Putting knowledge to work is the business of Cooperative Extension. With a network of university-affiliated staff in 59 of the 64 counties across the state, the local county Extension office is truly the front door to Colorado’s land-grant university. Local Extension professionals work side-by-side with community residents as they bring the knowledge base of Colorado State University to address locally-identified needs and issues. The mission of Colorado State University Cooperative Extension is to provide information and education and encourage the application of research-based knowledge in response to local, state, and national issues affecting individuals, youth, families, agricultural enterprises, and communities of Colorado. The Colorado State University Cooperative Extension system includes faculty and staff in 13 academic departments in five colleges.

A major factor affecting Colorado Cooperative Extension in 2003 was the state economy. An 18 percent budget reduction was imposed on CSU and in turn Cooperative Extension by the Colorado Legislature, which represented a total of $1.62 million dollars. This budget cut required us to implement significant staff and operating budget reductions while attempting to minimize the effect on programs with the greatest impact in communities and on programs addressing critical issues across the state. Cooperative Extension eliminated a total of 33 full-time equivalent positions through a combination of staff layoffs (23 filled positions were eliminated), reduction of a number of employees from full-time to part-time, and elimination of some positions that were vacant at the time of budget decisions. Position reductions or eliminations affected Cooperative Extension staffing in 26 counties across the state. Administrative and operating budget reductions also were made, along with reductions in faculty support dollars in five colleges on campus.

Even with these state budget reductions for Cooperative Extension now being implemented, we are looking forward and asking the question, “How might Cooperative Extension best be organized, structured and focused to serve the citizens of Colorado?” Futuring efforts for Cooperative Extension have been reviewing staff roles and relationships; technology, information management and access; organizational structure; diversification of funding; and marketing challenges for Cooperative Extension. These efforts will feed into the outreach portion of the Strategic Plan for the Division of Academic Affairs being led by CSU Provost Peter Nicholls.

Despite the difficulties in dealing with the budget cuts mentioned, we continue to have successes to demonstrate our commitment to the citizens of Colorado. We had great response in 2003 to our Web-based program, AnswerLink, which offers individuals access to a large database of routine questions and answers via the Internet. It includes an “ask the expert” component for Coloradans to ask questions and receive an email answer. Since its inception a year ago, there have been 222,000 hits on the site by people searching online information and 2,200 unique questions answered. Our staff in 59 county Extension offices also continue to be respected resources for their constituents--working with adults and 4-H youth, answering questions and providing information and educational seminars on current issues and “hot topics” like food safety and nutrition, animal health issues, drought, water conservation and others.

It is important for Cooperative Extension to provide support for priority programs throughout the state. We continue to seek new resources and increase efforts to secure more outside funding such as fees and extramural dollars. One avenue we have begun to use for generating some revenue is a fee for youth participation in 4-H, which will help insure continuity in program support and management, and assist with special services offered to youth in the Colorado 4-H Program. Please contact me at any time with questions, comments or ideas relating to Cooperative Extension educational programs.

Milan A. Rewerts
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