The UAF Cooperative Extension Service has two primary functions both related to connection.

First, we connect with Alaskans and their communities to transfer fact-based knowledge and information. Of equal importance is connecting Alaskans and their communities to the university. By making sure both connections are complete, we serve as the door to your university.

We do this through a dedicated staff, a very active State Advisory Council and thousands of volunteers and supporters. People from across the state attend Extension workshops, conferences and programming ranging from the traditional 4-H club to Master Gardeners, StrongWomen classes and renewable energy programs.

Fred Schlutt, Director
UAF Cooperative Extension Service

From the Director’s Office

The Cooperative Extension Service State Advisory Council has enjoyed this year of transition and growth. In May, we welcomed Fred Schlutt as the new vice provost for outreach and director of the Extension Service, and we enjoyed a very positive year developing a working relationship with UAF Chancellor Brian Rogers.

In program areas, we worked to help implement the chancellor’s vision of Extension as a critical instrument of the university’s effort to effectively engage with all Alaskans. To that end, we sharpened our focus on the sustainability of Alaska’s communities and lifestyles and are helping to coordinate all of the Extension program elements to maximize the impact of our modest resources.

Looking forward to 2010, the council is participating in the long-range planning process and will engage with the Legislature to make sure that the vital work of Extension is valued by Alaska’s policymakers.

Fred Schlutt

Council supports outreach

The Cooperative Extension Service relies on a variety of federal, state and local sources of funding. These charts show Extension expenditures as a percentage of the total budget and by category.

Fred Schlutt, Director
UAF Cooperative Extension Service

Phil Smith, Chair
State Advisory Council

From the Director’s Office

The Cooperative Extension Service relies on a variety of federal, state and local sources of funding. These charts show Extension expenditures as a percentage of the total budget and by category.

Fred Schlutt

Council supports outreach

The Cooperative Extension Service relies on a variety of federal, state and local sources of funding. These charts show Extension expenditures as a percentage of the total budget and by category.

Fred Schlutt

Council supports outreach

The Cooperative Extension Service relies on a variety of federal, state and local sources of funding. These charts show Extension expenditures as a percentage of the total budget and by category.

Fred Schlutt

Council supports outreach

The Cooperative Extension Service relies on a variety of federal, state and local sources of funding. These charts show Extension expenditures as a percentage of the total budget and by category.

Fred Schlutt
You could say Fred Schlutt grew up with Cooperative Extension. His father served as a 4-H agent and specialist for 38 years and his mother was a county home ec agent.

Schlutt, who became the statewide director of Alaska Extension in May, says his life path led naturally to 4-H and to Extension. He joined 4-H at 9 in Texas, attended 4-H camps and raised small livestock — the kind that could live in his parents’ garage in town.

Caring for poultry and rabbits also taught him responsibility, he says, though he didn’t realize it at the time. His father traveled on the job and his mother was busy so he knew, “No one was going to take care of my projects but me.”

During college, he studied horticulture, volunteered with 4-H and attended Texas A&M football games. He never missed a home game, and during his senior year, went to all the games, no matter where they were played.

Schlutt’s 30-year career with Extension began in Abilene, Texas, as a county agriculture agent. He also worked as a 4-H agent in Texas and Wyoming and, most recently, as state 4-H coordinator and senior development officer in Maine.

When the opportunity to lead Extension in Alaska became available, Schlutt knew he wanted the job. He sees similarities between Maine and Alaska Extensions — both serve isolated and rural populations and have small, dedicated staffs who are focused on community-based programming.

“Alaska really redefines the term rural,” he says. “This is just a different kind of rural, with a subsistence economy and a high cost of living.”

Schlutt did not grasp the enormity of the state and the challenges that presented until he visited communities around Alaska. Those geographic challenges, he believes, magnify opportunities for Extension work. Key challenges to Alaskans lie in the areas of energy, climate change, food security, health and community sustainability.

Schlutt, who lived in Maine for six years, is not fazed by the Fairbanks winter so far and is used to plugging his car in. He was joined in Alaska by his wife, Ann, and their daughter, Laura, a student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Another daughter teaches special education in Texas and a younger son attends college in Maine.

