

## THE HORTICULTURAL HISTORY OF THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE IN FLORIDA

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**Abstract.** Extension work started in Florida in 1899, before there was a formal Extension Service, as Farmer's Institutes and Co-operative Demonstration Work. In 1909 and 1911, respectively, boys' and girls' clubs were added. On 25 May 1915, following the approval of the Smith-Lever Act by the Florida State Legislature,

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**the Florida Agricultural Extension Division was created. Work on citrus has been an important part of Extension in Florida since its inception, including the Citrus Advisory Committee (1947-1964) and Florida Citrus Institutes (1930s-1970s), and continues today. Even though vegetable crops have been important in Florida for decades, formal Extension programs in vegetable crops did not begin until 1948. The program expanded rapidly in the 1950s and the Production Guides were initiated during that period. Extension programs in Ornamental Horticulture started in 1953 to cover commercial and home owner questions on ornamental plants. The broad range of crops, production systems, and markets in Florida requires an expanding emphasis on environmental horticulture. As changes in the demographics of the state and market competition for horticultural products continue, Extension will adapt to support the commercial industry and homeowner interest in Horticulture.**

### **Early Florida Agricultural History**

Horticulture has been a part of Florida for nearly as far back as records go. There are reports of citrus planting in 1577 and by the time of statehood in 1845, there were commercial groves in the St. Augustine, Pinellas County, and Indian River regions of the state (Cresap, 1982). There were also production problems for which growers needed answers, such as the 'coccus' or purple scale. By 1850, the new state had created a Board of Agriculture, which would later become the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The position of Commissioner of Agriculture was created in 1885 (PALMM, 2002).

The Federal Government had passed the Morrill Act (1862) to establish colleges that included instruction in agriculture in each state (NASULGC, 2004). In 1884, Florida established its first land-grant college at Lakeland, Florida Agricultural College, with an entering class of 31 students (Cresap, 1982). Women were first admitted in 1893. The name was changed to the University of Florida in 1903. In 1905, by Legislative order, several agricultural colleges, including the land-grant college, were abolished and consolidated and moved to Gainesville under the name of the University of Florida (1905). The second Morrill Act (1890) provided additional funds for the land grant institution, providing that race or color was not an admissions criterion, or to create a separate land-grant college for people of color. The State Normal College for Negro Students, later to become Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, was created in Tallahassee with these funds as Florida's "1890 Land Grant College".

Realizing that improvement of agricultural production would require research, the Federal Government passed the Hatch Act (1887) to fund an Experiment Station at each state's land-grant institution. In 1888, the Agricultural Experiment Station was founded on the campus in Lakeland with \$11,000 of Federal funds and approximately 100 acres of college land (Cresap, 1982). Of this, 40 acres were under water, 35 acres were dense forest, and most of the usable land was not yet cleared. Almost immediately, editorials in the Florida Farmer and Fruit Grower suggested that there should be several stations located throughout the state in order to best serve the farmers. The Agricultural Experiment Station moved to Gainesville in 1905, with the University.

Growers had already started forming organizations to exchange information on crop production. The Florida Agricultural Society started in 1825 and continued for at least 10 years (Cresap, 1982). The Florida Fruit Growers' Association

was founded in 1874 and the Florida Nurserymen's Association in 1887. In 1888 the two organizations merged to form the Florida State Horticultural Society.

### **Early Extension Efforts**

Although the new land grant college was training students in agriculture, there was a need identified for the information generated by the college and Experiment Station to reach the growers throughout the state. Starting in 1899, the College of Agriculture, with assistance from the Experiment Station staff, ran Farmers' Institutes throughout the state (Cresap, 1982). Although there was no state funding, the College was initially allowed to provide only one institute per county per year, if requested by the county residents. In the first year, 14 Institutes were held with an approximate total attendance of 4,200. Numbers of institutes and attendees increased annually. In 1913/14, 144 institutes were held with nearly 21,000 attending. In 1911, the Institute was brought to the people on an Exhibit Train, with different cars set up for different topics. Other public meetings, such as the Annual Citrus Seminars, which began in 1910, were organized by College and Station faculty (Cooper, 1976).

