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# Programs Addressing Consumer Concerns from the Ohio State University

**Barbara H. James**

Like other state universities throughout the United States, Ohio State University has been undergoing a restructuring process. This restructuring has challenged the University to examine its mission and its effectiveness and efficiency in serving the public. In the process, OSU has re-committed itself to university-wide outreach and engagement.

In my presentation I will be discussing outreach and engagement at OSU and the College of Food, Agriculture and Environmental Sciences' present and future consumer educational programming.

## **Ad Hoc Committee on Outreach**

In January 1994 President Gordon Gee charged his Council for Outreach and Engagement with helping the university to better connect with our public. The results of this committee's work is shaping university-wide outreach activities today. Outreach activities are defined by OSU as follows:

Outreach is that aspect of **teaching** that enables learning beyond the campus walls.

Outreach is that aspect of **research** that makes what we discover useful beyond the academic community.

Outreach is that aspect of **service** that directly benefits the public.

Engagement activities involve binding the university and the community (state, nation and the world) through dialogue, collaboration and partnerships that make a difference for its citizens.

President Gordon Gee is striving to make outreach and engagement take an even greater role in the academic lives of faculty by funding

projects and recognizing those individuals involved in these projects.

No other college at OSU has a greater commitment to outreach and engagement than the College of Food, Agriculture and Environmental Sciences (formerly the College of Agriculture), but before I discuss outreach of the College, I want to spend a few minutes discussing how the college is contributing to the restructuring of the university by building a climate of responsiveness to Ohio consumers.

## **College Name**

To more accurately reflect the mission of the College of Agriculture, the College's name was changed on July 1, 1994 to the College of Food, Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. I want to quote Dr. Bob Moser, Vice President Agricultural Administration and Dean, as he addresses the name change and what it means to the College, "Agriculture programs at OSU have grown to include food production from farm to kitchen as well as a host of non-farm disciplines. The name communicates that we prepare students to hold jobs and extend knowledge to consumers on the total food system, including production agriculture, but going beyond to value added aspects of food processing, retail and wholesale, quality of food, food safety and nutrition." This recognition of the total food system is meaningful to Ohio as the state ranks among the top ten in the U.S. for employment in food processing, adding \$18 billion to the state's GNP annually.

## **Project Reinvent**

As part of the university's restructuring, the college visioning process, Project Reinvent, was fortunate to be one of 12 projects to be funded by the Kellogg Foundation. The purpose of the grant was to study ways which land grant institutions, in this case OSU, works with its constituents and how the College can most effectively serve the needs of the people of Ohio.

In this process 18 focus groups were conducted with 230 individuals from the College, The University and the State of Ohio. The vision for the future of the College, which grew out of this process, is on the card in front of you. For our discussion today, let me highlight that the vision emphasized teamwork across disciplines, accountability and responsibility to our stakeholders and commitment to life-long learning.

We are now in the implementation stage of Project Reinvent. Over the next five years there will be 14 goals implemented. Among these goals several speak to outreach and engagement through responsiveness to our customers.

- \* Eliminate all barriers between departments and between teaching, research and Extension.
- \* Regularly listen to the full array of voices and understand the many paradigms of those whom we serve.
- \* Be noted for the ability to focus efforts so as to achieve excellence as measured by delivering the highest value to our customers.

### OSU Issues Teams

Since Extension is the arm of OSU most recognized for working with consumers, Extension has been working to move these goals forward by developing multi-discipline focused teams to work on various issues identified by in-depth customer needs assessment. Extension has organized teams to include faculty and staff from research and resident instruction. Departmental barriers have broken down to bring to bare the various disciplines needed to address important issues to the people of Ohio. These teams may be comprised of sub-committees to work on specific aspects of an issue. For example, the OSU Vegetable Team has a marketing subcommittee which includes individuals from horticulture, agricultural economics, community development and family and consumer science. Members are from resident instruction, research and from county and state Extension faculty and staff. Extension is providing the financial backing for these teams. Many of them are led by county agents who are released for 50% of their time and given a stipend to coordinate the efforts of the team. Since many

county agents in Ohio are regular University faculty, with academic credentials and a subject matter focus, it is not unusual to have a team such as the Vegetable Team, be coordinated by a field faculty agent with an expertise on the issue.

### Extension Consumer Programs on Food

For the rest of my presentation I will be discussing some Extension consumer programs more directly related with food.

