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## EXAMINATION OF THE ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM'S COUNTY LEVEL PROGRAMMING

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**EXAMINATION OF THE ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM'S  
COUNTY LEVEL PROGRAMMING**

**Laura Robinson**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research examines Alabama Cooperative Extension System's (ACES) county level programming process to determine if ACES is meeting the needs of the county. This research uses secondary data relating to County Advisory Boards, Program Advisory Committees, and Extension Team Projects to examine the dynamics of these three programs. This information also was used to select four Alabama counties to perform a detailed case study of county level ACES programming. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with County Advisory Board members and county level ACES employees. The findings from the secondary data indicate that there is a disconnect between the major issues of concern identified by County Advisory Boards and how ACES personnel allocated their time to Extension programming. Primary data from interviews indicates that ACES is addressing the critical issues of the existing County Advisory Boards; however, not all constituents of the county may be represented on these boards. Therefore, it is unclear if the needs of the county are actually being met.

## INTRODUCTION

The United States Cooperative Extension System (Extension) was created in 1914 with the passage of the Smith-Lever Act that “directed the Extension to ‘aid in diffusing. . .useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture and home economics’” (Rasmussen 1989:153). Because Extension provided scientific information to help improve rural agricultural activities, it has been described as a “friend of the American farmer” (Terry 1995a:58). Over the years, though, the declining number of people living on farms and in rural areas has created a dilemma for Extension. Some argue Extension should remain a friend of the farmer and maintain its focus on farms and rural America. Most, however, agree that for Extension to survive, it must change with the times and broaden its mission (Black et al. 1992; Conone 1991; Adelaine and Foster 1990; Johnsrud and Rauschkolb 1989; Meier 1989; Hildreth and Armbruster 1981; Boone and Kincaid 1966). Nevertheless, as Extension expands its scope, many of its programs and political influences are still deeply rooted in agriculture and are therefore, difficult to change.

To try and meet the needs of a broader public, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) established County Advisory Boards (CAB) in each of the state’s 67 counties. These boards identify areas of concern in their respective counties for Extension to address. County Extension agents use this information to develop educational programs for the county. Little has been documented about the dynamics of ACES programming at the county level. This study will examine the dynamics that occur at the county level that affect Extension programming.

Although Extension has expanded its focus to meet a broader clientele, many of their programs, staff, and volunteers still have strong ties to agriculture (Terry 1995a; Terry 1995b; Warner and Christenson 1984; Hildreth and Armbruster 1981). Alabama is no exception. The rationale behind this research is that Alabama, like the rest of the country, has seen a long-term decline in number and size of farms. In 1860, the majority of Alabama residents were employed in agriculture and by 1996, only about one-third of the state’s population was rural and far fewer were involved in agriculture (Robinson et al. 2000). With this decline in agriculture has come a rise in forestry in Alabama. Currently, 70% of Alabama is forested (Vissage and Miller 1990).

Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the county level educational programming within ACES in relation to forestry and natural resource issues. There are two main reasons for focusing on forestry and natural resource issues. First, by most standards the forest products industry is the state’s largest industrial sector based on the number of businesses, payrolls, value added, and value of shipped goods (Howze, Bailey, and Bliss 1994). Second, sustaining Alabama’s forests and natural resources is important because of their significance to the state’s well-being.

This project was organized around two main objectives. First, is to document linkages between County Advisory Boards, Program Advisory Committees, and Extension Team Projects for Alabama counties by dependency on timber. Second, is to examine how ACES personnel

determine which programs are implemented in order to address the major issues of concern identified by the County Advisory Boards.

### ACES Structure at the County Level

At the state level, ACES has an administrative staff that directs a state-wide operation and establishes state priorities. Extension specialists focus their efforts in particular subject matter program areas and assist the county staff in these areas. The four District Extension Coordinators (DEC) are each in charge of roughly a fourth of the counties in Alabama. County Extension Coordinators (CEC) are in charge of the county office and the county Extension agents and report to the DEC. There is one CEC per county office. Each of the offices has one or more county agents. County Extension agents oversee educational program areas such as 4-H, Agriculture and Natural Resources, or Nutrition.

At the county level, ACES has several programs to aid local staff in accomplishing ACES goals. The three main program components discussed in this report are the County Advisory Board (CAB), Program Advisory Committee (PAC), and Extension Team Projects (ETP). The basic relationship between these three programs and the local county office is shown in Figure 1. Further discussion of the programs' mission, members, and responsibilities is presented below.

