

Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau Ask Laura Newsletter Column
Authorship for May 2014 Newsletter: Laura Tourte

Q: I just read about UC Cooperative Extension's 100 year anniversary. Can you share more about your history?

A: Is it indeed true that the University of California Cooperative Extension is 100 years old – on May 8th to be exact! Our history extends all the way back to Abraham Lincoln, who was influenced by and interested in both farming and education. President Lincoln signed the Morrill Act into law in 1862, which authorized development of agricultural 'land grant' colleges in every state of the nation, and which ultimately forged the path for extension work. President Lincoln also created what he called 'the people's department' – the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Next came the 1887 Hatch Act, which established federal funding to link land grant colleges with agricultural experiment stations, where research was conducted. And finally, in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Lever Act into law, which established federal funding for nationwide 'extension' work—work that extended science-based information and education at the local level.

At each step in the legislative process, agriculture, education, and practical skills were recognized for their importance and contributions to the growth, vitality, and well-being of the country. Also important was a direct link to local communities. In fact, in addition to federal support through the USDA, and state support through the land grant colleges, local support from county government and support from local farmers through Farm Bureaus were two additional and all-important elements for the establishment and success of a local Cooperative Extension office. This historic 'shared funding and ownership' model, which demonstrated the value of public-private partnerships, persists today.

The first Cooperative Extension farm advisor was appointed in Humboldt County in 1913, slightly ahead of the official passage of the Smith-Lever Act. Additional farm advisors were appointed throughout the state in subsequent years, with Santa Cruz County's first farm advisor, Henry Washburn, appointed in 1917. Since its beginnings, UC Cooperative Extension has evolved and adapted its programs and services to meet the changing needs of its local communities over time, in both rural and urban settings. Programs and services often include agriculture and natural resources, youth development, and nutrition, family, and consumer sciences. Two volunteer programs, 4-H and Master Gardeners, also provide essential support, information, and education for youth and adults in our local communities. Though many of our programs and services have evolved over time, our mission—to provide practical, trusted, and science-based information at the local level—remains steadfast to this day.

This article was excerpted and adapted from "A Century of Science and Service", by UC Cooperative Extension Advisors Rose Hayden-Smith and Rachel Surls. More detail on the history of Cooperative Extension can be accessed at:

<http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/repositoryfiles/cav6801p8-133614.pdf>.