OSU has a rich history of providing consumer programs on food, nutrition and food safety through Family and Consumer Science Agents in county Extension offices. Current programs include:

1. The Family Nutrition Program, targets low income audiences in 66 counties in Ohio with education on making healthy and safe food choices. In a six month period, Extension conducted 2,293 group sessions which impacted 67,184 households.
2. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program graduated 8,416 families in the past year. Eighty-eight percent of these families showed a positive change in foods eaten at the end of the program compared to entering the program.
3. An innovative educational program, "Hey, Hey, Eat 5 a Day," was developed to encourage families to eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily and has reached 1,200 limited resource youth and adults.
4. Table tents have taught more than 700 college students about food choices.
5. A series of fact sheets, "Cultural Diversity: Eating in America," has helped teachers and health professionals to understand and respect food patterns of Amish, Appalachians, Asians, Hmong, Vietnamese, Puerto Ricans, Mexican and African Americans.
6. The Keep Food Safe Program is a food safety education curriculum written in both English and Spanish for migrant farm workers.
7. A food and nutrition "skillathon" attracted 882 participants at the Ohio State Fair's 4-H Food and Nutrition Week.
8. Roadside markets have assisted their customers by utilizing the Selecting, Storing & Serv-

ing Fruit and Vegetable Fact sheets provided by Extension.

These are just a few of the educational food related consumer programs conducted by OSU Extension.

As I have explained, we are trying to move away from compartmentalizing the various roles of faculty in our state by working on issue based teams. We have already briefly discussed Extension's leadership role with the Issues team. Let's take this one step further to envision Extension's leadership role in total University outreach.

Two years ago, the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service became the OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION. This name was given to Extension by President Gordon Gee to bring front and center the all inclusive nature of the Universities commitment to outreach and the important role Extension plays in achieving that aspect of the University's mission.

Extension work is greatly valued in Ohio. Unlike other government or educational entities, Extension has had the good fortune in recent years to receive annual increases in funding from the Ohio legislature. This has provided us with the ability to move aggressively ahead with programs to work with communities and consumers.

### OSU CARES

One new project being implemented is OSU CARES, part of Project Reinvent. OSU CARES, working through the statewide Extension system, will be a catalyst to activate teams of OSU professionals to address future critical consumer and community issues. OSU CARES will increase understanding of key consumer issues so individuals can make better decisions that affect their lives. Based on OSU's definition of outreach and engagement, OSU CARES will bring the resources of the total University to bear on proactive and innovative responses to future oriented needs of Ohio consumers.

Let me stress that this effort will differ from traditional Extension programming because: 1) It will draw upon the resources and educational services of the entire university, and; 2) It does not "respond" to current needs and concerns, but identifies issues about to impact Ohioans. In other words, the project is "future responsive."

A Key Advisor Team, comprised of representatives from state and national consumer, commodity, industry, and public sector groups, will be appointed by the President. This Team will meet twice a year to identify issues which will soon impact Ohioans. Examples of ideas that could be addressed are in the areas of health and health care, food safety, emerging environmental concerns, urban/rural interface or legislation affecting consumers, families or businesses.

These issues will then be given to a Catalyst Team from departments across campus as well as Extension field offices. The Catalyst Team will develop the response to the issue by utilizing OSU research, conducting new research, and develop teaching materials for use by OSU faculty and staff.

### Food Safety Hotline

The final project I would like to discuss is the Department of Food Science and Technologies Food Safety Hotline, which is conducted through its Food Industry Center. This hotline was originally established to serve food processors but, because of increasing consumer demand, soon began direct interface with consumers. The hotline also augments Extension's food safety educational programs by serving as one of the resources to field faculty and staff.

The endeavor is now partially funded by the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* newspaper. The Kroger Company also prints the hotline number on their milk cartons. The Center answers on the average of 1,900 calls a year. Seventy-seven percent of these calls are related to storage, handling, use and consumption of food. The balance are related to such topics as home canning, additives, nutrition and agricultural chemicals. Product recalls and nationwide food incidents dominated 1995 caller's concerns.

### Conclusion

In this presentation, I have shared OSU's vision of outreach and engagement for the consumer. It is becoming more and more vital that we connect with our many and varied customers and impact their lives in a way that we gain continued support for all University programming.

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