



Questions and Answers Regarding Funding of County Cooperative Extension throughout NH

1) What is the formal legislation that identifies UNH Cooperative Extension at the federal, state and local levels?

The formal legislation at the federal and state levels began with the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, establishing the partnership between USDA and the Land Grant universities.

The legislative basis for Cooperative Extension at the state level is reflected in:

RSA 24:10 UNH Extension: Program Purpose and Intent,

RSA 24:10-a County Programs: UNH Cooperative Extension, and

RSA 187-A:6 County Programs: UNH Cooperative Extension Outreach Programs.

The first RSA endorses the mission and tripartite agreement and the appropriation of county funds. The second RSA speaks directly to the MOU and county funding expended through the individual county advisory councils. The legislative basis at the county level is the MOU between the University System of New Hampshire and county government.

2) What is the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with county government?

In accordance with RSA 24:10-a, the MOU is an agreement between the University System of New Hampshire (USNH) and the respective county conventions and commissioners relative to the support and operations of the UNH Cooperative Extension (UNHCE) programs in the counties. The MOU may be revised by mutual agreement set forth in writing and signed by any party, or canceled by any party to the agreement on at least six months written notice to the other party. MOUs in all 10 counties were executed in 2006.

3) What changes were made in county funding of professional salaries as a result of the 1988 Legislative Study Committee report?

Prior to 1987, county legislative delegations were routinely asked by UNHCE to pick up the increased salary costs for county Extension educators. These increased costs were the result of USNH salary guidelines coupled with level federal funding. Recognizing that legislators wear “two hats” (i.e. legislators at both the “county” and “state” level), their attention focused on whether the costs for salary increases should be provided by the county legislative delegations or through the state legislature. This question was the impetus behind creation of the “Legislative Study Committee on UNH Cooperative Extension” (established on May 25, 1987 – Chapter 315:1 laws of 1987 – HB #367FN-A).

This study concluded fringe benefits and the cost of future salary increases, including the county and federal share, would be funded by the state through the University System budget. Consequently, this resulted in a cap on appropriations by the county legislative delegations for their level of salary support for professional Extension personnel in counties. The only change since the 1988 cap has been when the county voluntarily agreed to provide additional funding.

4) What has been the level of funding from federal, state and county governments?

County and federal levels of support have remained relatively flat, and increased costs for salary and fringe benefits have been provided through state appropriations to the university.

5) **What is the percentage difference of county funding for educator salaries in 1988 compared to now? How many federal and state dollars go into these county positions?**

In 1988, the ten counties provided approximately 47 percent of the funding for salaries. Since 1988, the percentage of funding from counties for salaries and benefits has been substantially reduced. The total 2008 county salary base, including associated fringe benefits, is \$5.6 million. Counties currently contribute approximately 18 percent of the total salary costs, with 82 percent from state and federal sources.

6) **What would happen if the county discontinued its support of professional salaries?**

The work of Extension educators in counties would be reduced by a corresponding percentage and programs and services would be reduced.

7) **Could federal and state funding continue for county use, should a county remove its funding?**

Federal and state funding would support, at a reduced level, local professional staff salary and fringe benefits only. As stated in RSA 24:10, it is the policy of the state of New Hampshire to recognize and support the historical tripartite cooperative agreement between the county, state and federal government, enabling implementation of Cooperative Extension's effective outreach efforts.

8) **What would the impact be to local Cooperative Extension offices should county government reduce or eliminate support?**

Consistent with the MOU, Cooperative Extension's presence in a county is contingent on the level of county funding support. Support from county government provides for administrative assistants; a portion of the professional salaries, and line items that support the local county office (e.g., rent, supplies, travel, etc.). If the county reduces its support, the Cooperative Extension administration working in collaboration with the County Extension advisory council would have to discuss what the level of staffing and programming would be dependent on the level of support the county provides.

9) **Could a county office continue to operate if only county office space and utilities were provided?**

Consistent with the MOU, if the county withdraws its complete support, excluding facilities and utilities, the local office could possibly remain open on a reduced schedule. In addition, programs and services could be curtailed or eliminated. To run a county office effectively, administrative and operational support are necessary.

10) **What are the differences in Cooperative Extension funding support among the 10 New Hampshire counties?**

The 10 county Cooperative Extension budgets are historically based on county support and needs. Generally, counties with a larger population and tax base have larger budgets. Certain counties have voluntarily increased their level of salary support since the 1988 Legislative Agreement to meet identified local needs.

11) **Have costs been shifted from federal and state governments to counties?**

County salary percentages have dropped dramatically since 1988, and the state commitment has increased.

12) **What are the regulations regarding how federal, state and county dollars are handled?**

All budget allocations are made in compliance with federal and state legislation and the county MOUs. At the federal level, use of federal dollars is awarded based on the annual submission of a Plan of Work and accomplishment reports. State funding is controlled through the University System of New Hampshire as outlined in its biennial budget requests. County Extension appropriations are made through annual budget requests to county government by the local Extension Advisory Council.

