

DIRECTOR'S LETTER



Dr. Joe H. McGilberry
Director

For many decades, the Mississippi State University Extension Service delivered educational programs across the state of Mississippi through county Extension offices staffed with agents working in one of four core program areas: agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer education, 4-H, and economic and community resource development.

While this method of delivery has been very effective, Mississippians today face increasingly complex problems because of the broad social and economic changes within our society. These issues require Extension professionals with greater expertise in more sharply focused subject areas. At the same time, economic constraints have pointed to a need for a more efficient program delivery model.

In 2001 the Extension Service established an internal team to develop recommendations for change. Those recommendations culminated in a plan for restructuring, which is being implemented in FY 2003:

- Every county will have a full-time Extension county director to coordinate assessment of local needs and delivery of educational programs in consultation with local leaders;
- 4-H youth development programs will continue to be conducted at the local level by a 4-H agent, 4-H program assistant, or the county director;
- The core county staff will be supported in program delivery by area agents serving multiple counties and specializing in 14 different areas of expertise. Each of these agents is being trained to develop greater depth of expertise in his or her subject area, making it possible to meet the more complex problems of the future. Areas of specialization include eight in agriculture and natural resources, five in family and consumer education, and one in economic and community resource development.
- Staff at the county and area levels will, as in the past, be supported in program planning and delivery by the expertise of Extension specialists at Mississippi State University and at research and extension centers across the state.

The MSU Extension Service greatly appreciates the past support of the Legislature. Although budget reductions have been inevitable in recent years, transitional support has enabled the Extension Service to restructure while continuing to deliver vital services to diverse clientele in every county of the state.

As restructuring has proceeded, many of those served by the Extension Service have cited the value of Extension programs and have sought assurance that Extension's services will continue to be available in the future. As can be seen in this annual report, the MSU Extension Service is maintaining its mission and commitment to serve the citizens of Mississippi with research-based educational and informational programs and appropriate technical assistance to improve the quality of their lives. Our by-line will continue to be "easy to find and ready to serve."

One of the strengths of the MSU Extension Service is being part of the land-grant network. National in scope, this network is a partnership of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, state governments, and county governments. This partnership expedites the sharing of resources, research, and educational programs and services.

Probably the most notable strength of the MSU Extension Service is our network of more than 7,500 volunteers who work with Extension agents and specialists each year to render educational services to neighbors, friends, and families in every community of our state. These dedicated and selfless patrons lead 4-H clubs, promote food safety and nutrition, facilitate the flow of new information related to agricultural production, and provide vital links to the best educational resources the world has ever known. As one example, more than 800 master gardener volunteers dedicate more than 50,000 hours of community service each year providing helpful information to ever-increasing gardening audiences.

The MSU Extension Service is very thankful for the continuing support of Mississippi's 177 legislators, 410 county supervisors, governor, lieutenant governor, Mississippi's congressional delegation in Washington, D.C., and the host of leaders and decision makers across our great state who believe in the value of delivering research-based educational programs and services to every Mississippian. We are committed to providing the best educational resources available to make our state a better place to live, work, and grow.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "J. McGilberry". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in the bottom right corner of the page.

