

Virginia Cooperative Extension

A partnership of Virginia Tech and Virginia State University



College of Agriculture
and Life Sciences



School of Agriculture
Virginia State University

Office of the Director

101 Hutcheson Hall (0402), Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, VA 24061
540-231-5299 Fax: 540-231-4370
algrant@vt.edu

October 7, 2010

Dear VCE Faculty and Staff, and Friends of Extension,

We are pleased to present you with Virginia Cooperative Extension's "blueprint" for the future. This document outlines our plan for creating a dynamic, innovative organization that will allow us to effectively deliver science-based information to Virginia's communities.

It has been more than 18 months since we began developing our strategic and restructuring plans for Extension. We have tried to make the process as open as possible and we are very grateful for everyone who took the time to participate and provide input and feedback.

We feel that we have developed an organizational model that enables us to create and deliver high-quality programs that use science-based information to meet the needs of clientele, while providing a presence in each locality. It also allows local governments a choice of program delivery that meets their needs. The plan gives us the flexibility to respond to emerging issues and changes in funding. Most importantly, it allows us to continue to support rural areas and traditional agricultural industries while paving the way for new economic opportunities across the breadth of today's agriculture, food, and fiber industries.

This plan is only the first step. Over the next six months, implementation teams will work with localities, stakeholders and employees to implement the plan. We will be working with local county and municipal leadership to determine local priorities and put into place specific regional centers to assist in addressing those priorities. We will also be working with human resources to clarify position responsibilities and assist in transitioning employees to new roles. We are confident that the direction we are taking is in the best interest of VCE at this time and we are optimistic that your continued involvement will define a strong future for VCE.

Sincerely,

Alan Grant
Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
Interim Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension
Virginia Tech

Wondi Mersie
Associate Dean and Director of Research
Interim Extension Administrator
Virginia State University

www.ext.vt.edu

Extension is a joint program of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and state and local governments.

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

Restructuring Virginia Cooperative Extension for the 21st Century

This plan is based on recommendations to restructure management and programming operations within Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) to support the implementation of the 2011-2016 strategic plan. The plan is based on the experiences of other states, the input of faculty and staff, and the input of stakeholders including state and county government officials, industry representatives, and other key partners. The restructuring plan is a blueprint to shape future planning and analysis of program implementation and reflects three core organizational structures related to programming, local presence, and organizational structure. Further work that will engage specific audiences in detailed implementation planning will begin in October 2010. Transition from the existing structure to the new structure is expected to begin in fall 2010 and continue through fiscal year 2013 in order to accommodate the budget cycles of local government partners.

Rationale, why restructure?

While the impetus for change focused on reduced state funding, the changing state demographics, technology, and societal expectations have challenged VCE's traditional content and program delivery model. In the 2010 budget bill, state funding reductions eliminated \$5.5 million for Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station and included a \$1 million reduction targeted specifically at restructuring VCE. Moreover, specific direction was given to VCE to report on the results of its strategic planning efforts. Specifically, VCE was charged to develop a plan that:

1. Places priority on the historic mission of Extension to fulfill the land-grant mission in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
2. Defines programming, locations, and funding sources.
3. Addresses potential duplication of effort with state and local agencies.
4. Eliminates low-priority programs.
5. Seeks to restructure and consolidate local offices in a manner that is financially and logistically beneficial while preserving delivery of critical programs in high-priority areas.

VCE's historic mission to "provide information and knowledge ... through instruction and the dissemination of useful and practical information" in partnership with the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station has contributed to the sustainability of an agriculture and forestry industry with an economic impact of more than \$79 billion¹. When Congress created the Cooperative Extension System nearly a century ago to address exclusively rural agricultural issues, more than 50 percent of the U.S. population lived in rural areas, and 30 percent of the workforce was engaged in farming. Fewer than 2 percent of Americans farm for a living today, and only 17 percent of Americans now live in rural areas².

1. Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, www.vdacs.virginia.gov/agfacts/index.shtml.

2. National Institute of Food and Agriculture, www.csrees.usda.gov/qlinks/extension.html.

Today's Extension program must bring economic value to citizens and leverage its ability to deliver science-based developments to the advantage of Virginia citizens.

