

EVOLUTION OF THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE IN ALASKA

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The Cooperative Extension Service was formally organized as a department of the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines, later the University of Alaska, on July 1, 1930.

PRE-EXTENSION PERIOD

A proper perspective of extension work in Alaska can best be obtained by reviewing the history of the United States Department of Agriculture work in the former territory. The earliest reference to this work is found in a report by Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson:

The first appropriation "to enable the Secretary of Agriculture to investigate and report to Congress upon the agricultural resources of Alaska, with special reference to the desirability and feasibility of the establishment of agricultural experiment stations in the Territory," became available July 1, 1897. The general supervision of the work under the appropriation was assigned to the Director of the Office of Experiment Stations.¹

Special commissioners were sent to the coastal area and islands of Alaska to make the investigations. The Secretary of Interior also made available the services of the superintendent of Government Schools in Alaska for collecting information on the agricultural possibilities of the Yukon Valley. Reports submitted were so favorable that Congress continued the appropriation for another year, and Professor C. C. Georgeson was sent to Alaska to establish a headquarters for agricultural investigations. The headquarters were located at Sitka in 1898. Then the Territorial capital. Congress, as a result of Georgeson's reports, authorized the Secretary of Agriculture "to establish and maintain agricultural experiment stations in Alaska, as well as to investigate the agricultural resources and capabilities of the Territory,...."² Land was acquired at Sitka and a permanent headquarters established during the summer of 1900/

Secretary Wilson commented on the work in Alaska at that time as follows:

The problem which the Department has undertaken to work out is to determine whether sufficient agriculture and horticulture can be developed in Alaska to form an important subsidiary industry to aid in the permanent development of mining, fisheries and lumbering, which will undoubtedly be the leading industries of this region. If all the food supplies of the population engaged in these industries must be transported from the United States and Canada, it is evident that the development of Alaska will be much slower and uncertain than if a considerable portion of these supplies can be produced in the Territory... If our investigations should do nothing more than establish a sound basis the growing of vegetables in little gardens about the cottages of miners and fishermen in Alaska, they will make an adequate return for the funds expended on them.³

The investigations resulted in sites being selected that seemed to have agricultural possibilities and where future settlement appeared likely. Experiment station farms were established in these areas and farming was attempted. Seven stations were established between 1900 and 1915. Only two of the original farms remain today, namely at Matanuska, in the Matanuska Valley, and Fairbanks in the Tanana Valley.

The United States Department of agriculture defined these establishments as experiment stations, although they would be more properly be termed demonstration farms. Their major purpose was to determine what types of agriculture could be carried out in the various parts of Alaska. Seed was supplied to cooperating farmers and gardeners in return for reports of their success or failure. Annual reports published from 1898 to 1931 make reference to farm demonstrations conducted, requests for information replied to and bulletins and circulars published, in addition to reporting the research projects.

The first publication appeared in 1902 under Georgeson authorship. Entitled "Suggestions to Pioneer Farmers in Alaska," it was revised in 1917 as Circular No. 1 with the title "Information for Prospective Settlers in Alaska." Additional education bulletins issued during this period were "Vegetable Growing in Alaska," 1905; "Cereal Growing in Alaska," 1926; "Vegetable Gardening in Alaska," 1928; and "The Potato in Alaska." 1929.

All Federally conducted agricultural work in Alaska between the years 1900 and 1930 was under the direction of the State Relations Service, Office of Experiment Station, United States Department of Agriculture.

These pioneer agriculturists determined areas of potential agricultural production and proved that farming and gardening were possible in Alaska. They made available to early residents the types of services later carried on by the Experiment Station and the Extension Service through the Land-grant College.

Alaska's land-grant college dates from 1915. The cornerstone was laid on July four of that year on land set aside by Congress for the support of a Territorial College and School of Mines.

The Territorial Legislature by its Acts of May 3, 1917, accepted the land grant and created a corporation, "The Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines," defining its duties and providing for a Board of Trustees consisting of eight members.

The college opened for instruction on September 18, 1922...4

As long as the Office of Experiment Stations, under the direct sponsorship of the Federal Legislature, continued to support agricultural research and informal education there was no reason to change the arrangement. No concerted effort was made to have the terms of the Hatch or Smith-Lever Acts extended to Alaska until the late 1920's when Federal support had diminished to the point where only two of the original seven experiment station farms remained active.

