

Extension Ag (ICM) Team, Special Session on the Extension Strategic Hiring Plan

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Arizona's agricultural professionals face significant challenges producing high quality food and fiber in desert agroecosystems, including, for example, water and irrigation issues, crop and pest management questions, and fluctuating markets. They rely on the timely, unbiased, science-based information provided through UA Cooperative Extension to remain productive, profitable, and competitive.

The multidisciplinary Extension Agricultural Team of Specialists and Agents is uniquely qualified to meet clientele needs for agricultural research, up-to-date information, and high-impact outreach. Our team includes Extension Specialists with local expertise in biometeorology, agronomy, precision agriculture, integrated pest management (IPM), weed science, plant pathology, and agricultural economics, along with the county agents with a role in agricultural Extension. This "super-team" was formed in 2009 through the union of four formerly independently funded Extension working groups (Cotton IPM/ICM working group, the Cross Commodity working group, the Vegetable working group, and the Crop Pest Losses working group). To keep things manageable, we have also formed smaller "Leadership Teams", subcommittees that focus on the development of outputs in specific areas, including the Vegetable IPM Team, the Field Crops IPM Team, the Soil Fumigant Education Team, the Agronomy Team, and the Crop Pest Losses Working Group. This re-organization has greatly increased our efficiency, coordination, communication, and outputs.

Because of our multidisciplinary, stakeholder-centered perspective, we believe that our views are important for Extension Administrative Team to consider in development and implementation of a hiring plan. This document is our contribution to this process.

Discussion and Ranking of proposed and additional positions

The CALS-CE Strategic Hiring Process adopted a "stop the bleeding" metaphor for identifying those positions that go to the underlying capacity of the CE system to even function. The Integrated Crop Management team discussed this at length and agrees there are certain positions that simply must be filled to enable critical capacity in the development and delivery of our local and statewide programs in agricultural Extension. As these are absolutely needed, there was no attempt to rank the two positions identified within this section.

The section that follows contains our top tier of priorities for the CE hiring plan, acknowledging that filling these positions might be protracted over an extended period of time in the "near-term" and as appropriate to other faculty turnovers within CALS. Because all these priorities are top ones and many external factors will weigh on the timing of each, we did not attempt to rank positions within this tier.

The last section contains our second tier of priorities. It should be made clear that they are still priorities and are important to a better functioning of our agricultural (and other) Extension programs. So they should be seriously considered for filling in the intermediate term. Because the timeline is even more extended for some of these positions, we did not believe it was necessary to rank within this tier of priorities.

Critical to Capacity, “Stop the Bleeding”, Positions (no ranking within this category):

- **LaPaz / Mohave County – ICM/Ag Extension “presence”.** This position was not captured by the CAL-CE Strategic Hiring Process of the summer of 2013, despite it being a glaring and critical gap in our capacity to deliver programs. As an area with first rights to water and a large tribal presence in agriculture, we envision a continuing and enduring need for personnel support in this area. We identify this resource as a “presence” simply to underscore that the group could envision a new kind of position at this location, one that might not require the title of “agent”. Most of all, we need someone on the ground in the Parker office who can build relationships to the agricultural community, fully articulate with agent programming from adjacent Counties and with statewide agricultural Extension. We believe that a role that explicitly ties this individual to the successful deployment of statewide and other team programming would help to reduce the isolation of this post that appears to have limited the success or durability of previous personnel holding the title of continuing-eligible Agents. No individual has remained in the Agent position there for more than 5 years in the last 25 years. A year-to-year, appointed faculty role might provide us the needed functions in this area (northwest AZ), while reducing uncertainties for the individual and creating flexibility of assignment.
- **Area Agent Horticulture, Cochise (#2 on the CALS-CE list).** We agree with the CALS-CE assessment that this is a “stop the bleeding” position, but wish to re-enforce the vision that this position will be in place to assist commercial growers of tree fruits, nuts and vines in their industry throughout Southeastern AZ. Further, this person would be the conduit through which all statewide agricultural Extension programming would be delivered to this region (i.e., for all plant production systems).

Top Tier Extension Priorities for consideration of filling in the near term (no ranking performed within this tier):

- **Assistants in Extension (AiEs).** The CE exercise of the summer 2013 showed some important gaps in supporting our investments in CE programming. Specifically, virtually all of the requests were for faculty lines in counties or departments, most targeting continuing eligible appointments. We believe there is an important niche to be filled by highly skilled paraprofessionals that assist Agents and Specialists (and teams) in deploying Extension programs (research & outreach). For example in the statewide IPM program, we have soft-funded AiEs (n=5) who are thought of as enabling or catalyzing elements for our team programming. Reviews of these positions are universally positive

and these people are considered high functioning, capable of enhancing: competitiveness & success in grants, production of critical outputs, needs assessment / program evaluation, and most of all responsiveness to and impact on stakeholders. Furthermore, these year-to-year appointments provide a degree of freedom and nimbleness that permits teams to shift directions and focus quickly and effectively. In agricultural Extension, we now have more Specialists than Agents, because of positions lost. It would make sense to have (fully or partially) hard funded AiE positions that support many needs for agricultural Extension throughout the state, e.g., agronomic crop production, vegetable production, specialty crops, etc. The specific approach for implementation of these recruitments could be via direct assignment to the aforementioned agricultural systems and their associated ICM teams, or via a competitive request system to CE for 3-yr terms, or some blended approach. For example, we have 4 agents covering field crops, vegetable crops, tree / nut crops statewide. One approach would be to hire an AiE for each of these areas and make them responsive to a team of Agents and Specialists in local and statewide programming.

