

AG NOTES
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UT/TSU Extension
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EXTENSION

We use that word a lot around here. It is part of our name, and it really is what we are all about. But just who are we and what do we do? How have we changed lately? What are we an extension of?

We have our beginning back in 1862, when President Abraham Lincoln and the Congress saw the value in establishing a system referred to as the land-grant colleges. These were to be schools of higher learning devoted to agricultural research and then teaching what was learned from that research to a growing population who would feed the country while it also began industrial growth. Up to that point most folks farmed and simply existed. This system was expanded in 1890 to provide the same opportunities for minorities to learn about agriculture and mechanical arts, the early stages of the industrial movement. Later, both systems had instruction in the area of home economics, now referred to as family and consumer sciences. In Tennessee, the 1862 land-grant college was what would become the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, and the 1890 college was what would become the Tennessee State University in Nashville. Now our county staff reflects a combination of both systems.

These land-grant systems provided for a school site and for actual farm land that would be used in researching all areas involved in plant and animal production for food and fiber. Later, there was a need to take that information the schools were discovering and teaching to their students on campus to those citizens in the countryside who would never attend one of these colleges. The Smith-Lever Act in 1914 was passed that established a service that would extend that information to the people in the states at the county level. We have observed the passage of that act and have over a century of good work for the people of counties that we serve.

There had already been some extension work done. There were boys' corn clubs as early as 1906, and there were girls' canning clubs in 1910. It was recognized even then that if the youth were taught new ideas and principles of farming and homemaking they would be more ready adopters and their skeptical parents would then follow suit.

There were many side-by-side plots with fathers and sons competing to see who could grow the most corn, etc. The sons would get the new hybrid varieties to plant, while their fathers would stick to their old favorites, and time after time the boys would win the yield contests. The same happened with the development of fertilizers. The same thing happened with the girls and their mothers, learning how to cook, preserve and can, increase the level of sanitation and personal health, and other issues of the day. These groups became the 4-H clubs, now embracing the traditional subjects of agriculture and family and consumer science plus modern technology and personal development topics.

The first county agent educator representing the University of Tennessee was here in 1917. He was Julius R. Hickerson, and I still have his report on file. The first home demonstration agent was here a few years later. It is really interesting to read their reports, giving an insight into how people lived. Very rural is a good description. There have been great educators to follow them over the years that improved the lot of the people in all of these areas. And the 4-H Clubs of Bedford County have had a great history, with the first state project winner in 1946, in the horse project. Imagine that!

We have all of these areas of information and instruction in the Bedford County office to serve its residents. Whitney Danhof is the family and consumer science educator. She works with groups in special interest areas of nutrition, food preparation, health, family economics, etc., and on one-to-one with other issues. She also maintains an active Family and Consumer Education Club program, with several community clubs with members well over one hundred in number.

We have two 4-H educators. Emily Osterhaus and Sean Giffin are responsible for the 4-H youth development program. Both of these educators will maintain contacts with over one hundred clubs and twenty-five hundred members who study personal development, workforce preparation, and many who are involved in projects from animals and plants to computer technology and environment. They serve youth from through the twelfth grade. Emily has a background in family and consumer sciences, and Sean graduated with a degree in agriculture.

Yesenia Lira-Garcia works with the Tennessee Nutrition and Consumer Education Program. Her mission is to help families who receive SNAP benefits to learn how to make better food purchases and improve their level of nutrition with better food quality and healthy choices.

Kim Harvey is our administrative staff member, who directs the public to the appropriate source of information and help.

I serve those who have an interest in agriculture, both full and part-time farmers with operations of all sizes, and residents who do not farm but do have issues with lawns, landscaping and household pests, whatever the case may be. I also work with county residents in the area of resource development, including such things as the fair and other community related events or issues.

UT-TSU Extension provides equal opportunity in all of our programs and employment. We are located at 2105 Midland Road in Shelbyville, and our phone number is 931-684-5971. We have a website, and we are on Facebook.

NEXT YEAR

I had a cousin who owned a farm with her husband, and he named it Next Year Farm. I asked him why he named it that, and he said that he always hoped that next year would be a better year than the one we were in.

So, on that same note, may next year be better to you and your family than this past year was. Happy New Year and may you have a great 2022!