Congress, on February 23, 1929, passed legislation extending the benefits of the Hatch Act establishing Experiment Stations and the Smith-Lever Act providing for Cooperative Extension work in Agriculture and Home Economics to Alaska. 5

The Act of February 23, 1929 was restrictive in that it did not provide for financing of extension and research on the same basis as in the States. Ernest Gruening, a former governor of Alaska, has pointed out that:

Congress had through the years enacted other acts further endowing agricultural research and agricultural extension work in connection with land-grant colleges. Despite the earnest efforts of Dr. Bunnell and Alaska's delegates, these acts would not be made available to Alaska for some years and then appropriations would be reduced from the amounts authorized by law and enjoyed by the states. 6

Specifically, the Act limited funds for extension work to "Such amount as the Secretary of Agriculture might determine." 7 Not until 1949 were the full benefits of legislation authorizing Federal appropriations for cooperative Extension work extended to Alaska.

EXTENSION SERVICE ESTABLISHED

The Territorial legislature accepted the terms of the Smith-Lever Act on May 2, 1929, and designated the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines as the college to administer Cooperative Extension work in Agriculture and Home Economics in Alaska, but they did not appropriate any funds for the work. The Secretary of agriculture made available ten thousand dollars to enable the College to organize the new department on July 1, 1930.

The founding of the Extension Service was reported in the October, 1930, Extension Service Review. Excerpts from this account follow:

At the request of Dr. Charles E. Bunnell, President of the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines, W. A. Lloyd, in charge of extension work of the Western States, United States Department of Agriculture, was sent to Alaska for two months to assist in organizing and starting the new service. Mr. Lloyd arrived at the College June 25. President Bunnell was appointed director of extension without compensation; George W. Gasser, assistant director for agriculture; Mrs. Lydia O. Fohn-Hansen, assistant director for home economics.... On the day the work was started at the College three boys' and girls' 4-H extension clubs were organized, one in gardening and two in sewing.

Early in July Mr. Gasser and Mrs. Fohn-Hansen accompanied by Mr. Lloyd, left the college for their first field trip. Eklutna, Matanuska, Anchorage, Seward, Juneau, Sitka, Ketchikan and Wrangell were visited and extension work organized. Nine 4-H extension clubs were started, with 110 members and 12 women's home economics clubs. Owing to the work being started in mid-season, only preliminary work could be done in agriculture. Plans were laid for another year. The clubs included in addition to the white children a

number of Eskimos, Aleuts, and Indians. Cooperative club work was established at the industrial school in Eklutna and the Jessie Lee Home at Seward. The club demonstrations are clothing, nutrition, and gardening. The work with women consists of sewing, home management and young-mothers clubs.

A few homesteaders are coming in each year and the foundations of organized rural society are being laid. The extension field, both in home economics and boys' and girls' clubs, is attractive, with possibilities for considerable development.

In agriculture the work for a while necessarily will be largely to give individual assistance to farmers or homesteaders and particularly to help market crops through organization.

The Extension staff was enlarged in 1932 by addition of a veterinarian. A full-time director was appointed in 1935. The assistant directors and the veterinarian traveled throughout the Territory helping the settlers in any way they could. Transportation was difficult and trips were long. Communications were poor. Four-H and Homemaker clubs were established but often disbanded for lack of extension personnel in the immediate area to provide continued leadership, yet the program reached more and more people each year and was well accepted.

Agricultural settlement in Alaska was greatly expanded in 1935 by action of the Federal Government establishing the Matanuska Colony. Of the formation of the colony, historian Hulley has written:

In 1934 Harry Hopkins, federal Relief Administrator in Washington, D.C., and other federal authorities, took up the idea of sponsoring a government-assisted colony in Alaska. They felt that such a settlement would aid the territory, supply foodstuffs for Alaska, serve as a step toward the possible defense of the region, and above all give a new start to scores of families from among the millions of farmers who were finding it almost impossible to make a living in the United States.

The Matanuska Valley in south-central Alaska, some 45 miles northeast of Anchorage, was finally selected by the federal administrators as the most suitable area for the New Deal experiment.

In June 1934, federal agents made a hasty survey of the Matanuska Valley. When their report was received in January 1935, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Department of Interior agreed jointly to sponsor the settlement. 9

Colonists were selected from the states of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, in the belief that persons from these northern latitudes could more easily adjust to the climate of Alaska. The first of 200 selected families arrived in the Matanuska Valley in May of 1935 with the remainder following in the early summer.