The Bureau of Plant Industry, a part of the USDA, started cooperative demonstration trials throughout the country in 1904, based on the boll-weevil demonstrations of Seaman Knapp, the bureau chief (NARA, 2004). In 1909, the demonstration trials began in Florida as part of a program to find alternatives to cotton production (Cresap, 1982). This program funded county-based agents to oversee the demonstrations on growers' farms and to report back to the Bureau office.

In order to encourage young people on farms to learn new production techniques, Boys' Corn Clubs (1909) and Girls' Canning or Tomato Clubs (1911) were formed under the auspices of the Dean of the College of Agriculture and the head of the Department of Home Economics at the State College for Women in Tallahassee, respectively (Cresap, 1982). In both cases, children were given seed and competed on their ability to produce the crop (Cooper, 1976). Girls also learned preservation methods for their produce. These organizations later became Extension's 4-H program.

### **The Extension Service Works for Florida Horticulture**

On 25 May 1915, the Smith Lever Act, establishing the Agricultural Extension Service, was accepted by the Florida Legislature. The budget in the first year was \$70,700, provided from federal, state, College of Agriculture, and county funds (Cresap, 1982). Thirty-nine counties had agricultural demonstration agents and 22 had home demonstration agents. The food shortage during World War I resulted in funds becoming available for agents in all counties of Florida as the Extension Service promoted food production and conservation. The Extension program in citrus began early, with the identification of the first citrus extension specialist in 1923 (Cooper, 1976). While Florida had been a major source of winter vegetables since the 1880s, the official Extension program in vegetable crops was not started until 1948. This was the same year that the program in subtropical fruits began, primarily in south Florida, with the formation of the Subtropical Fruit Growers Association. The program in Ornamental Horticulture was started in 1953 with a legislative appropriation based on a request from the Florida Nurserymen and Growers Asso-

ciation. In an effort to extend information to all Florida's citizens, Extension programs with the Seminole Indians were initiated in 1955 (Cresap, 1982). Extension specialists were first housed at FAMU in 1971.

The Extension Service reached the public in a variety of ways. The Farmers' Institutes continued until 1920 and were replaced by Farmers' Week at the University (Cresap, 1982). Growers and their families were housed and fed on campus and could participate in a variety of meetings. Farmers' Week was held from 1921-1932. In 1915, the first Extension bulletin was published, to be followed by many more. The first Extension radio broadcast in Florida was in 1928, with a weekly broadcast over the University station (Cooper, 1976). The program lasted until 1963, when the listenership was deemed too low to continue. Florida Extension hit the television market in 1952 with a program called "Extension Editorial" broadcast from Jacksonville. In 1976, Cooper (1976) reported that the mailing room had the facilities to produce 120,000 press runs a day to duplicate materials. In the 1990s, the increasing demand for materials led to the development of electronic publication and on-demand printing: CD-Rom based handbooks, FAIRS (Florida Agricultural Information Retrieval System) in 1995, and EDIS (Electronic Data Information Source) in 1998. Another service provided to the farmers of Florida was weather forecasting and reporting. The Weather Forecasting Service started in 1935 and the automated version, FAWN (Florida Automated Weather Network), became available in 1998.

Changes in the population of the state from primarily farm based to largely urban encouraged the Extension Service in Florida to provide more services oriented to homeowners. The Master Gardener program, a national training program to provide Extension agents with assistance with homeowner questions, started in Florida in 1979 (<http://www.mastergardeners.com/>). Thousands of Master Gardeners must have

been trained since then, and millions of questions answered. The Junior Master Gardener program is now available in some counties. In 1993, the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods program was started to help residents reduce pollution and enhance their environment by improving home and landscape management (<http://hort.ufl.edu/fyn/>).

Infoplease, an internet based encyclopedia, describes the mission of the Cooperative Extension Service as "to plan, execute, and evaluate learning experiences that will help people acquire the understanding and skills essential for solving farm, home, and community problems" (<http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/history/A0813449.html>). This objective is met through educational programs that make use of research findings emanating primarily from the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture and the state land-grant colleges and universities". Florida has a long tradition of meeting these objectives for its producers and consumers of horticultural crops and will continue to meet the changing demographics and needs of the state in the future.

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