

Celebrating 100 years of extending knowledge and changing lives

The Cooperative Extension Service as established by the Smith-Lever Act is quite rightly a centennial worthy of a celebration. Today, Cooperative Extension takes resources from the A&T campus in Greensboro and the North Carolina State campus in Raleigh to all citizens of North Carolina through a network of agents, paraprofessional and support staff stationed at 101 county Cooperative Extension Centers. But it wasn't always this way.

The Extension movement caught fire in the United States in the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century. One of the hotbeds is today an 1890 land-grant, Tuskegee University.

In 1906, Tuskegee University's president, Booker T. Washington, presented USDA a formal request to make one of his prized pupils the country's first African American Extension agent. USDA named Thomas Monroe Campbell the country's first African American extension agent. USDA made Campbell the farm demonstration agent for the Alabama county where Tuskegee is located. His job also included responsibility for Tuskegee's Movable School of Agriculture, known as the Jesup Agricultural Wagon. The horse-drawn wagon was equipped with plows and planters, and other farm equipment for demonstrations.



By 1914, Campbell had assisted eleven southern states in appointing African American farm agents and home demonstration agents. The guidance he was providing African American farmers was a welcome contribution for a nation on the brink of entering a World War that would remove much of the manpower from agriculture. By the end of World War I, Campbell's success was rewarded with a promotion to top administrator for the lower South. Those regions by then had 459 agricultural Extension agents at work. In 1913 and a year before Smith-Lever, North Carolina had five African American agricultural Extension agents.

The first African American agricultural demonstration agent in North Carolina was Neil Alexander Bailey, an A&T graduate. Receiving his bachelor's at age fifty made him one of the university's earliest adult education success stories. He helped farmers in Guilford, Randolph, and Rockingham counties hike their corn yields to 38 bushels per acre. This was more than double the county average.

Nineteen-forteen also marked the year of the first African American 4-H club in the state. That groundbreaking 4-H club was in Sampson County. Interest grew so rapidly that by 1915, there were enough 4-H clubs in North Carolina to justify a statewide coordinator. That coordinator, John D. Wray, was stationed at A&T.

Before 4-H and other Extension youth development programs, there were Corn Clubs for boys, and Tomato Clubs for girls. The forerunner of 4-H conferences was called the "Short Course." In 1926, the first statewide Short Course was held in on the A&T campus. By 1936 African American membership in 4-H reached 10,000 in North Carolina and a loan fund was established for them to borrow money to attend college.



In 1929 an African American Extension agent from eastern North Carolina, John W. Mitchell, was promoted to district agent and given an office on A&T's campus in Greensboro. In 1940, Mitchell became the first African American to supervise the state's African American agricultural agents. By 1943, Mitchell's abilities had caught the eye of USDA administrators in Washington, and he was offered a job in the nation's capital with the federal Extension office. He was succeeded in North Carolina by R. E. Jones as state supervisor of black farm agents.

R.E. Jones' 22-year career with Cooperative Extension was a series of landmark achievements.

Under Jones' leadership, in 1945, North Carolina became the nation's first state Extension system to employ an African American as a full-time Extension specialist. The specialist's area of responsibility was dairy production. That's because dairy herds contributed to family health as well as farm income. In 1953, another African American agent achieved recognition when the grand prize ham at a "Ham and Egg" show in Johnston County was presented to President Eisenhower. The African American Extension agent who had developed these "Ham and Egg" show competitions was nicknamed "Ham" Johnson in recognition of his national fame.



R.E. Jones oversaw other landmark achievements. By 1952, North Carolina ranked first in the nation in the number of African American extension staff of any state.



The 100-year anniversary of the signing of the bill that created the Smith-Lever (S-L) Act that officially started the national Cooperative Extension System.

The appropriation was unique in that it set up a shared partnership among the Federal, State, and County levels of government. A formula funding mechanism was designed to insure that there was support from each of the levels to help the fledgling system achieve stability and leverage resources.

Passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act of 1964 launched a merger of North Carolina's Agricultural Extension Program at A&T, the Agricultural Extension Service on the North Carolina State campus in Raleigh, and at the state's 101 county Extension centers. R. E. Jones was appointed an assistant director of the state's Extension Service but continued to maintain an office on the A&T campus in Greensboro.

Another landmark occurred in 1972. Congress approved an appropriation of four-million dollars for extension work and eight-million for research at the 16 historically black land-grant colleges and universities. But for Extension at the HBCU land-grants, the new funds were still channeled through administration at the larger, 1862 land grant universities in each of these states.



Then in 1977, Congress passed legislation that allocated Extension funds directly to A&T and the other Extension program at historically black colleges and universities. Under the leadership of Associate Dean Daniel Godfrey, The Cooperative Extension Program at A&T took advantage of self-determination for unprecedented expansion and accomplishments.



A&T Extension joined forces with the Tennessee Valley Authority to respond to paper mill closings in the North Carolina mountains with a project involving native shrubs that for some laid-off workers became a springboard into the Christmas tree industry. In 1978, A&T Extension introduced mobile marketing units — with storage and cooling for vegetable marketing to small-scale agriculture in North Carolina. In the late 1970s, the A&T Extension Program became one of the first 1890 Extension Programs to hire a forestry specialist with to work with small-scale farmers, and A&T Extension became one of the first 1890 Programs to qualify for Renewable Resources Extension Act funds. The funding was used to establish a Small Woodlot Management program.

In 1980, A&T Extension launched the Landownership Information Project in response to the decline in minority-owned farmland in North Carolina. At the time, African Americans were losing their land to legal pitfalls and unfair treatment by lending agencies at a rate two-and-a-half times the rate that white-owned farms were changing hands at foreclosure sales. The Landownership Information Project led to the Landless Prevention Project, which in turn, played a major role in the landmark Pigford vs. Clickman case, which resulted in compensation to many black farmers who had been victims of discriminatory lending practices.



The Tobacco Transition Payment Program of 2004 that came to be known as the "tobacco buyout" eliminated price supports and quotas paid to farmers. Smaller farms were in line to be hardest hit by the loss of \$7 million in federal subsidies, and economists were predicting many would fold without alternative crops for income to replace tobacco. A&T Extension rose to the challenge with an outreach to farms on alternative crops and livestock, including pasture-raised poultry, hogs, goats, mushrooms and cut flower production. Many of those programs are still supporting small-scale agriculture in North Carolina.

The Smith-Lever Act created Extension to extend the practical knowledge of agriculture, home economics and rural energy from the universities to the people. While times and technologies have changed, Cooperative Extension at A&T still exists to supply the latest research-based information so it can be applied to issues that matter most to the people of North Carolina.



And we have a vision firmly in place for the next 100 years of Cooperative Extension, based on the North Carolina A&T Campus in Greensboro and extended out to the citizens of North Carolina through 101 county Extension Centers. Our Local Food & Health Initiative means we will make the University Farm into a hub of local food production resources. A new pavilion, a local foods processing center, student run farm, and a creamery for producing artisanal cheeses and yogurt will strengthen areas where A&T Extension has traditionally excelled at the same time that the new facilities and programs will give us focal point for where we want to go. The A&T Cooperative Extension Program is already several strides into its next hundred years. The second century of progress begins with urban and local food production systems rooted in our legacy of alternative crops, poultry and livestock, and continued support for small farms. At the same time, our family, consumer sciences and youth development Extension work allows communities and families with limited financial resources to keep pace with the American dream. We invite all our new friends and traditional stakeholders to join us, and to build with us in this exciting venture.

