A Public Relations Plan

Prepared for

The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension

Updated: February 2013

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KEY MESSAGE

The primary message of this PR plan is the critical need to enhance Cooperative Extension’s visibility, recognition and understanding on a local, state and university level. As a large, widely distributed organization across Georgia with highly varied stakeholder groups, we are at a critical point in our institutional structure with regard to how we fulfill our mandate:

The mission of UGA Cooperative Extension is to extend lifelong learning to the people of Georgia through unbiased, trustworthy sources with research-based education in agriculture, the environment, communities, youth and families.

This plan is a fluid document designed to help provide background information about the work and role of the extension marketing advisory team. This team was formed in 2011 to help update the existing marketing plan, which was last updated in 2005. The team met and reviewed the current plan and provided suggestions, including the need for an evaluation of the public’s perception of extension and response to potential slogans.

WHAT IS UGA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION?

UGA Cooperative Extension is a county, state and federal funded organization supported by specialists in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and the College of Family and Consumer Sciences at the University of Georgia.

Cooperative Extension helps Georgians become healthier, more productive, financially independent and environmentally responsible by extending lifelong learning through unbiased, research-based education in agriculture, the environment, communities, youth and families. Extension agents stay in touch with issues relevant to people in local communities through county Extension offices.

UGA Cooperative Extension coordinates 4-H, Georgia’s largest youth program. Each year, almost 200,000 young Georgians participate in community projects, summer camps and conferences on today’s issues while having fun and learning to work together. The leadership skills and responsible values they learn in 4-H last a lifetime.

Most counties have a combination of agents who specialize in agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences and youth development. Agents complete specialized training to help them meet the needs of the communities they serve. Some specialize in horticulture; others, in row crop or livestock production. Some agents work to help families deal with rural development issues or raise healthy children in urban settings. All agents provide Georgia’s residents with a trustworthy, no-nonsense resource.
Cooperative Extension Leadership

UGA Cooperative Extension is based at the University of Georgia’s main campus in Athens. The personnel who make up the administration of UGA Cooperative Extension can also be found on UGA’s campus working hands-on with faculty and staff of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and the College of Family and Consumer Sciences.

- Beverly Sparks – Associate Dean for Extension, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
- Steve L. Brown – Assistant Dean for Extension and Agriculture & Natural Resources State Program Leader, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
- Deborah Murray – Associate Dean for Extension and Outreach, College of Family and Consumer Sciences
- Arch D. Smith – 4-H & Youth Development State Program Leader, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
- Tony Tyson – Director of Extension County Operations, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences

UGA Cooperative Extension is divided into four districts: Northeast, Northwest, Southeast and Southwest. Each district is headed by a District Extension Director.

- Northeast District: Norman McGlohon
- Northwest District: Greg Price
- Southeast District: Joann Milam
- Southwest District: Laura Perry Johnson

The four districts that make up UGA Cooperative Extension are also includes personnel who are highly skilled in the three areas of Extension: Agriculture and Natural Resources, Family and Consumer Sciences, and 4-H & youth development.

Agriculture and Natural Resources District Program Development Coordinators (PDCs)

- Northeast District: Bobby Smith
- Northwest District: Sheldon Hammond
- Southeast District: Phil Torrance
- Southwest District: Ken Lewis

Family and Consumer Sciences Program Development Coordinators

- Northwest District: Janet Valente
- Southeast District: Laurie Cantrell

4-H Program District Development Coordinators

- Northeast District: Al Parker
- Northwest District: Lori Bledsoe
Southeast District: Kathy Baldwin
Southwest District: Melinda Miller

On the county level, Extension offices are managed by Extension agents, program assistants and dedicated volunteers.

County agents and specialists throughout the state share information on issues like water quality, profitability in agribusiness, family wellness and life skills. They offer soil and water test kits, instruction and analysis, give advice on safe pesticide use, write and distribute publications and teach consumers skills to improve our quality of life. They are the local experts in agricultural production, gardening, food safety, nutrition, child safety and parenting and youth development.

County Extension agents help keep farmers and green industry professionals abreast of the latest agricultural technology, research and marketing strategies. Some agents help parents cope with the pressures of balancing home, work and children; others help keep families healthy with information on nutrition and food safety.

Volunteers are vital to the success of the UGA Cooperative Extension program. Most prominent in the areas of Extension involving children, volunteers have been an integral part of the success of 4-H since the 1920s. Volunteers coordinate local community clubs and help to plan and conduct local, regional, state and national 4-H events. Over 600,000 teen and adult volunteers share their time and talents with 4-H youth. They volunteer on a continuum, from club leaders who may devote many hours per week to 4-H, to event organizers who may volunteer for one specific event per year.

Master Gardener is operated through county offices of the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension. Through this program, individuals are trained in horticulture and related areas. These individuals volunteer their expertise, under the direction of Cooperative Extension staff, to help educate others through horticultural programs and projects that benefit the community. Georgia Master Gardener Extension Volunteers bring the latest horticultural information and practices from the world of research to their communities' landscapes and gardens.

The Extension Leadership System (ELS) in Georgia is a statewide network of county-based volunteers working to support, and advocate for, Extension programming at all levels. All County Extension Agents assemble and work with a Program Development Team (PDT) designed to support the work they do in their respective Extension program area (4-H Youth Development, Family and Consumer Sciences, and/or Agriculture and Natural Resources). In addition to the PDT’s, an overall county council serves to coordinate efforts for advocacy and support of the total county Cooperative Extension program.

