Direct Line

Extension folks are some of the busiest people around. You are also some of the most committed individuals I know. You seem ever willing to add one more program or one more meeting to your very full schedules so the people of Alabama will have the information they need.

At this time of tight budgets, I want each of you to know that I recognize and value your dedication to your jobs, to the System and to the state’s citizens. Your commitment, initiative and drive are crucial to the success Extension enjoys in Alabama.

We continue to watch carefully the Alabama Legislature as the fiscal year 2004 budget is developed. A reduction of more than 6 percent has been discussed. This would mean a reduction of almost $2 million to our total budget. This equals a loss of about 40 specialists and county Extension agents.

We will keep you informed as we learn of new developments. But I encourage you to focus on the work at hand. The best way we can demonstrate our value to lawmakers and our clients is by continuing to do good work in the face of adversity.

The three assistant director search committees have had initial meetings and are beginning their work to fill these crucial positions. My thanks to Tommy Brown, Jannie Carter, Rebecca Dollman and Jimmy Smitherman for providing leadership to each of these committees. I am confident that these committees will identify outstanding candidates for each position.

In addition to our two county Extension agents who have been deployed as part of the war effort in Iraq, a number of Extension employees have children and spouses deployed overseas. Please remember these brave soldiers and their families in your thoughts.

Congratulations to Virginia Morgan, Extension Communications, on being elected vice-president of Agricultural Communicators in Education! She begins her duties at the national meeting in June.

Also, congratulations to the Tuscaloosa County 4-H Shooting Sports Team that was featured on ESPN2 recently. It’s always exciting when our 4-H’ers receive much deserved media recognition, but it’s even more exciting when it’s a national media outlet.

Katanga Mants. Hale County Extension agent, says presenters represented a broad spectrum.

“We thought it was important the young people hear from people with real world experience,” says Mants. “They heard from a career counselor from a university and learned about saving and investing from a financial planner as well as participated in a variety of workshops led by county agents.”

Mrs. Alabama 2001, Kathy Midgley, introduced youth to PMS: Pre-Meditated Stupidity and what happens when this type of behavior is not controlled. She encouraged students to make their own choices and to be individuals.

"Don't let peer pressure and the pressures and situations of life get you down,” she cautioned.

Program Highlight: Youth Leadership Summit

More than 100 young people attended the Tuscaloosa District’s recent Youth Leadership Summit at Wallace Community College in Selma. Tuscaloosa District agents created the annual summit three years ago as a means of communicating with hard to reach teens. Information is provided on important life skills and educational options.

This year’s program focused on money management skills. Participants gained a better understanding of the need to make wise, informed decisions about their future, including choosing a career, selecting a college, starting their own business and managing their hard-earned money.
Young people got a wake-up call from "Auntie Bunny," better known as Yvonne Thomas, Montgomery County Extension agent, as part of The Real World curriculum exercises. The Real World exercises showed youth what their parents and other adults face daily when setting priorities for lifestyle spending. Youth learned the consequences of living beyond their means: ending up in a homeless shelter or being arrested for writing bad checks.

The annual program is held during Wallace Community College's spring break, and the college provides the facilities at no cost. This year participants came from 10 counties: Bibb, Chilton, Choctaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lowndes, Marengo, Perry and Sumter.

Chilton County Extension Agent Callie Nelson says the program was designed to meet several goals.

“First, we were trying to reach some of the underserved middle and high school students in our counties,” says Nelson. “Secondly, we wanted to create programs that would interest middle school-aged 4-H’ers and keep them active in 4-H.”

Program evaluations indicate the summit made a positive impact on the young people. At least 75 percent of participants rated each program segment as good or excellent. One participant said, “I now have an idea of how to budget and save and how to spend money wisely.”

Parents also left with a positive attitude. One parent offered these comments, “I really enjoyed the entire seminar. My daughter was a participant and she was really excited about attending. She learned a lot as well. Everything was great … well planned and presented!”

System Holiday Schedule

It's only April, but we do want to remind everyone of the System's holiday schedule. System employees on each campus will observe holidays of their respective universities.

Both Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities will be closed Friday, July 4 for Independence Day and Monday, Sept. 1 for Labor Day.

Thanksgiving holidays will be Wednesday, Nov. 26 through Friday, Nov. 28.

Both universities will close for Christmas recess at the end of the day Friday, Dec. 19. Each institution will reopen Monday, Jan. 5, 2004.

PERSONNEL

Appointments:
• Rita Dauber, Extension Program Office Assistant, ACENEP, State Headquarters, April 14

Resignation:
• Perry Mobley, County Extension Agent, Autauga County, April 4

ACES FAMILY HAPPENINGS
• Our sympathy to the family of Scott Billingsley, retired Lowndes County Extension Agent, who died March 28. Mr. Billingsley served the citizens of Lowndes County for 27 years before he retired from Extension work in 1979.
• Congratulations to Helen Bagley, Clarke County Administrative Assistant, and Donald Drinkard, who were married April 5.

Proposals Funded:
• No funding decisions in March

Proposals Submitted:
• Jim Novak to USDA/CSREES for National Risk Management Education Advisory Council, $89,662
• Chuck Hill and Molly Gregg to National 4-H Council for Alabama Professional and Volunteer Development, $25,000
• Jim Ryan to Beaumont Foundation for Community Grant for West Alabama, $90,085
• Jim Ryan to Beaumont Foundation for Community Grant for East Alabama, $90,085

Gaines Smith, Interim Director