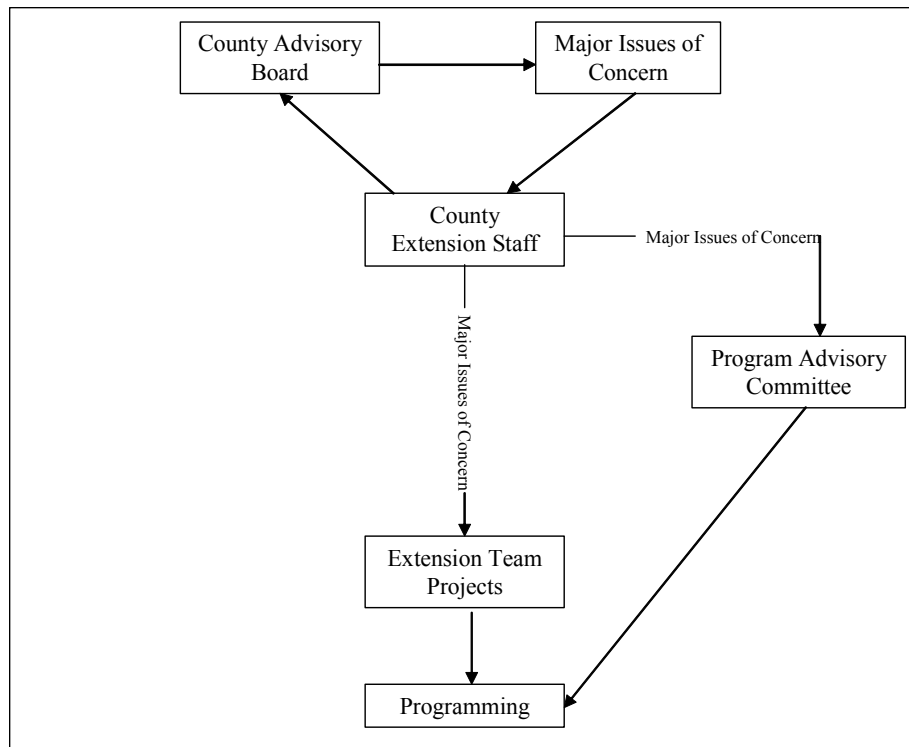


Figure 1. Expected Relationship Between the County Advisory Board, Program Advisory Committees, Extension Team Projects, and Extension Agents.

## **County Advisory Boards**

*Mission.* According to the County Advisory Board Handbook (1999:2), the mission of the CABs is to aid local extension staff by:

- Identifying issues of widespread public concern within the county.
- Helping the local staff decide which of these issues should be addressed through Extension educational programs.
- Helping the staff establish priorities and plan a well-balanced, total extension program.

*Members.* The entire county staff, under the leadership of the CEC, selects CAB members. According to the CAB Handbook, members of the CAB should include key leaders of the community, both formal and informal. The CAB should consist of a cross-section of race, ethnic, gender, economic strata and occupations. In general, the CAB is to meet three to six times a year (CAB Handbook 1999).

*Responsibilities.* CAB members have certain responsibilities for carrying out their mission. Their primary responsibility is to study information and data about the county in order to identify "critical issues and problems that affect the economic, physical, and social well-being of the county residents" (CAB Handbook 1999:2). In addition to identifying issues of concern, CAB members aid the local Extension staff in making decisions about the appropriate balance between traditional, non-traditional, and new programs in order to address the issues and local problems. The CAB also assists the staff in identifying and setting appropriate long-range goals and objectives for the entire county Extension program. The CAB provides a written report of recommendations to their county's Extension staff (CAB Handbook 1999).

## **Program Advisory Committees**

Program Advisory Committees (PAC) are "organized groups of individuals with a common interest in a specific issue of widespread, local concern that Extension has committed to address" (Program Advisory Committee Handbook 1999:2). Extension staff determines how many PACs are needed, the number of people on specific PACs, how often they meet, and their structure. County agents rely on PACs to ensure that the base-programs stay relevant and meet the needs of the clientele.

*Mission.* The main mission of a PAC is to aid county agents in the following:

- "Identify and bring about desired changes within a specific base-program area.
- Apply research-generated knowledge and leadership techniques to address specific issues of wide spread public concern" (PAC Handbook 1999:2).

*Members.* Members of a PAC should be community leaders that have a general knowledge of the program area within which they have volunteered. Like CABs, PAC members must represent a cross-section of race, age, sex, economic strata, skills, and knowledge levels.

*Responsibilities.* The role of PAC members is to study information from Extension specialists in order to identify and understand opportunities to apply new knowledge and a positive change to the specific areas of interest. PAC members also set long and short-range goals for objectives of county Extension programs. In addition, PAC members help agents obtain resources - facilities, equipment, program-specific donations, - needed to carry out

programs. Also, PAC members assist agents in implementing and evaluating certain educational programs (PAC Handbook 1999).

### **Extension Team Projects**

Extension Team Projects (ETPs) were created to replace individual plans of work and to better facilitate organized teamwork. The goals outlined in the Alabama Extension Long Range Plan of Work will be accomplished through these team projects (Extension Team Projects, 1997).

*Mission.* An ETP is defined as "a series of related activities which take place over a specified period of time (usually several years), and which involve several Extension-funded employees working together to accomplish specific objectives" (Extension Team Projects 1997:2). ETPs, defined by ACES, are in the areas of:

- 4-H & Youth Development
- Agriculture
- Community and Economic Development
- Family and Individual Well-Being
- Forestry and Natural Resources
- Urban Affairs and New Non-Traditional Programs
- General Program Support
- General Administrative Services

*Members.* ETPs are not committees or groups which meet, but rather are program areas which individual county agents and specialists identify as important to their assignments.

*Responsibilities.* County agents are required to allocate a minimum of 50% (116 days) of their time to one or more ETPs. Each specialist is required to allocate a minimum of 75% of their Extension time to one or more ETPs. The remaining days should be allocated to 'non-project work.' The amount of time dedicated to ETPs and non-project work should be discussed within each county staff group and their District Extension Coordinator (ACES no date).

### **Timber Dependency**

For analyses and comparisons, county level data were grouped into four categories. These categories were non-timber dependent, partial timber dependent, timber dependent, and urban. There are several definitions of timber dependency. Many studies look at economic measures (Machlis and Force 1988). Several scholars use the percent of the labor force in timber-related jobs in a particular area and compare this figure to the state figures (Cook 1995; Force et al. 1993; Machlis, Force, and Balice 1990).