The restructuring plan will enable an organizational structure that:

- Enables development and delivery of high-quality, research-based programs to meet the needs of communities.
- Links research and development activities from Virginia Tech and Virginia State University campuses with the delivery of educational programs across the state.
- Includes a delivery mechanism with a local presence.
- Allows local governments to have choices in their partnership in the delivery of programs that meet local needs.
- Continues to support rural areas and traditional agricultural industries, while paving the way for new economic opportunities across the breadth of today's agriculture, food, and fiber industries.
- May be adapted to meet evolving or emerging issues facing Virginians.
- Has an administrative and managerial structure that is efficient and can effectively focus resources on program delivery with minimum administrative overhead requirement.
- Integrates with the VCE Strategic Plan and the national program priorities of the federal funding partner, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).
- Updates position responsibilities, job functions, individual accountabilities, and performance standards for faculty and staff.
- Continues to invest in a network of skilled professionals through an ongoing commitment to professional and skill development.

Current situation, structure, staff, financing, and challenges

At the beginning of fiscal year 2010, VCE eliminated two management positions and six program leadership positions and reorganized supervisory responsibilities. In addition, 32 Extension agents and 12 Extension specialists retired as part of an early retirement incentive program. These changes enabled VCE to meet immediate fiscal challenges, while the staffing and program delivery mechanism remained the same as in previous years.

Almost 200 Extension agents and 100 support staff are housed in a network of 106 county and city-based offices across the state. Localities share in the salary costs of the agents and provide additional financial support, including office rent and operating costs. Some localities also pay the full cost of additional Extension program faculty. The direct local funding support of \$5 million is supplemented by an additional \$8 million of in-kind county support for office costs, operating support, county-paid staff, and travel assistance. In addition to the field network, there are more than 80 Extension specialists who work on the campus of Virginia Tech and at 12 Agricultural Research and Extension Centers (ARECs) across the state. Additional Extension faculty work under the direction of Extension programs managed from Virginia State University (VSU), which partners with Virginia Tech to make up VCE.

An agent in each county is designated the “unit coordinator” and charged with managing the business and operations functions of the county Extension operation, supervising the staff, acting as a liaison to county administration, and building relationships with local stakeholders. All agents in the county report to one of four district directors in the state. Thus, district directors supervise 40 to 60 Extension agents. District directors, along with a support staff position and a technology support position, are housed in a location that is somewhat central to each district. This site is usually a leased facility.

Programs are implemented through four program areas: Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Community Viability. Each program area is led by an associate director who serves as an interface between specialists and agents to implement a variety of Extension programs throughout the state.

Process, connection to strategic planning, and leadership benchmarking white paper

In the spring of 2010, Dean Alan Grant of Virginia Tech’s College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs) charged the leadership team of VCE (which included the district directors, associate directors, directors of human resources and finance at CALs, and the associate dean and associate administrator at VSU) to complete a review of other states that had faced similar issues to those of VCE and had responded through a restructuring effort. This team focused on the restructuring efforts of Iowa, Ohio, Minnesota, and Wyoming. Their analysis led to the following guiding principles:

1. **Enhance campus/field interaction:** Virginia’s plan should facilitate a greater connection between Virginia Tech and Virginia State University field Extension and on-campus departments, faculty, and administration to ensure that programs are science-based, meet community needs, and are delivered effectively. Current strategic planning efforts will provide program emphasis areas for the Extension program in Virginia.
2. **Create efficiencies in the VCE delivery model:** Delivery of VCE programs should eliminate artificial regional and programmatic boundaries in order to address needs identified through strategic planning, NIFA priorities, and ongoing situation analysis.
3. **Reduce administrative costs:** Streamlining the administrative structure of Extension.
4. **Maintain a local presence:** Maintaining a local presence throughout Virginia in support of the infrastructure that separates and empowers Extension’s delivery capacity and connectivity with the residents it serves.
5. **Enhance relationships:** Connection and/or reconnection with key partners/stakeholders at campus, local, and state levels is critical.
6. **Evaluate programs:** Elimination of duplicative programming and a renewed commitment to Extension’s historic mission. Look to potential rebranding of some program areas to emphasize their connection to the strategic plan and the historic mission of Extension.

In June 2010, Dean Grant assembled a nine-member task force (appendix A) and charged them with engaging stakeholders in developing a recommendation for changing the structure of VCE. The task force was asked to build on the work done by the leadership team and to organize several

subcommittees composed of specialists, agents, administrators, and stakeholders to provide input on delivery mechanisms, management and organizational structure, and funding models.