Longtime hobbies include coaching and refereeing. Schlutt has coached all his children in softball and, with his son, coached a Maine high school softball team to a state championship last spring. He has also refereed high school and college football for more than 30 years. After his first season of Alaska high school football, he was surprised and pleased to be asked to referee the large school state championship in Anchorage. He does not expect to coach in Fairbanks because of demands of his job, but he hopes to continue refereeing.

He also hopes to help as many Alaskans as possible through Extension.

When the opportunity to lead Extension in Alaska became available, Schlutt knew he wanted the job.
Brenna Schaake and her family hosted Misono Shiratori as part of a Japanese 4-H exchange this past summer. Misono, who is 12, lives in northern Japan. She speaks limited English but was all smiles for the four weeks she was in Alaska. When the girls couldn’t understand each other, they communicated with their hands, said Brenna, a sophomore at North Pole High School. The girls traveled to Valdez, swam at the hot springs, visited the university museum and toured the Tanana Valley State Fair. Misono particularly liked the fair and seeing moose.

Brenna says she wants to travel and experience another culture now. “I’d do it in a heartbeat,” she said.

Chris Pastro, a Randy Middle School teacher who coordinates the Alaska 4-H International Exchange Program with Jill Holmgren, said raising great citizens of the world is an important mission of 4-H. Many people think of domestic arts and raising livestock when they think of 4-H, but as Holmgren notes, “It’s not just about cows and cooking anymore.”

Alaska 4-H’ers hunt for small game and moose, perform with a Japanese drumming club and experiment with biofuels. More than 13,000 Alaska youth and their families participate in 4-H activities through clubs, after-school activities and special interest classes. The program emphasizes a hands-on approach to learning.

“Teens in the 4-H Youth in Government Program traveled to Juneau last spring to see how the Legislature works. Fourteen-year-old Michaela Rice, who testified on a cell phone bill, said seeing the Legislature in action made her more aware of how things work and more confident about voicing her opinion.

On the Kenai Peninsula, youth ages 10-16 participated in small game hunts coordinated by the 4-H Shooting Sports Program, Safari Club International and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

Experienced hunters Helen and Thomas Netschert hosted two 15-year-old girls on a hunting expedition in November. Only one of the girls had hunted previously. After a safety lecture and target practice, the girls both bagged snowshoe hares near Soldotna.

“They’re geared for
Experienced agent leads Alaska 4-H

Deb Jones returns to her roots in the new role of state 4-H program leader, coordinating youth development programs in Alaska. Jones has worked as a 4-H agent in Alaska, New Hampshire and Virginia, and as 4-H state specialist for the past eight years in Utah.

Jones envisions working with dedicated staff and volunteers in continuing support of 4-H’s strong traditional programs of agriculture and livestock, while growing new programs in the areas of science, engineering and technology, citizenship and healthy living.

Youth raise reindeer for auction

Three 4-H members raised reindeer for the 2009 Tanana Valley State Fair livestock auction. This is believed to be the first time reindeer have been featured during a livestock auction at a fair in the U.S. The UAF Reindeer Program donated reindeer to three 4-H members, who attended classes and learned how to care for their animals throughout the year. Reindeer have already been distributed to four 4-H’ers for next year’s auction.

4-H volunteer receives award

Priscilla Rice of Fairbanks received one of two national awards given to 4-H leaders in the country this past fall. Rice, who leads the Forget-Me-Not 4-H Club, was recognized as the 2009 National 4-H Salute to Excellence Volunteer of the Year.

Rice has led the club for seven years and serves as president of the Tanana District 4-H Leaders Council. She has coordinated a drive to send hundreds of care packages to U.S. soldiers in Iraq, planted thousands of flowers, led livestock clinics and organized statewide 4-H gatherings. Her husband, Steve, says, “Priscilla breathes, eats and sleeps 4-H; her blood truly runs green.”
Anna Simmons enrolled in a Master Gardener class for guidance this past spring after an unsuccessful attempt at gardening in Bethel, where marginal soil and permafrost present challenges. “It’s a little harder out here,” she said. “You really have to have a lot of help.” Simmons and several other Bethel residents grew a bounty of vegetables last summer in a new community garden, one of several recently developed in the state. The garden is a joint project between the City of Bethel and Cooperative Extension.

