

Ag Column
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Extension Education Programs: A Foundation of Tradition

March is Extension Promotion Month in Tennessee! We are celebrating the great educational resource available in your local Extension Education Programs, which still hold those values set forth over 100 years ago. Early on Extension's purpose was to share research-based information with farmers across our landscape. Today, our programs still focus on improving the lives of everyday citizens. Our tag line at the University of Tennessee Extension is "Real. Life. Solutions."

Extension programs were formed by the United States government with the passing the Smith-Lever Act of 1914. President Woodrow Wilson called Extension "one of the most significant and far-reaching measures for the education of adults ever adopted by government."

Some of the first Extension efforts involved corn clubs for boys and canning clubs for girls. Fathers and mothers took notice of the children's efforts. Sometimes, their corn yields and canned tomatoes exceeded those of their parents. The early UT and TSU Extension Agents decided if they could teach youth to grow better corn or can better tomatoes than their parents, the parents would adopt new methods. "To learn by doing" has long been the slogan of 4-H programs since the beginning. Demonstrations, both in agriculture and in the home, have always been a strong part of Extension programming.

Today, Extension is still making a difference in the lives of not only farmers, but also every citizen across our communities. 4-H members are still involved with livestock and cooking, but today they also have an opportunity to learn about robotics, computer science, nutrition, citizenship, and leadership. Our Family & Consumer Science agents continue to teach traditional topics such as canning and sewing, but they also teach health and nutrition, food safety, money management, parenting, how to cope with aging, and child care provider training. Our agriculture agents still work to improve the profitability of farmers, but they also teach home gardening, integrated pest management, pesticide safety, and the use of drones in agriculture.

Extension has also always played an important role in community economic development. We are strong supporters of your local farmers' markets and grower cooperatives. We often get involved in festivals and celebrations as a way of building communities. We connect to the public through commodity groups such as livestock associations, gardening clubs, Family & Community Education Clubs, and beekeeping clubs. Extension often plays a role in community resources such as fairs and education centers. We invite you to call our office at 423-574-1919 or reach us through email, which is available at sullivan.tennessee.edu.

The University of Tennessee Extension offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.