**Target Audience of this PR Plan**

- Administration of UGA Cooperative Extension program
- Administration of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

A total of 33 people participated in four focus groups to assess the public’s awareness of UGA Cooperative Extension. The focus groups took place in Sumter (11 people), Burke (9 people), Morgan (7 people), and Fulton (6 people) counties. Participants represented the following organizations/groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>f (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmers/Agricultural Producers</td>
<td>4 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Organization Leadership (e.g., Habitat for Humanity)</td>
<td>8 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Public (e.g., senior citizens, students, etc.)</td>
<td>4 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Public with 4-H Experience</td>
<td>6 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Officials</td>
<td>6 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>4 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Business</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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#NOTE: SOME PARTICIPANTS REPRESENTED MORE THAN ONE GROUP.

Each focus group was asked the same six questions. The questions were as follows:

- Question 1: So, what does Georgia Extension do?
- Question 2: How did you learn about what Georgia Extension does?
- Question 3: Why do you think people do not know about Georgia Extension & its value?
- Question 4: How could we best communicate the value of Georgia Extension? In what form should we communicate this?
- Question 5: Does it matter who/what kind of individual (e.g., celebrity spokesperson) shares the message?
- Question 6: Share your thoughts on these Extension slogans...
  - Learning for life.
  - Empowering people. Providing solutions.
Know how. Know now.
Making a difference.
Making life better.

The individual focus groups had similar responses to many of the questions. Following is a summary of the findings across counties:

- Georgia Extension is all about soil testing (a potential place for branding?)
- There is a major disconnect between UGA, Extension, and 4-H
  - Participants did not understand that these are associated with each other
- The Extension Agent is the credible source of information within the organization – focus on the individual Agent more (perhaps by name) to market Extension programs (i.e., car magnets, etc.)
- It is important to focus on the Extension image (logo and branding on short or vehicle)
- Utilization of Postal Mail over Internet/email information delivery
- “Know how. Know now.” = best slogan
- Visibility of Extension office could be improved with signage
- The reduced capacity and presence as well as the continued need for family and consumer sciences programming was noted multiple times

The Extension Marketing Advisory Team met on June 14, 2012 to study and discuss the outcome of the focus groups. The following recommendations were made:

- The number one focus for the UGA Cooperative Extension marketing and PR program needs to be better branding.
  - Simplify – put University/Coop Ext logo only, no college names
  - College names (College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and College of Family and Consumer Sciences) make the logo cumbersome
  - Constituents need to realize that Extension is administered through the University of Georgia, not CAES or FACS; also don’t realize that 4-H is part of Extension
- All branding needs to be done on state AND local levels – it will not be effective if it is not fully embraced

**GOALS/OBJECTIVES**

- To create a new, simplified logo or mark that emphasizes the connection between the University and Extension. Each County Extension office in the state should be able to incorporate their information into the same mark. The aim is to build the brand through consistency across the board.
- To reach the public through alternative communication methods. These can include, but are not limited to, occasional bulk mailings via-traditional postal service (i.e., seasonal, district, local, etc.), e-newsletters, mobile devices (i.e., smartphone apps), social media, PSAs and outreach events (ex: Extension Day at the Capitol vs. Ag/4-H/FACS Day). Focus on two-sided communication to engage the public.
• Increase visibility and recognition of Extension agents across the state. This can be done through a new PR campaign that focuses on the people of extension, IE: the faces of Extension.

• Training/Implementation Plan: Statewide access and adoption of the new Extension logo. Once trained, agents and specialists can implement the logo onto appropriate clothing of their choice. Additionally, personalized car magnets for agents have been suggested to increase awareness within each county. The new logo can be placed on soil test bags, pens/pencils, notepads, signage, table drapes, billboards, reusable grocery bags, stickers, mailings, digital products (i.e., templates, email signatures). Finally, Extension agents statewide should utilize an identical and unified boilerplate to conclude newspaper articles, PSAs, TV spots, etc.

**Timeline**

- **JULY 2012:** MEET WITH DISTRICT DIRECTORS & PROGRAM LEADERS TO DISCUSS FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS & PROPOSED PLAN
- **SEPTEMBER 2012:** MEET WITH PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT TEAM
- **OCTOBER 2012:** DISTRICT TASK FORCE REPRESENTATIVE TO PREVIEW FOCUS GROUP DATA AND EXPLAIN EFFORT TO ALL DISTRICTS DURING POW
- **JANUARY 2013:** SURVEY EXTENSION PERSONNEL RE: MARKETING NEEDS
- **FEBRUARY 2013:** CONDUCT INTERNAL FOCUS GROUPS IN RESPONSE TO SURVEY RESULTS
- **MARCH – MAY 2013:** DEVELOP AND SEEK UGA APPROVAL FOR LOGO; PILOT MATERIALS AND RESOURCES VIA TRAINING SESSIONS
- **SEPTEMBER 2013:** PROGRAM PLANNING ROLLOUT OF PLAN
- **OCTOBER 2013:** POW MINI-ROLLOUT
- **JANUARY 2014:** WINTER SCHOOL ROLLOUT/CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION