From the Director for Extension — The Danger of “Same Old, Same Old”

We’ve all probably used the phrase “same old, same old” to describe a situation. The meaning conveys that the situation hasn’t varied, and is familiar and predictable. Maybe you’ve heard the phrase used to describe extension programs. For some, predictability may be comforting because change is hard. While we all have different tolerances for change, the consequence of the phrase “same old, same old” — especially as it relates to extension programming — can be dangerous. Do our stakeholders consider extension programs as “same old, same old,” or do they view our programs as exciting, innovative, and relevant? Do they think of us as their indispensable educational partners?

The purpose of K-State Research and Extension is to identify the critical issues that affect our communities and develop and implement research-based educational programs to address those issues. The programs we developed 10 years ago aren’t likely to be as effective today because situations and people change. Maybe it takes a small tweak or maybe something more significant to increase the effectiveness. The important thing is to take a few moments during PDC and board meetings to discuss what changes are needed to increase the effectiveness of extension programs that help improve the lives, livelihoods, and communities of Kansans.

— Gregg Hadley, ghadley@ksu.edu

Save the Date — Partnership Zoom

All board members are invited to take part in the quarterly Partnership Zoom on Tuesday, August 27 from 7 – 8:30 p.m. Agenda items for this meeting include:

- Update from Director for Extension Gregg Hadley
- Agent Hiring Process
- Changes in the Extension Financial Auditing Team
- Programming Spotlight

Welcome Wild West District

More than half of Kansas counties are now in extension districts. The newest district, effective July 1, 2019, is the Wild West Extension District #18. The extension councils and county commissions of Haskell, Seward, and Stevens counties have come together for more efficient, effective and sustainable extension programs with the formation of the district. Extension district conversations are continuing across the state.

Local Unit Audit and Technology Support Positions Are Being Filled

Shay Strubinger has joined the business office of K-State Research and Extension as assistant auditor. Shay will work with Bob Casey, extension auditor, in auditing local unit extension finances and will provide training and support to local unit financial office professionals. Bob is in the process of hiring an audit accountant to provide additional support. The two new positions replace Teri Davis and Carol Mills who recently retired.

K-State Research and Extension is currently hiring two positions to provide technology support to state, regional, and local extension unit offices. Dave Dunn, who has served western Kansas, is retiring and Brent Comp, who has served Umberger Hall on campus and northeast Kansas offices, is transferring to another position with ITS. We expect both of these positions to be filled soon. They will join Steve Spencer, who serves southeast and south central Kansas.
Recruiting Board and PDC Members

New Program Development Committee (PDC) and extension board members bring new and fresh ideas to local extension programming, and summer is a great time to start recruiting those new PDC members. A tool to help is the Recruiting Board and PDC Members module; it provides a step-by-step guide to help identify potential members. The module includes position descriptions for PDC and board member roles as well as a recruitment worksheet and script for recruitment.

Improving Produce Safety in Kansas

Pathogens in produce cause a large number of food-borne illnesses every year. Nearly half of the estimated 48 million annual food-borne illnesses occurring in the United States were connected to fresh produce.

Consumers and local buyers are increasingly interested in buying local produce, but this produce must meet regulatory and marketplace requirements, which can be overwhelming for growers. In response, K-State Research and Extension provided a variety of workshops, on-farm produce safety assessments, and tools to help Kansas producers implement necessary changes to improve produce safety.

Of the Kansas growers that responded to a follow-up survey after attending the Food Safety Modernization Act Produce Safety Alliance regulatory training, 100% said they made some sort of change on their farm to improve food safety practices. In addition, farms that participated in on-farm produce safety assessments showed on average a 12.7% improvement in their produce safety practices.

One newer Kansas produce farmer who participated in an on-farm produce safety assessment showed a 57% improvement in their score. “Before this training, I didn’t have a food safety plan at all. In the long term, it will benefit us … lower our risk,” he said.

Extension Agent Hiring Process

K-State Research and Extension and the local board. According to the Memorandum of Understanding, each partner has defined roles and responsibilities in the hiring process.

K-State Research and Extension agrees to:

- Determine qualifications of local extension agents and present candidates to be interviewed by the local extension unit.
- Appoint extension agents, establish compensation, and supervise extension educators in cooperation with the local extension board.

In cooperation with the director of K-State Research and Extension, the local extension unit agrees to:

- interview candidates, recommend a candidate for appointment, provide established compensation to be channeled through K-State Research and Extension, and provide supervision and performance evaluation of extension educators.

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity employer (EEO). This means we agree not to discriminate against any employee or job applicant because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, physical or mental disability, or age. Additionally, K-State Research and Extension and K-State are committed to diversity and inclusion in the workplace. There are policies and procedures in place to ensure that our hiring processes follow the law, are unbiased, and promote a diverse workforce. When these policies and procedures are not followed, the university, K-State Research and Extension, and the local board are at risk of equal employment lawsuits and blemishes on our reputation.

To ensure compliance with EEO laws by everyone who participates in the agent hiring process, a new training module has been developed. The objectives of the new module are to:

- Emphasize the importance of maintaining fair and consistent practices for the recruitment, interview, and selection processes.
- Explain roles and responsibilities of K-State Research and Extension and local extension boards during the hiring process.
- Stress the importance of diversity and inclusion principles in the recruitment process.

Board members, local unit agents, and search committee members must complete the training before they participate in agent interviews. An Interview Guide and list of Unlawful and Inappropriate Questions are also available to help board members prepare for interviews.