

DIRECTOR'S LETTER



On behalf of the MSU Extension Service family, I'd like to thank you for your support and for the opportunity to serve you with the best research-based educational programs and services available today. Extension continues to be a vital component in all 82 counties of Mississippi, helping to maintain and build the cultural, social, and economic wellbeing of all Missisippians.

Extension began restructuring at the county level in July 2002 to achieve greater efficiency, align with current budget realities, and provide the higher level of expertise demanded by today's agribusinesses, families, and communities. Mississippi State University Extension Service delivers educational programs and services more effectively and efficiently under its new organizational structure.

During the initial phase of restructuring, Extension eliminated 101 permanent positions, reducing staff by 14 percent overall. We held an additional 76 positions vacant until January 1, 2003, when we began to rebuild the Extension Service to meet priority program responsibilities that are legislatively mandated and client driven.

Throughout 2003, we continued to maintain core staffing with a county director, 4-H presence, and support staff in all 82 counties. Area Extension agents were strategically located around the state to provide educational support and expertise at the local level. Extension specialists organized and led 16 priority program groups (PPG's) that coordinated development and distribution of educational programs and services to every county of our state.

In 2004, the restructuring process is moving into the refinement phase. The real key to making a successful move to a new delivery structure is our people. Extension workers have a tradition of assessing client needs and adopting new strategies to meet critical educational needs quickly. Adapting to change has been the hallmark of Extension since the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 established the Cooperative Extension System.

All area agents are required to complete 100 hours of professional development training each year. Most of the required training is geared to raise the level of expertise among area agents. The exponential growth of new research findings in all subject matter fields places higher burdens on field staff to keep up with the latest

"best management practices" in any given field of study. Extension agents must focus their learning on very specific areas of expertise to keep up with demands of our clients in every program area.

Wise use of technology is streamlining the way agents and specialists deliver educational programs and services. Cell phones, e-mail, and the World Wide Web have become widely used delivery systems by agents, specialists, and clients alike. Extension has also developed an extensive network of videoconference classrooms throughout the state. Videoconferencing complements the comprehensive computer network Extension has employed over the past decade to deliver vital information instantaneously into every corner of our state.

The business of MSU Extension Service is education. Technology is a tool, not a panacea. Extension enjoys the most comprehensive communication network of any agency or institution in Mississippi. However, the real strength of Extension is our people. All the technology in the world will never replace the personal interaction between subject matter agents and our clients. Extension reaches into every county of Mississippi with motivated, professional educators who work closely with farmers, homemakers, youth, community leaders, entrepreneurs, and business leaders to make Mississippi a better place to live. Extension workers are vital members of every community in Mississippi.

We greatly appreciate the confidence state legislators, county supervisors, and other public officials have demonstrated by providing resources we can use to meet the increasingly complex demands of our many audiences. We also appreciate the many agencies, organizations, and volunteers who partner with us to meet the growing needs of Mississippi communities. We especially value our friends, neighbors, and families who depend on us daily to provide the best research-based information and educational programs and services available today. We are committed to continuing our legacy of excellence in serving the citizens of Mississippi, and we thank you all for giving us the opportunity to serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe H. McGilberry". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Joe H. McGilberry

Executive Director for University Extension and Outreach