculty are those persons who have an Extension or Experiment Station ( off campus research center) appointment and are not located on the main campus. Extension personnel that are off campus may have a local or regional assignment. For instance, the Animal Sciences Department has 8 faculty members with Extension appointments in Oregon Counties. I feel that this system strengthens the technical competency of our Extension faculty. The Oregon system also catalyzes a free flow of information in both directions between local producers and the University.

The Animal Sciences Department believes that all Extension professionals must be technically competent. They need some specialization and I personally feel that they should all have some research expectation with their position. Maintaining an active research involvement will keep our faculty progressive. The Oregon tenure system requires that all faculty maintain some form of scholarly activity which also helps to keep our Extension faculty very progressive.

Web based information is continually reducing the need for the more generalist approach to handling Extension education. It may also mean an Oregon producer is getting answers to their questions from Oklahoma State University or Ohio State University instead of Oregon State University. As a result we feel that our Extension programming needs to be directed at very targeted programs. Examples are Quality Assurance (described above), winter nutrition programs for beef cattle and animal waste management programs.

Our larger producers that generate their primary incomes from animal agriculture are increasingly utilizing private consultants as advisors for their production questions. As a result of the greater availability of information and the changing demographics of agriculture described above, our Extension service has matured and is increasingly being asked to train the consultants and other advisors that our producers use.

It is imperative in the Oregon system in the United States of America that Extension be viewed as technically competent, scientifically based and neutral to the issues. With budget constraints reducing the number of personnel we have available more and more of our Extension programming will be regional and state wide in nature and less and less will be one on one with producers. Extending knowledge to producers will, however, continue to be an important part of the three missions of our Land Grant University system in the United States of America.