

## Budget cuts prompt Extension changes

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JEFFERSON — After losing \$3.6 million in state funding, Cooperative Extension, a division of University of Wisconsin-Extension that includes the 4-H and Youth Development program, was forced to begin developing a massive reorganization plan.

How exactly it will affect Jefferson County is not known yet.

“About a year ago, the governor had proposed his (state) budget,” Cathy Sandeen, chancellor for UW-Extension and UW Colleges, said. “It included a very large cut to the UW System and so we were able to deduce from that what the cut would be to our different divisions.”

Cooperative Extension is one of four divisions that make up UW-Extension. Programs within the division include Agriculture and Natural Resources; Community, Natural Resources and Economic Development; Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey; 4-H and Youth Development; Family Living; and Leadership Development.

The \$3.6 million cut, which represents 8.3 percent of the Cooperative Extension division’s ongoing state funding, was part of a larger reduction to the University of Wisconsin System’s state funding. The total reduction of \$250 million was approved when the state passed its biennial 2016-18 budget and went into effect on July 1, 2015.

“Cooperative Extension is one of the largest divisions in UW-Extension,” Sandeen said. “A permanent cut of \$3.6 million per year (is) large. This is on top of many years of cuts where we’ve done things (such as) asking people to do multiple jobs and cutting things around the edges. It was too big of a cut to handle in that way. We needed to really look at things in a different way.”

Dubbed “nEXT Generation,” the reorganization initiative incorporates cuts across three areas: \$1.2 million in county- and tribal nation-based programs, \$1.7 million in campus and UW-Extension specialist investment and \$700,000 in administrative and educational program support.

“It computes to 80 positions within all three areas across the State of Wisconsin,” Sandeen said. “That’s what we’re looking at reducing. It will be a culmination of unfilled positions and, unfortunately, positions that are currently filled by people.”

On Feb. 10, 2016, Sandeen released information outlining various “high-level” decisions regarding the reduced spending for which nEXT Generation aims.

Her decisions came after reviewing recommendations from nEXT Generation co-executive sponsors and a steering committee received in December of 2015. When Sandeen released the

December recommendations in January, she received close to 500 individual emails, letters, telephone calls and verbal comments, all of which she then reviewed prior to making final decisions.

Her county and tribal nation-based program recommendations include six areas of focus.

- Implementation of a multi-county area structure that provides shared administrative leadership to the area.

“Probably the biggest component of (the plan) is creating multi-county administrative units,” Sandeen said. “Right now, we’ll have offices in every county and we’ll continue to do that, but we’re going to consolidate administration so that we’ll have one person handling that administrative budget, financial, human resources over a larger, broader area.”

- Maintain single-county areas in high-population counties.

The plan currently splits the 72 counties in the state into 23 multi-county and single-county areas.

Jefferson County is part of a multi-county area along with Rock and Walworth counties.

- Maintain a Cooperative Extension office in each of the existing county and tribal offices.

“We will maintain offices in each county, but the individuals sitting in those offices might have multi-county duties,” Sandeen explained. “We already do collaborations across counties in terms of our programs and that will continue, but we may do even more of that.”

- Develop a statewide tribal support network that leverages resources to strengthen partnerships.
- Establish the appropriate mix of faculty, academic staff and university staff positions in each single- and multi-county area to best serve the needs of that area.
- Evaluate and provide recommendations on expanded use of digital technology in appropriate areas of program delivery, educational product development and administration.

“The other (main) component is, we want to look more closely at how we can employ technology to deliver our programs and services,” Sandeen said. “We do acknowledge there are broadband access issues in many parts of our state, but in the future, we know more and more people are going to be looking to technology solutions. At the same time, we are going to maintain our more high-touch personal programs like 4-H and Master Gardener. Those will remain local and high-touch.”

Sandeen gave two recommendations for campus and UW-Extension specialist investment.

The first was to strategically reduce the number of campus integrated and Cooperative Extension non-integrated specialists and support positions.