Input through subcommittees

The task force assigned leadership for three subcommittees: (1) enhance agent/specialist interaction, (2) maintain a local presence, and (3) enhance relationships. The leadership teams subsequently formed subcommittees drawn from a cross section of faculty, staff, and stakeholders, and each subcommittee designed mechanisms to collect information from target groups.

The “enhance agent/specialist interaction” team developed an open-ended survey that was initially vetted by a small group of agents and specialists and then distributed to 40 subcommittee members who represented campus- and AREC-based specialists, field agents, and administrators in all areas of VCE programming. Responses were obtained from 38 individuals and used to form the subcommittee’s recommendations (appendix B).

The “local presence” team developed a survey instrument that was distributed to city and county government officials, volunteers, and other stakeholders and to field Extension staff. More than 2,500 responses were received (appendix C).

The “enhance relationships” team identified 42 key stakeholders, industry representatives, elected officials, and other key leaders. Each invitee was asked to participate in a face-to-face interview or to complete a questionnaire. Of those invited, 23 stakeholder groups involving 40 individuals participated and provided in-depth responses (appendix D).

Common recommendations and key findings

Each subcommittee made recommendations of their findings to the task force in September 2010. The recommendations were organized into five themes, which would serve as a platform for restructuring:

1. The programming process.
2. Geographic structure.
3. Administration and management.
4. Professional development.
5. Organizational marketing and communication.

From these themes, the task force framed a structural model to guide the next phases of the restructuring process. The task force did not address organizational and marketing issues as part of its recommendations on reorganization.

Adoption of the recommendations

Following the work of the task force, the dean reviewed the recommendations and discussed them with the leadership of the university, the deans of the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine and the College of Natural Resources and the Environment, department heads, AREC directors, district directors, and associate directors. The dean also received feedback on the recommendations from the 229 Council, which provides coordination for Virginia Tech’s outreach and

engagement activities, and from the university provost, Mark McNamee. Virginia State University was also included in discussions.

The Restructuring Plan

The programming model

Extension will continue its historic mission and will place priority on program development in agriculture and natural resources and in 4-H youth development. The programming model is flexible, allowing Extension programs to be developed around issues from the strategic plan. In this way, programming can include a range of services designed to meet local needs. Program delivery will take advantage of multiple delivery modes, including technology, and will be focused on science-based research, delivered through an educational program model. The programming model will focus on a close and effective relationship between Extension specialists and the Extension field faculty. Some constructive features of the existing system have been retained, but the programming process will be strengthened to improve and sustain quality and to build stronger relationships between research activities and field delivery.

The program development and delivery model will be strengthened by establishing “issue-based program teams,” which will design educational programs that can be delivered in the state through a network of locally based field faculty. To recognize and stress the importance of field-based faculty in this process, agents (or “field faculty”) will be renamed “Extension educators.” The term “educator” more accurately defines the role of our field faculty than does “agent.” Extension educators will have an employment rank based on skills and competency-based promotion. To increase the quality of program delivery, Extension educators will focus on specific programs and be supervised by a series of “area program leaders” who will have a high level of expertise in a subject matter and can effectively train and mentor Extension educators in the delivery of program materials. The programming model is illustrated in figure 1.

