

ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE OF EXTENSION

4-H Program Management Domain

4-H, a positive youth development program, is part of the Land-Grant University and Cooperative Extension System in every state and territory. As a volunteer, it is important to understand the background of Cooperative Extension. For more information about Extension in your state, contact your local 4-H professional.

Evolution of Extension

Cooperative Extension provides research and agricultural knowledge and practices for the public to use in their daily lives or work. A component of, and funded by, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Extension is a great resource every state has available to the public. So, how exactly did Extension get to this point? Well, to begin, in 1857, Justin Morrill was a representative who was using agriculture ideas from agriculture societies. Shortly after, he proposed the idea of a land grant bill to Congress. In 1862, the bill was passed as the Morrill Act.

The Morrill Act - 1862

The Morrill Act provided federal land to every state with instruction to build and establish at least one agriculture college¹. These colleges had to provide agriculture, mechanical arts, and a military tactics component as part of their programmatic offerings.

The Morrill Act was established just in time to help with the need for home economics, agriculture practices, and other service fields after the Civil War.

However, African Americans could not attend land-grant universities because many were still in slavery, and the act did not pertain to racial lines. In 1890, a second Morrill Act was established to create agricultural colleges for African Americans. As land-grant universities began to form, there was a long debate about organizing agricultural Extension work. Years later, in 1914, the Smith-Lever Act was created.

The Smith-Lever Act - 1914

In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson signed legislation to connect the land-grant universities and the Extension services to ensure the public was informed about new research. Topics included agriculture, home economics, public policy, leadership, 4-H, economic development, and coastal development issues. That legislation was the basis for the Cooperative Extension System, a three-way partnership between the federal, state, and county governments, still in place today. Every county in every state in the country and US territories has an Extension program.

Evolution of 4-H

Extension work has always been focused on connecting agriculture practices to the public. Initially, schools and colleges of agriculture conducted public meetings and demonstrations to teach others about the new research or agriculture techniques. After the Morrill and Smith-Lever Acts passed, funds and available resources have

made Extension work easier to connect with the public. As a result, agricultural organizations like the boys' and girls' clubs have formed. That is how 4-H began. In 1902, boys' and girls' agrarian clubs were organized in many different places simultaneously across the country^{2, 3}. Eventually, the boys' and girls' clubs became known as 4-H, which is how the 4-H program was born.

Resources:

¹Comer, M., Campbell, T., Edwards, K., Hillson, J., (2006). Cooperative Extension and the 1890 Land-Grant Institution: The Real Story. Journal of Extension

²Franks, M., Hebert, L., Lepley, T., (2020). Louisiana 4-H Club Leader Guidebook. LSU AgCenter.

³Franks, M., Hebert, L., Lepley, T., (2020). Facts About 4-H. Letters to 4-H Leaders. LSU AgCenter.

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