The definition of timber dependency for this study is the proportion of the total employment and manufacturing employment that is in forest product industries (Robinson et al. 2000). Four Standard Industrial Codes (0800 Forestry, 24--Lumber and Logging, 25--Furniture, and 26--Pulp and Paper) related to forestry were used to identify the percent of forestry in manufacturing.

Counties with 25 percent or more of its manufacturing employment in forest-based industries were defined as timber dependent and those with less than 7.5 percent of manufacturing employment in forest-based industries were considered non-timber dependent. Those counties categorized as rural and have between 7.5 percent and 25 percent manufacturing employment in forest-based industries were considered partial timber dependent. Those counties that were less than 50 percent rural were classified as urban counties. Figure 2 shows the timber dependency levels for Alabama counties using 1996 Census data (Robinson et al. 2000).

There are limitations to using only percent of manufacturing data to determine timber dependency. Therefore, information on the percent of county forested land was also used in examining the data (Vissage and Miller 1990). The top ten most heavily forested counties are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Top 10 Counties by Percent of Forested Land in Alabama, 1990.

Top 10 Counties	Total Forest Land (acres)	All Land (acres)	Percent
1 Clarke	723.5	787.3	91.9
2 Washington	634.2	691.7	91.7
3 Choctaw	508.7	582.0	87.4
4 Bibb	346.5	400.0	86.6
5 Winston	331.8	392.6	84.5
6 Tallapoosa	378.5	448.8	84.3
7 Lamar	326.0	387.2	84.2
8 Conecuh	458.5	546.5	83.9
9 Fayette	337.9	403.0	83.8
10 Coosa	349.4	420.6	83.1

Source: Vissage, John S. and Patrick Miller. 1990. "Forest Statistics for Alabama Counties." United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service.



## METHODS

There were two main components to the research. The first component consisted of secondary data gathering. Secondary data collection was used to examine linkages between CABs, PACs, and ETPs for Alabama counties by economic dependency on timber. The secondary data sources were the CAB reports and listing of PACs provided by the county Extension staff. ETP data was obtained from the ACES internal Internet program. CAB reports, PAC listings, and ETPs were used to begin to paint a picture of the linkages between components of the county level programming process. In addition, the secondary data was also used to help select four counties to conduct comparative case-studies.

The second component of the research used primary data. Primary data came from a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews that were conducted during a case study of four Alabama counties. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data for the second part. To ensure that the interviews produced comparable results, a list of questions were on hand during the interview. This helped to ensure that I had comparable information, but also allowed me to gather additional information as needed.

### Secondary Data

This section describes the methods used in the first part of the research. Outlined below is how the data were collected and response rates.

#### County Advisory Reports and Program Advisory Committees

*Data Collection.* An E-mail message by Dr. Mark Dubois, Extension Forester, was sent to County Extension Coordinators requesting information on the following:

1. A listing of County Advisory Board members using the standard form from the ACES County Advisory Board Handbook – including information on race, gender, occupation, and perspective.
2. Major issues of widespread public concern at the local level (ranked from highest to lowest priority) from section E of the recommended format for the County Advisory Board Report.
3. A list of Program Advisory Committees.

The stated purpose of the request was to provide information needed to examine the role of Extension in providing sustainable natural resource programming. Information for (1) and (2) is recorded in the county's annual report that is submitted by April 1 of each year to the state ACES office.

The information was requested to be returned by May 12, 2000. Approximately one-third of the counties responded to this request. A second email was sent June 2, 2000, requesting the above information. Since many responses did not contain all three pieces of the requested information, individuals were called requesting the missing information. Time constraints precluded further data collection.

*Response Rate.* Approximately 72 percent (48) of the counties responded with some portion of the requested information (Figure 3). A breakdown of the response rate



for information on the CAB demographics, major issues of concern, and PACs by timber dependency can be found in Table 2. Only 39 percent (26) of the counties submitted a complete response to the requested information. Nineteen counties did not respond. These counties are generally located in the eastern part of the state, mainly within ACES East District boundaries.

Table 2. Percent of Alabama Counties, by Timber Dependency, that Provided Requested Information on County Advisory Board Demographics, Major Issues of Concern, and Program Advisory Committees, 2000.

Timber Dependency	Number	Percent of Counties Reporting On:					
		Race	Gender	Occupation	Perspective	Major Issues of Concern	Program Advisory Committees
		..... (percent).....					
Non-Timber Dependent	5	60.0	60.0	60.0	40.0	40.0	40.0
Partial Timber Dependent	17	58.8	58.8	64.7	41.2	58.8	47.1
Timber Dependent	24	83.3	83.3	83.3	79.2	79.2	66.7
Urban	21	38.1	38.1	38.1	38.1	42.9	57.1
Alabama	67	61.2	61.2	62.7	53.7	59.7	56.7

### Extension Team Projects

Extension uses ETPs to project the number of days they will allocate to various programming areas during the year. Information on ETPs from the year 2000 was downloaded from the Extension website and transferred to a spreadsheet. ETP information presented here contains data from 100 percent of the counties. Therefore, the ETP data is, theoretically, an accurate representation of where Extension staff allocated their time.

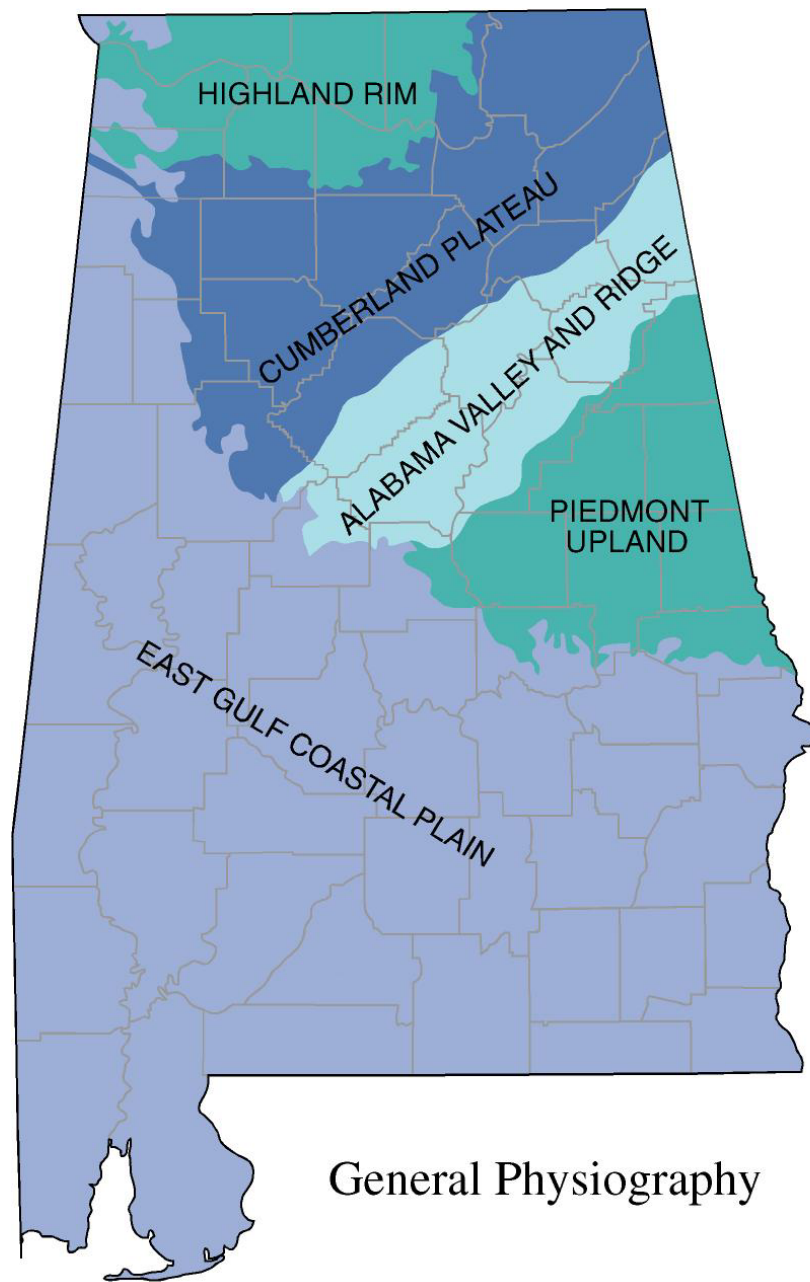
### Primary Data

Primary data were used to examine why county agents implemented particular programs. Additionally, it was used to identify the dynamics of the county advisory boards and determine how and why major issues of concern were chosen. The second part of my research consisted of a case study format using semi-structured interviews to elicit additional information from respondents of several counties.

### County Selection

The selection of counties for in-depth research was based on the following criteria. Only counties in the two physiographic regions of Alabama, the Piedmont and the Coastal Plains, were considered (Figure 4). The reasons for looking at these two regions were they have similar histories, natural resources, and agriculture.

Counties to be considered for selection were those 1) which, based on secondary data, appeared to have a disconnect between what was identified by the CAB as a major issue of concern and what was implemented as programs based on ETP data; and 2) where, based on secondary data, CABs, major issues of concern, and programming seemed to overlap. The counties chosen for in-depth analysis were more likely to provide insight as to why there is a connection or disconnection in programming.



## General Physiography

Produced by the Dept. of Geography  
College of Arts and Sciences  
The University of Alabama

Figure 4. Piedmont and Coastal Plain Region of Alabama.

Source: Alabama Maps. 2001. University of Alabama's Cartographic Research Laboratory  
<http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/alabama/physical/index.html>

## **Purposive Sampling**

Purposive sampling was used for the qualitative research. County Extension personnel and CAB members were considered for this phase of the study. Only full time Extension employees and employees not involved with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) or Nutrition Education Program (NEP) were chosen. The interviews of county Extension employees consisted of four county Extension Coordinators and six county agents. In addition, three key state Extension administrative employees were interviewed. These employees included the Acting Director of ACES and two state level Extension personnel.

After the counties were chosen, contact was made with each of the County Extension Coordinators (CEC) to inform them of the project and request permission to interview them and their CAB members. All four of the coordinators agreed and as requested, provided a list of the CAB members and their phone numbers. Interestingly, one county did not have a CAB. Therefore, the CEC provided me a list of people that were familiar with Extension and aided their office in programming.

I attempted to contact each CAB member on the list provided by the CEC. For all four counties, there were a total of 52 county citizens names provided. Of the 52 citizens listed, 33 interviews (64%) were completed. Those that were not interviewed were either unable to be reached by phone to set up the interview, did not feel they would have anything useful to contribute, or did not show up for the scheduled interview.

## **Interviews**

Prior to interviews, county citizens reviewed and signed an Informed Consent Form. Also, prior to interviews, county citizens and county Extension personnel were assured that no names would be used in the report and none of the counties would be identified. The reason for this confidentiality was to encourage open and honest answers.

The interview length ranged from 20 minutes to two hours. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were used for each subject. Most interviews took place in the county Extension office, citizen's place of employment, the local library, or in respondent's homes. Notes were taken during the interview and transcribed shortly after each interview. All interview data were reviewed and transcribed into Microsoft Access for further analysis.