Establishment of the Matanuska Colony gave the Extension service an opportunity to concentrate its effort and to prove its adaptability to local situations. The home demonstration leader went immediately to the colony where she remained all summer and fall working with the women who were pioneering on the frontier wilderness. The Extension Service director went on leave to work for the colony and later resigned from Extension. The Extension Service director continued to work closely with the colonists.

The Territorial and Federal governments took a greater interest in supporting extension in Alaska as a result of the successful efforts of the small extension staff in working with the colonists. Funds from both Territorial and Federal sources were increased in the following biennium by approximately 35 percent.

The first Extension Service field office was opened in Palmer, in the Matanuska Valley, in April of 1936. The office was staffed with an agricultural agent, a home demonstration agent and a secretary. These agents worked closely with the 200 colony families and the approximately 100 families who had homesteaded in the valley previous to the establishment of the colony, in helping them develop their farms and improve their living conditions, and to develop youth programs through the medium of 4-H clubs. This fact prompted the directors to write, in 1956, that, "In a sense, agricultural extension work in Alaska has, since its first beginnings in the Territory, concerned itself with what has recently become known as the 'farm unit approach.'"¹⁰

Action taken by the United States Department of Agriculture in 1936 had a direct influence on the role of the Extension Service in the eyes of the people. Production and Marketing Administration funds were made available to Alaskan farmers for the Agricultural Conservation Program and the Extension director was named administrator of the program in Alaska. The Extension director was thus placed in charge of an action program concerned with direct payments to farmers for carrying out certain conservation practices on their farms. Not until 1952 was the Commodity Stabilization Service, a successor to the Production and Marketing Administration, put on a committee basis in Alaska with a separate "state" chairman.

Establishment of the county and state Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committees, with a federally appointed chairman, did not separate this action program from the Extension Service as far as the farmers were concerned. Confusion continues because Extension is still required to furnish the committees with office space and clerical assistance on a reimbursable basis. Persons seeking information concerning the program come to the Extension office, which is also the Committee office, and talk to extension personnel. The confusion in the minds of the people is vividly illustrated in a book written by an Alaskan homesteader. He said, "The Extension Service, a government agency which functioned to help farmers, had paid me \$40.00 for clearing the acre and it expected me to use it for farming."¹¹

The Hatch Act establishing the Agricultural Experiment Stations was extended to Alaska in 1929. The Territory accepted the terms of the Hatch Act in 1933, and ownership of the two remaining Federal Experiment Station farms were transferred to the Alaska

Agricultural College and School of Mines. Research programs at these farms, located at Matanuska and at College, were directed by superintendents appointed by the President of the College.

The Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines were charged, by action of the Territorial legislature, to the University of Alaska in 1935. Two years later the University President moved to coordinate the program of the two experiment station farms with each other and with that of the Extension Service by appointment of a joint director with headquarters on the campus.

Territorial appropriations for the Extension Service during the next ten years increased and the organization gradually expanded. Permanent field offices were opened in Juneau, Anchorage and Fairbanks and staffed with home demonstration agents. A part-time 4-H State Leader was employed. Emphasis was placed on the direct personal contact of agents with the people to the extent that when the veterinarian resigned in 1938 no full-time specialists were again employed until 1957.

THE POST WAR PERIOD

The Federal government took a real interest in Alaska from the standpoint of military defense both during and following World War II. The only landings of enemy troops on American soil were made at Kiska and Attu in the Aleutian Islands. Following the war, as relations with Russia became unfavorable, Alaska's location was considered the logical site for military defense installations.

Military personnel agreed that Alaska would make a logical first line of defense against Russia but suggested that if the enemy cut off supply lines, troops stationed there might be rendered incapable of action by a food shortage. Military leaders indicated a real concern for increasing food production in the Territory. This concern led to another study of Alaska's agricultural potential.

The Agriculture Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations initiated a provision in the 1947 Department of agriculture Appropriation Act providing for a "nonrecurring, immediately available appropriation of \$20,000 to the Administrator, Agricultural Research Administration, for special exploratory investigations of Alaska, to determine the basic problems underlying potential agricultural development in appropriate areas of Alaska, as a guide to the development of future agricultural research in the region."¹² The investigations were carried out in the summer of 1946.

