

# Extension districts stretch budget, programs

Practical education and local Extension agents providing advice and direction on educational needs of its citizens: these are the hallmarks of the extension service provided by land-grant universities.

The work of providing these services to Kansans is carried out by extension agents, who provide a connection between Kansas State University and the citizens of a county.

"It is a very strong local government network," said Jim Lindquist, assistant director of field operations for K-State Research and Extension, "local people provide the educational needs of local citizens."

Kansas law requires each county to share the cost of extension programming.

Some Kansas counties cannot provide enough money for local programs, however, and only have a single agent.

"Many Kansas counties are not able to fund more than two agent positions," said Lindquist. "In these counties, the agents are generalists, serving agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, community development and 4-H youth development."

The Kansas Legislature passed the Extension District Law in 1991. Since then, 40 of Kansas' 105 counties have linked together into 14 extension districts to meet budget challenges and provide better educational programs and services to their residents.

The primary reasons for counties to form into district offices were efficiency and effectiveness.

"Getting sufficient economies of scale means not having to duplicate services in every county," Lindquist said. "Examples include not needing a bookkeeper in every county, shifting responsibilities around, lowering insurance costs through one policy and sharing equipment. With increased effectiveness, agents can specialize and offer more in-depth programming to residents across those counties that formed into a district."

Allen Warren is a county commissioner in Bourbon County. He was on the Extension Council when his county formed the Southwind Extension District No. 10, including Allen and Neosho counties, in 2010. He said in addition to better quality programs, the district has delivered more focused programs from the agents.

"We ended up with six specialists as opposed to two generalists working in our Extension office,"



Thomas County Extension

Extension agent Clint Milliman talked with farmers about the varieties planted at the county's wheat demonstration plot this spring. The plot was on the Solomon Creek Farm operated by

Mike, Jeanene and Tanner Brown south of Colby. Touring the demonstration plots gives farmers across the state an idea of how different varieties of wheat perform in their areas.

## Program dates back to 1863 statute

A unique educational system celebrating its 150th anniversary provided the framework for today's Extension Service. President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act in 1862, creating the land-grant system of state agricultural colleges.

The original purpose was to provide a practical education to the working class. Each state was to designate a university as the land-grant college, with Kansas State University named a land-grant

school in 1863.

In 1914, the Smith-Lever act formed the Extension Service as part of the nation's land-grant institutions. Today, K-State Research and Extension works to fulfill the original mission of disseminating information from the university to the people of the state to solve their problems and help with their needs through engagement and education.

— Information from Kansas State University

Warren said. "We always felt our extension agents were good agents, they worked hard. Yet they were trying to answer every question that came at them. Having six specialists is a tremendous benefit for the Southwind District."

### Forming an Extension District

"It's a fairly complex process when two or more counties come together," said Lindquist. "It requires the approval of each county extension council, county commissioners and the director of K-

State Research and Extension. The Kansas Attorney General reviews all paperwork and makes the decision to approve the district."

A district board oversees the new districts, with four members from each county. The laws require the governing body to be elected by the public on a general election ballot. This is held in odd years in the spring with other municipal elections, such as school districts and city commissions, Lindquist said.

"This governing body is responsible to the public. The extension district becomes a taxing authority to fund the needs of the district," he said. "Historically, our extension districts have been good stewards and are responsible in their decision-making relating to tax authority. The numbers have remained consistent through the years."

The oldest Extension district in the state is Post Rock, formed in 1994. Tom Claussen was a member of the Mitchell County Extension Council when it joined forces with Lincoln County. He is a member of the Post Rock board and was recently elected as a commissioner for Mitchell County. He said money was the driving force

in 1994, as the commissioners had not provided for necessary increases in funding for the Extension office.

"We were out from under the tax lid from the county commissioners," he said. "We didn't spend any more money, but it was easier to levy and control our funds."

District boards develop a budget to provide money for Extension programs. A proposed budget is presented at a public hearing to allow citizen comment. The money comes from property taxes, which become a district levy, no longer under control of the county commissioners.

Originally the levy for district offices was capped at 2.5 mills, but in 1999, the Legislature removed the cap, leaving decisions to elected representatives.

"History shows they are responsible and accountable to taxpayers," Lindquist said. "Local governing bodies work hard to provide focused programs with agents who have the time to offer more in-depth, higher quality programs for citizens."

In 2012, only one of extension's 14 district offices had a levy over 2.5: The River Valley District's tax levy was set at 2.663, down from 2.755 in 2011. The lowest levy is

in Central Kansas District No. 3, with at 1.179.