## **County Description**

Since interview subjects were assured confidentiality, county names and interview subject names will not be used. Therefore, the four counties will be identified as County A, B, C, and D for the purpose of discussion. In order to maintain confidentiality, the county statistics listed below are approximate figures while still providing a useful description of the county. A summary of the information below can be found in Table 3.

Table 3. Selected Characteristics of Case Study Counties and Alabama.

	Population, 2000 <sup>1</sup>	Percent Change in Population, 1990-2000 <sup>1</sup>	Percent Below Poverty Level, 1995 <sup>2</sup>	Unemployment Rates, 1999 <sup>3</sup>	High School Graduation Rate, 1998 <sup>4</sup>	Percent Births to Teenage Mothers, 1998 <sup>2</sup>	Number of Farms, 1997 <sup>2</sup>	Average Size of Farms in Acres, 1997 <sup>2</sup>	Percent Land in Forests, 1990 <sup>5</sup>
Alabama	4,447,100	10.1%	17.6%	4.8%	63%	17.1%	41,384	81	67.6%
County A*	25,000	-3%	25%	14%	60%	24%	400	100	80%
County B	15,000	10%	15%	6%	50%	21%	200	100	80%
County C	40,000	5%	20%	8%	65%	22%	900	100	70%
County D	23,000	15%	20%	6%	70%	24%	600	100	75%

\*Data rounded for confidentiality reasons.

Source:

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 2000. State and County Quick Facts.

<sup>2</sup> Center for Demographic and Cultural Research. 1999. *Alabama Population Data Sheet*.

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. 1999. Economic Research Service. U.S. Department of Agriculture.

<sup>4</sup> VOICES for Alabama's Children and the Center for Demographic and Cultural Research, 1999. *Alabama Kids Data Sheet*.

<sup>5</sup> Vissage, John S. and Patrick Miller. 1990. "Forest Statistics for Alabama Counties." *USDA Forest Service*.

### Subject Description

This section provides a description of all respondents. A total of 46 interviews were performed. Thirteen were with ACES employees. Three employees were state level administration employees and ten were county level employees. Of the ten county level Extension employees, four were County Extension Coordinators and six were county Extension agents.

Focusing on the ten county level ACES employees, four were female and six were male. Two were black and eight were white. Nine of the ten grew up in Alabama. At the county level, of the ten Extension employees interviewed, seven had some degree from Auburn University and two had a degree from Alabama A&M. This means that nine of the ten county Extension employees that were interviewed had some degree from a land-grant university. In addition, the length of time these ten county employees had been employed with ACES ranged from three to 32 years, with an average time with Extension of 18.7 years.

The intent of this part of the research was to interview CAB members in four counties. One of the counties chosen did not have a CAB. In that county, Extension personnel directed me to several county residents involved with Extension. For reporting purposes, these county residents and the CAB members of the other three counties will collectively be called 'county citizens.'

In the four counties, 33 county citizens were interviewed. Twenty-five were white and eight were black. Twenty females and 13 males were interviewed. The age range for the county citizens was 15 to 81. The majority of the county citizens, 28, were born and raised in Alabama. Although the majority of county Extension employees received education from a land-grant university only eight of 33 county citizens had a degree from one of these two institutions and none of the degrees were related to agriculture. At the county level, it appears that Extension has

been able to break away from its educational agricultural roots in choosing members for its advisory boards.

## **ANALYSIS OF COUNTY LEVEL PROGRAMMING BASED ON STATE REPORTS**

The purpose of the research reported here was to examine the relationship between ACES programs to determine if the programs were achieving the goals they set out to accomplish and whether they were meeting the needs of the county. This was accomplished by attempting to gather CAB, PAC, and ETP information from all Alabama counties.

Additionally, counties were categorized by their economic dependency on timber. Data from the counties were examined to explore the relationships between these three ACES program components and the extent to which they were meeting the needs of the county.

Data on the CAB, PAC, and ETP were gathered to identify counties to focus on and for interviews with Extension staff, CAB and PAC members. The following provides the results and discussions of the secondary data.

### **Results and Discussion**

Because a number of counties did not respond, data were only available for three of the five non-timber dependent counties. Since data are limited for this category, non-timber dependent counties are not examined in detail here.

#### **County Discussion**

County Extension programming was examined by timber dependency. There appears to be a disconnect between what CABs have identified as a major issue of concern, where the Extension agents allocate their time in the ETPs, and what PACs are created.

*Partial Timber Dependent Counties.* CABs in partial timber dependent counties tended to be most concerned about natural resources, followed by family, and then youth, agriculture, and development. The ETPs reflected a trend with 4-H & Youth Development, Family & Well-Being, and Agriculture having the most number of days allocated. Even though most of the major issues of concern identified by CABs dealt with natural resources, less than five percent of the days were allocated to Forestry & Natural Resource ETPs. This trend is seen again in PACs. All of the partial timber dependent counties had PACs in agriculture and only one county had a PAC in natural resources.

*Timber Dependent Counties.* CABs in timber dependent counties had most of their major issues of concern (in order of importance) in family, youth, and natural resources. The ETPs with the greatest percent of time allocated were those associated with Family & Well-Being, 4-H & Youth Development, and Agriculture. Forestry & Natural Resources had less than five percent of the days allocated. Half of the counties had PACs in natural resources and all but one county had PAC in agriculture. The data indicate that PACs in youth and family were ranked high in the number of counties with PACs.

