

Extension service suffers in face of budget cuts

By Jeff Billington

Arizona Farm Bureau

Since 1914 cooperative extension has been a staple in rural Arizona life, but recent budget cuts have caused strife in the longstanding institution.

The extension service, which is funded by and operates under the University of Arizona College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs), provides research, advice, training and youth programs to farmers, ranchers and families across the state.

Director of the Arizona Cooperative Extension Jim Christenson said the state's current financial woes have resulted in a \$4.4 million budget cut for CALs, a cut that heavily impacts extension.

"Most of our money is state money," Christenson said of the extension service's financing.

While CALs can use tuition increases to fund teacher salaries and grants help with the continued funding of research, extension faculty depends on tax money, he said.

"Tuition increases help with teachers but it doesn't solve the outreach problems," Christenson said. "The land grant mission is not funded by tuition."

The impact of the budget cuts can be seen in Gila, Yavapai



Photo courtesy Arizona Cooperative Extension

Rangeland monitoring programs help ranchers determine if their management objectives for vegetation and soil conditions are being met. The Cooperative Extension Rangeland Monitoring Program has been active in Arizona since 1970.

and soon Yuma counties where there is no one coordinating 4-H programs. Coconino and Greenlee counties are both without agriculture agents.

The extension service is filling the voids by using staff from other county offices to help out and is also looking into short-term fixes.

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Photo courtesy Arizona Cooperative Extension

Arizona Extension faculty have always used new technology. In the early 1900s they hopped on trains and traveled throughout the state delivering programs to local citizens right from the tracks. This photo, taken around 1912, shows the informal nature of these demonstrations — people could walk up to an outdoor classroom and learn about the latest farming and ranching techniques.

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"We're trying to hurry and fill them with temporary positions," Christenson said.

While extension has experienced budget cuts in the past, this time it is especially difficult, he said.

"This is the first time we've had an erosion like this," Christenson said. "We're scrambling to do 4-H programs."

Budget cuts to cooperative extension is practically a yearly occurrence but the CALS administration works to keep the service intact and functioning, he said.

"[CALS] Dean [Eugene] Sander and myself have worked to make sure the services continue," Christenson said. "It's not a question of commitment, but one of finances."

Yuma Farm Bureau member Tanya Hodges said it's a disappointment to



Photo courtesy Arizona Cooperative Extension

Extension livestock programs assist young and old alike in raising horses, cattle, sheep, goats, and other animals.

know Yuma may be without a 4-H coordinator.

"It's just a terrible shame," she said. "Here in Yuma we have one of the largest 4-H groups in the state."

Hodges, who has children active in 4-H, said the parents will have to help fill in for the absence of a coordinator.

While the parents are eager to help out, there is only so much they can do. "It's going to put more pressure on the volunteers," she said. "There are only so many of us to go around."

The extension's adept ability in securing grants has allowed research to continue, Christenson said.

"We are fortunate that we are getting forest health, fire and education funding," Christenson said.

While grants are a benefit to extension they are also limiting, he said.

"If it's not grant denoted we can't do a lot," Christenson said, adding that if there is a noxious weed situation or insect infestation research could be limited because funding for it was not specifically asked for in a grant.

Christenson is also looking for solutions to extension's financial difficulties by partnering with industry to get research and programs funded. This gives him financial assistance as well

as direction in what areas research is needed, he said.

"We look very much to our clientele to see what they want," Christenson said. "We're trying to keep them competitive in the international marketplace."

Some of the current research extension is doing deals with food security, forest health, fires and education. Grants are playing a key role in this research, he said.

The 4-H program is getting some help through a grant from the governor's office for after-school activities, but these types of grants are not readily available, Christenson said.

Despite the difficulties the extension is facing it is still focused on making sure its services remain available.

"We're trying to live up to our commitment," Christenson said. "We're going to continue delivering programs." ¹