13) **How does Cooperative Extension differ from other county-funded organizations?**

UNH Cooperative Extension is part of the University of New Hampshire. This relationship with the state's land-grant institution makes Cooperative Extension unique from other organizations in that it provides research-based, non-biased educational programs to address the needs of the people in all New Hampshire counties. Cooperative Extension collaborates closely with many state, local and non-profit organizations to ensure programs are complementary.

14) **Can campus-based specialists support the public at the local level?**

Campus specialists can and do, but with a limited number of specialists, they could not meet local demand throughout the state. The role of specialists is to train county educators who work directly with county residents.

15) **Does Cooperative Extension charge for programs to cover staff time?**

User fees to cover salaries for core educational programs are prohibited through the federal Smith-Lever Act. Fees are charged for services considered non-educational in nature such as soil testing. Registration fees may be charged for Extension-sponsored workshops to cover costs associated with running the workshop.

16) **Has Cooperative Extension at the county level changed over the years to meet citizen needs?**

The local county extension advisory council meets regularly to assess local citizen needs. Extension Educators design and implement programs in response to significant issues and needs reflected in annual plans of work. Technology has significantly augmented the way business is conducted and will continue into the future. For example, UNH Cooperative Extension has instituted regional video conferencing centers and a statewide toll free number for its UNH Cooperative Extension Education Center. Its Web site is organized around topics relevant to New Hampshire, the expertise of its specialists, and links to the national Extension system. It also provides direct county links to current, research-based education information about local programming and state programs pertinent to the county.

17) **What are the roles of administrative support staff?**

Duties of administrative assistants have changed significantly over the years. Examples of their functions include updating county web pages, maintaining databases, designing program brochures, preparing educational displays, scheduling and marketing programs, processing registrations, etc.

18) **What is the rationale for county support staff to be employed by county government?**

Since the full salary and fringe benefits for administrative staff are covered by the county, it makes more sense that the employing agency would be county government, exercising local county control of the associated costs.

19) **How does UNH Cooperative Extension use technology for reaching clientele?**

Cooperative Extension actively pursues opportunities to use technology to support clientele needs. For example, county agricultural resource educators use digital photography to send plant and insect diagnostic photos to the University, Master Gardeners are using an on-line course for support and training, and educators use video and web conferencing for program meetings. UNH Cooperative Extension also can be found on YouTube with digital video clips demonstrating such things as pruning techniques, GIS/GPS training and other workshop information. Podcasts cover a variety of educational topics.

20) **What is the basis for County Extension educator salaries?**

Cooperative Extension is an educational outreach component of the University of New Hampshire. Extension educators are required to have appropriate education and experience for the level of expertise required for their work. Recent equity studies indicate that Extension salaries are on par with the region for these types of professional positions.

21) What are considered “core program” areas and “core staffing” at the county level?

Core program areas at the county level are currently defined to include agricultural resources, 4-H youth development, family and consumer resources, and forestry and wildlife. Consequently, core staffing in county offices consists of having at least one program staff member, preferably an extension educator, in each of the currently defined core program areas.

22) How is county funding used as match for other Cooperative Extension funding?

A portion of the county appropriation for Cooperative Extension is utilized to match federal funding from the Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program and the U.S. Forest Service.

23) Could Cooperative Extension regionalize its county offices?

Each New Hampshire county is recognized as the geographic boundary for local Extension. Current state legislation, as reflected in RSA 24:10-a, recognizes the county Extension Advisory Council as the local sponsor of Cooperative Extension programs in the counties. Working in collaboration with UNH, advisory councils in each of the 10 counties assess local needs and serve as stewards of funds appropriated by county government.

Citizen volunteers serving on the local county extension council are continually engaged in strategic planning in an effort to be as cost effective as possible. Cooperative Extension throughout New Hampshire has been regarded as effective and efficient as compared to other states due in large part to its affiliation with county government and active county councils organized on a county by county basis. At its meeting on April 15, 2010, Extension’s State Council, with representation from all 10 county councils, unanimously endorsed the existing regional, “county-based,” structure in meeting the needs of New Hampshire residents. The endorsement reaffirms the continuation of the 10 county-based offices collaborating across county boundaries with core staff located in each of New Hampshire’s 10 counties.

24) What part does the University play in the total Cooperative Extension budget now, and why can't the county portion be shifted to the University?

The University of New Hampshire, through state and federal appropriations, currently provides the greatest percent as direct support to County Cooperative Extension. On the question of shifting the county portion to the University, it is important to note that in 1988, UNH provided approximately 40 percent of the total cost. Over the past twenty years, costs for the program have shifted more to UNH. This shift from approximately 40 to over 60 percent has been gradual and is the result of UNH assuming greater salary and benefit costs for the professional staff.

The MOU and RSAs that created the partnership call for New Hampshire counties to specifically support the operational cost of the program. The current appropriations from all ten counties total \$2.9 million. Cooperative Extension simply does not have the resources available to shift an even greater portion from the County to UNH.