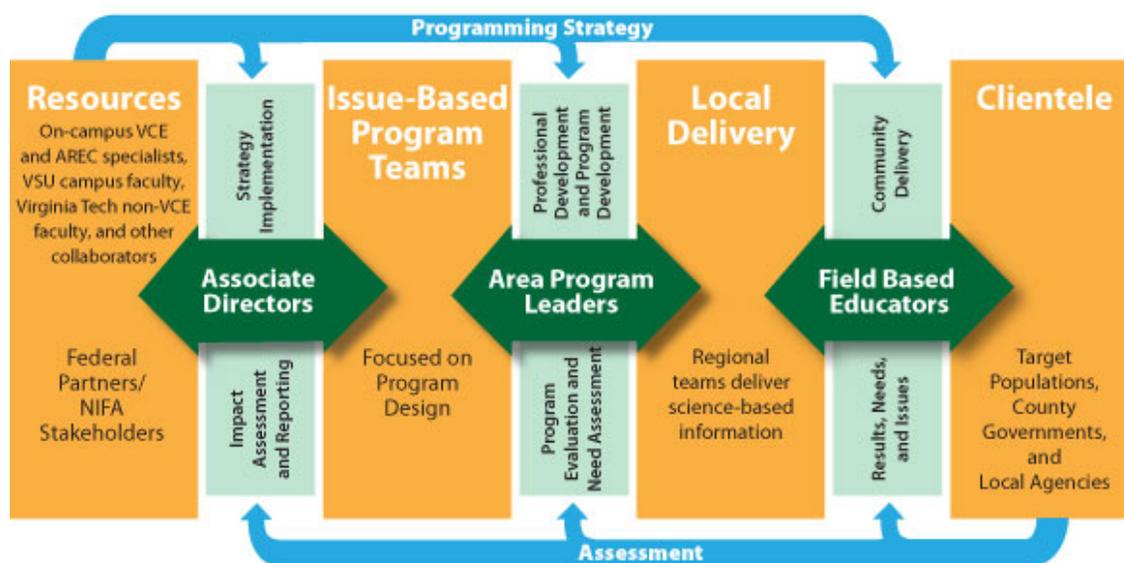


Figure 1. The programming model.

Associate directors will be assigned the responsibility of (1) acting as a liaison to federal partners and key external stakeholders, and (2) facilitating the formation of issue-based program teams. These teams will consist of specialists, experts, area program leaders, and Extension educators and will be charged with developing a program around issues identified as part of the strategic planning process. The teams will develop a business plan that articulates the intended program objectives, resources, and anticipated program impacts. Area program leaders will be selected from existing field faculty and charged with training Extension educators in the delivery of the program designed to target audiences. Area program leaders will supervise Extension educators and exercise control over program quality. Results, program evaluation, and program assessment will return through the programming chain to the issue-based program team so that programming can be continuously refined.

Key components:

- Issue-Based Program Teams work to develop programming
- Local needs can be addressed through program evaluation
- Area Program Leaders supervise Extension Educators
- Focus on delivery of high quality, research based programs to meet local needs.
- Formal process of program planning and assessment

Structuring for local presence and local choice

Having a local presence is important to the partnership between local government and VCE. Many localities feel that VCE should continue to have a facility within its county, while other counties are more focused on the local delivery of programs regardless of the physical location of offices. Currently, VCE does not pay for local office facilities but is provided space by counties. Simply closing offices offers no financial advantage to VCE and jeopardizes important local support.

Recognizing that VCE cannot maintain quality programming with limited resources, VCE will adopt a regional model of Extension educators clustered around a “business center” that serves a three- to five-county “region.” In this model, VCE support staff positions in county offices will be repurposed or moved to a business center. The business center will house one unit coordinator position, one business manager position, and one or more Extension educators serving that region. Additional positions, such as technology support and specific program positions that may serve multiple regions may also be located at the business center. Localities will be given choices about their level of participation. Each county will be offered the option to house one Extension educator that they feel will meet their local needs. This educator will be funded in partnership between VCE and the locality. Localities may elect to support *additional* Extension educators located in their county/city to work on specific programs. These additional Extension educators will be paid for in full by local resources. Some counties may elect to have a locally based Extension educator with more limited responsibilities and at a lower cost. These positions will be defined as assistant Extension educators. Other localities may decide that they do not

want an educator located in their county. By clustering counties, all educators in the region — regardless of their office location and program discipline — will work together to deliver a full array of Extension programs across the region.

Figure 2 illustrates the regional model.

