YOUR CAREER AS A COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
TEXAS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
J. E. Hutchison, Director, College Station, Texas
YOUR CAREER AS A COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT

Ben D. Cook, Mary L. Cothran and Joe H. Rothe

Do you want to participate in the vital changes taking place today and anticipated tomorrow in our country? Would you like to initiate change and help people adjust to new situations?

A career as a county Extension agent offers you these opportunities and more. You will use educational techniques to help people acquire knowledge and make sound economic decisions, solve critical problems and plan wisely for the future.

Your Job As a County Extension Agent

The objective of the Cooperative Extension Service is the development of people themselves to the end that they, through their own initiative, may effectively identify and solve the various problems directly affecting their welfare.

On the basis of the objective of the Extension Service, the job of the county Extension agent is that of an educator, teaching both rural and urban people new ways to better living. He must be a counselor, technician and organizer among many other things.

He is responsible for leadership development and program plans for farm, home and community improvement. To carry out this purpose the agent works directly with local people, helping them to apply the findings of research and practical experience to their problems.

The Cooperative Extension Program

To understand the county Extension agent's job one needs to have some understanding of the Cooperative Extension Service. Established in 1914, the Service is a cooperative effort of the United States Department of Agriculture, the Land-Grant colleges, the county government and the people themselves. It is the largest out-of-school educational system in the world. Through this educational process people develop increased ability and desire to assume leadership and community responsibilities. The clientele includes farmers,
persons in agri-business, homemakers, youth and others who have a need and interest for this type of education.

The population of Texas in April 1960 was 9,579,677 with 75 percent urban and 25 percent rural. The rural population was 17.7 percent rural non-farm and 7.3 percent farm. To serve people in the urban and rural areas there are 390 county agricultural agents and 280 county home demonstration agents. Also, 109 agricultural specialist, 23 home economics specialists and 38 administrators and supervisors help county Extension agents with special problems. A small staff in the Federal Extension Service of USDA assists the State when requested to do so. In addition, 37,413 adult leaders and 5,414 4-H junior leaders work with the county Extension agents on a voluntary unpaid basis.

An Extension Director is named by the governing board of Texas A&M University and approved by the Secretary of USDA.

The State is divided into twelve districts of approximately 22 counties each, for administrative purposes. An office staffed by a district agricultural agent and a district home demonstration agent is maintained in each district. Their primary responsibilities are administration and supervision of county personnel. Acting for the director, they work with the county government in the employment of county Extension agents.

One or more area specialists who give close technical assistance to individual agents are located in the district office.

The Service is financed cooperatively by the Federal, State and local governments.

**Duties and Responsibilities**

The county Extension agents take the latest research findings of the Land-Grant university and USDA to the people; and, in turn, refer the needs of the people to the university. They interpret, adapt and devise methods of applying this information to local needs.

Economic, social, geographical and population factors will cause the agents' work to vary from county to county.

The non-farm clientele is large and growing. Many people who seek information live in cities, suburban areas and villages. They ask for information on homemaking, gardening, lawn and
shrubbery care, insect control and consumer goods. In addition, agents develop educational programs with agri-business leaders for the non-farm segment of the total agricultural industry.

County Extension agents' specific responsibilities are to:

1. Represent the state Land-Grant college or university and the USDA in the county and carry on an educational program for better farm income, family living and community development.

2. Maintain a county Extension office as a unit in this cooperative endeavor.

3. Organize and develop county-wide educational programs in agriculture, home economics and related subjects; work as advisors, encouraging groups and individuals to help themselves.

4. Make studies and surveys of rural community problems in cooperation with state and Federal agencies, rural leaders and local businessmen. These studies include soil, drainage, crops, climate, marketing, acreage yields, production, farm management, cost data, outlook and trends, health and safety and other factors affecting rural well-being in the particular community or county.

5. Provide information to farm and other organizations and committees who determine local programs. Assist farmers in understanding programs and alternatives and how they apply to their farms.

6. Instruct people, using many methods such as group meetings, demonstrations, individual visits, group tours, circular letters, leaflets and bulletins.

7. Use radio and TV to carry programs to the public, maintain effective professional relations with newspaper editors, radio and TV man-
agers, leaders of clubs and organizations and school and county officials.


9. Prepare reports of work done and work planned so that administrators will have the facts available at all times.

10. Administer the expenditure of money allotted to the work at the county level for demonstration materials and miscellaneous supplies.

11. Select, organize and train local leaders to assist in carrying Extension programs to the people.

12. Keep up to date concerning the information sent out by the university and USDA.

In fulfilling these responsibilities, it is estimated that county Extension agents make more than 1.8 million personal contacts yearly. They explain and demonstrate better practices to over 3 million people in meetings. They release 43,000 news stories, give 23,500 radio talks and send out nearly 2 million bulletins.

**Where Employed**

A county Extension agent is found in nearly every county in Texas. In most of the counties you will find at least a county agricultural agent and a county home demonstration agent. In counties with a large population there may be as many as 10 agents on the staff.

**Working Conditions and Salaries**

Each county supplies its agents with an office, usually located in the county building at the county seat. Local office facilities are furnished by the county.

The salaries of Extension agents vary from county to county. The amount of the salary equals or exceeds those for similar vocations.
This will be discussed with you when you are interviewed for employment.

All newly-appointed county Extension agents are required to work in a training position as junior assistant agents or assistant county agents. The period of time in these positions varies, but normally, for a junior assistant it is 3 months and as assistant county agent it is 2 or more years. Assistant agents who do satisfactory work will be promoted to county Extension agent positions in counties other than the ones in which they have served as assistant agent.

Assistant agents work on all phases of the county program under the supervision of the county agricultural or county home demonstration agent.

Benefits include liberal life insurance, retirement benefits, sick leave, injury compensation benefits and 2 weeks vacation. Agents are provided regular in-service training and may attend summer school 1 to 6 weeks, taking courses related to their field of work.

In addition to the promotions mentioned above, there are other jobs in the Extension Service to which an agent can aspire, both in state and Federal positions. There are some overseas opportunities, too, as other countries are setting up Extension Services and American Extension Service personnel are called on to help organize these programs.

**Personal Qualifications**

A genuine liking for people and a belief in their desire to help themselves are essential qualities. The agent must have enthusiasm, initiative, leadership ability, a desire to cooperate, patience and a sense of humor. He should be objective, set high standards, have the ability to organize, to teach effectively and to speak and write well.
Academic Requirements

The county agricultural agent must have at least a bachelor of science degree in agriculture, and a bachelor of science degree in home economics is required of home demonstration agents, both from recognized colleges or universities.

Students may major in different fields of agriculture or home economics but should take as many courses in the social sciences as possible. Since agents work with people, sociology, psychology, education and communications are important subject areas.

A Master's or Doctor's degree is required for employment on the State staff or for administrative positions.

How To Get into Extension Work

You may contact your local county Extension agents, the district agent in your area of the State or the State agricultural or home demonstration agent at Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 77841.

You will be asked to submit an application. An interview by a district agent will be necessary before your application can be considered.

If your application is approved and positions are available, you will be contacted by a district agent for date and location of your employment. This means you will be an employee of the county and Texas A&M University, as well as a representative of USDA.