Overview of Douglas County Extension Program and Staff Chair Vision
John Punches, Area Chair for Coos, Douglas and Josephine Counties

Douglas County is located in southwest Oregon, and stretches from the Pacific Coast to the crest of the Cascade Mountains. It ranges in elevation from sea level to 9,128 feet. Its 5037 square miles are mostly forested, and over 50 percent of the county is owned/managed by the federal government (Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service). Agricultural land is located in lower elevation values of the Umpqua River and its tributaries. Primary agricultural products include beef cattle and sheep, forages, wine grapes, nursery products, tree fruits and nuts. The county also has a small but stable vegetable crop industry.

The county has a population of approximately 105 thousand, consisting of just under 40,000 households. About 20% of the population is 18 years of age or younger, and another 20% ages 65 or older. The 2007 Census identified 94.7% of residents as white and 4.0% as Hispanic or Latino. 81% of persons ages 25 or older have high school degrees, while 13.3% have bachelors degrees or higher.

Roseburg, population 20,500, is the county seat and primary employment hub. Eleven other incorporated cities (and several unincorporated areas) range in population from about 6500 persons to about 150 persons.

According to the Oregon Employment Department, in 2008 the county’s primary employer was local government, with employment of 6040 (of which 2920 were school teachers). Federal and state governments employed another 2690. 5230 persons worked in manufacturing (3130 in wood products), 4390 in retail trade, 4540 in health and education (not including k-12 teachers), 3610 in leisure and hospitality, 2970 in professional and business services, and 1740 in transportation and related activities. About 4500 persons worked in agriculture, about 850 in logging and mining, and 1740 in construction. Douglas County often faces high unemployment, and at last listing was in the 18% range.

The Douglas County Extension Office has been in operation since 1917 and has had longstanding support from the Douglas County Commissioners. When loss of revenue threatened their ability to continue funding the Extension Office in 2007, they supported local efforts to establish an Extension Service District with a dedicated tax base for Extension programs. That effort was approved by voters in May 2008, and the office has been able to rebuild its local program delivery infrastructure.

Traditional Douglas County Extension audiences have included commercial livestock producers, family forestland owners, professional foresters and loggers, home and commercial horticulture, homemakers (canning, food safety, home economics) and youth and parents involved in 4-H clubs that focused on market animals, home economics, expressive arts, dogs, horses, small animals and other “traditional” project areas. Major collaborators included agriculture and forestry commodity associations, a 4-H leaders association and county and federal land management agencies. The county has benefited from well developed Extension volunteer
programs, including 4-H leaders, Master Gardeners, Master Woodland Managers, Master Food Preservers, and (to a lesser degree of development) Master Watershed Stewards. With the stabilization of our local funding base, and through effective recruitment of grants and sponsorships, our the office has been able to reach out to several newer and emerging audiences including youth ages 5 through 10 (who are involved in the 4-H Cloverbud program), youth involved in a broadening array of school enrichment, after-school and no-school-day activities (including natural resource events and Wildlife Stewards), youth interested in science and technology 4-H clubs, persons interested in climate change and carbon emissions persons interested in stream enhancement and water quality, winegrape growers, small (non-commercial) farms and organic farm efforts, community college students, and low-income families. New or enhanced collaborations include those with Umpqua Community College, area watershed councils, the Umpqua Community Action Network, the Umpqua Community Development Corporation, the Douglas County Global Warming Coalition, the University of Oregon (Climate Master program), Mercy Medical Foundation and many others.

Our office is currently staffed by nine faculty members:

• John Punches, Area Chair for Coos, Douglas and Josephine Counties
• Steve Renquist, Home and Commercial Horticulture
• Shelby Filley, Regional Livestock and Forages Specialist
• Steve Bowers, Forestry
• Raini Rippy, Forestry and Natural Resources (grant and district funded)
• Jodi Smith, Youth Forestry and Natural Resources (grant and district funded)
• Tracy Martz, 4-H Youth Development
• Suzi Busler, Family and Community Health (stationed in Lane County, focused on food safety and preservation)
• Mandi Hatfield, Nutrition Education (funded by SNAP-ED)

We rely upon the support of five staff positions (totaling 4.0 FTE), who provide customers service and secretarial assistance, accounting, database management, website maintenance and a host of other services.

OSU Extension is an attractive collaborator for these organizations because it brings to the table a well-established capacity for educational programming and program management, a reputation as a trusted source of information and problem-solving skills, long-term relationships with a broad cross-section of Douglas County residents, and a tremendous volunteer base. Its ability to identify community needs and tailor educational programs and services to those needs is one of its key strengths.

Extension utilizes a variety of communication mechanisms to reach audiences in Douglas County. These include workshops and seminars hosted by local faculty and campus-based specialists, conferences on major issues, newsletters targeted to specific audiences, a weekly newspaper column addressing local issues and featuring local Extension activities, feature articles in local/area newspapers, field visits, office visits, and lots of time on the phone answering questions. Our volunteers operate a plant clinic and help staff a statewide food preservation and safety hotline – services that address thousands of calls each year.
My goal is to continually expand our relevance to the communities we serve, to add value to their businesses and provide lifelong learning opportunities. I believe we must continue serving “traditional” audiences, while broadening our reach to include new and/or underserved audiences. We are in the early stages of a private fund development campaign that could significantly enhance Extension’s local educational capacity by stabilizing basic infrastructure and/or endowing county-based faculty positions. I believe this type of funding will be necessary to maintain service for traditional programs, as well as enhancing our reach.

I believe our future will likely include some form of “Open Campus” collaboration, whereby the Extension Office, local community college, and campus-based resources can be made more readily available to area residents, who will benefit from a more integrated educational system. My technology vision includes development of more web-based content, development of a technology-enhanced teaching space that would link with campus and other Extension teaching locations, and providing community access to OSU resources such as the library and distance education courses.

I welcome the study team’s recommendations for how we might achieve these objectives.

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