- **Yuma ICM/IPM Agent** (derived from Specialty Crops IPM Specialist, YAC/Entomology #5). With gross revenues statewide upwards of \$2B annually for plant production, this group determined that we do not have a complete network of Agents to help develop local programming and to articulate with statewide programmatic needs. Currently, we depend on two central AZ area agents (Mostafa & Loper), a regional specialist (Norton), and a Yuma County Director / YAC Director (Nolte) for deployment of statewide programming. With the additions of positions in northwest AZ (Parker, AZ) and southeast AZ (Willcox, AZ), we extend our coverage significantly. However, the team identified a much larger need for local and statewide agricultural Extension programming in Yuma than can be covered currently. So we acknowledge and understand Entomology/YAC's request for a specialty crops IPM Specialist. However, we respectfully suggest that, given the burgeoning importance of vegetable seed crops, dates, and other Yuma-specific specialty crops and our continuing need for agricultural Extension support in Yuma, a Yuma County Agent with training and focus on Integrated Crop Management and/or Integrated Pest Management would best serve our needs in agricultural Extension programming there and regionally.
- **Applied Plant Pathology Extension Specialist (#18).** Plant diseases remain an important limitation to efficient plant production throughout the state of Arizona. We have 3 key senior level personnel who are or may likely retire in the near term (M. Olsen & M. McClure on campus; M. Matheron at YAC). Our capacity to respond to critical problems in plant pathology including nematology is quickly diminishing. There is a significant need for someone who works directly with growers to address their needs in plant pathology. The duty post for this appointment could be variable, but the scope would have to be statewide and across all agricultural systems.

- **Agronomy Extension Specialist, MAC/Plant Sciences (#21, Cropping System Agronomist).** We currently have just one plant scientist who is dedicated to understanding and improving statewide production systems through agronomic research and outreach (Ottman, forage and grain crops). We have a large need to address plant production systems via a dedicated field crops agronomist with experience in and understanding of irrigated systems and a working knowledge of the plant-water-soil relationships that govern these extremely productive systems in Arizona.
- **Vegetable Extension Specialist, YAC/Plant Sciences (#20).** As above, expertise in plant production systems is a must to energize and activate team programming. Vegetable crops statewide are among the most valuable plant production systems we have (on a per acre basis). Yet, we have not had this gap filled for many years. As with the field crops agronomist, we need someone who understands plant-water-soil relations and can collaborate productively with other members of our agricultural teams.

Second Tier Extension Priorities for consideration of filling in the intermediate term (no ranking performed within this tier):

- **Irrigation Specialist (#1),** submitted by ABE. There are many and varied reasons why this position is important to Arizona. Water is simply the most important input to our plant production systems. Needs maybe greatest in the central part of the state where water prices are much higher and priority for water is lower — thus, stakeholders need increased efficiencies and better research/outreach on how to best meet plant developmental needs. The opinion of this group was that this person should be able to meet both sets of needs: engineering and the biological issues. The specific phenotype may change depending on the sequence of and abilities of new hires that precede this recruitment (e.g., Agronomy Extension Specialist). In fact, it was suggested that it might be feasible to find a qualified candidate with plant-water-soil expertise combining this position with the next.
- **Soil Science Extension Specialist (#23),** submitted by SWES. Soil fertility and plant relations are important areas of program development. Similar to above, the specific target of this recruitment could potentially be impacted by other recruitments and existing human resources in this area.
- **IPM Specialist Ecotoxicology (#4) (MAC/Entomology).** Perception of risk by the agricultural community and greater society at large is a huge issue that impacts multiple CE programs, even those that transcend traditional agricultural Extension (e.g., food and nutrition, medical / public health, etc.). Much work (and funding) is available to propel this position to the forefront of our IPM, food safety, and water and environmental quality programs. We envision someone who can communicate about risk as it relates to food safety, pesticides, pollinator safety, biotechnology, etc. Agriculture would be the

consistent context for this position and would support industries in Arizona. Natural linkages to existing programs would create important synergies and value for our stakeholders.

- **Fruit, nut and vine specialist (#19)**, campus based. This position would play a leadership role in development of statewide fruit, nut, and vine Extension programs working closely with area Agents and others in the southeastern, southwestern, and other portions of the state.
- **Economic Impact Analyst (duty post in AREC, Norton School, or directly in CALS)** (perhaps a better title, Extension Program Analyst). We agree with the Norton School request (#13) that evaluation continues to be a growing area of need within CE programs. Whether a Ph.D. or M.S. level individual would be most appropriate for the position can be debated, but we agree that someone with skills and interests in evaluating Extension programs with solid economic credentials would help augment the modest investment CALS has already made in this area.