



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – August 12, 2014

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### **N.C. Cooperative Extension Service announces its strategic plan for the future**

RALEIGH, N.C. – The [North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service](#) at N.C. State University announced a strategic plan for restructuring the century-old organization by targeting its strengths, improving access to services across the state and refocusing resources to support its refined core areas. The Extension Service will implement its strategic plan during a 22-month transition period through July 2016. Dr. Joe Zublena, director of the Extension Service at N.C. State, presented the plan to Extension employees across the state via a webinar on August 12. ([Watch a strategic plan video.](#))

“We’re better aligning our resources and refocusing on three core areas: Agriculture, Food and 4-H Youth Development,” said Zublena. “These are the areas where we are most needed, best equipped to provide solutions, and can make the most impacts on North Carolina’s communities and economy.”

The Extension Service has experienced federal and state funding reductions of \$13 million since 2008 and a total of \$22 million since 1991. During that time, the organization has permanently lost 157 county and campus-based positions through attrition. Yet Zublena points to proactive, positive opportunities as a primary factor in the restructuring.

“The Cooperative Extension System celebrated its centennial this year, which presented a unique opportunity not only to recognize our historical accomplishments, but also to evaluate our operations and envision long-term goals to improve how we serve our clients going forward,” said Zublena. ([Learn more about Extension’s Centennial.](#))

“At the same time, North Carolina is experiencing an agriculture industry boom – it’s the state’s leading industry at \$77 billion – and we’re ideally positioned to step up and help the state achieve its goal of growing agriculture to \$100 billion.”

As part of the plan, the Extension Service will maintain its presence in each of the 101 local Extension centers across the state (including every county and the Eastern Band of Cherokee). Each local center will now be offered the same base staffing model, including agents in agriculture, 4-H and Family & Consumer Sciences (FCS), as well as a support specialist. One of the base programmatic positions will also serve as County Extension Director.

Additional agriculture agents will be strategically distributed throughout the state where most needed based on county statistics, including the number of farm operators, population and agriculture cash receipts. Extension will seek a 50-50 funding match with local governments on all base positions.

At present, some counties are without a base level of access to Extension through agents because of funding reductions over time. The new plan intends to address this issue at a local level, as well as add regional expertise through area agents specialized in commodities and specific issues to which Extension can bring expertise.

“An essential objective throughout this process was to ensure that the public continues to have access to trusted, research-based information,” said Zublena. “By offering every local office the same core expertise, we’re improving and better targeting our services across the state to help improve the lives, land and economy of North Carolinians.”

The three core program areas of agriculture, food and 4-H youth development include multiple sub-programs and services. For example, agriculture programs will consist of consumer/commercial horticulture, livestock and traditional agriculture; food programs include food safety, nutrition and food preservation; and 4-H youth development programs will include life skills, leadership and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education, among others. Statewide flagship programs like local foods will fall under each of the three core areas.

(more)

Cooperative Extension is a collaboration between the federal, state and local governments, as well as among land-grant universities across the nation. While the Extension Service at N.C. State partners with N.C. A&T State University as a fellow land-grant university, this plan reflects changes only for N.C. State Extension.

“The success of this model will depend largely on the partnerships we’ve forged with local governments and N.C. A&T State University,” said Zublena. “We strongly value those relationships and what we’ve accomplished over the years, and we will continue as a strategic partnership to provide stellar service across the state.”

Going forward, the Extension Service will apply a “high tech-high touch” approach by investing in technology and web-based resources for employees to help clients, according to Zublena. Plans include incorporating new technical tools and platforms to improve access to online resources, supporting the development of online Extension courses and interactive publications, and implementing an online registration and event management system.

“We plan to invest in modern technology while maintaining a high level of personal service and client access to our agents and specialists through field days, farm visits and the like,” said Zublena. “In the future, we envision building even stronger relationships with clients by integrating today’s tech advancements with our traditional onsite services.”

Extension is introducing strategies for recruiting and retaining agents, including increasing starting salaries, expanding the agent career ladder, optimizing employee onboarding and enhancing training opportunities for employees. The plan also calls for the creation of integrated program teams around commodities and specific issues, like blueberries or food safety, to align Extension, research and client resources and promote program growth and innovation.

The strategic plan is the culmination of extensive research and discussions, including 2,000 participants at 14 public listening sessions; more than 600 employees at Extension’s State Conference in 2013; eight state Extension systems that have undergone change; and 179 county commissioners and managers that responded to surveys assessing their needs. Extension administration also appointed a Visioning Team made up of about 45 employees, stakeholders and community partners who helped craft the strategic plan for the organization’s future.

“We asked questions, engaged stakeholders, and poured over data for 10 months to ensure that Extension will continue to create economic, societal and intellectual prosperity for the people of North Carolina for years to come,” said Zublena.

In September 2014, the Extension leadership team will visit each of the organization’s five districts to meet with employees and discuss the plan. The dates are being finalized at this time and will be shared when available.

“This plan builds on a long, proud tradition of serving the citizens and communities of North Carolina to create a modern organization that transfers and applies the research at N.C. State University,” said Zublena. “Our vision for the future ignites a renewed organizational focus, invests in essential resources and creates an unprecedented level of service and access across the state to create economic, societal and intellectual prosperity for North Carolinians.”

Learn more about the strategic plan and restructuring at [www.ces.ncsu.edu/vision-initiative/strategic-plan](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/vision-initiative/strategic-plan).

### **About the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service**

Established in 1914, the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service is part of N.C. State University’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) and a national Cooperative Extension network. The N.C. Cooperative Extension Service partners with county and tribal governments and N.C. A&T State University’s Cooperative Extension Program to provide seamless educational programs that enrich the lives, land and economy of North Carolinians. Extension programs meet people’s needs, supply decision-makers with unbiased data and help individuals, families and communities succeed.

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