The following statement indicates that the concept of people in the United States Department of Agriculture toward the role of agriculture in the Territory had changed little from 1900. Most informed residents of the State hold this same concept today. "Farming in Alaska was considered in the exploratory investigation as an auxiliary to military, transportation, mining, fisheries, forestry, and industrial development."¹³

The exploratory investigations and subsequent hearings resulted in Federal legislation providing for an expanded agricultural research program from the University of Alaska back to the USDA

The United States Department of Agriculture developed a five-year plan based on direct federal appropriations in addition to land grant and Territorial funds. The direct appropriation by Congress to the Agricultural Research Administration of the United States Department of Agriculture for work in Alaska provided the wedge for assuming direction of the program. A well-equipped physical plant including offices, laboratories and staff houses was established at Palmer. These physical facilities are still federally owned.

This action of the federal government dealt a severe blow to the Extension Service for a number of reasons. The joint directorship of the Experiment Station and the Cooperative Extension Service was terminated. A new director was named to head the Experiment Station and the University as Director of the Extension Service retained the former joint director. Headquarters of the Experiment Station was moved to Palmer, some 400 miles from the University campus and the University lost effective control of the program. Professional persons employed by the Experiment Station in the new program had federal civil service status without University appointment. This action was interpreted by the people of Alaska as indicating a lack of faith on the part of the federal government in the leadership of the University of Alaska. This attitude was further enhanced by the significant fact that, although a substantial increase in funds was made available for research, no additional funds were made available to the Extension Service for disseminating the results of the research to farmers.

The 4-H and home economics programs of the Extension Service appear to have survived this period without loss of prestige, largely because of the personal respect which the people of the territory had for Mrs. Lydia Fohn-Hansen who was Home Demonstration Leader and acting 4-H Leader at the time.

FROM 1949 TO PRESENT

The outlook for extension improved somewhat in 1949 when, on October 27, Congress extended to Alaska the full benefits of legislation authorizing federal appropriations for Cooperative Extension work. Thus, for the first time federal funds were made available to Alaska on the same basis that they were allocated to the states.

The Veteran's on the Farm Training Program was developed after the war to allow veterans to be paid a certain sum while learning to farm on their own farms. The veteran had to attend regular classes and follow acceptable farming practices. If the veteran met the requirements, he was eligible for monthly payments while enrolled in the program. The University of Alaska held the contract with the Veteran's Administration for

administering the program in Alaska and assigned responsibility to the director of the Extension Service.

Acceptance of the program appeared to have many advantages, but it also had its disadvantages. Two new district agricultural agents' positions were established with the funds for this program and the increased appropriations, which had become available in 1949. These agents were to spend half of their time as veteran-on-the-farm training instructors and the other half of their time as agricultural agents. The Alaska Extension Service had again become involved in a program including payments to farmers.

The Veteran's on the Farm Training Program came to an abrupt halt in Alaska in the spring of 1952 with Veteran Administration charges of abuse of the use of funds through payments to veterans not meeting all the requirements. Charges and counter-charges were made, with the result that as late as 1958 the Veteran's Administration was forcing many veterans to repay the money they had accepted in good faith through Extension Service connected personnel. The program terminated in 1952.

The University administration became concerned, in 1951, about the lack of leadership the University was exerting in the field of agriculture. The research staff was successfully gathering facts needed by the rural people but had little means of getting the information to them. University and Experiment Station personnel held a number of conferences in the winter and spring of 1951 and 1952. A representative of the United States department of Agriculture joined in the final meetings. A plan for developing the traditional land-grant college functions of resident teaching, extension and research in agriculture was developed and approved by the University of Alaska Board of Regents and the divisions concerned in the United States Department of Agriculture.

The approved plan called for associate director of the Experiment Station to add to his responsibilities those of Director of the Extension Service and Dean of Agriculture. Equally important was the provision for joint research-extension specialist and research-teaching appointments.