Claussen said citizens control who is elected to the Extension boards. "We are all friends and neighbors," he said. "If we spend money unwisely, we have to meet that taxpayer on the street."

"We are all on the ballot; we can easily be replaced."

The Post Rock district increased its levy for a short time back in the mid 1990s while at the same time streamlining programs, he said.

"We were frugal but had the means to appropriate our funds with no shortfall," Claussen said, adding that in recent years, the levy has gone down.

"Our agents have been very good on holding the line on spending, often as if spending their grandmother's last penny. They are stewards of the taxpayers money and offer a good program."

In 2005, Jewell and Osborn counties joined the Post Rock district, and this July, Smith County will join the district.

Claussen said the benefits to the five counties will be seven specialized agents; and being their own taxing entity to control resources and expenses. Each agent is required to work a certain number of hours in each county, has a defined set of responsibilities which makes it easier for face-to-face visits and local support; but they also make good use of technology, e-mail, telephones and other resources.

"The university has given us all the help we've needed," Claussen said. "If not for their guidance, we couldn't have formed a district. That's why it worked ... the university supported us."

### Staff Perspective

Extension agents working in districts agree that there have been benefits for them in forming the multicounty units.

"My 'box' has expanded," said Pat Gerhardt, of the River Valley District. "We've been strongly encouraged to go outside the box and outside our comfort zones to seek new audiences. We have the support of the board to do that."

David Hallauer in the Meadowlark District said, "The district has provided the opportunity and visibility for me as an agent to forge more specialized relationships. If you are seen as a viable educational source, and I think districts help shore us up as such, doors open for you to work with other agencies. They know who you are, what you can do, and that you are more specialized in a field, so they use you as a resource."

David Key, also in the Meadowlark District agrees.

"We've actually dedicated more resources, more people out there giving these programs," he said. "Our programming is snowballing, getting better."

## Abortion doctor loses license

TOPEKA (AP) — Kansas regulators today revoked the medical license of a doctor accused of performing inadequate mental health exams on young patients she then referred to the late Dr. George Tiller for late-term abortions.

The state Board of Healing Arts earlier an administrative judge's decision to strip Dr. Ann Kristin Neuhaus of her license. Neuhaus provided second opinions that Tiller needed under Kansas law to perform some late-term abortions at his Wichita clinic.

Tiller, one of a few U.S. physicians known to perform abortions in the final weeks of pregnancy, was shot to death in May 2009 by a man professing strong anti-abortion views.

The administrative judge concluded in February that Neuhaus performed inadequate mental health exams in 2003 on 11 patients, aged 10 to 18. The judge said Neuhaus' records didn't contain the information necessary to show that she did thorough exams or that the patients' care would be "seriously jeopardized."

Neuhaus has argued that her exams met accepted standards of care, and some abortion rights supporters questioned whether she could receive a fair hearing from the board, with Republican Gov. Sam Brownback, a strong abortion opponent, in office for almost 18 months. Neuhaus can challenge the board's decision in court, and her attorneys expected her to appeal.

In letters to board members last week, Neuhaus' husband, Michael Caddell, and their 15-year-old son described the case against Neuhaus as part of ongoing "gross violations of our loved one's civil rights."

Neuhaus, from Nortonville, a small town about 30 miles north of Lawrence, had an inactive medical license that allows her to provide limited charity care, but she

had asked the board to reinstate her to a full, active license. The revocation will take effect when the board puts its decision in writing and delivers a copy to Neuhaus, possibly next week.

The case centered on how Neuhaus concluded that each of the 11 patients had serious mental health issues and that an abortion was advisable. The law required Tiller to obtain an independent second opinion that a patient faced significant and permanent harm if the pregnancy continued. Neuhaus provided such assessments for Tiller from 1999 to 2006.

Neuhaus strongly disputes the judge's characterization of how she used the program and testified in a hearing that she didn't put more details in her records to protect patients' privacy. She also testified that she sometimes refused to allow abortions to go forward.

The case stemmed from a 2006 complaint by Cheryl Sullenger, senior policy adviser for Operation Rescue. The anti-abortion group Kansas for Life also had scrutinized Neuhaus for years and raised questions about her activities.

Neuhaus had performed abortions in Wichita and Lawrence but stopped in 2002. When she provided second opinions for Tiller, Kansas law restricted abortions at or after the 22nd week of pregnancy if the fetus was viable. In those cases, pregnancies could be terminated only if the patient faced death or "substantial and irreversible" harm to "a major bodily function," including mental health. Legislators tightened the law last year so that it no longer includes the mental health exception.

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