Direct Line

Changes affecting Cooperative Extension in our state are occurring rapidly.

We have welcomed a new interim president of Auburn University. Dr. Ed Richardson is familiar with Extension through his rural background and previous positions of leadership in secondary education at the local and state levels. We continue to work with Dr. John Gibson at Alabama A&M University to provide effective programs to our urban residents and other targeted audiences across the state.

New trustees are being appointed at Auburn University. Efforts are under way to ensure their familiarity with Cooperative Extension and its importance at our land-grant universities and to the people of Alabama.

As these and other changes occur, awareness of Extension is more important than ever. Please join me and others on the leadership team in getting that point across to our leaders, to the decision makers and to the citizens of Alabama. Learn more about our efforts in this area from another section in this Extension Connections.

Reshaping the Alabama Cooperative Extension System into a more focused and accountable organization is well under way. The reorganization plan is now online at http://secure.aces.edu/internal/SysReorgPlan-3-4-04.pdf. This is a living document that will be fine tuned over time. Ray Rice has compared the reorganization to painting a mural. In contrast to a photograph that has details in place and fixed at the moment it is created, a mural develops over time with details added and adjusted as needed. With the basic structure and framework in place, refinements are being made based on the input and feedback of many individuals and groups.

Nine County Extension Coordinator positions have just been filled. The remaining 21 County Extension Coordinator positions have been opened for applications, with an April 2 deadline.

Temporary employment agreements are helping to bridge our programs from the previous county-based structure to the new regional team approach.

These types of agreements are also being used to meet our contracted objectives for specific programs.

Changes in our funding status continue to be a challenge. Monitor the Alabama legislative activities on the Education Trust Fund for higher education to keep current on state funding that makes up 55 percent of our budget. Various Extension-related lines in the U.S. Department of Agriculture budget for 2004 were reduced in a range from .59 percent to 10 percent. Diligent efforts are under way to restore these in the 2005 process. Our growth area continues to be in programs supported in grants and contracts. This is great, but special, time-limited resources can carry us only so far.

Progress in the 4-H Capital Campaign continues. Contact Beth Lawrence to discuss how you can help meet the development goals for the Environmental Education Center and local 4-H programs. Thanks for your work to date on this. Let’s build on these accomplishments to finish the campaign.

Quite a bit of effort is being directed to continue a unified System composed of the AAMU and AU Extension programs after the current court order expires in August 2005. State legislation is being considered to do this.

Tommy Elliott and I recently met at the 4-H Center with a group of retired Extension professionals. We gave them an update on current happenings in Extension and thanked them for the solid foundation of accomplishments that they built. Our organization and programs thrive from that foundation. Most of the retirees are involved in local and statewide Extension-like activities.

As we move forward, I want to thank each of you for your continued commitment to the Extension mission. Few of us will be unaffected by the transition that’s under way. So keep focused on providing viable, effective programs as Extension evolves into a more focused and accountable Extension System.
Communication Plan Update

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System received top billing in the March 9 Business Section of the Montgomery Advertiser after a program by Interim Director Gaines Smith. In the presentation, Smith told the Montgomery Rotary Club about the history, growth and accomplishments of the state’s Extension System.

The March 8 speech, which marks a new component of the Communication Plan, was the first of several speaking engagements planned for some of the more prestigious civic clubs in the larger media markets across the state. Smith’s 20-minute speech and audio-visual presentation chronicle the history, growth and current financial situation of Alabama Extension.

Other presentations are planned in Huntsville, Birmingham and Mobile and then in smaller media markets such as Tuscaloosa, Decatur, Auburn-Opelika, Anniston, Dothan and more.

Media coverage will be sought as Smith travels the state in an effort to increase awareness of the Extension System beyond the community leaders found in these civic clubs and on into the minds and homes of citizens served by newspapers in these cities.

Awareness of Extension among Alabama’s newspaper executives received a big boost recently when Extension participated in the Alabama Press Association Winter Convention held in Auburn. Members of the Extension Communications staff manned an exhibit designed to inform press representatives of the vast educational resources available to them and their readership through Extension.

Information sheets about the News and Public Affairs Unit, resources designed specifically for the media and a list of upcoming Extension awareness publications were also available to the APA members.