*Urban Counties.* As defined by CABs, urban counties had the majority of their major issues of concern in family, natural resources, and youth. Only two urban counties had major issues of concern in agriculture. Yet, the occupations of CAB members showed a trend in a different direction. In urban counties, the pattern showed more than four times as many CAB members in agriculture as there were in natural resources. Once again, the trend in the greatest number of ETPs allocated was in Family & Well-Being, Agriculture, and 4-H & Youth Development. Less than four percent of the time was dedicated to Forestry & Natural Resource issues. Almost 70 percent of the counties had a PAC in family and health. All but one urban county had a PAC in agriculture. Less than half of the PACs were in natural resources.

For all counties, there was a disconnect between the major issues of concern the CAB identified and what Extension did to address these concerns. This was especially evident in natural resources and agriculture. The major issues of concern, identified by the CAB, were not carried through to the PACs and ETPs in natural resources and agriculture (Figure 5).

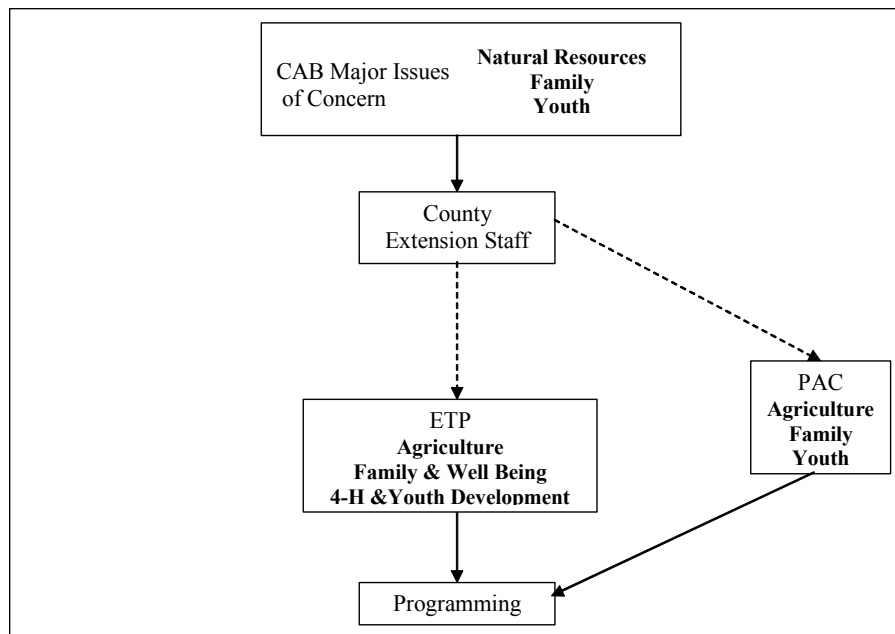


Figure 5. Top Programs Identified for Major Issues of Concern, Program Advisory Committees, and Extension Team Projects.

In contrast, there is a considerable amount of time dedicated to agricultural issues even though the CABs identify other areas as critical issues of concern. Were the CABs effective? Was ACES following through with programs set up to identify problems in the county? Were the ETPs really meeting the needs of the county? It appears that in certain program areas the programming process worked but in others it was still unclear why there was a disconnect.

Secondary data were used to examine the extent to which there were congruence between local needs and county level programming. Analysis of secondary data alone cannot determine why certain programs did not appear to be meeting needs of the county identified by members of the community on the CAB. The purpose of the CAB is to identify issues of widespread concern, and help ACES staff decide which issues should be addressed through Extension

educational programs. PACs are to address widespread issues that the Extension is committed to handling. Furthermore, PACs are to make sure that base-programs stay relevant and meet the needs of the clientele. But, if county Extension agents and PACs are encouraged to use existing groups, commodity or special interest committees, as they have used for years, then new programs to meet the county needs may not be created.

By using the CAB, PAC, and ETP data collected in this study we can begin to paint a picture of the relationship that exists between Extension programming and how well they meet the needs of Alabama counties. In the next section, results of a comparative case study of four counties are presented in the hope of explaining the findings of this analysis of secondary data.

## **CASE STUDIES OF COUNTY LEVEL PROGRAMMING**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in four counties. The results and description section detail Extension's county level programming from the perspectives of both Extension employees and county citizens.

### **Results and Discussion**

Little has been documented about the dynamics of ACES county level programming. This section will provide insight on programming at the county level. The section is organized by Extension personnel's view of county level programming followed by county citizens view of county level programming.

#### **Extension's View of County Level Programming**

Extension employees have a variety of major program activities. Extension's Acting Director describes the six core areas Extension works with: agriculture, forestry and wildlife, 4-H youth, family, community economic development, and urban. Some specific issues agents and coordinators work with are home economics, health, food, nutrition, 4-H, agriculture, forestry and natural resources, community economic development, leadership, and youth development. The allocation of agent's and coordinator's time varies by employee and county. For example, one agent may have allocated 50 percent of their time to 4-H and 50 percent to agriculture, while another agent may have allocated 100 percent of their time to 4-H.

Extension work falls into two broad categories as described by one of Extension's state administration personnel. He explained that counties have structured programs like NEP and EFNEP. They also have a considerable amount of unplanned, unstructured work driven by clientele requesting for information.

In order to determine if Extension is meeting the needs of the county, it was important to understand how structured programs were established. When county Extension employees were asked how they determine which programs to implement, eight of the nine county Extension employees said PACs provide them guidance. One county Extension employee stated that PACs give guidance on where the county's efforts should be focused. Another agent said the CABs do not come up with individual programs; they provide the big picture. The PACs, on the other

hand, come up with programming. However, one county Extension employee said the information comes from advisory boards, agents, and specialists. The general sentiment, though, was that the CABs identify priorities, but PACs tell Extension personnel which programs to implement. Based on this information, the PACs work as they are supposed to.