Changes in organization have resulted in a joint Extension Service-Experiment Station director with no provision for a Dean of Agriculture. Five research scientists continue to devote approximately 25% of their time to extension-specialist activities. The Extension Service has also employed a full-time specialist in the field of horticulture. A feeling of interdependence and a desire for cooperation on the part of staff members have resulted in continued good relations between the Experiment Station and the Extension Service. The third side of the normal land-grant college triangle in the field of agriculture, that of resident instruction, has been de-emphasized since 1955 and the University of Alaska does not now offer a four year undergraduate program in any area of agriculture. The University's department of agriculture does offer a two year curriculum in the basic sciences and the following advice to potential agricultural students: "Students preparing themselves for an agricultural career are advised to enroll for the first two years, recognizing the reservation that their second two years of training will have to be acquired at some other institution."¹⁴

Very little work was carried on by the Cooperative Extension Service in isolated villages of northern and western Alaska until early in 1956. At that time funds were made available to the Extension Service by the Alaska Rural Development Board, a territorial board established by the legislature to evaluate the conditions in isolated villages and seek solutions to village problems. An agricultural extension agent was employed to develop a program of better living and community development in these villages. From the beginning this agent and other staff members working with him have fostered the development of 4-H Clubs, home gardening and better nutrition. Federal "Special Needs" funds have been available since 1956 to expand this program in the isolated villages. The first state legislature meeting in 1959 abolished the Alaska Rural Development Board but granted funds for isolated village work directly to the Cooperative Extension Service.

Additional emphasis was placed on the youth program in 1957 by employment of a full-time state 4-H Leader. This work is currently supported entirely by federal "Special Needs" funds. 113 4-H Clubs has an enrollment of 1182 boys and girls throughout Alaska in 1957. The enrollment rose in 1958 to 1156 young people in 141 clubs. State programs include a roundup on the University of Alaska campus in June. Four-H Club members also compete for trips to Chicago to attend the National 4-H Club Congress in the fall.

Headquarters of the Cooperative Extension Service is at the University of Alaska, College, Alaska, which is near Fairbanks. The Director devotes approximately 30% of his time to Extension. The remainder of his time is occupied with duties as Director of the University's Agricultural Experiment Station.

Direct responsibility for program and operation is delegated to an Associate Director, who also is assigned duties in the academic program of the University. The Associate Director is assisted by the State staff which includes a Home Demonstration Leader 4-H Leader, an Administrative Assistant, a Horticulturist and the Director of Information.

District Agricultural Agents are located in field offices at Fairbanks, Palmer and Homer. District Home Demonstration Agents are located in field offices at Fairbanks, Palmer, Anchorage, Homer and Juneau. Headquarters for the isolated village district is on the University of Alaska campus. A Home Demonstration Agent is employed during the summer months to work in isolated villages in the area of Nome. A part-time assistant to the Home Demonstration Agent in Juneau has an office in Ketchikan through the cooperation of the Fisheries Products Research Laboratories. In most cases the districts served by the offices are the areas adjacent to the cities or towns in which the offices are located.

The Director and five research persons serving Extension as specialists are located at the Experiment station headquarters in Palmer.

The total operating budget for fiscal 1960 amounts to \$242,853 with \$122,703 from federal sources and \$120,150 from state sources. This dollar for dollar ratio in Alaska compares to the average for all land-grant colleges of nearly \$2.00 of state money for every dollar of federal money.

The United States Department of Agriculture's field committee for Alaska was established to evaluate agricultural needs in the Territory and to advise the Secretary of Agriculture. Committee membership is limited to heads of the United States Department of Agriculture branches operative in Alaska.

The Extension Service Director participates actively in the semi-annual meetings. This committee has been effective in fostering cooperation among federal agricultural agencies in Alaska at the state level.

The close association with the agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committees, through their use of Extension facilities has been noted. In addition the Extension Director serves on the state committee, and the agricultural agents serve on the local committees.

Cooperative working arrangements have been maintained with the Soil Conservation Service in the field through district agricultural agents having ex officio membership on local soil conservation district boards. Cooperation at the state level is assured through the Extension Director who is a member of the Alaska Soil Conservation District Advisory Committee.

Relations with other federal and state agencies are good. These relations are generally informal and based on professional and personal relationships of the individuals involved, and the strong desire of most of the people to use their resources in accomplishing the greatest overall gains for Alaska.

Continued development of Alaska, as a state will bring many more people who will have to learn to adjust to the North Country. These people will also have to be fed, clothed and housed. The Cooperative Extension Service has been developing for 29 years in Alaska. The Service reached a degree of maturity that will enable it to help both the old and new residents achieve the goals of orderly development of the State and a good life for themselves and their families.

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