The project attracted a mix of experienced and novice gardeners, according to Bethel Extension agent Leif Albertson. “It went way better than I thought it would,” he reports.

Simmons planted three 40- to 50-foot rows in the garden, harvesting potatoes, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower and other vegetables.

Extension agents across the state report that Alaska is following a national trend — a greater interest in gardening and a desire to eat local. A poll last year predicted a 40 percent increase in the number of U.S. households raising vegetables.

Agriculture and horticulture agent Michele Hébert taught two well-attended Master Gardener classes in Fairbanks this past spring. Usually participants want information about growing flowers, but Hébert noticed a change. “This year, everyone wanted to grow vegetables,” she said.

Participation jumped more than 60 percent this past year in Extension’s Master Gardener program, which includes 40 hours of instruction, followed by a 40-hour volunteer commitment. More than 250 individuals attended Master Gardener classes in Fairbanks, Anchorage, Craig, Bethel, Palmer, Kenai and Homer or through an online course.

“Eating Local Alaskans choose homegrown”

Andrew Simmons, left, gets potato harvesting help in the Bethel community garden from several youth, including David Charlie, standing center. At right is Leah Walsh. Photo by Leif Albertson

Page 4 — Program Highlights 2009
The desire of Alaskans to eat local is also reflected in other Extension programming. The desire of Alaskans to eat local is reflected in other Extension programming. Palmer agent Stephen Brown offered four sessions of what he calls “Chicken University,” about the fundamentals of raising a backyard flock.

Classes on preserving native foods also continue to draw greater numbers of Alaskans who want to preserve fish and game meat, as well as what’s coming out of their gardens. Fairbanks agent Roxie Dinstel said the greater interest is probably driven by several factors including the economy and a desire by Alaskans to reduce their carbon footprint. Most produce grown in the United States travels at least 1,500 miles before it gets sold, she notes, and it’s a much greater distance in Alaska.

Another concern is food security, said Dinstel. If people grow and preserve their own foods, they know exactly how it has been grown and what has been added to it.

“They have more control if they grow it themselves,” she said.

Anchorage Master Gardener Joette Storm and three other Master Gardeners offered popular “front yard farming” classes this past spring, as part of their volunteer commitment. Storm, a retiree, was inspired by an author who advocates turning lawns into productive garden spots. Storm herself gardens in four raised beds on the south-facing side of her house, near downtown Anchorage.

Juneau agent Darren Snyder helped develop a community garden in 2008 at a low-income housing complex and continues to coordinate the project, along with one of the residents. Eight to 10 families and numerous community youth have gardened the past two years in the 22 raised beds.

“The kids just love it,” said Snyder.

He is also working with a local homeless shelter to develop a terraced community garden spot on the hillside behind the shelter. Current plans also call for rooftop container gardening atop The Glory Hole Shelter. The shelter wants to produce more of its own food for clients — and to give clients a role in producing it.

Precision ag co-op reduces costs

Precision agriculture is a new way of farming that uses the GPS to precisely steer tractors and harvesting equipment. This greatly reduces the amount of fuel, chemicals and labor used in farming while increasing the harvest.

Alaska has been the last state to adopt precision agriculture because of its high cost and the smaller size of Alaska farms. The cost for Palmer area farms has been significantly decreased due to a collaboration in Mat-Su. The school district purchased a GPS base station, the borough provided data and Extension contributed technical expertise. Participating farmers can share this base station, so it saves each farmer using the system approximately $15,000.

Grass runways increase safety

Flying rocks from gravel airstrips often dent propellers and cause other damage to small planes that use the runways. With a goal of improving aviation safety, Extension offered its first workshop this past fall on establishing and maintaining grass airstrips. Forty-five pilots representing 50 runways participated in the workshop led by the Palmer agriculture and horticulture agent.