The well-received exhibit designed by Extension Communications is now on display in Duncan Hall at Auburn University. The exhibit is available for county use as well.

Extension Communications will soon begin distribution of several new publications included in the Communications Plan.

Everyone on the newly compiled leaders list will soon receive the first issue of Extension Update, a quarterly newsletter designed to inform leaders all across Alabama about the accomplishments of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

Recipients of Extension Update include civic, business and education leaders identified last year by the 67 county offices, plus the Alabama Legislature and Congressional delegation, Alabama media outlets and all employees of Extension.

The first issue will be mailed in April, with other issues to follow in July, October and January of each year.

Extension employees will also soon receive the first Driving Our Message. This quarterly newsletter will highlight ways everyone can promote Extension as a system. A special feature of each issue will turn the spotlight toward successful promotional efforts being achieved by Extension specialists and agents across the state.

PERSONNEL

Kudos:

- **Patti Presley-Fuller**, Pickens County Extension Agent, on being named Pickens County Citizen of the Year
- **Carol Whatley, Bruce Dupree, Glenda Freeman, Ross Heck** and **Jodi Robinson** of Extension Communications on winning a Gold Award from the Association for Communication Excellence for the System’s Identity Guide

Appointments:

- **Paula Lovell**, Lauderdale County Extension Office Administrative Secretary, Jan. 20
- **Geni Lynn Payne**, Calhoun County Extension Agent, Jan. 23
- **Rebecca Rogers**, Crenshaw County Extension Agent, Feb. 1
- **Flossie Young**, Custodian II, 4-H Center, Feb. 2
- **Tamra DeBenedetto**, Mobile County Extension Agent, Feb. 16
- **Gregory Fisher**, Extension 4-H Center Program Coordinator, March 1
- **Nan Chambliss**, Autauga County Extension Office Administrative Secretary, March 8

Resignations:

- **Sueanne Mitchell**, Geneva County ACENEP Agent, Feb. 19
- **Amanda Wagoner**, Walker County ACENEP Agent, Feb. 27

ACES FAMILY HAPPENINGS

- Our sympathies to the family of **Exa Till**, retired Chambers County Extension Agent, who died Jan. 6.
• Our condolences to the family of Herbert Oakley, retired Conecuh County Extension Agent, who died Jan. 21. Mr. Oakley had served the citizens of Conecuh County for 27 years when he retired in 1981.
• Our condolences to the family of Charles S. Foreman Sr., retired Greene County Extension Coordinator, who died Jan. 22.
• Our sympathies to Patti Golden, Extension Program Associate, whose father, Bill Teske, died Jan. 24.
• Our sympathy to Noel Thompson, Extension Data Analyst, on the death of his mother, Phyllis Samuels, Feb. 2.
• Our sympathies to William Norwood, retired Marengo County Extension Coordinator, whose father, William M. Norwood Sr., died Feb. 2.
• Our condolences to Pat Blackwell, Walker County Agent Assistant, whose brother, Joe Hill, died Feb. 5.
• Our condolences to the family of Wayne Thompson, retired Tallapoosa County Extension Coordinator, who died Feb. 8.
• Our sympathies to the family of Yvonne Lewis, Bullock County ACENEP agent, who died Feb. 21.
• Our condolences to the family of Ruby Robinson, retired Jefferson County 4-H Agent, who died March 1.
• Congratulations to Susan Hill, Winston County ACENEP Agent, and her husband, Mike, on the birth of their son March 12.

Proposals Funded:
• Wendy Padgett, Wilcox County BOE for Wilcox DREAMS, $36,610
• Wayne Brewer, USDA/APHIS for Gypsy Moth Survey, $48,700
• Rick Wallace, to ANDCR for Nonpoint Source Clean Marina Program Development, $10,000
• James Hairston and Eve Brantley, Texas A&M for Multistate Extension Training Workshop: Stream Restoration, $23,000

Proposals Submitted:
• Matthew Smidt, Kathryn Flynn and Joshua McDaniel to Pennsylvania State University for Sustainable Forestry Partnership Seminar, $22,202
• Evelyn Crayton and Laura Booth to USDA for Healthy Indoor Air for America’s Homes, $3,000
• Xing Ping Hu to EPA for Toxic Exposure Awareness and Prevention Program, $60,000

Gaines Smith, Interim Director