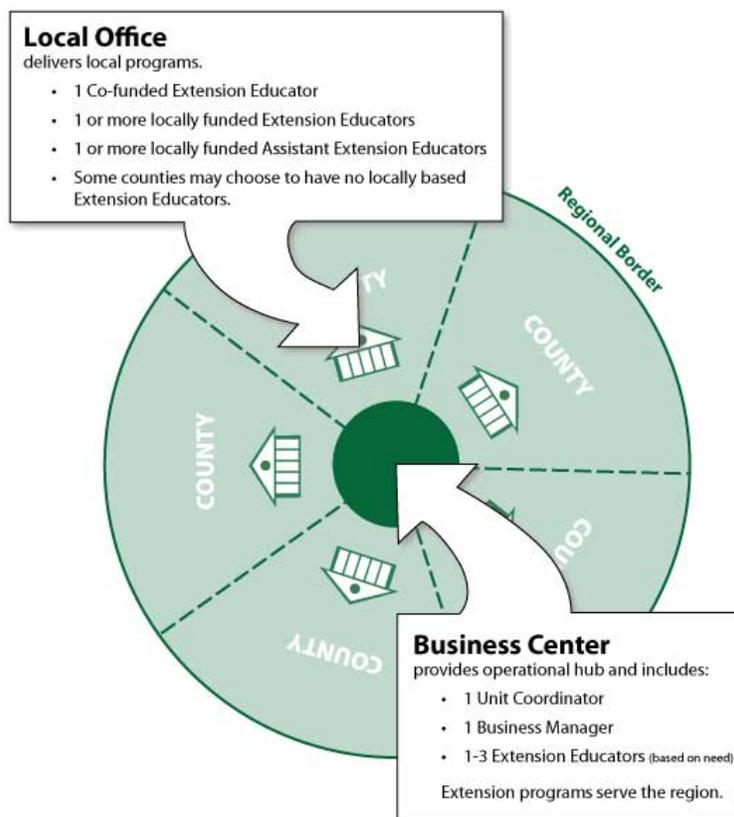


Figure 2. A five-county regional model.

This model illustrates a five-county region with the business center as its operational hub. Planning will begin in fall 2010 to identify 22 regional business centers across the state using the existing 22 planning districts as a guide. In the next six months, district directors and unit coordinators will work with local governments to determine the needs of localities and develop specific county groupings, staffing needs, and business center locations. Business center operations will be located in existing facilities that are large enough to meet needs; their location will depend on the input of localities.

Localities currently pay a portion of the salaries of Extension faculty in their county/city. This system can be cumbersome to administer and cause variations in local budgets. A new, simplified financial structure will be explored with localities. The goal will be to create a financial partnership that does not increase the current costs to localities, implements a simplified rate structure, supports budget planning, and reduces administrative inefficiency. The leadership of VCE will work with local leaders to meet this goal in the coming months.

Key components:

- Localities prioritize positions for co-funding and can add additional positions.
- Business center will handle all administrative functions in the region.
- Extension educators housed in the business center, together with locally based agents, will deliver Extension programs throughout the region.
- Ensures access to programming through increased collaboration.

Reporting structure

District directors were challenged to effectively supervise a large number of faculty members across a large geographic area. In addition, the separation between Extension specialists, who are responsible for program design and research, and field faculty can create a disconnected Extension system. Some stakeholders have commented that their county agent lacked sufficient expertise to address their problems, and those clients chose to communicate directly with specialists. The resulting demands on the specialist’s time subsequently reduced the ability of faculty to conduct the research and creative work that served as the basis for sound Extension program development. Others were very satisfied with their interaction with the field-based agent but recognized that a high level of client engagement can reduce the ability of agents to deliver high-impact, science-based programs consistent with organizational planning.

The reporting structure within field operations will be reorganized to reduce the number of employees being supervised by any one supervisor, and the structure will include supervisory relationships that promote consistent alignment of the work of specialists and agents toward organizational objectives.

The planned organizational structure is illustrated in figure 3.