Recommendations were based on aviation turf research from the Matanuska Experiment Farm and a demonstration runway in Talkeetna. Hardy Alaska turf grass was seeded directly on gravel, saving the airstrip owner the cost of hauling in expensive topsoil. As a result of national publicity on the workshop, our agent received dozens of e-mails and inquiries from engineering firms, pilots and other extensions interested in developing grass runways.
As heating costs continue to rise, Alaskans have turned increasingly to renewable energy sources.

Extension has responded in a variety of ways — helping Alaskans burn safely and efficiently with firewood and supporting the development of biomass projects that are fueled with wood waste.

Sitka agent Bob Gorman said while wind-generated and hydroelectric power have been successful in some areas of Alaska, wood heat is a logical choice for many residents, particularly those who live in forested rural areas and have the highest heating costs.

“In addition to being economical, the main virtue of wood heat is its simplicity,” said Gorman. “Collecting firewood and burning firewood is really easy to do.”

During the past year, Extension has provided information to residents about how to install, maintain and use wood stoves safely at renewable energy fairs, and has hosted responsible wood-burning classes on how to burn wood efficiently and lower stove emissions.

Extension also expanded its wood heating website this past year. Available at www.alaska woodheating.com, the website offers information on stove types, wood heat safety and installation, as well as suggestions, by region, on how to locate firewood and which varieties provide the greatest heat. An online heating cost calculator helps residents compare costs associated with different fuels.

Extension program assistant Karen Petersen has worked to support development of biomass projects on Prince of Wales Island. Sawmills there process more than 28 million board feet of timber annually. As much as half of each sawn log becomes wood waste in the machining process, so the mountains of wood waste that are generated make the island a good candidate for biomass heat.

Petersen worked with the City of Craig, which became the first community in Alaska to install an automatic wood chip-fed boiler in 2008. A large boiler next to the municipal pool heats the pool and two schools in the community of 1,000. Propane and fuel still provide supplemental and backup heat.

The first full year of boiler operations included several challenges that limited boiler efficiency...
to about 35 percent. City Administrator Jon Bolling said the city still saved $40,000 with the project. A consultant adjusted the system this past fall and operators received additional training, which is expected to increase boiler efficiency.

Bolling is pleased with the system, which is providing more heat to the school district this year. “I think in the long run, it’s going to be really good for us,” he said.

Petersen is excited about the Craig project and the biomass possibilities for other Southeast communities. During the past two years, she has helped small sawmill operators on Prince of Wales Island explore options on what to do with their wood waste. Most sawmills burn their waste in large slab piles.

Possibilities they have considered include biomass products such as pellets, presto logs, biobricks and chips. Petersen and some of the operators toured a manufacturing operation in New England that produces biobricks, which are compressed wood bricks that burn efficiently in wood stoves.

Six sawmill operators formed the Prince of Wales Biomass Cooperative and became an official Alaska corporation in August. They are developing a business plan and are considering an operation that would employ five people who would manufacture biobricks.

Extension also has had a hand in several other biomass projects, including proposed projects at Kenny Lake School, and a plan for the U.S. Coast Guard to switch to biomass heat at several locations in Southeast.

Visit www.alaskawoodheating.com for information on stove types, wood heat safety and installation.
Anne Sherman used to have to stand on a stool to retrieve her heavy kitchen mixer, which rests on top of her refrigerator. Participating in StrongWomen classes has given the 81-year-old the added strength to handle the mixer without that extra step. She can also take longer and more vigorous walks with her dog. “I have more strength and more confidence,” she said.

Sherman and about 10 other Fairbanks women meet twice weekly in the Cooperative Extension Service classroom to participate in the StrongWomen program, which provides strength and balance training for middle-aged and older adults.

During a recent session, the women strapped on ankle weights for a series of leg exercises that appear deceptively easy. As the women lifted and stretched, good-natured talk about local politics, travels and gardening filled the room. They chose dumbbells of different weights for the arm exercises.

Sherman and some of the other women have been coming for nearly five years. Kathy Vaupel, who leads the sessions, said she would not have continued exercising so long without the group. “We solve the world’s problems,” she joked.

