

Cooperative Extension

Background

Cooperative Extension is an off-campus, non-credit, educational arm of the University of California (UCR) established by the federal Smith-Lever Act of 1914. The act grants federal funds to land grant colleges, one of which is the University of California. The Riverside County support is defined by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) written in 1955. This support is critical for the continuation of the program. The Riverside County Board of Supervisors created a county support base to work cooperatively with UCR and the U. S. Department of Agriculture to provide educational programs on topics of agriculture, food safety, family economics and youth development. The production, processing, marketing and use of food, fiber and ornamental horticultural plants are a very significant component of Riverside County's economy. The three offices of the Cooperative Extension are an important information source and an access route to research knowledge for agriculture producers, natural resource managers and users, policy makers and consumers.

The original MOU stipulates:

"The County of Riverside shall for each fiscal year of this agreement make available through its regular budget procedures for disbursement by the County Director, sufficient funds to pay the salaries at prevailing county rates of the nonprofessional personnel of the Agricultural Extension Service, who shall be county employees consisting of not less than seven clerical and stenographic employees, as well as necessary extra help, and to pay maintenance and operation and outlay costs of the Agricultural Extension Service."

Findings

1. The workload for the University of California Cooperative Extension programs has increased in recent years. At the same time, there has been an overall decline in the budget since 1990 by the

County of Riverside for its share of the funding partnership of Cooperative Extension programs.

The following table reflects the decline in county support since 1989.

1989-90 386,000

1990-91 395,000

1991-92 358,000

1992-93 323,000

1993-94 288,000

1994-95 290,000

1995-96 289,000

1996-97 282,000

1997-98 290,000

1998-99 288,000

2.The partners in Cooperative Extension funding, county, university and federal government, rely on each other for the organization to function at full potential. In recent years, limited funds have made this nonmandated programming extremely difficult to maintain. Funding does not reflect any consideration for the Consumer Price Index or salary upgrades.

3.At the Blythe facility, Cooperative Extension is currently sharing space in the Agricultural Commissioner's office in the County Administrative Center. Due to the shortage of staff, it is only manned part time.

4.Custodial service reduced to once per week in all three offices during the recession is inadequate for the present increased work load.

5.To augment the clerical staff, Master Gardeners and students, when available, supply volunteer support for some essential clerical functions.

6.The department is still understaffed by 2.5 personnel to cover the extensive county's heavy workload.

7.Previous grand jury reports, to which the Board of Supervisors concurred, recommended the county

honor its commitment to fund its appropriate share of the cost of operating the Cooperative Extension. To date, this has not been done.

Recommendation

The Board of Supervisors:

Charge the County Executive Officer to immediately implement a plan to increase Cooperative Extension's funding allocation to the level agreed to in the 1955 Agreement.