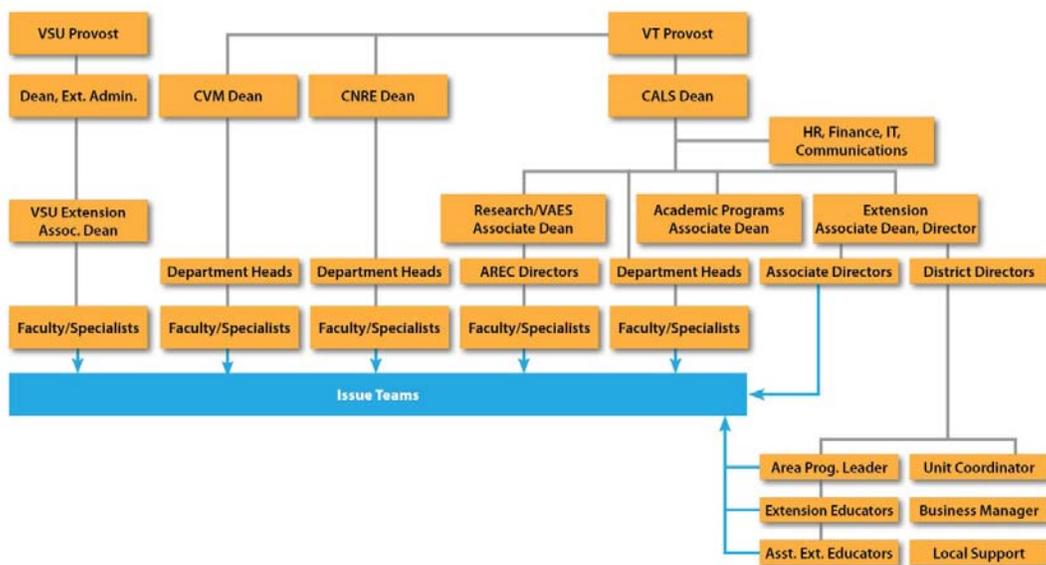


Figure 3. The planned organizational structure.

In this structure, assistant Extension educators include a variety of locally funded program assistant positions that require associate or bachelor's degrees. Assistant Extension educators will be expected to report to one of three levels of Extension educators. Extension educators will be divided into three ranks consistent with the current professional development ladder in place: associate Extension educator, Extension educator, and senior Extension educator. All ranks of Extension educator will report to an area program leader in their area of programming expertise. A supervisor and subordinate may not necessarily work in the same region but are united in their focus on a common set of program objectives.

While area program leaders will be supervised by a district director, the area program leader will receive significant programmatic direction from the issue-based program team. Unit coordinators will supervise the administrative staff in their business center, while district directors will supervise the unit coordinators. This structure creates a level of managerial oversight that increases the accountability of faculty and staff and increases the formal tie between program design and its implementation. This structure illustrates the important role that will be played by the issue-based program teams in bridging the organizational structure (blue lines in figure 3). However, issue-based program teams are not expected to have a formal supervisory role.

Key components:

- Supervisory chain focuses on programs not administrative responsibilities.
- Area Program Leaders and the Extension Educators that they supervise share common areas of expertise and knowledge.
- Increases career track options through program development or administration and management.

New roles and functionality

Assistant Extension educator: This title will replace current part-time/full-time program assistants, program technicians, program coordinators, project associates, etc., in the field. This change will create consistency across the state for locally funded programmatic positions that have traditionally assisted agents or supported programs. These positions **may be restricted** based on local or grant funding and would require an associate's or bachelor's degree. These positions will report through an associate Extension educator, Extension educator, or senior Extension educator. These positions will be classified as staff or hourly wage employees.

Associate Extension educator: This title will replace current associate Extension agents. These positions will be identical to a new hire in the current model. They would require a minimum of a bachelor's degree at hiring and be required to obtain a master's degree within six years and be promoted to Extension educator. These positions would report through the area program leader in the district or department. The district director will serve as reviewer. These positions will be administrative/professional faculty.

Extension educator: This title will replace current and future Extension agents. These positions will be identical to Extension agents in the current model. Employees will be eligible to receive this title after obtaining a master's degree and successfully completing the promotion process. These positions will report through the area program leader in the district or department. The district director will serve as reviewer. These positions will be administrative/professional faculty.

Senior Extension educator: This title will replace current senior Extension agents. These positions will be identical to senior agents in the current model. Employees could obtain this title after seven years of employment and promotion to Extension educator. The current system for promotion to senior agent will be utilized in this process, though some review of criteria may be needed. These positions will report through the area program leader in the district or department. The district director will serve as reviewer. These positions will be administrative/professional faculty.

Area program leader: This is a new position designation. Area program leaders will be responsible for new agent training and mentoring. Area program leaders will also assume direct supervision of associate Extension educators, Extension educators, and senior Extension educators. Area program leaders will typically be housed in field offices or business centers and will report to the district director. Area program leaders may also be faculty members located in departments or ARECs who give leadership to specific issues or statewide programs (e.g., farm business management, forestry and natural resources). District-based area program leaders will be Extension educators with additional responsibilities of program leadership and supervision. Compensation will be adjusted while serving in this role.

Unit coordinator: This position will be responsible for managing the regional business centers, including fiscal management and personnel management of the business center support staff. This position will be an Extension educator with responsibilities for center management to include local government relationships and Extension Leadership Council development. This position will report to the district director and compensation will be adjusted while serving in this role.

Business manager: This is the proposed name change for the unit administrative assistant who serves the administrative functions of the business center. If local governments elect to fund additional support for units located within a particular region, then that additional support staff will be titled "unit administrative assistant."

