

HISTORY OF  
GILA COUNTY EXTENSION

By F. Van Wilson

The Gila County Extension Office was established in August 1935. The Gila County Cattle Growers' Association was the organization that worked to get the Agricultural Extension Service in Gila County. They have been a strong supporter ever since and have cooperated closely in all programs.

There have been only three agricultural agents, two home agents and two 4-H agents in the County since that time with the exception of B.I.A. Extension contract that began in 1968 and ended in 1980.

Sam Armstrong was the first County Agent, as we were called in those days. He came to Gila County from Cochise, where he has been serving as County Agent. Sam had a time getting along with his staff, as he was Agricultural Agent, 4-H Agent and Home Agent. He shared office space with the County Engineer his entire tenure. He was assisted in the mid-Fifties by Helen Goetz, Home Agent-at-Large.

Sam ended his Extension career in November 1959, when he passed away. He is still remembered and well thought of here for the efforts he made and service he gave. We still enjoy the relations he established.

R. G. (Pat) Grav was Agricultural Agent and Agent in Charge from July 1960 until June 1969. Pat was a native of Globe. Some of the major accomplishments Pat helped bring into being include:

- A permanent Home Economics position was established and was staffed by Mary K. Simmons in July 1963. Mary K. transferred to the San Carlos contract in 1968. She later moved to Cochise County in 1978 and has since retired. Betty Faris became Gila County Home Agent in September 1968.

- Pat was also able to get the Extension Office separated from the shared space with the County Engineer.

- He assisted the Gila County Cattle Growers in establishing a cooperative stocker-feeder sale as an effort to solve their ever increasing marketing problems. This auction sale is now going into its eighteenth year. Pat moved to the greener pastures of Montana in June of 1969, and Van Wilson moved from Pinal County to Gila in September 1969 to begin serving the people of Gila County as their Extension Agricultural Agent-County Director.

A branch office of Gila County Extension was established at San Carlos to deliver an Extension program to the residents of the San Carlos Indian Reservation. The Bureau of Indian Affairs contracted with Cooperative Extension Service of the University of Arizona for this work. Terence O. Wheeler and Mary K. Simmons were the Agricultural Agent and Home Agent assigned.

The Bicentennial Year (1976) brought Gila County a new Courthouse in which the Extension Service was given space. The Gila County Agricultural Agent was asked by the County Board of Supervisors to carry out the task of landscaping the new building.

Gila County was granted its first full-time 4-H Agent in March of 1978 in the person of Kathryn Ojerio, who had been serving the Navajos with the Navajo B.I.A. contract. She served in this capacity until June of 1981. Leah Morgan Clark became out 4-H Agent in February 1982 and is still very capably guiding the 4-H program.

The San Carlos Extension contract was terminated June 1980. Extension workers who assisted with the San Carlos program were Gracie McCormack, Matt Mastic and, lastly, Lee Van Hollingsworth.

The secretarial duties of the Gila County Extension office are performed by Shirley Knowlton, who has been a faithful worker since March 1961. Shirley has a total of 23 years of service to the Gila County Extension program.

It is interesting that the Gila County Extension is the only County Extension that is housed in the County Courthouse. It should also be noted that the budget for the first County Extension Office was for \$4000 per year shared half and half by County and State. We don't know what amount of Smith-Lever funds were provided. Our present budget totals just in excess of \$100,000, of which \$10,600 is from County funds.

It is estimated that the livestock marketing program in cooperation with Gila County Cattle Growers has improved the producers' marketing position some 10-15 percent; or has brought the 26 producers who actively participate an additional 1.6 million dollars during the past eighteen years for their market animals. Gila County Extension Staff has assisted with the Beef Cattle Improvement program with the San Carlos registered Hereford ranch. The program has yielded much information to both Indian and non-Indian producers. Unfortunately, we have really no good way to determine our impact with the County residents who call on us for assistance with their home gardening problems.

The County Extension Service was for years supported by the Farm Bureau, which in our case was pretty much in name only. In 1964, State legislation established the formation of County Extension Advisory Boards as the supporting organization. The present Gila County Extension Board is made up of the following people: Chairman Carter Nelms, Elaine Drorbaugh, Dwight Cooper, James Griffin, Wa (?) Lockhart, James Tidwell and Leroy Tucker.

County Agents after Van Wilson:

Bill Frost  
Derek Bailey, 1995 - 1996  
Chris Jones 2/22/1999 - Present

Area Agent, since 1995:

Jim Sprinkle