The StrongWomen program started at Tufts University after research showed that strength training can increase strength, muscle mass and bone density. It also reduces the risk for chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis and arthritis.

Linda Tannehill, an Extension agent from Soldotna, was one of two agents who approached StrongWomen founder Miriam Nelson in 2002 about developing a strength-training curriculum for Extension educators. Both agents piloted the curriculum, which is now offered through Extension in 40 states.

As one of 11 StrongWomen “ambassadors” in the United States, Tannehill trains instructors to implement the programs in their communities. Since 2005, she has trained 121 instructors in Alaska and 50 in Oregon. During the past year, she trained 31 leaders to teach the program in their home communities of Unalaska, Cooper Landing, Willow and Anchorage.

Groups meet at senior centers, churches, hospitals, school gyms and health clinics. Some of the groups meet for eight, 10 or 12 weeks and others, like the Fairbanks group, are ongoing.

Norma Wyckoff of Bethel leads the longest-running StrongWomen class in the state. Tannehill introduced the program to the community in 2004, and Wyckoff participated in a class led by the Bethel agent before taking the leader training in December 2004.

An average of 10-12 women show up for her class, which meets three evenings a week in the Bethel Community Center. With an isolated community such as Bethel, Wyckoff said few exercise options exist. The class has been especially popular with women in their 50s and 60s.

Wyckoff herself has noticed greater flexibility and less joint pain since she started the program. Other women in the class have talked about improvements in strength and in balance.

It also works for mental health, she says. “Everybody reports that they feel better.”

Elaine Estey started exercising with a StrongWomen class in Anchorage two years ago after reading Miriam Nelson’s book about the benefits of strength training. She attempted the balance test in the book, and in her words, “failed completely.” A bone density scan at about the same time also showed that she had osteopenia, which can be a precursor to osteoporosis.

Since starting the
Four new DVDs developed by Extension agents and staff show Alaskans how to best preserve foods native to the state. The latest DVDs in our Preserving Alaska’s Bounty series are Pickling, Drying Foods, Sausage and Jerky and Jams and Jellies. Other DVDs in the series provide instruction on canning and canning meat and fish in cans and jars.

Check out our new interactive online lessons on making jams and jellies, pickling vegetables, making sauerkraut, infusing vinegar, making sausage and making jerky. DVDs may be ordered online at www.uaf.edu/ces/pubs or through local Extension offices. The Flash modules may be viewed at www.uaf.edu/ces/preservingalaskasbounty.

Coping with Chronic Diseases

One of our agents helps individuals acquire skills to manage their chronic health conditions. During the past year, she has trained 112 leaders who will teach the six-session Living Well Alaska course to others in their communities. One enthusiastic new leader has taught the course four times.

‘Energy Guy’ Earns Recognition

Rich Seifert received the Emil Usibelli Distinguished Service Award this year, one of the most prestigious faculty awards at UAF. Seifert, also known as Extension’s “Energy Guy,” has worked as the energy and housing specialist for nearly 30 years, helping people across the state. This past year has been a busy one for Seifert, who nearly doubled his efforts to teach workshops in energy conservation and retrofit. He also trained other agents to help their communities.

Seifert has given us a great example of service. He donated his $10,000 prize to help retrofit the home for the UAF Honors Program.

Preserving Alaska’s Bounty

Four new DVDs developed by Extension agents and staff show Alaskans how to best preserve foods native to the state. The latest DVDs in our Preserving Alaska’s Bounty series are Pickling, Drying Foods, Sausage and Jerky and Jams and Jellies. Other DVDs in the series provide instruction on canning and canning meat and fish in cans and jars.

Check out our new interactive online lessons on making jams and jellies, pickling vegetables, making sauerkraut, infusing vinegar, making sausage and making jerky. DVDs may be ordered online at www.uaf.edu/ces/pubs or through local Extension offices. The Flash modules may be viewed at www.uaf.edu/ces/preservingalaskasbounty.

“’I have more strength and more confidence.’” — Anne Sherman