Doing Their Part, Too
Office Professionals Find They’re Key to Efficient District Programs

K-State Research and Extension employees say that combining county services into a multi-county district is a more efficient way to work.

It is helping them save money in their local programs and serve residents better.

“We don’t duplicate efforts in each local (county) office with the office professionals because now instead of doing three sets of monthly finances, we are doing one,” said David Key, director of the Meadowlark Extension District. “Instead of three county newsletters, we’re doing one district newsletter.

“To me,” Key added, “it’s efficiency.”

Extension districts allow agents to specialize in a subject area important to communities, but the move has also been good for office professionals.

Some examples:

• In the Meadowlark District, Amy Haverkamp’s primary responsibility is to handle budgeting for the district. “My [college] degree is in that area,” she said, “so I am able to use that more than I was when we were in a county office.”

• In the Golden Prairie District, Jennifer Ackerman is the go-to gal for the district’s newsletter, which recently was recognized as the best in a 12-state region. “In a county, you had to cover all areas (of expertise), but in a district, you can split it up between the office professionals, which allows us to balance [the work] a lot better,” she said. Ackerman noted that her ability to take over the newsletter completely allowed one of the agents to spend more time working on youth development in the three-county area.

• In the River Valley District, Frieda Knitter handles the financial responsibilities for four counties, but says the district’s individual offices still value teamwork. “We all communicate very well,” Knitter said. “Sometimes, it’s two or three times a day that we’ll call each other if we have questions.”

“At the time we formed a district, our board and staff looked at [staffing] and chose to offer the opportunity to specialize not only to agents, but to our office professionals, as well,” said John Forshee, director of the River Valley District.

“Having the office professionals specialize does...
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offer some efficiency advantages for us...but beyond that, there are advantages for our outside contacts,” including residents in the district.

R. Scott Barrows, the director of the Golden Prairie District, said that when office professionals specialize, they find new opportunities to save the district money.

“We have conference calls and are able to do some ordering together to keep supply costs down,” he said. “We share equipment. Before, we didn't have some of those capabilities. It’s a great balance with our office professionals.”

Key said he appreciates being able to hire employees with specific skills.

“Now we see a higher set of skilled people that can manage web based programming, so [for example] we have assigned the web duties to one of our office professionals,” he said. “It’s working out pretty well.”