Extension specialist: This title will be reserved for terminal-degreed, tenure-track, or continued-appointment faculty in academic departments or ARECs. This position will lead issue-based program teams and oversee program development and delivery. Administrative/professional or special research faculty with a "specialist" designation will be retitled when possible.

Anticipated outcomes for resource reallocation, program delivery, program quality, and commitment to counties, cities, and state stakeholders

The restructuring plan reduces the number of positions with administrative responsibilities and reassigns human resources to programming activities. The program delivery model allows VCE to leverage the research resources of Virginia Tech and enables these assets to drive programming to

Virginia citizens through an integrated managerial chain. The regional model allows groups of Extension educators to work together to deliver high-quality Extension programs across a region. This approach allows Extension educators to acquire high levels of knowledge and expertise as part of a team of educators. At the same time, counties may tailor the type and number of Extension educators in the locality to meet specific needs.

A renewed focus on the professional development of Extension educators and closer integration of Extension educators with Extension specialists will enhance the programming impact of educators and provide career growth opportunities. Extension educators will be able to pursue career development through traditional managerial tracks or by developing deeper and broader Extension competencies. The use of issue-based program teams will ensure that Extension programs are relevant, high quality, supported by research and scientific methods, and collaboratively deployed to result in measurable impacts on audiences. The proposed structure facilitates the implementation of traditional Extension programs while utilizing limited resources to address emerging issues. Issue-based program teams can organize resources to develop innovative approaches to the strategic priorities of stakeholders, including the federal partner, USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Key outcomes:

- Unit coordinators reduced from 106 to 22; re-assign remaining UCs to Educator positions.
- Districts reduced from six to four.
- Eliminated district program leader positions in each district.
- Eliminated clerical support for district program leader positions in each district.
- Reduced unit administrative assistant positions from 100 to 22 business managers.
- Reduced administrative costs by concentrating functions at regional business centers.
- Improved two-way flow of information.
- Enabled administrative functions to be conducted at lower costs.
- Reassigned existing faculty and staff to focus on program delivery.
- Provided counties with flexibility to scale county-based local Extension staffing to their needs.
- Preserved local presence at no additional costs.
- Concentrated limited resources to maximize impacts in a region.
- Created a formal structure to enable research advances to drive educational program delivery to citizens.
- Facilitated career development opportunities and increased the skills of Extension educators.
- Created greater accountability for program impacts.
- Implemented a flexible program design that can adjust to changing priorities and local funding initiatives.
- Formalized responsibilities for local and federal government relationship development.

Timeline and transitional planning

October 2010	Restructuring plan announced to internal and external audiences.
November 2010	Members of the restructuring task force will meet with small groups of Extension faculty and staff to explain the proposed model.
October 2010 – January 2011	District directors and unit coordinators will work with local counties to define regional clusters, local programming needs, local staffing needs, and plans for shared funding.
November 2010 – January 2011	Human resources staff will design process to facilitate transfer of existing employees to new roles.
November 2010 – March 2011	State leadership team will align the activities of Extension educators with the strategic plan. Programs that do not have clear alignment with the programming model or strategic initiatives will be eliminated by June 2011.
November 2010 – March 2011	Human resources will perform compensation study and recommend a revised compensation plan.
January 2011	Professional development program will be rolled out at statewide Extension conference.
January 2011 – June 2011	Issue-based program teams will be formed and implemented during 2011.
February 2011 – May 2011	Existing faculty and staff will be reassigned to new roles.
July 2011	New roles implemented. Establish business centers. New model fully implemented by October 2011.
July 2011 – April 2012	Implement new fiscal model with localities for implementation in their FY2013 budgets.

Moving forward

The planned structure builds on the long tradition of Extension excellence and creates a modern delivery mechanism. The revised structure reflects the financial realities within the state but focuses resources to achieve meaningful citizen impact. While the change will be challenging, the planned structural elements offer the opportunity for faculty and staff to engage with stakeholders in a more innovative, creative, and optimistic way. A restructured organization will allow VCE to maintain its position as a catalyst for the well-being of residents for the next century.

Appendices

- A. Task force composition.
- B. Specialist/Agent Interaction subcommittee report.
- C. Local Presence subcommittee report.
- D. Enhance Relationships subcommittee report.