

Committee to Study the Establishment of a Farm Viability Program

**Testimony of Ann Weaver Hart
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Room 102, Legislative Office Building**

Chairman Williams and members of the Committee, my name is Ann Weaver Hart, and I am the President of the University of New Hampshire. I am pleased to be here today to speak to you about the partnership between Cooperative Extension and the University of New Hampshire.

The University Of New Hampshire is a state land-grant, sea-grant and space-grant university, and as such is charged by Congress to conduct resident instruction and outreach to people beyond the classroom. Cooperative Extension is a critically important partner in this mission, disseminating research-based education and information developed by the University in the areas of natural resources and youth, families and communities. This "cooperative" effort ensures all people have local access to their state university and the knowledge and resources available to address needs and problems. Agriculture-based programming is a major component of Cooperative Extension in New Hampshire, with 25 agriculture staff addressing issues such as best management practices, technology adoption, business and market planning, and economic development of natural resources-based businesses.

The committee has asked me to focus my remarks today on two issues: First, does Cooperative Extension receive all of the state funding intended for it, and second, are there agriculture positions in Cooperative Extension that are left vacant as a means of balancing its budget? I am happy to address these issues, and I hope I can provide information to clear up any misconceptions about the current situation.

Cooperative Extension receives state funding through two separate PAUs within the budget of the University System of New Hampshire: One of these provides the state contribution for campus-based operations, including Extension Specialists; the other provides the state contribution for Extension programming in each of the state's counties. There have been instances in the past, particularly in the 1990s, when shortfalls in the state budget or in the UNH budget resulted in across-the-board rescissions in all UNH programs, including Cooperative Extension. However, this has not happened during my administration, and I have no intention of targeting Cooperative Extension funds to make up for future shortfalls in other parts of the university.

This is not to say that Cooperative Extension does not face the same budget realities that all components of the University system have faced; cost increases that exceed funding increases mean something has to give. Increasing personnel and operations costs have a significant impact on every program's ability to maintain service levels. Because of the Legislature's 1988 agreement on funding personnel increases for county-based staff, Cooperative Extension places a greater demand on state funding. Fulfilling the University system's obligations for county-based Extension staff under the 1988 agreement is a top priority for the trustees, and these costs have been treated as a critical need in the University System's budget since that time.

As the committee explores the Cooperative Extension/UNH funding relationship, it is important to remember that the University provides additional resources for Cooperative Extension. The College of Life Sciences and Agriculture contributes funding toward most of the Extension Educator positions in the Agriculture program, and the University provides tuition subsidies to Cooperative Extension totaling over \$280,000 annually. Far from diverting Cooperative Extension funds for other purposes, UNH is actually adding to the resources available for its operations.

In addition to state and University funding, Cooperative Extension receives funding from New Hampshire's counties, from private sources and from the federal government. While federal formula funding has remained flat for more than 10 years, we have seen an increase in competitive federal grants. In recent years, Extension staff members have made remarkable progress in pursuing grant funding, and they continue to take the lead in actively seeking out new resources to support the work of Cooperative Extension.

By leveraging all of these funding sources and following the guidance of county and state advisory councils, Cooperative Extension has managed to support programming in all of its priority areas. As the committee is aware, there are some positions that remain vacant, but the staffing situation in the Agriculture program is not as dire as you may have been led to believe. Of 22 Agriculture-based Extension Specialist positions under discussion, 12 are filled and 10 are vacant. However, 7 of those that are vacant have been vacant for more than 10 years, (these include positions specializing in poultry, dairy, livestock, agricultural engineering, equine and entomology). Recent vacancies in vegetables and fruits have been combined into one position that has been filled, and the new Extension Specialist will begin work in December. The remaining vacancies are in agricultural business management and agronomy. At present, if positions eliminated over 10 years ago are included, the equivalent of just over 17 positions are vacant across all Cooperative Extension program areas; this number is only slightly higher than the total of 15 positions five years ago. Agriculture does not represent a disproportionate share of these vacancies. Dean Pike and his team at Cooperative Extension are making every effort to staff Cooperative Extension in keeping with the program's goals and priorities, and subject to resources available.

The University Of New Hampshire takes its land grant mission very seriously, and we are committed to fulfilling our role as a resource for all New Hampshire citizens. Cooperative Extension is a crucial partner for disseminating the knowledge developed on our campus and is perhaps our most powerful link to our communities. We are committed to supporting Cooperative Extension, financially and otherwise, and helping the program continue the work it has so ably done since 1913.

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.