To accomplish this, Sandeen charged the executive co-sponsors and the steering committee of nEXT Generation to do three things:

- Work with campus partners and consider meeting budget reduction targets through a combination of open positions, reductions to the UW-Extension-based S&E and other support before eliminating positions.
- Establish guidelines for the hiring of future integrated and non-integrated specialist faculty based on collaborate and strategic priorities of UW-Extension, campus partner priorities and emerging programmatic priorities/issues.
- Establish accountability criteria so that UW-Extension appointments and financial investment clearly reflect UW-Extension organizational priorities, administrative responsibilities, teaching load and performance.

The second recommendation was to develop and implement mechanisms for the allocation of resources (a flexible pool of base, one-time and other funds) accumulated over time used to address critical emerging issues or problems in the state that require special expertise beyond that available among existing faculty.

“The original recommendations I received (from the steering committee) proposed an ‘overcut’ of 10 percent of full-time employees,” Sandeen said in the release. “Based on feedback, this pool will not be established immediately, but will be phased in over time. I will charge the executive co-sponsors and the steering committee to develop a plan in consultation with our campus partners. In addition, the final amount of the pool may differ from what was proposed in the original recommendations.”

Within the administrative and education program support, Sandeen also had two recommendations.

The first is to consolidate Cooperative Extension administrative functions with UW-Extension central administration where possible to leverage efficiency and flexibility while maintaining support of UW-Extension’s mission.

Second, Sandeen recommended undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the division’s overall revenue/resource portfolio and recommend opportunities for enhanced mission-driven revenue generation and entrepreneurship.

“We’re taking a budget cut and we’re going to have to work with the counties to prioritize,” Sandeen said. “What are the most important programs that they need and what can either be eliminated or put on hiatus while we’re in this situation? We can’t continue to do everything that we’re doing today, but we need to be really thoughtful about what we do and we turn to our county partners to help us set those priorities.”

As previously stated, the recommendations and decisions within these three key areas of budget reduction are “high-level” decisions. In order to determine the more intricate details of nEXT Generation, working groups currently are being established.

“Yes, we will organize into multi-county areas (and do these other things),” Sandeen said. “But once we do that, there are an enormous number of details that need to be worked out, so the work groups is where those details will be considered.”

According to Matt Hanson, the southern district regional director of UW-Extension, there will be at least 16 working groups.

“They’re probably going to be sequenced, so not all of them will be starting at Day 1, which will likely be early May,” Hanson said. “Each team will have somewhere between five and 10 individuals ... to keep it manageable. (It is) at least a day a week of time commitment as they’re doing research and surveys and seeking input and other types of information that will help feed this process and then be able to look at our current state — where we’re at now, what we’re doing, what are the gaps — and come up with options in terms of how can we structure or look different to meet our function of delivering educational programming.”

The working groups will be assigned to one of four categories: programming, organization structure, program development or support.

There are four programming work groups. They are agriculture and natural resources extension; community, natural resources and economic development; family living programs; and 4-H youth development.

There are two planned organizational structure work groups: state-wide organizational structure and county and tribal organizational structure. There is one program development work group.

Nine support work groups are planned: strategic resource planning; administrative technology; business services; communication and marketing; Cooperative Extension academic departments; extramural funding; human resources; professional and organizational development; and volunteer support and development.

“(Who is in the group) depends on the purpose of the working group — what they’re going to be doing,” Sandeen said. “We want people with real expertise in the areas under consideration who can really help us understand. That will be people from within Cooperative Extension, people from county boards, people in the community — but we want people who have the time to devote to this because it’s going to be a significant amount of work and people who really bring some expertise, regional knowledge or government knowledge to the table so that we can come up with the best solutions possible.”

The final day to submit nominations for the working groups was April 12. The groups are expected to be set up by early or mid-May with their planning completed by fall or late 2016. Implementation of the plans are expected to go into effect sometime early next year.

“I think it’s important to note that Cooperative Extension has been a part of the fabric of Wisconsin for a century,” Sandeen said. “We take that role very seriously and, what we’re trying to do, is work to create an infrastructure for Cooperative Extension in the future so that we maintain our basic structure that will allow us to grow at a later time when there are additional resources available.”