Clearly, PACs are an important part of programming. Two types of PACs were identified during the interviews. First are committees that follow the Extension's PAC Handbook guidelines. The other type of committee that several Extension employees classify as PACs were actually existing groups that operate outside the structure of Extension but to which county Extension employees belong.

Two examples of this type of "PAC" are the Cattlemen's Association and the County Forestry Planning Committee. There are different views on creating Extension PACs and using other groups' committees as a PAC. Of the four counties studied, only one county did not use existing committees like the County Forestry Planning Committee or Cattlemen's Association as a PAC. One county Extension employee said they try to use existing committees because the same people would be coming out to the meetings anyway. But this may defeat Extension's purpose of having racial and gender balanced committees.

The other type of county level programming is ETPs. ETPs are supposed to be the primary way county personnel allocate their time to program areas. When asked about the usefulness of ETPs, seven of the ten county Extension employees had negative responses. There were a wide range of views on ETPs. But overall, they appear to be more of which ETP the county Extension personnel can use to count the project they just did, rather than an accurate picture of how they actually allocate their time.

CABs are the third major type of programming that exists at the county level. CABs identify the major issues of concern for the county to help the county Extension determine where they should focus their efforts. The selection of CAB members is important. Representation on the CAB is essential because one of the key aspects of collaboration is the involvement of stakeholders. Selin and Chavez (1995:190) define stakeholders as "individuals, groups, and formal organizations who have a perceived interest or impact on a particular resource." The people on the CAB are people with an interest or impact on Extension.

Selin et al. (2000) argue having a broad representation of stakeholders is a good predictor of initiative effectiveness. However, it is also important to look at who is not chosen. Gray (1985) explains care must be taken when selecting stakeholders because omission of relevant stakeholders can lead to difficulties during implementation. By choosing people who are familiar or interested in Extension or work with Extension, Extension can remain in their comfort zone. The county personnel state that they already know what the major issues of concern are for the county, the CAB just confirm what they expect. But if they had people from other aspects of the community, they might get new ideas.

The continual choosing of people who are familiar with Extension is similar to cooperative domination. One view is that the selective choosing of people helps to create "correct" thinking (Rural Sociological Society 1993). While it is not clear who may be missing

from the board, they do have a cross-section of members. I agree with Kenney (2000) who feels that environmental viewpoints are under-represented in collaborative group processes and commodity interests are over-represented. Since people outside CABs and Extension were not interviewed, it is difficult to identify if there are still some interests in the county that are missing from the CABs.

In addition to the selection of CAB members, how they operate also is an important factor to having successful collaboration and thus potentially a successful CAB. Selin and Chavez (1995) describe collaboration as an emerging process rather than a rigid organization. Where the resources are available for the CAB to meet, the CAB worked well. But in the case of the county without a CAB, the county coordinator did not support the goals of the CABs. The feeling was the CABs did not have much value and therefore no CABs exist in that county.

The three counties with CABs were dedicated to having successful CABs. This dedication is critical for the CABs. Selin et al. (2000) cite a study by Williams and Ellefson (1996) that identified three factors crucial to keeping individuals and partnerships together – recognition of common goals, an informal and open structure, and information sharing among partners.

Extension employee's view on county level programming is important to take into account when examining programming at the county level. To complete the picture, it was also necessary to understand county level programming from the county citizen's perspective that were involved with this programming.

### **County Citizens' View of County Level Programming**

Johnsrud and Rauschkolb (1989:4) affirm that Extension must continue to undergo change to respond to national and local needs. At the local level, it was evident that Extension has started to move beyond the traditional agriculture focus. As Meier (1989) explains, Extension is establishing linkages beyond its agricultural clientele base and exploring new opportunities and clientele linkages while keeping with the basic mission of Extension. This was evident in the CAB.

Warner and Christenson (1984:140) warn there is always the “danger that, if county advisory committees are composed of traditional Extension supporters, then new program emphases will be overlooked.” Black et al. (1992:15) refer to Cole and Cole's book on advisory councils and “maintains that: ‘A necessary ingredient for success in Extension programming is the active participation of a cross-section of people in developing and supporting its programs.’” Members for CAB are chosen by the county Extension personnel based on race, gender, and occupation. This is to ensure that there is diversity on the boards and to make sure that all aspects of the county are represented. Virtually all of the CAB members interviewed said that the boards were diverse and all aspects of the county were represented.

Although the people on the CAB are diverse on paper, the same types of people were chosen year after year. All three CAB have people from the Department of Human Resources (DHR). Employees of DHR rotated on and off the Board. Extension personnel fill the CAB member vacancies with people in the community who they knew either through 4-H or through

people who came in and ask questions. CAB members chosen who were not familiar with Extension were usually selected because they worked in one of the “token” or standard membership positions, such as bankers or DHR, on the CAB.

When the CAB members were asked if any groups or individuals were missing from the CAB, of the 16 CAB members and county Extension personnel asked, only one person said that someone was missing. The one exception was one elderly women who said her son should be on the CAB because he had some good points about the community and housing. It is important to note that no citizens in the county other than CAB members and those directly involved with Extension (in the county without a CAB) were interviewed. County citizens may have a different view on the CAB member representation.

I asked the CAB members if there was a leader or anyone that dominated the meetings. Everyone felt that they all had equal time to participate. As the collaboration model states, the power is shared and the CAB members can take collective responsibility for the decisions made. Selin and Chavez (1995:193) state “when power differences exist among parties or when certain parties are not perceived as having a legitimate claim to participate in consensus forums” collaboration can be hindered.

