

## WSSA Gives a Shout Out to Cooperative Extension



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The U.S. Cooperative Extension Program is approaching its 100-year anniversary – an important milestone for an organization that has helped to transform American agriculture since its founding in May 1914. Through the years, extension agents have taught farmers how to manage crops more efficiently, win the battle against weeds and other pests, and produce significantly more food per acre.

Today the program continues to make a significant impact through nearly 3,000 local extension offices nationwide. Each is staffed by faculty and local educators affiliated with the nation's land-grant university system who take the latest research findings and translate them into practical, actionable information.

The portfolio of services delivered by Cooperative Extension is very broad, says Chris Boerboom, director of the North Dakota State University Extension Service and a member of the Weed Science Society of America (WSSA). "The program undoubtedly has made a major economic contribution by helping to ensure we have an abundant food supply. But extension agents are also involved in a wide variety of activities that benefit farmers, home owners and youth in communities of all sizes."

A few examples of the program's impact: More than 90,000 master gardeners trained by Cooperative Extension contribute free services to local communities that are valued at more than \$100 million annually. Cooperative Extension personnel educate more than five million low-income people each year in how to improve their nutrition. They foster science and leadership initiatives for six million young people annually through 4-H, the nation's largest youth development program. And they field countless projects tailored to the needs of local communities, as illustrated by the case studies below:

GEORGIA: Extension specialists at the University of Georgia used research findings on herbicide rotation to advise cotton farmers on better techniques for battling glyphosate resistant Palmer amaranth (*Amaranthus palmeri*) – a weed that significantly reduces crop yields and clogs harvesting equipment.

MICHIGAN: Students in a Saginaw County High School 4-H program sponsored by extension specialists at Michigan State University were taught how to convert used cafeteria cooking oil into biodiesel fuel to power school buses. Teens in the program shared what they learned with local farmers, who now are producing biodiesel fuel to power farm equipment.

TEXAS: Extension agents with Texas A&M University are conducting workshops in Hildago County to help small farms become more successful. Topics range from soil preparation and irrigation strategies to best management practices for weed control. They have also launched a farmers market where small farms and backyard gardeners can sell their produce.

CALIFORNIA: University of California extension advisors in Sierra County are conducting research to help ranchers, landowners and land managers prevent the spread of houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officinale*), a noxious weed that is poisonous to cattle and horses.

SOUTH CAROLINA: Extension agents at Clemson University are helping to educate local communities on best practices they can use for battling aquatic weeds in ponds and other bodies of water.

NEW YORK: Extension nutrition educators at Cornell University are working with a coalition of community partners across a tri-county area on a program to prevent childhood obesity. They are focusing on improved access to fresh produce and greater opportunities for physical activity.

In addition to community-based initiatives, extension agents pool their resources to partner on programs nationwide. For example, they formed an Extension Disaster Education Network to respond rapidly to urgent needs involving hurricanes, floods, fire, drought, crop disease, pest outbreaks and more. They also have teamed to launch eXtension, an interactive website that consolidates a wealth of information – from energy conservation techniques and lawn care tips to profiles on invasive species. Extension scientists and educators answer the more than 4,500 questions submitted to the site each month through the “Ask-an-Expert” feature.

“Cooperative Extension programs are funded by federal, state and local governments nationwide, and it is an investment producing immeasurable returns,” says Lee Van Wychen, Ph.D., science policy director for the Weed Science Society of America.

“Extension personnel make a major economic contribution by helping farmers nurture and protect crops from disease and damaging weeds, but they also are helping to bring research-based best practices to urban and suburban homeowners and local communities nationwide. All of us are touched by their work in some way.”

For more background on our nation's Cooperative Extension Program or to locate your local extension office, visit:  
[www.nifa.usda.gov/qlinks/extension.html](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/qlinks/extension.html).