

# Understanding Extension for School-Based Agricultural Education #1: Extension 101<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This article and series were designed primarily for use by secondary agriscience teachers in school-based agricultural education programs (SBAE) to help build a strong understanding of Extension and the role of Extension professionals. Agriscience programs help students understand many facets of agriculture, including Extension services. Very few resources have been designed specifically for agriscience teachers to use in their classrooms. An important part of access and use of Extension services is understanding its background, structure, and function. This initial publication in the *Understanding Extension for School-Based Agricultural Education* series provides agricultural educators and the general public with a basic understanding of Extension. This publication also provides an overview of the *Understanding Extension for School-Based Agricultural Education* series in the Appendix.

## What is Extension?

Extension is the collaboration of state, federal, and county governments that provides scientific knowledge to the general public through educational programs (UF/IFAS, 2020g). The Florida Cooperative Extension Service is a collaboration of the University of Florida (UF), Florida A&M University, and state and local entities (FAMU, 2019).

The University of Florida's Extension program is known as UF/IFAS Extension (UF/IFAS, 2020b). The University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) utilizes facilities all over the state for teaching, research, and demonstrations, with 16 on-campus academic departments and schools and 12 Research and Education Centers (RECs), as well as Extension offices in all 67 counties (UF/IFAS, 2020h). Extension is made up of thousands of people, including faculty, scientists, educators, staff, and volunteers (UF/IFAS, 2020g). Programs through Extension are services or learning opportunities for community members or farmers to learn more about local agriculture, health and nutrition, or community resources. Extension delivers research to the people who need it and reaches those in rural, urban, and suburban communities, helping not only those in farming, but also families and youth (UF/IFAS, 2020g; USDA/NIFA, 2020).

## History of Extension

The history of UF/IFAS Extension began in 1862 with the passing of the Morrill Act. This act gave each state thousands of acres of federal land and assigned any proceeds made off the land to be given to the colleges of agriculture and mechanical arts. In Florida, that college was Florida Agricultural College (UF/IFAS, 2018).

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In 1905, the Buckman Act was passed in Florida. It combined four different colleges: the Florida Agricultural College, the East Florida Seminary of Gainesville, the St. Petersburg Normal and Industrial School at St. Petersburg, and the South Florida Military College at Bartow. The name of this combined entity was the University of the State of Florida, which was renamed in 1909 to the University of Florida (UF/IFAS, 2018).

In 1914, the Smith-Lever Act was passed, which led to the establishment of the Cooperative Extension System. The Cooperative Extension System was the partnership of land-grant schools (including the University of Florida) and the US Department of Agriculture. The main purpose of this partnership was to create a way to educate the public on scientific research (Hillsborough County Government, 2018).

UF/IFAS was established in 1964 by the combining of four entities at the University of Florida: the College of Agriculture, the School of Forestry, the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station, and the Cooperative Extension Service (Hillsborough County Government, 2018).

## Mission of Extension

The mission of UF/IFAS Extension is to develop knowledge in agriculture, human and natural resources, and the life sciences, and to make that knowledge accessible to sustain and enhance the quality of human life (UF/IFAS, 2018).

## Services

UF/IFAS Extension offers a variety of services for many. As a land-grant institution, the University of Florida utilizes Extension to present resources to the public. Farmers and producers access information on improving their operations (USDA/NIFA, 2020). These services also improve the lives of families through several opportunities. Some of these services include but are not limited to:

- Personal and group learning opportunities (e.g., 4-H)
- Computer networking (e.g., webinars)
- Consultations
- Demonstrations
- Educational materials
- Field days
- Meetings and workshops

Not every department or program of UF/IFAS Extension offers the same services. Some may focus on hands-on workshops, while others offer classes (Hillsborough County Government, 2018).

## Programs

The services that are offered through UF/IFAS Extension are taught through different programs. Every office offers different programs, depending on the need for a program in the community where the office is located. If a community has a large emphasis on coastal care, their local office may have a Sea Grant program agent. However, if a community has a large commercial horticulture interest, there may be an agent for commercial horticulture but not a Sea Grant program agent (UF/IFAS, 2018). Previous EDIS documents have noted that the term “program,” when referring to Extension, is difficult to define (Israel, Harder, & Brodeur, 2011).

UF/IFAS (2018) provides a list of programs that include, but are not limited to:

- Florida Master Gardener Program
- Florida-Friendly Landscaping™
- Florida 4-H
- Florida Master Money Mentors
- Family Nutrition Education Programs
- Florida LAKEWATCH
- Sea Grant

A comprehensive list of these programs and resources can be found at <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/who-we-are/extension-services/>.