Warner and Christenson (1984) discuss the effectiveness of programs and maintain unless programs meet the demands and expectations of intended clientele, they can be seen as ineffective and a waste of taxpayers’ money. The county citizens were asked if they found Extension useful. Of the 18 people asked, all but three said they used Extension in their own life. Of those who were asked about the usefulness of the CAB, only one person said that if it were abolished no one would miss it. The rest felt the CABs were useful. Selin and Chavez (1995:192) maintain, “Stakeholders will remain committed to the process if the issue is perceived as important and if they believe benefits from participating will outweigh the costs.”

During the meetings, the CAB identified major issues of concerns and Extension used these recommendations to create programs for the next year. From what I gathered, Extension is meeting the needs of the county based on what the CAB identifies and will address the issues raised by the CAB. All 19 county citizens asked said Extension takes the CAB recommendations seriously and implement the programs based on these. This is important to note because if the CAB members did not feel that Extension was listening to their suggestions or meeting their needs, then Extension is wasting their time and the CAB member’s time.

Warner and Christenson (1984) explain a number of other groups are related to Extension and are affected by its vitality. Many of these commodity groups, Pork Producers, Cattlemen’s Association, Soybean Producers, Milk Producers, etc., have “not only influenced the nature of Extension programming, but they have also provided an effective lobby in support of Extension” (Warner and Christenson 1984:38). Extension may have tremendous support from these commodity groups at the state level, but these commodity groups did not show through at the county level. When both the county citizens and Extension personnel were asked who the major supporters were of Extension in their county they gave a variety of supporters. It did not seem that the commodity groups were dominant actors with Extension in the counties studied.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to understand the dynamics of county level programming for Alabama's Cooperative Extension System. To do this, several approaches were used. First, by requesting data from all Alabama counties, we expected to obtain an understanding of how CABs, PACs, and ETPs contributed to Extension programming at the county level. While this information was useful and the numbers painted an important picture, it did not tell the entire story. Therefore, the second part of the study included semi-structured interviews of CAB members and Extension personnel in four Alabama counties. Interview data, important in their own right, were necessary for understanding the secondary data, but also seemed to contradict some of that data. What emerged from combining primary and secondary data is a richer portrait.

The purpose of the first part of the research was to examine the linkages between the various Extension-based advisory and planning committees in appropriate county level planning. The work was inspired initially by the observation that ACES was not devoting adequate attention to natural resource issues, including forestry. CABs, PACs, and ETPs were used to examine this question. Counties were categorized by extent of dependency on timber in order to determine the importance of a county's economic dependency on timber and extension programming at the county level.

The findings from the secondary data indicate there is a disconnect between the major issues of concern identified by the CAB and how Extension uses its resources to address these concerns. However, after interviewing the CAB members in three counties, it appears that Extension is adequately addressing the major issues of concern identified by the CAB. The issues that are identified as major issues of concern require different amounts of time and resources to address the issues. The issues that are raised as major issues of concern are valid issues, but many of them are timeless issues not easily solved. Unemployment, poor parenting skills, youth issues (drugs, alcohol, pregnancy) were some of the issues raised.

The membership of the CAB was similar in both the secondary data and the primary data. There was a cross-section of race and gender on the CAB. Generally, CABs had an equal representation of males and females, with only a few exceptions. The secondary data showed that the occupations of CAB members were mainly in the field of agriculture, business, education, and government with very few in natural resources. This was also the case in the four case studies. There appeared to be a pattern of choosing the same perspectives or occupations year after year. This could limit the scope of ideas that are raised on the CAB. Since members of the community not involved with the CAB were not interviewed, their attitudes towards Extension and CAB representation are unknown.

The secondary data indicated that the major issues of concern pertain to family, natural resources, and youth issues. Yet, this information is not always carried through to programming within PACs and ETPs. Typically, the PACs are in agriculture, family, and youth. ETPs are in family and agriculture topic areas with very little time allocated to natural resources.

A closer examination of counties, based on the case studies, showed that program emphases were not distributed equally. Based on the primary data, the CAB identify big picture items while PACs helped Extension personnel create programs. Also, most of the county Extension personnel did not place much emphasis on the ETPs. So, while the secondary data does tell us something about the county level programming, it must be qualified by the primary data.

What can we learn from this research? Extension may be falling into the pattern of agency capture through their selection of CAB members. This could lead to Extension's programs remaining the same and addressing the concerns of a specific group of clientele. The findings from the interview data indicate that the CAB members were pleased with Extension and felt that they were meeting the needs of the community. However, Extension may not be meeting the needs of the county as a whole, but rather addressing selected issues. Thus, the CAB selection process itself may keep Extension from involvement outside of their comfort zone and meeting the needs of the entire county.

The secondary data helped paint a picture of the county level programming while the primary data filled in many of the gaps identified in the secondary data. Extension should be cautious of only using secondary data to evaluate programs. A closer look at individual counties may reveal something entirely different.

This research mainly looked at county level programming. The primary focus was on the CAB to see how Extension identified major issues of concern in the county and whether these needs are being met. Another aspect that should be examined is to gather information from the PACs. This may shed light on how actual programs are created for Extension to implement. Additionally, to obtain a broader look at Extension, it would be necessary to survey or interview various members of the county that are not involved with Extension programming. This would demonstrate if Extension is meeting the broader needs of the entire county and identify specific individuals or groups were not represented on the CAB. The reader should bear in mind that all individuals interviewed in the course of this study were directly involved with Extension programming.

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