## Extension Agents: What do they do?

There are many different roles and careers found in Extension. For this document, we are exploring the role of the Extension agent, also referred to as Extension professionals or Extension faculty. Extension faculty serve as faculty members at the University of Florida in the state of Florida. In SBAE, these agents often bridge the gap between schools and Extension offices. Extension agents receive scientific findings from the University of Florida and their scientists and deliver the educational material to producers and growers, stakeholders, and the general public. They also try to ensure that the information that was delivered is being applied by the audience that they try to reach. The agents

are responsible for creating educational programs that provide information to the county's community. In order to be successful in creating these educational programs, the agent must develop an understanding of their community and its needs (Israel et al., 2011).

Every Extension professional has a variety of daily duties that are specific to their program focus. Some agents may have to help answer questions from the community more frequently, on subjects such as pest management, landscaping, information on 4-H, financial management topics, and a variety of other topics (UF/IFAS, 2020e; UF/IFAS, 2020f; UF/IFAS, 2020d). They may have to travel to residents' homes or commercial farms to check irrigation, soil, pest management, or livestock facilities (UF/IFAS, 2020e; UF/IFAS, 2020c). Programs have stakeholders that are involved in the program, including advisory committees, the 4-H Foundation, and the 4-H Association. The work duties of an agent can change constantly, and they adapt to those changes when they occur.

UF/IFAS Extension agents have five common areas of focus (UF/IFAS, 2018), which include:

- Agriculture
- Lawn & Garden
- Natural Resources
- Family Resources
- 4-H Youth Development

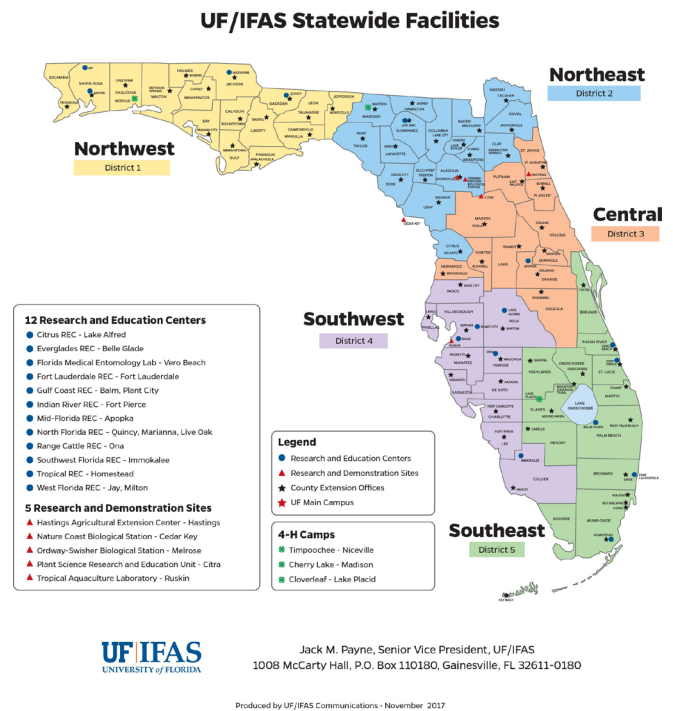
## Locations

A UF/IFAS Extension location can be found in all 67 counties in the state of Florida. The areas of the state are divided into five districts: Northwest, Southwest, Northeast, Southeast, and Central (UF/IFAS, 2020a). One can search for a local office by going to the UF/IFAS Extension website and searching for the appropriate county. The location of the local office may also be found on the county's main website, under their departments.

## Additional Resources

In addition to the many opportunities that are provided to consumers, producers, and stakeholders in our state, UF/IFAS Extension also provides free, 24/7 access to the *Solutions for Your Life* Website (UF/IFAS, 2020i). This site can be accessed at <http://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/>, and it provides science-based content to help solve any issues or questions you may have regarding topics such as agriculture, lawn and

garden care, family resources, the environment, and much more (UF/IFAS, 2018).



Credits: UF/IFAS Communications

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## **Appendix: Understanding Extension for School-Based Agricultural Education Series Overview**

### ***Understanding Extension for School-Based Agricultural Education #1: Extension 101***

Overview of the background of Extension is provided for agricultural educators, consumers, and the general public.

### ***Understanding Extension for School-Based Agricultural Education #2: Utilizing Extension Services in School-Based Agricultural Education***

Overview of how UF/IFAS Extension can be utilized in agricultural education.

### ***Understanding Extension for School-Based Agricultural Education #3: FFA & 4-H—A Comparison***

Introduction to the history, characteristics, and membership process of these long-standing organizations.